Irish Studies, Colonial Questions: Locating Ireland in the Colonial World

Questions about Ireland's colonial status, and about the country's relationship to the British Empire, did not begin in the 1980s. However, for reasons both domestic and international, these topics began to receive sustained academic attention and became the focus of considerable controversy in Irish studies in that decade. In retrospect, the Field Day Theatre Company's staging of Brian Friel's *Translations* in 1980 might be seen as a constitutive moment in the emergence of postcolonial studies in Ireland. The play raised a cluster of issues about British state expansion in nineteenth-century Ireland, about the politics of cultural collision and language change, and about the role of knowledge in the imaginative appropriation of territory, that would subsequently become key issues for an emergent Irish postcolonial studies as well. Later in the decade, Field Day also published a number of pamphlets that implicitly situated modern Irish culture within a colonial framework.[1] The small but growing body of work that shared this critical perspective received further stimulus in 1988 when Field Day commissioned pamphlets by Edward Said, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, each of which examined some aspect of modern Irish culture within the context of colonialism, imperialism and anti-colonial nationalism.[2] In the same year, David Cairns and Shaun Richards published their seminal *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture*, the first extended historical survey of Irish literature to draw explicitly on the wider international body of postcolonial cultural

1 See especially Seamus Deane, *Civilians and Barbarians* (Derry, 1983), and Declan Kiberd, *Anglo-Irish Attitudes* (Derry, 1985), both reprinted in *Ireland's Field Day* (London, 1985).

2 Edward Said, *Yeats and Decolonization* (Derry, 1988), Fredric Jameson, *Modernism and Imperialism* (Derry, 1988), and Terry Eagleton, *Nationalism: Irony and Commitment* (Derry, 1988), later republished in Seamus Deane, introd., *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis, 1990)

criticism inspired by Said's *Orientalism*.[3] The increasing significance that postcolonial theory was beginning to assume in Irish cultural studies was indicated in the early 1990s with the inclusion of essays by Luke Gibbons, David Lloyd and Clair Wills in a special issue of the *Oxford Literary Review* on colonialism.[4] All three essays explored Ireland's particular place within the categories of British nineteenth-century colonial and racial discourse. Since then a substantial body of criticism by some of Ireland's leading cultural critics has appeared that draws extensively on the theoretical resources of postcolonial studies. Key works include Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley's, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland* (1992); David Lloyd's *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (1993) and *Ireland After History* (1999); Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1995); Luke Gibbons's *Transformations in Irish Culture* (1996); and Seamus Deane's *Strange Country* (1997).[5]

Postcolonial studies in Ireland is sometimes conceived as an offshoot of literary or cultural studies, but the scholarship and controversies emerging from the 1980s onwards were indebted not only to the wider international emergence of postcolonial studies but also to concurrent developments in British and Irish historiography. The development of the historical enterprises sometimes referred to as the 'the Atlantic archipelago' and the 'new British history' are noteworthy in this context.[6] Both challenged, in various ways, twentieth-century British historiography's insular amnesia about the British imperial enterprise. The new British history took as its object the interconnections between English state formation and the extension of English control over the rest of the British Isles, while the Atlantic model investigated the wider connections between developments in the British Isles and Britain's westward expansion into North America and the Caribbean. Long before the 1980s, Irish historians, notably David Beers Quinn and Nicholas Canny, working with the Atlantic model of history had been busily publishing on the connections (personnel, trade, practices, and *mentalités*) that linked the early modern English plantations in Ireland with the contemporaneous establishment of British colonies in North America.[7]

3 David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester, 1988)

4 Luke Gibbons, 'Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History', *Oxford Literary Review*, 13, 1–2 (1991), 95–113, subsequently republished in Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork, 1996); David Lloyd, 'Race Under Representation', *Oxford Literary Review*, 13, 1–2 (1991), 62–94; Clair Wills, 'Language Politics, Narrative, Political Violence', *Oxford Literary Review*, 13, 1–2 (1991), 20–60

5 Thomas A. Boylan and Timothy P. Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland* (London, 1992); David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham, 1993) and *Ireland After History* (Cork, 1999); Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1995); Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture*; Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford, 1997). Other book-length contributions include Fintan Cullen, *Visual Politics: The Representation of Ireland 1750–1930* (Cork, 1997) and Gerry Smyth, *Decolonisation and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature* (London, 1998).

6 For some suggestive overviews on the development of the 'New British' and 'Atlantic' models of historiography, see the special forum on 'The New British History in Atlantic Perspective' in *American Historical Review*, 104 (1999).

7 Quinn's works include *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca, 1966) and *Ireland and America: Their Early Associations, 1500–1640* (Liverpool, 1991). Among Canny's numerous publications, see: 'The Ideology of

The historical research agenda pioneered by Quinn and energetically developed by Canny has generated considerable dispute in its own right. Its critics have suggested that early modern Ireland was culturally less alien to the British than the more remote and only recently 'discovered' Americas and that Ireland's constitutional relationship to the British crown was more ambivalent than that of the American colonies.[8] For such critics, Ireland must be considered 'a constitutional anomaly, neither the "kingdom" of England nor a "colony" in north America'.[9] Nevertheless, despite the controversy that Canny's work provoked, the emergence of postcolonial studies in the 1980s generated more intense academic heat for several reasons. First, the disputes provoked by the work of Beers Quinn and Canny had been restricted to historians, but postcolonial studies extended the debate about Ireland's colonial condition across several disciplines, thus lending the controversies more interdisciplinary and methodological dimensions. Second, while the Atlantic and (to a lesser extent) the new British histories unsettled the state-centrism of the dominant strains within both Irish and British nationalist historiography, both modes of scholarship remained concentrated on the early modern period, whereas the works that appeared under the rubric of postcolonial studies in the 1980s asserted that colonialism was not simply a remote historical phenomenon but something that remained critical to the development of Irish society until the twentieth century, and that its consequences continued to shape developments in the post-partition period as well. To many, such claims represented not only an unwarranted exaggeration of the importance of colonialism but also an unwelcome 'politicization' of Irish scholarship.[10]

However, the emergence and reception of postcolonial studies in Ireland must ultimately be linked not only to domestic and international intellectual cross-currents, but also to the socio-political climate on the island at the time. The social toll of the

English Colonization: From Ireland to America', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 30, 4 (1973), 575–98; *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established* (New York, 1976); *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, 1987); and *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland and the Atlantic World, 1560–1800* (Baltimore, 1988). See also the contributions by Canny and others in K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny and P. E. H. Hair, eds., *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480–1650* (Liverpool, 1978) and in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Oxford History of British Empire, 1, The Origins of Empire* (Oxford, 1998).

8 For representative critiques, see T. C. Barnard, 'Crisis of Identity Among Irish Protestants, 1641–1845', *Past and Present*, 127 (1990), 39–83; Karl Bottigheimer, 'Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Westward Enterprise 1536–1660', in Andrews, Canny and Hair, *Westward Enterprise*, 45–64; Ciaran Brady, 'The Road to the View: On the Decline of Reform Thought in Tudor Ireland', in Patricia Coughlan, ed., *Spenser and Ireland; An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Cork, 1989), 25–45; Hiram Morgan 'Mid-Atlantic Blues', *The Irish Review*, 11 (1991–92), 50–55; and Steven G. Ellis, 'Writing Irish History: Revisionism, Colonialism, and the British Isles', *The Irish Review*, 27 (1994), 1–21.

9 Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie, eds., *Natives and Newcomers: Essays on the Making of Irish Colonial Society, 1534–1641* (Dublin, 1986), 17

10 Examples include Denis Donoghue, 'Fears for Irish Studies in an Age of Identity Politics', *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 Nov. 1997; David Krause, 'Review Article: The Reinvention of Ireland', *Irish University Review*, 27, 2 (1997), 236–44; and Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1994), 22–44.

long economic recession that had continued in the South since the early 1970s and the political deadlock, hunger strikes, and military conflict in the North created an aggravated political and intellectual atmosphere in which the word 'colonial' carried a volatile historical and semantic baggage that disturbed many. Since the 1970s, the dominant intellectual responses to the economic and political conflicts that afflicted the island had been shaped by variants of modernization theory and revisionist historiography. Based on a crude dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, modernization theories sought to explore the institutional arrangements, cultural values and other social variables that might allow traditional societies to become modern as quickly and effectively as possible.[11] From this perspective, the problems that bedevilled Irish society — whether political violence and sectarianism in the North or conservative Catholic nationalism and economic inefficiency in the South — were understood to mean that Ireland remained a dysfunctional traditional society that had still to make the necessary transition to a properly modern social order.

The popularity of modernization discourse in both political and academic milieux is at least partially explained by its discursive suppleness, and by its consequent capacity to lend itself to a wide range of political positions and agendas.[12] 'Modernity as such,' Francis Mulhern comments, 'has no necessary social content: it is a form of "temporalization", an invariant production of present, past and future that "valorizes the new" and, by that very act, "produces the old", along with the characteristic modes of its embrace, the distinctively modern phenomena of traditionalism and reaction."[13] Irish liberals, genuinely concerned to secularize the Catholic-dominated official culture consolidated in the Irish Republic after independence, had used the tradition/modernity dichotomy very effectively to argue that Irish social legislation needed to be modernized to bring the country into line with the rest of Western Europe. However, the same dichotomy could equally well be used to advance the rather different interests of neo-liberals less concerned with social emancipation than with the emancipation of international capital from all sorts of traditional constraints such as state or trade-union regulation. Modernization discourse also exercised considerable attraction for some sections of the Irish left on both sides of the border. Some liberals and leftists, dismayed that the Irish political landscape did not conform to the right–left divisions common to most Western European societies, seemed to believe that only when a European

11 For a more detailed analysis of modernization theory, see Jorge Larrain, *Theories of Development: Capitalism, Colonialism and Dependency* (Oxford, 1989), esp. 85–110. For an incisive critique of the limits of modernization theory as a mode of comparative social analysis, see Dean C. Tipps, 'Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 15 (1973), 199–226.

12 For an incisive critique of modernization discourse in the Irish context, a discourse he terms 'the cultural dominant of the nineties' and 'the preferred code of advocacy and dissent', see Francis Mulhern's *The Present Lasts a Long Time: Essays in Cultural Politics* (Cork, 1998), 1–28, 20.

13 Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time*, 20. Mulhern's critique draws on Peter Osborne's *The Politics of Time: Modernity and Avant-Garde* (London, 1995).

modernization had enabled Ireland to overcome 'the idiocy of rural life' in the South and the 'atavism' of sectarianism in the North, would Irish social democracy finally make its belated rendezvous with history.[14]

For many, one of the main attractions of postcolonial studies as it took shape in Ireland in the 1980s was its capacity to destabilize the regnant intellectual assumptions of both modernization discourse and revisionist historiography. Like modernization theory, postcolonial studies seeks to articulate the systemic connections between the various crises that affect Irish society, north and south, but it does so in a manner that disputes crucial tenets of the older orthodoxy. From the perspective of postcolonial studies, modernization discourse is simply a contemporary variant on the nineteenth-century bourgeois ideology of evolutionary progress, the occluded side of which has always been European imperialism and the colonial subordination of the greater part of the world to metropolitan domination. By focusing overwhelmingly upon variables relating to indigenous aspects of social culture and structure, modernization theories generally display indifference to the wider systemic dimensions of economic and political imperialism. Even in those cases where they do accord significance to external forces, modernization theorists tend to evaluate 'impact' in terms of the diffusion of ideas, values and expectations, but rarely attend to the structural composition of the wider world system that constrains and conditions such interactions. Where modernization discourse consistently locates modern Ireland within an apparently self-contained Western European context and a foreshortened time span in which the past is reductively coded as 'tradition', the latter conceived as a negative force that acts mainly as an impediment to progress, postcolonial discourse insists on the need to understand Irish historical development in terms both of the *longue durée* and of the wider geographical span of Western colonial capitalism. Both modernization discourse and Irish revisionist historiography stress the reactionary nature of Irish nationalism, especially its more militant versions, but postcolonial discourse has suggested that Irish nationalism can only be understood contextually as the complex outcome of local interactions with an aggressively-expanding imperialist world economy. Revisionist historiography and modernization studies have both been obsessed with the 'high' history of nation and state formation, with the narrative of the political élites that shaped Irish state apparatuses. Postcolonial discourse, in contrast, has sought to develop a more

14 For a revisionist-leftist overview of southern Irish society informed by a modernization perspective, see Ellen Hazelkorn and Henry Patterson, 'The New Politics of the Irish Republic', *New Left Review*, 207 (1994), 49–71. See also Tom Nairn, 'The Curse of Rurality: The Limits of Modernisation Theory', in John A. Hall, ed., *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1998), 107–34, 107–08. For both articles, what Nairn calls the 'curse of rurality' seems to be the determinant explanation for conservatism and violence in Irish society, and Ireland's entry into the European Union is undialectically conceived in each case as an unequivocal moment of emancipation. Nairn's thesis that the upsurge of ethno-nationalist violence around the globe in recent decades can be traced to 'the spell of rurality' displays a remarkable lack of interest in issues of imperialism and state oppression in many of these regions.

critical understanding of the various forms of subaltern social struggles largely written out of the dominant modes of Irish historiography, whether in bourgeois nationalist or revisionist versions.[15]

For a variety of reasons, then, the applicability of postcolonial studies to the understanding of Irish culture and society, and the question as to whether Ireland was or was not a colony, have never been 'purely' scholarly or academic issues. Methodological differences, different disciplinary protocols and practices, and extra-academic political ideologies and allegiances all came into contentious, and sometimes confused and confusing, play with each other on this issue. For some, to use the word 'colonial' in an Irish context in recent decades has been tantamount to giving intellectual succour to the Provisional IRA; for others, the word emphasized only the negative aspects of Ireland's relationship to the United Kingdom at a time when it was important to build new and better relations with that state. The terms 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' also seemed to controvert the idea, shared by nearly all political parties in the South especially, that Irish people should forget the past and get on with integrating themselves into European mainstream culture where their future now lay. Differences about whether or not Ireland should be regarded as a colony do not tidily organize themselves along conventional 'right' and 'left' fault-lines and render the ensuing controversies more intricate and acrimonious, even if not always more enlightening. It is against this complex socio-political and intellectual-methodological background that any attempt to weigh questions about Ireland's colonial status must be evaluated.

2

The question about Ireland's colonial status can be posed and inflected in a variety of ways. For some critics, the essential question is whether Ireland can legitimately be considered a colony just like Britain's other overseas possessions. For others, the more pressing issue is whether colonialism played a significant role or not in Irish historical development and in what periods (if any) its significance was most consequential. Does the situation in Northern Ireland, for example, represent the continued salience of a colonial dimension in Irish politics or has colonialism long since ceased to be relevant to contemporary matters? If colonialism has actually left any substantive socio-cultural legacies in its wake, what form do they take and how are they to be addressed?[16]

15 This aspect of the postcolonial studies project is developed most forcefully by David Lloyd in 'Regarding Ireland in a Postcolonial Frame' and 'Outside History: Irish New Histories and the "Subalternity Effect"'; both essays are in *Ireland After History*.

16 This essay was completed prior to the publication of Stephen Howe's *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford, 2000). Since any substantive engagement with Howe's study would require a separate essay in its own right, this will not be attempted here. The most comprehensive review of Irish scholarship on the colonial question to date, Howe's book has been widely welcomed by revisionist critics especially as a decisive critique of Irish postcolonial studies. While it does usefully critique some of the

For sceptics, the contention that the Irish historical experience resembles that of other colonized countries is simply a species of auto-exoticism with little conceptual merit. Three key objections to the conception of Irish history in colonial terms are consistently cited. The first is that the Irish situation is much more usefully compared to those of other Western European societies, especially to other small peripheral societies dominated by more powerful neighbours, than it is to those of colonized societies in more distant quarters of the globe. In geographic, religious, racial, cultural and economic terms — so this argument runs — Ireland was always an intrinsic part of Western Europe. Hence attempts to consider its historical development in terms of non-European colonized countries tend inevitably to eclipse the intricate network of connections that bind Ireland to its immediate geo-cultural locale. This line of argument has essentially to do with propinquity: its operative assumption is that countries tend inevitably to be shaped by developments in their immediate environs and that Western Europe thus provides the appropriate, indeed inevitable, framework for any comparative analysis of Irish society.[17]

more tendentious arguments about Ireland's colonial status, Howe's overall grasp of contemporary Irish cultural theory is weak and many of his arguments about Irish nationalism, which are heavily indebted to revisionist scholarship in the first instance, are quite debatable. Moreover, revisionists who dispute the whole idea that Ireland can be considered a colony in any sense will hardly find much comfort for their own positions in Howe's conclusion that Ireland has had: 'A colonial past, then, yes; though one that took unique hybrid forms, involving extensive integration and consensual partnership as well as exploitation and coercion. And only as part, and not on all levels the dominant part, of an extremely complex and unusual set of legacies shaping the historical present' (232). The circularity and shadow-boxing inherent in this mode of argument should be evident. As the present essay will indicate, many colonial situations could be characterized as 'hybrid forms'; there is nothing aberrant or unique about this and, therefore, to say that Ireland was a colonial hybrid is not to say very much one way or the other. Nearly every mode of colonial power also involved elements of co-operation and 'consensual partnership' on behalf of some sections of the colonized peoples; there is nothing specifically Irish about this either, though the way the sentence highlights the matter seems to infer that this was at least somehow unusual. Colonialism by definition also implies some form of 'integration' of colony and metropole; perhaps Howe wishes to suggest that the degree of integration was exceptional in the Irish case. But even were this the case, and it probably was, then it would not thereby follow that the consequences of integration were any less 'colonial' — indeed, the most successful modes of colonialism might well be those where the colonized society is disaggregated to the degree that very little of it remains intact and 'integration' into the colonizing society on the latter's own terms is the only option left to the 'natives'. Finally, in no colonial situation, even in undisputed instances like those of India or Africa, would one argue that colonialism was the whole story or, as Howe puts it, more than 'only as part, and not on all levels the dominant part' of the historical legacies shaping the present. In sum, the effect of Howe's passage is to suggest that Ireland can be considered colonial only in a highly qualified sense, but what he says of Ireland might be said of many (if not indeed all) colonies. In passages such as this, Howe seems implicitly to assume some 'classical' colonial situation to which Ireland fails to correspond, even though, elsewhere in the study, he dismisses the idea that there is some 'classical' colonial model.

17 The objection based on ideas of physical propinquity is developed in Barnard, 'Crisis of Identity Among Irish Protestants 1641–1685', 43. The emphasis on propinquity in Irish studies displays a conceptual indebtedness to 'area studies' modes of scholarship.

A second objection is that Irish nationalists seldom conceived of their historical experience in colonial terms and even more rarely identified their own situation with that of other non-European colonized peoples in Asia and Africa or elsewhere. It is argued that the terminology of 'colonialism' and 'imperialism' did not appear in Irish nationalist or unionist discourse until comparatively recent times, and that those opposed to British rule in Ireland used instead the political languages derived from their immediate European surrounds. The language of Irish dissent to British rule, that is, was coded variously in the languages of Jacobitism, of English radicalism and French republicanism and was even shaped by anti-slavery and abolitionist discourses that dominated European politics at specific historical moments. Only rarely was it coded in a specifically anti-colonial vocabulary. It is also argued that where Irish nationalists before the twentieth century did locate Ireland within a wider imperial frame, they tended in the main to compare their situation with those of white settler peoples in the British Empire, not with those of the indigenous peoples. Thus, for example, Irish nationalists writing in the *Nation* in the early nineteenth century frequently drew analogies between their own situation and that of French Catholics in British Canada, not with that of the native Canadians. Similarly, at the start of the twentieth century, many Irish nationalists sympathized with the revolt of the Dutch Boers against British imperialism in South Africa but not with the struggles of native African peoples in the region.

A third objection is that not only did the Irish usually fail to identify with the subaltern indigenous peoples of the British Empire, but that they were in effect, like the Scots, enthusiastic co-partners and beneficiaries in the British imperial enterprise. The massive emigration from Ireland to colonies such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand and the country's significance as a supplier of manpower to the British imperial military machine as well as its extended contribution to the Catholic missionary enterprise in Latin America, Asia and Africa are usually cited to support this argument. Given its involvement in such enterprises, 'then surely Ireland,' Thomas Bartlett has queried, 'so far from being a colony, should be considered a mother country in her own right?'[18] From this perspective, even if not formally an imperial metropole like Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal or Spain, Ireland nevertheless shares more in common with these adjacent colonizing powers than it does with the colonized peoples of the European empires.

All of these arguments carry some weight and collectively they serve as useful reminders of the dangers of facile identifications between Ireland and 'Third World' colonial situations. But none constitutes a decisive objection to the proposition that Ireland was a colony. I will deal with the question of Ireland's place within Europe here; the other objections will be engaged later in the essay. With regard to the issue

18 These objections are succinctly outlined in Thomas Bartlett, '"What Ish My Nation?": Themes in Irish History, 1550–1850', in Thomas Bartlett et al., eds., *Irish Studies: A General Introduction* (Dublin, 1988), 44–59, 47. See also Tom Dunne, 'New Histories, Beyond "Revisionism"', *The Irish Review*, 12 (1992), 1–12.

of location, it is important to note that the thesis that Ireland was a British colony does not at all rest on the assumption that the country was somehow, culturally or otherwise, 'outside' of Europe and hence part of the 'Third World'.[19] It is transparently the case that the major intellectual and cultural transformations that have shaped Western Europe — the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, French republicanism and German Romanticism, ultramontane Catholicism, European literary modernism, among them — have also exercised a decisive role in the development of Irish society. For those who would contend that Ireland was a colony, however, what matters is that these wider European currents were mediated through a society that was in its structural composition — class and ethnic relations, land tenure systems, relationship with England, and so on — objectively colonial in character.

In a classic essay, 'Misplaced Ideas', the Brazilian cultural critic Roberto Schwarz discusses what he describes as the besetting 'experience of incongruity' that continually obsesses commentators on Brazilian society.[20] Schwarz's attempt to account for this 'experience of incongruity' centres on a contrast between the ideological function of liberal ideas in Europe (their location of origin) and Brazil (one of their places of adoption). In Europe, he suggests, liberal ideology was the expression of a triumphant bourgeoisie in its successful struggle against the *ancien régime*. In Brazil, where the fundamental productive relationship in the nineteenth century continued to be based on slavery, an ideology that proclaimed the autonomy of the individual, the equality of all men, the universality of the law and the disinterest of culture was patently out of place. For Schwarz, an ideology is 'in place' when it constitutes an abstraction of the social processes to which it refers. In Europe, liberal ideology constituted, therefore, an abstraction of industrial capitalism; the import of liberal ideas to Brazil, however, created a situation where these ideas were put to work in a social order of a very different kind. The contrast between, on the one hand, the material realities of the slave trade, economic dependency, and a political system based on clientilism and favour and, on the other, a liberal discourse that proclaimed universal equality before the law and the virtues of the impersonal state, created an effect of ill-assortedness, dissonance and distortion. This distortion, Schwarz contends, contributed simultaneously to the debasement of Brazilian intellectual life and to an almost reflex scepticism where matters of ideology were concerned, since the disjunction between ideology and material reality was so vast. According to Schwarz, then, the 'experience of incongruity' that obsesses commentators on Brazil ought not to be construed in terms of a clash between European 'modernity'

19 See, for example, Longley, *The Living Stream*, 30.

20 Roberto Schwarz, 'Misplaced Ideas', in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, edited with an introduction by John Gledson (London, 1992), 19–32, 25. My reading of Schwarz's essay has been informed by several commentaries. See especially Adriana Johnson's 'Reading Roberto Schwarz: Outside Out-of-Place Ideas', *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 8, 1 (1999), 21–33, and Neil Larsen, 'Brazilian Critical Theory and the Question of Cultural Studies', in his *Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture and Politics* (Minneapolis, 1995), 205–16. See also the comments by Francis Mulhern in *The Present Lasts a Long Time*, 159–60.

and Brazilian 'backwardness', nor explained away by a poststructuralist relativism that assumes that the real problem has to do with the inadequacies of the European sciences and methodologies and not with Brazilian reality itself. Instead, that experience must ultimately be attributed to the constitutive paradox of the Brazilian social order: a local slave-owning latifundist economy structurally integrated on a dependent basis into the 'liberal' capitalist world economy.

From a postcolonialist perspective, Irish history discloses a constitutive paradox of a rather similar kind. The suggestion is not, patently, that nineteenth-century Ireland was like nineteenth-century Brazil. What is suggested, rather, is that although Ireland belonged to the same geo-cultural locale, the same orbit of capital, as the major European imperial powers, it was integrated into that orbit of capital in a very different way to its main European neighbours. Those who contend that Western Europe represents the appropriate comparative framework for the evaluation of Irish society assume an essentially homologous relationship between the country's spatial location, its socio-economic composition, and its cultural dynamics. Conceived in this way, differences between Ireland and Europe are invariably structured by the conceptual couplet of 'backwardness' and 'advance'. The postcolonialist perspective, in contrast, suspends the notion that geography, economy and culture are all neatly homologous with each other, and attempts to investigate the *discrepant* ways in which Irish political and cultural life, which were obviously shaped and textured by wider European developments, were at the same time overdetermined by the country's dependent socio-economic composition. Contrary to what its critics would claim, then, postcolonial studies is neither misplaced nor out of place in Irish circumstances. On the contrary, it might be argued, following Schwarz, that an obsessive 'experience of incongruity' — occasioned by the fact that dependent cultures are always interpreting their own realities with intellectual methodologies created and validated somewhere else and whose bases lie in other social processes — is indeed a typical characteristic of postcolonial societies.[21]

In an insightful survey essay, Joseph Ruane has demonstrated that a *theoretical haziness* about whether or not Ireland should be considered a colony extends across all the major disciplines within the Irish academy. Discussing Irish historiography, Ruane notes that colonial themes have been paramount in the writings of historians of the late medieval period in Ireland, covering such topics as the coming of the Anglo-Normans, the displacement of the native Gaelic lordships, the introduction of English concepts of sovereignty and legality, and so forth. In the case of early modern Ireland, colonial themes continue to occupy a central place in the historical literature. The arrival of new classes of British settlers in the Tudor, Cromwellian and Williamite conquests, the massive confiscation of lands by the settlers and the displacement of native élites of both Irish and Old English descent, the deliberate destruction of Gaelic society and the opening up of the economy to capitalist accumulation, as well as the perception of the

21 Schwarz, 'Beware of Alien Ideologies', in *Misplaced Ideas*, 33–40, 39

Gaelic Irish as wild and uncivilized, have encouraged many historians to use the language of colonialism to characterize developments in this period. Ruane notes, however, that the analytical model that governs Irish historical writing alters quite dramatically for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the language of colonialism suddenly drops from mainstream historiography at this juncture 'without explicit justification or discussion' to be replaced by the language of 'modernization'.[22] For many historians, he comments, the Act of Union in 1801 puts a remarkably speedy end (apparently by the magic wand of parliamentary statute) to whatever colonial features may have existed in Irish society over previous centuries.[23]

Given Ireland's location within Europe, its geographical distance from other British colonies, and its integration into the United Kingdom, it is scarcely surprising that some scholars have attempted to settle the controversial issues involved by way of various 'intermediate' solutions. These generally work from the assumption that Ireland's experience was colonial to some degree but that it was always 'anomalous' or 'atypical' and hence by inference too 'exceptional' to be usefully considered alongside the overseas colonies. Hence while some will allow that the Irish experience of British rule may share some similarities with that of other acknowledged colonies, the differences are ultimately held to weigh more heavily than any similarities. Alternatively, it has also been proposed

22 Joseph Ruane, 'Colonialism and the Interpretation of Irish Historical Development', in M. Silverman and P. H. Gulliver, eds., *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology Through Irish Case Studies* (New York, 1992), 293–323, 318. Ruane's essay offers a comprehensive overview of the treatment of the colonial theme in Irish studies across a range of disciplines, including history, geography, sociology, economics and political science. For subsequent comments, see also Joseph Ruane, 'Ireland, European Integration, and the Dialectic of Nationalism and Postnationalism', *Études Irlandaises*, 19, 1 (1994), 183–93, and 'Colonial Legacies and Cultural Reflexivities', *Études Irlandaises*, 19, 2 (1994), 107–19.

23 The question as to whether Ireland should be considered a colony or a small European nation has a great deal to do with the categorization of Irish nationalism. For those who doubt the validity of the colonial model, Irish national struggles are better considered in terms of those of other Western or Central European movements such as Young Italy or Hungarian or Polish nationalism rather than in terms of movements in the 'Third World'. David Lloyd has observed that there are compelling arguments on either side of this debate, but it is the dichotomy between 'Europe' and the 'Third World' that subtends this controversy that must ultimately be queried. David Lloyd, 'Outside History: Irish New Histories and the "Subalternity Effect"', in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty, eds., *Subaltern Studies IX* (New Delhi, 1996), 261–80, 262. When contemporary scholars of whatever hue discuss colonialism they invariably refer to British, French and Iberian *overseas colonies* in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The great Habsburg, Ottoman and Tsarist Russian European *land empires* that stretched from Siberia across Central Europe to the Middle East until World War I are routinely passed over in silence. A lack of comparative research makes it difficult to say whether or how the practices developed by these land empires differed and in what ways to those developed in the overseas colonies of maritime empires. Whether or not a territory was geographically contiguous to the dominating power or a distant overseas possession does not seem the decisive issue. From a materialist standpoint, the fact that the Western European maritime empires (England, France, Holland) that eventually displaced the older Iberian empires were advanced capitalist countries, while the Central and Eastern European land empires were much less so, seems more important. Were the modern European land empires to be taken into account, then the either/or compartmentalization that structures debates as to whether the nineteenth-century Irish experience was closer to that of Europe or the so-called 'Third World' might be less compelling.

that Ireland should be considered an example of 'internal colonialism' whereby England came to dominate the Celtic peripheries as distinct from its overseas colonial enterprises. Neither of these intermediate 'solutions' is theoretically compelling. The conception of Ireland as somehow anomalous or exceptional rests on the untenable assumption that there is such a thing as a standard colonial experience, a classic colonial order of things replicated almost everywhere across the world, while the concept of internal colonialism depends on a categorical distinction between geographically contiguous and overseas colonization processes that has never adequately been theorized.[24]

If matters are to be advanced beyond the controversies that have attended the initial emergence of postcolonial studies in Irish scholarship, it is imperative to understand that the issue about whether Ireland can be considered a colony can be posed on two *analytically* discrete levels that require different methods of investigation: one that has to do essentially with matters of consciousness, systems of representation and discursive régimes; the other with 'objective' structural and socio-cultural correspondences — though of course ultimately the relationship between these two 'levels' also needs to be theorized. This essay will deal briefly with both levels individually, setting aside for the present the more complex question of their mediation. In doing so, it will work with the hypothesis or proposition that Ireland was indeed a colony and that there are compelling arguments to support this case. However, its objective is not to 'prove' that it was so, but rather to consider some of the theoretical matters that need to be addressed if the colonial question is to be advanced in some reasonably satisfactory way. As Ruane has rightly observed, comparativist studies in the Irish humanities are poorly developed, and neither those who advocate that Ireland is best compared to its smaller European neighbours nor those who propose a colonial framework of analysis have conducted much comparative research to substantiate their cases.[25] In the absence of extensive comparative research of these kinds, it would be premature to leap to conclusions; the priority of this essay, therefore, is to elucidate some of the ways in which a comparativist colonial research agenda might be constructed and developed.

On the first level, when we ask, 'Was Ireland a colony?', the question that is essentially being posed is: To what extent did those charged with British government in Ireland, as well as Irish nationalists, unionists and others, consciously consider the Irish situation a colonial one? Since British rule in Ireland extended over several centuries, during which time the British Empire changed dramatically in economic character and geographical composition, and since conceptions of empire and colonialism also changed from one epoch to another, what is called for here is a very challenging kind of intellectual history:

24 The argument that Ireland's constitutional circumstances makes it an 'anomaly' is asserted in Brady and Gillespie, *Natives and Newcomers*, 17. The concept of Ireland as 'internal colony' is developed in Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (London, 1975). For a succinct critique of Hechter's work, see William N. Sloan, 'Ethnicity or Imperialism? A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21, 1 (1979), 113–25.

25 Ruane, 'Colonialism and the Interpretation of Irish Historical Development', 318

one capable of tracing the shifting ways in which the various British governing classes, Irish political élites and insurgent social movements conceived of the Irish situation over an extended period of time. Whereas most historiography, imperialist, nationalist and post-nationalist, has focused on the more élite classes competing for position within the state — in other words, privileging those classes that leave behind the most extensive written archives — postcolonial studies has shown greater interest than most in the histories and structures of feelings of those subaltern classes and organizations that were more difficult to conscript into state-and-nation-building movements. Even so, the task of reconstructing the ways in which the more subaltern sectors of society viewed their situation is a difficult one, and a great deal of work remains to be done in this area. While the value of a history of *mentalités* and systems of representation of this sort can hardly be questioned, some caveats need to be entered. As mentioned earlier, it is commonly argued that Ireland cannot be considered a colony at some or other stage because the Irish did not deploy the language of colonialism and that opposition to British domination was coded instead in the language of tyranny and denied citizenship or argued on the constitutional grounds that the country was a separate kingdom. The difficulty with this line of argument, as David Lloyd has pointed out, is that it assumes already the historical development of a concept whose full range of meanings emerged only gradually through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[26] The fact that 'peasants' in late medieval England, Spain or Russia did not consciously think of themselves as oppressed by a 'feudal' social system does nothing to diminish the theoretical value of the term 'feudalism'. For the same reason, the objective theoretical value of the term 'colonialism', which historically emerges as a conceptual rationalization of European overseas rule and only later as part of a wider oppositional critique of that enterprise, can never be made to rest solely on the subjective consciousness or the available political rhetorics of the colonized.

The argument that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Irish nationalists looked mostly to the white settler colonies to highlight their own grievances, and less so to the indigenous native peoples of America or Africa or wherever, also needs to be weighed in this context. It is often forgotten that in the period between the eighteenth and the late nineteenth century (perhaps even later) the most difficult struggles of the European imperialist metropoles were not for the most part with the native peoples in their colonies but with their own white settlers.[27] The transformations of the whole structure of the contemporary capitalist world system as a consequence of Britain's disputes with her restive white setters in North America and Spain's with her creole populations in South America in the late eighteenth century testify to the world-systemic significance of such conflicts. In other words, the earliest and most successful anti-colonial nationalisms

26 Lloyd, *Ireland After History*, 7

27 See Arghiri Emmanuel, 'White-Settler Colonialism and the Myth of Investment Imperialism', *New Left Review*, 73 (1972), 35–57. Emmanuel does not mention some significant exceptions such as the slave rebellion in Haiti or the so-called Great Indian Mutiny.

were those of the white settlers and creole populations in the Americas and, given the wider global significance of such movements, it is not particularly surprising that their influence was most acutely registered in Ireland at the time. The fact that many prominent Irish nationalists — John Mitchel and Arthur Griffith are frequently cited cases — considered it outrageous that Ireland should be treated as a colony, because to do so was to put an ancient and civilized European people on the same level as non-white colonial subjects in Africa or Asia, is well established. Numerous examples of Irish nationalists — such as Michael Davitt or Patrick Ford — who did identify the Irish predicament with that of non-white colonized peoples can always be produced to counter the examples of those who did not. But to try to determine the ratio of those individuals who did and who did not is only to compound the conceptual confusion and futile point-scoring inherent in this whole mode of argument. The extent to which *some* versions of anti-colonial nationalism (throughout the world and not just in Ireland, as some Irish revisionists seem fondly to imagine) assimilate and replicate elements of the racist and imperialist mentalities they set out to oppose is a well-developed theme in postcolonial studies, and Irish nationalism in this and other respects thus shows the conventional limits of nationalism as an oppositional discourse. Yet the fact that some Irish nationalists or some versions of Irish nationalism were capable of only a very limited and conservative critique of British imperialism is not in itself an argument that Ireland was not a colony. Were the class-consciousness and solidarity of the oppressed not something that has continuously to be struggled for, educated and directed, rather than something that automatically attends the subaltern condition, then oppression would not be the problem it is in the first instance.

If the concept of colonialism has a theoretical value that cannot be reduced to the subjective consciousness of the colonizer or the colonized, this might well beg the question as to why it matters at all whether either the Irish or the British conceived of Ireland in colonial terms. Even if some British administrators or some Irish nationalists discerned parallels between the situation in Ireland and that in various British colonies, this obviously does not establish that the actual conditions were indeed always commensurable. Nevertheless, these things do matter, since, as Luke Gibbons has argued, it is always the case that understanding communities or cultures does not consist solely in establishing 'neutral' facts and 'objective' details: 'it means taking seriously *their* ways of structuring experience, their popular narratives, the distinctive manner in which they frame the social and political realities which affect their lives'.[28] Once it is allowed that language and culture are the spheres through which conflicts are experienced and evaluated, then it is clear that the attempt to trace the shifting ways in which Ireland was conceived in relation to other parts of the colonial world does have its own intrinsic historical value and scholarly interest. There is now also a steadily accumulating body of work that attempts to trace the shifting mentalities and

28 Gibbons, Introduction in *Transformations in Irish Culture*, 17

ideologies of settlement and resistance in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ireland.[29] A good deal of this scholarship is centred (no doubt disproportionately) on the writings of Edmund Spenser, but the range of materials covered is constantly expanding.[30] For the post-Union period, the parallels between British attitudes to Ireland and India in the nineteenth century are discussed by Scott B. Cook, while Perry Curtis's and R. N. Lebow's books on the racialized constructions of the Irish in British and American popular culture in the Victorian period are important contributions to any understanding of nineteenth-century attitudes towards the Irish.[31] To date at least, the scholarly material on the subject of colonialism is concentrated overwhelmingly on English language sources. The historical response of the subaltern Gaelic community to British rule in Ireland is consequently still seriously underresearched, though Joep Leerssen's work and especially Breandán Ó Buachalla's *Aisling Ghéar* represent pioneering attempts to excavate this material.[32] The kinds of scholarship referred to here clearly suggest that

29 Some important book-length studies on the representational systems that shaped British rule in Ireland and Irish responses to that rule lend considerable support to the idea that the Irish situation can usefully be viewed within the wider context of European colonization and imperialism. Much of the most valuable work on this issue concentrates on the early modern period. For its scope and authority, Nicholas Canny's work on how Ireland's colonial experience in the Tudor and Stuart period was of a piece with the greater European westward colonial thrust at the time, represents the outstanding contribution in the field. In a suggestive work of historical jurisprudence, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought* (Oxford, 1993), Robert A. Williams Jr. has also argued that Elizabethan colonial projects in Ireland drew extensively upon Spanish colonial doctrine in the Americas. More recently, valuable studies in the early modern period, notably those of Clare Carroll and Patricia Palmer, have extended this kind of research in new directions, examining the ways in which discourses of civility and barbarism in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ireland were developed in dialogue with, and sometimes shaped, parallel sets of discourses then being fashioned by English and other European powers in the New World. See Clare Carroll, *Circe's Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Ireland* (Cork, 2001) and Patricia Palmer, *Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland: English Renaissance Literature and Elizabethan Imperial Expansion* (Cambridge, 2001).

30 On Spenser, see Anne Fogarty, ed., *Special Issue: Spenser in Ireland: The Faerie Queene 1596–1996*, *Irish University Review*, 26, 2 (1996); Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Salvage Soyl* (Oxford, 1997); Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1997); and Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity* (London, 1997). For works that look beyond Spenser, see Brendan Bradshaw et al., eds., *Representing Ireland: Literature and the Origins of the Conflict, 1534–1660* (Cambridge, 1993) and the anthology of travel writing edited by Andrew Hadfield and John McVeigh, *Strangers to that Land: British Perceptions of Ireland from the Reformation to the Famine* (Gerrards Cross, 1994).

31 Scott B. Cook, *Imperial Affinities: Nineteenth Century Analogies and Exchanges between Ireland and India* (New Delhi and London, 1993); L. Perry Curtis Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, rev. edn. (Washington and London, 1997); R. N. Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy* (Philadelphia, 1979). See also Tadhg Foley and Sean Ryder, eds., *Ideology and Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin, 1998) and Keith Jeffery, ed., *'An Irish Empire?': Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996). Other useful analyses of nineteenth-century discourse include Angela Bourke, *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* (London, 1999) and David Cairns and Shaun Richards, 'Discourses of Opposition and Resistance in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Ireland', *Text & Context*, 2, 1 (1988), 76–84.

32 Joep Leerssen, *Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expression prior to the Nineteenth Century*, rev. edn. (Cork, 1996); Breandán Ó Buachalla, *Aisling Ghéar: Na Stíobhartaigh agus an tAos Léinn, 1703–1788* (Baile Átha Cliath, 1996)

connections between Ireland and other colonial sites were a reasonably consistent feature of both British administrative and Irish oppositional discourses. What is still much less well established, though, is the extent to which discursive identifications between the Irish and other colonial situations remained scattered, opportunistic and unsystematic or to what degree, or at what moments especially, they acquired systematic force. The shifting trajectories and mutations of such discourses as they are transformed over the longer term from one historical epoch to another also remain unmapped. An authoritative genealogy of the discourses of British rule in Ireland from the early modern period to the twentieth century, and of the discourses of Irish response and resistance to such rule, is something that has yet to be achieved.

3

Discourses that construe Ireland in colonial terms help us to understand how political agents and communities structured their own experience, but no historical materialist could be content to pose the question 'Was Ireland a colony?' simply at the level of systems of representation. To do so would be to allow a one-sided concern with semiotics and matters of ideology and political consciousness to dispose with the question of deciding whether or not the putative correspondences between Ireland and other colonies are compelling as an explanatory historical framework. For this reason, the question must also be posed at a level that tries to determine if there are compelling or illuminating socio-cultural correspondences or similarities between Ireland and other colonial situations. But this immediately leads to the question: With which colonies and with what kinds of colonial processes elsewhere might the Irish situation productively be compared? Naïve objections to the proposal that the Irish historical experience can be considered a colonial one, often assume that there is such a thing as a typical colony and a standard or one-size-fits-all colonial experience against which Ireland's claims might be weighed and measured. The real difficulty, on the contrary, is that colonial practices, structures and conditions around the globe have been of the most varied and heterogeneous kinds. The sheer diversity of lands that comprised the British Empire alone has caused scholars to question whether any substantive similarities between colonial polities can be deduced, and some have even queried whether the term 'colonialism' itself has any analytical value.[33] To avoid surrender to such positivism, which reduces everything to a catalogue of disconnected singularities, Irish studies might do well to devote more attention to the task of generating a serviceable historicized typology of colonies.

The conservative historian of empire D. K. Fieldhouse and George Fredrickson, an American comparative sociologist of race relations, have divided overseas colonies into

33 See Robert J. Hind, '"We Have No Colonies" — Similarities within the British Imperial Experience', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26 (1984), 3–35.

four categories: administrative, plantation, mixed settlement and pure settlement.[34] Though often the most prized imperial possessions, administrative colonies aimed at military, economic and administrative control of a politically strategic region and were never settled by Europeans on a mass scale. What usually destined a particular region to be an administrative colony rather than one of the settler types, Fredrickson suggests, was the presence of a dense, settled, agricultural population with a complex social and economic system, considerable military capacity, and relative immunity to the diseases of European origin of the kind that wreaked demographic havoc on the native peoples of the New World. Where such factors obtained, European conquest would normally be difficult and costly and little land was readily available for white settlement. Hence, once they had attained dominance in the region, the European powers could economically benefit most by extracting economic surplus or valuable mineral resources from these lands without systematically destroying their traditional societies. Colonial control in such instances could best be exercised by means of indirect rule exercised by co-opting indigenous élites or by newly constructed colonial bureaucracies staffed by European administrators and civil servants, or by way of some combination of the two. This category includes the colonies of South Asia as well as most of Africa and the Middle East.

In contrast to the administrative colonies, where power was exercised through a relatively small, sojourning group of primarily male European administrators, settlement colonies were characterized by much larger settler European populations of both sexes whose intentions were for permanent settlement. These fall into three general types. Plantation colonies usually attracted relatively small numbers of white settlers, but these acquired large tracts of land, found that the indigenous population did not meet their labour needs, and imported a slave or indentured and usually non-European labour force to work the mono-cultural plantations. In the plantation colonies, the mode of economic production rested essentially on the forced labour of imported workers to produce specialized staples for the world market. The paradigmatic instances in this case are the mono-cultural plantations in the West Indies and in the southern region of the United States.[35]

In the mixed settlement colonies, of which the clearest examples are the highland societies of Latin America, the indigenous peoples were not annihilated. Still, the Iberian settler culture and social structures nonetheless became dominant. When Europeans first intruded, these regions already had large populations and complex sedentary societies. But the drastic losses suffered by the native population as a result of epidemics,

34 D. K. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1965), 7–13; George Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race: Historical Perspectives on Slavery, Racism and Social Inequality* (Middletown, 1985), 216–35. My own taxonomy borrows heavily from Fredrickson's reworking of Fieldhouse's scholarship. For another attempt at a typology, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, trans. Shelley L. Frisch (Princeton, 1997), 10–12.

35 On the plantation colonies, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, 1990) and David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987).

warfare and brutal exploitation allowed the European settlers, Fredrickson suggests, to monopolize control of the land and to replace native political and cultural institutions with their own. Though the racial and class strata that emerged in such situations were typically very complex, miscegenation normally occurred and gave rise to racially mixed groups that served as buffers between those of settler and indigenous descent. Labour was exploited in such situations usually by way of coercive landlord–peasant relationships — with the indigenous peasantry left in place but required to pay tribute to European landlords or political authorities in the form of labour or commodities.[36]

In the pure settlement colonies, of which the United States, Canada and Australia are the exemplary instances, the native peoples were either exterminated altogether or their remnants pushed onto reservations in remote or unproductive regions. European exploitation in these regions did not take the form of the coercion of native labour. Instead, an expanding settler frontier was constantly pushed back as the indigenous peoples were displaced to make way for new waves of settlers. The North American and Australian colonial economies of this kind depended in their initial phases on indentured or bonded labour and even at later stages cheap 'coolie' labour from Asia especially continued to play a major role in their development. But because land in such instances was usually relatively cheap by contemporary European standards, and labour consequently comparatively expensive, the pure settlement economies were not structured in terms of the 'feudal' tenurial systems that characterized mixed settlement and plantation colonies, where a small landed oligarchy dominated peasant masses. Instead, farmer-settlement and free white labour became the social dominant. Because of the rigid social separation between settler and displaced native and comparatively low levels of miscegenation, these societies usually became homogeneously European in cultural character. Nevertheless, since land was cheap and white labour expensive, and because there were fewer inherited institutional restraints than in Europe, these societies were also often less rigidly socially differentiated and considerably more egalitarian — at least for white settlers — than their European counterparts.[37]

Used crudely, typologies such as these can freeze into Weberian ideal types. But they can also be used productively to highlight dominant settlement patterns, economic systems, labour forms, and state structures that emerged in particular colonial situations, and they can be adapted to account for historical transformations within a given colonial situation in response to the larger global mutations of the world capitalist system. Moreover, it is also clear that many colonial situations must be construed as composites or hybrids of the basic types rather than simply as varieties of them. The case of the

36 For overviews of colonial South America, see James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwarz, Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Latin America and Brazil (Cambridge, 1983) and Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, Colonial Latin America (Oxford, 1994).

37 On these issues, see R. Cole Harris, 'The Simplification of Europe Overseas', Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 67, 4 (1977), 469–83, and R. Cole Harris and Leonard Guelke, 'Land and Society in Early Canada and South Africa', Journal of Historical Geography, 3, 2 (1977), 135–53.

United States, which can be described as a composite of a pure settlement colony in the North and a plantation type in the South, is a case in point — though several other major examples such as South Africa or Palestine might also be mentioned.[38] The chief value of such typologies is that they can help to distinguish the new and varied compositions of land, labour and capital (and the attendant class, racial and cultural relations) that typically emerged and predominated in different colonial situations. As such, they may have at least the potential to take us beyond the ungrounded theoretical abstractions for which postcolonial theory is sometimes rightly criticized.

4

Viewed in this frame, some elements essential to any evaluation of Ireland in comparative colonial context become evident. First, Ireland was systematically colonized on a modern proto-capitalist basis in the early modern period, roughly contemporaneous with the establishment of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South America and the English ones in North America. None of the expanding European colonial powers in that period was a stranger to conquest and colonization when it reached the New World: all had been engaged in extensive offshore colonization schemes before undertaking longer-range overseas colonial enterprises. Portugal had already occupied the islands of the Azores and Madeira, and was establishing trading colonies on the coast of West Africa, while Castile had taken the Moorish kingdom of Granada and was completing its conquest of the Canary archipelago. Both Iberian kingdoms had also been engaged for centuries in the struggle to expel the Moors from the Iberian peninsula. Many of the techniques developed to settle and defend great tracts of underpopulated territory, as well as the spirit of religious crusade that inspired this reconquest, were to be carried over in due course to the New World.[39] By the same token, England had been engaged for centuries in various attempts to subjugate Ireland when it established its first colonies in North America. In the sixteenth century efforts to establish comprehensive schemes of plantation by Englishmen in the Gaelic areas of the country were already under way, and Ireland was gradually redefined at this time as a crucial strategic site in the European struggle to control the Atlantic and the New World. In the same period, the island also became what William J. Smyth describes as one of the epic battlegrounds in the struggle between Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe.[40] For this reason, it has been

38 See George M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History* (Oxford, 1988). On Palestine, see Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

39 On these continuities, see Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (London, 1992), 55–75.

40 See William J. Smyth, 'Ireland a Colony: Settlement Implications of the Revolution in Military Administrative, Urban and Ecclesiastical Structures, c.1550 to c.1730', in Terry Barry, ed., *A History of Settlement in Ireland* (London, 2000), 158–86.

suggested that religion, not ethnic descent or cultural identity, became the major index that distinguished between colonizer and colonized in early modern Ireland, with the Old English settler-descended communities from the pre-Reformation period ultimately relegated by the New English Protestant arrivals in the early modern period to the same inferior social status as the Gaelic Irish.[41] Because colonial processes change over time, however, the indices that distinguished between colonizer and colonized changed also, and hence the ways in which religion, culture and ethnicity were articulated with each other to demarcate the divide varied considerably from one conjuncture to the next.

The dominant economic system that shaped early modern colonial development was state-regulated merchant capitalism (or mercantilism). Like the West Indies and the American colonies, Ireland in this period underwent an exceptionally violent and accelerated process of colonial modernization in which every aspect of the indigenous society was almost wholly transformed in a very short space of time. All of these colonial sites were commercially oriented towards the emerging Atlantic economy, but imperial mercantilist policy was designed to prevent the colonies from developing independent trading links with each other. Instead, trade had to be channelled through the British and Spanish imperial centres, inhibiting independent economic development and diversification within the colonies over the longer term and thereby establishing the structures that would condition future economic dependence.[42] One of the distinguishing characteristics of the colonial outposts of this emergent Atlantic economy is the velocity of their transition from various forms of pre-capitalist society to mercantile capitalist modernity, without experiencing what Kevin Whelan has called the long conditioning of other medieval European societies.[43] Thus, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Ireland was a very lightly settled, overwhelmingly pastoral, heavily-wooded country, with a poorly integrated, quasi-autarkic and technologically backward economy. By the end of the century, all that had changed. As it was commercially reoriented to service

41 Raymond Crotty has argued that where religion became the index between colonizer and colonized, it has proved more durable as a mode of social differentiation than race: 'Colonizers and colonized in Ireland were distinguished ... by their religions. The former were Protestant; the latter were Catholic. The inevitable miscegenation between white colonizers and black or brown colonized produced sub-classes of mestizos, mulattos and Eurasians, who occupied the middle ground and eroded in time the sharp distinctions between black/brown and white. But successive generations born in Ireland, whether of mixed parentage or not, were Catholics and Protestants, with no diminution over the centuries of the fine theological distinctions between them.' Crotty, *Ireland in Crisis: A Study in Capitalist Colonial Underdevelopment* (Dingle, 1986), 38. Crotty fails to comment on the ways in which the Catholic Church itself assumed the role of 'middle-man' or 'buffer' between British rulers and Irish masses for much of the nineteenth century. The subject of religion has received little attention in Irish postcolonial studies.

42 Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World System, II, Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600–1750* (New York, 1980) is the classic study of this development. For an alternative account, which seeks to remedy the theoretical weaknesses in Wallerstein's work and to correct its North European bias, see Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London, 1994).

43 Kevin Whelan, 'Ireland in the World-System 1600–1800', in Hans-Jürgen Nitz, ed., *The Early-Modern World-System in Geographical Perspective* (Stuttgart, 1993), 204–18, 205

the expanding English mercantilist state and concurrently integrated into the world of North Atlantic trade, Ireland, Whelan argues, underwent 'the most rapid transformation in any European seventeenth century economy, society and culture'.[44]

In all the colonial sites that constituted this new Atlantic world this precociously accelerated modernization process was accompanied by what would ultimately appear from the perspective of a more fully developed industrial capitalism, with its 'liberal' emphasis on free labour and free trade, to be apparent economic and legal-juridical 'archaisms'. These include the slave plantations in the West Indies, the southern United States and Brazil; the encomienda and hacienda system in South America; and the oligarchic landed estates system in Ireland — by the nineteenth century the last would be regarded by political economists of all shades as the single greatest impediment to 'proper' capitalist development in the country. In nearly all these situations, moreover, the native populations were subjected for extended periods to legal and political constraints — though these, as might be expected, varied in kind enormously — designed to exclude them from civil and political society and to secure the privileges of the immigrant settler communities. To schematize, then, colonialism in these areas, based on the monopoly of land maintained by state structures controlled by classes mostly of settler origin, was corollary to a globally expanding commercial capitalism and hence all of these economies were deeply integrated into the emergent world capitalist system. But basic productive relationships in all of these situations continued to depend on overwhelmingly rural workforces subjected to various modes of coerced labour.

The discrepancy between the precocious modernity of these colonial societies and the extent of their integration into the emergent capitalist world system, on the one hand, and some of their more 'archaic' *ancien régime* characteristics has generated considerable theoretical controversy among Marxists. One position, associated with the work of Paul Baran, André Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein, holds that capitalism as a mode of production can be equated with the penetration of capitalist market relations. From this perspective, as capitalism comes into contact with other modes of production through trade, all economic activity is increasingly subordinated to the profit-maximizing imperatives of the market. Hence all essential distinction between the capitalist mode and modes initially outside the capitalist sphere is rapidly eroded and the problem that then poses itself is that of analysing the relationships of unequal exchange that subsequently emerge between capitalist core and periphery. An alternative position, associated with Ernesto Laclau and Robert Brenner, holds that while capitalist expansion is often accompanied by the extension of capitalist class relations, it may also result in the combination of capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production in ways that contribute to underdevelopment. Brenner, for example, contends that capitalist expansion may result in 'merely the interconnection of capitalist with pre-capitalist class forms, and indeed the strengthening of the latter'. Alternatively, it may also lead

44 Whelan, 'Ireland in the World-System 1600–1800', 204

to 'the transformation of pre-capitalist class relations, but without their substitution by fully capitalist social-productive relations of free wage labour, in which labour power is a commodity'. For Brenner, accounts such as Wallerstein's, that equate capitalism with the extension of the capitalist market

> fail to take into account either the way in which class structures, once established, will in fact determine the course of economic development or underdevelopment over an entire epoch, or the way in which these class structures themselves emerge: as the outcome of class struggles whose outcomes are incomprehensible in terms merely of market forces.[45]

These different theoretical methodologies point to strikingly different conceptualizations of Irish history. From the first perspective, a hallmark of the Irish economy as it developed in the seventeenth century is the accelerated velocity of its enforced capitalist modernization through conquest and colonization and the extent to which the country is incorporated as a producer of agricultural exports into an emergent Atlantic economy. The sweeping aside of existing feudal custom and moral economy during the successive conquests that displaced the old Gaelic systems is viewed in this context as leading to an unfettered capitalist exploitation of peasant labour in Ireland. Unrestrained by the hereditary rights and established moral economies that conditioned landlord–tenant relationships in Britain, the Irish situation in this view constitutes not a more retarded but rather a less regulated form of capitalism that lacked the customary checks and balances that made its British counterpart more politically stable. Moreover, Ireland's specialized and dependent economy, oriented towards international export, made it more vulnerable to the cyclical vagaries of international markets and this in turn aggravated the political volatility of a region already fissured by colonially-structured ethno-religious cleavages.

From the alternative perspective, which has been argued by Eamonn Slater and Terrence McDonough, the British conquest of Ireland allowed for the creation of a landlord class that controlled the Irish legal and political system to a degree unparalleled in England. In this account, conquest led to the emergence of a kind of bastardized feudalism that allowed the landlords to extract rental payments from tenants by means of extra-economic coercion. Notwithstanding the fact that it was constitutionally integrated into the most advanced industrial capitalist economy of the time, Irish society remained essentially feudal or quasi-feudal in character in this view until the very end of the nineteenth century. It was not, they argue, primarily the dynamics of the capitalist market but rather the development of class struggle within what remained an essentially

45 Robert Brenner, 'The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism', *New Left Review*, 104 (1977), 25–92, cited in Eamonn Slater and Terrence McDonough, 'Bulwark of Landlordism and Capitalism: The Dynamics of Feudalism in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Research in Political Economy*, 14 (1994), 63–118, 64–65. My account of these Marxist debates rehearses the account offered in Slater and McDonough.

feudal mode of production that eventually propelled the demise of this system. After the late nineteenth-century collapse of landlordism, peasant proprietorship replaced it with a small farmer régime, and only then was the stage set for actual capitalist production in agriculture.[46]

Depending on the theoretical model applied, it is argued then that Ireland either underwent an extremely rapid enforced transition to a form of dependent capitalism constrained within a colonial relationship mediated through London or, alternatively, that it evolved by way of a bastardized variety of colonial feudalism that allowed only for a very late development of capitalism by Western European standards. The differences here do not simply reduce to matters of different chronologies of capitalist development; different conceptions of the character and role of the Irish state are also at issue. Despite such divergence, both models suggest that Irish historical and economic development poses theoretical questions for Marxism that cannot be slotted into the feudalism–absolutism–capitalism sequence usually applied to the core centres of Western European imperialism. Though modern Ireland emerges in the same orbit of capital as the Western European imperial states, its social development and functional role within that orbit seems in crucial respects very different.

What both theoretical models suggest, therefore, is that the assumption that Western Europe constitutes the natural frame of comparative analysis within which Ireland should be located is open to question. The importance of Europe as the source of many of the economic, political, cultural and intellectual stimuli that shaped Irish society is not in doubt here — though these stimuli were also felt, to varying degrees, in all the major colonies of European settlement in the Atlantic world. What a postcolonialist methodology would suggest, though, is that it is the disjunctive way in which these metropolitan influences are articulated in a socio-economic context different to those in which they originally emerged, that constitutes one of the real interests of the Irish situation.

If Ireland is included in the category of settlement colonies as outlined above, then it evidently belongs to a quite limited set of situations where the settler population did not over time become a demographic majority. South Africa (partially settled in the same historical epoch as Ireland was), Algeria, Rhodesia, Kenya and Palestine (all settled in a much later epoch when industrial capitalism had already developed in Europe) are other major examples. As in the South American colonies, in Ireland the native population was not expelled but was retained as a peasant labour force within a land system now almost totally monopolized by the settler élite. But in contrast to South America, where the indigenous Indian population suffered a drastic decline, in Ireland the native population actually increased in the early modern colonial period and remained a demographic majority in most parts of the island except in the north-east.

46 Slater and McDonough, 'Bulwark of Landlordism and Capitalism', 111

The fact that Ireland was a settlement rather than an administration colony is of some significance. Within the administrative colonies, concentrated mostly in Asia and Africa, colonialism did not create new societies by destroying the native élites and installing European ones in their place — instead it intervened to restructure existing 'traditional' societies. Within the system of domination maintained by the colonial state in such cases, two distinct social communities came into contact with each other, but the social distance between the metropolitan rulers who remained a tiny demographic minority and the majority indigenous society was clearly marked. In such instances, the metropolitan society was a mere bridgehead of the metropolis and had no local 'creole' identity. The settler colonies, in contrast, were characterized by a much larger and more socially mixed metropolitan-affiliated population and in such cases the colonist and indigenous societies were more closely intermeshed. In these situations, the settlers became an independent third factor that intervened between the imperial mother-country and the colonized native peoples.

These settler communities were typically engaged throughout their history in a struggle on at least two fronts. On the one side, they were determined to maintain their control over the natives of the occupied territories since these constituted the most immediate threat to their privileged position within the colony; on the other, they also struggled, sometimes violently, against the metropolitan mother-state whenever the latter's trade monopolies threatened their interests or whenever metropolitan policies seemed to favour the natives in ways perceived to jeopardize settler control. On the political plane, the relative weight of the settlers and their capacity to act independently differed widely from one situation to the next, but their structural positions are nonetheless often very similar.[47] Because their relationship and manner of integration into the colonial society was different, settlers defended their position, which was based on immobile property, much more aggressively than administrators did. For this reason, the emancipation of settlement colonies was generally a much more violent and protracted affair than that of their administrative counterparts. For the imperial metropole, the democratization and political independence of a colony did not always threaten its economic control over the region. From the point of view of minority settler communities, however, the same processes would inevitably have much more immediate and drastic consequences since they spelled an end to their monopoly of power within the colonial state.

In Irish nationalist discourse it is regularly asserted that Ireland was the first British colony to win independence, setting an example that India and the other colonies would later follow. The claim has some validity: in his theoretical survey of colonialism, Jürgen Osterhammel states, for example, that '[t]he endorsement of "home rule" in Ireland in 1922 may be regarded as the first major act of colonial liberation of the twentieth century'.[48] Nevertheless, this emphasis on Irish precedence in the twentieth century can

47 See Emmanuel, 'White-Settler Colonialism and the Myth of Investment Imperialism', 39–40.
48 Osterhammel, Colonialism, 37

occlude or misconstrue some curiosities of the Irish situation in comparative colonial terms. After all, the twentieth-century decolonizations were only the third phase in the wider territorial dismantling of the European overseas empires. The first wave of decolonization saw the national emancipation of most of the European possessions in the New World between 1776 and 1825.[49] The second wave began in Canada in 1839 and inaugurated the slow transformation of the pure settlement colonies in places such as Australia and New Zealand into *de facto* autonomous states, generally known as 'dominions' within the British Empire after 1907.[50] Since Ireland was colonized during the first phase of European expansion, it might be argued that the real question that calls for explanation is why the development of colonial-settler nationalism in Ireland did not follow the same trajectory as in the American colonies that had their genesis in the same historical epoch. Had this occurred, then Ireland might have been expected to win its independence in the first wave of decolonization when the American colonies all the way from the United States to Argentina, as well as Saint-Dominique in the West Indies, won theirs. The creole nationalisms pioneered in the American colonies constitute, as Benedict Anderson suggests in *Imagined Communities*, the first successful anti-colonial independence movements.[51]

As is well known, an Irish 'patriot' Protestant nationalism did indeed emerge precisely in this period, on cue with that in the other settler colonies. Nevertheless, unlike the movements in the Americas, this nationalism did not succeed in winning independence and, after the 1798 rebellion, Ireland's semi-autonomous colonial parliament was abolished and the country integrated into the British state.[52] Why did Irish settler nationalism falter when its American counterparts prospered? This is not the place to tackle this issue in any depth but some speculative comments may be entertained.

When considering the two situations, one major difference between Ireland and the South American colonies at this time was that Spain was overrun by Napoleon's armies and cut off from naval access to its colonies by British blockade. While Spain could thus offer little support to its colonial loyalists, Britain suffered no such fate and emerged after the Napoleonic Wars as the supreme European power.[53] Spain's weakness in this

49 Decolonization in this instance obviously refers to the political independence of the European settler peoples. Though inadequately enforced, laws had existed under European imperial rule to protect indigenous peoples; so for them and for slave populations in these regions, the severing of links with the metropolitan mother-state usually led to intensified oppression rather than to emancipation.

50 For this periodization, see Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, 37.

51 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn. (London, 1991), 47–65

52 The literature on this period is vast and interpretations diverse. For some important recent contributions, see Thomas Bartlett, 'The Rise and Fall of the Protestant Nation 1690–1800', *Éire-Ireland*, 26 (1991), 7–18; James Kelly, *Prelude to Union: Anglo-Irish Politics in the 1780s* (Cork, 1992); Dáire Keogh, *The French Disease: The Catholic Church and Radicalism in Ireland 1790–1800* (Dublin, 1993); Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Houndmills, 1992); and Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity* (Cork, 1996).

53 For a succinct overview of this period in the Spanish colonies, see Burkholder and Johnson, *Colonial Latin*

period must be seen in any case as part of a much longer process of decline whereby it ceded its place as a centre of colonial trade to more successful capitalist imperial rivals. Despite Spanish metropolitan weakness, some of the Hispanic American creole struggles for independence were still constrained by a fear of what would happen if the masses revolted, and in some instances the memory of recent insurrections from below acted as a considerable deterrent to the drive for full autonomy. Creole attitudes were often indecisive and even after they had seized control from the royal governors in several South American capitals after Spain was occupied by Napoleon in 1808 many of the local élites continued to proclaim their loyalty to the Spanish throne. It was only when the Spanish monarchy, restored in 1814, attempted to restore the *status quo* after a period in which the colonies had already enjoyed *de facto* autonomy, that many creoles finally opted for complete independence.[54]

The mixture of creole anxiety concerning the dangers of mass insurrection from below and increasing self-assertiveness in the face of imperial crisis has some suggestive parallels with Irish Protestant nationalism in the same period. The long eighteenth century between 1690 and 1829 is often considered the era of the Protestant nation in Ireland. During this period the Protestants of Ireland became a politically confident class that completely monopolized state power. Throughout the period between 1650 and 1778, however, the Protestant parliament in Dublin had fewer powers than most of the avowedly colonial assemblies in Britain's North American colonies. The American struggle for independence, and its attendant rhetoric of 'democracy' and 'representation' and 'uniting', exerted an enormous impact on Irish Protestant nationalism. In addition, Britain's losses in the American war made it uniquely vulnerable to Irish pressures at that moment. When the American colonies declared themselves independent, 'patriot' members of the Irish parliament, backed up by volunteer militias, managed to have the constitutional relationship between Ireland and England adjusted and, as Thomas Bartlett observes, 'succeeded in giving Ireland for the first time something that looked like an independent parliament'.[55] The experiment was short-lived however. Mounting popular unrest in the aftermath of the French Revolution culminated in the emergence of a more radical republican nationalism determined to sever the link with Britain and committed to establishing an Irish republic that would extend civil and religious liberties to Irish Catholics. The threat posed by the republican rising in 1798 and the dangers of French invasion induced Britain to reassert its control over Ireland. It also persuaded the Protestant interest to surrender the parliamentary independence it had long defended rather than risk the loss of its political control over the country.

America, ch. 8.

54 This point is made in Peadar Kirby, *Ireland and Latin America: Links and Lessons* (Dublin, 1992), 32–33. For a more extended account of the Latin American revolutions, see Lockhart and Schwarz, *Early Latin America*, 405–26.

55 Bartlett, '"What Ish My Nation?"', 46

Thus, the intellectual stimulus to Irish Protestant nationalism in the late eighteenth century may have come from the North American colonies, but, it may be argued, the social conditions in which that nationalism developed were more like those in Latin American societies — a narrow oligarchy and culturally distinct peasant mass. In such conditions, the demand for independence had to be weighed against the danger of mass insurrection from below. Given the decline of Spanish imperial power, South American creole nationalisms ultimately opted for political independence. Confronted by an economically and militarily stronger imperial centre closer to hand, as well as by the dangers posed by the threats of a Catholic majority and the new French-inspired republican creed, Irish Protestant nationalism took a different route and opted instead for political integration into an expanded United Kingdom. It is perhaps a telling sign of the times that it was Daniel O'Connell, the hero of the struggle for Catholic emancipation in the early nineteenth century, who came to bear the title 'The Liberator', originally coined for Simón Bolívar, the great architect of South American independence.[56]

As mentioned earlier, the fact that Ireland became part of the British state after 1801 is the main reason why many Irish historians find it difficult to accept that Ireland can be regarded as a colony from this time onwards. It is true that its integration into the United Kingdom granted Ireland privileges enjoyed by no other colony. Ireland sent MPs to Westminster, something that neither the British white settler colonies nor the Asian and African colonies did. Irish migrants to the outposts of empire, or to former British colonies such as the United States, could also profit from what David Roediger has called, in a ground-breaking study, 'the wages of whiteness'.[57] They could, in other words, be integrated into the settler society labour forces or into the colonial bureaucracies in ways rarely open to non-European peoples. The scale of Irish immigration to the United States and several British colonies is regularly cited nowadays as evidence that Ireland effectively 'behaved' culturally as another European imperial centre, even if it was not formally one. But Roediger's work does not support this claim. For him, Irish immigrants in America serve as a paradigmatic case for understanding 'whiteness', not as an always-already given biological or epidermal 'reality', or as an index of automatic cultural kinship, but as a socially constructed project. In *The Wages of Whiteness*, therefore, the 'whitening' of Irish immigrants is conceived as a compensatory 'wage' that worked to disrupt possible black/Irish or Irish/Chinese identifications in the context of industrial exploitation, thereby pitting race against class alliances in ways that

56 On O'Connell and Bolívar, see Oliver MacDonagh, *O'Connell: The Life of Daniel O'Connell 1775–1847* (London, 1991), 171. My thanks to Margaret Kelleher for alerting me to this point. The spectre of the South American revolutions can also be detected in some of the Anglo-Irish literature of the period such as Sydney Owenson's *Florence Macarthy* (1811) in which the hero returns from the Spanish American revolutions in a ship portentously named 'Il Librador'. Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806) also alludes to South America, as, for example, in the long footnote in the third volume of that novel when Owenson refers to Garcilaso de la Vega, el Inca, the mestizo son of a Spanish father and Inca mother who had written a history of pre-Hispanic Peru which treated the defeated Inca rulers with sympathy and respect.

57 David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991)

have haunted working-class struggles ever since. From this perspective, the fact that the Irish in America would often play an extremely reactionary role in that country's race wars is not adduced as evidence that the Irish were culturally preconditioned to behave the same as other imperialist Europeans from the same part of the world.[58] Instead, the story of the Irish immigrants is offered as key to the demonstration of the historically constructed nature of 'whiteness'; racialized Irish subjects of British colonial rule set out actively to pursue the status of whiteness to negotiate their way out of their subaltern structural position into mainstream American society. Though the historical upshot is the same — the Irish identified with white supremacy rather than with the non-European oppressed and exploited — there is a substantive distinction between an analytic that stresses an enthusiastic embrace of either 'whiteness' or imperialism on the basis of a pre-supposed common European identity, and one that stresses that it was precisely because they could not automatically assume such 'whiteness' in the United States or in the British Empire that the Irish were so anxious to disclaim identifications with non-Europeans who also occupied subaltern positions in the social hierarchy.[59]

Whatever the situation of the Irish abroad, the assumption that Ireland simply ceased to be a colony as a consequence of its constitutional integration into the United Kingdom runs up against some considerable difficulties — not least the catastrophic dimension to Irish development in the century subsequent to the Act of Union. Historians seem largely to agree that an extended period of modest economic development and prosperity which had begun about 1660 stalled after 1815. It has been argued that in 1700 Ireland seemed set for a brighter economic future than Scotland, the other country within the United Kingdom that stood in roughly the same historical relationship to England.[60] Yet by the 1840s, when Scotland was well on the way to becoming an advanced industrial economy, Ireland was still overwhelmingly agricultural and held fast in the grip of an extended economic crisis that would culminate in the Great Famine, the last great subsistence crisis in Western Europe. The devastating consequences of that famine were both immediate and long-term. In the short-term, about a million people died and a million and a half emigrated. In the course of a single decade between 1841 and 1851 the country's population was reduced by 20 per cent. Over the longer term, in a sustained stream of emigration, more than 4 million people left Ireland between the Famine and World War I. Many European countries experienced high emigration rates in the latter

58 Roediger's work offers an instructive contrast in this respect to Donald Akenson's *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630–1730* (Liverpool, 1970).

59 For other works on the 'whitening' of Irish immigrants to the United States, see Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, vol. 1 (London, 1994) and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995).

60 L. M. Cullen and T. C. Smout, eds., *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History 1600–1900* (Edinburgh, 1978), 4. For a later revised view by the same authors, see L. M. Cullen, T. C. Smout and A. Gibson, 'Wages and Comparative Development in Ireland and Scotland, 1565–1780', in Rosalind Mitchinson and Peter Roebuck, eds., *Economy and Society in Scotland and Ireland, 1500–1939* (Edinburgh, 1988), 105–16.

half of the nineteenth century, but its size and duration distinguished the Irish outflow.[61] So great was the volume that Ireland in this period can reasonably be described, in Jim Mac Laughlin's words, as a 'global emigrant nursery' which supplied several of the core industrial centres of the world economy, especially Great Britain and North America, with cheap labour.[62]

The volume of emigration served ultimately to reorganize the whole structure of Irish class relations: it devastated the rural labouring class and impeded the growth of an urban working class. For the most part, with the exception of Belfast, the Irish industrial proletariat in this period was concentrated in urban centres outside rather than within Ireland. In places such as England, Scotland, the United States and Australia, Irish workers would later become key constituencies in the emergent Labour-oriented parties, but in nineteenth-century Ireland itself it was the rural lower and middle classes that remained the motor of radical social change. The consequences of the Famine, however, were not simply economic. Demographic disaster was compounded by cultural trauma, as English, long the language of state and economic power, quickly displaced an already declining Gaelic as the spoken language of the mass of the population. This in turn lent impetus to a cultural nationalism determined to salvage what it could from the shipwreck of the old civilization and to reverse what was conceived, no doubt often simplistically, to be a deliberate state-supported policy of anglicization and cultural assimilation. One does not have to interpret the period in apocalyptic terms to conclude that many of the long-term social patterns conditioned in one way or another by the Famine would continue to reverberate across most of the twentieth century in Ireland.

It was this catastrophic dimension to nineteenth-century Irish history that persuaded many Irish nationalists at home and abroad that, whatever its constitutional position, Ireland's relationship to England continued to be a colonial one. Economic stagnation, famine and flight, industrial underdevelopment, the superimposition of English on Gaelic culture, the spread of new pseudo-scientific racialist doctrines to legitimate Empire and notions of British superiority all lent force to that conception. So too did the fact that despite the constitutional merger, a whole series of Irish institutions — the police and legal systems, Dublin Castle and the Lord Lieutenancy, systems of education and local government — either had no counterpart in the rest of the United Kingdom or operated in ways quite different to their British counterparts. Irish nationalists were not alone in drawing conclusions about the colonial nature of the relationship. On return from a visit to Ireland, Friedrich Engels observed in a letter to Karl Marx in 1856 that: 'Ireland may be regarded as the first English colony and as one which because of its proximity is still governed exactly in the old way, and here one can already observe that

61 Timothy W. Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850–1914* (Princeton, 1997), 101

62 Jim Mac Laughlin, 'Emigration and the Peripheralization of Ireland in the Global Economy', *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center*, 17, 2 (1994), 257

the so-called liberty of English citizens is based on the oppression of the colonies.'[63] Ireland and India would become the two key sites for Marx's speculations on the nature of colonial capitalist development, and it was his conception of conditions in Ireland that prompted Marx's strongest comments about the regressive (rather than progressive) consequences of colonial rule.[64] By the second half of the century, Indian nationalist movements were taking a keen interest in Irish struggles, and in 1886 complaints were made to Lord Kimberley, the secretary of state for India, that 'all the arts of Irish agitation had come to India'.[65]

Thus, the thesis that it is Ireland's geographical proximity to Britain or its constitutional merger with the United Kingdom that renders its condition completely different to those of Britain's distant overseas colonies, runs directly contrary to Engels's comments of 1856 cited above. For Engels, we recall, 'Ireland may be regarded as the first English colony and as one which *because of its proximity* is still governed exactly in the old way.' Following this lead, it is at least arguable that the Union, far from ending Ireland's colonial status, actually served to make the Irish situation, politically at least, considerably more difficult than that of other colonies. The constitutional merger did not undo either the deep ethno-religious cleavages or the Protestant colonial nationalism that matured in the epoch that preceded the Union. Instead, the latter might be argued to have mutated in different directions. In one line of development, an erstwhile colonial-settler nationalism with tentative separatist inclinations was now transmuted into a rearguard imperialist nationalism whose central dogma was that any concession to Irish demands for autonomy (however modest) was bad for Ireland, Britain, and the Empire. There was another line of Whiggish liberal unionism which collapsed as a political force only when the extension of mass suffrage and the rise of Irish nationalism undermined the paternalist structures of social control on which it depended. A third line would see many Irish Protestants, from Thomas Davis to John Mitchel to Isaac Butt to Charles Stewart Parnell to Douglas Hyde and W. B. Yeats, assume decisive roles as political leaders and cultural intellectuals in the development of several different modalities of Irish nationalism.

As the nineteenth century proceeded, however, Irish nationalism was now opposed by powerful forces in Westminster because concessions might create a domino effect throughout the Empire, especially in India, and because they might stimulate the break-up of Britain itself. Nevertheless, as time progressed, the British position in Ireland became increasingly untenable. Since it was formally part of the British state, Ireland could not consistently be denied British liberal and democratic standards, despite the fact that these undermined the privileged position of the Protestant Anglo-Irish élite on whose support the Union largely depended. In the north-east, the capacity to maintain the

63 Engels, cited in Seamus Deane, 'The Famine and Young Ireland', in Seamus Deane, ed., *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, vol. 2 (Derry, 1991), 115–21, 118–19

64 See the collection of writings gathered in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Ireland* (London, 1971).

65 Cited in Crotty, *Ireland in Crisis*, 221

Union was strongest, since this was the only region where the Protestant population was a demographic majority and where there was a broad-based Protestant working class. In this region alone Protestant-unionist power had a wide populist base and did not simply rest on the monopoly of landed estates or on the control of command positions within the state apparatus. The uneven development of capitalism had also opened up economic cleavages between the more industrialized north-east and the rest of the island in ways that had generated compelling economic incentives in the north-eastern region to maintain the link with Britain. The intricate clash of domestic and metropolitan interests ultimately created a triangular conflict — one that simply cannot be accommodated within a reading of history as a bilateral conflict between English imperialism and Irish nationalism still sponsored by some Irish postcolonial critics — that catapulted the whole of Ireland into military conflict. Only in the later case of Algeria, perhaps — where questions of the integrity of the French Republic and settler resistance to both anti-colonial nationalism and metropolitan betrayal were intertwined in an analogous concatenation — did another colonial independence movement stimulate such severe political convulsion in the *domestic* politics of a metropolitan European imperial state.[66] India was undoubtedly a more important imperial possession than Ireland and its loss had more far-reaching consequences for Britain's place in the world. Yet when India was finally 'released' by Britain in 1948, there were no army revolts such as the Curragh Mutiny in Ireland and no internal splits within any of the major British political parties such as the one that sundered the Liberal Party over Irish Home Rule. The fact that Irish independence generated such sharp crisis within the United Kingdom might be construed as evidence that the relationship between the two countries was simply more 'intimate' than that between Britain and its more distant colonies. But the emphasis on 'intimacy' serves only to displace the more crucial structural point. For those committed to Empire, to the territorial centralization of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and to the class interests vested in the House of Lords, which twice exercised its veto over Home Rule, the democratization of Irish society was consistently conceived as a threat. That democratization and the preservation of Empire, the Union and the interests of the Irish Ascendancy and British aristocracy were construed to be so at odds, is ultimately the strongest evidence that the structural relationship between the two countries was indeed a colonial one.

5

Irish postcolonial studies presents a considerable challenge to Irish studies as currently constituted. Too often reduced on all sides to a drama between nationalism and its critics,

66 For a careful comparative analysis of Ireland and Algeria, see Ian Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca, 1993).

the real novelty of this new field of scholarship may well lie elsewhere. To determine how Irish social and cultural development was mediated by colonial capitalism is the goal of postcolonial studies. From its inception, the colonial process was never simply a matter of the subjugation of this or that territory. It was, rather, an *international* process through which different parts of the globe were differentially integrated into an emergent world capitalist system. Once this premise is accepted, then it follows that the determination of a specific national configuration must be conceived as a product of the global: to borrow Neil Larsen's phrase, the *part* must be thought through the *whole* and not vice versa.[67] In contrast to a nationalist conception of Irish studies, obsessed with the discovery of chimerical 'national' identities, and a liberal area studies alternative that hesitates to look beyond the horizon of the British Isles or Western European state formation, postcolonial critique impels Irish studies in the direction of conjunctural global analysis. From such perspective, the national arena still remains a crucial site for social struggles, but a true understanding of those struggles can only be grasped contextually within a wider global frame.

For the most part, debates about whether Ireland was or was not a colony have rarely got beyond questions of geo-cultural location and constitutional statute. These are important, but not the decisive issues. If colonialism is conceived as an historical process in which societies of various kinds and locations are differentially integrated into a world capitalist system, then it is on the basis of the comparative conjunctural analysis of such processes that debate must ultimately be developed. Cultural analysis has an important role here, since this is the decisive area where social conflicts are experienced and evaluated, but it is ultimately the contradictions of the wider capitalist system that shape those conflicts, whether cultural, political or economic. While I have suggested that typologies of colonialism can serve as a useful heuristic device for the analysis of colonial situations, any taxonomy that loses sight of the fact that colonialism is an historically changing process will also be reductive. As Francis Mulhern has remarked, Ireland's colonial history, by virtue of its sheer duration, can read like a history of colonialism itself.[68] In the late medieval period the country was, like Scotland and Wales, one of the ragged frontiers of English state expansion and contraction; in the early modern period, a commercial settlement plantation was developed in the same westward thrust as European expansion into the New World. At the moment of the southern state's independence, it was constitutionally configured as a white 'dominion' like Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa. But this status was conferred against the backdrop of a triangulated military conflict between nationalist, unionist and metropolitan British forces — in some ways a precursor to the situation involving a similar tangle of forces that would later emerge in Algeria — that split the island into two states. The situation in contemporary Northern Ireland is sometimes compared to

67 Larsen, *Reading North by South*, 214–15
68 Mulhern, *The Present Lasts a Long Time*, 24

that of the Basque region in Spain or to ethnic conflicts in Central Europe. But Northern Irish republicans have also construed and evaluated their situation in terms of African-American civil rights campaigns and late anti-colonial struggles in South Africa and Palestine.[69] The recent 'peace process' is also repeatedly compared to roughly concurrent processes in the Middle East and South Africa. Even the term 'Celtic Tiger', adopted to describe the late twentieth-century economic boom in the Irish Republic, implicitly associates that phenomenon with the small handful of East Asian 'tiger' economies that have emerged from a colonial history to attain levels of economic development comparable to those in the West. While the term infers, on the one hand, that Ireland had by the close of the century attained levels of economic development comparable to those in the rest of Western Europe, it also infers, on the other hand, that the trajectory of that development finds its closest parallels with other non-European histories. The point, finally, is not to adduce whether Ireland is or is not really 'just like' any of these situations, since no two colonial sites are ever completely identical. It is, rather, to think of the ways in which specific national configurations are always the product of dislocating intersections between local and global processes that are not simply random but part of the internally contradictory structure of the modern capitalist world system.

69 Several works in comparative sociology locate Northern Ireland within a wider colonial settler context. In addition to Lustick cited above, see Ronald Weitzer, *Transforming Settler States: Communal Conflict and Internal Security in Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe* (London, 1990); Michael MacDonald, *Children of Wrath: Political Violence in Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1986); Hermann Giliomee and Jannie Gagiano, eds., *The Elusive Search for Peace: South Africa, Israel, Northern Ireland* (Cape Town, 1990); and Pamela Clayton, *Enemies and Passing Friends: Settler Ideologies in Twentieth-Century Ulster* (London, 1996). Some leading political scientists and sociologists of the Northern Ireland conflict have also attributed some importance to settler colonialism as a shaping influence on the contemporary period, though the degree of salience they attach to it varies. See Liam O'Dowd, New Introduction to Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (London, 1990); John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford, 1995); Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Power in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1996). For a related view, which situates Northern Ireland in terms of other 'ethnic frontiers' in Europe and elsewhere, see Frank Wright, *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis* (Dublin, 1987).