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L I M I N A

Constructing Culture in the West of Ireland: Representations of Identity in Text and Space

Mark Maguire

This article considers the apparent homogenisation of cultures. Contrary to this view, I focus on the incorporation of novel circumstances into existing structures in a small Irish fishing community displaced by modernity. One cannot consider them as separately structured, however. I use Foucauldian analysis to suggest that modernity, in repressing separateness, may also be productive of it.

A paradox seems evident in contemporary views of culture within the world-system. There are those who point to an increasing global homogenisation; yet, in contrast, people everywhere are rediscovering or finding anew the separateness of their identity, heritage and traditions. The work of anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, has contributed much to this problematic issue. In a recent article, he criticises those haunted by the spectre of what he calls despondency theory - a label he uses to describe proponents of dependency and world-systems theories - who emphasise an increasing sameness in indigenous cultures.[1] He suggests that fixed in this approach is a Western gaze that sees capitalist penetration defiling once pristine cultures and reducing them to faded remnants, more familiar than exotic. Within this view, local variations of extrinsic systems seem anomalous while the promotion of 'culture' is habitually consigned to the wastebasket of inauthentic 'invented traditions'. By focusing on such variations, Sahlins' own well-documented stance proffers an understanding of cultures as separately structured syntheses of stability and change that adapt existing meaningful schemes to novel circumstances.[2] Thus, he looks beyond the so-called 'invention' of culture and instead sees the inventiveness of culture.

In this article, I am interested in exploring a specific local appropriation of identity rhetoric and in tracking down some possible wider patterns. In short, I follow Sahlins in suggesting that interested peoples in a variety of situations have taken up the grammar of 'culture'. Suddenly, he tells us, everyone has it.

> Australian Aboriginals, Inuit, Easter Islanders, Chambri, Ainu, Bushmen, Kayapo, Tibetans, Ojibway: even peoples whose ways of life were left for dead or dying [*by anthropologists*] a few decades ago now demand an indigenous space in a modernising world under the banner of their 'culture'. They use that very word, or some near local equivalent.[3]

My specific concern is with a small West-of-Ireland fishing community. Unlike Sahlins' examples, I am not suggesting that one may consider this community to possess a separate structure. On the contrary, my interest lies in the popularity to claims of difference and a separate heritage within the almost self-satisfied cultural homogeneity of a Western country.

The approach I adopt is both historical and cultural: through the lens of a community's literature, I will highlight how they appropriated extrinsic symbolic capital and spaces, thus promoting a separate tradition. Briefly, this community, known as the Abbey Fishermen, owned much of the River Shannon around Limerick City. With the advent of the giant hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha in the 1920s, the Shannon's salmon population (the main resource of local fishing families) declined at a tremendous rate. The fishermen defended their historic rights in a three-day long clash with the police, bailiffs and the army, known in historical consciousness as the Battle of the Tailrace.[4] Later, in arbitrating the conflict and in public debate over it, the idea that these people possessed cultural difference in terms of a distinct heritage came to be a source of much debate. My suggestion is that, in this case, the seeds of a separate 'culture' were sown from without, indeed inscribed on a wider sense of cultural identity. In a Foucauldian sense, I am arguing that a certain productivity of repression is evident.[5] While this community dissipated in the wake of modern developmentalism, the discourse of that project carried with it and secured a place for a concept of local culture. In many ways, this approach is contrary to received wisdom regarding difference. While a significant body of anthropological work has highlighted the cultural exchange that marks the interaction between modernity and 'otherness', only recently have cultural theorists suggested that 'difference' may in fact be inscribed on the lens of the Western gaze.[6] This may elucidate an unwritten bias towards 'true' difference as opposed to marginality or the more familiar within ethnography, a theme described amusingly by Renato Rosaldo:

> When I was a graduate student contemplating fieldwork in the Philippines, a teacher warned me the Filipinos are 'people without culture'. Meaning to be helpful, he suggested doing fieldwork in Madagascar because people there have 'rich' cultures. Once in Manila, I found that his prophecy appeared to be

> confirmed by the standard Filipino half-joke about their 'poor' culture. What could one expect, they added with a faint twinkle, from people who had spent more than three hundred years in a monastery and nearly half a century in Hollywood.[7]

My use of Michel Foucault to describe this modern interplay with otherness, and indigenous engagements with difference, is rooted in an appreciation for the lucid way he analyses modernity through power-knowledge. The savant's later work on sexuality draws out a proposition he previously outlined in *Discipline and Punish*: that power-knowledge may not just be repressive but by its nature may also be productive.[8] The modernist discourse displayed an obsessive concern with mapping, separating and quantifying - in short 'objectifying' - difference, thereby and perhaps inadvertently conferring a certain legitimacy on it; this discourse also makes available legitimating categories to indigenous and marginal peoples. Through a Foucauldian perspective, I am moving from Sahlins' focus on separate cultures' meaningful engagement with modernity towards an analysis of how Western marginal peoples also access the power of difference, enhancing their identity, making it 'richer' and more exotic.

This article focuses on text and space to describe the history of the community in question. Local social histories recall the story of the Abbey Fishermen, which added to the reification of a local promotion of heritage and tradition. I also look seriously at space. The fishing community disintegrated following a development scheme and one may view much of the local writing outlined herein as an attempt to stake out a position in relation to that particular modernist spatial statement. Space, put simply, became a discursive axis for local identity rhetoric. In order to theorise the cultural process involved, I deploy the recent work of Jacques Derrida. Derrida navigates a problematic polarity in current theory. On one side of an opposition, following phenomenology, is the suggestion that space attains a level of complexity that rejects textual and semiological analysis; on the other side are those following a more hermeneutic-inspired approach who emphasise text over space. Derrida, however, refuses to credit this opposition and calls for a 'new textual economy'.[9] Following this line of thinking, this article suggests how discourse and space interlink in the formation of identity. Through the local appropriation of these modes of representation, one may see a community accessing and employing many elementary elements of modernity.

The productivity of displacement

In order to look more closely at concepts of culture in this community, I employ a remarkable local-history text, William Lysaght's *The Abbey Fishermen: A Short History of Snap-Net Fishing in Limerick*. The author, a local historian and amateur ethnologist, narrates the history of his

kinfolk from the early thirteenth century. Unfortunately for Lysaght, the Abbey Fishermen did not appear in conventional histories of the region and produced few indigenous documents. Faced with a 'people without history', he constructs an inferential chronicle of the community with great skill. Essentially, a wealth of information does exist on conflicts between net fishing and fixed weir enterprises on the River Shannon. In particular, Lysaght uses accounts of net-fishermen's conflicts with the various owners of the Lax Weir, a salmon-fishing station of great national importance particularly from the early eighteenth century onwards.[10]

If one takes up his narrative in 1719, Limerick Corporation had at that stage just leased the Lax Weir to John Smith & Co.[11] John Smith was something of a new species in the region. Previous owners of the Weir were mainly from the local ascendancy and not motivated explicitly by profit. Smith, on the other hand, was one of a new line of capitalist/merchants to hold the lease and he, and a rapid series of like-minded successors, induced years of violence and litigation. According to Lysaght, the net-fishermen 'claimed the right to fish there [the Shannon] by common usage'[12] and Smith reportedly responded by arming 'a body of men who fired at the fishermen, wounding one man, Thomas Lyddy'.[13] By the turn of the nineteenth century, the situation had worsened with the succession of John Bourke to the Lax Weir lease. Bourke's mercenaries assaulted the net-fishermen and crippled one man, Thomas Clancy. However, the next tenant was to prove an even greater source of conflict. McAdam of Black Water followed his predecessors' example and hired paramilitaries. In one confrontation, his mercenaries murdered a fisherman called Hartigan. Local members of the gentry, Connolly and Russell, staged a protest by fishing from boats in McAdam's portion of the river. Outraged at his monopolist tendencies and disregard for the law, these gentlemen succeeded in stemming the violence for some time. The dispute went to court in 1816 and saw a public alliance between local net-fishermen and the aristocracy.[14] The latter's influence was enough to end McAdam's tenure. However, he remained a feature in local tales. According to Lysaght, McAdam's grave became a place of pilgrimage for the Abbey Fishermen and it was customary for them to spit at the headstone cursing the occupant.

This remarkable series of conflicts across classes continued with and ended after the tenure of one Poole Gabbett Esq., which lasted from 1834 until some point in the 1860s. Not long after his arrival in Limerick, Gabbett's sons began a series of ambushes aimed at the net-fishermen. On one occasion, they planned to waylay the men at the riverbank by firing upon them from cover. Their hapless marksmanship failed to kill any fishermen. Their shooting did, however, result in the wholesale massacre of some unfortunate cattle grazing nearby, and they were withdrawn from the conflict 'lest they lose their lives'.[15] Desperation forced Gabbett to hire a group of destitute pensioners as assassins. Their shooting was fortunately even more defective than that of his sons. On Monday, 26 July 1841, the

conflict between Gabbett and the net-fishermen went before the local court. While the jury could not reach a verdict, the case had many profound effects. Gabbett, through a new legal ability to use drift and shore nets, was now in a position to catch large numbers of salmon before they reached the fishermen. Consequently, those fishing from the seaward part of the Shannon began to employ drift nets. The fishermen divided between those who converted and those who remained with snap-nets. It was the group that remained with the latter method that became the Abbey Fishermen.

In following the rather complicated and murderous history of this region, one must be mindful of the project that Lysaght was undertaking. The title of his work suggests he was endeavouring to construct a history of the Abbey Fishermen, yet much of his book is a chronicle of net-fishing conflicts on the Shannon. This sleight of hand succeeds in evading a problematic issue: the history he records bears no mention of the Abbey Fishermen; rather, the disputes involved a number of fishing families that cannot be considered as a single unit.[16] As indicated above, Lysaght presents us not with the history *of* the Abbey Fishermen but, rather, with the past *as* the Abbey Fishermen's history. The tenuous link between the two is a shared mode of production: various and at times conflicting forms of net fishing. The author strengthens this link by juxtaposing historical voices. One reads of characters in Lysaght's text, such as McAdam of Black Water, through his quasi-objective lens distended by oral tradition, as in the custom of spitting on the late merchant's grave. This allows us to see Abbey Fishermen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by asserting facts: that McAdam clashed with net-fishermen, and that it was a custom amongst the Abbey Fishermen to spit upon his grave. At best however, the relationship between these facts is ambiguous.

Rather than looking upon Lysaght's cultural ordering of the past as 'invention', one may find clues to 'inventiveness'[17] in turn-of-the-century events. In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the Land War (brought about by nationalist agitation against excessive rents charged by the so-called 'absentee' Anglo-Irish landlords) wrought significant changes in rural Ireland. The ripples of these transformations washed over much of the Lower Shannon. The 1903 land reform acts dissolved many large, Anglo-Irish estates and sold them to former tenants, usually in rather asymmetrical fashion. The new landowners had the option of purchasing game and fishing rights, and the river, as private property, transferred without reference to customary claims. In order to meet this new challenge, a number of fishing families united. In 1905, the Abbey Guild of Fishermen first met at Bridge Street School in Limerick City. Over the next 10 years, the guild embarked upon the purchase of several fisheries. Thus, my argument is that at a time of change and instability this community sought to promote a sense of timelessness and solidity in order to further its interests and standing, as encapsulated in their rather grandiose title. Their new- found status was brief, however: in the early 1920s, the Irish Free

State began construction of a giant hydro-electric dam near their portion of the Shannon.

Intersections

Originally proposed after the Civil-War cease fire in 1923, the construction of a hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha became synonymous with the development of the new Irish Free State (*Saorstát na hÉireann*). In a country with few economic prospects and a troubled position betwixt modernity and tradition, development allowed people to think in terms of a modern Ireland. Throughout several years of construction, newspapers carried endless articles and editorials that dissected each new phase or detail for the consumption of an insatiable public.[18] Ardnacrusha also became a rather successful tourist destination. Great Southern Rail ran countless excursions to the construction site, which catered for business classes, academics and many other visitors. Postcards, stamps, paintings, exhibitions of realistic models and tourism all established the project in the popular imagination. However, such a potent 'logo' ran contrary to the established symbolic capital of the nation-state. Thus, Ardnacrusha had to encapsulate a particular version of the past - development could not occur at the expense of tradition. Two texts produced at the time encapsulate this situation eloquently. The first is the writing of novelist Valentine Williams, commissioned by the *Structural Engineer Journal* to forge an account of the arrival of German planners, engineers and architects from Siemens in Hamburg:

> The German engineers found themselves in a virtually road-less tract of desolate pasture land with naught save a couple of miserable hamlets, all along the way from Limerick to Killaloe. … They inhaled the soft and sluggish Shannon air and watched the ragged natives pottering about their wretched hovels and dim cabbage patches in the leisurely manner particular to the West of Ireland peasantry. … Ireland is pre-eminently a country where for every one man that starts out to get something done, ninety-nine will stand around and explain to him his folly.[19]

Williams, the author of popular crime novels, echoed the well-established tone of the colonial travelogue to invoke a striking image of a nation-state on the periphery, in every sense of the term. The second text, a tourist publication commissioned by *Bord Fáilte*[20] and penned by D.L. Kellagher, appeared at roughly the same time:

> Here is Ardnacrusha … hitherto for all the years of recorded time a green, glancing, fertile place, with cattle lowing and birds smiling over it with a song. A house here and there, white and tidy, hardly bigger-looking than a milestone, a herd following his cattle, a milkmaid in the tradition of the ballads, as poetical and, perhaps, as unreal—that was all the hitherto. The *now* of Ardnacrusha is different. … [And] the natives can talk in terms of modern magic today. The scheme that made a new and bloodless revolution in Ireland begins here. … The Shannon Scheme is evolution-revolution, more subtle than any before it. It is partially, a psychological move, a diversion from the battles of the baser, if more idealistic order. … Darkness and half-lights are the enemies to all except poets. Ireland has been insufferably long a twilight place.[21]

Much the same insipid imagery is at work in both extracts: untidy Irish 'natives', both natural and supernatural, unfixed in a disorderly landscape. The same corrective is also evident - development. However, the two texts differ in one important respect. Kellagher's narrative is closer to that which predominated in 1920s Ireland. While Williams is dismissive of 'the Irish', positing modernity as something that sweeps tradition away, Kellagher offers a tale of development that relies upon the legitimacy that tradition can offer in a nation-state pressing towards modernity. Examples of this strategy abounded at the time.[22]

The narrative of nationality and development that emerged, how it incorporated and 'objectified' tradition, was bound inextricably to the practice of representing culture. Here my perspective resonates with Foucault to suggest that the process of development afforded an opportunity for a modernist discourse to be extended, which sought to produce an appropriate place for tradition within an economy moving towards modern capitalism. The symbolic capital employed during the construction of Ardnacrusha drew upon the wealth of symbols and images - evident, for example, in D.L. Kellagher's prose - produced during the sustained cultural revivalism of the previous century. Impressive images of Celtic difference infused literature, a growing tourist industry and nationalism, of course. W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge all sought out Celtic difference before committing it to paper. So too did artists such as Seán Keating and Paul Henry. Artists and poets/folklorists were all involved in a rather similar and disjointed project: to discover an Ireland outside of modernity and to salvage its culture, in the words of the *Saorstát* Government, 'before it disappears'.[23] One of the best examples of this strategy is evident in the

Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook (1932). This edited volume contains chapters on industry, agriculture, history and folklore, and the Shannon hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha. As an official publication intended to promote Ireland as a site for foreign investment, the handbook reflects the discourse of the time. The overall emphasis is on industry and the development of the state; however, infused in the text is a constant referencing to tradition, reflected best in the cover - a Book of Kells[24] style genuflection to Ireland's past (see Fig.1).

For Lysaght, writing about a community declining in the face of a potent symbol of progress, a wealth of symbolic capital was open to appropriation. A long intertextual canon existed about 'traditional' Ireland and the undermining and licentious advances of the modern world. A canon that included ethnographies such as Conrad Arensberg's and Solon Kimball's *The Irish Countryman*, for example.[25] If the *Saorstát* was going to narrate the construction of Ardnacrusha as a natural step from tradition to the future then Lysaght could just as easily dash its most basic assumptions. In his writing, the Battle of the Tailrace between the fishermen and the state becomes a decisive moment, an event in which a local culture was destroyed in the name of progress.

Contested Spaces

The Shannon Scheme opened officially in 1929. Shortly after, the destructive consequences of hydro-electric turbines on fish stocks became apparent. On 13 July 1932, conflict erupted. For three nights, the Abbey Guild members fished the Tailrace of Ardnacrusha symbolically. Indeed they managed to land several salmon and each catch provoked roars from the thousands of spectators who lined the riverbank. By day, the guild issued innumerable press releases recounting their attempts to assert their ancient livelihood. Essentially, a marginal community, through actions that spelt the dissolution of their recently formed 'culture', succeeded in reifying that very concept in spectacular and emotive scenes that seemed from an earlier time when state and nation were at odds. The conflict ended with the capitulation of the fishermen and a protracted period of litigation. Newspaper editorials and comments regarding their compensation case (mid-1930s) also added greatly to this process of cultural production. For example, *The Limerick Chronicle* carried the following story of the arbitration:

> [The] Official Arbitrator ... said the Abbey Guild was the oldest body of fishermen in Ireland. Its members had the right to fish in the Shannon from Corbally to Plassy from time immemorial. The exact date of its establishment was not known. … Composed of a number of Limerick families: ... MacNamara, Hayes, Shanny, Clancy and Lyddy - the last named family

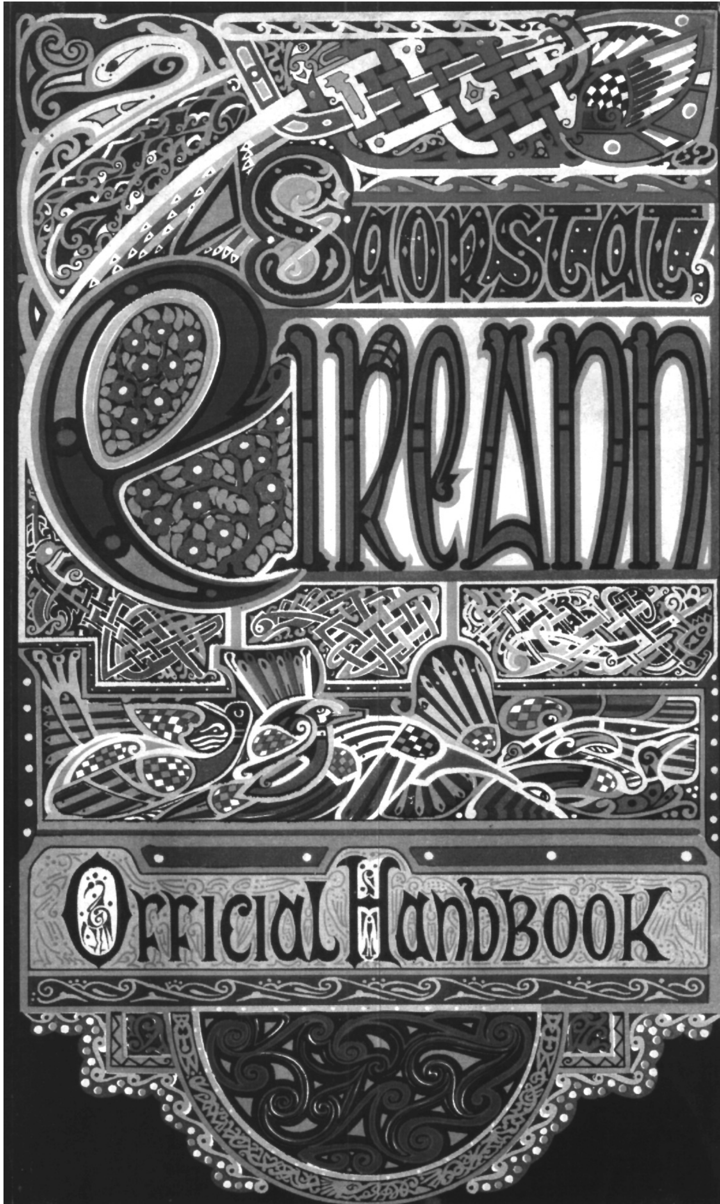

Fig. 1: Cover, Saorstát Éireann: Official Handbook *(1932)*

> had become extinct – membership of the Guild was male entailed and … administered very conservatively.[26]

Clearly, such concepts as culture, tradition and history were of critical importance in arbitrating such a conflict. The evident difficulty for the *Saorstát* also involved such categories: the symbolic capital of the nation-state mirrored that apparently being devastated at Ardnacrusha. This resonates in some of the government debates of the time. In Parliament, Senator Johnson wished the administration to take account of 'their sons who are coming on and who have naturally expected to take up the work which their fathers and grandfathers and their great, great grandfathers have followed'.[27] He assured his colleagues:

> This … body … has been in existence for centuries. It consists of a group of families that have had certain rights ... from time immemorial. … Rights coming down for centuries, ratified by parliament, ratified by custom.[28]

Thus, the fishing families comprising the Abbey Guild moved, with the help of troubled senators, newspapers and a local historian/ethnologist, from marginality to the place of tradition in a nation-state that based its legitimacy on similar, 'cultural' qualities.

Lysaght adds to the local appropriation of 'culture' by employing classical tools of representation in his text, to promote an identity bound to the wider politics and cultural discourse of the time. In the appendices to his book, he draws together some of the basic instruments of ethnography - language, material culture and photography - to construct a formal record of this community and their way of life. His survey encompasses the visible, material culture of the Abbey Guild, lists of poles, oars and ropes as evidence of 'livelihood' in the form of artefacts, together with miscellaneous photographs. He lists dozens of place-names and colloquial words with direct English translations. Lysaght highlights those words, phrases or artefacts that one could consider to be in anyway unique. To borrow a term from George E. Marcus, one could suggest that he engaged in a 'salvage mode'[29] of cultural representation.

Lysaght's domestication of the ethnographic gaze represents an attempt to access the repository of power available in the idea of a visible, tangible identity and his use of artefacts and symbols highlights a process of reification in knowable objects. Anthropologist Simon Harrison employs the useful term 'symbolic inventory'[30] to describe how, in competing for symbolic capital, people employ sacred objects as nexus in their webs of significance. It is appropriate at this juncture to again echo Foucault's concept

of the productivity of repression. What we see in Lysaght's appropriation of an ethnographic gaze is a local attempt to access modernist modes of representation. In order to draw out this point more fully, I will look at the way in which the space of the hydro-electric scheme and the resulting conflict came to be sewn into the fabric of local texts and memory.

Texts and textures

In the years of post-Civil War reconstruction, the Irish *Saorstát* inscribed the concerns of an emerging nation-state on the texture of the monumental Shannon Hydro-electric Scheme. In tandem, a marginal community was busy accumulating property and constructing a new identity. In 1932, the synthesis of these two related yet relatively autonomous historical processes proved both violent and revealing. The space of Ardnacrusha formed the spatial axis of this conflict. It is illustrative to examine how this monument imbued the 'culture' that found expression in Lysaght's cultural/ historical musings.

In 1939, the Abbey Guild dissipated amid a court case over the distribution of compensation. Some former guild members prospered while others found only disenchantment and displacement. One informant of mine sketched a less-than-glowing image of his experience: 'We were on the dole, some of us worked in the building[sic] ... only [as] labourers; a few tradesmen; a lot were only labourers.'[31] The late historian Kevin Hannan paints a poignant picture of the displacement felt by another of these men. Tom 'the Bull' is described in the historian's prose as an Abbey Fisherman skilled with a snap-net, a person inseparable from his livelihood. The disappearance of his 'way of life' relegated him to the cultural wasteland of marginality, where his 'philosophy of life … uncertain income and … partiality for the pint'[32] made him transparent, de-cultured, like us but worse off.[33] Tom Bull's 'philosophy' is captured in a popular folk tale involving a barman named Clohessy to whom he owed money:

> Clohessy: [*Commenting upon Tom's leaking roof]* "Tis [sic] a wonder Tom [that] you wouldn't fix that leak on a day like this."
> Tom: "Sure no one could fix the hole on such a wet day."
> Clohessy: "Why not have it done on a fine day. I will pay for the cost."
> Tom: "Ah, what use would that be? Sure it never leaks on a fine day." [34]

The historian's darkly comic prose also evokes a source of redemption. Though displacement spelled a peripheral place in the wage economy, the heritage of 'culture' secured at least some legitimacy for an out-of-work labourer - legitimacy based on a sense of 'otherness' or even the

picturesque. This redemptive narrative resonates in contemporary writing within the community descended from the fishermen and their kinfolk. Recent development and resettlement projects on King's Island, the district once associated with the Shannon fishermen, have invigorated this genre with a sense of urgency. The poetry of a local woman and daughter of an Abbey man, Mae Leonard, has emerged to defend the virtue of local values from defilement by modernity. In a recent newspaper article, Leonard captures in autobiographical prose the discursive axis of the community's spatial history:

> So late one Sunday evening as we … were paddling downstream on the ebb tide, Dad hissed "Halt, pull into the rushes" … "no sign of the bailiff. Right lads, get that salmon." "What's the bailiff?" I dared to ask and was silenced by a deafening chorus of "Shush" [sic]. But at the time how could I appreciate the huge story of the Abbey Fishermen's struggle to hold on to their salmon fishing rights against all the odds? How could I possibly understand … that [they] had been sacrificed into the building of the Shannon Scheme at Ardnacrusha? I knew them. They were my family and friends. The Clancys, Hayes, McNamaras and Shannys. … The ESB slung an electric fence across the Tailrace. … Our salmon at Ardnacrusha that summer evening had been stunned by that fence, yet we felt like criminals taking it from the Shannon.[35]

The theme of sacrifice opens a narrative path to a monumental space. The path scored by this metaphor was well worn. Decades earlier, Lysaght concluded his account of a fishing community with a lament for the loss of tradition. The Abbey Fishermen, he wrote, have been absorbed into mainstream life, abandoning their identities for ours. 'Salute them', he demands, 'their heritage was sacrificed on the altar of progress'.[36]

The writings of Lysaght and Leonard, and historical consciousness, confirm an attempt to appropriate space through text. By discussing above the manner in which writing opened a narrative path to space, I am evoking a concept that finds expression best in the work of Jacques Derrida. People often employ spaces of representation to give expression and concreteness to their identity. There has long been a tendency to disassociate 'writing', in the grammatological sense, from space, however. Perhaps this separation is rooted in an opposition between the perceived reality of space and the more intangible nature of culture. Taking, for example, the perspective of Henri Lefebvre, one sees a recognition that space is produced in a proto-Marxist sense. Nevertheless, he calls for a restraining of semiological and symbolic interpretations.

> A spatial work (monument or architectural project) attains a complexity fundamentally different from the complexity of a text … in that it tends towards the all-embracing presence of the totality. … In and through the work in space, social practices transcend the limitations by which other 'signifying practices', and hence other arts, including those texts known as literary are based.[37]

Contrary to this, Derrida's wider conception of 'writing' demands one think of text as a labyrinthine path, which, like a palimpsest, opens a way and imposes a fabric.[38] He elaborates:

> We might be tempted to speak here of … a new textual economy, an economy in which we no longer have to exclude the invisible from the visible, to oppose the temporal and the spatial, discourse and architecture. Not that we confuse them, but we confuse them according to another hierarchy, a hierarchy without an "*arché*", a memory without origin, a hierarchy without hierarchy.[39]

Essentially, text and space intersect in the example outlined in this article to snatch a sense of 'culture' from the grip of a wider modernity. Fragments of history and a shared memory of conflict were inscribed upon and reified in a contested space. The same process is also apparent when one considers the literature describing and enfolding the development project from outside the community. Both D. L. Kellagher's and Valentine William's prose sought to write upon the scheme a narrative that situated it at the junction between tradition and modernity. The similarities at both levels are striking.

Following on from my introduction to this article, my employment of Jacques Derrida's often elaborate writing is aimed at exposing his significant contribution to understanding the relationship between discourse and space. Derrida's elusive use of the term 'new textual economy' is perhaps best seen as an attempt to move beyond the traditional polarity that existed between spatial analysis and more hermeneutic-inspired discursive approaches. His sense of 'writing' as a human productivity independent of any specific medium and opposed to arbitrary oppositions is, I would suggest, both attractive and useful.

Conclusions

In this article, I have looked at the relationship between text and space as a lens through which to view a community's history and promotion of 'culture'. Following Sahlins, I have looked at this case as an example of inventiveness rather than suggesting any inauthenticity. While this approach

supports his contribution to a critique of the despondency surrounding an apparent homogenisation of indigenous cultures, contrary to Sahlins' examples, I have not argued that this community possessed a separate structure. Rather, it seems evident that while development displaced this local community the symbolic capital that it carried secured a niche for their own emerging sense of identity. This process seems to resonate in Foucault's concept of the productivity of repression.[40] In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault proposes that an obsession with the perceived repression of sexuality may in fact reveal a certain productivity. This article has argued that the fixation with cultural homogenisation neglects the productivity it carries in its wake. Indeed, such rhetoric may mask the relation between the apparent spread of uniformity and persistent local claims to separate identity and traditions.

Notes

[1] Marshall Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things That I Know About Culture', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol.5, no.3, 1999, pp.399-423.
[2] Marshall Sahlins, *How 'Natives' Think: About Captain Cook, For Example,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995.
[3] Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things That I Know About Culture', p.401.
[4] Mark Maguire, 'The Space of the Nation: History, Culture and a Conflict in Modern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, vol.6, no.2, 1998, pp.109-121.
[5] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction,* Vintage, New York, 1980.
[6] E. Valentine Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck (eds), *Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literary Studies,* University of California Press, Los Angeles and London, 1996.
[7] Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Rethinking of Social Analysis*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1993, and 1989, p.197.
[8] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Penguin, London, 1977**.**
[9] Jacques Derrida, 'Why Peter Eisenman Writes Such Good Books', in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, Routledge, London, 1997, p.350.
[10] Lysaght begins his history of the Abbey Fishermen with King John's grant of the Lax Weir to William De Broasa in 1202. However, the legality of this grant was questioned by the local net-fishermen in several court cases. Following local history, Lysaght suggests that Dominican friars built the Weir for the citizens of Limerick and it was subsequently and illegally confiscated. This colloquial explanation falls down on one point: the Dominicans did not arrive in Ireland until 1227.
[11] Ireland to this day retains a form of limited local government vis-à-vis planning, sanitation, transport lines, etc. Each county has a county council and each city a corporation. The city corporations are public services. However, until the early twentieth century Limerick Corporation maintained a very pro-active aspect in relation to city finances. Its directors were from the local merchant classes and often used their position to further commercial projects.
[12] William Lysaght, *The Abbey Fishermen: A Short History of Snap-net Fishing in Limerick,* Treaty Press, Limerick, 1968, p.15.
[13] Paul Caughlin, *A Report of the Late Fishery Case in which Pool Gabbett [Esquire] was Plaintiff*, Treaty Press, Limerick, 1841, appendix, no pagination.
[14] The alliance between the net-fishermen and the local gentry resulted in the formation of the Fishermen's Law Fund Society.
[15] Lysaght, p.18.
[16] See Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick Its History and Antiquities*, Mercer Press, Cork, 1884.
[17] Sahlins, 'Two or Three Things That I Know About Culture', pp.402-404.
[18] Maurice Manning & Moore McDowell, *Electricity Supply in Ireland: The History of the ESB*, Gill

& MacMillan, Dublin, 1984, p.51.
[19] Valentine Williams, 'The Shannon Scheme', *Structural Engineer*, vol.15, 1929, p.19, passim.
[20] *Bord Fáilte* is the Irish tourist body, which has responsibility for the promotion of tourism in Ireland and oversees markets.
[21] D.L. Kelleher, 'The Shannon Scheme', in Jim Kemmy (ed.), *The Limerick Anthology*, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1996, p.251, passim.
[22] See Maguire, pp.109-121; Luke Gibbons, 'Coming out of Hibernation: The Myth of Modernity in Irish Culture', in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 1988, pp.205-219; and John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993.
[23] Irish Free State, *Saorstát na Éireann: Official Handbook*, Talbot Press, Dublin, p.265.
[24] The Book of Kells is an impressive decorative text written by monastic scholars, which is over 900 years old. It is a designated national treasure housed in Trinity College, Dublin. Written during the so-called golden age before Norse invasions of Ireland the artefact seems to represent an Ireland unspoilt by successive in-migration. It is known particularly for its intricate Celtic-style artwork.
[25] Arensberg's and Kimball's research was set only a few miles from the site of the development scheme in the 1930s. It is curious that this significant snap-shot of rural Ireland failed to mention the project. See Conrad Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study*, Peter Smith, Gloucester Mass., 1937.
[26] *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 July 1936, p.2.
[27] *Seanad Debates*, 1934, p.809.
[28] Ibid., pp.234-236.
[29] George E. Marcus, 'Contemporary Problems of Ethnography within the Modern World System', in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p.165n1.
[30] Simon Harrison, 'Four Types of Symbolic Conflict', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (n.s.) no. 1, 1996, pp.255-272.
[31] Former Abbey Guild member, interviewed by Mark Maguire, 1995. Tape of the interview in possession of author.
[32] Kevin Hannan, 'Tom Bull', *The Old Limerick Journal*, no. 6, 1981.
[33] Rosaldo, p.197.
[34] Hannan, p.6.
[35] *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 March 1996, p.23.
[36] Lysaght, p.57.
[37] Henri Lefebvre, 'The Production of Space (Extracts)', in Leach, p.140.
[38] Jacques Derrida, 'Architecture Where the Desire May Live', in Leach, pp.319-324. And, Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, p.7.
[39] Derrida, 'Why Peter Eisenman Writes such Good Books', p.350.
[40] Foucault.

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