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The Space of the Nation: History, Culture and a Conflict in Modern Ireland

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The past two decades have seen a sustained attack upon the *grand récits* of the national project. In particular, the writings of Benedict Anderson have done much to highlight the manner in which people 'think' the 'imagined community' [1]. Anderson has consistently focused upon the contribution of print-capital and language towards the uniform thinking necessary to national consciousness [2]. The evident problematic in this approach has led French Marxist, Henri Lefebvre to write:

Some people—most, in fact—define it as a sort of substance which has sprung up from nature. ... The Nation is thus endowed with a consistent reality. ... There are other theorists, however, who maintain that the nation and nationalism are merely ideological constructs. ... The nation is on this view scarcely more than a fiction. ... Both of these approaches ... leave space out of the picture. [3]

In both cases, according to the savant, nations are considered to be purely mental abstractions. His proto-Marxist analysis focuses upon the rise of vast webs held together by hierarchical centres of power, and representations of space. Lefebvre expands upon this point employing the seminal concept of 'monumentality'. Monuments are nodal points in power-laden webs; they require people, or communities, to partake actively of their ideology. Consequently, the Marxist approach forces us to understand nation-building in a radically different light; one contrasting with the literary-based research which characterises the study of Irish nationalism:

A spatial work attains a complexity fundamentally different from the complexity of the text, whether prose or poetry. ... What we are concerned with here is not texts but texture. We already know that a texture is made up of a usually rather large space covered by networks or webs; monuments constitute the strong points, nexus or anchors of such webs. [4]

As texture, the monument may produce discourse in the form of texts. However, such texts describe space, and are dependent upon it; alone they cannot produce the nationscape.

In his second edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson shied away from his usual linguistic and textual fetishes and assessed the contribution of the national and imperial state-building resources: census, map, and museum. These bureaucratic resources proved to be excellent instruments with which to proscribe and categorise populations and territories, and, thus, produce a 'fixed' *episteme*. This state-endorsed version of identity and history was instilled in national consciousness through the 'logoisation' of certain symbolic spaces. Capitalist manufacture ensured that these logos were

re-produced, *en masse*, for public consumption (usually as stamps, letter-heads, and postcards): 'Norodom Sihanouk had a large wood and papier-mâché' replica of ... Angkor displayed in the national sports stadium in Phnom Penh. ... It served its purpose—instant recognisability via a history of colonial-era logoization' [5].

In this article I will add to this new approach by analysing the historical development of one of modern Ireland's most conspicuous national monuments—the Ardnacrusha Hydro-electric Scheme. This project was conceived within months of the Civil War cease-fire, and was seen by many as an important test case for the young nation-state. Indeed, the project was inextricably bound to the public perception of the Saorstát to the extent that its physical construction became a metaphor for the nation-building of the era. The imagination of the public was well and truly captured as reporters, authors, artists and tourists descended upon the construction site in their droves. The scheme was also noted for the seamless manner in which its architects wove an icon of industrial progress into the fabric of a nation supposed to be rural and anti-modern. The success of Ardnacrusha in this regard did much to cement the form of nationalism which came to dominate Irish politics.

The story of this national development is also one of local resistance. Ardnacrusha had a profoundly damaging effect upon the local salmon fisheries. One local community, the Abbey Guild of Fishermen, took action in defence of its livelihood. Though the resulting 'Battle of the Tailrace' remains a relatively obscure incident it was, nevertheless, characterised by several days of riots, protest, and, eventually, by military action. The battle occurred during the early days of de Valera's first government; it provides ironic tales of Fianna Fáil troops firing upon the kind of small community which its party rhetoric celebrated. I propose to use this historical evidence to build up a snap-shot of the Abbey Fishermen. I will suggest how they consistently accessed the symbolic national currency of the time, and, in a broader sense, confirm the significant role of active agency and multiple narratives in the production and reification of the nationscape.

Imagining Ireland

After only one year of provisional independence, the government of the Saorstát embarked upon what is, comparatively, the largest development project in modern Irish history. Ardnacrusha emanated from somewhere in the space between nation and state, and wove modernity into the archaic fabric of nationalist Ireland. It is possible to examine the ideology of this development through its textual production. The *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook* (1932) provides one such example. It contains a glowing description of Ardnacrusha. Indeed, an entire chapter is devoted to the infinitesimal details of its construction and productive capability. The mandate for this nation-building is established with eloquent prose: 'For the first time since the middle ages the needs and wishes of the Irish people now shape the policy of the Irish Government' [6]. This national mandate is grounded in a particular vision of the Irish people and their past. Irish history and culture is viewed in such a way as to legitimise the present. We are assured that 'in Gaelic times Ireland was entirely rural' [7]. The continuity of immemorial rural life with the present is confirmed by the representational spaces produced by artists such as Paul Henry. Sketches of tidy white houses, dwarfed by an emerald natural landscape, discreetly embellish the periphery of the text. However, this legitimising narrative is at risk, as the chapter on folklore forewarns: 'We cannot give a further lease of life to our folk-tales, or to the beliefs and customs of a genre that is fast

passing away, but it is essential that every phase of this folk culture should be recorded before it disappears' [8]. It is recommended that we record, indeed, museumise culture as a 'fixed' effigy of the past; a representation that forms a tangible narrative for people on the brink of modernity.

It is from within this context of vanishing Gaels and rural idylls that Ardnacrusha emanates 'distinct from imported fuel' to chart a modernising future for the Irish people [9]. This remarkable representation of space is encapsulated in the use of *Book of Kells* style artistry to cover what is, essentially, a development plan. John Breuille describes this phenomenon, employing the term 'nationalism as development' to suggest that development, usually labelled modernisation, 'requires the partial or complete abandonment of traditional values and practices' [10]. This abandonment of tradition is, according to Breuille, paradoxically based on the 'allegedly traditional features of society' [11]. Luke Gibbons echoes this theoretical sense of nationality and modernity in his work on Irish development policy. Using the international examples of Reagan's 'Return to the Range' and Thatcher's 'Victorian Values', he remarks on the ubiquitous green stamp which modernisation receives in Ireland [12]. Gibbons makes considerable use of the Bord Fáilte sense of modern Ireland as a *mélange* of misty past and economic modernity. Ardnacrusha was depicted according to this technique in the Bord Fáilte writings of the 1920s. D. L. Kelleher's *The Shannon Scheme* describes Ardnacrusha as 'evolution-revolution'. Kelleher conjures up images of the rural Ireland upon which Ardnacrusha was constructed: 'A house here and there, white and tidy ... poetical ... and ... unreal' [13]. Now, according to the author, diesel engines are the 'deities' and 'kilowatts the acolytes' [14]. This is the 'modern magic' of an evolution-revolution.

The Saorstát Handbook and the writings of authors such as Kelleher allude to the manner in which the development project was deployed as a logo of nationality. The construction site itself was to play a major role in the promotion of this discourse. In order to enhance this pedagogical use-value the state financed the movement of large numbers of people, on guided tours, to see the 'wonderful feat of engineering' [15], and, more specifically, to take home a visual impression or logo. The demand was so vast that Great Southern Rail had to lay on special trains to cope with the numbers. This burgeoning travel industry is all the more extraordinary considering both the cross-section of the population involved, and the lack of precedent for such a tourist destination in post-Civil War Ireland. The *Limerick Chronicle* refers in depth to the unusually broad appeal of Ardnacrusha: 'The harnessing of the Shannon has attracted the attention of capitalists engineers and scientists in varying parts of the world, and in the past two years or so it has seen a large number of them, apart altogether from the thousands of ordinary visitors at Ardnacrusha' [16].

The impact on the 'ordinary' visitors to the Shannon development is described in the 1990 edition of Paul Duffy's *Ardnacrusha: Birth Place of the ESB*. Duffy incidentally talks readers through the types of sights which would greet a tourist; starting at the Weir and Intake at Parteen Villa he lingers over precise engineering details and measurements, referring habitually to several dozen pictures dispersed throughout the text. These photographs appeared as popular postcards in the 1920s and frequently depict, for the purpose of scale, a labourer dwarfed by either machines or the dam at Ardnacrusha: 'A splendid example of Teutonic architecture' [17]. Duffy notices these workmen in asides such as a tale of Connemara men employing Curragh-building skills to manufacture turbines. Thus, the historical ramble captures the dominant performative theme of Ardnacrusha—national construction. The building site, which most

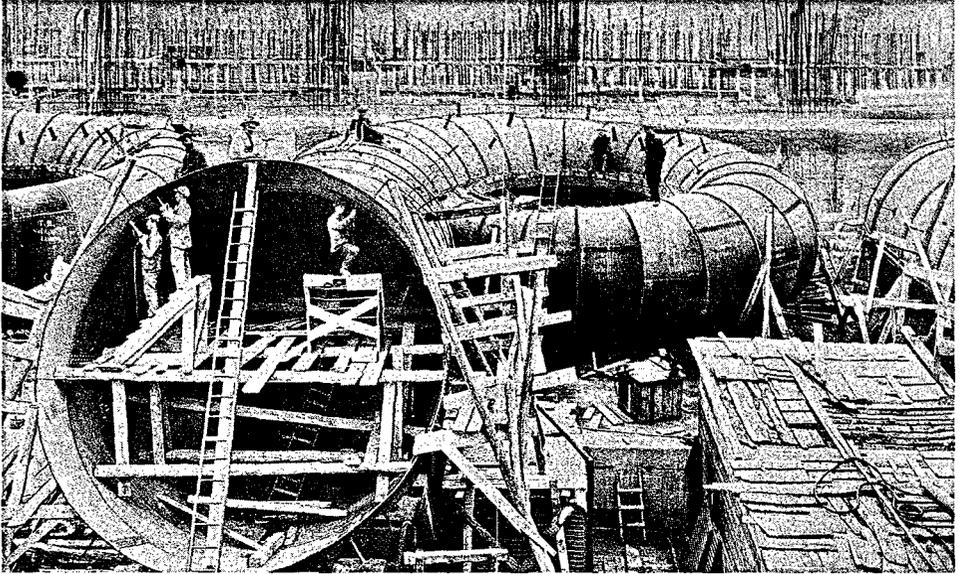


FIG. 1. Ardnacrusha under construction. Courtesy: Electricity Supply Board of Ireland.

visitors agreed to be ‘the eighth wonder of the world’ [18] became a visual exhibition with an intentional quality. Ardnacrusha was built early in the national-time of the Free State; in having thousands visit the construction site the Saorstát was producing a visual image of a nation-state ‘in the making’. Stories of accomplished boat-makers from Connemara using their traditional skills to weld turbines turned crass modernisation into *bona fide* national development.

Clearly, not all citizens were free to travel to Ardnacrusha to see Irish men build the nation-state. Hence, images of construction had to be brought into the realm of public observation and dialogue. The newspapers had a significant role in this process; most published lavish reports. In a more direct form of logoisation the Saorstát administration augmented the growing collection of postcards by employing the artist, Seán Keating, to document visually the construction process. His etchings form a more high-brow alternative to the carnival of power-scheme models produced by the Electricity Board [19]. As Norodom Sihanouk realised in Cambodia, citizens must visit the monumental sites of the nation-state, and, as that is not always possible, the monumental sites must be brought to the people—even if they are made of papier-mâché.

The Altar of Progress

In the same month as the opening of the Shannon Scheme the tale of Saint Mo Lua’s Oratory featured in the newspaper headlines. The oratory stood in the way of the huge headwaters of the soon-to-be-opened Shannon Scheme. One archaeologist urged the government to consider the ‘treasure of ancient monuments which she has inherited’ [20], while Bishop Fogarty of Killaloe suggested that it should be valued as ‘the monastery where St Hannan, a prince of the Dalacassians, received his religious education’ [21]. Several options were open to the state. Its decision was to remove the tiny oratory block-by-block and re-erect it on a new site in Killaloe. A substantial ceremony was organised involving mass on Friar’s Island (where the oratory was originally built). The protagonists gathered in Killaloe and, bearing banners with such

pious nationalist slogans as ‘God save the Pope’ and ‘remember O’Connell’, they marched *en masse* to the Island [22]. Along the way the hymn-playing Boherboy Band provided musical accompaniment. A *Limerick Chronicle* reporter in attendance suggested that Mo Lua’s had ‘for centuries ... witnessed the ravages of time’, but had now to be ‘sacrificed to modern progress’ [23].

The sacrifice traces a narrative line of inevitability from ancient Celtic life to modernity, and sketches a future of industrial progress. In sacrificing the oratory, the state performed a new era of nationalism and development in a world of public observation and dialogue. This type of performance became embedded in the monumental space of Ardnacrusha. As a logo of the nation-state it represented a particular set of cultural understandings. As a place on the local landscape the dam imported these understandings into a community; a part of which was violently opposed to its construction. The result of this interaction was a violent conflict.

The Battle of the Tailrace

By 1925 Ardnacrusha had become the *à la mode* topic in public discourse. Debates raged in the government and media about almost every aspect of its construction. One such debate concerned the issue of private versus state capitalism. It prompted Senator O’Farrell to castigate the scheme for bearing the imprint of ‘the cloven hoof of socialism’ [24]. Safety was also a major concern. Some feared that Limerick would become a ‘gigantic lake’ if some knuckle-walking Republican got busy with a spade. It was amid these concerns that the question of the Shannon Fisheries first surfaced at national level. It was an issue that was to remain the spectre of the project. According to the poet and Senator, Oliver St John Gogarty, ‘The only criticism that I could conceive is that the river Shannon may not be full of fish, or if so, they might be in a condition half way towards canning’ [25]. At this early stage the Saorstát administration made its position clear. Minister for Industry and Commerce, Patrick McGuilligan, bluntly stated in the Seanad that ‘the proviso in the bill is that every precaution is to be taken to protect the fisheries from harm, but that in the last resort, if the fisheries conflict with electricity, electricity wins out’ [26].

In 1929 the Shannon Scheme officially opened. Free State Premier, W. T. Cosgrave, pronounced: ‘Henceforth the Shannon will be harvested for the service of the nation’ [27]. However, by spring of that year the full effects of the turbines on the salmon population had become apparent. One of the areas worst affected was owned by the local Abbey Guild of Fishermen [28]. In an interview one Abbey Fisherman, called ‘Patrick’, now well into his seventies, passionately recalled to me his feelings about the situation:

That finished us! That finished the Abbey Fishermen definitely. There was too much of a stream coming out of the Tailrace and the fish ... went with the stream. The Shannon ... our part of it ... that was finished anyway. It took our living away from us you know. They called it progress! [29]

Fianna Fáil came to power in 1932. As ardent supporters of the party, the fishermen expected the situation to change in their favour. De Valera’s vision of Ireland, rural and timeless, seemed to underwrite the stance of the Abbey men as much as it did the foundations of Ardnacrusha. However, following repeated exchanges the government refused to negotiate. The fishermen responded by threatening to occupy the power-

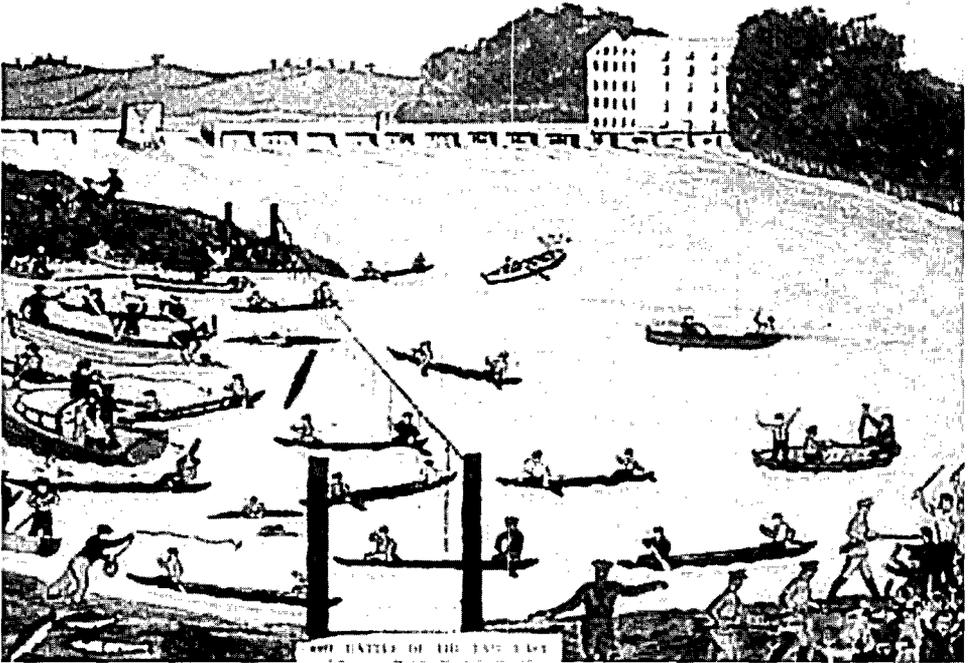


FIG. 2. 'The Battle of the Tailrace' painted by Bobby Duilig and donated by the late mayor of Limerick, Alderman Jim Kemmy, T.D. Courtesy: the author.

station tailrace. On 13 July 1932, the *Irish Times* provided the following description of the 'Troubled Waters' at Ardnacrusha:

A great deal of tension prevailed in Parteen district last night in view of the threat of the Abbey Fishermen's Guild, as conveyed earlier in the day to the fishery authorities in Limerick, to net the Tailrace, at the power station, Ardnacrusha. Hundreds of people collected on the banks of the river. ... About 11 o'clock ... the full fleet of Abbey Fishermen, numbering twenty-four boats, each being occupied by two men, approached the prohibited water. Inspector Lane of the Fishery Board shouted to the men from the bank that fishing was not allowed in the Tailrace. The boats however proceeded on their course. [30]

Local author, William Lysaght, describes what happened next:

There was a moment's hesitation, but with a cry of 'up Garryowen' and a few deft strokes of their paddle, Randy and Lully Hayes sent their boats surging in-between the chains behind one of the launches. This was the signal for concerted action. In a matter of minutes all the boats were inside, the battle was on. [31]

The nationalist cry of 'up Garryowen' is almost comical, considering the fact that the fishermen were in the process of attacking the forces of de Valera's Fianna Fáil. Indeed, the cry highlights the confused nature of the conflict. The state sought to destroy the very kind of group which its nationalist rhetoric celebrated, and did so in the name of the nation.

Kevin Hannan, a local historian and author, recalled to me his impression that the battle was a public enactment of their right 'to earn their livelihood'. Indeed, his eye-witness account describes how the fishermen managed to land several salmon; each symbolic catch exciting roars from the baying crowd. In order to disperse the crowd the authorities opened fire. Luckily, no one was killed, and by three o'clock the following morning the fighting had ended. The Abbey Fishermen had lost several nets and boats, and civic guards had taken forty-two names from amongst the unruly mob.

According to the national papers the confrontations of the following night were even more severe. 'Fierce Fights in Banned Water' read the headline in the *Irish Independent*. The reporter described how 'the Fishermen, when they entered the waterway, were cheered by a large crowd who lined both banks of the canal. They were pursued by Bailiffs and Civic Guards in motor launches' [32]. At one point, pandemonium erupted when a bailiff opened fire on the mob with his revolver. Stone-throwing ensued, and the police baton-charged. The Abbey men, for their part, contented themselves with goading the crowd:

One of the Fishermen, well over fifty years of age, threw himself into one [boat], and had to be lifted out bodily. ... The four Fishermen who had been dispossessed of their boats again took possession, and launched their craft amid resounding cheers. Before taking their departure two of the Fishermen took headers fully dressed into the canal. The crowd cheered wildly, and evidently in response to the cheers, one of the two men repeated the performance. [33]

The situation, described in the national papers as the 'Shannon Fishery War', spilled into its third night. Reduced to a fleet of ten boats, the Abbey Fishermen began their advance at around ten o'clock. Again, they symbolically fished the mouth of the tailrace while playing to the cheering crowd. The authorities had placed a local detachment of the army at the forefront of the conflict. Before long the scene turned to chaos and 'a struggle ensued ... shots were discharged and the crowd dispersed in all directions ... detachments of Free State troops, with fixed bayonets, forced the crowds to withdraw' [34]. Again, these scenes faded with the evening light. Early the following week the state returned all confiscated boats and nets to the fishermen. An inter-departmental committee was established to investigate the litigation arising from the conflict.

Citizenship and Culture

Through an examination of state records from the 1930s it is possible to piece together the issues surrounding the government in legislating for the Abbey Fishermen. Though it had the legal right to enforce purchase of the guild's water, it still faced many problematic cultural issues. In parliament, Senator Johnson decried the attempt by the state to compensate the fishermen based upon 'net profit' and the 'wages of their labour' [35]. The senator wished the administration to take into account 'their sons who are coming on and who have naturally expected to take up the work which their fathers and grandfathers and their great, great grandfathers have followed' [36]. Opposing this view, Senator Duffy adopted the line that the Abbey men were 'small farmers and labourers' for whom labour was a 'commodity' [37]. The point of contention in this debate is relatively clear. One camp proposed that the Abbey Guild be regarded as both workers and nation-state citizens; entitled to compensation for lost

wages. Those opposing allowed the guild access to another category; one of pre-modern 'folk' entitled to the legitimacy which accompanies a 'rich' culture. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo writes eloquently on this issue discussing the relationship between 'citizenship' and 'culture'. Marginals, according to Rosaldo, exist in a hybrid place, and are invariably 'relegated to the analytical dustbin of cultural invisibility' [38]. In a cultural discourse which endorsed modernity through development and history through sacrifice, the Abbey Guild appeared simultaneously to be neither and both.

Discussing national logos, similar in nature to Ardnacrusha, Benedict Anderson suggests that these representations of space embodied a proscribed sense of culture and history. The logos were the result of, and accompanied by, a state bureaucratic instrumentality which 'fixed' other cultures and preceding modes of production. Anderson identifies these instruments as census, map, and museum. It is possible, through an examination of the deployment of such instruments, to chart the Saorstát's exchange with the fishermen.

Census, Map, Museum

In 1936 the Saorstát commissioned a survey of the Abbey Guild of Fishermen in order to gauge any claim for compensation. The following (abridged) document was circulated by local officials:

1. Name and address?
 2. Age?
 3. Give particulars of each fishing season during which you actually fished in the river Shannon in the Abbey Fishery.
 4. Were there any years in which, although you were not actually fishing, you or your family received any contribution from other fishermen, or from the Abbey Guild?
 5. Is there any record or remembrance in your family as to how long members of your family were fishing?
 6. Can you give any idea or approximation of your earnings from the fishery in the various years?
 7. Can you give any idea as to the number of hours which you worked in each week while engaged in fishing?
 8. What other employment had you and what is your occupation now?
 9. State as far as you can the periods of such employment, giving dates in each case.
- [39]

The fishermen's argument during much of the subsequent litigation was that their way of life could neither be bought nor sold. The government survey appears to originate from the opposite mindset. It requires a certain individual to complete it; one constructed so as to be categorised and quantified. In order to produce this individual the document requires a statement of hours spent at work, earnings per hour, etc., disclosing the fact that the Saorstát administrators were weighing livelihood using purely capitalist tools. For the government legislators, work was something to be paid for; it existed in a place where work was carried out, and the lives of workers were broken up into clear areas of productivity and leisure.

Benedict Anderson employs the idea of the census to describe how imperial and national states produce 'citizens' by classifying them: 'The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place. No fractions' [40]. Understanding the fishermen as people subject to earnings and hours of

work aided the state in a refusal to recognise marginality; to compensate and forget. In accepting the state's compensation the Abbey men were becoming transparent and post-cultural. Rosaldo suggests that 'full citizens lack culture, and those most culturally endowed lack full citizenship'. Marginals, therefore, are condemned to 'bobbing and weaving between assimilation and resistance' [41].

The construction of Ardnacrusha also involved a considerable production of maps. Many of those representations took the form of tourist guides. Others still formed the basis of a considerable body of scientific and engineering literature. Both discourses emphasised the scientific and modern over the archaic and curious in their spatial representations [42]. Thus, these maps are power-laden in that they include, exclude, and peripheralise. Within this new space the area by-passed (the area owned by the Abbey Fishermen) had to be accounted for. Reality could either be post-cultural space or curious places fit for tourism; both formed part of the same discourse. It was the tourist aspect of the spatial discourse that prompted the managers of Ardnacrusha to hire the local author and historian, Kevin Hannan, to map the old Shannon. The map was to be a representation of the past; a visual catalogue of a culture fast disappearing from everyday life [43]. Though it was cartographically sound, the map was decorated with a host of unscientific and aesthetic frills. The myths and lore of the Abbey Fishermen, as well as outlines of the men themselves, are pictorially represented according to the various stretches of water. The folk cartography also seeks to 'fix' the Abbey Guild—into a place of history and curiosity in a new system with little real use for such traits, but, nevertheless, a system which based its sense of legitimacy on precisely such a heritage.

The state also sought to deal with the Abbey Fishermen through the deployment of museological resources. Many artefacts were exposed by the huge Siemens machines which excavated the tailrace at Ardnacrusha: arrowheads from the Bronze age and beyond, iron fishing hooks, and the fishing equipment of the Abbey Guild. Dredged up in the archaeology of development they sit side-by-side with the other exhibits at Limerick City Museum. Foucault, in his essay *Of Other Spaces*, discusses the power of the museum's panoptic gaze: 'The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times ... [in] a place outside of time and inexcessable to its ravages, a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity' [44]. The question is: how did people interact with this process, give it meaning, and simultaneously undercut its certainties?

Making Nations and Citizens

In 1934 the Abbey Guild played out the final chapter of its history in litigation. Having been compensated to the tune of £44,000, the Guild disintegrated amid internal disputes. Many of the Abbey men resorted to welfare assistance; others returned to fish the tailrace in a more unofficial capacity. Local author, Kevin Hannan, writes a compassionate tale of the displacement suffered by one of their number:

Tom ('Bull') was an Abbey Fisherman who knew the bed of the river as well as he knew the earthen floor of his own cabin ... as if his Brocaun was equipped with radar [45]. The results of his philosophy of life, his meagre uncertain income and his partiality for the pint were reflected in the wretched condition of his hovel. [46]

In this era of displacement the Battle of the Tailrace played a defining role in establishing a new cultural niche for the former fishermen. Another local author, William Lysaght, describes how the events were culturally appropriated:

Today the art of snap-net fishing is no longer practiced on the Shannon—the Brocauns have disappeared. Weeds now grow in the once fruitful draws with the romantic Irish names. The descendants of the Fishermen have been absorbed by less colourful, less fruitful employment. Salute them, their heritage was sacrificed on the altar of progress. [47]

Lysaght's words are echoed in the historical consciousness of the local poet, Mae Leonard. In a recent autobiographical newspaper article she narrated her own experience of Ardnacrusha as a place in the historical landscape: 'How could I appreciate the huge story of the Abbey Fishermen's struggle ... how their fishing grounds had been sacrificed to the building of the Shannon Scheme at Ardnacrusha' [48]. The obscure, marginal history of the Abbey men; their sacrifice and negotiation, are issues interwoven with the texture of the Hydro-electric Dam. Understanding how this monumental development was culturally domesticated, and 'folded into the mold of local life' [49]. indicates how active human agency enables the production of nationality—by giving meaning to it.

Meaningful Spaces

The local literary reaction to the dam constitutes just one of the ways in which the development was domesticated. As already noted the state deployed a bureaucratic instrumentality in an effort to 'fix' the Abbey Guild into some form of recognisable category. The fishermen's culture was mapped, museumised, surveyed, and classified. The nation did not tolerate their marginal borderland. At various points, the Abbey men engaged in this process, resisted it, and colluded with it according to their own cultural webs of significance. In doing so, they perverted the process of nation-building to gain a cultural currency recognisable in the new nation-state.

The 1936 census, which was designed to assess the Abbey Guild for compensation, transformed the men into post-cultural citizens in the eyes of the state. Locally, however, the results of the survey proved to be strangely useful. In the appendix to William Lysaght's *The Abbey Fishermen* the results are used as proof of ownership, and proof of the existence of an immemorial fishing culture. Thus, marginal labourers became, legally, a guild of property owners; entitled to compensation. In a similar way Kevin Hannan's map of the Old Shannon is illustrative of this process. The map seeks to represent a marginal area as a curious place of 'culture', complete with archaic practices and lore. Pictorial representations of Guild tales and modes of production emphasise difference and timelessness. Therefore, in acting as an agent of nation-building, Hannan was endowing marginals with legitimacy. His detached historian's gaze presents an ambiguous borderland as a historical reality. Legend and lore enter the realm of both a scientific and folklorist discourse. However, the most striking example of this phenomenon may be found in the museumising of the Guild. A cursory tour of Limerick City Museum reveals a veritable cabinet of Abbey Guild curiosities. On one side, as visitors enter, are models of the fishermen's boats, separated by time and glass. On the other side, odd bits of stone, iron, and rope form a catalogue of fishing practices. Among the centre-pieces of the museum, complete with back-lighting, is a large model of the Abbey Fishermen; carved from wood and glass to give a realistic

impression of the culture frozen in time—an innocent community engaged in an archaic way of life. Thus, the dam at Ardnacrusha and its ideological and instrumental accoutrements both help to ‘fix’ whilst being domesticated within local culture. Active agents incorporated outside processes within meaningful schemes even as they themselves were manipulated by other agenda.

Conclusions

The history of the Dam bespeaks a process of physical and metaphoric production, in a proto-Marxist sense. Physically, Ardnacrusha provided a topographical reference point for the co-ordinates of national consciousness. Tens of thousands travelled great distances to see this icon of modernity and post-Civil War development. This physical monument was appropriated for its cultural use-value by the nation-state. Images of Ireland were stitched together with modernity to produce an appropriate logo for a ‘fixed’ sense of culture and history.

I have tried to show how such monuments acquire their meaning, not only as symbolic places on the nationscape, but also as spots on the local landscape. The obscure story of the Battle of the Tailrace provides a remarkable insight into how people weave narratives and identities around such monuments, and thus give them meaning. As active agents people produce space and are themselves constituted by it. In the Battle of the Tailrace issues of nationality were at stake in a world of public observation and dialogue. The outcome of the battle altered certain aspects of that sense of nationality while reifying others. With his customary insight, the political patriarch Eamonn De Valera once described Ardnacrusha as ‘an experiment of great sociological value’ [50].

NOTES

- [1] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991).
- [2] See Partha Chatterjee, ‘Nationalism as a Problem’, in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft (Routledge, 1995), pp. 404–407.
- [3] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Blackwell, 1991), pp. 111–112.
- [4] Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 222.
- [5] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 183.
- [6] Saorstát Éireann, *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook* (Talbot Press, 1932), p. 15.
- [7] *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook*, p. 123.
- [8] *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook*, p. 265.
- [9] *Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook*, p. 123.
- [10] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 269.
- [11] Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, p. 269.
- [12] Luke Gibbons, ‘Coming out of Hibernation? The Myth of Modernity in Irish Culture’, in *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s*, ed. Richard Kearney (Wolfhound Press, 1988), pp. 205–219.
- [13] D. L. Kelleher, ‘The Shannon Scheme’, in *The Limerick Anthology*, ed. Jim Kemmy (Gill and Macmillan, 1996), pp. 254–255.
- [14] Kelleher, ‘The Shannon Scheme’, p. 255.
- [15] Electricity Supply Board, *Fifty Years of Shannon Power* (Stationary Office, 1978), p. 15.
- [16] *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 May 1927, p. 6.
- [17] Paul Duffy, *Ardnacrusha: Birth Place of the ESB* (Electricity Supply Board, 1990), p. 10.
- [18] Duffy, *Ardnacrusha: Birth Place of the ESB*, p. 9.
- [19] One such model—cast in solid silver—may be seen in the ESB headquarters in Dublin.
- [20] University College Dublin (UCD), Archives: McGuilligan Papers, 1929.
- [21] UCD, Archives: McGuilligan Papers, 1929.

- [22] *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 June 1929, p. 3.
- [23] *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 June 1929, p. 3.
- [24] *Seanad*, 1925, p. 1047.
- [25] *Seanad*, 1925, p. 1030.
- [26] *Seanad*, 1925, p. 326.
- [27] *Irish Times*, 29 June 1929, p. 7.
- [28] Despite their grandiose title they were a marginal community, having only formed a 'guild' in 1905.
- [29] The quotation was recorded during fieldwork interviews.
- [30] *Irish Times*, 13 July 1932, p. 7.
- [31] William Lysaght, *The Abbey Fishermen: A Short History of Snap-net Fishing* (Intype, n.d.), p. 29.
- [32] *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1932, p. 11.
- [33] *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1932, p. 11.
- [34] *Irish Times*, 18 July 1932, p. 7.
- [35] *Seanad*, 1934, p. 809.
- [36] *Seanad*, 1934, p. 809.
- [37] *Seanad*, 1934, pp. 817–818.
- [38] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Rethinking of Social Analysis* (Becon Press, 1993), p. 209.
- [39] Lysaght, *The Abbey Fishermen*, pp. 47–48.
- [40] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 168.
- [41] Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, pp. 200–211.
- [42] Duffy, *Ardnacrusha: Birth Place of the ESB*, Appendix.
- [43] The management of Ardnacrusha preserves copies of the late Kevin Hannan's maps.
- [44] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge, 1995), p. 1.
- [45] The term 'Brocaun' is a colloquial expression for the type of boat used by the Abbey Fishermen. These unique craft were propelled in Venetian style.
- [46] Kevin Hannan, 'Tom Bull', in *The Old Limerick Journal* vol. 6 (1981), p. 6.
- [47] Lysaght, *The Abbey Fishermen*, p. 57.
- [48] *Limerick Chronicle*, 10 February 1997, pp. 15–16.
- [49] A. Jamie Saris, 'Mad Kings, Proper Houses, and an Asylum in Rural Ireland', in *American Anthropologist* vol. 98, no. 3 (1996), pp. 539–554.
- [50] Electricity Supply Board, *Fifty Years of Shannon Power*, p. 38.