Roundtable

Mapping irish colonialism: a round-table

William J. Smyth, *Map-making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland c.1530–1750*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2006, 584 pages, 130 maps & illustrations, €69.00 hardback.

Forging early–modern, colonial Ireland

This is an important book. Smyth begins by setting out his three main themes: forging, colonialism and early modernity. There are then five chapters on 'making the documents of conquest speak' where maps and censuses are interrogated for what they say both of the process of colonialism and of its material, social and ideological consequences. Three regional case-studies follow, integrating these themes with the transformation of the economies and societies of Dublin, Kilkenny and Tipperary counties. In two subsequent thematic chapters, Smyth takes up the changing territoriality and linguistic geography of Ireland before concluding by examining the Irish contribution to the expansion of Europe overseas to North America. The book has important things to say about Ireland and implicitly about historical geography and Irish Studies. It is a magnificent achievement and Cork University Press has done its author proud with a generous allowance of maps and illustrations, over thirty in colour.

   Continuity is a contentious element of Irish identity. Forging draws our attention to 'the creation of new local, regional and national societies.'[1] This is, of course, a matter of emphasis but when E. Estyn Evans celebrated the continuity of culture achieved through working on a common ground, he was not only treating Irish regional identities as inherently rural but he was also stressing their pre-Celtic elements in the face of nationalist claims about the Celtic period as a new beginning and true foundation.[2] If Ulster had a pre-Celtic agrarian identity that remained recognisably present in modern times, then, its creation was not a matter of the plantations and could not be undone simply by repealing the Conquest.[3] There is more stress upon discontinuity, or at least upon dramatic change, in the writings of Tom Jones Hughes where, for example, place-name

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[1] Smyth, *Map-making*, 5.

[2] E.E. Evans, *The Irishness of the Irish*, Belfast, 1968.

[3] B. Graham, The search for the common ground: Estyn Evans's Ireland, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 19 (1994) 183–210.

elements are used to document regions of light or heavy Anglo-Norman influence.[4] Forging promises attention to transformation.

Fire and famine were employed in the Cromwellian conquest (1641–54), and pestilence volunteered. Smyth suggests that the population of Ireland was probably two million in 1641 and that it may have lost a third to war, hunger, disease and emigration within a decade. In some places 80% of all property was destroyed while 10,000 Catholics lost their land, 45,000 were removed to the western province of Connacht, a further 40,000 were shipped out as soldiers to the armies of Catholic Europe and perhaps 20,000 sent as indentured labour to the West Indies or Virginia.[5] This was traumatic for '[u]nlike the earlier Norman conquest, the ruthless Cromwellian conquerors or their New English/Scottish predecessors proselytized every corner of […] the island and as zealous revolutionaries, attempted to superimpose new models of religious, linguistic, legal and economic behaviour.'[6] It is clear that short of, and before, this scorched-earth strategy, Gaelic Ireland had shown itself able to adapt to English demands for land and resources and yet retain elements of its legal, cultural and economic arrangements. It had shown a remarkable capacity for 'negotiating colonialism.'[7] There are those who argue that even this Cromwellian conquest 'petered out,' for no full-scale replacement of the Irish in Ireland proved possible.[8] Nevertheless a dramatic re-ordering of property had been achieved and, with the failure to convert any but a very few Irish to Protestantism, this new social order was for long defended against the majority of its subjects in the name of religious rectitude and through broadly colonial rule. The strength of Smyth's account here is that he describes and documents these asymmetries rather than re-levelling them into a discourse of plurality as in many recent works in Irish historical geography that underline 'the hybrid nature of Irishness' with its 'communalities of identity.'[9] We should beware of writing the historical geography only of the future we would like to have.

Colonialism is central to Smyth's book and here, again, he is more explicit than most earlier writing in Irish historical geography. The book, in this respect, shares a lot with works in American historical geography, notably those of Cole Harris and Don Meinig.[10] Indeed, not the least of its achievements is to be a worthy companion to them in the project of writing a historical geography of colonialism and imperialism. Smyth takes from Meinig a sense of the power of map-diagrams for describing the spatial strategies of that taking of the land from indigenous peoples that Meinig terms 'imperialism' and Smyth terms 'colonialism.' From Brian Harley, Smyth takes an awareness of the ways maps prepare, project and prosecute power, ideologically,

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[4] T. Jones Hughes, Town and Baile in Irish place-names, in: R. Glasscock and N. Stephens (Eds), *Irish Geographical Studies*, Belfast, 1971, 244–258.

[5] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 161–163.

[6] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 334, 336.

[7] J. Morrissey, *Negotiating Colonialism*, London, 2003.

[8] A.E. McCullough, The language and legitimation of Irish moral outrage, *British Journal of Sociology* 40 (1989) 227–243, 230.

[9] B. Graham, Preface, in: B. Graham (Ed.), *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography*, London, 1997, xi–xii, xii.

[10] R.C. Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change*, Vancouver, 1996; Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia*, Vancouver, 2002; D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History. Vol. 1. Atlantic America, 1492–1800*, New Haven, 1986.

militarily, and economically.[11] Of course, for Ireland, he is also able to draw upon the work of John Andrews on the production of colonial maps at a variety of scales from the nation to the estate.[12] Planning the subjugation of Ireland, Henry VIII sent over mapmakers to examine the coastline for offensive and defensive actions while during the conquest of 1550 William Cecil used maps to plan the disposition of troops and to locate the families notable as friend or foe to the English.[13] Later, in the 1650s, William Petty surveyed in great detail, large parts of the island preparatory to their re-allocation to soldiers and adventurers as the English crown turned to making the Irish pay for their own conquest. Smyth documents the technical virtuosity with which Petty organised teams to march, under armed guard, across the landscape, surveying local topographic details that were the basis of native understandings of land quality and property boundaries. In all some eleven million acres were confiscated and rendered available in this way.[14] Mapping, expulsions, plantations and settlements, these were the geographical instruments of English colonialism both in Ireland and in much of North America. Both sets of places were seen as tributary to the British colonial system and '[n]either colony was given much autonomy to develop enterprises directly in competition with the metropolitan colonial power.'[15]

    The colonial taking of the land, the creation of a new territoriality of administration, and the attempt to impose a new religion is narrated with brio and mapped with clarity and originality (see, for example, the dramatic illustration offered by Fig. 10.1).[16] Smyth also gives a lively account of resistance with the Catholic church re-introducing priests and organising their own new parochial system. Ireland was the only country in Europe where the Counter-Reformation succeeded without, and indeed against, the state.[17] These issues of colonialism and resistance are highly contentious within Irish Studies. There are some wishing to present the English presence in Ireland as part of a long-term consolidation of a nation-state that began around London and then acquired parcels of territory here and there until it consolidated these in the early modern period. Stephen Howe wishes to read the work of Steven Ellis in precisely this way. Howe proposes that we choose an archipelagic approach over an emphasis on colonialism.[18] It is true that reviewing Tudor policies towards its marcher regions places Ireland alongside Wales, northern England and Scotland in ways that is certainly illuminating but the perspective was developed originally to counter the myopia of 'English' history and Ellis was following John Pocock in this regard.[19] Placing Irish and English relations alongside the Tudor policies in other peripheral areas leaves Sarah Barber convinced that '"[c]olonialism"

[11] J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography*, Baltimore, 2001.

[12] J.H. Andrews, *Shapes of Ireland: Maps and their Makers 1564−1839*, Dublin, 1997.

[13] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 30−35.

[14] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 181.

[15] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 432.

[16] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 347; reproduced with kind permission of the author and Cork University Press.

[17] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 365.

[18] S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*, Oxford, 2000, 14.

[19] S. Ellis, 'Not mere English': The British perspective 1400−1650, *History Today* 38 (1988) 41−48; J.G.A. Pocock, Contingency, identity, sovereignty, in: A. Grant and K.J. Stringer (Eds), *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, London, 1995, 292−302.
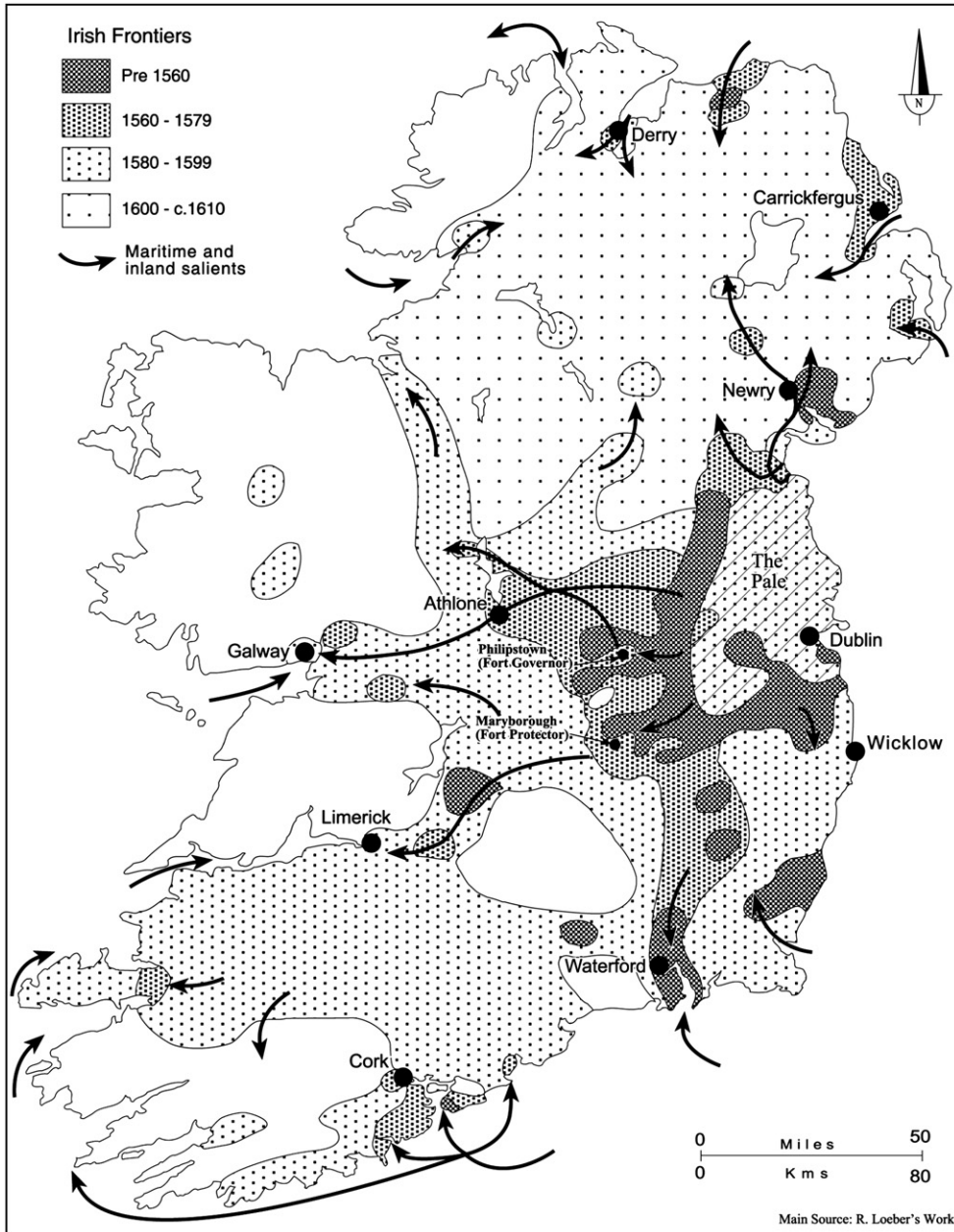
Fig. 10.1. English settlement and frontier expansion in Ireland between *c*.1530 and *c*.1610 (adapted from maps in Rolf Loeber, *The geography and practice of English colonisation in Ireland 1534 to 1609* (Athlone: The Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement, 1991)). Figure 10.1, Smyth, *Map-making*, p. 347.

was a process by which the south-eastern, agrarian society established its control over the remote corners of these islands.'[20] Smyth's account of the taking of land and of the establishment of ideological and political institutions to sustain that transfer reinforce this view of English rule in Ireland as colonial.

Clifford Darby's is only one among many accounts of the transformation of English agrarian society during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a story of technical improvement.[21] Institutions, such as property or proletarianisation, being invisible, were not properly part of historical geography considered as the history of visible landscapes or mappable distributions. Darby's methodological guidelines could not constrain geographical inquiry in North America where Carl Sauer's concern with what Derwent Whittlesey termed sequent occupance led ultimately to a critique of both industrialism and indeed European colonialism as he compared the use made of resources by successive generations.[22] Similarly in Ireland, while there were many works of historical geography that focused on mapping artifacts, there was also a concern, particularly in the work of Jones Hughes, with institutions such as landlordism.[23] What has been missing, however, i any account of the dynamics of economic change. Walter Freeman's sterling mapping of the economic geography of Ireland on the eve of the famine did not really engage with economic dynamics in a sophisticated way.[24] Smyth explains the evolution of the economic geography of Ireland in terms of 'Western colonial capitalism' and early modernity.[25] Of the three strands running through the book, this is, in my opinion, the least well developed. That new societies were forged in Ireland and that this forging was colonial in nature are established to my satisfaction at least. However, the capitalist nature of this colonialism is less well theorised or demonstrated.

Early modernity is offered as a description of the energies animating changes in the economy of England. This was the transformation visited upon Ireland through the replacement of Irish by English law. Like Darby, Smyth identifies themes such as the clearing of the wood but he goes further and shows how this had both ideological and economic consequences. In ideological terms, the felling of the grand forests was clearing away the refuge for rebels and also laying low symbols of the Old Irish lords.[26] In Ireland, the English state failed to impose the constraints on forest use it insisted upon in England where the woods were by this date a precious resource for naval shipbuilding. In Ireland bark was used for tanning, and charcoal was made so cheaply that iron ore was imported from England for smelting. The cleared woods made way for sheep ranges funded from the wood sales. This story is suggestive of capitalist transformation but not really

[20] S. Barber, Conclusion: A state of Britishness?, in: S.G. Ellis and S. Barber (Eds), *Conquest and Union: Fashioning a British State, 1485−1725*, London, 1995, 306−311, 307.

[21] H.C. Darby, The age of the improver, in: Darby (Ed.), *A New Historical Geography of England*, Cambridge, 1973, 313−352.

[22] C.O. Sauer, The agency of man on earth, in: W.L. Thomas (Ed.), *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, Chicago, 1956, 49−69; Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main*, Berkeley, 1966.

[23] Jones Hughes, The estate system of landholding in nineteenth-century Ireland, in: W. Nolan (Ed.), *The Shaping of Ireland: The Geographical Perspective*, Dublin, 1986, 137−150; Jones Hughes, Landlordism in the Mullet of Mayo, *Irish Geography* 4 (1959) 16−34.

[24] T.W. Freeman, *Pre-famine Ireland: A Study in Historical Geography*, Manchester, 1957.

[25] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 12.

[26] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 87.

explicit enough. Similarly in the regional chapters we hear tales of changes in the products of the rural economy. In the case of Newcastle and Uppercross, county Dublin, a partial census provides a snapshot of the social and occupational structure and Smyth notes the large number of servants for the big farmers and the equally large number of cottier and labouring households.[27] In Kilkenny, Smyth finds but slow expansion of the commercial pastoral economy and in Tipperary the growth of the New English pastoral economy at the expense of the Gaelic tillage economy. The focus is mainly upon landholding patterns, upon how or whether Old English and Gaelic landowners were able to recover any of their confiscated holdings. Commenting upon the growth of a new commercial economy that concentrated power geographically in the larger ports and socially among the larger graziers, Smyth notes that those who did not adjust to the new order became wandering beggars with 34,000 of them in the 1730s, concentrated mainly in Dublin.[28] Building upon his reference to the early modernising energies of the New English he notes the building of roads for military purposes and their subsequent use for commercial ones. And yet, English law in Ireland did not mean that Ireland developed agrarian capitalism along the same lines as the English model.[29]

When they turned to this question in the nineteenth century, and notably after the famine, Irish political economists identified obstacles to the free play of markets in land and labour in rural Ireland.[30] For John Elliot Cairnes, absolute property rights in land led to a concentration of ownership that gave tenants too little security for them to use land sensibly.[31] John Stuart Mill agreed and went as far as arguing that ownership by a landlord under Irish conditions was a form of feudalism that had been introduced by foreign conquest. Landlordism in Ireland was castigated as feudal by reformer and revolutionary alike. Michael Davitt described the Land War (1879–82) as achieving the end of feudalism.[32] These references to landlord power as feudal were more than metaphor. The level of exploitation of the direct producer rested upon fully non-economic forms of coercion.[33] Slater and McDonough refer to arbitrary fines, labour rent and landlord right to evict the tenant at will and retain as his own property any fixed investments made by the tenant. Thomas Cliffe Leslie argued that the penal laws placed Catholic tenants before Protestant landowners worse than 'the Egyptians were at the mercy of Pharaoh in the famine, for their lands as well as their cattle and money were gone, and nothing remained to exchange for bread but their bodies and their labour.'[34] We might ask if extra-economic coercion is a normal part of colonial labour relations and if so, then, in looking to the consequences of English colonialism in Ireland, we might not consider exploring as a relevant

[27] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 263–264.

[28] Smyth, *Map-making,* (note 1), 390.

[29] K. Tribe, *Genealogies of Capitalism*, London, 1981.

[30] T. McDonough and E. Slater, Irish political economy before and after the famine, in: McDonough (Ed.), *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, Dublin, 2005, 212–234.

[31] T. Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought*, London, 2002, 246.

[32] M. Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland; or, The Story of the Land League Revolution*, London, 1904.

[33] E. Slater and T. McDonough, Colonialism, feudalism and the mode of production in nineteenth-century Ireland, in: T. McDonough, *Was Ireland a Colony?*, Dublin, 2005, 27–47.

[34] T.E. Cliffe Leslie, *Land Systems and Industrial Economy, or Ireland, England, and Continental Countries*, London, 1870, 128.

parallel that articulation of capitalist export and peasant production called by Witold Kula the second feudalism of Eastern Europe.[35]

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