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Review article: We are all transnationalists now*

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One of the boldest academic deceptions of our time is the mantra that history (in particular Irish history) needs to be rescued from its lingering 'insularity' by the application of a 'transnational perspective' – fresh, flexible, cosmopolitan, and marketable. No self-respecting practitioner today would deny the importance of pursuing 'a mosaic of individuals, groups and activities connected and sustained across national borders', as this perspective is defined in one of the most valuable and wide-ranging contributions in Whelehan's volume (p. 45). Yet, on reflection, it is obvious that this is precisely what a great proportion of Irish historians have been doing over the past half century at least. The lingering fact of British rule has always made it impossible to write about modern Ireland's political history from an 'insular' perspective, though excessive emphasis has admittedly been given to the relationship with Britain. Yet, over the last two centuries, this distortion has regularly been challenged by historians, often but not always 'nationalist', who have pursued and celebrated Ireland's European and global connections. This applies particularly to the study of Irish literature, Gaelic language and culture, Irish nationalism and republicanism, and disciplines with conspicuously transnational scope such as military, economic, and class history. With the obvious exception of local studies, it is difficult to point to a single sector of modern Irish history which has lacked a 'transnational perspective'.

In one respect, historians of Ireland have long been at the forefront of transnational studies. Massive and sustained emigration to Britain, the Americas, and the British empire has generated a vast body of scholarship concerning the intrinsically transnational 'diaspora'. Apart from the fact that most natives of post-Famine Ireland spent most of their lives outside Ireland, the diaspora engendered numerous foreign historians of partly Irish descent who have been impelled to try to connect the histories of home and host societies. In my view, the resultant avalanche of Irish transnational studies has

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* Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history. Edited by Niall Whelehan. pp x, 256. New York and Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. 2015. £110.

Loyalism and the formation of the British world, 1775–1914. Edited by Allan Blackstock and Frank O'Gorman. pp x, 299. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press. 2014. £75.

Irish migrants in new communities: seeking the fair land? Edited by Mícheál Ó hAodha and Máirtín Ó Catháin. pp x, 159. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. 2014. £80.

put British diaspora studies to shame, except in the imperial context. It is true, of course, that many transnational interpretations are tendentious, and that vast gaps remain in our knowedge of relevant documentation. Yet, if insularity is a problem, it applies most forcefully to historians in Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australasia who have been slow to draw connections with other sites of Irish settlement, and sometimes demonstrate naivety as interpreters of the homeland. This tendency has been eloquently and effectively challenged and undermined by master transnationalists such as Don Akenson.

The accusation of Irish 'insularity' is particularly wrong-headed, given the chronic reluctance of 'Irish' historians (particularly of the twentieth century) to incorporate 'Protestant Ulster', and the reciprocal provincialism of some Ulster practitioners. It remains commonplace for books concerning twenty-six counties (often with scant reference to twenty-five of these) to use mendacious terms such as 'Ireland' or 'independent Ireland' in their titles and analysis. This deplorable practice is perpetuated by supervisors that continue to sponsor topics whose scope is defined by conveniently accessible state documentation rather than social realities. A truly insular treatment of almost any aspect of Irish history since 1922 would bring together the 'two Irelands', an essential bridge between local and transnational settings. That is not to impugn the intrinsic value of local studies, which if properly contextualised are of fundamental importance to the advance of knowledge, and which will become still more prevalent as public demand and academic sponsorship for vapid generalisations in mega-histories recede. Meanwhile, the way forward for historians of modern Ireland is surely to continue much as before, fortified by extra doses of imagination, fresh documentation, and linguistic skills.

Niall Whelehan's show-case of *Transnational perspectives on modern Irish history* embodies negative as well as positive aspects of the crusade. His introductory manifesto rightly stresses the need for 'different approaches' to 'advance the conversation' about Irish transnationality, the point being repeated verbatim in the course of a few pages (pp 1–2, 9). The claim to methodological novelty is overdone by Whelehan and several of his contributors, even in two of the most accomplished essays by Enda Delaney (on the Great Famine) and Fearghal McGarry (on the 1916 rebellion). Delaney, a pioneering champion of transnational perspectives who has written several impressive studies of the Irish diaspora, must be well aware that sophisticated treatments of the Great Famine in global context (pre-eminently by Cormac Ó Gráda) have multiplied over the past three decades – not since 2007 as suggested by a footnote citing 'recent accounts' (pp 107, 123). Even more perplexing is McGarry's complaint about the 'historiographical short-comings' (such as preoccupation with 'the nation-state') of most studies of the rebellion, including his own work *The Rising* (2010). Following this rather coy confession, McGarry lists 'exceptions to this tendency', which together cover almost every relevant historical domain (Fenianism, biography, 'diplomacy, propaganda, cultural and intellectual history') (p. 166). Though his advocacy of a history incorporating overseas influences on and responses to the rebellion is unexceptionable, McGarry's transnational context is oddly narrow, containing scant reference to the central importance of the Great War in generating and lending significance to the event. When McGarry asks 'What might a global history of 1916 . . . reveal?', his approach scarcely overlaps with the late Keith Jeffery's masterly contextualisation of the Dublin rebellion in *1916: a global history* (London, 2015).

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Setting aside the editorial agenda, this volume is of generally high quality with many unfamiliar findings and some model applications of transnational research. Kyle Hughes and Donald MacRaild present a wide-ranging and well-documented survey of Irish involvement in British radical politics, complementing their work on transnational loyalism mentioned below. Timothy Meagher's survey of 'Irish America without Ireland', though less probing, is a useful synthesis. Hamish Maxwell-Stewart gives an exemplary analysis of Irish convicts in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), showing that they were less inclined than British convicts to be punished for indiscipline or to attempt escape, though also less successful in finding convict spouses. Enrico del Lago writes elegantly about the impact of Count Cavour's advocacy of agararian reform in Piedmont on his *Thoughts on Ireland* (1844), noting the revealing fact that Cavour deemed it unnecessary to visit Ireland in order to verify his thoughts on that subject. Orla Power contributes a tantalising miniature on intra-Irish tensions in St Croix, a Danish Caribbean possession, and Róisín Healy unravels fascinating strands of Irish support for Polish rebels in 1863–4. One forgives her pious observation that 'as *Transfergeschichte* or the history of transfer tells us, ideas are subject to modifications and adaptations as they move from one culture to another' (p. 150). Really? Jonathan Wright offers a penetrating analysis of the idiosyncratic anti-Catholicism of Sir James Emerson Tennent, a Whig turned Tory M.P. who was at times a darling of the Orange Order. Wright argues persuasively that the peripatetic Tennent was torn between attraction to Roman rituals observed in Florence, approval of Catholicism in Ceylon as a first step from heathenism towards salvation, and indignation at the role of 'priestcraft' in generating Belgian secession from the union with Holland in 1831. These vying transnational experiences help to explain why Tennent could be at once a friend of Cardinal Wiseman and a virulent opponent of Catholic clerical influence in Irish elections.

Perhaps the most engrossing essay is Irial Glynn's sparkling account of 'Returnees, forgotten foreigners and new immigrants: tracing migratory movement into Ireland since the late nineteenth century'. His combination of basic statistics and pithy analysis demonstrates 'that Ireland was not an insular, homogeneous island before the late-1990s. Irish people encountered external cultures more often than is generally assumed' (p. 243). As Glynn observes, 'studies of Irish migration are typically outward-looking and focus on the diaspora abroad' (p. 224) – the very antithesis of 'insularity'. Essays like this vindicate the practical value of 'transnational perspectives' and should act as an inspiration to others.

Like diaspora, loyalism in 'the British world' can only be understood through transnational and comparative study. Treating loyalism as a fluid and contested idea, distinct from 'patriotism', Alan Blackstock, Frank O'Gorman and a dozen able contributors survey 'the role of loyalism in promoting and mobilising sentiments of national identity in Britain and Ireland' and in the ever-changing British empire (p. 2). The editors mistakenly state that the term 'was first coined as late as 1837', two centuries after the advent of 'loyalist': in fact, the word appears in a pamphlet published in 1777 by the 'Liberty Society' in Savannah, Georgia. While pointing out that the focus of loyalism (and loyalty) shifted over time from the monarch to the ever broadening notion of a constitutional monarchy, the editors do not sharply distinguish between loyalism and loyalty. The history of loyalty in the British world would

encompass all attitudes and forms of behaviour exhibiting or implying attachment to the Crown and Constitution, whereas that of loyalism relates to the self-conscious and public declaration of such an attachment. Since many self-proclaimed loyalists, such as Orangemen, adhered to the pliable doctrine of 'conditional loyalty', loyalism was perfectly consistent with being disloyal to the Crown if deemed to have betrayed its constitutional duty to maintain Protestant ascendancy in church and state. Educated Presbyterian loyalists were inclined to make their loyalty conditional on observance of a social contract, embodying religious toleration and identified with the Williamite settlement. Conversely, most truly loyal citizens of the British empire were hostile or indifferent to belligerent assertions of loyalism.

Those who chose to trumpet their loyalism typically belonged to two categories: Catholics, Dissenters, and other suspect 'minorities' out to prove their loyal credentials, or else Episcopalians who believed that their ascendancy and entitlements were under threat. In each case, the point was to advance group interests, often in overt competition with loyalists of the opposite camp. The editors rightly reject the obsolete assumption that loyalism entailed unthinking deference to 'conservative elites', affirming that it was consistently 'a contested and dynamic political force' (p. 13). With local variants, the religious dichotomy within loyalism prevailed throughout the period 1775–1914, being most conspicuous in times of war and rebellion. Complementing a balanced conspectus of English loyalism (1580–1840) by O'Gorman, Hughes and MacRaild offer a thorough account of anti-Catholic and Orange loyalism in nineteenth-century Britain. The Irish case, complicated by the fact that Catholics were in the majority, is well treated in Jacqueline Hill's long-run survey and Blackstock's dissection of 'conditional loyalty' (1793–1849) and of consequent tensions between conservative elites and Orangemen. Andrew Holmes closely examines the 'Presbyterian Whig' variant of conditional loyalty, stressing the reluctance of most Presbyterian evangelicals to become brethren until their incorporation in resistance to Home Rule from the 1880s. Patrick Maume, in an interesting essay on the unpredictable Ulster conservative and Orange favourite James Whiteside, shows how his anti-Catholicism (like that of Emerson-Tennent discussed above) was moulded by continental travel, especially to Italy.

In the colonies, the meanings and functions of loyalism took distinctive forms despite the common affirmation of adherence to the British monarch. In the United States, where (as Keith Mason observes) the majority of 'loyalists' continued to live after the revolution, survival required delicate negotiation with the victors. In British North America, well served by Mark McGowan on Catholic loyalism and Scott See on Orangeism in the maritime provinces, rivalry between Catholic and Protestant apostles of loyalism resulted in ugly sectarian clashes. Though Irish Catholics long bore the brunt of Canadian anti-Catholicism, in contrast with the notably conservative Québecois, French Canadian loyalty also came under scrutiny following the execution of Louis Riel in 1883. It is a pity that McGowan's useful survey ceases before the Great War, which sorely tested the depth of all variants of Canadian loyalty and loyalism. The organisation of Protestant and Orange loyalism in Australia and New Zealand is considered by Richard Davis and Brad Patterson respectively. The final chapter on India, by Oliver Godsmark and William Gould, highlights another dimension of imperial loyalism scarcely touched on by students of the 'settler colonies'. This is the manner in which colonial

administrators delegated authority and conferred patronage on native-born elites, ranging from princes and upper-caste Hindus to educated Muslims, in order to maintain tenuous control over an otherwise unmanageable population. Though vying with each other to affirm their 'loyalism', many of these 'collaborators' mutated into nationalists as the weakness of imperial authority became ever more evident.

The briefest and fuzziest of the works under review is a curious compilation of essays on Irish emigration, ranging from the meticulous to the ridiculous. The editors, who contribute only a two-page mission statement, are respectively a versatile bilingual poet-journalist-historian and a self-declared member of 'Anarchist Academics' whose speciality is Irish republicanism in Scotland. They aim to blaze 'new pathways' into the diaspora experience, drawing upon 'a respect buried deep in Irish tradition for the individuality and instrumentality of the narrative, which is sometimes lost in conceptual models and empirical methods'. As an empiricist who occasionally dabbles in models, I shudder at the editorial jollity that 'there is nothing wrong with a little chaos now and then' (p. vii). Empiricism, as exhibited by the orderly presentation of documentary evidence, is ably practised by Malcolm Campbell (on Irish encounters with Pacific tribal leaders), Noémie Beck and Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin (on Irish cultural and linguistic adaptation in Québec), Kate O'Malley (on the problems facing Irish businessmen and settlers in independent India, compounded by the absence of Irish diplomatic representation), Gerard Moran (on assisted emigration from Connemara), and James Patrick Walsh (on the difficulty faced by an Irish miners' leader in Colorado in avoiding misidentification as a 'Molly Maguire'). Touches of chaos are contributed by Jay Tunney, son of the boxer Gene Tunney, who contributes 'ramblings from the D.N.A. of being Celtic' (p. 87) on the affinity between his father and Bernard Shaw. Lachlan Whalen meditates irrelevantly on the Long Kesh compositions of Bobby Sands and 'the paradox of exile', internal in his case. Few will read the entire book, short though it is and uncluttered by empirical paraphernalia such as statistical tables, but several essays advance our understanding of specific aspects of Irish migration. Refreshingly, the contributors make no reference to transnationalism.

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