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Book Review: Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Society in Ireland by Ian N. Gregory, Niall A. Cunningham, C.D. Lloyd, Ian G. Shuttleworth, and Paul S. Ell

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Gregory, Ian N., Niall A. Cunningham, C.D. Lloyd, Ian G. Shuttleworth, and Paul S. Ell. *Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Society in Ireland*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. xv + 243 pages. Paperback, \$45.00.

Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Society in Ireland is a detailed historiographical narrative of two centuries of Irish national identity, politics, and religious division. With interdisciplinary specializations in history, geography, archaeology, paleoecology, socio-cultural change, and data digitization analysis, the authors of the book explore how economy, society, politics, and religion have shaped Ireland's history. Most importantly, religion and geography were explicitly linked in the formation of ethnic, political, and spatial-religious identities that have and continue, to some extent, shape Irish society today. The narrative presented can be summed up under the rubric of four sequential, but by no means exhaustive, sections: The Plantations and the Seeds of Ireland's Religious Geographies; The Famine and Its Impact (1840s-1860s); Partition, Civil War and Division (1911-1960s); and Communal Conflict in Northern Ireland (1969-2001). Courtesy of new geospatial technologies, the authors capitalized on the use of Geographic Information System Databases.

The link between religion and geography hinges on the political ideologies of unionism (loyalty of Northern Ireland to the United Kingdom) and nationalism/republicanism (unification of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland). The seeds of Ireland's religious geographies were planted following the establishment of plantations in the 16th and 17th centuries, with the purpose of settling specific areas with English and Scottish Protestants loyal to the British crown for political and economic reasons. Politically, it was designed to mute the perceived threat that Catholic France and Spain could pose through Catholic Ireland, and economically the objective was to strengthen the commercial links between southwestern Scotland and northeastern Ireland. To this end, major plantations were set up in predominantly Protestant areas around Dublin, Ulster and parts of Munster and the midlands, but no efforts were made to establish plantations in parts of predominantly Catholic western Ireland. Consequently, the plantations laid the foundation for the fusion of identity, economy, politics, religion, and geography. The aftermath of the Siege of Derry in 1689 in which Ulster Catholics rebelled and killed thousands of Protestants, economically marginalized Catholics while sealing the ascendancy of Protestants. Consequently, industrialization and urbanization occurred in largely Protestant areas, while economic stagnation and rural overpopulation occurred in Catholic areas. Undoubtedly, the close connection between ethnic identity, political allegiance and socioeconomic status resulted not only in geographical but also social segregation. The authors aptly noted that the resulting economic and social divisions generally fell along religious lines.

The Great Famine and its impact on the Irish population, economy and society marked a watershed in the history of Ireland. The crop failure, which began in 1845, was occasioned by an infection of potato blight, and the collapse of the crop yield in subsequent seasons marked a turning point of unprecedented magnitude. By the end of 1851, about 1.1 million deaths were believed to have directly resulted from the Great Famine. Given that the potato blight devastated overwhelmingly Catholic areas, it did not alter the religious geography of Ireland. Nevertheless, the perceived inadequate response of the British government raised questions in the minds of Irish Catholics about the idea of a United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

The Post-Famine period clearly delineated different trajectories for the northern and southern portions of Ireland. The division included aspects of economic, political, religious, ethnonational identities, and distinct geographies. This mix served as fault lines that contributed to the polarization of Irish society, which, ultimately, culminated in Partition in 1921. The newly-formed Northern Ireland, with a Protestant majority, remained part of the United Kingdom, while a newly-independent state became the Republic of Ireland. The authors contend that “Partition did not create the divisions in Ireland’s religion, society, and economy, it merely formalized the existing rifts” (p. 134). Nonetheless, both the Famine and the Partition impacted the population of Ireland. Census data show migrations, mostly from the south, to the industrial hub of Greater Belfast, and to England, Wales, the United States and Canada. By the 1960s, a series of policy changes galvanized a remarkable economic expansion in the Republic, and by the mid-1990s, the shift lifted Ireland from stagnation to the “Celtic Tiger” of foreign investment.

Unfortunately, the late 20th century witnessed a stark contrast between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland was characterized by rapid economic growth as well as a decline in religious conflict for a variety of reasons, including diminished identification with one religion or the other. In contrast, between 1971 and 2001, Northern Ireland experienced not only a decline in traditional manufacturing industries, but also a protracted politically violent conflict that came to be dubbed “the Troubles.” A key issue was the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. Evidently, the economic stagnation of the north, unemployment, alienation, and discrimination against Catholics heightened sectarian tensions. The casualty count stemming from the conflict was over 3,000, including Unionist and Protestant paramilitary, Catholic and Protestant civilians, and British security forces.

Ireland experienced enormous social and economic changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some of which have been gradual and long-term, and others sudden and dramatically traumatizing like the Famine, the Partition, and the Communal Conflict. In spite of these developments, differences in politics and cultural identities in the north still fall, for the most part, along religious lines. The *1998 Good Friday Agreement* helped to bring an end to “the Troubles,” but it is, at the moment, doubtful that it will eventually lead to the emergence of a single Ireland. Hopefully, as the economic and political ties between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland become stronger, the strains between the Unionists and Nationalists will weaken.

By tapping the power of new geospatial technologies, the authors explored the intersection of geography, religion, politics, and identity in Irish history. *Troubled Geographies: A Spatial History of Religion and Society in Ireland* is a well-researched and written scholarly book that would interest students of European/Irish history and socio-cultural change.

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