INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE

Historical Geographies of Ireland: Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Legacies, Part 2

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Reviewing the *festschrift* for Willie Smyth,[1] Robin Butlin noted the focus of Irish historical geographers upon "the question of Ireland as a colony."[2] Together with the half-dozen essays published last year in *Historical Geography* 41, this further dozen adds weight to this observation, not least by including a further substantial contribution from Willie Smyth himself. The conceptual and historical context for these works was outlined in an introductory essay for the first set of papers.[3] Here, I will briefly relate this current set back to the themes introduced in the earlier Introduction. The essay by Smyth and that by Cronin return us to the bloody conquest of Ireland and the subsequent making of new administrative and economic geographies to sustain the colonial order. Smyth notes that in his *Map-Making, Landscapes and Memory*, he had been able to exploit the voluminous English language materials of the colonial enterprise to evoke the patterns of the Gaelic society then placed under threat, of the English rule that undermined that older order, and of the Irish-English society that, under the most unequal and fraught of circumstances, took form in the aftermath of the conquest.[4] In reflecting upon that earlier work, Smyth remarks upon his relatively limited use of Irish language sources. In the present essay, he supplements his earlier work in this regard. In particular, he looks at attempts to reinvigorate as well as preserve Irish-language culture through compendious works that offered a digest of historical knowledge about pre-Conquest Ireland. Such works were also a plea that the oppressed Catholic majority in Ireland might get justice. Smyth argues that this renaissance of historical scholarship is likely to have influenced the rebels who rose up in 1641 against English rule. He then moves to the trauma of that rebellion and the decade of wars that ensued between the Irish and their English and Scots neighbors in Ireland. The Irish poetry of the period registers the unbearable horror of the interrelated destruction of a culture and a landscape.

Nessa Cronin takes up the story of the English re-settlement of large swathes of Ireland after the desolation and displacement produced by Oliver Cromwell's suppression of the Confederate campaign of the 1640s and 1650s. There is now a substantial literature sustaining the claim that colonies often served as a laboratory where social and economic policies were first tried before being introduced back into the metropole.[5] Cronin relates the mapmaking work that William Petty did as part of the Down Survey in Ireland to his studies of the political arithmetic of the English state. Political Geography and Political Economy were twins. Cronin follows Foucault in highlighting the novelty of a governmentality that took "population" as its focus, but Cronin goes somewhat further than Foucault in suggesting that this governmentality was at first blush distinctly colonial.[6] With this genealogy, the English suppression of the Irish rebellions in the 1640s and 1650s becomes a key focus for the study of the conditions for the emergence of the modern state.

Norbert Elias drew attention to the making bourgeois of a ruling class as a long process of cultural innovation, a civilizing process.[7] Alongside the self-regulation by the elite, there was at various times the pursuit of respectability among the poor and the lower middle class.[8] There was also a more directed effort on the part of the ruling classes to inculcate in the poor that acceptance of the social order that would make them cooperative, if not docile subjects. David Nally has studied the Irish Famine from this perspective, emphasizing the opportunity for civilizing the poor that Victorian legislators and administrators found in the desperate circumstances of the starving millions.[9] In different ways, Lougheed and Beckingham take up these themes of the broader civilizing process. In the field of education, experiments were ventured in Ireland long before similar were attempted in Britain. Ireland was visited with a project for a state-funded and compulsory education system in the 1830s, something England would not see until the 1870s. Kevin Lougheed shows the importance of local circumstances in shaping the controversies over proselytizing that would ultimately end this novel effort at multi-denominational education.[10] David Beckingham studies the self-regulation of the Irish in Britain and the importance of temperance in this regard. He looks at the staging of Father Mathew's phenomenally successful campaign of pledge-taking. He also shows the ways that the nationalist agitation of Daniel O'Connell created circumstances that Mathew could exploit but which also imperiled his claim that his was a purely civilizational and not a political movement.

The complexity of the colonial political encounter is evident also in Carl Griffin's essay on the early reaction in Britain to the emerging Irish potato blight in 1845-7. He shows how Ireland was conceptualized as a problem; the Irish question. This strips colonial agency from the representation of the causes of the Famine, allowing the British to imagine their obligations to Ireland as no more than those of voluntary charity. In my chapter, I look at how, in response to the awful conclusion reached by many Irish people that the English seemed prepared to let hundreds of thousands of Irish people starve to death, Irish nationalists were driven to integrate their understanding of the economic and political dimensions of colonialism. The form of anticolonial nationalism that developed comprehended an utopian ambition that saw some Irish political thinkers conceptualize nationalism as a step towards social justice rather than as mere autonomy. After the trauma of the Famine, many British observers moved towards a racial understanding of the enduring difference of the Irish. Diarmid Finnegan remarks on the compatibility of racial reading of Irishness with a very wide range of politics, extending even to some versions of diasporic nationalism.

The diasporic dimension of Irish identities is well treated in essays by Mulligan and Jenkins. Fenianism was a resolutely diasporic movement with political events in Ireland, Britain and America influencing each other. Adrian Mulligan shows how international relations were implicated in Irish nationalism thereby. The United States offered citizenship to residents who rescinded earlier attachments. As a society of immigrants, it had to develop a novel form of citizenship that went beyond the absolute spaces of monarchs and subjects. Ultimately, Britain had to accede to the new world order. William Jenkins looks at the ethnic press and the cultivation of Irish heroes as a way that diasporic identities were forged. He shows how particular versions of diasporic Irishness were developed for and out of both the public and the covert practices of Fenianism.

The failure in Ireland of the Fenian rising of 1867, and in 1866 and 1870 of the Fenian raids from the United States into Canada, reshaped the mutual expectations of Irish nationalists from America, Britain and Ireland. The political energies of the Irish nationalists in Ireland were directed towards the land question and by the later part of the century towards constitutional reform and Home Rule. In this context, the British government renewed its attempts to bring the Irish to a more ready acceptance of their integration into the British polity. Arlene Crampsie

shows the ways that the reform of local government was offered a vehicle for making the Irish into citizens of an integrated British state. To a significant degree this worked and the new local authorities in Ireland did much to improve the lives of Irish residents with sanitary and other improvements. Of course, ultimately constitutional agitation was trumped by the insurrection of 1916 and the division of Ireland that was part of the settlement of 1921.

The postcolonial legacies of this division were an explicit focus of an art project, *Troubling Ireland*, which Bryonie Reid both participated in and here writes about. In particular, Reid explores the relations between history and identity, the ways that places interpellate people into traditions and with consequences that they may find deeply troubling. Nuala Johnson shows how troubled histories inflect projects of commemoration even where these are tied to an urban renewal presented as being of benefit to all parts of the community. The violence in Northern Ireland during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was part of the legacy of the division that came with qualified independence in 1921. The legacy of this recent period of violence and struggle structures even the commemoration an event such as the sinking of the Titanic in 1912. The new Titanic quarter in Belfast draws upon public fascination with the loss of this enormous ship on its maiden voyage. Yet these spaces of new urbanism remain in thrall to the legacies of colonial and postcolonial conflicts in ways that these essays in Irish historical geography can help us to appreciate.

NOTES

1   Patrick J. Duffy and William Nolan (eds), *At the Anvil: Essay in Honour of William J. Smyth* (Dublin: Geography Publications, 2012).

2   Robin Butlin, "Review of Duffy and Nolan, *At the Anvil*," *Journal of Historical Geography* 46 (2014): 129-130, 129.

3   Gerry Kearns, "Irish Historical Geographies: Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial legacies," *Historical Geography* 41 (2013): 22-34.

4   William J. Smyth, *Map-Making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland, c. 1530–1750* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2007).

5   Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge, Massachusets: MIT Press, 1989).

6   Michel Foucault, "Governmentality" [1979], trans. Rosi Braidotti, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87-104.

7   Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol.II. State Formation and Civilization*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982 [1939]).

8   Peter Bailey, "'Will the Real Bill Banks Please Stand up?' Towards a Role Analysis of Mid-Victorian Working-Class Respectability," *Journal of Social History* 12, no. 3 (1979): 336-353.

9   David Nally, *Human Encumbrances: Political Violence and the Great Irish Famine* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

10   With consequences that continue to the present day: Gerry Kearns and David Meredith, "Spatial Justice and Primary Education," in Gerry Kearns, David Meredith, and John Morrissey (eds) *Spatial Justice and the Irish Crisis* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2014), 177-206.