The Worlds of Irish Anthropology

Edited by Hana Cervinkova and Mark Maguire

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Foreword

The chapters in this volume stem from the 'Irish Anthropology Day', an extraordinarily enjoyable and fruitful celebration of anthropology in Ireland that was held in Dublin in May 2022. The variety of the contributions to this day, and the way they illuminate our understanding, both as to anthropology's intellectual contribution and its engagement with public policy, mean that this book will stand as a model of its kind.

This event, and now the book, *Worlds of Irish Anthropology*, are one of a series of country days held in recent years by the RAI: in order of appearance, these are France, Poland, Norway, Austria, Wales, and Brazil. Brazil is now in press, and we are also to hold a celebration of anthropology in India later in 2026. These days, and the volumes that emerge from them, have each yielded contrasting insights into the ways our discipline has taken shape in different countries. Extremely briefly, we have seen how anthropology has always been close to philosophy and public intellectuals in France (for example, through Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, Philipe Descola and, most recently, Didier Fassin, who honoured us with the RAI Huxley lecture in 2025). We have explored the way that anthropology in Poland has felt a need to explore the question of where the centres of the creation of anthropological knowledge may lie, hence the ironic title of that volume, *Anthropology in the Twilight Zone*. Likewise, anthropology in Austria has had to overcome multiple challenges, not only with regard to its uneven response to the Nazi occupation after the Anschluss, but also the rather restrictive *Kulturkreis* approach of the Catholic priest Schmidt and his intellectual follower Koppers, who nevertheless undoubtedly showed great courage in resisting that Nazi incursion.

We have seen too, the way that social anthropology took root in Norway, its extraordinary success in pre-university educational environments and later in the public sphere, working with Norwegian overseas-aid programmes. We have seen also how anthropologists have committed themselves to the cause of protecting and aiding indigenous peoples, and how the tragedy of the burning of the national museum in Brazil has demonstrated solidarity between anthropologists and indigenous peoples. Finally, we have seen too, how even though there is a long and distinct anthropological tradition in Wales, one that could surely be built upon for the coming generations, it does not appear to have been commensurately successful in institutional terms: programmes have been started variously in Bangor, Aberystwyth, Swansea and Lampeter. Yet, there is, at present, in spite of these efforts to start anthropology at various times, no major department of anthropology in Wales. Of course, it may be

But what Boas was trying to put in place was not in any way a national anthropology. Instead, he was completely devoted to a transnational scientific discourse that would transcend nationalist considerations. It is to this end that he spent considerable efforts before the Great War in working with the Royal Anthropological Institute to found an international congress of anthropology that would establish mutually acceptable terminology for the investigations that were necessary to the discipline. The following sequence of events is extremely complex in detail, spanning two world wars and delicate negotiations between France (who at that time wished to keep the Germans at arm's length) and Britain (who wished to include them). But suffice it to say that eventually, his prompting paid off; the first congress, the Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, was held in 1934 in University College London. This Congress eventually became the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) in 1938, and then – fast forward to our days – became a founding partner with the World Anthropological Union in 2015, which consists of the IUAES and the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA).

Another way that this point may be demonstrated is through the European Association of Social Anthropologists, the biennial conference of which was so successful at Maynooth in 2010. The largest of all the anthropological associations in Europe, it was founded in 1999 by a small number of anthropologists, greatly stimulated by the way that communications with colleagues in eastern Europe were becoming possible for the first time in more than fifty years. A highlight of that meeting was the way, as anthropologists from the former socialist states even today often reminisce, they were able to travel to meet their counterparts after so long being prevented from doing so freely. EASA remains one of the most successful, still-expanding associations in the discipline, and long may it flourish.

Does this mean, however, that all has been successful: that we can rest assured as a medium-sized discipline that is making a steady contribution; or in Kuhnian terms, that the time for great paradigm collapses has passed and that we are now content in our own professional clothes? Alas, this does not appear to the case. In order to explore this, we need to return briefly to the world of Anglo-American anthropology.

Malaise

Within the anthropology of the twenty-first century, combined with an extraordinary flourishing of excellent work, there is simultaneously a malaise and angst that is arguably the most serious the discipline has ever encountered. This is much more than the what might be regarded as the traditional internal disagreements that have often turned out to be very fruitful; but rather a sense

of being a persecuted small discipline. In the UK, for instance, this has been accentuated by the closure of departments in Kent and Roehampton, as well as previously in Swansea and Hull. Other departments are regarded as struggling, and there is a sense that undergraduate recruitment too is declining.

Understandably, there is a great deal of frustration – and very often these closures are out of the control of the hard-working colleagues who are caught up in reorganizations that do not favour them. However, there is a further discourse which brings us back to the question of truth and the idea of anthropological practice. Here, we need to consider the third of the great anthropological associations in the anglophone sphere: the Association of Social Anthropologists. It is sometimes held that social anthropology took its modern form in the London School of Economics at Malinowski's seminar between the wars. It is indisputably the case that the seminarians had an enormous influence in the subsequent decades. However, the kind of anthropology that was agreed upon really took shape just a little after that point, with the founding of the ASA in the late 1940s. Their founding conception embodied the idea of anthropological practice as an empirical endeavour, greatly influenced by Radcliffe-Brown, who was made life president of the association, which was chaired in turn by Evans-Pritchard.

Evans-Pritchard himself, followed very quickly by later generations of anthropologists, found this simple empiricism – which they named scornfully 'positivism' – unsatisfactory, resulting in the first of a great number of shifts in anthropological understanding. I hardly need to stress here the details of this well-known change toward an interpretive approach. However, I would like to remark upon one of its consequences, which is in the transformation of way that the question of truth becomes understood.

One way of illustrating this might be to consider why Malinowski, for instance, regarded anthropology as important. Malinowski clearly felt that a) research pursued by anthropologists gave rise to insights that were otherwise unavailable; b) that that essential to this was the quality of fieldwork; c) that those who were not professionally trained were unable to gain access to the knowledge thereby produced unless there were anthropologists who were able to explain it to them.

If we fast forward to that kind of contemporary anthropology that denies the easy access to the external world that Radcliffe-Brown took for granted, it seems to have fallen into something of a dilemma. It still claims that the principle reason to conduct anthropology is to access the truth, but what is meant by 'truth' is inverted, or rather, the truth claims become such that 'the truth' does not exist at all: knowledge is all too often regarded as having no universality, being divided up into mutually incommensurable spheres of human existence.

While this approach may be perceived to address some hegemonic and epistemological issues that quite rightly should be addressed, it is nevertheless in danger of making it logically impossible for anthropology to approach policymakers and demonstrate its usefulness. For, if we are to make ourselves useful as a discipline – and in so many ways we demonstrably have done – we have to do so on the basis of being able to solve problems that occur in the everyday life of the world that we inhabit. We cannot say to the administrator faced with a concrete problem that progress is impossible because the truth of the matter is relative; nor can we claim that there is an abstract, Platonic anthropology that can solve the world's problems because it has privileged access that no one else has. Our approach has to be the opposite: that we can contribute using our material and the experience that we have accumulated by sharing it, by working willingly with a host of different actors. Anthropology, indeed, in the university is in practice a concrete manifestation of the opposite of such a vision: it combines almost seamlessly with so many different social science and humanities disciplines: languages, geography, development, economics and international relations to name but a few of the obvious candidates.

Let me give a final example of what I mean. Sometimes, anthropological courses in the UK, as they are advertised to potential undergraduates, have used as their slogan that anthropology enables one to understand what it means to be human. But this is precisely the kind of self-presentation I have found to be so very destructively solipsistic. How can we as a discipline claim any privileged knowledge as to what it means to be human? What of the musician who, through a perfect performance, reduces their audience to tears? What of the lover who, united with their longed-for partner, feels that the world is enchanted with every breath? What of the great writings of every literature tradition which highlight and reflect the very heart of the dilemmas of existence? Could not these, too, make a similar or parallel claim?

In the end then, my argument is this: inherent within the very definition of anthropology is the idea that through becoming an anthropologist we will explore the world of human cultures in interesting ways. In making a claim to be anthropologists at all, we assume that access to an external reality is feasible. Once we accept, and realise this, the way is open to create a much less antagonistic and a more co-operative vein. The essays in this, and in the other books that this series has produced, illustrate just how important this endeavour can be.

David Shankland
Director, Royal Anthropological Institute

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Hana Cervinkova and Mark Maguire

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Introduction

Hana Cervinkova and Mark Maguire

The Irish Anthropology Day was the seventh in the series of one-day conferences celebrating traditions of anthropology in different countries initiated and organized periodically by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. The Irish Anthropology Day was unique in at least two ways. Its extensive preparations, which began in March 2020, were held during the Covid-19 pandemic, generating logistical challenges, including several postponements. The successful conference, which finally took place in the historical building of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland at Merrion Square in Dublin on 19 May 2022, was for many of us the first opportunity to meet colleagues in person after more than two years of online work. A conference representing anthropology on a geopolitically divided island characterized by historical and epistemological complexities required that conversations take place across borders and national traditions. The scientific and organizing committee - David Shankland (RAI), Hastings Donnan (Queen's University Belfast), and Hana Cervinkova and Mark Maguire (Maynooth University) – worked to ensure voices from both the south and the north were represented, and an open conference call and invitations were shared widely across the island. Fifteen papers were presented at the event in Dublin, which was opened by an online address by Helena Wulff (Stockholm University), who spoke about inspiration from Irish dancers and writers for her ethnographic work.

All those who presented at the conference, as well as those who submitted abstracts but could not eventually participate, were invited to contribute to this publication. The final book has eleven chapters, which include historical

reviews, conceptualization and reflections on intellectual developments of anthropology on the island, as well as contributions featuring ethnographic work as it inscribes itself in the landscape of global developments in anthropological research. Nine chapters are based on papers presented during the Dublin conference, and the additional chapters are by authors who submitted abstracts and later full-length papers. The book is thus reflective of the conference itself, and includes authors who answered our open call, which was distributed across departments in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The first chapter is a broad sketch of past attempts at capturing historical developments in anthropology in/of Ireland. The authors propose an expansive view of anthropology as an intellectual field with academic and public relevance, illustrated by its strong presence in and outside of academia. In the following three chapters, anthropologists with a long history of engagement with anthropology in Ireland reflect on their past research and its recent configurations. Drawing on a powerful ethnographic experience in Ireland, Lawrence Taylor reflects on the importance of landscape in his research in Ireland and on US/Mexico border. Through the concepts of moral geography and moral entrepreneurship, he considers questions of place and space, the relation between fieldwork and theory and the value of comparative experience. Thomas Wilson returns to his 1970s and 1980s research of local political life in Meath with a fresh ethnographic study in the county, showing the impact of suburbanization on political culture. Jamie Saris illuminates the history of medical anthropology in Ireland through selected moments in his career. Describing specific social and fiscal political contexts and contingencies to which he refers as 'micro-climates', he shows how anthropology has become institutionally situated, with particular attention to his home department at Maynooth University.

The last research study, which figures in Saris's reflection, is attended to in more detail in the following chapter by David Prendergast, who addresses anthropologists' contributions to collaborative and multidisciplinary research on ageing. He draws on specific ethnographic case studies in Northern Ireland to critically reflect on the concept of 'ageing-in-place' as it has informed research programs in Ireland. The next three chapters concern the continued legacies of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Matthew Gault builds on his ethnography in the rural landscape of County Fermanagh to illuminate the implications of storytelling related to the sites of memory of former conflict for reconciliation projects in post-conflict societies. Gordon Ramsey employs an intersectional perspective to understand working-class loyalism and argues, inspired by Thomas Piketty, that sectarian allegiance is a form of class politics. Chiara Magliacane draws on her ethnography of youth social workers

in Belfast to illuminate the role of local (state) actors in the administration of care in conflict and post-conflict contexts.

The last section of the book, which includes three ethnographic studies, opens with a first-hand autoethnographic account of Ireland's direct provision system by the Nigerian anthropologist Abayomi Ogunsanya. Based on ethnographic research of practices involving the rehoming of ex-racing greyhounds, Chrissy Skelton analyses the contested social, political and ideological space they inhabit in the context of Irish family and home. Fiona Murphy offers an intimate ethnography of her grandfather and his childhood in an Irish industrial school, highlighting the difficulties in conducting archival research on Catholic institutions in Ireland and the silencing of a difficult past. The book concludes with a reminiscence on the rich anthropological journey from the University of Khartoum through Queen's University in Belfast and the University of St Andrews to Maynooth by Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, illustrating some less-known and important elements of the history of anthropology on the island of Ireland.

1

Situating the worlds of Irish anthropology

Mark Maguire and Hana Cervinkova

[We] need to know as much about the eye that sees as the object seen.
Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man* (1949:11)

Reflecting

In this book, anthropologists and near neighbours grapple with themes ranging from migration and memory to social class and religious conflict. They do so by drawing on various interdisciplinary resources and theoretical influences. The collection, then, speaks to contemporary anthropology's pluralism, intertextuality and intellectual promiscuity.[1] The contributors are nonetheless united in approaching large-scale challenges through theoretically informed analysis of cultural scenes and life-worlds, through ethnography, in other words. Therefore, although our focus is Irish anthropology, this book

1 Of course, many anthropologists grumble about those who wander across disciplinary boundaries and experiment with exotic philosophies. Several decades ago, Marvin Harris protested 'the number of experimental, personalistic, and idiosyncratic field studies carried out by untrained would-be novelists and ego-tripping narcissists afflicted with congenital logo-diarrhoea' (Harris 1994:64). More recently, in response to statements about innovation, new challenges and the future of European anthropology, Christina Toren insisted that the correct response is to baton down the hatches, 'stick to our guns' and 'insist that our students be trained in the methods appropriate to long-term participant observer fieldwork, irrespective of where in the world they are working or what they are working on' (2015:503).

occasions reflection on ethnography in the contemporary moment – and we take this opportunity here.

This volume emerged from a Royal Anthropological Institute seminar on Irish anthropology, and several contributors situate themselves vis-à-vis their disciplinary predecessors. However, the past and present often appear uncomfortable together, as if in a broken relationship. For example, one author sets their exploration of ethics and ethnographic intimacy against prior racializing and 'extractive' projects. The strained relationship between contemporary Irish anthropologists and their predecessors hints at more than the narcissism of small generational differences.

Many countries have coherent anthropological 'traditions' with 'founding fathers' and revered texts.[2] Not so here. It would be an overstatement to describe Irish anthropology as a scholarly tradition, even though it is a popular subject offered by several universities and is represented by a scholarly association that organizes conferences and publishes a journal.[3] Identification with Irish anthropology does not require ancestor veneration, reference to revered texts, or even payment of association fees. Instead, it is a broad church that welcomes nationalists and pluralists, students of local life, cosmopolitan social theorists, the curious and the promiscuous.

In the past, commentators have assessed the importance of Irish anthropology within the broader discipline and concluded that it is of 'limited significance' (Peace 2008:701). However, disciplinary history generally foregrounds the work of 'great men' (and occasionally women) in elite institutions. Illustratively, despite its significance to the late nineteenth-century formation of professional anthropology, Ireland receives scant treatment in George Stocking's *Victorian Anthropology* (1987), a half-dozen vague mentions to be exact.[4] Of course, intellectual historians must edit the

2 As if to make this point, the contents of Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen's *A History of Anthropology* (2013) are actually set out according to 'founding father' and regional school of thought.

3 In *The Anthropology of Ireland*, Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan similarly perform a pluralist reading of Irish anthropology, concluding, 'Over the last century, and most certainly today, there has been no single anthropological template that has driven or structured whatever might be seen to be the anthropology of Ireland.' (2006:5). Moreover, they note that, certainly at particular historical conjunctures, a different 'tradition' of ethnographic writing appears in Northern Ireland, with a greater focus on class and conflict than found in south-of-the-border community studies (e.g. Harris 1972), though one can observe contrasting writing about the Republic during that period (e.g. Brody 1974; cf. Cresswell 1969).

4 Stocking's *After Tylor* (2012:98–102) devotes a few pages to Ireland but adds little beyond the usual tired tropes expressed in a lazy yet imperious tone.

past, but the exercise is prone to false positivism and, inevitably, exclusivism. Here, we contend that it is more faithful to history, especially postcolonial Irish history, and more productive for future scholars, to approach Irish anthropology as expansively as possible.

A cracked looking-glass

As already indicated, there are several reviews of anthropological writing about the island of Ireland.[5] A recent example is Diarmuid Ó Giolláin's venturesome introduction to *Irish Ethnologies* (2017), which folds Irish anthropology into folklore and labels the resulting *mélange* 'ethnology'.[6] In Ireland, folklore emerged adjacent to anthropology and is today an enterprise

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Hilariously, he casts Ireland's bloody War of Independence and the subsequent partial withdrawal of Crown forces as 'the terms of imperial dominion being ... substantially attenuated' (2012:382). To paraphrase George Orwell, when vague words fall from the mouths of the powerful they land on the truth and cover it like snow. One of the goals of volumes like this, devoted to anthropology as emergent outside traditional centres, is to reflect on disciplinary self-knowledge. Much can be said about disciplinary tradition keepers in this regard. Stocking is jokingly referred to as 'Haskell Hall's House Historian', a reference to the building that accommodates Chicago's anthropology department. His collection of essays, *The Ethnographer's Magic* (1992) notes (bemoans?) the decentring of the discipline from its traditional redoubts in elite universities, inadvertently conceding that his histories are stories of knowledge and power in specific institutional contexts. That said, power-knowledge is never as serious as it pretends. Adam Kuper's *Anthropology and Anthropologists* serves house histories of leading Oxbridge anthropologists with plenty of gossip on the side, while Charles King's recent *Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century* (2019) cuts straight to the affairs, jealousies, malaria and vendettas.

5 Examples include, *inter alia*, Donnan and McFarlane 1989; Egan and Murphy 2015; Peace 1989; Wilson and Donnan 2006.

6 Ó Giolláin's collapsing of disciplines is done partly to conform to the volume's origins as a special number of the journal *Ethnologie Française*. It could be argued, of course, that at various times anthropology and folklore have been collapsed into ethnology. In 1900, for example, Cambridge University established a Lectureship in Ethnology to bring together several scholarly currents, but in that case the label 'ethnology' was understood as a placeholder, an ostensibly neutral institutional wedge driven in by utopians, feminists, socialists, anarchists to establish a place for geography, anthropology, sociology, political economy, archaeology and folklore. In Ireland, however, the brand has a long and toxic association with narrow racial 'surveys', notably George Ellis's *Irish Ethnology Socially and Politically Considered* (2009 [1852]).

focused primarily on Irish culture.[7] Anthropology always looks elsewhere, historically, comparatively and theoretically. It is a discipline that long ago refused the label 'ethnology'. Jacques Derrida's (1978) deconstruction of Lévi-Straussian structuralism was a critique of ethnology as metaphysics in a state of collapse. We also find this entry in Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary*: 'Ethnology, n.: The science that treats of the various tribes of Man, as robbers, thieves, swindlers, dunces, lunatics, idiots, and ethnologists.' (1911:88).

Scholars are fond of categorization and love nothing more than dragging other scholars into categories, dead or alive. For example, commentators on Irish anthropology embrace a twelfth-century Anglo-Norman chronicler as a proto-ethnographer, but frequently elide the contribution of colonial statisticians. The search for proto-ethnographic examples is a project founded on presentism. Here, we argue for a more inclusive approach, one open to historical surprise and revision and critical of all unexamined conventions. A more inclusive reading would, for example, involve a discussion of William Petty, whose seventeenth-century surveys combined maps, statistical analysis and proto-anthropological insight to assess human nature and 'the worth of men' (Petty 1970[1691]). For Karl Marx, Petty was the 'audacious genius' who advanced the capitalist world system by perfecting dispossession. For Michel Foucault, Petty isolates human nature to exploit it and thus lays the foundations of modern governmentality (Foucault 2007:84n., 283n.; Marx 1904:n.2; Maguire 2018; Poovey 1991).[8]

An open perspective on anthropology also helps us appreciate the importance of Ireland in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social thought, as expressed in travel journals and correspondence.[9] For example, Alexis de Tocqueville, accompanied by Gustave de Beaumont, toured Ireland in 1835, following the publication of *Democracy in America* (Larkin 1990; de Tocqueville 1835, 1958). His notes provide an extraordinary account of a land

7 The Irish government, through various iterations of the Department of Education, supported the Irish Folklore Institute (est. 1930), then the Irish Folklore Commission (est. 1935).

8 There is a longstanding, if uneven and contested, scholarly tradition on Ireland and Empire, which describes John Bull's other island as a laboratory where various instruments of rule were first tested, from centralized communications and social engineering to institutional formations from policing to postal services. The early modern roots of these experiments are the focus of recent scholarship (see Ohlmeyer 2005; also Jeffery 2017).

9 We cannot neglect Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), albeit a satirical novel. Swift plays with the form of the travelogue by the learned explorer, meditates on observation and offers cultural critique by imagining a series of utopias (cf. Trouillot 1991).

on the verge of starvation, ruled over by a cruel yet indifferent aristocracy.[10] He compares Irish poverty to that experienced by Iroquois 'friends' and even hints at a 'general theory' of feudalism. For contemporary anthropologists grappling with racism and state violence, Tocqueville offers a prescient analysis of how social and moral orders infuse and often refuse state power. A broadly similar analysis is available in the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass's writing about Ireland (Kinealy 2018). These accounts stand adjacent but in contradistinction to Frederick Engels's (1971[1853]) thin description of law and order in his 'Irish letters' to Karl Marx.[11] All this to say, rather than being of 'limited significance', if seen through a wide-angle lens, the story of Irish anthropology is worldly.

During the late eighteen hundreds, the Anglo-Irish, together with Presbyterians influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment, led a remarkable antiquarian movement that acted as an interlocutor for Gaelic writing and scholarship.[12] By the nineteenth century, the Irish, decimated by famine and emigration and for so long regarded as 'wild', morphed into prelapsarian peasant 'folk' – inspiration for those who had difficulty reconciling themselves with modernity.[13] Somewhere there are still people and herds, to borrow from

10 Gustave de Beaumont later published *Ireland: Social, Political, and Religious* (1839). There is some speculation that de Tocqueville did not publish on Ireland to leave the way clear for his companion (see Larkin 1990).

11 Historical change should always be considered when comparing social commentary—countries do not hold still for their portrait. Nonetheless, Engels's analysis of the sharp end of British rule sets the record wrong in ways that are hard to correct. In a famous passage to Marx,

> Ireland may be regarded as England's first colony and as one which, because of its proximity, is still governed exactly in the old way, and one can already notice here that the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies. I have never seen so many gendarmes in any country ... who are armed with carbines, bayonets, and handcuffs.
>
> (1971[1856]:93)

In fact, the 'gendarmes' were imbricated with local life, and often staffed by the Catholic sons of Ireland (see Herlihy 2016). Also, there were multiple police forces in the country. Engels's letter influenced, ironically for Marxism, a tradition whereby policing is not regarded as institutional solidity always ready to melt into air, but rather the state's underlying and brutish form.

12 Ó Giolláin's *Irish Ethnologies* provides an excellent precis of this work (2007:3–4, *passim*).

13 Egan and Murphy (2015) describe anthropology's role in assigning the Irish to the 'savage slot', a phrase coined by Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991). But, Trouillot's well-known term disguises deeper, and occasionally erroneous, reflection on how categorical thinking about savagery and barbarism blends with realist and utopian imaginaries. Michel Foucault (2003:194–9) writes eloquently on this, showing the

Friedrich Nietzsche, and influential nineteenth-century revivalists, romantics and anthropologists found a universal somewhere else in Ireland. Here is W.B. Yeats's recollection of his first meeting with John Millington Synge:

> Six years ago I was staying in a students' hotel in the Latin Quarter, and somebody, whose name I cannot recollect, introduced me to an Irishman, who, even poorer than myself, had taken a room at the top of the house. It was J.M. Synge. … [H]e wished to become a writer. He had, however, nothing to show but one or two poems and impressionistic essays, full of that kind of morbidity that has its root in too much brooding over methods of expression, and ways of looking upon life, which come, not out of life, but out of literature, *images reflected from mirror to mirror*.
>
> (Yeats 1961:298, our emphasis)[14]

The desire to escape from a world of mere reflection inspired Yeats, Augusta Gregory and several others to conduct extensive ethnographic field research. On this ground, a literary renaissance flowered, one in which an *ancien régime*'s artistic production fed a national cultural revival with revolutionary potential. Terry Eagleton (1995) argues that modernism is born of the dialectic between the archaic and the modern, the latter being most clearly observable not in the metropolitan core but in the defiant periphery. In Ireland, ethnography of a kind, often conducted by disaffected cosmopolitans of a type, became the preferred mode of representation.

As noted earlier, Jacques Derrida exposed the intrinsic contradiction of 'ethnology' – denoting anthropology absent of reflexivity. It is, he explains, an effort to absorb the Other into a universalizing epistemology. However, it is also the point of tension where the Western *episteme* exposes itself by overextension and recursion (1978:282).[15] One may see this tension in Alfred Cord Haddon's surveys of the Aran Islands and John Millington Synge's literary masterpiece about the same tiny archipelago.[16] In short, Aran refused

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importance of spatiality and temporality; and, James Scott's (2017) recent work is similarly important.

14 It is not clear if Yeats is recalling an encounter roughly as it happened or how he would have liked it to be, *l'esprit d'escalier*.

15 To quote Derrida precisely, anthropology is 'privileged' among the human sciences because it 'borrows from a heritage the resources necessary for the deconstruction of that heritage' Derrida 1978:282).

16 We bracket the history of folklore here, as it is already set out in by Ó Giolláin (2017). As one might expect, *Irish Ethnologies* discusses the pioneering work of Douglas Hyde adjacent to revivalist writing, and describes later institutionalization.

to be measured by the scientist of man or romanticized by the disaffected writer.

Commentators often cast Victorian Irish anthropology, as represented by Haddon and Browne's survey of the Aran Islands (1891–3), as clumsy crypto-colonialism. It is later, with Haddon's expedition to the Torres Straits in 1898, that the birth of professional anthropology is formally recognized.[17] However, Ciaran Walsh's recent *Alfred Cort Haddon: A Very English Savage* (2023) shows him steeped in anarchist philosophy, fascinated by the ethnographic potential of photography and cinematography, and frustrated by academic collusion with imperialism. Haddon visited Aran in 1890 as part of the government-funded survey of fishing grounds. The survey gives us plenty of crude physiognomic descriptions, but Haddon's photographs, sketches and notes show a profound ethnographic respect for the proud 'argonauts of the western isles' (Walsh 2023:100; see also Fitzpatrick 2012).

Haddon's career was not a linear one. He returned temporarily to skull measuring after the 1890 expedition, yet his Aran experience compelled him to conceive a new discipline *avant la letter*. He imagined a scholarly enterprise that would explore customs, lore and livelihoods in 'the uttermost parts of the earth' or in the nearby 'playground, on the village green – even in our cities' (quoted in Walsh 2023:7).[18] Moreover, representation 'in its widest sense' would not begin and end with the written word. Like John Millington Synge, Haddon understood the power of photographs and was fond of wowing the public with magic lantern shows.

Ó Giolláin traces wider connections between the continental European interest in Irish folklore and the later rise of 'auto-ethnography' – perhaps better labelled 'ethnic autobiography' (Fischer 1986:194–234, passim) – especially in island communities.

17 James Urry's *Before Social Anthropology* (1993:62–7, 73) is one such example. However, Urry shows little knowledge of Haddon's fieldwork in Ireland and is focused on reading anthropology's history as a series of neat periods. For an erudite critique of such (unfortunately common) readings of disciplinary history, see Shankland (2019).

18 There remains much reverence for 'overseas fieldwork' in social and cultural anthropology, though dozens of critiques have been published by those who favour decolonization of disciplinary conventions and those who have examined the distinctive pattern of overseas travel. Undoubtedly, as Adrian Peace (1988) once suggested, Ireland has not been a preferred ethnographic destination. But Haddon, via Walsh (2023), raises a more fundamental question: if we decide to treat anthropology in its widest sense, we must surely think differently about the history of ethnography in the discipline, in terms of its mode of representation, but also in term of its earliest innovators (Pachirat 2017).

Nearly a century later, Clifford Geertz claimed that ethnography is 'just a kind of writing, putting things on paper' (1988:1). Of course, he uttered these words during a moment of intense disciplinary self-critique, when anthropologists asked questions about representation and authorial authority. However, new programmes for the study of the contemporary also emerged in that exact moment of epistemological crisis.[19] By revisiting the history of Irish anthropology, we begin to see how the discipline evolved and how debatable views calcify as conventions, such as the view that ethnography is simply 'writing culture'.

A few short years after Haddon's expedition, John Millington Synge arrived on Aran with a camera, fiddle and portable typewriter. His book, *The Aran Islands* (2006), announces itself as a 'direct account' of native life. Indeed, the reader is immediately inserted next to a turf fire on Árainn Mór and introduced to exotic scenes by the intrepid ethnographer. However, the culture that was already an image of itself ruined his *mise-en-scène*. An old man tells Synge about the Nordic folklorists, ascendency scholars and academic charlatans who went before him.[20] He meets children who sell trinkets to 'ladies and gintlemins' visiting from the mainland (among them, perhaps, W.B. Yeats?), along with the occasional returned Yank. Deflated, he decamps to Inis Meáin. On that remote outcrop, he observes police from the mainland arrive to impose 'abstract truth' and impersonal contracts on the native order of things.[21] Like Haddon, Synge was appalled by colonialism

19 The key text during this era is undoubtedly James Clifford and George E. Marcus's edited collection *Writing Culture* (1986). The book arrived on a wave of academic deconstructionism and was hugely popular among literary critics keen to see all knowledge as textual. Of course, it acted as a corrective to an earlier genre of anthropology that used writing to construct a 'crystal window to the reality beyond', to borrow from Geertz (1988:29). However, remarkably few critics, it seems, read past the introduction, and thus appreciated George E. Marcus's nascent programme for multi-sited ethnography or Paul Rabinow's early work on the anthropology of the contemporary.

20 The old man, 'Mourteen' Coneely accuses Jeremiah Curtin of 'selling' local folk stories for profit. The accusation is not without merit, and it calls attention to prestige/profit in the academic world. Curtin published *Myths and Folklore of Ireland* in 1890, which influenced Yeats's writing, which in turn expanded the public appetite for folklore. The old man's stories were wrenched from lived experience, reflected from mirror to mirror, and returned undead, as if the fairies took them.

21 One of the more interesting discussions of *The Aran Islands* is in Declan Kiberd's essay 'Synge's *Tristes Tropiques*' (2000). Kiberd picks out the discussion of the arrival of policing as a proxy for 'civilization' and sees the fingerprints of fashionable anarchism. However, it is surprising that Kiberd choses this very

and his complicity with it. Perhaps this is why the authorial voice fades as the narrative progresses. He went to Aran to capture a world of 'simplicity and unity' (2006:9). He found a living culture already imbricated with modernity, syncretic and sensitive to representation. *The Aran Islands* is a reflection through, to borrow from James Joyce, a 'cracked looking-glass.'[22]

When contemplating the Aran Islanders, Synge (1966) could not help but think of the defiant Parisians of the Latin Quarter – the ethnographic gaze returned. Fragments and images replace narrative confidence. Scott Ashly (2001) reads this as the language of science yielding to the language of dreaming. He has Synge anticipating the emergence of modern anthropology as rival ways of knowing and representing the world – the scientific and objective, and the mythical and poetic – trapped in the same academic-administrative unit. David A. Westbrook approaches the same problem with more eloquence:

> A young man leaves Paris or some such centre for the 'field', armed with a notebook, a bit of reading, rather inchoate beliefs in the importance of cultural specificity and underlying humanity, and an earnest yet pleasing manner. After some months or years of talking to, indeed living among, members of another culture, the young man returns and writes up his findings about life elsewhere. ... the better part of the Parisian intelligentsia will briefly entertain the notion that they are not the centre of the universe, that there are other ways of being human – that is, ethnography is always, in part, a critique of home. Built into this story are a host of assumptions about the modern and the traditional, the familiar and the exotic, the adventure and the objective ('science' doing double duty here), the inauthentic and the authentic, and human possibility. ... [Now] the romantic comes to seem the Orientalist, which is too implicated with the colonial and often associated with domination, even cruelty. Once there were no more islands over the horizon of consciousness, the geographical and social context of ethnography changed. It is tempting to tell this as a story of decline, the closing of an intellectual frontier, with dwindling scope for real excitement,

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moment to bracket the obvious, and potentially conscious, literary framing. Was Synge unaware that the Aran Islands already had three police barracks and eighteen policemen for a population of just over three thousand souls? (Harvey 1991:239; also Fitzpatrick 2012). Anarchism as propaganda by omission?

22 The phrase is from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1990 [1922]:7), specifically a Mulligan meta-retort to the so-called ethnographic encounter in Telemachus.

> much less heroism, the sad history of a North Atlantic encounter with the tropics.
>
> (Westbrook 2008:9–10)

Westbrook is interested in going beyond just-so stories and 'writing culture' critiques to explore the refunctioning of ethnography such that it might address a world larger than the blue-stocking class in London, New York and Paris. To fully appreciate the stakes here, we must discuss twentieth-century anthropology in Ireland and elsewhere.

The involution of tradition

As Gregory Castle (2001:253) reminds us, Irish people became more conscious of their representation during the early twentieth century. In the opening pages of *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce unseats ethnographic authority, certainly the revivalist variety, and gives us mimesis and knowingness in place of romanticism and tradition. Simultaneously, one sees the flowering of an extraordinary number of ethnic autobiographies. For example, Maurice O'Sullivan's *Fiche Blian ag Fás* (1933) offers a beguiling portrait of innocence and change, inspired partly by his friendship with English classicist and Marxist George Thompson.[23] A year later, having returned from a career as a union organizer and professional communist in America, Tom O'Flaherty (brother of the famous author Liam) published the valedictory and somewhat spicy *Aranmen All* (1934). In contrast, that same year, Robert O'Flaherty (no relation) brought the groundbreaking ethnographic film *Man of Aran* to the world's screens. In the film, actual Islanders oblige the director by agreeing to act like the 'primitives' stalking his imagination.[24] All this to say, in the early twentieth century, images of Irishness were reflected between mirrors, and Irish people held some of those mirrors.[25]

23 None other than E.M. Foster penned an 'Introductory note' to *Twenty Years A-Growing* (1938), the English-language translation of *Fiche Blian ag Fás*, claiming it was an insider's account of a civilization thus far only described imperfectly from the outside – as Marshall Sahlins was fond of saying, anthropology became the science of the disappearing, with the anthropologist eventually disappearing too. Foster also noted that *Twenty Years A-Growing* was remarkable in that it was a personal account addressed to modernity.

24 One of the leading protagonists in *Man of Aran* is 'Tiger King,' and the real Tiger did not prosper from his part in the film. He died in poverty in London during the 1970s. On his deathbed, he informed an Irish journalist that the whole film was 'bullshit' (see RTE 1976).

25 Here we have noted only the literature on Aran, but one could easily list the ethnic autobiographies that emerged from the Great Blasket Island, which, again, carried the fingerprints of visiting Celticists, folklorists and writers.

Ethnography, literature and representation were matters of great seriousness in early twentieth-century Ireland. However, like the final moment in *Lord of the Flies*, the grownups arrive, and everything that happened before becomes mere child's play. In the early 1930s, Harvard's Earnest Hooton, funded by a Rockefeller Foundation grant, donations and even monies from the Irish government, inaugurated the Harvard-Irish Mission. The goal was to demonstrate the capability of anthropology – denoting three strands: archaeology, physical anthropology and social anthropology – to study the journey of a traditional society to modern nation-statehood scientifically. The Harvard project aimed to test a question of world-historical importance, and Ireland, once again, offered an ideal laboratory.

The overall mission director was William Lloyd Warner, a junior faculty member with ethnographic experience in aboriginal Australia and, importantly, in Newburyport, Massachusetts, where he used the same methods to represent a modern 'Yankee City'. He employed two graduate students from his Newburyport study to conduct the Irish fieldwork, Conrad Arensberg and Solon Kimball. Structural functionalism arrived in County Clare from Australia by way of Massachusetts.

Warner was convinced that the mission would license a new brand of anthropology, a truly comparative social science, and did everything possible to ensure that the world read about it as a scholarly success story. He courted Eamonn de Valera, the Catholic hierarchy, made an agreement with the National Museum and the Folklore Commission, and launched a press campaign. So successful was the campaign that local libraries saw a run on anthropology books.

The key publications from the Harvard mission are Arensberg's essays, *The Irish Countryman* (1937), and his monograph with Kimball, *Family and Community* (1940). Standing back, one may observe four modes of critical response to these publications. Firstly, from early on, critics detected an intrinsic conservativism in structural functionalism (e.g. JHH 1937).[26] This was less of an academic criticism – after all, early twentieth-century anthropologists were obsessed with how stability was maintained amid change – and more a moral-political suspicion. The worry was that functionalists might excuse oppressive structures as necessary bulwarks against Hobbesian chaos (Sahlins 1999:404). Later anthropologists were quick to dismiss the Harvard team's theoretical 'rigidity' (Brody 1974:6) and tacit approval for 'the *ancien régime*

26 It should be no surprise that Arensberg devoted much of the latter part of his career to the study of community in industrial society and cultural change therein (e.g. Arensberg 1972; Arensberg and Kimball 1965).

of patriarchal Ireland' (Scheper-Hughes 2001:4). The first kind of critical reaction, then, was a moral-political attack on a strawman.

Secondly, during the 1960s and 1970s, Irish academics questioned Arensberg and Kimball's claims about the continuity of the 'stem family' and farm life (e.g. Gibbon and Curtin 1978; cf. Fitzpatrick 1983). Questions were also asked about the limits of 'community' as an analytic device and anthropology's proclivity for addressing modernization without discussing it directly (Harris 1988; Higgins 1984; Peace 1989; Taylor 1996; Wilson 1984).

The third mode of critical scholarship draws out the fecund ideas in Arensberg and Kimball's research while questioning their approach and some of their more dubious claims (Byrne and O'Mahony 2012; Maguire 2004; see also Guinnane 1997). However, the Harvard-Irish Mission, it turns out, does not hold up well under questioning. As previously noted, the project team courted the Irish powers that be to secure funds, support and official endorsement for their publications. The key individuals involved agreed (or volunteered) to censor their publications rather than risk offending church and state and millions of potential Irish-American readers (Byrne and O'Sullivan 2019, 2020), and this when Irish people faced persecution and prosecution for publishing controversial ideas.

After Arensberg *et al.*, another mode of critical engagement with modern Irish anthropology emerged, a reaction among literary figures that has yet to receive sustained attention. During the 1940s, writers began anew to push against the restrictions of public culture, with Seán Ó Faoláin imagining an Ireland not as the cigarette end of civilization but 'as complex and various as possible' (1925, 1926, 1944–5:6). His lover, and literary better, the shamefully overlooked Honor Tracy resolved to shatter a few mirrors. In her novel *The Straight and Narrow Path* (1956), the protagonist, Dr Butler, a distinguished anthropologist convalescing in rural Ireland, happens upon a group of nuns giggling while jumping over a bonfire, 'one of the oldest fertility rites in the world!' (1956:9). What follows is an account of anthropological reason unravelling in a nation that welcomes outsiders but not their 'analysis', where Enlightenment principles look suspiciously like bourgeois pretentiousness.[27] Tracy, a multilingual cosmopolitan steeped in Irish literature and culture, was

27 The protagonist tells his solicitor,

> As an anthropologist, I have been in communities before now where fear and prejudice and magic had more to say than reason did, and it was not my experience that they were either the happiest or the most flourishing. I'm fully alive to the comical side of this affair and in days to come, looking back, no doubt I shall relish keenly. But, in the meantime, the fact that the nuns did leap fires, which strikes you as immaterial, will have at all costs to be

more than happy to take shots at Ireland's patriarchal *ancien régime*. However, she did so without the posturing and moral Pharisaism of those who followed her (e.g. Scheper-Hughes 2001). A few years later, Samuel Beckett's *Watt* (1959) walked much the same path. Beckett has a student named Louit depart urban Ireland on a 'research expedition in the County Clare' carrying 'coloured beads' for trading with the locals. Louit underestimates his research expenses and is reduced to eating his dog, and, worse still, he mislays his ethnographic notes on the way home. Eventually, the college's accountants investigate him – the cost of research being more important than quality – and he produces a fake Irish peasant wearing a kilt to testify on his behalf.

In *Watt*, Beckett parodies Arensberg's descriptions of family life, eventually probing matters such as incest, delayed adulthood and insanity (schizophrenia) as symptoms of the breakdown of the kinship order of things. One must conclude, returning to David Westbrook from earlier, that the 'host of assumptions' plated into the classic story of anthropology, 'about the modern and the traditional, the familiar and the exotic ... the inauthentic and the authentic' logically entail 'a story of decline, the closing of an intellectual frontier' (Westbrook 2008:9–10).

Twentieth-century Irish anthropology has been presented as a generational conflict between romantic but conservative comparative anthropologists and a new wave of Bohemian ethnographic 'writers' who were unafraid to pass judgement on a culture in decline. Dramatic stuff. However, on closer inspection, all one hears, to borrow from William James, is the sound of biases being rearranged.

Irish ethnographies written during the 1960s and 70s ventriloquized the disciplinary concerns of the authors' country of academic origin. Robert Cresswell lived in Kinvara, County Galway, for several years during the 1950s, recording his experiences in remarkable photographs and Kodachrome slides. Unfortunately, his monograph *Une communanté rurale d'Irlande* (1969) is a monochromatic tour through Irish history, the agricultural economy and kinship, conforming to the understated French ethnographic tradition of the time.[28] The contrast with Hugh Brody's *Inishkillane: Change and Decline in the*

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maintained by me: because the alternative is the negation of absolutely all I believe in.

(Tracy 1956:83)

28 Cresswell represented a community modernizing with considerable sensitivity, and he understood the painful importance of emigration. He could hardly ignore it: the community he studied sustained a net population loss of eighty per cent between 1841 and 1956. Families became multinational, but the bonds that made them a family were simply stretched too far. In this regard, Cresswell echoes the earlier work of Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll in the *Irish Journal* (1957). Böll's

West of Ireland (1974) is dramatic. Influenced by the later work of E.E. Evans-Pritchard and the relativism of philosopher Peter Winch, 1960s British social anthropology turned from structure to the study of process and meaning (see also Fox 1966). Licensed thus, Brody's *Inishkillane* is a gorgeously realized text, peppered with apt quotations from Irish literature, sensitive to people disappointed with life, disillusioned with 'tradition' and prone to just upping and leaving.[29] But Brody's sensitive prose ends before the book does: the final chapter is devoted to slinging mud at pseudonymous local businessman Michael Ryan and his family. Michael is a 'gombeenman', we are told, his young son a 'bully', and his whole clan is the personification of rent-seeking capitalism. The final chapter of *Inishkillane* is an anti-capitalist abrogation of the nuanced ethnography that preceded it.

A species of American psychosocial anthropology also appeared in Ireland.[30] John Messenger's *Inis Beag* (1969) argued that Jansenist Catholicism produced so much sexual repression on Inisheer that reproduction became a miracle. However, the Islanders' sexual mores were comparable to similar European populations, so miracles did happen, with monotonous frequency. Messenger did not know this because he conflated ethnography with participant observation and, thus, put too much stock in his investigative abilities – the old problem of evidence *videre*. Locals were reluctant to discuss their sex lives with Messenger, and he blamed them for their reticence. Later, he salami-sliced his ethnographic research for a series of valedictory publications about Ireland and anthropology (1984, 1989). Therein, he reveals that the locals ran him and his wife out of town. He left something behind: Messenger

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book was so popular that it was, ironically, responsible for a large flow of avant-garde immigrants from Germany and France to the western seaboard. Cresswell is now remembered in Ireland more for his photographs, which recall the work of Dorothea Lange, and the earlier Lawrence Collection, more so than his ethnography writing.

29 The bleeding out of youths is a subject anticipated, yet again, by Honor Tracy. In *Mind You, I've Said Nothing*, she offers this reflection during a trip to the Great Blasket:

> It was a dying world, too, inhabited by old people living on memories or young ones longing to be away. They could hardly wait, those young people, to exchange their simple, wholesome, laborious lives in that lovely corner of earth for the high wages and debased pleasures, the bustle and confusion, of an English or American town.
>
> (1962:134)

30 One might argue that the new-wave Americans were anticipated by the remarkable work of Robin Fox in *Kinship and Land Tenure on Tory Island* (1966), and *The Tory Islanders: A People of the Celtic Fringe* (1978). Fox went on to help nurture the interdisciplinary field now known as 'socio-biology'.

co-wrote a popular song about a terrible shipwreck, which congratulates him on promotion to 'Full Professor' (see 1984:125, *passim*).

The controversy over Messenger's work was a mere gust compared to the ethical storm that followed the publication of Nancy Scheper-Hughes's *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics* (1979). She claimed stunted psycho-sexual development, delayed marriage and the stress of coming of age in a disintegrating kinship structure caused the unusually high incidence of mental illness, especially schizophrenia, in rural Ireland. Channelling the spirit of Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), she hoped her ethnography would show that schizophrenia arose from nurture, not nature, and thus Western science and medicine would be humbled by her 'psychological study of primitive youth for Western civilisation', to borrow Mead's subtitle. However, she had only superficial knowledge of comparative socialization and marriage patterns and thus offered only loose comments on the aetiology of schizophrenia (Guinnane 2007; Higgins 1984). The book is remembered today not for its bold but flawed thesis, but, instead, for its ethical failings (Kane 1986; Taylor 1996).

Like Messenger before her, critics pounced on Scheper-Hughes's inaccuracies and intrusiveness (e.g, Callahan 1979; Kane 1982; Viney 1983). She returned to her field site, An Clochán, during the 1990s, kept a secret record of her interactions against the villagers' wishes and a few locals duly requested her departure. A new edition of *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics* appeared in 2001, bookended with essays that promised self-reflection. Unfortunately, the new essays are solipsistic and defensive – at one point, she makes the Kafkaesque claim that her analytical power is evidenced by the pain she caused (see 2001:xxi).

In her review of the new edition, Kim Hopper (2003) argues that Scheper-Hughes sincerely believes that her work held up 'a mirror at which her informants could only stare' (2003:119). However, rather than offering a painfully accurate ethnographic reflection, the people of An Clochán saw monsters. As one local told her, '[We] recognized the bits and pieces of ourselves strewn about here and there. You turned us into amputees with hooks for fingers and some other blackguards heart beating inside our own chest' (Scheper-Hughes 2001:xix).

And yet, to this day, the ethnographic genre promoted by Scheper-Hughes persists – highly subjective accounts of human suffering that aim to advance a moral-political project (cf. Kulick 2006; also Ortner 2016). Reflecting on this 'dark anthropology', David Graeber (2016) wondered if the genre offers an extreme expression of disciplinary doxa. Since Franz Boas and Margaret Mead, anthropologists have used ethnographic research to question grand, universalizing claims about the human species (King 2019). When it comes to

nature v. nurture – now correctly understood as 'Galton's error' – psychosocial anthropologists stand on the side of nurture and, therefore, as they see it, on the side of the angels. They view truth-claims about human nature as ideological positions. Their enemies are the Darwinians down the corridor of the typical four-field department, who keep racist skeletons in their closets. *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics*, and *Inis Beag* before it, are perhaps best understood as artefacts of a culture war prosecuted by academic Don Quixotes.

It is important to reflect on all of this history, ancient and relatively recent, before we turn to consider contemporary Irish anthropology. It is important because it answers the longstanding question: why is there no definable 'Irish tradition' of anthropology? Anthropology and folklore do not share a space called Irish ethnology. The story of Irish anthropology is not a Whiggish history of progressively better anthropological projects succeeding those of an earlier generation. On the contrary, Ireland has often been a laboratory for testing prefabricated anthropological models, from comparative to psychosocial studies, each overflowing with unwarranted epistemological confidence.

Are we there (modern) yet?

> It all seems
> A little unreal now,
> Now that I am
> An anthropologist
>
> – Derek Mahon, Lives (1972)

From the 1970s onwards anthropology grew locally in Ireland, first at Queen's University Belfast, then with the opening of an anthropology department in St Patrick's College, Maynooth (now Maynooth University) during the early 1980s. Several generations of Irish-educated anthropologists work worldwide, and Ireland remains a popular field site.

Since then, Irish anthropology, like the discipline globally, appears less unified and more like a scholarly mosaic: thematic discussion often occurs within sub-sub-disciplines. Anthropologists have, however, used detailed ethnographic research on Ireland to contribute to larger themes, such as, *inter alia*, history in anthropology (McLean 2004; Silverman and Gulliver 1992), the global and the local in economic life (Salazar 1996), religion (Taylor 1995), politics (Komito 1989; Wilson 2013), migration (Maguire and Murphy 2012), borders (Donnan 2010; Wilson and Donnan 2012), traditional music (Kaul 2009), dance and literature (Wulff 2007, 2020).

For our purpose here, we foreground two significant strands of Irish anthropology. Firstly, there is a longstanding scholarship on the conflict in Northern Ireland, which includes several globally significant ethnographies (Feldman 1991; Harris 1972; Sluka 1989). Secondly, there is a strong line of research that uses 'community' and 'culture' as heuristic devices for investigating class, cultural change and marginalization (Curtin, Donnan and Wilson 1994; Curtin and Wilson 1987; Gmelch 1986). This second strand, more so than the first, congeals important trends in anthropology and ethnography today.

Irish anthropological research on 'community', which seems metonymically exchangeable for locality and identity, is generally alert to the risk of using calcified social-scientific categories. However, from the 1980s onwards, Irish social science became hyper-sensitive to the use of such common anthropological categories (Tucker 1994), just as global anthropology was wrestling with how to frame 'culture' vis-à-vis 'the processes that transcend separable cases' (Wolf 1982:17; see also Roseberry 1989). For Vincent Tucker (1994:201), the problem is that the 'anthropological obsession with the local and empirical' comes at the expense of class analysis and discussion of the capitalist world system. Wilson and Donnan (2006), building on earlier work (Donnan and McFarlane 1997), suggest that localism may be one of the reasons for anthropology's limited impact on Irish politics, policy and public life generally. One might quibble here and point to several notable exceptions (*inter alia*, Bryan and Jarman 1996; Prendergast and Garattini 2016; Saris *et al.* 2002), but their point holds, at least from their perspective.

The most comprehensive statement on Irish anthropology is Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan's *The Anthropology of Ireland* (2006). Therein, the authors draw on decades of ethnographic research to provide an erudite tour of the field, north and south. Rather than retrace their steps, here we focus on their identification of the limits of the field. In short, Wilson and Donnan describe anthropology in Ireland as having a 'quiet' (2006:7) place in public life. They argue that this may be because the discipline is not part of the academic armature of policymakers and influencers. Perhaps this is because its slow-cooked results are too rich to be digested in boardrooms. However, more likely, they argue, it is because anthropologists focus on local life in communities distant from centres of power. Their challenge, then, becomes how to produce ethnographies that illuminate lived realities of structured inequalities in a nation-state deeply connected to modernity, Europeanization and the global capitalist economy. The problem is 'locality' (Wilson and Donnan 2006:165–7), but is this problem resolvable?

In this chapter, we have shown the diversity of ethnographic writing in Ireland and argued for scholarly pluralism from necessity. This pluralism is

evident across the volume, with essays by anthropologists from the north and south of Ireland, who work in Ireland and write internationally or who study their intellectual home. Pluralism is also evident in styles of ethnography – like Ian Hacking (1992), we use 'style' to denote the expression of grounded reasoning. This volume showcases ethnographic projects that differ in style-as-substance, from their intellectual inspiration to theme and *telos*. Nevertheless, they still sit together on speaking terms, partly because of the fecundity of 'locality'.

Herein, Thomas M. Wilson writes about the political culture in suburban County Meath, his field site for several decades, where he witnessed enormous demographic and cultural changes. Wilson clearly sees that anthropology has a public role and his essay, 'From large farms to little Dublins', suggests how ethnography may illuminate the critical nexus of local politician-constituent relationships. In this regard, he extends a policy-relevant body of scholarship that he played a central role in cultivating (Wilson 2013; also Curtin, Donnan and Wilson 1994; Curtin and Wilson 1987; Wilson and Donnan 2006), one that uses research grounded in locality – neighbourhoods, villages, cities, even regions – to explain social transformations and grapple with inequities. In a somewhat different vein, we may see the contributions of Saris, Prendergast or Ramsey as similarly attuned to using grounded ethnographic research to illuminate questions ranging from so-called disadvantage and digital connectivity to sectarianism. This kind of work resonates with the long line of Irish anthropology projects that one may gloss as publicly engaged critical ethnography (see, *inter alia*, Donnan and McFarlane 1989; also Bryan and Jarman 1996).

However, this volume also showcases ethnographic work that may seem to be from a different scholarly turn. Fiona Murphy and Abayomi Ogunsanya – perhaps Lawrence Taylor in a different way – each offer reflexive ethnographic accounts that spring from individual experience of sociality and social penumbra and 'problems'. But there is always a 'here' – indeed, as one reads, one feels the presence of locality, eliciting empathy, and provoking thought and critique.

Of course, as Arjun Appadurai (1996:182) reminds us, the entire ethnographic project is 'isomorphic with the knowledge it seeks to discover and document, as both the ethnographic project and the social projects it seeks to describe have the production of locality as their governing telos'. And so, conscious now that its subjects think and do for themselves, the ethnographer turns to sociologies of class, race, gender and other identity markers as a way to connect the empirical local to the capitalist world system (Eriksen 2016:8). The danger here is obvious: ethnography will become the

provider of 'dark' material to 'realist' social analysis, perhaps influencing policy and public discourse, sometimes in unintended ways.[31]

Take, for example, Danny Miller's recent 'village ethnography' of an Irish seaside town, *The Good Enough Life* (2024). The book was intended to reflect the author's experience of a prosperous community at peace, freedom-loving yet conscious of social injustice, socially cohesive and inclined to cooperation. Yet, when interviewed on national radio about Cuan (Skerries), at a time when anti-immigration protests burned (literally) in towns and villages across Ireland, the author was interpreted as arguing that demographic and social cohesion is better than 'diversity' (Newstalk 106 2023). In her recent book *Sightlines* (2022), Eileen Kane grapples with these issues in her discussion of parallax locality, which shifts according to perspective and, more importantly, is positioned within overlapping discourses.

The challenge today is not the fact that we study ordinary people's lives in one or multiple sites (or while they move) or whether we study down, up or sideways (Hannerz 2006), but that we shift our 'way of seeing' (Wolcott 1999) to focus on *anthropos* in multiple real and imagined worlds. Ulf Hannerz refers to a global ecumene characterized by persistent cultural interactions between people and permeated by zones of consociality – the being in each other's presence in the mediated global reality (Hannerz 1989). It is by working on the borders of the traditional cultural frames and consociality, the aspect of the cultural process to which anthropologists have privileged access through their ethnographic field observations, that we have a chance to spot 'what is emergent' and contribute to drawing the Big Picture (Hannerz 2015). Therefore, the perception that anthropology has a limited presence in the public realm because of its methodological and conceptual apparatus may need to be refocused. We want to argue here that anthropology has an important public presence and the capacity to increase that presence.

There are several major centres of anthropology on the island of Ireland. Queen's University has an anthropological heritage stretching back a half century; Maynooth anthropology is forty years old. The discipline is growing elsewhere also. In each centre, classical scholarship mixes with publicly engaged critical ethnography in a pluralist atmosphere. This is to be encouraged, celebrated, defended. Our students, many of whom do not pursue anthropology beyond graduation, gain immensely from their education. They may not remember all the facts or the names of each teacher, but they

31 For a critique of the 'realist' mode of ethnographic writing, see Marcus 1998. Today, entire generations of anthropologists have been educated to write experimental and multi-sited ethnographies that explore the unfolding contemporary (Rabinow *et al.* 2008; Tett 2015).

remember the ethnographic worlds they were encouraged to study. In this volume, in writing ethnography, teaching anthropology and in public life, a globally situated Irish anthropology asks the central anthropological question: What does it mean to inhabit an interconnected and transforming world?

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