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Crossing the Battlefield: Archaeology, Nationalism, and Practice in Irish Historical Archaeology

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‘In other countries the past is the neutral ground of the scholar and the antiquary, with us it is the battlefield.’ The Nation, Dublin 1852.

Introduction

Questions of nationalism and identity are inescapable within Irish archaeology, with interpretations of all sites in both political jurisdictions - the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland - shaped by the convoluted relationship with Britain; this is a relationship that, despite its complicated nature, has often been seen as colonial and as unresolved because of the continuing existence of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the close political and cultural ties between the Republic of Ireland and the United States, coupled with the economic, political, and cultural power wielded by the broader Irish Diaspora, continue to influence understandings of the Irish past in ways that can articulate more with American nationalism and Irish American identity, than they necessarily reflect either the actualities of the Irish past or the needs of the Irish present. While post-Celtic Tiger Ireland consciously aims to move beyond the rhetoric of the past, American notions of Irishness, informed by notions of coloniality, confound this shift in perspective by continuing to influence the manner in which Irish heritage is presented and marketed to overseas visitors. The focus here is on narratives of hardship, oppression, and cultural authenticity rooted in perceptions of the nineteenth-century transatlantic
migration. The ambiguous nature of the relationship between Ireland, Britain, and America provides a useful space to consider new ways of addressing the relationship between colonialism, nationalism and identity of value to historical archaeology more generally.

*Background: Ireland and colonialism*

Nationalism on the island of Ireland is strongly influenced by postcolonialism. To be postcolonial is by definition dependent upon having once been ‘colonial’, yet Ireland’s coloniality remains a topic of some considerable debate (Howe 2000; Ruane 1992). The increasing role of Ireland within the European Union provided the space for reconsideration of Ireland as having endured a straightforward colonial history. Exemplifying this revision is the work of historian Liam Kennedy. Differentiating the economic situation of Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with that of post-colonial nations such as India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Ghana, Algeria, and the Congo, Kennedy (1996: 173) has argued that ‘Ireland is not a postcolonial society in any Third World sense’ and ‘a west European comparative framework fits the Irish case far more effectively.’ Using economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and social indicators such as infant mortality and overall life expectancy, Kennedy’s figures set Ireland apart. For example, in 1913 the GDP *per capita* was $655 for Ireland, in contrast to $198 for Ghana, $74 for India, and $6 for Portuguese Timor. During the heyday of the Celtic Tiger economy, Ireland surpassed the United Kingdom in terms of standards of living and *per capita* economic productivity, with a GDP in 2006 of US $45,580, ahead of the United States at $44,970 and the United Kingdom at $40,180 (World Bank 2007).

But colonial models of Irish history do not rely solely on economic indicators in making a case for Irish coloniality. Arguments in favor of Ireland having been colonized point
first to the twelfth century, when a series of Anglo-Norman lords, initially on the invitation of an Irish counterpart, invaded the country and established first military outposts and eventually agricultural settlements and towns. Unlike the territories of England and Wales that were conquered by Norman invaders, however, the Anglo-Norman adventurers who made their way to Ireland in the twelfth century did not supplant native legal systems nor did they dominate demographically in terms of incoming settlers. Even the most English of Ireland’s medieval towns, Dublin, experienced considerable Gaelic influence (Duffy, Edwards and FitzPatrick 2001; Fitzsimons 2001; Kane 2011; Smith 2011).

England only began endeavoring to assert firmer political control over Ireland in the period of the Reformation as part of the Tudor English kingdom’s competition and conflict with Spain. Ireland, as a Catholic country, was viewed as a possible back door for a Spanish invasion. This intensification of English involvement in Ireland was characterized by episodes of brutal warfare which ultimately ended in the defeat of Irish forces and the surrender of Ulster leader Hugh O’Neill in 1603. Ireland, however, still remained a separate (albeit clearly subordinate) kingdom rather than a colony, notwithstanding the implementation of plantation schemes, which saw loyal, mainly Protestant British (both English and Scots) settled, or ‘planted’ in Ireland. These plantation efforts were overtly based upon colonial ideology, yet in practice they attracted only relatively small numbers of actual settlers. Efforts to redesign Irish society through plantation thus relied upon the participation of Irish elites, both Gaels and Old English (the term given to the descendants of the Anglo-Norman invaders). Political uncertainty, the 1641 Irish Rebellion, and subsequent Cromwellian warfare in the mid-seventeenth century ensured that the ambitious goals of the plantation scheme, in terms of landholding, urban development, and cultural change, went unfulfilled. Protestant control itself was not assured until after the Williamite Wars of 1688-1690, with
the defeat of the Catholic James II and the accession of the Protestant William of Orange (Barnard 2004; Canny 2001; Ohlmeyer 1993).

The eighteenth century saw power increasingly consolidated into the hands of a small Anglican elite, with laws enacted that disenfranchised Catholics as well as dissenting Protestants, the latter including a large community of Presbyterians whose ancestors had come to Ulster as planters. Eighteenth-century Ireland capitalized upon favorable trade relations with Britain, and as discussed by Colin Rynne (2008: 3), also served as ‘a junior partner in British colonialism, sending both goods and personnel to Britain’s overseas colonies.’ Major manufacturing centers such as Belfast and Cork placed Ireland in the core of the British industrial ‘revolution.’ Here could be found not only the mainstay of British shipbuilding but also the most extensive linen manufactories, breweries, and distilleries within the United Kingdom. Such industrial centers provided sharp contrast to the small communities reliant upon subsistence-level fishing and farming that could be found dotted along the western seaboard (Aalem Wheland and Stout 1997; Sikes and Meide 2011). In agriculturally productive regions in the midlands and in the northeast, major market towns supplied not only local communities, but served as conduits for the export of Irish agricultural commodities to the rest of the United Kingdom and well beyond. Port cities such as Dublin, Belfast, Cork, and Limerick tied Ireland into the wider Atlantic economy, providing salted and pickled foodstuffs to North American and Caribbean plantations, importing tobacco and sugar, and training captains and crew for employment in the lucrative slave trade (Rodger 2007). Dublin particularly had expanded into a key mercantile as well as political and cultural hub, intimately tied into the British Empire. The year 1801 brought Ireland fully into the United Kingdom in the wake of the failure of the 1798 Rebellion.
Led by the United Irishman, the 1798 rebellion was influenced by both the American and French revolutions, and saw Catholics and dissenting Protestants, primarily Presbyterians, coming together to challenge the power of the Anglican Ascendancy and particularly the latter’s hold over an economy and society which had become increasingly stratified (Connolly 2008). Outside of the cities, on the many great estates that had emerged following the redistribution of lands and the entrenchment of the Ascendancy in the latter half of the seventeenth century, systems of tenancy developed that severely constrained the abilities of non-elites to control their own lives. Lack of economic mobility was exacerbated by demographic change, with the population increasing from around 2 million in 1700 to over 8 million by the 1840s. This rapid increase in population has traditionally been associated with the reliance on the potato, the chief source of food for an estimated three million Irish people, but was also associated with low marriage ages and critically, a decrease in mortality rates associated with improvements in health care and poor relief (Cullen 1974-5; Boyle and O Grada 1986). Such improvements were no match for the catastrophic effects of failures in the potato crop, most notably associated with the 1845 appearance of a new form of blight, *Phytophthora infestans*. Estimates suggest that the Great Hunger, or Famine of 1845-52 caused the deaths of up to one million (Crowley, Smyth and Murphy 2012; Kinealy 1994), an episode in Irish history that continues to be a subject of heated debate in terms of its differential impacts across the island, the degree to which economic policies can be held accountable for famine deaths, and the degree to which Ireland’s possible coloniality should be considered a factor (McDonough and Slater 2005; Kinealy 2005).

In part owing to the horrors of the Famine and subsequent high levels of emigration, nationalist sentiment coalesced throughout the island in the latter half of the nineteenth
century. Cultural efforts focused on reviving and celebrating the Gaelic language, while political efforts focused on land reform and lobbying to achieve Home Rule for Ireland. While initially Home Rule efforts were supported by both Catholic and Protestant leaders throughout the island, by the second decade of the twentieth century, opposition had become rooted in Ulster and the Unionist cause increasingly associated as Protestant in nature (and encompassing both Anglicans and Presbyterians). The Home Rule debate in Parliament was put on hold at the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1914, and then superseded by an abortive effort at armed rebellion by radical nationalists in 1916. Known as the Easter Rising, this week-long conflict changed the face of nationalist debate within Ireland, away from political debates and towards militancy. Violence broke out in January 1919, following the electoral success of the Republican party Sinn Fein. The conclusion of this two-year War of Independence was a treaty signed in December 1921 that allowed for the creation of the Irish Free State, but also retained six counties of Ulster within the United Kingdom. This created the political province of Northern Ireland but sowed the seeds of conflict that would express themselves most violently in the thirty year conflict known as The Troubles (1968-1998).

Archaeology and nationalism in Ireland, north and south

The 1916 Rising and the subsequent 1922 partitioning of the island into the Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland led to the construction of competing readings of the archaeological and natural history of the island; readings that aimed to naturalize the border. For the Republic of Ireland, the new government actively sought to encourage unity through notions of a Celtic heritage, promoting the Irish language and adopting archaic Irish words to describe new political institutions: for example, the old Irish
Word ‘taoiseach’, meaning something like ‘chieftain’, was chosen to describe the prime minister of the new state in 1937. The notion of a Celtic identity, however, is itself a construction of the nineteenth century, when the term Celtic was transformed into the racial ‘other’ of Anglo-Saxon (see Mytum, this volume). Certainly there is little unambiguous archaeological evidence for a Celtic Ireland. A Celtic language was introduced sometime after the end of the Late Bronze Age, but there is no physical evidence for conflict with an invading force, nor evidence for any externally-driven change in settlement and mortuary patterns. Turning to the great Iron Age royal sites celebrated in early medieval literature, such as Dun Ailinne, Navan, Tara, and Rathcroghan, archaeology has revealed continuity from the Neolithic into the Iron Age, not abrupt and violent change (Waddell 2014, Waddell 2011; Mallory 2013). Nonetheless, Irish archaeologists in the first half of the twentieth century intentionally prioritized the examination of early sites, as underscored by statements made by Irish archaeologist R.A.S. Macalister (1928, 356): “as we review the products of medieval Ireland, we see everywhere a sad decline from the achievements of Celtic Ireland.” Furthermore, “in speaking of the antiquities of the period ... their extension to Ireland is much more a matter of English than of Irish interest.”

As archaeologists in the Republic sought the metaphorical roots of Irishness, the newly created Irish Folklore Commission set out to chronicle rural Ireland, focusing upon, in the estimation of geographer Mary Burgess (2005, 124), “continuity between Gaelic, pre-colonial folk culture and that of contemporary Ireland.” Irish identity in the new republic was Celtic, Catholic, and rural (Graham 1994), best exemplified by society in the West of Ireland. Emphasis on Gaelic continuity and the purity of rural life was enshrined within the precepts of the new Irish government particularly under the leadership of Eamon de Valera (1932 to 1948, 1951 to 1954, and 1957 to 1959). The constitution drafted in 1937
emphasized the purity of rural life, economic self-sufficiency through traditional agriculture, and adherence to the precepts and faith of the Catholic Church.

Although it only opened in 2001, the National Museum of Ireland’s Museum of Country Life continues to emphasize readings of Irish identity as rooted in the rural west. Designed to showcase the National Museum’s impressive folklife collections, much of it gathered in the 1930s under the new government, the museum is situated outside of the market town of Castlebar, Co. Mayo, in the grounds of the former Turlough House Park, an estate once owned by the Fitzgerald family. The decision to site the museum in the west is in keeping with a continued tendency to view the west as the most authentically Irish. The Museum (http://www.museum.ie/countrylife/overview.asp) aims to “portray the lives of ordinary people who lived in rural Ireland in the period 1850 – 1950. Emphasis is placed on the continuity of lifestyles, which were established for several hundred years and which lasted well into the 20th century.” Permanent exhibits emphasize hardship and continuity as encapsulated in material culture, as exemplified by text associated with the permanent exhibit ‘Romanticism and Reality’: “Life in rural Ireland is popularly portrayed as simple and romantic. The reality was different. Life was a struggle and survival depended on a detailed knowledge of the landscape and environment; on craft, skill and ingenuity. This way of life changed little over many hundreds of years and its continuity is evident in the similarities between recently-made objects and their counterparts made long ago.” Hardship is overtly defined in light of the colonial relationship with Britain, with the underlying theme of an essential and enduring Irishness that ultimately triumphed through independence. Photographic backdrops of dramatic scenery from windswept coastal landscapes on Achill Island and the Aran Islands visually imply that ‘authentic’ Ireland is rural and western, where the influence of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British plantation was minimal.
The exhibits highlight indigenous crafts such as furniture making, thatching, vernacular boat construction, and basketry, with displays explaining that “most of the objects that people needed for their daily lives were made by hand using locally available raw materials.” Such a statement, however, denies the reality of the material evidence found on archaeological sites of 1850-1950, which routinely incorporate an array of mass-produced commodities such as sponge-decorated ceramics, pharmaceutical and alcohol bottles, press-molded table glass, and metal tools and trinkets (Horning 2007; Forsythe 2013; Kuijt 2015; Orser 2010). Even the most westerly locales such as Achill Island, which features in many of the museum photographs, were hardly unaffected by the wider economy and patterns of consumption in the nineteenth century. Archaeological excavations in the deserted village on Slievemore, Achill Island, uncovered household assemblages replete with decorated tea wares (principally English and Scottish sponged whiteware), manufactured glass, and commercial food jars and cans dominated by industrially-produced ceramics and glassware (Horning 2007; Horning and McDonald 2005). Far from producing all of their household needs by hand, Achill residents relied upon cash to acquire goods; this cash was earned through regimes of seasonal labor performed as far away as Scotland (Dunn 2008; Dunn and Meide 2014).

In the north of Ireland, archaeology, history, and folklife also played key roles in the construction of a new identity, with much post-partition research attempting to justify and reify the north of Ireland as a place apart from the rest of the island. Even geology was mobilized in these efforts, with an emphasis on geological continuity with Scotland in the form of Dalriadic schists contrasted with the physical as well as metaphorical fault lines to be found running roughly along the new political border. The notion that physical geography was a determining factor in Northern Irish identity was a theme that ran throughout the
extensive scholarship of the folklife scholar and geographer Emyr Estan Evans, who founded the department of geography at Queen’s University Belfast (Stout 1996). His belief in a unique identity and character of the north of Ireland is underscored by his assertion that “the two communities in the north, however deeply divided by religion, share an outlook on life which is different from that prevailing in the south and which bears the stamp of a common heritage” (Evans 1973: 74). That common heritage was rooted in physical geography, a belief picked up on by the Dutch geographer Marcus Heslinga whose 1962 volume *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide* took as its theme the unnecessary division of the island of Ireland from the wider British isles, itself a significant natural (and by extension) cultural region (Heslinga 1962; Green 1995: 145).

Archaeology was also central to efforts to explore and explain Ulster’s perceived ‘difference’. In 1938, the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, originally founded in the nineteenth century, was re-launched. In the estimation of one critic, the journal was intentionally employed as “an organ of the British establishment in Ulster” (Stout 1996: 118). Whatever the merits of that assertion, it is clear that archaeological interpretations did focus upon the uniqueness of Ulster’s archaeological heritage. One of the first scholarly studies employing archaeology to distinguish the north from the rest of Ireland was D. A. Chart’s 1928 *History of Northern Ireland*, a work which arguably legitimized the new state through eliding the new political entity with the ancient province of Ulster (Burgess 2005: 122). In 1928, Sir Arthur Keith argued that the monuments of the north of Ireland were markedly different from those of the south, precipitating efforts to categorize Ulster’s prehistoric tombs as more like Scottish examples than site types from elsewhere on the island of Ireland. One of the more well-known debates over the origins and character of megalithic tombs in the north of Ireland was that between Estyn Evans and Ruaidhri de Valera, son of the Republic
leader Eamonn de Valera and a professor of archaeology at University College Dublin. Both focused upon one type of monument, the court tomb, which Evans argued diffused into Ulster from Scotland, whereas de Valera believed that the tomb type “reached Ireland direct from Western Europe” bypassing any British influence (Evans 1996, 211). Evans (1996, 213-214) dismissed de Valera’s theory as “special pleading”, “piled up on insecure foundations.”

It was not only Ulster’s Neolithic archaeology that was tainted by border politics. Just as Iron Age archaeology was invoked to proffer a sense of Irish national identity in the Republic, it was also employed in the north to naturalize the border, particularly in relation to a series of interrupted Iron Age linear earthworks running roughly from Co. Donegal to Co. Monaghan. Extrapolating well beyond the archaeological evidence, some present-day politicians employ the features to justify the continued separation of the six counties from the Republic, as demonstrated by references to the “great walls of Ulster” which helped to “preserve her independence against Southern aggressors” on the (Unionist-dominated) Lisburn Borough Council website. Furthermore, according to Ulster Unionist David Hume, the earthworks prove that “The ancient history of Ulster... underlines the essential fact which Irish nationalists conveniently ignore: Ulster has always been different from the rest of Ireland. And it always will be” (Warner 2000). Yet Ulster is not the only place in Ireland apparently demarcated by such extensive earthworks. Mallory (2013; 174) notes that similar earthworks can be found protecting the River Shannon in the province of Munster, and speculates that they were as much about commandeering labor towards social cohesion as they were to do with protecting against cattle raids.

Whatever the original function and meaning of the earthworks, they are conveniently employed as a plank of one of the more contentious, recent uses of
archaeology and identity politics in the north of Ireland which focuses on the origins of an ancient Ulster tribe known as the Cruthini. As formulated by its principal proponent, the loyalist politician Dr Ian Adamson (1991), the Cruthini were the original non-Celtic inhabitants of the province of Ulster who were displaced to Scotland by Iron Age Gaelic incomers, and whose descendants returned to Ulster to stake their rightful claim through the mechanism of the seventeenth-century plantations. As succinctly argued by historian Hiram Morgan (1993: 36), Adamson’s theory provides the Protestant community with “a claim to be native so that no one can upbraid them with the term ‘colonist’”; an interpretation acknowledged even by one of the supporters of the theory, Michael Hall (2007: 21): “Cruthinism was seized upon by some protestants as a ‘we were here first’ counterbalance” to Republicanism. The inflammatory nature of much of the debate over the Cruthini renders more scholarly efforts to explore the archaeological evidence for Iron Age connections between Scotland and the north of Ireland challenging, if all the more necessary.

Archaeological objects also get caught up in debates over Ulster Irishness. For example, the Broighter gold hoard from the first century BC has been a subject of ongoing debate over its rightful home since it was discovered near the Lough Foyle shore in north Ulster in 1896. Consisting of a model boat, two twisted bar torcs, two necklaces, a beaten bowl and an elaborately decorated buffer torc, the objects were originally sold to the British Museum. The Royal Irish Academy, however, protested to the Crown, and the Crown then launched a successful case against the British Museum favoring the deposition of the artefacts in Dublin- then part of the United Kingdom. The case was prosecuted by Sir Edward Carson, a prominent Ulster Unionist and anti-Home Rule leader who would later argue for Partition (Neill 1993). Despite much protest and a first ever brief visit to Northern
Ireland in November 2013, the hoard remains in the collections of the National Museum in Dublin as an exemplar of Irish Celtic metalwork. But it was found in Ulster, a place that— if we are to believe scholars such as Chart, Evans, Keith, and politicians like Hume and Adamson, was always different from the rest of the island. The find spot for the Broighter Hoard is within the present-day borders of Northern Ireland. Should the gold be kept in Dublin, or returned to the North? Is the Broighter Hoard emblematic of Irish national heritage, or Ulster heritage?

Nationalism and Irish historical archaeology

The importance of prehistoric through later Iron Age archaeology to differing constructions of Irishness is clear, which has had a positive outcome in helping to ensure protection of and interest in associated sites, however they may be understood. Far more problematic are medieval and post-medieval sites that are associated with the extension of English, and later British, engagement on the island. In the nineteenth century, numerous medieval tower houses were destroyed, as much “to obliterate the still dangerous, if fractured, symbols of past political power” (Ní Cheallaigh 2007: 140) as to facilitate urban expansion, notwithstanding the reality that tower houses were not only constructed by the Anglo-Norman elite, but also by the Gaelic elite. A case in point is the late nineteenth-century decision to destroy one of Limerick’s most significant tower houses, Galwey’s Castle. Built around 1600, this structure on Limerick’s Nicholas Street had been refurbished in the latter part of the seventeenth century to include ornate brick ‘Dutch’ or curvilinear gables. By the late nineteenth century, however, the building had come to be associated with Lord Deputy Henry Ireton, who had led a siege of the town in 1651 on behalf of Cromwellian forces. According to tradition, Ireton lived in this tower for a few months in
1651, participating in the execution of local Irish rebels who were purportedly hung from
the windows of the structure. The demolition of the edifice was justified by local politicians
because “it was undesirable that it should be preserved as a memorial to a man of infamous
memory” (Donnelly 2001: 12; Barry 1894).

Targeting monuments of ‘oppression’ continued well into the twentieth century, as
exemplified by an abortive effort to demolish the Anglo-Norman Athlone castle in the 1970s
because of its association with English colonialism (O’Keeffe 2005), and echoed in a
continuing ambiguity towards Plantation-period monuments. Their physicality continues to
impact and influence understandings of the past, even if subconsciously, as argued by the
geographer Kevin Whelan: “Ruins were stitched into the popular understanding of Irish
history.” Recognition that ruins have agency is not a postmodern conceit. In 1694, Sir
William Brewster read Irish treachery in the physical traces of violence: “The ruins of
demolished towns and fortresses in Ireland and the vast heaps of bones of slaughtered
men...are but too sensible monuments of their villainy, and cannot but when we see them
but make us reflect upon their behaviour to us.” For Brewster, destruction ultimately
symbolized victory, in much the same way that the later destruction of sites presumed to
carry the taint of English colonialism served to underscore the victory of the Irish over the
British in the twentieth century.

Not surprisingly, interest in Ireland’s medieval archaeology was virtually non-existent
until the 1970s, with post-medieval archaeology lagging even further behind (see Dikkaya,
this volume, for another example of the negative impact of ideology on the archaeology of
the medieval and post-medieval periods). As wryly acknowledged by Nick Brannon (1999),
the development of post-medieval archaeology in the north of Ireland owes a debt to
paramilitary bombings that precipitated urban rescue excavations. It was not until 1999,
following a cease fire and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, that an organization
dedicated to examining Ireland’s post-medieval archaeology was formally established
(Donnelly and Horning 2002). All periods are not yet equal, however. In the Republic,
narrow readings of the 82 year-old National Monuments Act regarding the widely-
misunderstood ‘cut-off’ date of 1700 leaves post-medieval sites stuck in limbo, if not
purgatory, whereby they are not routinely included as archaeological sites on the Record of
Monuments and Places (RMP) while ruinous structures are also excluded from the National
Inventory of Architectural Heritage. In a retrograde step, government archaeologists began
to quietly and systematically remove post-1700 sites from the RMP in 2011, citing concerns
from developers. Extensive lobbying has so far halted this practice, but not restored the
deletions, nor provided a more sensible way forward. By contrast, and indicative of the
divided identity of the north, the legal system regarding heritage in Northern Ireland derives
from both Irish and British practice. As such, it does not include any ‘cut-off’ dates, reflected
in the fact that over 16,000 industrial monuments are recorded as archaeological. While it
remains a struggle to treat eighteenth through twentieth century sites as uniformly
archaeological, there is no presumption against their inclusion on the Sites and Monuments
Record.

On the positive side, engagement with the material legacies of early modern and
modern Ireland has been made much easier by the peace process, loosening the grip of the
nationalist narratives that once dictated archaeological agendas (Horning et al 2015;
Horning 2013a). In the Republic, the death of the Celtic Tiger as a result of the global
financial crisis of 2007-8 has shaken nationalist confidence, and there are signs of a growing
discontent with black and white postcolonial narratives, as exemplified by the public
support for the 2011 visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Dublin — the first official visit of a British
monarch since Irish independence - and the more open acknowledgement of Irish military involvement in WWI (Johnson 2012, 2003). At a scholarly level, increasing interest in understanding the nature of Irish cultural relations in the late medieval period also implies a desire to deal with uncomfortable truths, such as the involvement of Irish elites in the processes of conquest and plantation (Lyttleton 2013).

While opening up a space for discourse, the peace process in Northern Ireland also, perversely, constrains understanding as it is built upon the notion of parity between the two traditions rather than the forging of any shared identity. Thus the very structure of the peace process reifies separation in a bid to reduce conflict through mutual tolerance. The results of the most recent Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NLIT 2013) indicate that overwhelmingly, Catholics continue to identify as Irish, Protestants as British. In terms of future aspirations, the choices remain either all-Ireland unity, or staying within the United Kingdom. Perhaps ironically, the archaeological record of the seventeenth century contradicts these ingrained assumptions of separation and conflict that served as the bedrock for 30 years of violence during the Troubles. Plantation-period sites routinely reveal evidence for shared activities and material blending between the Irish and the incoming planters. Such evidence for syncretic practice can be found in the widespread presence of Irish vernacular buildings and ceramic vessels in English plantation villages (Horning 2001); early plantation-period settlements with diverse populations (Breen 2012); the adoption and subversion of English polite architecture by the Gaelic elite (Donnelly 2005); the mimicking of Gaelic hospitality rituals and use of associated material culture by the planter elite (Horning 2013b); the reuse of medieval raths and crannogs by settlers (Brady and O’Conor 2005); and continuity in pre-plantation settlement patterns and landscape use, accompanied by documentary analysis highlighting routine interaction between indigenous
Irish and incoming settlers (Breen 2012; Donnelly 2007; Donnelly and Horning 2002; J. O’Keeffe 2008). In the present, such tangible evidence possesses a profound capacity to challenge understandings of the divide between Irish and British identities and contribute to the emergence of some form of shared Northern Irish identity (Horning et al 2015; Horning 2013c).

**Diasporic memories**

Ireland may be an island, but understandings of its history are constructed, and remain meaningful, well beyond its shores. An inescapable aspect of modern Irish identity is the role played by the wider global Irish diasporic community, and the explicit use of archaeological and historical sites in the production, marketing and consumption of that identity. The principal audience for heritage in the Republic of Ireland is not local communities, but tourists. Tourism is the third largest sector in the Irish economy, contributing 5.9 million to the Irish economy in 2013. Over 3.3 billion of that figure was contributed by the 6.7 million overseas visitors (Faílte Ireland 2014). Irishness, and by extension versions of Irish history palatable to the Irish diaspora, is recognized as a marketable commodity and an international brand (Graham 2001, 149). As expressed by geographer Nuala Johnson (1999), Ireland’s economy has shifted from “a peripheral European state specializing in the export of agricultural products” to one she labels a “‘pleasure periphery’ designed to retail and retell historical narratives to an ever-increasing volume of travelers visiting the island.” More tongue-in-cheek is Terry Eagleton’s observation: “Ireland’s other major export is itself ... Irishness is the intoxicating liquor which the country is best at distilling. Consumed too freely, it produces more fantasies,
hallucinations, false hopes, weepiness, bravado and phoney cheeriness than Bushmills ever did” (Eagleton 1999, 39).

Perhaps the most cynical, or at best instrumentalist, expression of the use of Ireland’s history as a net exporter of people, was a transparent effort in 2013 by Failte Ireland (the Irish tourist board) to restore Ireland to economic stability through a tourism initiative directed at Irish Americans labelled the Gathering (http://www.thegatheringireland.com/ ). Dubbed ‘the grabbing’ by RyanAir executive Michael O’Leary, and ‘a scam’ by the actor Gabriel Byrne, the gathering overtly aimed to capitalize upon Irish American money by appealing to the Diaspora. To judge by Failte Ireland (2014) figures, the effort was a success, as North American visitor numbers increased by 11 percent. The final report on the initiative concluded that The Gathering Ireland succeeded in its broad based aim of engaging the people of Ireland to invite ancestral relatives and friends to attend 5,000 Gatherings right across the country, noting as well that the key market was the United States, which saw ‘double digit growth.’ The majority of the events staged for the gathering emphasized genealogical connections, with the greatest density of these events occurring concentrated in the western counties “with a strong tradition of emigration and diaspora connections” (The Gathering 2013, 21). As exemplified by these events and their geographic distribution, it is the experience of the Irish in the nineteenth century, and particularly the Famine experience and subsequent migrations that frames and shapes contemporary Diasporic understandings of Ireland. Irish Americans who trace their ancestry back to the forced emigration of the Famine period seek in the tourist landscape of contemporary Ireland confirmation of past suffering as well as validation of their claim to an Irish authenticity; an authenticity rooted in the rural Ireland of the west that also underpinned the nationalism of Éamon de Valera.
Archaeology is also deployed in efforts to reconnect the diaspora with the homeland. American historical archaeologist Charles Orser (2004, 175; 2005) specifically structured his archaeological research in Ireland to speak to the preoccupations of this Diasporic audience seeking evidence of their past in the Irish present: “The descendant community encompasses a global cohort of thousands of people who were forcibly evicted from their homes as a direct result of landlord power. Many of these men and women find themselves living in North America and elsewhere simply because their ancestors were dispossessed in Ireland”. Orser sympathizes with the desire of these individuals to reconnect with their received past, encapsulated by his emphasis upon the legitimacy of their claims of dispossession, and his research focus upon the sites associated with Famine-era evictions. Sites associated with eviction and emigration resonate with Diasporic audiences, as underscored by the comments of the American scholar Michael Mays (2005, 3) regretting the Celtic Tiger fuelled replacement of “the Famine huts that had stood for a century-and-a-half as silent testimony and mute memorials to the hundreds of thousands who perished during the time of ‘the great hunger.’” While diasporic visitors seek confirmation of their remembered histories through the testimony of abandoned landscapes, locals now seek renewal and occasionally, erasure.

Evocative survivals such as the above-mentioned deserted village on Slievemore Mountain, Achill Island, Co. Mayo (fig. 1) readily appeal to visitors searching for reminders of ancestral hardships. Over 80 masonry byre dwellings of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century construction still stand along the lower slopes of Slievemore, roughly organized into three ‘village’ clusters, and interspersed with small garden plots enclosed with stone fences. The stark appearance of these empty ruins, the constant presence of flowing groundwater, and the chill winds that regularly blow across the mountainside from the nearby Atlantic
Ocean contribute to understandings of Famine-related hardship and emigration. But the story behind this village, and its abandonment, is at odds with this presumptive history. Archaeological investigations clearly indicate that the deserted village was not deserted until the end of the nineteenth century, with continued seasonal use into the 1940s (Horning 2007; Horning and McDonald 2004; Dunn 2008). But the story of Slievemore in the post-Famine period is not easily read in the ruins, and locals often prefer to avoid the topic (Miller 2012). The village brings in visitors seeking physical confirmation of their received histories, and as elsewhere in the west of Ireland, tourism is a significant prop for the local economy.

The dominance of the Famine narrative in popular memory overwhelms the wider and more complex story of emigration from Ireland to North America. Characterization of Irish emigration as principally derived from evictions is overemphasized, the movement of urban residents as well as small landholders is overlooked, and the movement of substantial numbers of Ulster Protestants to the middle Atlantic regions - particularly during the eighteenth century - seldom included as part of the Irish American story (Dickson 1966; Fitzgerald and Ickringill 2001). Eliminating discussion of the more than one million Protestant Irish who emigrated to North America (David Noel Doyle [1985] estimates that over one million Irish Protestants emigrated in the period 1715-1790) illustrates Don Akenson’s 1999 description of the term Irish-American as a code word: “in almost every context in which it is used, it refers only to Catholics. It is a doubly dangerous term, because not only does it exclude, on sectarian or racist grounds, all Protestants from being ‘Irish,’ but it seduces the unwary reader into thinking that he or she knows more than is actually the case.” Akenson’s characterization of Irish America as exclusively Catholic is underscored by the comments of United States Deputy National Security advisor Denis McDonough, whose
grandparents emigrated from Ireland, in a March 2010 Irish Times interview. When asked “what does it mean to be Irish in America?” McDonough, who had spent a total of ten days in Ireland, responded by saying “in the first instance it means being Catholic” (Marlowe 2010, 9).

Historiography of the Famine era remains contentious, with considerations of the geographic variation in Famine deaths and Famine-related emigration often tinged by north-south politics as well as diasporan identity politics. Despite statistics to the contrary, it is often assumed that Ulster was unaffected by Famine; a reading far more in tune with presentist concerns than the actualities of past experience. Regardless of the wrangling of historians, it is the popularized accounts press of the mid-nineteenth century that still most influence diasporic understandings. Sensationalized reports and imagery from the newly emergent British popular press are routinely redeployed to ensure the ongoing potency of Famine memory. Irish suffering was visually encapsulated on the pages of the Illustrated London News in a series of well-known sketches which continue to feed self-perceptions in the diaspora, and to play a role in politics, as well as heritage presentations, across the whole island of Ireland. Traveler’s accounts accompanying the imagery of Irish suffering proliferated; highlighting the most extreme cases of poverty and deprivation. Often identical in tone and content, these accounts followed standard conventions and appealed to a British audience alternatively fascinated and repelled by the Irish underclass, as noted by Melissa Fegan (2001, 361), “the great attraction was not the landscape and literature of Ireland, but Irish misery.”

A common device for these narratives was to set the Irish case up against the condition of enslaved Africans and Native peoples, invoking familiar tropes of savagery as exemplified by an account by Gustave de Beaumont (1839, 130; Gibbons 1996, 151-152):
“I have seen the Indian in his forests and the negro in his irons, and I believed, in pitying their plight, that I saw the lowest ebb of human misery; but I did not then know the degree of poverty to be found in Ireland. Like the Indian, the Irishman is poor and naked; but he lives in the midst of a society which enjoys luxury, honours and wealth ... He is governed by laws, a sad condition, which combines the vices of civilization with those of primitive life. Today the Irishman enjoys neither the freedom of the savage nor the bread of servitude.”

Notwithstanding the fact that De Beaumont and other travel writers composed their prose for a particular audience at a particular time, their readiness to equate the oppression of the Irish as akin to, or worse than, that experienced by enslaved and colonized peoples elsewhere provided the foundation for a lasting trope that continues to impact upon identity politics in the Diaspora and particularly in North America (see Ignatiev 1995).

Equating the experience of the Irish with that of enslaved Africans invariably raises the issue of race and racialization. In theorizing whiteness, Theodore Allen (1994, 22) postulated that the Irish had been racially oppressed, albeit in a complicated manner “without reference to alleged skin color.” In his well-received study “How the Irish Became White” historian Noel Ignatiev (1995: 35) also starts from the assumption that “Ireland presents a classic case of racial oppression” in order to ground his argument about how the Irish employed skin color to their advantage within the racialized society of antebellum America. While Ignatiev presents a compelling case for the self-aware actions of the Irish in America, as they drew upon their own familiarity with anti-black prejudice within British society, the presumption that the experiences of those who fled famine and poverty in nineteenth-century Ireland illuminates the entirety of social relations in Ireland vastly oversimplifies the rather more complicated position of Ireland within the British Empire.
While Ignatiev acknowledges that Irish emigration to North America prior to the Famine was not limited solely to the poorer, rural Catholic Irish of stereotype, the assumption that inequality in Ireland was racially-based mainly serves the purposes of particular American narratives, rather than providing a nuanced understanding of social relations and identity construction within Ireland itself.

While there is no doubt that Irish both within and without Ireland have experienced economic and social oppression, it also must be recognized, as noted by Bryan Fanning (2002, 13), that “Ireland has a shared history of race and racism with other western countries as well as its own specific engagements with black societies through colonialism ... Throughout the nineteenth century the British army, colonial police forces and, at times, the Indian civil service, were disproportionately of Irish origin.” The experience of enslavement, and the psychological impact of being classed as property, cannot be viewed as equivalent to the experience of a rural Irish peasant, regardless of the famous lament of the nineteenth-century nationalist leader Daniel O’Connell that “in the history of mankind there is nothing to be compared with the atrocity of the crimes which England has perpetrated on the Irish people” (Martin 1843, iii). Insistence that the Irish were uniformly as oppressed as were enslaved Africans in the Americas could be viewed as just another way in which the Irish utilized their whiteness in the service of their own racial advantage. In the estimation of Liam Kennedy (1996, 222), “the projection of a victim status could be both functional and empowering.” That the equation still has political currency is evident in contemporary Irish Republican rhetoric, as exemplified in the writings of Sinn Féin’s Gerry Adams (1996, 281): “Irish republicans had a natural, instinctive and deep affinity with the oppressed black majority in South Africa and with the ANC.”
The natural affinity towards oppressed Africans that Adams may feel was clearly not widespread in the Celtic Tiger era Republic of Ireland, where in 2003, 79 percent of black and other ethnic minority individuals reported being subjected to racial discrimination (Loyal 2003, 86). Incidents of racial intimidation and violence towards recent African immigrants significantly outnumber episodes of discrimination experienced by other ethnic groups, according to a 2006 survey by the Economic and Social Research Institute (McGinnity et al 2006), and continue to be problematic in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland (Ulin, Edwards, and O’Brien 2013). Furthermore, it would seem that those close ties with ANC activists do not extend to physical proximity, as attested to by the decision of the former ANC activist Patrick Macphoso, who emigrated to Ireland in 2001, to stand for the Dublin City Council in order to “highlight racism and discrimination against foreign migrants” (McDonald 2009; Phelan 2011). Ireland, much like the rest of the European Union, is caught up in the politics of immigration and isolationism.

**Conclusion**

However European Ireland may be now, there remains an unresolved tension with the colonial Ireland of the Diaspora, and particularly with the prevailing narrative of Irish America in which Irish immigrants suffered extremes of poverty, starvation, and political oppression before reaching the promise of the New World. This enduring narrative must be understood as both a product of American national myth as well as one of its firmest planks. The successes of Irish Americans, particularly in the realm of politics, are routinely cast in light of the obstacles like poverty and Catholicism that were overcome via the opportunities of America. The centrality of the American dream to Irish America has also long been understood and exploited by Irish nationalists. Consider the 1880 claim of Irish Nationalist
Charles Stewart Parnell, presented to a Wisconsin audience, that “the condition of the negro slave in the South was better than that which has been the constant condition of the tenant farmers, or, at all events, the majority of the tenant farmers of Ireland” (cited in Kennedy 1996, 167). Websites such as IrishCentral.com and IrishAmerica.com routinely feature heartwarming stories of immigrant success in America; stories that are personally meaningful and meaningful in the reification of American nationalism and national identity, but which are problematic for Ireland in that the primary view of Ireland is of a broken homeland rather than the twenty-first century technological powerhouse dreamt of by Irish politicians and entrepreneurs.

In an increasingly globalized world, perhaps it is impossible to disentangle the Ireland of the diaspora from the Ireland as twenty-first century European nation. Yet the continuing lure of traditional models of Irish nationalism, particularly as given expression during the formative years of the Irish Republic, for Irish America is increasingly at odds with the perspectives and realities of society on the island of Ireland. Tourist economies battle with development economies in the Republic; while post-conflict Northern Ireland continues to struggle with how to deal with the legacy not just of thirty years of violence, but in addressing the complex histories of the last 500 years which gave rise to twentieth century division.

The fracturing of identity throughout the United Kingdom, most markedly associated with the narrowly defeated 2014 Scottish referendum on independence (as touched upon in the present volume’s introduction); calls for enhanced Welsh devolution and a burgeoning movement for English nationalism renders the position of Ulster Unionism, and by extension the future existence of Northern Ireland precarious. Prior to the May 2016 referendum on the European Union in which England and Wales voted to
leave, while Scotland and Northern Ireland chose to remain, the appetite for all-Ireland unification had declined even amongst Northern Catholics (Devenport 2013, Gordon 2012, McDonald 2011). Post-Brexit, conversations have changed. Beyond the fears over the restoration of a hard border between north and south, the majority of people living in Northern Ireland wish to remain part of the European Union. By early August 2016, the Irish passport office recorded a 63% increase in applications from Northern Ireland for Irish passports (a total of 6,638 applications in July alone) (Ferguson 2016). Generally speaking, those who identify as Unionist have typically chosen British passports, while Nationalists are more likely to hold Irish passports. The potential unification of the island in order to remain part of Europe is not outside the realm of possibility.

What role can and should historical archaeology play in the contemporary national identity politics of Ireland? Existing historical narratives have been constructed and reconstructed over many generations and in many different locales, all designed to serve specific purposes. But contested sites such as those associated with Ireland’s ‘coloniality’, including plantation period sites as well as rural nineteenth-century homesteads and industrialised ports, continue to exist in the present, within and amongst communities struggling to address major issues of the day, from the peace process in northern Ireland to the debates over immigration and the nature of identity in the Republic. What historical archaeology throughout the island has revealed is more than the familiar old story of hardship, oppression, and inequality, though certainly that can be read in the ruins. Historical archaeology also reveals evidence for syncretism and shared practices, and also reveals the echoes of empire through commodities—produced and consumed—that intimately connected Ireland with Africa, India, Asia, and the Americas.
For Northern Ireland in particular, engaging cross community groups in a process of mutual discovery of shared histories confounds the simplicity of traditional colonial readings of the Irish past and holds promise for a future where all those who call the island of Ireland home can acknowledge the intertwined nature of past lives. The challenge lies more in engaging the Irish diaspora in this process of discovery; as such engagement inevitably forces recognition that Ireland in 2015 is not the Ireland of 1845, nor is it the Ireland as packaged up and sold in the Irish-themed pubs that now can be found in every corner of the globe (Mays 2005; O’Toole 1997). Ireland today, like Ireland of yesterday, is constantly engaged in formulating new identities and understandings of itself; understandings wrought through global connections as much as local continuities. Historical archaeology exposes these transformations and continuities, while the ambiguous character of national identities on the island of Ireland provides a salutary caution in reference to the ready acceptance of nationalist histories in other places and spaces.

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*Figure caption:*

Figure 1: Deserted Village of Slievemore, Achill Island.