# 1 Introduction: Networks of empire – Ireland and India

## Introduction

The narrow, atavistic and reactionary section of the Ireland of to-day will, doubtless, sneer at us 'Shawneens' and 'West-Britons,' but at the time we regarded ourselves as Irish Europeans, cosmopolitans and citizens of the world, who hoped to find in a liberalised and democratised British empire, in which Ireland occupied her worthy place, a *metier* in which we could live satisfying lives, and perhaps contribute a share, great or small, to human progress and human civilisation.[1]

Patrick Heffernan, a former Irish member of the Indian Medical Service, made these comments in 1958, almost ten years after the Taoiseach, John A. Costello, had unexpectedly announced to a Canadian reporter that Ireland was to leave the British Commonwealth of Nations and become a republic. Heffernan, who had been brought up on the outskirts of Cahir, Co. Tipperary and had received a Catholic education in Cork and Dublin, held the conviction that Ireland and Irish people (irrespective of religious creed or class) had played significant roles in the wider British imperial system. At a time when Éamon de Valera and the Fianna Fáil party had just returned to power following the Irish General Election in 1957, Heffernan's comments had a particular resonance. His sense that an Irish Catholic background was not incompatible with British imperial service, and therefore did not diminish his Irishness, was not uncommon, even during the heyday of Irish nationalism in the 1950s.

Heffernan's 'cosmopolitans and citizens of the world' emerged from the distinct cultural, economic and political conditions of nineteenth-century Ireland, yet were joined together with their English, Scottish and Welsh colleagues within the British Empire, a legitimate arena for work where they could improve the material condition of their own lives as well as contribute to the welfare of others. As one astute Indian civil

[1] Major P. Heffernan, *An Irish Doctor's Memories* (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1958), pp. 1–3.

servant, A. G. Haggard, a Sub-Divisional Officer in Buxar, commented in the late nineteenth century:

> The Irish members [of the Indian Civil Service] have mostly known each other in Ireland, the Scotch in Scotland and the English in England. During their long preparatory studies and their subsequent training the whole body have met (Irish, English and Scotch) time after time; they have formed intimacies and friendships; have worked, resided, and travelled together; have been united in a common end and occupation; have given material assistance and shared in mutual rivalries.[2]

Like Heffernan, Haggard emphasises shared collaborative experiences, popular beliefs and cultural mentalities which have nevertheless become somewhat obscured within Irish historiography over the past fifty years.

In its attempts to recover these everyday mentalities and restore nineteenth-century Ireland to its proper imperial context under the Act of Union (1801–1922), this book focuses on the cross-cultural experiences, ideologies, institutions and personnel at the centre of imperial networks that were fashioned through Ireland's involvement with the British colonial project in India during the 'long' nineteenth century. In doing so, it examines the complex historical processes that brought these two very different communities of the Empire into systems of contact, collaboration and conflict long before the development of modern communications technology and the so-called contemporary 'age of globalisation'. From the mid eighteenth century until the late nineteenth century, Ireland and India were joined together by an intricate series of networks of military recruitment, intellectual exchange and political interdependence. These networks were imperial in nature and were borne out of direct Irish involvement in British territorial expansion into South Asia during the Seven Years War. Although Ireland was never a homogeneous economic, political or religious entity during the nineteenth century, Irish men and women (both Catholic and Protestant, from the north and south) nevertheless served as soldiers, missionaries, educators, doctors, scientists and administrators within the imperial system, where they played an important part in the formation of the colonial state and in defining the expanding roles and responsibilities of the modern British state in its Indian environment. Yet, despite occupying central roles within this process, the Irish have never been the subject of a detailed, contextualised study

[2] Memorandum by A. G. Haggard to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, d. Buxar, 12 August 1875. Papers Relating to the Selection and Training of Candidates for the Indian Civil Service: *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. LV (1876), p. 333.

that charts their movements, shifting concerns and significance within the numerous global networks forged through British imperialism in India. Equally, despite recent isolated studies examining the plethora of connections that existed between nineteenth-century Ireland and India, Ireland's role in facilitating British imperial expansion in the East has yet to be sufficiently considered by historians.[3] Indeed, the reticence of scholars to examine the Irish within an imperial context in India is almost certainly attributable to the nature of much written history in both Britain and Ireland during the second half of the twentieth century.

## Colony, nation and empire

Historical interpretations of the role of Ireland and the Irish in the nineteenth-century British Empire have traditionally been dominated by several contradictory developments. Among the widely varying responses to the establishment of British hegemony in Ireland under the Act of Union are those ranging from accommodation and apathy to statements of resistance and armed struggle.[4] In evaluating these responses, however, scholars have been somewhat hindered in their investigations by perceived notions of exclusivity and exceptionality in relation to Ireland's status under British rule. Although not officially a 'colony' of the British Empire per se, Ireland was nevertheless subjected to Tudor colonisation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and was joined legislatively to Great Britain under the Act of Union between 1801 and 1922.[5] Owing to the existence of various constitutional anomalies lying at the heart of the Union, Ireland, at once, was not perceived to be a 'colony' in the same sense that India, for example, was.[6] Conversely, despite supplying a disproportionate number of soldiers and administrators for British overseas service, the Irish, unlike the Scots, were not fully integrated into the sinews of metropolitan power. Rather, the Irish occupied an anomalous position of being 'imperial' and 'colonial' at the same time, 'coloniser' but

[3] For a recent example of the substantial personal connections linking Ireland, India and the British Empire, see Tadhg Foley and Maureen O'Connor (eds.), *Ireland and India: Colonies, Culture and Empire* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006).
[4] C. Brady, *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism, 1938–1994* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994).
[5] D. Fitzpatrick, 'Ireland and Empire', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 494–521.
[6] See T. Bartlett, '"This Famous Island Set in a Virginian Sea": Ireland in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire', in P. Marshall (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 2, The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 254–76.

also 'colonised'.[7] Although there have been plenty of recent studies on aspects of 'Scotland's Empire' – most notably on the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment and Scottish Presbyterianism on the manner in which the Scots circulated their ideas and cultivated distinctive relationships with indigenous peoples abroad – the case of Ireland and empire is still very much a new field of enquiry.[8] To a significant degree, the reticence of Irish scholars to write about Ireland's engagement with the Empire was further reinforced by a developing nationalist mode of historical writing that took hold in Ireland in the aftermath of decolonisation. This tradition – encouraged initially by the process of state-building and state-reform movements in Europe during the nineteenth century – has remained the dominant mode of history writing for almost 150 years. As a result of the mainstream practice of writing history within national boundaries, historians have tended to focus upon domestic concerns and issues at the expense of international influences in order to explain the origins of national development as well as the formation of national identities.[9] To the detriment of empire studies in Ireland, nationalism during this period was generally equated with anti-imperialism and as a result the role that Ireland played in British overseas expansion was largely omitted from Irish history books.[10]

Moreover, given the heterogeneous nature of nineteenth-century Ireland and the presence of multiple ethnic and religious divisions within it, a single unifying sense of Irishness was never really a defining feature of the Irish in the Empire. Rather, it becomes important to thoroughly nuance the notion of Irishness to recognise that the Irish comprised a multiplicity of communities, often with very different, sometimes contradictory or competing sets of aims and imperatives. Indeed, it is this very difficulty in framing a discussion around the Irish as a distinct migrant community that goes some way towards explaining why nationalist historiography has struggled to accommodate the role of Ireland in the Empire in general. Indeed, the persistence of the nation state as the traditional framework of historical analysis has meant that many histories of modern Ireland in fact belie the significance of

[7] A. Jackson, 'Ireland, the Union, and the Empire, 1800–1960', in K. Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire: Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 123–52.

[8] See, for example, T. M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600–1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2003) and M. McLaren, *British India and British Scotland, 1780–1830: Career Building, Empire Building and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (University of Akron Press, 2001).

[9] See A. G. Hopkins, 'Back to the Future: From National History to Imperial History', *Past and Present*, 164 (1999), 198–243.

[10] Brady, *Interpreting Irish History*, p. 210.

Ireland's imperial past by producing narratives that have traced the historical course of the nation from the onset of colonialism through to independence, while virtually ignoring Ireland's substantial involvement in the Empire.

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have begun to consider more fully the distinct experiences of separate Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh relationships with the British Empire.[11] For over two decades, proponents of the 'New British History' have attempted to view the domestic history of Britain and Ireland in the context of the experiences of the four primary ethnic groups that constituted these lands, namely, Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh.[12] Yet, the history of the British Empire (integral to the unfolding of the history in each of these locations) has until recently been treated separately. Traditional accounts of metropolitan-focused imperial history, for example, have tended to view the history of the British Empire almost exclusively from the perspective of England, or more specifically, from London. By focusing upon the binary interactions between 'metropole' and 'periphery', such accounts have helped consign the history of Irish, Scottish and Welsh involvement in the British Empire to the margins of imperial history, while simultaneously obscuring the crucial role of indigenous peoples and the colonies themselves in the imperial process.

A failure to pluralise the imperial experience at a domestic level implicitly recognises the centrality (and thus singular importance) of England as the centre of the Empire from where ideas, capital and power were all transmitted to the colonies in the periphery. It was precisely because Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales were never homogeneous economic, political or religious entities that the Empire was designed to act as a powerful solvent for the different ethnicities and identities of these regions, binding them together and finding a common purpose through a distinctly 'British' endeavour. However, recent research has demonstrated that far from dissolving regional particularisms and unifying the diverse peoples of the 'British Isles' under the imperial umbrella, the Empire actually worked in a manner whereby separate relationships between each were formed and national identities reinforced. Increasingly, historians are now moving away from a study of the simple bilateral relations involving 'metropole' and 'periphery' to the more complex multilateral relationships engendered

[11] See J. M. MacKenzie, 'Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire', *History Compass*, 6/5 (2008), 1244–63.

[12] H. Kearney, *The British Isles: A History of Four Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

through separate Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh involvement with the Empire. Many studies typical of the 'new imperial history', for example, have demonstrated that Irish, English, Scottish and Welsh personnel in fact viewed the Empire in different ways and interacted with indigenous people and culture accordingly.[13] By charting a myriad of these responses, historians of the British Empire are now beginning to piece together a fuller explanation for the timing and development of overseas expansion as well as the complex factors leading towards decolonisation.

Certainly, histories of other former colonies of the British Empire have demonstrated similar preoccupations with the nation. The historiography of Australia, for example, has long abandoned an imperial framework with its emphasis on tracing constitutional, political and administrative progress from crown colony through to limited self-government, Federation and eventual full national autonomy. Australian history now views the process of 'white' settlement as a violent incursion upon a peaceful and rich indigenous culture and upon a fragile land unable to cope with the introduction of Western agricultural norms and practices. What was once a historiography that recognised the British Empire as a reciprocal movement of peoples and energies as part of a broader global phenomenon has now yielded to more pressing national concerns.[14] The same may also be said of South Asian historiography with its continued emphasis on nationalism, separatism, communal conflict and partition.[15] Even in India, where the 'Subaltern Studies' school has done much to advance our understanding of 'history from below', there remains a strong focus on the nation and elite constructions of nationalism.[16] Such a focus on the nation-state as a neatly bounded, excisable dimension fails to recognise the essentially

[13] See, for example, K. Jeffery (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester University Press, 1996); J. M. MacKenzie and N. R. Dalziel (eds.), *The Scots in South Africa: Ethnicity, Identity, Gender and Race, 1772–1914* (Manchester University Press, 2007); and A. Jones and B. Jones, 'The Welsh World and the British Empire, *c.* 1851–1939: An Exploration', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 31, 2 (May 2003), 57–81.

[14] See, for example, S. MacIntyre, 'Australia and the Empire', in R. W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. V, Historiography* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 163–81.

[15] See, for example, I. Talbot, 'Pakistan's Emergence', in Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 253–63.

[16] R. Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in R. Guha, *Subaltern Studies I* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 1–8; D. A. Washbrook, 'Orients and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of the British Empire', in Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 596–611.

dispersive and permeable nature of all national boundaries.[17] As a consequence, studies that treat the nation as a discrete body of historical analysis do not sufficiently take into consideration the broader global currents fashioned through involvement in imperialism that have helped shape the course of national development and national identities.[18] This is not to say, of course, that one needs to dispense with the idea of the nation entirely. On the contrary, many important aspects of national histories remain integral to the process of tracing links and reciprocity between nineteenth-century Irish and Indian history. However, if such links are to be thoroughly examined in the future there is clearly a need to look beyond the limited framework of national histories and boundaries to the broader connections that tied Ireland and India together to a wider imperial system.

Indeed, in recent years the limited framework of national histories has come under increased scrutiny. Following the pioneering work of Nicholas Mansergh and the subsequent 'revisionist' debates that infused Irish scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, historians working on placing British overseas expansion in the context of world history began pointing to the central role played by Ireland in facilitating British imperialism during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[19] In *Imperial Meridian*, C. A. Bayly, for example, observes how British imperial history had been continually 'straitjacketed by the "English" and "nationalist" views of Irish history'.[20] Teleological narratives, Bayly argues, failed to take into account 'the extent to which Ireland was the colonial society where the mechanics and ideology of imperial rule were first implemented'.[21] In their attempt to create a national history of Ireland, Irish historians continually 'downplayed their rôle in the military and political service of the British Empire' despite the fact that 'Irish patriots were desperate to reap the benefits of imperial expansion' and 'Irish soldiers and savants were in the front line of empire-

[17] A. Burton, 'Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating "British" History', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 10, 3 (September 1997), 227–48 and 'When Was Britain? Nostalgia for the Nation at the End of the "American Century"', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75, 2 (June 2003), 359–74.

[18] F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 2005), p. 18.

[19] See N. Mansergh, *Commonwealth Perspectives* (London, 1958); N. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs: Problems of Wartime Co-operation and Post-war Change, 1939–1952* (Oxford University Press, 1958); N. Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience* (London, 1969); and N. Mansergh, *The Prelude to Partition: Concepts and Aims in Ireland and India* (Cambridge University Press, 1978).

[20] C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780–1830* (London: Longman, 1989), p. 12.

[21] Ibid.

building'.[22] Notwithstanding a renewed interest by scholars in Ireland's interaction with the British Empire, however, surprisingly very little has been written exploring the various ways in which Ireland and Irish people impacted upon the Empire and vice versa.

Unlike historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholars of early modern Ireland have long recognised the need to move beyond employing simple 'national' or 'coloniser–colonised' models in their analysis to more enabling cross-cultural or transnational approaches. The work of Steven G. Ellis on late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Tudor Ireland has stimulated an ongoing academic debate because of its positioning of Ireland as a focal point in the construction of contemporary Tudor politics and state-building. Far from a separate political or geographical entity, Ellis insisted that the history of Ireland at this time could only be properly understood in the context of a wider 'British Isles' framework.[23] Other historians of this period, most notably Nicholas Canny, have instead preferred to locate early modern Ireland within the broader global context of a 'British Atlantic world'. Building on the work of D. B. Quinn, Canny was among the first of his generation of scholars that sought to merge the histories of English (later British) settlement in Ireland with colonial expansion in North America.[24] For Canny, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Ireland was central in the construction and maintenance of the 'first British empire'. As Britain's 'oldest colony', Ireland was an important site from where ideas, capital and personnel all moved with great fluidity westward to Britain's colonies in North America, the Caribbean and beyond.[25]

Although historians have called for similar research on Ireland's multifaceted imperial role for the modern period, contemporary debates surrounding the nature of Ireland's historical relationship with the Empire have remained largely centred on the character of its constitutional and political ties with Britain.[26] Moreover, such attempts have tended to focus almost exclusively on the colonies of 'white settlement' or in North America, overlooking Ireland's significant presence in Britain's Eastern Empire. Kevin Kenny's edited volume of essays on *Ireland and the British Empire*, for example, has sought 'to determine the

[22] Ibid., pp. 12–13.
[23] S. G. Ellis, *Ireland in the Age of the Tudors, 1447–1603: English Expansion and the End of Gaelic Rule* (London: Longman, 1998).
[24] For an example of Quinn's early work on this subject, see D. B. Quinn, *The Elizabethans and the Irish* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).
[25] N. Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World 1560–1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
[26] S. Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

shifting meanings of empire, imperialism and colonialism in Irish history over time'.[27] Beginning with the Tudor conquests and colonisation of Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Kenny's book attempts to demonstrate how 'modern Irish history was largely determined by the rise, expansion, and decline of the British empire' and equally how 'the course of British imperial history…was moulded in part by Irish experience'.[28] Although several authors in the volume venture to 'examine the participation of Irish people in the empire overseas', important questions regarding the identity of Irish imperial savants and settlers, their relationship with the colonial state, other 'colonisers' and 'colonised' peoples, as well as the exchange of ideas, practices, material objects and styles fashioned through these encounters, remain largely unanswered. Despite offering fascinating glimpses into these issues at times, the recurring theme that dominates the majority of essays in this volume concerns whether Ireland's historical relationship with England (later Britain) could be characterised as being specifically 'colonial' in nature, and at what point in that relationship was Ireland's colonial status established and who was responsible for it.[29]

While ongoing debates concerning the exact nature of Ireland's colonial status persist, its role as an important supplier of goods and commodities, personnel, ideas and finance for the British Empire is only beginning to be explored.[30] As the work of Clive Dewey, Howard Brasted and S. B. Cook has demonstrated, British legislation, systems of governance and methods of control were all frequently 'tried and tested' in Ireland before being 'exported' to other parts of the Eastern Empire.[31] At various points over the past thirty years, these scholars have demonstrated persuasively that owing to its close geographical proximity to Britain and given the central role that it commanded in domestic British politics, Ireland served as a 'laboratory' or testing-ground for numerous social, administrative and constitutional policies for imperial matters in the East.[32] Furthermore, taking into account the sheer volume of

[27] Kenny, *Ireland and the British Empire*, p. xix. [28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid; see also T. McDonough (ed.), *Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005).
[30] See, for example, Howe, *Ireland and Empire*; Kenny, *Ireland and the British Empire*.
[31] See, for example, C. Dewey, 'Celtic Agrarian Legislation and the Celtic Revival: Historicist Implications of Gladstone's Irish and Scottish Land Acts, 1870–1886', *Past and Present*, 64 (1974), 30–70; H. V. Brasted, 'Indian Nationalist Development and the Influence of Irish Home Rule, 1870–1886', *Modern Asia Studies*, 12 (1980), 37–63; S. B. Cook, *Imperial Affinities: Nineteenth Century Analogies and Exchanges Between India and Ireland* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993); C. A. Bayly, 'Ireland, India and Empire: 1870–1914', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, X (sixth series) (2000), 377–97.
[32] Cook, *Imperial Affinities*, pp. 29–30.

Irish people involved in imperial service overseas, Ireland, like Scotland, played an integral role in the construction of a 'British' national identity. In recent times, Linda Colley, among others, has pointed to the need for a comprehensive study of the origins of 'Britishness' that takes into account the vast number of Catholic Irish soldiers who served in the British army both at home and abroad.[33] In equal ways, historians of Ireland have been at pains to demonstrate how the Empire played a crucial role in informing the varieties of Irishness that emerged under British rule. R. F. Foster, Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh and Peter Gray have all recently argued that Irish identity in the nineteenth century was not only constructed within the framework of the Act of Union, but also that British and Irish identity were closely connected with a favourable view of the Empire, as an arena within which the Irish could prosper.[34]

Although there are signs that historians are now beginning to give more serious attention to Ireland's historical relationship with the British Empire, Keith Jeffery has recently pointed out the need to move beyond simply recalling the achievements or deeds of those Irish who rose to prominence in the Empire, if we are to truly advance our understanding of this relationship.[35] Jeffery's call that scholars begin to consider more fully the implications of various Irish backgrounds, forms of education, religious, political or moral viewpoints on imperial affairs in different parts of the Empire assumes all the more relevance at a time when an increasing number of historians, postcolonial theorists and literary critics are beginning to frame their narratives in broader global and transnational contexts.[36] One very important development in this regard has been the rise to prominence in recent years of the 'new imperial history' that emerged in the wake of earlier debates involving the Subaltern Studies Collective and the Cambridge school of historians.[37] Proponents of the 'new imperial history' have attempted to shift the focus of colonial studies away from the metropolitan domain of

[33] See L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

[34] R. F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993); G. Ó Tuathaigh, 'Religion, Identity, State and Society', in J. Cleary (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and P. Gray (ed.), *Victoria's Ireland? Irishness and Britishness, 1837–1901* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

[35] Jeffery, *'An Irish Empire'?*, Introduction.

[36] J. Cleary, 'Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context', *Éire-Ireland*, 42, 1–2 (2007), 11–57.

[37] See R. Guha and G. Chakravorty Spivak (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For an overview of some of the debates involving Subaltern Studies, see V. Lal, 'Subaltern Studies and Its Critics: Debates over Indian History', *History and Theory*, 40, 1 (February 2001), 135–48.