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Review article:
Cartography and commemoration: the Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*

I

The *Atlas of the Irish Famine* is a stupendous piece of book production, finished to the highest standards. It comes to 700 pages (and four kilograms) with nearly every page featuring colour images, including paintings, drawings, engravings, maps and photographs. It won a prize for the best Irish-published book of 2012 and has been a major commercial success, being reprinted a few times within months of publication, and it's not hard to see why. It's a beautiful object, and €59 is a very reasonable price indeed for a product of this quality. A few inquiries among non-academic readers of my acquaintance suggest a few other reasons for its wide popularity. The book is divided into eighty-eight more or less free-standing articles so that readers can dip into it and read about a specific topic, rather than feeling that they should start at the beginning, as one would with the more usual monograph presentation of the Famine. Another attraction is the atlas format, with over 200 national and regional maps in full colour and in plenty of detail. Readers can see how the area in which they live fared during the 1840s, or perhaps the regions their grandparents came from, and compare that experience continuously with the regional and national picture. Given that most of the chapters are written by acknowledged experts, the book represents a very successful fusion of the popular and the academic approaches to the Famine.

While this explains the popularity of *this* book about the Irish Famine, it doesn't explain the popularity of *a* book about the Irish Famine. What does the success of what is practically a coffee-table book about the worst catastrophe in Irish history for centuries mean? One thing it signifies is the establishment of the Famine as the defining event of Ireland and of Irishness, its elevation to official status demonstrated by the presentation during St Patrick's weekend 2013 by the taoiseach, Enda Kenny, of a leather-bound luxury copy of the *Atlas* to President Obama (whose photo in fact appears on page 595). This sense of Irishness is a globalised one, and the role of the Famine in creating or expanding Irish communities in Britain, North America and Australia makes this a book that is addressed to the diaspora as well as to Ireland, and there are authoritative chapters on migration by Kerby Miller, Piaras Mac Enrí, Thomas Kennealy and others. As one of the editors, William Smyth, puts it in the first chapter, citing Cormac Ó Gráda, the Famine is 'as important to Ireland as, say, the French

* Atlas of the Great Irish Famine. Edited by John Crowley, William J. Smyth and Mike Murphy. Pp xvi, 710, illus. Cork: Cork University Press. 2012. €59, £55.

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Revolution to the French and the First Industrial Revolution to the English' (p. 5). The book itself is also much concerned with memorials and memorialisation, in effect with the institutionalisation of the Famine in the present, and there are chapters on the New York Famine memorial (by Joe Lee) and the Strokestown Famine Museum (Terence Dooley) as well as one on famine memorials in general (John Crowley). The introduction goes as far as presenting the book as 'an act of commemoration of the known and unknown dead of the Famine and of the millions who had to flee Ireland' (p. xvi).

What does such a commemoration normally look like? One way of remembering people en masse is to inscribe their names in some way, such as the different indexes of deaths in Northern Ireland since 1969 or the Vietnam war memorial in Washington D.C. Examples of this type of commemoration are scattered through the *Atlas*. There is a photograph of a glass panel in Sydney on which is engraved the names of orphan girls who arrived as part of an assisted emigration scheme between 1848 and 1850 (p. 555), and a similar one in Grosse Ile, Quebec (p. 535). Others examples are in the form of contemporary documents, such as those reproduced on pages 278–9 that show families evicted in Donoughmore, County Cork, a similar list of twenty-nine evicted families on the estate of Lord Lucan in 1848 (p. 72), a list of tenants in Baltyboys estate in County Wicklow (pp 355–7) and a shipping list from 1848 (p. 495). The most evocative are the 'List of paupers relieved' in Roscrea workhouse, which contains nearly 400 names along with the areas they came from (p. 141), a list of ninety of those who died in the same workhouse in 1848 along with their ages (p.143), and a list of 138 families in County Leitrim who received clothes from a Quaker relief scheme, which, as Gerard Mac Atasney puts it, 'brings the reader face to face with the destitute of Riverdale, Drumshanbo, Gubnaveigh and Derigvon' (p. 303).

A commemorative impulse is also visible in the book's illustrations. There are thirty-six photographs of memorials and graveyards, and the same number of photographs of workhouse buildings and fever hospitals, which constitute a type of archaeology of the Famine. In addition, there are eight modern photographs of fields with lazy beds or potato ridges still visible in them. All of these images, like the lists of evicted families and workhouse inmates, signify the absence of those who died or emigrated in the Famine, and have a commemorative rather than an explanatory function in the book. The principal visual explanatory or expository role is played by maps, as one would expect in an atlas, and while the maps by no means dominate the book, they are its most novel and innovative element, as the endorsements on the dust jacket point out, and they are worth considering in detail.

II

The *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* is not the first book to adopt a cartographic approach to the Famine. *Mapping the Great Irish Famine*, produced by a team from Queen's University Belfast, appeared in 1999, and a comparison between the two books is instructive. *Mapping the Great Irish Famine* is entirely in monochrome, as compared to the spectrum of colour in the new *Atlas*. This allows the new book to incorporate an unprecedented level of detail, with many

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of its maps showing data at a parish level, whereas the maps in the Belfast book are mostly at barony or even county level. The Belfast volume is far more focused on the maps, however. The *Atlas* has 212 in 710 pages, or 0.3 per page, whereas *Mapping* has 296 maps in 220 pages, or 1.4 per page, well over four times as much. (This is leaving aside the peculiarities of each book, such as the six maps in the Belfast book that are famously entirely blank, since the units of measurement chosen are too broad to register any variation in distribution, and a certain duplication of material in the *Atlas*, where essentially the same maps appear in different sections.)

As this suggests, the maps are far more prominent in *Mapping*, and indeed the relationship between text and map is also very different in the two books. In the Belfast volume, there is a list of maps at the beginning, they are the primary element and the text is entirely a commentary on them, even to the point where such commentary appears superfluous or tautological – 'as the map demonstrates, and not unexpectedly, the highest consumption of fish was in coastal counties, almost forming a circular fringe around the country'.[1] In the *Atlas*, by contrast, there is no list of maps and in most sections they are illustrative of a text which could often function just as well without them, and indeed in many cases the text does not refer to the maps. The exceptions are the chapters by one of the book's editors, William J. Smyth, which serve as overviews and links between different parts of the book. Many others, however, have no maps at all – Peter Gray on relief, Christine Kinealy on Queen Victoria, Hilary O'Kelly on workhouse clothing, Michelle O'Mahony on the Cork workhouse, Julian Campbell on the artist James Mahony, John Feehan on Baunreagh, County Laois, Regina Sexton on diet and others. On the whole, perhaps the term 'atlas' doesn't adequately convey the nature of the new book. It could at least as accurately be described as an 'encyclopaedia'.

The two books also offer a contrast in terms of the source material for the maps. They both follow some well-worn paths, producing maps that have appeared elsewhere, often decades ago in books such as T. W. Freeman's *Prefamine Ireland: a historical geography* (1957), of such standard measures as population density, employment, poor housing, literacy, numbers receiving relief in 1846 and 1847 and so on. The data that underlie the maps differ somewhat in the two books. The *Atlas* uses figures from the censuses of 1841 and 1851 and makes its chronological comparisons between these two. *Mapping* casts its net more widely, mobilising the censuses of 1861 and 1871 as well as some material from the Poor Inquiry of 1833–6. It is regrettable that the *Atlas* would limit itself in this way, since one of the revisions that emerged from the scholarship of the 1990s was that the Famine continued in many areas into 1851 or even 1852, as opposed to the '1845–47' that sometimes appeared in older books. Indeed the very first chapter in the *Atlas*, by Smyth, is called 'The story of the Great Irish Famine 1845–52'. The extent of social dislocation means that what was being measured in the 1851 census was often continuing famine conditions rather than post-famine, and that a later census might give a different picture.

What can we say in general about the advantages and disadvantages of maps for an analysis of the Famine? Neither book offers an extended defence or

[1] Liam Kennedy, Paul Ell, E. M. Crawford and L .A. Clarkson (eds.), *Mapping the Great Irish Famine* (Dublin, 1999), p. 75.

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justification for this approach. The introduction and conclusion of *Mapping* deal with the question of whether the Famine was a watershed in Irish history, and there is no discussion whatever of a spatial element to this question. Similarly the introduction to the new *Atlas* (there is no conclusion) is for the most part an essay on the historiography of the Famine since its centenary in 1945, but it does give the following justification:

> While recognising the power and effects of the general political and administrative forces at work and the devastating impacts of the Famine island-wide, the interpretation of these maps and other evidence equally highlights the diversity of local, provincial and emigrant conditions and experiences.

A map, in other words, presents a picture that is at once unified and internally differentiated, and, we might add, with an apparent immediacy of perception that a text cannot achieve.

There are limits to this approach, however, even taking it on its own terms. In the first place, maps are best at displaying one variable at a time. There is only one map in the *Atlas* that attempts to show two variables simultaneously (there are none at all in *Mapping*), charting both population decline and the proportion of population engaged in agriculture. It is cluttered and quite difficult to read. It is possible to show two phenomena perfectly clearly on the same map, as shown many years ago by Austin Bourke's map of housing quality and illiteracy in 1841.[2] To be fair, Bourke was showing two binary variables at a county level; the *Atlas* map is showing five values of two variables at a parish level, a far more ambitious undertaking.

The fact that the maps show only one variable means that a good deal of their explanatory potential involves comparing one map to another, in effect a visual argument based on ostension. On page 196, for example, we are invited to compare a map showing the decline in children under five between 1841 and 1851 with the map showing overall population decline (the latter map is on page 19, making immediate comparison difficult, and the text on page 196 does not tell the reader this). The geographic correlation of these two maps is 'simply staggering'; similarly, the 'detailed correlation with the map of decline in agricultural families (p. 186) is striking'. But beyond showing the similarities, which are surely not surprising, the method does not offer any explanation of the distribution pattern. The parish of Kilballyowen, County Clare (Loop Head), for example, is very different on all three measures to its neighbours, as is the parish of Killorglin in County Kerry, but there is no indication of why this might be.

Ostension as a method becomes problematic when the visual patterns perceived by the mapmaker or author are not apparent to the viewer or reader. The commentary on a map showing the percentage distribution of families employed in agriculture suggests that 'once again the boundary line from Galway bay to the Cooley Peninsula emerges' (p. 183). I cannot see any such line; I do, however, see a very definite Sligo–Cooley line. (The next paragraph, incidentally, suggests that the percentage engaged, rather than employed, in agriculture is 'far more instructive', and that there is a clear division each side of a line from Donegal to Waterford. There is no way of checking this line, or checking whether the map is indeed more instructive, since there is no such map

[2] Austin Bourke, *The visitation of God? The potato and the Great Irish Famine* ed. Jacqueline R. Hill and Cormac Ó Gráda (Dublin, 1993), p. 21.

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in the book.) Similarly, the map of industrial activity is said to have a line from Donegal Bay to Wexford; to my eyes, a Sligo–Drogheda line is at least as strong, if not stronger (p. 185). A map of population decline in Roscrea Union (p. 131) is said to show a centre–periphery distribution, but an east–west one is much more apparent to this viewer. A centre–periphery pattern is also suggested for a map of population decline in south Ulster (p. 449) where 'it is striking that the greatest population losses are in parishes which are aligned along county boundaries, possibly reflecting greater remoteness from urban areas and their support systems.' However, a look at the map shows that many of the parishes with the lowest losses are also on county boundaries. In any case, the assumption that county boundaries and towns don't coincide is dubious, to say the least, and in fact the border area with the greatest decline, the Monaghan–Cavan border, is the one with the greatest number of towns, Cootehill, Belturbet, Kingscourt and Shercock, with Carrickmacross and Clones close by. Not surprisingly, the author, Patrick Duffy, concludes that it is 'difficult ... to generalise about Famine conditions and their effects, either within counties or across the island.' (p. 449)

The second limit to a cartographic approach to the Famine is that a map is only as useful as the data that underlie it. A case in point is the map on page 110 of the *Atlas*, showing 'approximate number of dead as per Poor Law Union 1841–51'. This is based on the tables of deaths in the census of 1851, figures that are described by Ó Gráda elsewhere in the *Atlas* as 'seriously flawed' (p. 171). The pattern it shows is not similar to any of the other maps of deaths, this difference is not properly explained, and it is difficult to see why it was included or what, if anything, can be learnt from it. Similarly, maps on two facing pages (pp 580–1) purport to show levels of Irish speaking in 1841 and 1851. A comparison between the two maps shows a startling *increase* in the percentage of Irish speakers in areas such as counties Roscommon and Limerick, which go from under 10% to over 20%. Of course there was no such increase. It is the result of basing one map on the reported linguistic capacities of the very elderly in the 1911 census and the other on the reported capacities of the entire population in the 1851 census. The hazards of such a method are clear, but all these maps, death totals, population and language, nevertheless look authoritative and compel assent because they are presented as tidy schematisations, in an apparently neutral and quantitative grid.

Finally, maps need to be presented clearly, comprehensibly and accurately, and there are quite a few cases in the *Atlas* where this is not done. The caption to the map on page 108 states that it shows the lower bound of Mokyr's estimate of deaths, whereas it in fact shows the upper bound, as is clear from the main text of the chapter. In the case of the map showing the two variables, the caption says that one of the things being measured is 'agricultural change'; in fact it measures the percentage employed in agriculture in 1841, not at all the same thing. More seriously, the caption to the map on page 182 says that it 'attempts to measure the scale of population loss per parish between 1841 and 1851 vis-à-vis the land valuations'. There are six shades on the map, and these are explained in the main text. After repeated readings of both caption and main text, however, the map was no clearer to me, and the only understanding I could come to was that the map shows population decline only, and not its relationship with anything else, despite what the caption and text say. It seems to show the same thing as the map on page 19, 'Percentage change in the distribution of rural population between 1841 and 1851', although since the units of measurement differ slightly, it is difficult to be

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entirely sure. Echoing Duffy's comments about south Ulster, the text concludes that the data are 'complex and not amenable to an analysis of simple or single equations' (p. 182). This proposition would arguably be better as a starting point for a cartographic exercise than as a conclusion.

An even more confusing case is the map on page 194, 'The changing distribution of levels of literacy 1841–51', comparing the censuses of those years at a parish level. This is a quite astonishing map, showing dramatic changes with no obvious patterns. Indeed parishes with a rise in literacy rates of over 25% are found beside parishes with a drop of over 35% in counties Clare, Galway, Sligo, Meath, Wicklow, Waterford and Cork, and there are countless other less extreme but equally striking contrasts. However, when the map is compared to the figures in the censuses from which it derives, there is no correspondence between them. In two adjoining parishes in west Galway, Ballinakill and Ross, the map shows a drop of 15–25% and a rise of over 25% respectively, an enormous difference. The census shows that in reality the proportion of those who could read and write increased in both parishes, and by roughly the same amount, in Ballinakill from 8% to 11% and in Ross from 6% to 9%. What the map is in fact showing is the *number* of people who could read and write, and not the proportion – Ballinakill going down from 517 to 420 and Ross up from 239 to 303. This is borne out by comparison of the north-west Clare parishes of Gleninagh and Killonaghan, supposedly registering an increase of over 25% and a decrease of over 35% respectively. This elementary error is confusing, to say the least, but the discussion of this map in the main text adds to the confusion. It claims to discern regional patterns, but this is blatantly contradicted by the map itself, which is an almost random patchwork. It also states that the map shows 'an intimate relationship between illiteracy levels and population change', which of course it doesn't, since it shows neither illiteracy levels nor population change. It then quotes Joel Mokyr's suggestion that if literacy levels had been higher, the death rates would have been lower. What this means is left unclear. If we take literacy levels as an indication of wealth, then the statement is unproblematic – the better-off you are, the less likely you are to starve. But the implication here, and in other places in the *Atlas* (see page 256 for example) is that literacy itself was a survival skill and that therefore a higher literacy level, independently of any other factors, would have kept people alive. This is illustrated by a leaflet (p. 195) that accompanied the relief depots in 1845–6, giving a brief explanation of how to make maize porridge. I find it hard to believe that anyone died because they themselves couldn't read a recipe for stirabout, rather than have it explained to them by a relief official or a neighbour.

Overall, while there is much information in the maps in this book and they are beautifully produced and in great detail, the effect of the cartographic presentation of the 1840s on this reader was to undermine rather than to reinforce his confidence in mapping as an explanatory strategy.

III

There is another aspect of maps that strongly influences the approach of this book to the Famine. Maps show a society or an economy as distributed in space, and the organisation of the book overall is also largely spatial. It begins with four

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sections that present the Famine at a national level. This is followed by four regional sections, one on each province, making up a quarter of the book. These regional sections are further subdivided spatially into local studies of a county, poor law union or parish. Another substantial section presents Famine-period emigration according to geographic destination, with chapters on Liverpool, Glasgow, Canada, the United States and Australia.

A map or a spatial presentation is less geared to displaying and analysing the internal differentiation of a society in a specific place – in effect it analyses a society horizontally rather than vertically. Perhaps as a result, there is not a great deal in this book about the class conflict that was such a feature of the Famine years and that tended to be strongly emphasised in the historiography during the 1970s and 1980s. To the extent that such conflict is registered, it is between landowners and tenants, and there are a few graphic and extremely effective illustrations of estate clearances. But below the level of landlord, pre-Famine society was highly stratified, in the south especially, and it is difficult for a map to convey this or to convey the antagonisms and struggles between different social groups. There is no map, for example, of the food riots that characterised the first year or so of the Famine. They are mentioned in passing at various places in the text, as is the thriving sale of firearms to farmers, but there is no extended analysis of the impact of the Famine on the farmer-labourer conflicts that had been such a powerful feature of pre-Famine society. In a way this omission is surprising, since many of the contributors have previously written extensively about this dimension of the Famine. The relative elision of such social dynamics in the *Atlas* is summed up in the conclusion to William Nolan's otherwise admirable chapter on the land question in the later nineteenth century:

> By default therefore the Land Acts had widened the divide between farmer and labourer ... But possession of the land had been regained and even the Great Famine could be consigned to history. (p. 579)

Possession had been gained by farmers, certainly, and it could well be in their interest that the famine be consigned to history. This is a long way from Joe Lee's blunt assessment that 'if the strong farmers did well out of the Famine, the labourers were broken', or from Ciarán Ó Murchadha's elegant summary in his recent history of the Famine:

> Large farmers certainly advanced their position greatly in the post-Famine period ... No longer tied to primitive barter relationships with bound and unbound labourers, they lodged the profits of livestock sales complacently in the provincial banks that flourished during the 1850s.[3]

These are one or two exceptions to this pattern among the contributors to the *Atlas*, such as Dympna McLoughlin's study of what she calls 'subsistent women', but in general a map-led approach tends to treat the population of an area as a single unit.

This tendency is reinforced by a preoccupation in the book as a whole with the theory and practice of the workhouse as emblematic of both the experience of

[3] Joseph Lee, 'Women and the church since the famine' in Margaret McCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds), *Women in Irish society: the historical dimension* (Dublin, 1978), pp 37–45, 40; Ciarán Ó Murchadha, *The Great Famine: Ireland's agony 1845–52* (London & New York, 2011), pp 188–9.

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famine and the nature of contemporary government. Alongside the thirty-six modern photographs of workhouses and their associated hospitals already mentioned, there are nine architectural drawings of workhouses and fever hospitals (really eight, since the same one is reproduced on pages 87 and 157). In the text, there is an entire section devoted to the workhouse, understandably, but it also features strongly in the section on 'The Great Hunger', where there is a chapter on the Poor Law during the Famine, and in the four regional sections, which include studies of particular Poor Law unions and workhouses. While the workhouse and the Poor Law are a crucial part of the story of the Famine, one effect of this kind of concentration is to remove much of the agency that people had, reinforcing the image of homogeneity that the *Atlas* presents. Of course the agency of a large part of the population was severely circumscribed by the catastrophic conditions of the Famine years, but to overstate their passivity does not seem entirely just to their memory.

The sections and chapters on workhouses have a double vision. On the one hand, they look at the operation of the Poor Law in practice, at for example the crises of accommodation and of finance that affected most western unions after the summer of 1847, and at the efforts of officials and government to deal with them. On the other hand, they examine the ideological background of the workhouse, with a strong Foucauldian emphasis on Benthamite architecture and on classification. A chapter on the design and functioning of workhouses in Ulster by Liz Thomas contains a section called 'discipline and punishment', while a study of Roscrea union, by William Smyth, is entitled 'Classify, confine, discipline and punish'.

These two approaches are not entirely integrated, however. Despite its title, the chapter on Roscrea, for example, is a narrative of the practical problems of a workhouse during the Famine, with conclusions about the 'administrative competence' of the staff, some of whom 'carried out their prescribed duties as best they could' (p.144), rather than a study of a total institution. In other words, the ideology of the Poor Law and the impact of the Famine on its operation remain distinct issues. What separates them is the magnitude of that impact, and this magnitude does not really register in the *Atlas*, largely because the conception of the Famine that underlies it is one that conceives of the Famine fundamentally in terms of relief. The second section of the book is called 'The Great Hunger', but sixty-two of its seventy-four pages are concerned with relief or the ideology informing it. There is no extended discussion of food supply or mapping of the magnitude and variability of successive potato failure, and no writer cites the fundamental calculations of Peter Solar or, before him, T. P. O'Neill.[4] A partial exception is Ó Gráda in a chapter towards the end of the book comparing the Irish Famine with late twentieth century ones, who quotes Solar in passing, to the effect that the food supply failure was 'far out of the range of actual or likely European experience' (p. 656). The implications of this for the operation and success of relief schemes are worthy of analysis but don't receive it in this book.

[4] Peter Solar, 'The Great Famine was no ordinary subsistence crisis' in E. M. Crawford (ed.), *Famine: the Irish experience, 900–1900* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp 112–31; T. P. O'Neill, 'Food problems during the Great Irish Famine', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, lxxxii (1952), pp 99–108.

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In David Arnold's terminology, a famine is a structure as well as an event, a permanent possibility as well as a sudden catastrophic shock, and the *Atlas* therefore downplays the event, the shock.[5] It also, however, downplays the structure. The reader of this book would have some difficulty understanding why such a large proportion of the population of Ireland had become vulnerable to the failure of a single crop. A chapter by Smyth entitled 'The longue durée – imperial Britain and colonial Ireland' despite its title spends twelve pages discussing official actions after 1845, and just one page analysing economic trends since the eighteenth century. The subsequent chapter, 'The colonial dimensions of the Great Irish Famine', by David Nally, begins by stating that most of the literature on the Great Famine begins in 1845 and consequently 'fails to treat historically Irish vulnerability' (p. 65). While this is arguably true of the *Atlas* itself, it is certainly not true generally, and discussion of poverty, tillage versus pasture, deindustrialisation and the potato have dominated the literature since the work of Crotty and Cullen in the 1960s, or even since that of K. H. Connell in the 1950s. Mary Daly's 1986 survey, *The Famine in Ireland*, for example, devoted the first fifty-one pages out of a total of 124, nearly half of the book, to the century before 1845. In Nally's view, the vulnerability was created ultimately by the seventeenth-century conquest, whereby 'the usurpation of indigenous land' produced a poor underclass. This long-term process is sketched in less than two pages, with the rest of the chapter discussing colonial attitudes and social engineering in the nineteenth century.

If the background of the Famine is neglected in this *Atlas*, the same is true of its effects within Ireland. This is a more remarkable omission, since the book is predicated on the centrality of the Famine to the subsequent history and identity of Ireland. Many of the social effects are covered in William Nolan's account of the land question mentioned earlier, but there is little attention given to any cultural influences. One example would be the central role often given to the Famine in the so-called 'devotional revolution', the making of the particular type of Catholic belief and observance that came to characterise most of Ireland until recent decades, but there is no discussion of this. Instead, the work of evaluating the cultural effects of the Famine falls to a chapter on language shift by Mairéad Nic Craith. On the first two pages, we find the maps referred to earlier, apparently showing a substantial increase in Irish-speaking in many areas between 1841 and 1851. This anomalous fact is not noted in the text. The next two pages tabulate and discuss the results of the question about linguistic competence in the 1851 census. The discussion ends with the observation that the results of this and later censuses are faulty, 'and should not be needlessly repeated as accurate', thereby invalidating most of the previous two pages, as well as the second map. This is followed by a simplistic account of theories of linguistic relativity, citing authorities from Herder to Gadamer about the supposed incommensurability of different languages but without drawing out the implications of this for an understanding of the process of language shift or cultural change more generally. The one concrete example of such relativity that is cited, which is to do with different verbal categories in Irish and English, is incorrect in two different ways. The chapter fails to convey anything substantial about the relationship between the Famine and language shift or about cultural change in general and the Famine.

[5] David Arnold, *Famine: social crisis and historical change* (Oxford, 1988), pp 6–11.

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IV

This atlas sees the Famine as central to the modern identity of the people of Ireland and of the diaspora. In this context, there is a final notable omission, exemplified by the neglect of Solar's work mentioned above. He refers to the Irish Famine as being 'outside European experience'. Given Ireland's current status as a member of the European Union, with a substantial amount of its economic sovereignty apparently recently ceded to European institutions, it would have been good to have had Ireland's exceptionalism in a European context, and perhaps even whatever typicality Ireland and the Famine may have had, drawn out. There is no discussion in this book of the general European experience of famine up to the 1740s, or of later famines such as the Finnish famine of 1867. A chapter on Irish emigration to Scotland in the 1840s by John Reid does not anywhere mention the fact that there was a potato failure in the Highlands and Islands in the same years. There was no significant rise in the death rate, but there was emigration as large as anything recorded in Ireland, and in some areas such as the island of Mull one third of the population left between 1841 and 1851. The only mention of the Highland famine in the *Atlas* is by William Smyth, who refers to 'the sympathetic leadership to their tenants that was so much a feature of the Scottish landlords' role in Scotland's potato famine' (p. 57). It is true that Scottish landlords were in a much better position to support their tenants during the 1840s, but this was partly because so many of them had ruthlessly and brutally cleared their estates of smaller tenants in preceding decades, in a way that Irish landlords had not. Overall, the version of contemporary Irishness manifested in this *Atlas* is more Boston than Berlin, more Sydney than Stornoway.

This review has focused on the shortcomings of the book rather than on its strengths, but given its stellar cast of contributors, and its use as a calling card by official Ireland, it deserves to be held to the highest standards. There are undoubtedly many fine things in it, and the fact remains that there is nothing quite like it as a compendium of the single most formative event in modern Irish history. With all its faults it is a great achievement and should be saluted. Moreover, since the *Atlas* is likely to have many future editions, the editors can follow the example of their illustrious predecessor, Abraham Ortelius of Antwerp. Ortelius put together what is generally held to be the first atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, in 1570, and was one of the first publishers to exploit the possibility of the printed book to request additions and improvements from readers, and many new maps were supplied by them for nearly thirty subsequent editions. One can only wish the same for the *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* and hope it has a long life as a standard work.

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