THE ADMINISTRATION OF HUNGER: COLONIALISM, BIOPOLITICS AND THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE, 1845-1852

by

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Abstract

Seasonal hunger and “partial famines” were common occurrences in nineteenth-century Ireland, but the Great Irish Famine (c.1845-1852) was sudden, stark and devastating. The immediate trigger was the appearance of a mysterious blight causing the widespread failure of the potato harvest. In a relatively short period of time almost one eighth of the population perished, while two million Irish ploughed the seas searching for new homes and new beginnings.

This dissertation aims to resituate the Famine within a nexus of political violence. This nexus was forged through a history of capitalist-colonial relations with Britain and later through a series of biopolitical ‘experiments’ that brought Irish life increasingly into the realm of state power. Earlier modes of conquest and colonisation were gradually superseded by a powerful ideology of reform and ‘amelioration,’ which ultimately legitimised a series of state-led interventions in Ireland.

Threading this historical narrative are three important famine landscapes. Firstly, I examine how discourse produces and sustains profound fractures between ruler and ruled — the satiated and the emaciated — and how this mobilises specific government interventions ostensibly to support those deemed incapable of helping themselves. Secondly, I analyse the evolution of a series of institutional landscapes that extended and deepened the administrative arm of the state and ultimately played a significant role in operationalising various modalities of relief during the eighteen-forties. Thirdly, I focus on a series of politico-juridical acts that produce the figure of homo sacer — a radically depotentiated form of life that may be improved out of existence or destroyed with little compunction. Together these ‘faminescapes’ manifest (and mystify) the economic relations of production, modalities of representation, and regimes of power that constitute the horror of mass starvation.

An historico-political understanding of these processes is essential to challenging claims that naturalise famine. I conclude that famine mortality occurred inside a sophisticated apparatus of care and direction: aid was controlled, relief structures were operationalised, institutions were built, bodies were managed, laws were sanctioned, and ideologies were mobilised. Important too is the knowledge that famine was used as an engine of historical transformation, a practice that is still relevant to many of today’s so-called ‘natural disasters.’
Table of Contents

Abstract......................................................................................................................... ii
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... iii
List of Tables ................................................................................................................ v
List of Figures ............................................................................................................... vi
Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... viii

Introduction: Victims Without Oppressors and Deaths Without Crimes ..................... 1
  Traumatic History......................................................................................................... 1
  Naturalising Hunger and Politics of Blame.................................................................... 3
  ‘Famine Crimes’........................................................................................................... 7
  Life-administering Biopower........................................................................................ 10
  The Bare Life of Homo Sacer...................................................................................... 14
  Between Limitless Care and Unconditional Abandonment........................................ 16
  Faminescapes............................................................................................................. 20
  Dissertation Outline................................................................................................... 23
  Conclusion.................................................................................................................... 25

Chapter One: Acts of Union ......................................................................................... 28
  Introduction................................................................................................................ 28
  Colonial Law and the Pale............................................................................................ 35
  Crown Control and Statute Book Colonialism............................................................ 48
  Acts of Union: Irish Questions and Colonial Answers............................................... 55
  Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 72

Chapter Two: Making up People: Routes and Routines in the Production of Colonial Space ................................................................................................. 75
  Introduction................................................................................................................ 75
  Letterpress Landscapes and the Knowledge Economy............................................... 78
  Routes and Routines of Colonial Travel..................................................................... 83
  An Amateur Commissioner......................................................................................... 88
  History and Life.......................................................................................................... 94
  Landscapes of Disaffection and Reform.................................................................... 97
  “A Different Race of Men”: the Racialisation of Poverty........................................... 110
  Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 120

Chapter Three: The Administration of Hunger .............................................................. 124
  Introduction................................................................................................................ 124
  The Laboratory........................................................................................................... 126
  Under the Eye of a Paid Officer................................................................................. 129
  Violent Geographies: Bare life and Abandonment..................................................... 149
  The War on Dwelling and the Miserable Ejected....................................................... 169
  Breaking into Jail........................................................................................................ 183
  Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 190
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Four: Rationalising Disaster: Thomas Carlyle and the Irish Question</th>
<th>192</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De-humanised Geographies</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlyle's Sickly 'Irish Question'</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Eternity's Commissioner&quot;</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governing Starvation</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: the Language of Legitimation</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusions: Hungry Tremors</th>
<th>223</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Long Haemorrhage</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-naturalising Famine</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An &quot;Artificial Famine&quot;?</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faminescapes</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Homines Sacri</em></td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bibliography</th>
<th>256</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Workhouse Designs</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Nicholls's Tables</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 3.1: Workhouse and Outdoor Relief ................................................................. 183
Table C.1: Faminescapes ....................................................................................... 245
Table C.2: Inside-Outside Dialectics ................................................................. 249
Table C.3: Faminogenic Behaviour .................................................................... 254
Table A2.1: Numbers relieved in the workhouse together with the number and rate of deaths .......... 285
Table A2.2: Numbers of destitute persons out of the workhouse under the 1st and 2nd sections of the Extension Act (10th and 11th Vict., cap.31) .................................................................................. 286
# List of Figures

## Introduction: Victims Without Oppressors and Deaths Without Crimes

| Figure 1.1 | The Extent of the Blight in Europe, 1845 | 2 |
| Figure 1.2 | Sir Charles Edward Trevelyan | 4 |
| Figure 1.3 | John Mitchel | 6 |

## Chapter One: Acts of Union

| Box 1.1 | Famine, historiography and the politics of anachronism | 30 |
| Box 1.2 | The law of attainder | 42 |
| Figure 1.1 | The Pale | 37 |
| Figure 1.2 | Tudor plantations | 39 |
| Figure 1.3 | James I plantations | 43 |
| Figure 1.4 | Transfer of Land Ownership | 45 |
| Figure 1.5 | Daniel O'Connell | 57 |
| Figure 1.6 | Driving Cattle for Rent between Oughterard and Galway | 59 |
| Figure 1.7 | Traveller and Beggars in Muckross | 68 |

## Chapter Two: Making up People: Routes and Routines in the Production of Colonial Space

| Box 2.1 | Abnormality and the production of Manichean Geographies | 95 |
| Box 2.2 | Overpopulation and the Naturalisation of Disaster | 119 |
| Figure 2.1 | Excerpt from Henry Inglis’s Table of Contents | 80 |
| Figure 2.2 | Canal and Road Services, c. 1841 | 84 |
| Figure 2.3 | Bianconi Services 1815 – 1840 | 84 |
| Figure 2.4 | An Outside Jaunting Car as Inglis described | 85 |
| Figure 2.5 | The Hut or Watch-house | 99 |
| Figure 2.6 | Miss Kennedy Distributing Clothes at Kilrush | 100 |
| Figure 2.7 | Common Mayo Mud Cabin | 102 |
| Figure 2.8 | Worst Sort of Mayo Stone Cabin | 102 |
| Figure 2.9 | Hovel Near the Foot of the Reek | 103 |
| Figure 2.10 | A Kerry Cabin and Its Inhabitants | 107 |
| Figure 2.11 | Early Racialisation of the Irish | 110 |
| Figure 2.12 | Daniel O'Connell Conjures up the Irish Frankenstein | 111 |
| Figure 2.13 | The King of A-Shantee | 113 |

## Chapter Three: The Administration of Hunger

| Figure 3.1 | Poor Law Unions Created Between 1838 and 1850 | 138 |
| Figure 3.2 | Elevation of Main Building of the New Workhouses of Castletown and Dingle | 139 |
| Figure 3.3 | Aerial View of Parsonstown Workhouse, Co. Offaly | 140 |
| Figure 3.4 | The Workhouse Admission and Discharge Book | 143 |
| Figure 3.5 | The Poor Law Commissioners’ Dietary Recommendations | 146 |
Figure 3.6 Government Sale of Indian Corn, at Cork .................................................. 151
Figure 3.7 The Central Soup Depot, Barrack Street, Cork ........................................ 163
Figure 3.8 The Village of Moveen, three miles West of Kilkee .................................... 174
Figure 3.9 The Ejectment of Irish Tenantry: troops help evict tenants and their houses are ‘tumbled’ ................................................................. 175
Figure 3.10 A Scalpeen at Dunmore ........................................................................... 176
Figure 3.11 An Evicted Family with their Scalpeen in a Ditch ...................................... 177
Figure 3.12 Starving Peasants at a Workhouse Gate ..................................................... 185
Figure 3.13 Woman Begging at Clonakilty ................................................................. 187

Chapter Four: Rationalising Disaster: Thomas Carlyle and the Irish Question

Figure 4.1 Thomas Carlyle ......................................................................................... 194
Figure 4.2 Charles Gavan Duffy ................................................................................ 200
Figure 4.3 Young Ireland in Business for Himself ...................................................... 204
Figure 4.4 Thomas Carlyle’s Second Tour of Ireland, 1849 ....................................... 206
Figure 4.5 The Irish Old Man of the Mountain and his £50,000 of relief ...................... 209
Figure 4.6 The Impudent Irishman asks John Bull for a “thrifle” to buy a blunderbuss 210
Figure 4.7 The Workhouse at Clifden, Galway, which Carlyle visited in late July, 1849 212

Conclusions: Hungry Tremors

Figure C.1 The Visionary Geography of an Improving Landlord .............................. 226
Figure C.2 A Terrible Record: the Dwindling Population of Ireland ....................... 230
Figure C.3 Emigrants at the Government Medical Inspector’s Office ....................... 244

Appendix 1: Workhouse Designs

Figure A.1 Exhibiting the Enlargement of the Workhouse for Buildings for the Children 279
Figure A.2 Elevation of Proposed New Building for Children .................................... 280
Figure A.3 Union Workhouse. Drawing of Hot Plate ................................................. 281
Figure A.4 Union Workhouses in Ireland: Ventilation .............................................. 282
Figure A.5 Workhouse Bedstead .............................................................................. 283
Figure A.6 Drawing of Ventilators for Outer Walls .................................................... 284
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For millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics calls his existence as a living being into question

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

*Doctrines are war machines*

Regis Debray, *Critique of Political Reason*

*The human body is a battleground*

David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*

*Famines are wars over the right to existence*

Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*

*The poor were treated and despised as if they were beings of quite a different creation. The satiated never understand the emaciated*

Hugh Dorian, *The Outer Edge of Ulster: A Memoir of Social Life in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*

*Ireland, Ireland that cloud in the West, that coming storm*

William Ewart Gladstone, letter to his wife, 1845
Introduction

Victims without Oppressors and Deaths without Crimes

"The abyss has been fathomed."

— Charles Trevelyan. The Irish Crisis.

Traumatic history

In 1843 a mysterious blight was observed in the potato crop in America. Within two years it had crossed the Atlantic and spread across many parts of Europe, first appearing in Dublin in August 1845. Over the next five years the Irish potato crop failed four times, the ironic exception being the year commonly referred to as "Black '47." During that period one million people, approximately one-eighth of the population, perished while a further two million left behind their homes forever. Three million people, largely labourers, cottiers and small holders, were literally dead or gone. Historian Peter Gray has said that "no peacetime European crisis since the seventeenth century, with the possible exception of the Ukrainian famine in the early 1930s, has equalled it in intensity or scale."

The occurrence of a devastating famine in Ireland, at the time when European famines were thought to be a relic of the past, has provoked deep, serious and oftentimes acrimonious debate. In the field of Irish Studies there is perhaps no more divisive issue than the Irish Famine. Oddly enough, however, it is neither the enormity of human suffering nor its intense consequences on Irish society that tend to stoke the flames of dispute. The stakes appear highest (and the tone most shrill) when dealing with the vexed questions of judgement and responsibility. A number of disturbing facts tend to aggravate these debates. Firstly, the sojourn of Phytophthora Infestans, the potato-killing pathogen, to Irish shores was in itself unexceptional (various regions of Europe and Scandinavia were also affected), but in comparative terms its effects were, to say the least, dramatically disproportionate across Ireland (see Figure I.1). Indeed, as already suggested, Ireland suffered mass starvation on a magnitude that the European continent had not endured for centuries. More controversial is the knowledge...

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that, as the Irish Famine drew to a close, over one million visitors poured into London to witness the Great Exhibition (1851) where Britain’s “technical, industrial and financial supremacy” was proudly displayed. The exhibition is quite literally a spectacular reminder that the catastrophe of Famine occurred when Ireland was constitutionally linked to Great Britain, then considered to be ‘the workshop of the world,’ a beacon of democratic government, and one of the most interventionist governments of its day.

Finally, as Gerry Kearns points out, the debate is polarised by the constraints of writing what he helpfully terms “traumatic history”: “What hangs over the historiographical debate ... is not just modern politics, but also the dilemmas of dealing with national identities organised around extreme situations.” According to Kearns these “extreme situations” operate like a “moral black hole” draining history of nuance “and leaving only extremism beyond its pull.” No doubt traumatic tensions have fuelled wide disagreement about how and why so many Irish perished, but it is Kearns’ insistence on a “moral black hole” that seems to inhere to “extreme situations” that I find most suggestive. Why does historical judgement fall short in situations where it is surely most needed? Below I want to examine several attempts to explain the Irish Famine that might be said to lean towards this “moral black-hole” in so far as they tend to naturalise the Irish experience of mass starvation. The point is not to castigate these attempts at historical judgement, but to examine the depths of this “moral black hole” where in the face of extreme situations history seems particularly unhelpful.

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Naturalising hunger and politics of blame

Kearns is right to assert that writing “traumatic history,” and basing judgements around “extreme situations,” has had a deep impact on the historiography of the disaster, but I would add that this relates to the very nature of the “extreme situation” and what we take this term to mean. There is certainly a school of historical thought that interprets the “extreme situation” of famine as revealing a deeper and more troubling excess. One example would be neo-Malthusian arguments that claim that nineteenth-century Ireland represented a case of extreme overpopulation (a “superabundant” people) and that a population cull through mass hunger was unavoidable. Other scholars choose to place the blight to the centre of their story assigning the real meaning of events to an unruly nature. In one of his many books on the Irish Famine, for instance, Cormac Ó Gráda claims that and that the Irish Famine was “a tragic ecological accident.” “In the end,” he writes “the Irish were desperately unlucky.” More recently David Dickson has described the Irish Famine as being the result of a series of “malign coincidences,” a term that seems to echo Ó Gráda’s reading. As with neo-Malthusian arguments this view places events beyond blame because, as Terry Eagleton writes, “a blankly indifferent Nature is not even enough of a subject to be malevolent.” More seriously these arguments tend to mimic a belief held by many Victorians that the Famine was the will of an almighty “providence” whose intentions and methods are as unfathomable as they are inevitable. Whether “a blankly indifferent nature” or a divine dispensation, the effect is to naturalise the Famine by invoking a human travesty in which it is impossible to find anyone culpable. Read this way we might say

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7 It seems that configuring Irish history, and the Famine’s place in this narrative, involves configuring degrees of security; and even perhaps degrees of indemnity, from the contemporary implications of past events. One sees such calculations plainly in Ó Gráda’s popular account. Prised between “the Whig view” of history and the “genocide theories formerly espoused by the few nationalist historians,” Ó Gráda concludes his otherwise measured account with the frivolous lines that the Famine was a natural disaster. Cormac Ó Gráda. The Great Irish Famine. London: Macmillan, 1989: 76. To be fair, Ó Gráda’s subsequent writings demonstrate just how far he has distanced himself from this earlier opinion, but similar judgements persist albeit in a less apologetic terms. See Franklin Foer. “Pataki and Potatoes: Half-baked Ideas about Irish History.” Slate. January 19, 1997.


that the “extreme situation,” and the monstrous excess of the Irish Famine, is the fact that life is sacrificed to form of violence beyond malevolence and reproach.

I want to discuss two more examples, which though entirely different in emphasis, also run against the problem of non-accountability. In May 1977 Austin Bourke published an article in the *Irish Times* newspaper titled “Apologia for a Dead Civil Servant.” In this very important opinion piece, the author seeks to exculpate the role of Charles Trevelyan, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, for most of the Irish Famine (see Figure 1.2). Bourke claims that Trevelyan has been unfairly vilified as “principal scapegoat for the British government’s mishandling of the famine crisis.” The article is intended to stand as “a cautionary example of how easily one can be led to transfer guilt from a responsible minister of government to a public servant who faithfully implements and defends his master’s policy without regard to his own opinions or preferences.”

To justify this position Bourke makes the argument that Trevelyan was far more compassionate in administering state provisions under the Tory administration led by Robert Peel than under the subsequent leadership of John Russell and the Whigs. The implication being that it was government that influenced Trevelyan and not vice versa.

It is Bourke’s belief that Charles Trevelyan was a handmaiden of power, a person who executed higher orders practically anonymously, without manifest “opinions or preferences.” In other words, we are being asked to excuse Trevelyan’s role because he was a mere cog in a wheel — a “principal scapegoat.” There are, I think, clear problems with this argument. In particular, Trevelyan’s own account of *The Irish Crisis* (first published in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1848) flies in the face of Bourke’s reading. Trevelyan goes to great lengths to justify government policy — in this sense the volume stands as an excellent reminder that Famine revisionism is not a twentieth-century invention — even sending copies of his manuscript to the

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Pope (who had been exhorting Catholics to send aid to Irish charities), the King of Prussia, as well as newly appointed relief officials in Ireland. It is difficult to square Bourke’s image of Trevelyan as a timorous public servant with the fact that Trevelyan was instrumental in building the Treasury into its modern supervisory role for the entire civil service. Indeed, if we reflect on contemporary famines it is government officials that more commonly face censure on the seemingly fair grounds that they usually have the most authority and resources.

Yet, at another level, Bourke’s argument raises far more serious questions regarding individual responsibility and the not inconsiderable difficulties of writing traumatic history. The problem that Bourke identifies in his ‘scapegoat thesis’ is the shifting of responsibility from human agents to systems. This is also a problem identified by Hannah Arendt in her controversial treatise on the banality of evil. How does one judge human actions when faced with the knowledge that a system — in Arendt’s case totalitarianism — can actually turn people into cogs? Herein lies an essential problem regarding the question of responsibility and blame: if one places blame at the door of a particular individual the shout is raised that they are being made a ‘scapegoat’ for a larger structure, whereas if one condemns the system, say economic policies or institutional structures, then by generalising the atrocity one also risks trivialising it.

Thus unlike neo-Malthusian, providentialist, or fate-based readings, Bourke’s interpretation places the Famine more squarely within a political context. But if politics is, first

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13 For example, David Marcus makes clear that government officials are often “those most likely to have the resources and authority to commit famine crimes.” David Marcus. "Famine Crimes in International Law." *The American Journal of International Law* 97.2 (2003): 247 n19. I discuss this important article in the conclusion.


15 During the trial of Eichmann the judges circumvented this problem: “For, as the judges took great pains to point out explicitly, in a courtroom there is no system on trial, no History or historical trend, no ism, anti-Semitism for instance, but a person, and if the defendant happens to be a functionary, he stands accused precisely because even a functionary is still a human being, and it is in this capacity that he stands trial.” Arendt agreed with this decision, but even so she felt that the system itself cannot be left out of the account altogether. Hannah Arendt. "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship." *Responsibility and Judgement.* Ed. Jerome Kohn. New York: Schocken Books, 2003. 30-32

16 Arendt correctly noted that guilt is inherently individualising: “When all are guilty no one is: confessions of collective guilt are the best possible safeguard against the discovery of culprits, and the very magnitude of the crime the best excuse for doing nothing.” Hannah Arendt. *On Violence.* New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1970: 65. The unexplored terrain of triviality is where Arendt found herself. In this sense, her report on the “banality of evil” has but one unequivocal message: evil seldom arrives in the package we expect.
and foremost, the domain of human action, how can we accept what Bourke is asking us to: namely, that some human actions are more or less empty and attributeless and thus beyond malevolence and reproach? Of course it could simply be that Bourke is wrong and for this reason it is worth comparing his arguments with those of John Mitchel. Mitchel also judged the Famine to be a political event, although his controversial views are certainly not biased in favour of Trevelyan.17

We know that Mitchel understood the Famine to be part of a history of colonial conquest, but he also emphasised that this “conquest” was of a radically different order to a military campaign. In the following extract from The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps), Mitchel makes this point explicitly:

If one should narrate how the cause of this country was stricken down in open battle, and blasted to pieces with shot and shell, there might be a certain mournful pride in dwelling upon the gallant resistance, as in the case of our Irish wars against Cromwell, against King William the Third, and against the power of Britain in ’98; — but to describe how the spirit of a country has been broken and subdued by beggarly famine; — how her national aspirations have been, not choked in her own blood, nobly shed on the field, but straggled by red tape; — how her life and soul have been ameliorated and civilized out of her; — how she died of political economy, and was buried under tons of official stationery; — it is a dreary task, which I wish some one else had undertaken.18

Mitchel’s death-dealing famine is the consequence of colonial bureaucracy (“red-tape” and “official stationery”), fiscal ideology (“political economy”) and Whiggish liberalism (“amelioration”).19 However, the immediate striking point is that both Mitchel and Bourke, who are otherwise impossible to measure in the same sentence, conclude that the Irish Famine involved the workings of a system that killed people more or less anonymously. This is a significant point. As with readings that ‘naturalise’ famine, human life is seemingly abandoned to violence beyond imputability in so far as it is practically impossible to attribute responsibility anonymously. This point should not be taken to mean that these readings are

17 Gerry Kearns provides a detailed consideration of Mitchel’s views on Irish history and how this inflects various strands of Irish nationalism. Kearns, op. cit. See also Donnelly, op. cit.: 18-22.
19 In my opinion Mitchel offers a compelling reading of how the Irish Famine occurred. Where his account is most wrong — and most troubling — is his xenophobic hatred of “the English.” I discuss this aspect of Mitchel’s writings in the conclusion.
worthless. On the contrary, what begs addressing is the significance of these unlikely coincidences, including this recurring scene of non-responsibility in which — for different reasons — the concept of guilt seems not useless, but attributeless.

‘Famine crimes’
Here it certainly helps to consider the larger picture. Recently Alex de Waal, a leading figure on issues of hunger and human rights, has called for the political and legal recognition of what he calls “famine crimes.” As a solution to situations of mass starvation de Waal proposed that “anti-famine contracts” could be established between a people and their government.\(^\text{20}\) Leaving to one side the merits or demerits of this proposal it is immediately obvious that de Waal's remarks only make sense from inside the knowledge that famines are unpunishable atrocities: deaths that are not recognised as crimes as such. The knowledge that certain people needlessly starve to death raises innumerable politico-ethical difficulties, but none more difficult to face than the fact that this happens with near total impunity making the search for 'oppressors' seem somewhat superfluous and the language of responsibility almost meaningless. We can begin to relate this point to the readings just discussed by rehearsing some comments made by the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben.

According to Agamben, the concept of responsibility has been “irredeemably contaminated” by the law to the point where responsibility (and guilt) simply express two aspects of legal imputability: “The gesture of assuming responsibility is therefore genuinely juridical and not ethical. It expresses nothing noble or luminous, but rather simply obligation, the act by which one consigned oneself as a prisoner to guarantee a debt in a context in which the legal bond was considered to inhere in the body of the person responsible. As such, responsibility is closely intertwined with the concept of culpa that, in the broad sense, indicates the imputability of damage.”\(^\text{21}\) In other words, according to Agamben, the principle of


responsibility — and certainly the gesture of assuming responsibility — only makes sense inside the sphere of juridical obligation and legal bond.  

This presents a real difficulty for any analysis of famine precisely because famines, understood as unpunishable atrocities, remain impervious to principles “irredeemably contaminated” by the law. Indeed, it is this “extreme situation” — of employing juridically tainted categories where they are seemingly unhelpful — that muddies the water of judgement and raises the stakes in writing history around traumatic situations. In this sense what Kearns identifies as the “moral black hole” of trauma drains history of far more than nuance. Faced with the reality that certain lives are routinely exposed to death, history conjures up human cogs, lethal systems, and rebarbative natures — ever larger ‘scapegoats’ — to resolve the unsettling fact that guilt cannot be assumed.

Recent studies show that the “moral black hole” is assuredly deepening. Mike Davis estimates that across the ‘Third World’ between 60 and 90 million people died of famine in the late Victorian period. Two centuries later, according to the World Food Organisation, ten million people die of hunger and malnutrition every year. That amounts to 25,000 lives every day or one human life every five seconds. Today hunger and malnutrition are the number one risk to global health killing more than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. These figures need to be considered in light of the fact that “The twentieth century was the worst ever in terms of famine mortality, yet it was also the historical moment when the technical capacity to eradicate famine was first achieved.”

Indeed, the editors of a provocative volume of essays on “new famines” argue that “in most cases when famines happen, no government is thrown out of power.” By way of demonstrating the complete “confusion” of ethical and juridical categories Agamben maintains that in modern society “the contrite assumption of moral responsibility is invoked at every occasion as an exemption from the responsibilities demanded by the law.” Agamben. *Remnants of Auschwitz*, op. cit.: 24. At first abstruse, this contention holds a fair degree of purchase. Take, for example, the fact that the former U.S. Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, can publicly declare guilt and regret for his seminal role in the Vietnam War or the fact that a company like Shell can respond to its collusion in the execution of Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa (along with eight other Ogoni leaders) by initiating a “massive media blitz pronouncing the company’s commitment to corporate social responsibility.” Similarly during the Irish Famine Edward Twisleton, the Chief Poor Law Commissioner, resigned on the grounds that he could no longer partake in government’s policies which he believed were killing many Irish people. In other words, he resigned on moral grounds and not on any legal pretext. I take up this argument in the conclusion. Doug Sanders. “It’s Just Wrong What We’re Doing.” *Globe and Mail*. January 24, 2004; Sofiri Peterside, Patterson Ogon, Michael Watts and Ann Zalick. “The Delta Blues Again.” *Counterpunch*. November 10, 2005.


power, no politician is tried for genocide, no donor agency officials lose their job."\textsuperscript{25} In an important essay on the Irish Famine Amartya Sen acknowledged that: “Famines are, in fact, so easy to prevent that it is amazing that they are allowed to occur at all.”\textsuperscript{26} Recently Jenny Edkins, echoing Alex de Waal’s point about “famine crimes,” argues that because famines are allowed to happen — and, in some cases, are made to happen — acts of “mass starvation” ought to be considered crimes.\textsuperscript{27} Edkins argues that “If mass starvation is a crime, the appropriate language should be used. Crimes don’t happen, they are committed. Crime is not ‘ended,’ but criminals deterred, detained and prosecuted.”\textsuperscript{28}

Hence I want to insist that Kearns's remarks regarding the “moral black hole” to trauma and the consequent difficulty of writing history around “extreme situations” actually dovetail with recent suggestions that “there is a ‘black hole’ of accountability at the heart of international relief systems” when dealing with famine.\textsuperscript{29} I insist on this because it suggests that history and indeed international relief operations need to grasp the nettle of non-responsibility that weighs so heavily on the discussion and response to famine. Accordingly, the beginning point of my analysis is to question what sort of politics treats certain people as secondary subjects whose lives are of little or no value — that can expose peoples lives, routinely, more or less anonymously and with seeming impunity to a death-dealing violence? How is this extreme situation of “complete rightlessness” created? Indeed what sort of subject is captured at the centre of this politics?\textsuperscript{30}

In negotiating these difficult questions I have benefited from a close reading of the philosophies of Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault and in particular their theorisations on the development of “biopower.” In different ways both Foucault and Agamben argue that human life is increasingly caught a powerful dialectics of care and conquest that defines Western modernity. Since the concept is quite complex, and since Agamben's relationship to Foucault's original theorisations is mired in controversy, it seems helpful to provide a history of the concepts and theory before I outline precisely why it relates to the Irish Famine and how the dissertation will be structured.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.: 5.
\textsuperscript{27} Edkins, op. cit.: 15.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.: 15
\textsuperscript{29} Devereux, Howe, and Deng, op. cit.: 5.
Life-administering biopower

The concept of “biopower” was first deployed by French philosopher, Michel Foucault, in the last chapter of his well known study The History of Sexuality. In the final part of the book, which was it seems the first to be written, Foucault discusses the deployment of sovereignty in the context a new technology of power, what he calls “a bio-politics of the population.” The historical development of this power requires some explaining before I discuss Agamben’s re-reading.

What is biopower? What does it have to do with the state and the right of death and power over life? It is necessary to dig deep into the history of sovereignty to uncover an answer.

For a long time one of the characteristics of sovereign power was the right to decide over life and death. The power of the sovereign over individual lives was, Foucault tells us, an ancient right deriving from the Roman patria potestas that granted the father of the Roman family the right to “dispose” of the life of his children and his slaves. Gradually sovereign power was diminished, or at least circumscribed, until its invocation was conditioned by the defence of the sovereign and his survival. If the sovereign was threatened by external enemies he could legitimately wage war and require his subjects to take part in the defence of the state. Without directly proposing their death he was empowered to “expose” their life to likely fatality. Thus he wielded, if you like, an indirect power over his subject’s life and death which Foucault formulated as right to make die or let live. Foucault characterises this form of power as mainly a power of deduction: “Power in this instance was essentially a right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself; it culminated in the privilege to seize hold of life in order to suppress it.”


32 Foucault. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, op. cit.: 136.
According to Foucault this all changed at the end of the eighteenth century (and this is what primarily interest us). Now, so Foucault claims, sovereign power takes control of life in order to reinforce and optimize its existence rather than to seize and suppress it. In other words, we can now speak a “life-administering” power as sovereign power yields ground to biopower.\(^{33}\) Today, more so than ever before, the state takes control of life, of the human being as a living being, as one its prime objectives. Foucault explains best:

The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines — universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the era of biopower.\(^{34}\)

Clearly there are two new and related powers operationalised. The first, regarding the discipline and administration of the individual body, Foucault calls anatomo-politics and the second, detailing the regulation of the entire social body, Foucault calls a bio-politics of the population or human species.

From Foucault’s earlier studies we know that the discipline of the individual body (or anatomo-politics) operates in and through ‘disciplinary spaces’ like the prison, the asylum, the schoolhouse, the army barracks and so forth. It works at the level of the body through distribution, separation, surveillance, and using techniques like inspections, bookkeeping, reporting, and drilling, which are carefully deployed in order to exact dependencies.\(^{35}\) The new biopower emerging at the beginning of the nineteenth-century does not eliminate or supplant anatomo-politics — and this is crucial — but rather expands and redeployes it. Unlike anatomo-politics, which is addressed to bodies, the new non-disciplinary power is applied “not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living being... to man-as-species.”\(^{36}\) We no longer have simply an anatomo-politics of the human body, but a “biopolitics” of the human race.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.: 136
\(^{34}\) Ibid.: 140.
\(^{35}\) The key text is Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1979. Foucault also discusses what he calls “political anatomy” and, significantly, how this relates to capitalism.
Foucault cites a number of historical examples including the science of demography, the
birth of statistics (which etymologically links knowledge to statecraft), public health campaigns
and so forth. These interventions permitted power to invest life at the level of “populations”
and “species,” and to think of “living” as a complex relationship between material forms (like
wealth and resources) and social programmes (like policing, public health, and social
development). Under biopower fertility, illness, diets, habitation are subject to minute
observation. Issues such as geographical area and climate become paramount. Epidemics,
diseases, and famines are now carefully managed. In short, modern governments — from the
late eighteenth-century on — are not just concerned with their territory and the individuals
within it but with an economic, political, scientific and biological problem. This problem is
“life” which has now become a target of power. As Foucault elaborates: “Western man was
gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body,
conditions of existence, probabilities of life, and individual and collective welfare, forces that
could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner.”

What are we to make of this bio-regulation by the state, this “bio-power”? If in the
nineteenth-century we are confronted with a power that works to optimize life, a power that is
essentially “life-administering,” how come Foucault can tell us that “wars were never as bloody
as they have been since the nineteenth-century, and all things being equal, never before did
regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations”? In other words, how does biopower
relate to sovereignty — the power to kill and expose certain lives to violence?

Foucault attempts to answer this question through an ingenuous reformulation: if
sovereignty’s old right was “to make die or let live.” Today we live in a world in which a new
right is established “to ‘make’ live and to ‘let’ die.” ‘Making live’ — which is the power of

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38 The following summary owes much to Stuart Elden. "The War of Race and the Constitution of the State", op. cit.: 125-51
40 Foucault writes that "biopolitics deals with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem." Foucault. Society Must Be Defended, op. cit.: 245
41 Foucault. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, op. cit.: 142.
42 Ibid.: 136-137.
regularization or biopower — never entirely escapes the death function of sovereign power. Rather it redistributes its functions without terminating its effects. Accordingly wars today "are no longer waged in the name of the sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity. Massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed."  

There are two important points to all this. The first is to do with what Foucault describes as "the entry of life into history" (and thus into the orbit of political techniques) through a biopower whose "highest function" is to "invest life through and through."  

This investment describes how the management of life is increasingly included in our political systems. Foucault is not claiming that biopower was "the moment when the first contact between life and history was brought about," but that life is increasingly passed into "knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention." In other words, the politicisation of natural life, in its biological factness, outlines an important development in the relationship between geography, knowledge and power. Biopower marks a series of important connections between patterns of inscription (which invest life) and regimes of intervention (that produce forces to be modified) that are also, of course, productions and orderings of space.

The second important point concerns the creation of a certain tension between biology and history. What Foucault describes as "the entry of life into history" was neither a seamless nor unproblematic move. The development unleashed what he called a "new mode of relation between history and life" — a "dual position" — that placed life "at the same time outside of history, in its biological environment, and inside human historicity, penetrated by the latter's techniques of knowledge and power." This last sentence neatly summarises the contradictions and tensions that run to the core of biopower. It is as though the birth of biopower somehow captures life in an ambivalent fracture between biological determination and politically mediated existence. Although Foucault's gloss is hardly prolix it clearly does suggest that

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43 Ibid.: 137.
44 Ibid.: 141, 139.
46 Ibid.: 143. Emphasis added.
47 It is clear that Agamben analysis is profoundly related to this last point, but nowhere does he quote Foucault's statement on the "new mode of relation between history and life."
modernity's investment in life is riven by tensions. Indeed, the introduction of a distinction between a life that is biologically determined and one that is politically qualified is very suggestive of how racial markings might interpose a violent logic on a life administering power.  

The bare life of homo sacer

For Giorgio Agamben biopower imposes a similar ordering that he describes as an “inclusive exclusion.” Unlike Foucault, however, Agamben traces the genealogy of this paradox to Ancient Greece. The Greeks — unlike us — had no single word to refer to what we mean today by the term ‘life.’ Instead the Greeks distinguished between zoë: natural life and bios: politically qualified life. In other words, when classical political thinkers sought to define politics, they did so by setting it aside from natural life, which they thought of as an essentially private affair. The purpose of politics was therefore not simply life, but the attainment of the good or beautiful life. Only through political action could a good and truly human life be achieved. The point Agamben makes is that while these classical thinkers conceived of natural life as that which is outside the polis (the realm of politics), this natural life (zoë) is actually presupposed as that which must — at the same time — be excluded through its transformation (inclusion) into politically qualified life (bios). Hence natural life is, as it were, disavowed yet presupposed in biopolitics and it is this “inclusive exclusion” that enables the very existence of politics.

J.M. Bernstein helpfully summarizes Agamben’s thinking on the legacy of Greek politics: “From the moment in which men began to institute truly political forms of society, there arose the necessity to marginalise the claims of animal happiness ... The emergence of the political requires the systematic severing of the authority of nature. Severing the authority of nature, however, could not succeed if the claims of bare life were simply left outside the political, passed over and ignored. Rather, the fate of bare life was to be included in the polis through its exclusion ... For Agamben this structure of the inclusive exclusion of bare life is constitutive of

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49 "From the beginnings of political thought a separation was drawn between the culturally elaborated normative authority of the good life for man and the mere fact of life, whose goodness appears not as an authoritative claim, but rather, like the weather or the charms of the palette, as a contingent occurrence beyond the governance of reason or the laws of society." Bernstein, op. cit.: 3.
not just the political, but the sovereign political as the deepest expression of western metaphysics.”

Here Agamben is radicalising Foucault’s genealogy of sovereignty whereby “The sovereign ... evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring.” In Agamben’s judgment “the first foundation of political life is a life that may be killed, which is politicized through its very capacity to be killed.” Moreover, this twist on conventional definitions of sovereignty denotes that “the originary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment.” The law applies to life by no longer applying to it, by suspending itself. In the last instance the modern state, which is of course thoroughly vested in the principle of sovereignty, is not based on the constitution of a social contract, but on the latent power to “untie” all juridical obligations: “The [sovereign] tie itself originally has the form of an untying or exception in which what is captured is at the same time excluded, and in which human life is politicized only through an abandonment to an unconditional power of death.” In other words, the modern state increasingly places human life at the centre of its political order, but that this placement (or inclusion) is also a displacement (or exclusion). This is the logic of the Greek polis writ large.

This is where Agamben draws on Foucault and also departs from him. Like Foucault, the inclusion of life within politics produces a fracture (an inclusion and exclusion) but, in contradistinction to Foucault, he asserts “the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty.” This is important because Agamben’s paradigmatic example of “bare life” — the life that is politicized through its capacity to be killed — is the ancient Roman figure of homo sacer (meaning sacred man). According to Agamben this obscure figure of Roman law represents a life that may be killed but not sacrificed: “homo sacer belongs to God in the form of unsacrificeability and is included in the community in the form of being able to be killed. Life

50 Ibid.: 4.
51 Foucault. The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, op. cit.: 136.
54 This is why Agamben cites Saint Paul as an epigraph to his book: “And the commandment, which was ordained unto life, I found to be unto death.” Ibid.: 9, ix.
55 Ibid.: 83.
that cannot be sacrificed [excluded] and yet may be killed [included] is sacred life."\textsuperscript{56} Homo sacer is so resonant for Agamben because it embodies the paradox of bare life, a life drawn in an inclusive exclusion, or "state of exception," that makes sacrifice impossible but killing permissible. In the last instance, homo sacer represents a depotentiated "bare life" that can be killed without committing any crime — a phrase that has immediate resonance with the liminal status of famine deaths.

To summarise, both Agamben and Foucault agree that the politicisation of natural life is the profound turning point in the history of western political theory.\textsuperscript{57} But for Foucault, "the conception of modernity as biopolitics [involves] the transformation of the interest of the sovereign state from a power deciding over the life or death of those within its borders to an intrinsic concern with human life as such."\textsuperscript{58} Or as Mika Ojakangas helpfully glosses, with Foucault sovereignty organised around patria potestas gradually yields to a biopower animated by a life-administering maternus cura.\textsuperscript{59} With Agamben, however, sovereignty is not eclipsed but reaffirmed in the politicisation of bare life and its capacity to be killed. Agamben appears to defend what Foucault supposedly dismissed: "a persistent and illimitable sovereign power dealing death."\textsuperscript{60}

\textbf{Between limitless care and unconditional abandonment}

It should be obvious that when Agamben describes "killing" he does not mean simply murder as such, but like Foucault "every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on."\textsuperscript{61} This logic applies to many people today whose status as human beings makes killing them less than a crime. The spectre of the dispensable subject is present in warfare, for example, in the figure of the "civilian casualty," people killed or maimed not by any strict design as such, but because their lives and deaths are inconsequential.\textsuperscript{62} Similarly, and in a manner not unrelated to the present study, in a capitalist market when travesty befalls peoples

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Ibid.}: 82. In Remnants from Auschwitz Agamben extends homo sacer to the figure in Nazi camps known as the Muselmann. Agamben. Remnants of Auschwitz, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{58} Bernstein, op. cit.: 4.
\textsuperscript{61} Foucault. \textit{Society Must Be Defended}, op. cit.: 256.
\textsuperscript{62} This formulation is taken from Noam Chomsky cited in Gregory, op. cit.: 70.
and ecologies outside of the “cash nexus” of buyer and seller, it is recognised (if at all) as a “market externality.” How do we account for this violence that is so often devastating but apparently unaccountable? Indeed, it is possible to extrapolate this logic to consider the routine violence that characterises the experiences of internally displaced persons, stateless minorities, refugees, maquila workers, and famine victims — in other words, human lives exposed (often wilfully) to horrendous conditions that are very often fatal.

Clearly then there is a real tension (that is beyond any merely theoretical dispute) between a life subject to limitless care and a life subject to unconditional abandonment. For instance, Maria Margaroni believes that Agamben’s real insight is his attempt to account for the “un-heroic, unaccountable death” that marks the lives of so many unfortunates. As Margaroni argues Agamben is “trying to articulate a mode of bio-power that escaped Foucault, one emerging at the threshold between patria potestas (the sovereign’s fatherly power over life and death) and what Ojakangas calls ‘maternus cura’ (the biopolitical maternal care for all living).”

It is this threshold between a life subject to unconditional violence and unconditional care that I think is so resonant to the historical unfolding of the Irish Famine. What I want to lay emphasis on in the dissertation is the ways in which prior to the Famine Irish life was increasingly incorporated into the apparatus of the state (the biopolitical work of colonialism and capitalism is therefore incredibly important) and, also, how during the Famine a whole series of laws, administrative measures and institutional regimes were introduced and operationalised. In other words, violent exposure to death occurred inside a sophisticated apparatus of care and direction: aid was controlled, diets were managed, institutions were built, laws were passed and ideologies mobilised. When the *Times* newspaper described government policy toward Ireland as a “trial by letting alone” they unwittingly grasped the fate of bare life

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64 Margaroni’s summary is problematic. For instance she argues that Foucault’s ‘condemned man’ in *Discipline and Punish* is condemned within the community as its member, whereas Agamben’s *homo sacer* is characterised by his separation from the community: “His death is the result of his abandonment, not any sovereign decision over life and death.” However, Agamben clearly states that abandonment — and the state of exception — are deeply imbued in the exercise of sovereignty (indeed Agamben’s use of Carl Schmitt’s definition of sovereignty runs throughout the book: “Sovereign is he who decides on the state of the exception.” Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, op. cit.: 11). Nevertheless, the tensions between care and abandonment which Margaroni emphasises are useful. Margaroni, *op. cit.*: 35. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, op. cit.: 11.
that is included through its exclusion and that is politicised through its capacity to be killed but not sacrificed.\textsuperscript{65} Biopower is thus a sort of tension film linking together yet holding apart \textit{patria potestas} and \textit{maternus cura}: pure violence and limitless care. The task is to assess how exclusion, on the one hand, and a "supervening and tentacular" inclusion on the other are correlated in and through biopower and how this correlation wrecks devastation on the lives of some of the poorest and most vulnerable people.\textsuperscript{66}

There is much more that one could say about biopower. Indeed the literature on the topic is now enormous. However, I want to limit myself to sketching four additional remarks regarding the critical use of this concept. In Agamben's rush to 'correct' Foucault's original sketch much of the latter's historical insistence is lost. This is especially true with regard to Foucault's important comment that biopower was an "indispensable element" in the political economy of capitalism. "The latter would not have been possible," Foucault writes, "without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production [anatomo-politics] and the adjustment of the phenomena of the population to economic processes [biopolitics]."\textsuperscript{67} Not only does Agamben tend to ignore the intersections between capitalism and biopolitics (or at best, tends to perceive capitalism as a mere effect of biopower), he also seems to assign biopower a sort of transcendental essence that is deeply problematic.\textsuperscript{68} Secondly, both Foucault and Agamben discuss biopower as a technology capable of capturing 'life.' At times this all important 'life' seems rather nebulous and amorphous. In other words, both thinkers are shy in telling us how power targets specific populations (and not others in the same way) and how this biopower might function in relation to gender, race and class.\textsuperscript{69} Certainly, Foucault is less guilty of this, and in his lectures at the Collège de France we get a glimpse of his assessment of \textit{race} within biopolitical modernity. Nonetheless, what is glaringly absent (perhaps understandably in what are after all lecture-sketches), is the material framework that racism must necessarily address.\textsuperscript{70} A project such as this cannot address all of these shortcomings, but it clearly must

\textsuperscript{65} Cited in, Fegan, \textit{op. cit.}: 37.
\textsuperscript{66} Fitzpatrick, "Bare Sovereignty", \textit{op. cit.}: 7.
\textsuperscript{67} Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality, Volume 1}, \textit{op. cit.}: 141. In general I think Agamben pays too little attention to the productive processes of capitalism and its links to biopower — but see his suggestive comments concerning \textit{homo laborans} (after Hannah Arendt) and "bare life." Agamben. \textit{Homo Sacer}, \textit{op. cit.}: 3-4. See also Brett Neilson. "Potenza Nuda? Sovereignty, Biopolitics, Capitalism." \textit{Contretemps} 5 (2005): 63-78
\textsuperscript{68} Peter Fitzpatrick critiques Agamben's "enviably confident comparison[s]" between the archaic and the modern. Fitzpatrick. "'These Mad Abandon'd Times'.", \textit{op. cit.}: 258.
\textsuperscript{69} Margaroni, \textit{op. cit.}: 36.
\textsuperscript{70} Foucault. \textit{Society Must Be Defended}, \textit{op. cit.}: 239-263.
address some. In particular, if biopower is suggestive of society’s capacity to abandon certain people to starvation or, in effect, disallow them to live, it must be remembered that hunger is a terror in its own right. Travelling through County Roscommon in 1847 Alexander Somerville described how “the people are literally crawling to their graves, their eyes starting in their heads with stomach torture.”

Hunger terrorises particular lives, communities and ecologies. It is intensely material and this material factness cannot — must not — be forgotten.

Thirdly, it should be noted that however reticent Foucault and Agamben are in regard to race as a political calculus of biopower, both have virtually nothing to say about colonialism. In Agamben's defence it might to be said that he is offering a philosophical thesis and not an historical recital. Nevertheless the last part of the book Homo Sacer elaborates the argument that totalitarian politics was biopolitics writ large and that the concentration camp — in so far as it was founded on the “state of exception” — was the most “pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space.” It is curious, however, that Agamben begins this section of the book acknowledging that the first camps were in actual fact colonial camps (he names the example of the Boer war camps) and that one of the most obvious precedents for the “state of exception” is the proclamation of a “state of emergency” routinely declared in territories under colonial occupation. Although Agamben raises the matter, he fails to address its implications. Of course this is not to draw an equation between totalitarianism and colonialism. Rather is to

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73 This is, more or less, Agamben's own words. See “Non au tatouage biopolitique.” Le Monde 11 January 2004.
74 Agamben. Homo Sacer, op. cit.: 123.
76 Giorgio Agamben. State of Exception. Trans. Kevin Attell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 2005: 2. This neglect is doubly curious since Agamben is so obviously familiar with the work of Hannah Arendt who devotes a third of her justly renowned collection, On the Origins of Totalitarianism, to a history of imperialism. Agamben reproaches Arendt for ignoring the biopolitical in her study of totalitarianism. This is true, but to be fair, Arendt seriously engages with colonialism and capitalism — something Agamben fails to do. Other scholars have noted some of these oversights. In particular see Derek Gregory comments in Felix Driver, Steven Graham, Derek Gregory, Michael Watts. “Book Review Symposium.” Progress in Human Geography 29.3 (2005): 351-380; Mbembe, op. cit.: 11-40; Gerry Kearns. "Bare Life, Political Violence and the Territorial Structure of Britain and Ireland." Inhuman Geographies/Spaces of Political Violence. Eds. Derek Gregory and Allan Pred. New York: Routledge, Forthcoming.
77 This caveat is also important because of the emotive and controversial use of the term “holocaust” to describe the Irish Famine. The earliest association I have discovered occurs in John O'Rourke's study, almost a half century before the Nazi death camps. In chapter twelve O'Rourke's study, almost a half century before the Nazi death camps. In chapter twelve O'Rourke writes: “Every day, every hour produces its own victims — holocausts offered at the shrine of political economy.” John O'Rourke. The History of the Great Irish Famine of
insist on the fact — generally omitted in the literature — that the historical geography of colonial-capitalism is also replete with disturbing examples of biopolitical regulation. One need only think of the influence of Malthusian and Darwinian theories in aiding the colonial state to seize ‘life’ at the population level (Malthus) and the species level (Darwin) and, of course, the severe consequences of this biopolitical fracture producing, as it did, the idea of “surplus” bodies and inferior races. These absences and omissions are essential to the development of my argument.

**Faminescapes**

“What confronts us today,” Agamben writes, “is a life that as such is exposed to a violence without precedent precisely in the most profane and banal ways.”78 Faced with this knowledge “It would be more honest and, above all, more useful to investigate carefully the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime.”79 The aim of the dissertation is to consider how this “abandonment” — which is in fact an “inclusive exclusion” — is politically achieved. How are human beings stripped of political status and reduced to the expendable figure of “bare life” so that their deaths do not constitute a crime?

To begin to think through the implications of these questions, and how biopolitics relates to famine, means reworking many conventional theorisations, which tend to conceive famine as a failure, whether it be a failure of food production or the lack of food entitlements.80 Jenny Edkins argues that such theories do not entertain the thought that famines might be engineered from within the current politico-economic order.81 Developing the ideas of Amrita Rangasami,
Edkins further argues that famines ought to be seen as "a protracted politico-social-economic process," a product of existing arrangements of power, rather than its breakdown.  

Taking this injunction seriously I prefer to address "faminescapes" rather than the notoriously slippery term "famine." The former term has a double conceptual advantage. Firstly, it stresses that the word "famine" is a verb as well as a noun. Like other social phenomenon it is produced in and through particular performances — that is specific expressions and actions that constitute new states (including dearth, famishment, rightlessness, and mortality) through specific iterations. Secondly, it is hoped that the term "faminescapes" expresses the fact that these seemingly 'abstract' theorisations have, in the last instance, very real geopolitical coordinates. Famines are not only acutely corporal. They are also rooted in — and routed through — spaces that are material, imagined, and techno-political. Again the emphasis here is not on space as a 'container' of famines, but on the designation of space as a strategy of social control. 

In the chapters that follow I try to show that "faminescapes" were produced on at least three levels in nineteenth-century Ireland. This triumvirate will be employed throughout and so it makes sense to clarify terminology here.

1. DISCURSIVE. It has been claimed that Great Irish Famine was the first ever media famine — an event that was not only rehearsed but defined in the media. This interesting proposition prompts several others. In the first place, a number of studies have analysed how racial and cultural stereotyping can influence government decision-making.

Building on this research I want to broadly consider how discursive acts of inscriptions are connected to state regimes of intervention. How did pre-Famine portrayals of the Irish affect government strategies and did colonial stereotypes influence the administration of famine relief? In examining the production of instrumental knowledges — knowledges directed toward more effective government — I question how a monopoly on truth is assumed and the consequences for those who are considering incapable of representing themselves.86

2. **INSTITUTIONAL.** Famines are invariably played out in some form of institutional context. Irish hunger was governed through a number of institutional landscapes including the Poor Law workhouses, Soup Kitchens and Public Work schemes. In particular I explore how these relief programmes became vast experiments in the state control of “bare life.” In other words, I want to analyse the extent to which the machinery of famine relief became an important technology of biopower. How did certain spaces facilitate the deployment of power?

3. **POLITICO-JURIDICAL.** As I state above the task is to understand how a position of extreme rightlessness is imposed and maintained. How are certain people stripped of political status and reduced to bare life?87 Here I want to consider how acts of “politicide” are intimately connected to capitalist-colonial acts of subjugation.88 Capitalist-colonialism is implicated in biopower in so far as it involves the state extending its sovereignty over peoples and territories beyond its borders. As Mbembe has noted: “correlated to the new geography of resource extraction is the emergence of an unprecedented form of governmentality that consists in the management of the multitudes.” This management clearly involves an extension of power over the human being’s capacity to labour. How is “bare life” made manifest in the abject figure of the redundant labourer and the racialised figure of the subaltern? And how does this logic produce a radically rightless human being?

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86 Arundhati Roy insists that there is no such thing as ‘the voiceless’ only the wilfully silenced and the preferably unheard. Arundhati Roy. “Peace? Speech on Accepting the Sydney Peace Prize.” ZNet November 7, 2004.
These three levels — rhetorical, institutional and politico-juridical — examine how the Irish population were discursively constructed, institutionally managed, and politically and legally controlled and how this story relates to the unfolding of the Great Irish Famine.

Dissertation outline
Chapter one “Acts of Union” begins with an examination of Ireland’s colonial status. In this chapter I make the case that the colonial experience is pivotal — not incidental — to Irish history. In particular I want to show how the making and taking of space (politically, socially, and economically) is directly relevant to the loss of life during the Irish Famine. Running through the chapter is the idea that the colonial production and seizure of space necessitated various “acts of union” — serial performances which attempt to make good an original claim of possession. The larger argument is that there is a real evolution in colonial governance toward biopolitics and more careful methods of superintending Irish life, land and resources. These developments were largely at the expense of the majority of Irish people who were by the eighteen-forties extraordinarily vulnerable.  

Chapter two “Making Up People: Routines and Routines in the Production of Colonial Space” offers a critical account of how contemporaries responded to the scene of pre-Famine Irish life and how a rhetorical space opened up between ‘the satiated’ ‘the emaciated’ that disabled empathy and rationalised a death-dealing orthodoxy. In other words, it is an attempt to examine a rhetorical faminescape. I pay particular attention to how contemporary travel writing, political pamphleteering and the government commissions tackled the issue of Irish poverty. The chapter is intended as an analysis of popular geopolitics, one that takes seriously Amartya Sen contention that “The sense of difference between ruler and ruled — between ‘us’ and ‘them’ — is a crucial feature of famines.”

I explore this claim by focusing on how instrumental knowledges about Ireland and the Irish are produced. These knowledges try to make Irish life increasingly visible so that it might be more governable. Similar to modern scientific knowledge they attempt to “bring distant objects close to hand, rendering these transported objects manipulable and predictable.” As such these knowledges are replete with

89 Mokyr builds the concept of vulnerability into his analysis of the pre-Famine economy by questioning to what extent poverty reduced people’s ability to cope with “exogenous shocks.” Mokyr, op. cit.
“techniques which replace absence with presence [and] difference as distance with identity as proximity.” In fact, the colonisation of life by knowledge is actually structured like the “inclusive exclusion,” which brings life under its gaze, but not without mapping distinctions between the governed and governing — those who represent and those who are incapable of representing themselves.

In chapter three, “The Administration of Hunger,” I begin by discussing the drafting and implementation of an Irish Poor which was established in 1838, four years after the overhaul of the English poor law and just seven years prior to the first appearance of Phythophthora Infestans. This discussion connects the rhetorical constructions previously discussed with the vast social experiments in managing Irish poverty. After discussing the development of the Irish Poor Law I critically explore how the government responded to the appearance of blight in Ireland. As mentioned above, a plethora of institutional spaces — and legislative initiatives — were designed to address the problem of Irish hunger. A major part of this response involved the co-opting of the Poor Law as a famine relief strategy which had very severe consequences for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of Irish society. The larger argument is that the government’s relief arrangements enabled the state to virtually monopolise the means of subsistence for vast numbers of people and thus assume control over a radically depotentiated form of life. In other words, the government of relief slowly merged with the political regulation of “bare life.” The emphasis on regulation is quite deliberate since I also argue that the aid structures were increasingly bound up with long term goals aimed at radically restructuring Irish society. The colonial prerogatives of improvement were amalgamated with government relief measures.

The final chapter, “Rationalising Disaster: Thomas Carlyle and the Irish Question,” returns to the theme of discursive management during the Irish Famine examining Thomas Carlyle’s journeys in Ireland. Carlyle’s opinions on Ireland are significant for three reasons. First, the timing of his visits is immediately striking. Carlyle travelled Ireland in 1846 and again in 1849. These dates profile the beginning and the deadly culmination of the Great Irish Famine, and Carlyle’s response to these different famine landscapes is important. Secondly, even granting the abundance of Victorian tours in Ireland, it is difficult to find an equal to the person reverently referred to as the “Chelsea sage.” Carlyle was a respected Victorian figure and what he has to say about Ireland would command attention. Thirdly, Carlyle did not travel
Ireland alone. The well-known nationalist Charles Gavan Duffy accompanied Carlyle on both occasions. Duffy also published his own version of their sojourn which offers a vivid counterpoint to Carlyle’s perspective. A close reading of their journey (and subsequent arguments) might help us understand how particular political rationalities are forged at the “contact zone” of two cultures. Finally this chapter also considers Carlyle’s shift from being a critic of laissez faire to being a defender of property, arguing that this move parallels his propensity to qualify human value through environmental and racial readings of the Famine. I suggest that such calculations take us into the domain of biopower and capitalist political economy, perhaps the two most powerful forces directing the course of the Irish Famine.

**Conclusion**

Discussing my research with friends and colleagues I have often been asked why we need another book on the Irish Famine. The question is perhaps a reflection of other currents. Following the sesquicentennial commemoration of the Famine some media pundits complained that we had arrived at a new nadir of ‘famine fatigue.’ Why are we still talking and writing about the event? I must admit that I find such comments remarkable in their condescension. Not to mention the fact that so much about the Irish Famine experience remains hidden or ill-understood there is the obvious fact that we live in a world in which the spectre of starvation and routine malnutrition continue to haunt a depressingly large portion humanity. If “famine is conquerable” as de Waal and others insist then the figures released by the United Nations’ World Food Programme (cited above) are a strong indictment of our current political systems. How is so much of humanity still exposed to such violence? de Waal has recently suggested that contemporary famines are an important legacy of the nineteenth century thinking. It seems worth looking at this legacy a little longer.

In the following essays my aim is to bring another perspective to the study of the Irish Famine. Besides forays with new archival materials there have been a number of bold efforts to shift the theoretical lens on the Famine. Cormac Ó Gráda’s use of Amartya Sen’s entitlements theory is notable in this respect, as is Stuart McLean’s clever reading of Walter Benjamin to

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92 Mary Louise Pratt coins the phrase “contact zone” to signify: “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992: 4.

93 Alex de Waal. *Famine Crimes*, op. cit.: 1.

94 Alex de Waal. *Famine That Kills*, op. cit.
throw new light on how the Famine has been appropriated by History. One might also mention the interpretations contained in Chris Morash and Richard Hayes’ edited collection ‘Fearful Realities’: New Perspectives on the Famine. And indeed much more besides.

My own research builds from these and other efforts to engage with the Irish past in alternative ways. This dissertation does not — and cannot — lay claim to being an exhaustive treatment of the pre-Famine and famine period. I am especially aware that Irish acts of resistance are almost entirely absent from the following discussion. This is not because I want to render invisible the agency of the Irish or indeed their attempts to solve their own problems, but because the function of this dissertation is to explain the role of ‘government’ in the management of hunger and not the history of the Irish Famine per se. Moreover it is worth bearing in mind that Cecil Woodham-Smith spent ten years researching her pioneering book The Great Hunger (1962). Nowadays scholars are producing comprehensive tomes on the role of the Catholic Church during the eighteen forties or on the internal dynamics of the British parliamentary parties in that same period. Indeed, this short but very tragic period of Irish history is now a major research specialism in its own right. All the same there has been no attempt to apply Foucault’s insights to the Irish Famine and indeed very little attempt to engage with his writings in Irish Studies more generally. The lacuna is perhaps surprising given the recent interest in Irish postcolonial studies and the influence of discourse analysis more generally. Indeed, it seems to me that Foucauldian critiques attentive to how histories are

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97 There is also the common assumption that famines generally foster conditions of apathy and not resistance. This assumption does not hold for Ireland in the eighteen-forties. Nevertheless, I think there is some truth to Hannah Arendt’s assertion: “It is no doubt possible to create conditions under which men are de-humanized — such as concentration camps, torture, famine — but this does not mean that they become animal-like; and under such conditions, not rage and violence, but their conspicuous absence is the clearest sign of de-humanization.” Hannah Arendt. On Violence. op. cit.: 63.
forged through systems of production, modalities of representation and regimes of power, are particularly well-suited to interrogating the 'silent violence' of famine.

The moral imperative raised by famine is an increased intervention in the realm of "bare life." This is precisely why famine relief is very closely linked to development aid. According to de Waal, Georg Simmel captured the problem very well when "He identified the de facto (European) definition of the power as those to whom we give assistance, avowedly to correct their position, but in fact to prevent them from correcting their position for themselves." The famished, like the poor, are embodiments of "bare life" inclusively excluded through acts of charity and relief that are, in the last instance, regimes of correction and acts of political violence. Moreover when these efforts in correction go wrong the consequences are very often enormous for the underprivileged and inconsequential for the powerful. As Noam Chomsky has said: "There have been quite a few experiments in economic development in the modern era, and though it is doubtlessly wise to be wary of sweeping generalisations, still they do exhibit some regularities that are hard to ignore. One is that the designers seem to come out quite well, though the experimental subjects, who rarely sign consent forms, quite often take a beating." The following essays are an initial effort to begin thinking in this direction.

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Chapter One
Acts of Union

"Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area — of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations. The writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries."

— Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics."

"The mass of the people struggle against the same poverty, flounder about making the same gestures and with their shrunken bellies outline what has been called the geography of hunger."

— Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth.

Introduction

It is important to distinguish Victorian attitudes toward Ireland and the Irish from those of previous centuries. After all in situations of structured, continuous contact it seems reasonable to expect an array of dispositions, attitudes and perceptions, not to mention different tactics of domination and counter-strategies of subversion. However, the analysis of such differences will inevitably throw up some continuity, and here the researcher is presented with a number of difficulties. Significantly, studies of the immediate pre-Famine period are not as common as one might expect and among the studies available there are very few accounts that position the Famine within a historical geography of colonialism. In 1975 Peter Gibbon declared: "The occasion for all this [suffering] is well known — successive failures of the potato crop, the stable diet of half the population. Less well known are the circumstances in which this situation arose, and their relation to British colonialism." Precisely twenty years later, marking the sesquicentennial commemoration of the blight, Kevin Whelan could still assert that the "colonial context ... [is] too often ignored in our recent analyses of nineteenth-century Irish
Since then a good deal of work has been done to address this oversight. In particular the diverse writings associated with the Field Day Company are noteworthy. By and large, however, the contemporary historical opinion on the Famine has been little affected, a fact which at least partially reflects the fractious and ongoing debate regarding the applicability of colonial models to Irish history more generally.

It must seem a little odd, then, that Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The Great Hunger* (the most popular account of the Famine and possibly the most popular Irish history book of all time), frames the Famine in relation to Ireland’s political subjugation. In fact one could argue that it is precisely this focus that some historians find so jarring. For instance it is often implicit in revisionist scholarship that the historical legacy of the Famine is a sort of false consciousness resulting from an unhealthy reliance on a small but vocal coterie of nationalist writers. Liam Kennedy, for instance, critiques the nationalist mythology of “incomparable oppression” of which the Great Famine plays a central role. Published in 1962, *The Great Hunger* is sometimes seen as exemplary of this mythological tradition. For example, D.G. Boyce has said

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4 Field Day began with the founding of the Field Day Theatre Company (1980) by playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea. The company’s first production was Friel’s play *Translations*. What began as an artistic collaboration became a politico-cultural project designed to question the stultifying stereotypes of ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland and notions of cultural identity more generally. In 1990 the Field Day commissioned a series of pamphlets by three prominent scholars — Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Edward Said — who have all made significant contributions to literary criticism, history, politics, cultural studies and postcolonial theory. See Terry Eagleton, Frederic Jameson and Edward Said. *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. The company also launched *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 5 volumes (1991-2002), and a number of important monographs as part of its *Critical Conditions* series (1996-present). Most recently (Spring 2005) Field Day launched a new peer review journal called *Field Day Review* under the editorship of Seamus Deane and Breandán Mac Suibhne.


7 Kennedy, op. cit.: 217. Significantly Kennedy’s own book hardly mentions the Great Famine (it is not cited in the author’s subject index) and his chapter on the “Union of Ireland and Britain, 1801-1921” virtually skips over the disaster.

8 In 1963, for instance, undergraduate students at the Department of History, University College Dublin, were assigned the question: “*The Great Hunger* is a great novel. Discuss.” Cormac Ó Gráda. *The Great Irish Famine*. London: Macmillan, 1989: 11. There is now huge, broad and often rancorous debate on revisionism from which a post-revisionist school has emerged. See Roy Foster. "We Are All Revisionists Now." *The Irish Review* 1 (1986):
that "writers as diverse as Cecil Woodham Smith and the IRA leader, Ernie O’Malley, shared a common view of the Famine as a kind of genocide." Boyce’s “kind of” is a weasel phrase. In fact, Woodham-Smith rejects the “genocide—race murder” interpretation of the Famine, and does so explicitly. But even less polemical assessments tend to attribute too much to Woodham-Smith’s gripping narrative. It must not be forgotten that colonial and anti-colonial narratives were contemporaneous with the Famine and not simply the product of later historical work. Moreover, Woodham-Smith’s conclusions are, in some instances, far more moderate than her detractors might like to suggest (see Box 1.1). Nevertheless, until quite recently, historical interpretations loosely following Woodham-Smith’s research were characteristically derided as ‘emotive,’ a rather unfair tag which performs the double-task of dismissing these narrative whilst promoting other, presumably more objective accounts.

**Box 1.1 Famine, historiography and the politics of anachronism**

Woodham-Smith adopts a widely used form of apologetics that we might call the politics of anachronism. Rather than suggest that nature was to blame, or that famine was inevitable, many historians claim that it is ‘unhistorical’ to judge past generations according to present criteria. This view is clearly seductive. For instance, Mary Daly writes that “it does not appear appropriate to pronounce in an unduly critical fashion on the limitations of previous generations.” Peter Gray (by no stretch of the imagination a ‘revisionist’) believes that: “Historians risk falling into gross anachronism in attempting to pass judgement on long-dead individuals.” Margaret Crawford also asserts: “to believe it [the British government] could have interfered with private markets is simply anachronistic.” Likewise Woodham-Smith concludes *The Great Hunger* with the following caveat: “The eighteen-forties, however, must not be judged by the standards of today; and whatever parsimony and callousness the British Government displayed towards Ireland, was paralleled seven years later by the treatment of their own soldiers which brought about the destruction of the British Army in the Crimea.”


11 In the same article Peter Gray concludes that: “The charge of culpable neglect of the consequences of policies leading to mass starvation is indisputable. That a conscious choice to pursue moral or economic objectives at the expense of human life was made by several ministers is also demonstrable.” Of course, the difficulty in squaring Gray’s two sentences is partly my point. Peter Gray. “Ideology and the Famine.” *The Great Irish Famine*. Ed. Cathal Póirtéir. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995: 87, 103.


13 Woodham-Smith, *op. cit.*: 405.
There are in fact two charges of anachronism here. The first relates to evidence and the second pertains to historical judgement, although they are both clearly related. For instance the claim that it is “simply anachronistic” to say the government could have interfered with the markets is only tenable if one ignores a vast body of evidence which demonstrates very direct interference in the markets in favour of property. In other words, the charge of anachronism is not supported by the evidence.

Moreover, the charge of anachronism pertaining to acts of historical judgement is also problematic. There is the clear suggestion that we should be less critical of ideologies that were popularly endorsed such as laissez faire. However, this moral relativity is unhelpful. Should we equally excuse slavery because of the prominence of racist thinking? Moreover, at a purely historical level it is difficult to square claims of anachronism (in “attempting to pass judgement”) with contemporary expressions of moral outrage as the Famine unfolded. For example, the contemporary English writer Spencer Hall questioned “is not such annihilation, if it could be prevented and is not, national murder?”

Travelling through some of the poorest parts of Ireland in 1847, William Edward Forster noted in his diary that the landlords “as a class ... are unable to keep their peasantry alive. Their blood, therefore, will be at the doors of all of us who, being able, are unwilling to help.” Later he pronounced that: “No one of us can have a right to enjoy either riches or repose until, to the extent of his ability, he tries to wash himself of all share in the guilt of this fearful inequality, which will be blot in the history of our country and make her a byword among the nations.” S.G.O. Osborne felt that “The British lion has indeed here so mangy an appearance, that every Briton of common decency would have inclined to disclaim all connection with the unhappy animal.” Whatever else such statements say, they are a fair reminder that critical judgements were never the exclusive province of Irish nationalists. To proclaim “who are we to judge them?” is always a politically loaded question. This is as true today as it would have been in the eighteen-forties. Indeed it is anachronistic to suddenly forget this fact.

Of course there are exceptions. I have already mentioned the writings of Field Day which are exceptionally attentive to the significance of colonialism. Beyond this group of scholars, historians James Donnelly, Peter Gray, Christine Kinealy and Kerby Miller have all published research which explores, sometimes directly, though more often implicitly, the relationship between colonialism and the Irish Famine. In particular Kinealy’s A Death-Dealing Famine, writes the history of the eighteen-forties back into a story of “dispossession and

16 Ibid.: 198.
disunity,” and a recent chapter in the excellent book Was Ireland a Colony? adds more depth to her earlier assessment. Significantly, none of these interventions have prompted anything like the ridicule directed at Woodham-Smith. Indeed, the return of the repressed is noted by Kinealy, who adds, quite correctly, that recent publications on the Famine have come a lot closer to agreeing with many of Woodham-Smith’s original conclusions. Even so a great deal of theoretical and substantive work remains to be done. The Great Hunger was published in 1962 before the great wave of decolonisation in the non-European world and the advent of postcolonial studies as a vibrant research field in its own right. Meanwhile in Ireland the sesquicentennial commemorations have come and gone and despite professions of ‘famine fatigue’ we are still without a substantial monograph that addresses the Famine as a colonial experience.

This chapter does not — and cannot — attempt to redress this fact, but it does make the case that an understanding of how space is historically produced and seized is directly relevant to the tremendous loss of life during the Irish Famine. It has of course been said (by Joel Mokyr) that the unprecedented upheaval in landownership, particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, had a precipitous impact on nineteenth-century Irish life. What is lacking, however, is a thorough understanding of how presumably past colonial actions of politico-military violence continued to impact Irish livelihoods in the nineteenth-century. True, colonialism is always about the taking and plundering of territory, but these aims are achieved by remarkably different means. It is important, therefore, to understand the various ways in which Ireland became what Foucault would call a “field of intervention” for English and later British colonisation. There is, as Terry Eagleton has said, “a question about different levels or

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19 Ibid.: 156.
20 Ibid.: 156.
dimensions to colonialisation." The historical development of colonial governance in pre-Famine Ireland is precisely what I want to explore in this chapter.

In what follows I prioritises three colonial moments in particular: the foundation of the Pale, the plantations and confiscations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the Act of Union in 1801. I describe these 'colonial moments' as iterative performances — or "acts of union" — that attempt to make good an original claim of possession. What is 'possessed' here is obviously of the utmost importance. The Pale, for instance, produced a barbarous race that lay quite literally "beyond the law" but which were subsequently 'included' through the extension of English jurisdiction. The plantations and confiscations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were justified by appealing to an uncivilised Irish or 'Old English' culture and its potentially corrosive effect on central government. The extension of Crown control

Although Ireland cannot be called simply a 'colony' like, for instance, the Spanish colonies in the New World or the Dutch colonies in the East Indies, Tudor policy in Ireland was certainly inspired by colonialist attitudes, and often looked towards Spanish policy in America for inspiration. The status of Ireland as kingdom, with a parliament (albeit one excluding, on various counts, native representation) is the main difference between Ireland and a colony proper. But in other respects (the expropriation of the land, its distribution among immigrant settlers, the social establishment of these settlers as a new ruling class, the submission of the native population both in social and economic terms, their employment as providers of cheap labour, the subordination of the country's internal economic interests to those of the 'mother country') Ireland did have the character of a colony. Plantation policy even in its nomenclature had a colonial connotation - the English colonies in North America were also known as plantations. And although slavery as such was not established in Ireland, the actual position of the labouring population in rural areas, especially under the penal laws of the eighteenth century, was one of complete social and economic dependence on the landlord, and lacking most elementary civic privileges. Isolated instances of slave deportations, e.g. to the West Indies, occurred during the Cromwellian settlement.


thus posited an indigenous population that was to be “inclusively excluded” through Anglicisation. In a similar way, the Act of Union which became law in 1801 made Ireland a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However, through political legerdemain the Catholic majority were politically disenfranchised leaving them especially vulnerable to the precipitous effects of economic amalgamation with the world’s most advanced industrial nation. I want to show that these very different colonial actions actually extended powers hold over life, in ways that are obviously different in terms of immediate circumstance, violent intensity, political mentality and so forth, but similar in presupposing (and inclusively excluding) ways of life that are deemed to be dangerous or wretchedly different. To the extent that this is true, ‘colonialisation’ may be said to work on “bare life,” which is to say a life of radical rightlessness.27

In the pre-Famine decades the utter wretchedness of Irish life and the perilous position of the Irish peasant in particular, is vividly portrayed by government officials, economists, and travel writers. I will examine these accounts in some detail in the next chapter since they offer an important glimpse at Irish conditions, contemporary thought on poverty and race as well as politico-economic prescriptions for relieving what public intellectuals euphemistically referred to as the ‘Irish Question.’ Writing within the socialist tradition, however, James Connolly was one of a few writers to conclude that this pitiful position was ultimately the reflection of an historical geography of exploitation. In *Labour in Ireland* Connolly describes what he considered to be the lot of the typical Irish peasant: “Politically he [sic] was non-existent, legally he held no rights, intellectually he sank under the weight of his own social abasement, and surrendered to the downward drag of his poverty. He had been conquered, and he suffered all the terrible consequences of defeat at the hands of the ruling class and nation who have always acted upon the old Roman maxim of ‘Woe to the vanquished.’”28 The peasant that Connolly describes is of course an exceedingly depotentiated figure which calls to mind Agamben’s *homo sacer*. I want to try and locate the production of this bare life through various colonial strategies. To begin with I focus on politico-military violence and particular strategies of occupation, dispossession and banishment. I argue that these conquests paved the way for political structures


of reform, fiscal programmes, and development ideologies that also advanced their own form of colonial violence. This political geography offers one explanation as to how the pre-Famine peasantry were "without control of the land and the means of life generally" and how this *de facto* position influenced the historical unfolding of the Irish Famine.\(^{29}\)

**Colonial law and the Pale**

Ireland's colonial history is long and complex. Early raids by Scandinavian Vikings brought Ireland its first settler populations since the Celts arrived in 400 B.C.E., but the country's political association with England did not begin until the Norman conquests (1169-1315).\(^{30}\) The prelude to invasion was both fractious and farcical. Two Irish kings Dermot MacMurrough and Tiernan O'Rourke enjoyed a longstanding hatred. In the course of their feuding MacMurrough abducted O'Rourke's wife, Derbforgaill, and though subsequently recovered, O'Rourke continued to hold grievance. Hatching a series of cunning alliances O'Rourke gained the upper-hand, and forced his archrival to flee Ireland. Not to be easily outdone MacMurrough repaired to the court of Henry II, then Norman king of England, to reclaim his lost territory and title. Through Henry's intercession MacMurrough was able to enlist the aid of the legendary Norman leader Strongbow. In exchange for the aid of the Norman war machine, MacMurrough promised his daughter's hand in marriage as well as the succession rights to his kingdom. The deal was agreed and the first Norman troops arrived at Bannow Bay in 1169. There quickly ensued a series of pitched campaigns in which the Normans (aided by MacMurrough's men) managed to capture the important Viking centres of Waterford and Dublin, routing O'Rourke and his allies en route. As if sensing success MacMurrough took ill, never to recover, and his reclaimed title reverted to Strongbow. Nominally, Strongbow and his troops were acting on behalf of Henry II, but the King feared that Strongbow planned to establish an independent kingdom in Ireland. In a pre-emptive move, the Henry travelled to Ireland — reinforced by a show-case retinue of men — and was decreed feudal lord of Ireland in 1171. Abductions, collaborations and serendipity: under such auspices English intervention in Ireland began.\(^{31}\)


\(^{31}\) Significantly, many post-Union travelogues on Ireland — which I discuss in detail in the following chapter — include a history of British intervention in Ireland. A good example being, Sir Richard Colt Hoare. *Journal of a Tour in Ireland, A.D. 1806*. London: W. Miller, 1807.
Like the Vikings they succeeded, the Norman settlers preferred to seize the fertile lowlands, consolidate their hold in urban centres, and allow indigenous rivalries to unfurl around them. Their settlements were inevitably piecemeal, and in time they merged with the indigenous populations, often adopting their language and customs. Nonetheless the Norman settlement established a vital precedent that was to be seriously augmented during the Tudor reconquest of Ireland (1485-1603). During the fourteenth and fifteenth-century, English rule was effectively confined to a small political-juridical tract of land popularly known as “the Pale.” The boundaries of the Pale extended north from Dublin to Dundalk, inland from the coast as far as Naas and snaking south to capture the settlement of Bray (see Figure 1.1). In response to the recalcitrance of the indigenous population the English Crown convened a parliament at Kilkenny, the place that lent its name to the infamous Statute in 1336. Written in Norman-French the Statute of Kilkenny sought to criminalise the use of the Irish language, manners of dress and other indigenous customs. For instance, it was ordained “that no alliance by marriage, gossipred, fostering of children, concubinage or by amour, nor in any other manner, be henceforth made between the English and Irish.”

To ride a horse “otherwise than on a saddle in the English fashion” was deemed illegal and to sell horses or armour to the Irish was treasonable offence. Equally it was “ordained and established, that every Englishman do use the English language, and be named by an English name, leaving off entirely the manner of naming used by the Irish; and that every Englishman use the English custom, fashion, mode of riding and apparel, according to his estate; and if any English, or Irish living amongst the English, use the Irish language amongst themselves, contrary to the ordinance, and therof be attainted, his lands and tenements, if he have any, shall be seized into the hands of his immediate lord.” The legal proscription of cultural difference was coterminous with acts of economic regularisation.


33 “A Statute of the Fortieth Year of King Edward III.” op. cit.

34 Ibid.

35 The sale of victuals was to “be reasonably regulated.” Merchants and their merchandise were to present themselves before a mayor, seneschal, bailiff or provost, to negotiate prices and taxes. Ibid.
Figure 1.1: The Pale
In a sense the Statute of Kilkenny repeats earlier legislation to the same effect, but its occasion and tone suggest a smouldering fear that colonial power was radically ineffectual. To the extent that the statute criminalised indigenous life it also directed its edicts and norms at the settlers themselves who were forbidden to adopt such modes of living. Acculturation was made a criminal offence. Herein lies the suggestive power of John Lynch’s famous epigram that the early settlers steadily became *Hiberniores Hibernicis ipsis* (more Irish than the Irish themselves). Today many historians still refer to the Normans as the “old English.” Indeed Englishness, like Irishness, was not a stable identity. It could, therefore, be subject to an unsettling cultural overhaul — a sort of colonisation in reverse. Hence colonial demarcations and differentiations required constant surveillance and reaffirmation. The cultural porosity of the contact zone was what Nicholas Canny referred to as “the permissive frontier.”

The Pale was thus a geographical reflection of a crisis in power, another early instance of what MacCarthy-Morrogh describes as “the dark fears of the classic embattled settler.” It was with reference to the “barbarous” Irish living outside the Pale that the English phrase “beyond the pale,” meaning beyond the law, originates. Early colonial law clearly recodified — and spatialised — its own retrenchment in the face of a recalcitrant indigenous culture. But this retrenchment can be overstated. As Martin Heidegger points out: “A boundary is not that at which something stops, as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something...”

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39 John Morrissey helpfully discusses various “axis of cultural blending” that are typically reinforced in colonial societies through the “perennial necessity of networking.” Morrissey. "Cultural Geographies of the Contact Zone", *op. cit.*: 560-61.


begins its presentencing. As we shall see, the Pale was an early attempt at policing cultural difference through presentencing politico-cultural norms. Thus the Pale is neither a perimeter nor a frontier. It is properly speaking an inside-outside dialectic — at once topological and topographical — which constitutes differences (the ‘civilised’ and the ‘barbarous,’ those inside the law and those literally beyond it) precisely as it attempts to erode them. The law is directed at ways of life that are deemed dangerous and therefore must be excluded through their inclusion within a normalising law. This calls to mind subsequent attempts to legislate indigenous language and religion out of existence. I will return to this argument momentarily.

Colonial policies gathered pace under Tudor rule. Following Henry VIII’s break with Rome, Catholic Ireland was thought to be a strategic threat to the Crown. As a consequence Henry duly proclaimed the Kingdom of Ireland (1541) — replacing the earlier Lordship of Ireland — and embarked upon a series of “plantation” schemes that were later continued and expanded under the reign of Elizabeth I (see Figure 1.2). Henry sought to convince many of the Gaelic and Anglo-Irish lords beyond the Pale that he could guarantee superior security by presenting them with a legal title to their lands. Forty of the most important lords “surrendered their lands to the crown and received them back in capite by re-grant.” The policy, known as “Surrender and Regrant,” proved to be a successful but ultimately limited platform for colonisation during the Tudor period. As Seán Duffy relates:

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42 Cited in, Homi Bhabha. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge, 1994: 1
43 Dudley Edwards and Hourican, op. cit.: 156.
The job of making English landlords out of Irish warlords might eventually prove possible, but not without a lot of effort pushing square pegs into round holes. The Principle of primogeniture that underpinned English common law — the system by which the eldest legitimate child succeeds to all property and titles — ran directly counter to Irish practice, where bastard sons had as much right as legitimate offspring, lordship could not pass through the female line, and, most importantly, there was no automatic right to succession by an eldest son: if he succeeded his father it was only because he had proved himself to be the obvious choice, frequently only after lengthy and bloody succession dispute with, perhaps, a brother or cousin.\textsuperscript{45}

However, the most common form of colonisation was of a more coercive nature. It involved the confiscation of land and the replacement of indigenous farmers with English and later Scottish planters. In response to insurrection Edward VI imprisoned O'Connor of Offaly and O'More of Laois and declared their lands forfeit. Under Mary Tudor a plantation scheme for Laois and Offaly was prepared in 1556. One hundred and sixty families, mostly from the Pale and England, were granted estates.\textsuperscript{46} Indigenous resistance was quite strong and the lands bordering the newly planted estates suffered internecine strikes that ultimately led to the settlements' failure.\textsuperscript{47}

The plantation policy really gained momentum under Elizabeth's rule. In 1583 the Earl of Desmond was killed during a rebellion and Elizabeth saw an opportunity to re-create what historian Jane Ohlmeyer terms "the world of south-east England" in Munster.\textsuperscript{48} Accordingly, in 1586 she confiscated 374,628 acres in counties Cork, Limerick, Kerry and Waterford.\textsuperscript{49} This massive deterritorialisation was followed by an equally ambitious project of reterritorialisation: landed estates of 12,000, 8,000, 6,000 and 4,000 acres were awarded to thirty-five English landlords and some 20,000 settlers "who vowed to introduce English colonists and to practise

\textsuperscript{46} Dudley Edwards and Hourican, \textit{op. cit.}: 157.
\textsuperscript{47} In other instances, small colonies of English settlers were “planted” to provide ideal farming communities for the indigenous populations to emulate. These exemplary plantations — promulgating civilisation \textit{by example} — are an interesting archetype of the agricultural schools and the ideology of “scientific farming” that became so popular in Ireland during the nineteenth-century. For comments on the civilising work of agricultural schools see Harriet Martineau. \textit{Letters from Ireland}. London: J. Chapman, 1852: 11ff; William Makepeace Thackeray. \textit{The Irish Sketch Book}. 1859. London: John Murray Ballantyne Hanson, 1985. For a description of wealthy Scottish, English and Irish farmers beginning agricultural operations in Galway during on the Famine see James H. Tuke. \textit{A Visit to Connaught in the Autumn of 1847: A Letter Addressed to the Central Relief Committee of the Society of Friends}. London: Charles Gilpin, 1847: 6.
\textsuperscript{48} Ohlmeyer, \textit{op. cit.}: 137.
\textsuperscript{49} Dudley Edwards and Hourican, \textit{op. cit.}: 157.
English-style agriculture based on grain growing. Sir Walter Raleigh was allotted the prize settlement of 40,000 acres. Although the “Munster Plantation” was only partially successful (only a portion of the confiscated lands were actually settled and even this was not financially rewarding) it was a significant lesson in colonial governance. It was far more systematic than any previous plantation and it proved the rule that large numbers settlers were vital if the plantation was to be a success. By the end of the sixteenth-century 12,000 settlers were actively engaged in farming on the confiscated estates and many inhabitants “now wore shoes (rather than brogues), English caps, stockings, breeches, and jerkins, while an ever-increasing number of people spoke English.”

However, as Ruth Dudley Edwards and Bridget Hourican observed, as far as plantation policy was concerned Elizabeth was above all a pragmatist. When McMahon of Monaghan was “attainted” (see Box 1.2.) in 1591 and his estate forfeited, Elizabeth allotted the lands between two local lords. Elizabeth’s approach was doubtlessly a response to the political climate and the necessity of maintaining local alliances, but it also epitomised a significant element of colonial thought that viewed the imposition of English legal and administrative procedures as the best means of achieving political stability and native enlightenment. This was not, necessarily, an ideological contest between conciliatory policies and more punitive practices. After all colonial discourse often works to dress a de facto imposition as a civilisational gift. Such calculations are clear, for instance, when in a report in 1576 Sir William Gerard asked “can the sword teache theim to speake Englishe, to use Englishe apparel, to restrayne theim from Irish axactions and extotions, and to shone all the manners and orders of the Irishe. Noe it

50 Ohlmeyer, op. cit.: 137.
is the rodd of justice that must scower out those blottes." In other words, disciplinary practices often worked within reform policies as a “strategy of conquest.”

Box 1.2. The law of attainder

Under English law, up until the nineteenth century, “attainder” was the legal consequences of judgement of death or outlawry, in respect of treason or felony. It resulted in the forfeiture of estate, both real and personal. The latter implied a corruption of blood, so that the condemned could neither inherit nor transmit by descent, and generally, the extinction of all civil rights and capacities normally granted to the person. In other words, a person outlawed lost the right to seek legal protection.

It is worth recalling that “Surrender and Regrant” conferred legal titles on lands that previously existed, as it were, outside the Pale of the law. In other words, its purpose was to bring lands and titles outside the law under the wing of English rule and government. However, this inclusion within the law was also an act of exclusion.

Clearly, under the law of attainder an outlawed life is seized in an inclusive exclusion whereby the law applies to life by not apply, by suspending itself. The outlaw is brought within the pale of the law only to be placed beyond it. This structure of inclusive exclusion permits an outlaw to be convicted of crimes, have his/her property forfeited or to be executed, all without the benefit of a legal trial. Here the outlaw is a clear manifestation what Agamben figure of homo sacer — a bare life that can be killed without committing a crime.

It could be argued that the law of attainder actually embodies the territorial structure of the Pale, based as it is upon those who are literally inside the law and those who are beyond it. It is hardly

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56 Cited in, Ohlmeyer, op. cit.: 133-34.
57 Clare Carroll argues:

Many of the policies thought of as ‘reform’ by the early modern English in effect destroyed indigenous cultural, economic and political institutions. Such policies as surrender and regrant, which abolished Gaelic titles and entailed the surrender of ownership and use of land to the English sovereign; composition, which imposed only once one tax to the English crown but in so doing abolished the customary support of local Gaelic lords; the new colonies of Munster and Ulster, which sought to make more profitable use of land ad in the process displaced native inhabitants; and martial law itself which imposed capital punishment with out trial — all were thought of as ‘reform’ by the early modern English in Ireland.

Clare Carroll. Circe’s Cup: Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Ireland. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001: 12. Other scholars tend to view coercion and conciliation as warring ideologies. Seán Duffy writes that: “the same conflict between coercion and conciliation underlay British policy towards Ireland until the twentieth century.” Seán Duffy, op. cit.: 97. See also note 95 and passim.

surprising that the law of attainder was applied to other English colonies (though it was also enforced for treasonable acts within England). Indeed, one of the motivations for the American Revolution was frustration at the injustice of attainder. For my own purposes attainder reminds us that the extension of English jurisdiction (what William Gerard called “the rodd of justice”) across Ireland was also an act of political violence. In such cases, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon, we could say that for the native justice is what is directed against them.⁵⁹

These early plantation schemes proved largely unsuccessful until Elizabeth paved the way for the most extensive plantations of Ulster. Her successful conclusion of the bloody Nine Years War (1594-1603), and the later flight of the Ulster aristocracy to continental Europe (an exodus which became known as “Flight of the Earls”⁶⁰), created a crucial power vacuum which the newly appointed King James I moved to exploit.⁶¹ In contrast to earlier schemes, the plantation of Ulster confiscated large swathes of land. Six counties were involved in the ‘official’ plantation: Armagh, Fermanagh Cavan, Coleraine (renamed Londonderry), Donegal and Tyrone.⁶² Of the 3.8 million acres confiscated, 1.5 million acres were

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⁵⁹ Fanon actually wrote “For the native objectivity is always directed against him.” Frantz Fanon. The Wretched of the Earth. New York: Grove Press, 1963: 77.

⁶⁰ Duffy cites a Gaelic poet’s reaction: “If Providence has ordained that Ireland, a new England in everything but name, should henceforth be in the hands of enemies, it is fitting to bid farewell to that Island.” Séan Duffy, op. cit.: 103.


⁶² Dudley Edwards and Hourican, op. cit.: 159.
either partly or wholly infertile (see figure 1.3). This land was to be re-granted to the indigenous Irish. According to the Articles of Plantation of Ulster (1609), there were to be three divisions of settlers:

Undertakers: Scots and English of high rank who were to be allocated estates of 2,000, 1,500, and 1,000 at a rent of £5 6s. 8d., per acre. They were to be allowed only English and Scots tenants.

Servitors: These comprised mainly administrators or military men who were allocated estates of similar proportion at a rent of £8 per 1,000 acres. Irish tenants were to be permitted only in limited cases.

Native Irish: These paid £10 13s.4d per acre and were allowed Irish tenants. Their estates were usually between 100 and 300 acres.

The principle was that only a small number of native settlers would be retained and only on condition that they assumed English modes of dwelling and farming. Ideally this allowed the new colonists to concentrate in groups rather than on ‘islands’ or ‘pockets’ of land. Their geography was to be bounded and exclusive as otherness continued to play an important role in demarcating the frontiers of empire. As John Morrissey writes: “outright dispossession ... was frequently the endgame of differentiation.”

In practice, however, the Irish population was neither completely removed nor wholly Anglicised. Although new English and Scottish planters did arrive in substantial numbers they often had to allow Irish tenants in order to make their estates viable. In addition to these state sponsored schemes, private plantations were established in Antrim and Down, which proved to be remarkably successful. By 1618 there were estimated to be 40,000 Scots in Ulster. Indeed, before the end of James’ reign additional plantations were established in Leitrim, Westmeath, King’s County, Queen’s County, Longford and Wexford, although with only limited success.

The consequence of these plantations was to fortify the power of a new elite, loyal and largely Protestant aristocracy. At the end of the Tudor monarchy, and despite the early

63 Ibid.: 159.
64 Ibid.: 159; Ohlmeyer, op. cit.: 138.
65 Seán Duffy, op. cit.: 109.
66 Morrissey, "Geography Militant", op. cit.: 166-76.
67 Dudley Edwards and Hourican, op. cit.: 159.
68 Kennedy discusses the Longford settlements focusing on how the Protestant community fared between 1660-1921. Kennedy, op. cit.: 1-34.
confiscation schemes, 90 per cent of the land remained under Catholic ownership. By 1641, and mainly as a result of the Ulster Plantations, there were estimated to be 100,000 Protestant settlers in Ireland (comprising 30,000 Scots and 70,000 Welsh and English). Still vastly outnumbered by Catholics (at around 15-1), the colonists now controlled 41 per cent of the land. However, by the time of James II accession to the throne in 1685, the new settlers possessed nearly 80 per cent of the land, following Oliver Cromwell’s vicious campaign to put down a Catholic rebellion in 1641 and the subsequent Jacobite war in Ireland.

The Irish rebellion had been fierce and bloody and Cromwell returned in kind when he and his army of 3,000 Ironsides landed in Ireland in early August 1649. Following a number of decisive military encounters the rebellion was utterly shattered. Surviving Irish officers surrendered on terms that allowed them to recruit in military service overseas. Those who were reduced to penury and beggary because of the conflict were transported to the West Indies as indentured labour. After the military conquest parliamentary commissioners were sent to Ireland “to suppress Catholicism, to make provision for a puritan ministry and for the education of reliable and ‘godly ministers of the gospel.’” Roman Catholic bishops and clergy had a price put on their heads, were hunted down, killed, imprisoned or banished. Mostly importantly, however, the military defeat paved the way for fresh round of confiscations, transportations (or ‘transplantations’ as some historians prefer) and redoubled plantation schemes (see Figure 1.4). Following the customary forfeiture of rebel lands a series of Acts between 1652-53 decreed that Irish landlords who were entitled to hold onto their estate would be transported west of the river Shannon to the lands in Connaught and Clare.

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69 Ohlmeeyer, op. cit.: 139.
71 Seán Duffy, op. cit.: 109. The Scot Presbyterians were also targeted to a lesser degree.
72 Ibid.: 116, 118.
Thus Cromwell was said to have driven the rebellious Irish either "To Hell or to Connaught," but according to some descriptions there was little difference: "It was into this barren province [Connaught] that the Irish were driven by Cromwell. They were forbidden to appear within ten miles of the Shannon, or four of the sea, and, if they evaded the stringent passport system which was established, they were doomed to death without trial, although it was said with truth that certain parts of the province did not contain 'wood enough to hang, water enough to drown, or earth enough to bury a man.'"\(^{73}\)

All told some 11 million acres were appropriated across Leinster, Munster and Ulster though clearly this cantonisation of the rebel population also involved huge confiscations within Connaught and Clare.\(^{74}\) Of huge consequence too was the confiscation of all properties in towns and cities held by rebel forces. Crucially, as Denis O'Hearn points out, this meant that Catholic merchants were excluded from local government and *ipso facto* the structures of economic and political power.\(^{75}\)

The waves of war, confiscation and banishment paved the way for a "Protestant Ascendancy."\(^{76}\) Future rebellion was to be quashed by a "complex body" of anti-Catholic legislation — stretching from the end of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth-century — that became collectively known as the Penal Laws.\(^{77}\) Woodham-Smith describes these punitive acts in the following words:

> In broad outline, they barred Catholics from the army, navy, the law, commerce, and from every civic activity. No Catholic could vote, hold any office under the Crown, or purchase land, and Catholic estates were dismembered by an enactment directing that at the death of a Catholic owner his land was to be divided among all his sons, unless the eldest became a Protestant, when he would inherit the whole. Education was made almost impossible, since Catholics might not attend schools, nor keep schools, nor send their children to be educated

\(^{74}\) According to Ruth Dudley Edwards and Bridget Hourican 35,000 soldiers plus 1,000 adventurers were originally apportioned land, although it is thought that fewer than a quarter of this number actually settled in Ireland. Dudley Edwards and Hourican, *op. cit.*: 161.
\(^{76}\) The Treaty of Limerick, which ended the Jacobite rebellion in Ireland, resulted in another exodus of the native aristocracy later referred to as the "Flight of the Wild Geese." It is estimated that a further one million acres of land were confiscated.
\(^{77}\) The Law school at the University of Minnesota provides a concise summary and full text of the penal legislation between the years 1691-1759. The material may be searched in chronological order or by subject matter. http://www.law.umn.edu/irishlaw/index.html (accessed June 12, 2005).
abroad. The practice of the Catholic faith was proscribed; informing was encouraged as ‘an honourable service’ and priest-hunting treated as a sport.\textsuperscript{78}

Contemporaries were no less stringent in their criticisms. The Irish born statesman and author, Edmund Burke famously decried the Penal Laws in the following terms: “IT HAD a vicious perfection — it was a complete system — full of coherence and consistency; well-digested and well-disposed in all its parts. It was a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance and as well-fitted for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.”\textsuperscript{79}

These sectarian acts were buttressed by a number of important economic sanctions. According to a recent assessment by Denis O’Hearn, the Navigation, Cattle and Wool Acts were especially important in terms of securing what O’Hearn calls a negative economic path dependency.\textsuperscript{80} For example, Navigation Acts in 1660, 1663, 1670, 1671 and 1696 — “a rather invisible episode in Irish colonial history” — excluded Ireland from importing most American plantation commodities.\textsuperscript{81} Likewise the Cattle Act of 1665 prohibited the exportation of Irish cattle to England, and the Wool Act of 1699 banned the export of Irish wool to any country other than England.\textsuperscript{82} These acts had disastrous consequences for Irish trade; indeed most acutely in the case of live cattle where exports plummeted from 37,544 in 1665 to 1,054 in 1669.\textsuperscript{83}

O’Hearn’s research is exemplary in insisting that the exceptions (his emphasis) to these acts affected Irish economic development just as much as the restrictions they imposed. For instance, the Wool Act cushioned the English wool market from competition on the continent as well as facilitating the transition to linen production in Ireland. Similarly, by restricted Irish exports of live cattle, the Cattle Act encouraged a transition to the provisions trade (including

\textsuperscript{78} Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 22.
\textsuperscript{79} Cited in, Diarmuid O’Muirthe, ed. A Seat Behind the Coachman: Travellers in Ireland 1800-1900. Dublin: Gill Macmillan, 1972.; i. Seán Duffy provides an important gloss: “Of course the strict letter of the ‘popery laws’ was by no means always enforced, and, in any case, under the terms Catholics could still practice their religion, but they must do so from a position of utter inferiority, political, social, and economic. It is important too to note that in addition to Catholics, Protestant dissenters were also kept in an inferior position. The 1704 Act had a clause enforcing a sacramental test repugnant to dissenters, the refusal to take which debarred them, like, Catholics, from public office and from military employment.” Seán Duffy, op. cit.: 122.
\textsuperscript{80} O’Hearn, op. cit.: 4.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.: 8-9.
\textsuperscript{82} Kinealy. A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 20; O’Hearn, op. cit.: 8-11.
\textsuperscript{83} O’Hearn, op. cit.: 10.
the exportation of cattle in barrels), an expansion in sheep husbandry, and the exportation of wool to England. According to O’Hearn, “trade restrictions were designed to not only to suppress Irish competition with England but to encourage Irish production of commodities that were crucial to England’s Atlantic commercial project.” Properly speaking these ‘acts of union’ were not punitive but disciplinary: they suppressed some behaviours as they incited others.

Crown control and statute book colonialism

These historical geographies are important to tell in order to question the more crude assumptions of Irish “underdevelopment” in the pre-Famine decades. The story of conquest is also the story of uneven geographical development as a result of foreign intervention. This point is lost without an understanding of the colonial past and its contested histories of occupation, warfare, confiscation, banishment, politicide and ethnocide.

By the end of the eighteenth-century it was clear that the bulk of the Irish population lived in abject poverty. “They had ceased to be a nation,” wrote Paul Dubois, “and became instead an inert mass of exhausted and hopeless people.” In his imaginative biography of Daniel O’Connell, Sean O’Faoláin describes the “awful slow withering-away of the eighteenth century” that was repeatedly evoked by contemporaries: “Every single historian of that century has spoken of her [sic] in terms of some disease, and the best phrase of all says that she was like a body dragging itself about with one half already dead. That dead half was the past, alive only in memory, and slowly rotting even there.”

In his History of the Poor Law in Ireland, George Nicholls, the Irish poor law commissioner (whom we will deal with at length in the following chapters), glosses this period of Irish history in an entirely different and revealing way. According to Nicholls by the eighteenth-century: “we no longer see any allusion to the ‘Irishry’ as a separate race. All are, brought within the pale of the law, or it may rather be said that the law and the pale have
I emphasise this last sentence in particular because it is remarkably suggestive of a dramatic shift in colonial affairs. In the fifteenth-century “the Pale” not only symbolized but territorialisod the impotency of colonial law: what lay beyond the pale (the “Irishry”), lay beyond the edicts and norms of colonial rule. In this regard we have already noted that many of the prohibitions under the Statute of Kilkenny were directed at the settler class within the Pale and not the far more substantial indigenous population beyond it. In reality the Pale symbolised the impotency of English rule and government as well as the fears of acculturation. According to Nicholls, however, by the eighteenth-century a new modality of colonial law is in force. He seems to be suggesting that the law has now captured what remained outside and beyond it. In his words: “all are brought within the pale of the law.” Since an ‘outside’ no longer exists there is no longer any reference to any outlawed “Irishry” in the statute books. He also implies, however, that the law has accomplished this — the seizure of its outside — in a significant and peculiar way. In effect, the colonial state does not rid itself of the Pale, but rather captures and internalises its politico-juridical structure as the prevailing modality of power. In other words, the Pale is not overwritten, but writ large upon the colonial landscape.

In light of subsequent history the transposition outlined by Nicholls is certainly naïve and perhaps triumphantistic. Nonetheless, I am interested in this formulation for two related reasons. Firstly, he seems to be implying that the law not only captures the “Irishry,” but the Pale itself (the law and the pale have become conterminous). Since the Pale was basically a structure of exclusion, colonial law has in fact been included an exclusion. Clearly this act of “inclusive exclusion” approximates Giorgio Agamben’s understanding of sovereign power, which also involves a taking of the outside. According to Agamben: “The ‘ordering of space’ that is ... constitutive of the sovereign nomos is therefore not only a ‘taking of land’ ... but above all a ‘taking of the outside,’ an exception.” Agamben argues that the “inscription of the outside of the law within the law” means that “the originary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment.” Here we need to recall that Agamben means “abandonment” in a very particular way. Borrowing from Jean Luc-Nancy he writes: “The tie itself originally

has the form of an untying or exception in which what is captured is at the same time excluded, and in which human life is politicized only through an abandonment to an unconditional power of death.”\textsuperscript{91} The human life that is politicised in this way is in fact “bare life.”\textsuperscript{92}

As I have suggested already, it must be borne in mind that Agamben is offering a philosophical thesis and not an historical recital. His work on biopower is really a departure point for interrogating how the state becomes involved in the government and administration of life. Given the earlier discussion it is clear that colonialism and capitalism also extend power’s hold over life. As regards thinking through how these different productive processes might intersect I find the writings of Marxist geographer David Harvey quite useful. Especially relevant for my purposes is Harvey’s privileging of an “inside-outside” dialectic in the historical geography of capital accumulation.\textsuperscript{93} In The New Imperialism, Harvey persuasively argues that capitalism perpetually seeks something “outside of itself” in order to continue to accumulate. Historical examples of the process include Marx’s theory of the industrial reserve army and the recourse “structural adjustments” for the purposes of continued accumulation. Harvey names this predatory “inside-outside” dialectic “accumulation by dispossession.”\textsuperscript{94} Although Harvey’s research ignores biopower, the importance he attaches to capitalism’s capacity to manufacture its external settings rubs well with Agamben’s understanding of sovereign power as above all the “taking of the outside.”\textsuperscript{95}

\textsuperscript{92} “[T]he decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life — which is originally situated at the very margins of the political order — gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside an inside ... enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. At once excluding bare life from and capturing it within the political order, the state of the exception actually constituted ... the hidden foundation on which the entire [Western] political system rested.” Agamben. Homo Sacer, op. cit.: 9. See also Peter Fitzpatrick. "Bare Sovereignty: Homo Sacer and the Insistence of Law." Theory and Event 5.2 (2001): 14.
\textsuperscript{93} Kearns also relates this aspect of Harvey’s work to Ireland. Gerry Kearns. "Bare Life, Political Violence and the Territorial Structure of Britain and Ireland." Inhuman Geographies/Spaces of Political Violence. Eds. Derek Gregory and Allan Pred. New York: Routledge, Forthcoming.
\textsuperscript{94} “Accumulation by dispossession” is clearly derived from Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation. Harvey prefers a new term because he wants to insist that ‘primitive’ or ‘original’ accumulation is an “important and continuing force in the historical geography of capital accumulation through imperialism [my emphasis].” Harvey is drawing on Hannah Arendt’s work. David Harvey. The New Imperialism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003: 140-144.
\textsuperscript{95} Harvey’s rather simplistic discussion of the liberating potential of humankind’s “species being” is a case in point, though it must be said, the role of the body in the process of accumulation is brilliantly examined in his essay “The Body as an Accumulation Strategy.” See David Harvey. Spaces of Hope. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
With this in mind I would like to turn back to Nicholls’ observation. The historical incorporation of the “Irishry” within the pale of the law seems to exemplify the gradual incorporation of bare life (“originally situated at the very margins of the political order”) inside the political realm. When Nicholls states that there is no longer an allusion to the “Irishry” as a separate race he is not implying that they cease to exist but that they have been “inclusively excluded” in the new colonial order. But if we can now append Harvey’s insights on predatory capitalism, we see that the economic logics of empire are also at work. The process of endless accumulation means that peoples, places and resources ostensibly outside the productive processes — in so-called ‘peripheral’ zones — are relentlessly brought into its sphere of capital’s influence. Engels and Marx had warned that the endless accumulation of capital would engineer something like a colonisation of the life-world (“it must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere”), while Harvey’s own work testifies that capital’s dilatory propensities are always riven with violent tension: “The aggregate effect is ... that capitalism perpetually seeks to create a geographical landscape to facilitate its activates at one point in time only to have to destroy it and build a wholly different landscape at a later point in time ... Thus is the history of creative destruction written into the landscape of the actual historical geography of capital accumulation.” The tensions which Harvey alludes to, as well as the endless colonisation by capital which Marx and Engels prophesise, bear more than a cursory resemblance to the structure of inclusive exclusion.

I am interested in how these arguments illuminate the historical geography of colonialism I have been tracing. Nicholls’ formulation suggests that the inclusion of the Irish under English jurisdiction was ultimately an exclusionary act. Indeed, I have been arguing the attempts to secure English jurisdiction reproduced “bare life” within the political order. Mary Tudor was the first sovereign to realise that it was necessary to import settlers in substantial numbers, not to guarantee military supremacy and greater security, but to change the entire composition of the Irish society. Furthermore, James I recognised that the “re-peopling” of Ireland could not take place without the systematic importation of large numbers of settlers.

99 Indeed, the accumulation of capital requires new labour power as well as new landscapes making Agamben’s definition of “bare life” as the site of an “incessant decision on value and non-value” all the more resonant. Agamben. *Homo Sacer*, op. cit.: 153.
100 Dudley Edwards and Hourican, op. cit.: 155.
Thus the extension of English jurisdiction (an inclusion) actually meant Anglicisation (an exclusion). When King James characterised indigenous communities as “half-subjects” he was prefiguring the bare life on which geopolitical strategies would be imposed.\(^1\) The brutal Cromwellian confiscations which followed changed the whole ownership of land throughout Ireland. Property was forcefully transferred into Protestant hands; a project which most historians admit played a huge role in exacerbating the vulnerability of the majority of Catholics who were almost wholly disenfranchised.

Nicholls also identifies a general historical trend away from pure violence toward more meticulous methods of governing. This is what could be called ‘statute book colonialism.’ The “Irishry,” formerly beyond the law, are now inscribed within the law and governed by its edicts and norms. Harvey’s theory of “accumulation by dispossession,” relying as it does on an inside-outside dialectic, provides an interesting explanation for this transition. The political and military conquests I have charted were in effect tactical deterritorialisations that paved the way for new waves of reterritorialisation by power and capital. The need for greater control over Irish people and resources compelled new and more meticulous ways of managing the population. Violence does not ceases to exist — far from it — rather it is increasingly refined and channelled through alternative matrices, namely the state and its juridical arm, the law.\(^2\) As I have argued the exclusionary nature of colonial law actually guarantees the inclusion of bare life.

The movement from war to politics, or more precisely, the subversion of the former within the latter, helps explain why so many contemporary observers resorted to the language of war to explain the theatre of politics. Such comments come from across the political spectrum. Thus one English juror declared: “You may track Ireland through the statute book, as you’d follow a wounded man through a crowd — BY BLOOD.”\(^3\) The American traveller, W.M.S. Balch (who quoted the latter) thought that the ferocity and violence of earlier centuries was simply superseded by more ingenious forms of subjugation. His description of nineteenth-century Irish life is worth quoting from:

\(^{101}\) Morrissey, “Contours of Colonialism”, op. cit.: 97.
The ‘god of war’ has been exchanged for the ‘golden calf,’ which receives a devouter homage and costlier sacrifice than the former ever did. The sacrifices are not the flesh and blood freely spilled in valorous deeds of chivalry, nor the hideous tortures of savage barbarity, which have marked the ages that are past. They are the wearing, tearing, carking cares of money-getting, which eat into men’s souls, and, like a stimulating drink, urge forward din courses of extravagance at first never contemplated. The vassals are no longer led to battle, weaponed and fed, at the lord’s expense. They are sent into the field to work and starve. The will is conquered, and a tame submission to oppression long enforced, has destroyed all consciousness of self-dignity and hope of social redemption, so that the peasantry, or vassals, now live in a condition of constant dependence and patronage more servile and humiliating than existed in the sunniest days of feudalism.

John Mitchel’s study, The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps), is another example of the tendency to resort to the language of war to explain the theatre of politics. Mitchel describes how Ireland slowly perished according to the rules of political economy in terms that surpass Balch’s cynicism regarding the “carking cares of money-getting.” It would, of course, be wrong to say that Mitchel ignores the cowing potential of brute military force — the “horse, foot and artillery” that scars the historical geography of Ireland. However Mitchel’s overriding emphasis is on the detailed processes of “relieving” and “ameliorating,” which for him epitomise the dreary “consummation” of Ireland’s conquest in the decades preceding the famine: “They were to be ameliorated out of their lives: there was to be a battue of benevolence.” “For, in the nineteenth century,” Mitchel declares, “civilized governments always proceed upon the most benevolent motives.” Different though these accounts doubtlessly are Nicholls, Balch and Mitchel are in agreement that that the “Irishry” were to be increasingly governed through compacts of reform, civil process and “money-getting.” It is on the aims and consequences of such programmes that they differ.

Hannah Arendt noted that “violence has always been the ultimo ratio in political action and power has always been the visible expression of rule and government.” The contested

104 Ibid.: 59.
108 Ibid.: 92.
historical geography of early modern Ireland seems to verify this point. However, Arendt also argued that the presence of violence exposes a true absence of power: "Violence can always destroy power; out of the barrel of a gun grows the most effective command, resulting in the most instant and perfect obedience. What never can grow out of it is power."109 This thesis is interesting in regard to changes in British colonial policy in Ireland. Indeed the history of colonial violence might be construed as an attempt to establish "effective command" and "perfect obedience," whereas the preservation of colonial rule requires substituting the mechanisms of power for the machines of violence. Violence might win power, but it can scarcely maintain it for long.110

The dilemma of those that seek power is how best to create and maximise control. Can politics take the place of war as the theatre of subjugation? These questions address something of what Foucault meant when he famously inverted Clausewitz's formula to conclude that politics is the continuation of war by other means.111 They also bring us back to the geopolitical sutures between capitalism, colonialism and biopolitics. The use and control of external resources, territories and bodies is precarious business requiring constant refinement, deeper levels of administration, and more careful methods of superintending the fabric of life. In Ireland a long and bloody history of direct and violent colonial intervention was slowly giving way to another form of tyranny buried in statute books, legislative reforms, fiscal ideologies and property rights.

Again it is difficult to state this as a complete and categorical schism between campaigns of extermination and projects of expropriation (historical geographies are never so pure), but there does seem to be a real attempt to transpose violence into rule by government.112 John

110 Arendt also discusses the much feared "boomerang effect" of colonial violence, where a regime of aggression in faraway lands is repatriated to the empire, meaning in the case of England, "that the last 'subject race' would be the English themselves." Arendt On Violence, op. cit.: 54. Foucault very clearly borrows this idea in a lecture given at Collège de France. See Michel Foucault. Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège De France 1975-1976. Trans. David Macey. Ed. Arnold I. Davidson. New York: Picador, 2003: 103. The Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw also understood this lesson when he allegedly called for 'home rule for England,' the implication being that the first and last colony of Great Britain was England. Indeed, Declan Kiberd finds much the same argument in Oscar Wilde. Kiberd, op. cit.: 44.
111 "We are always writing the history of the same war," he declared, "even when we are writing the history of peace and institutions." Foucault. Society Must Be Defended, op. cit.: 15-16.
Morrissey is right to take issue with the tendency to examine Tudor Ireland through a narrative of reform. "Reconquest and not reform," he writes, "was ... the end narrative for Tudor Ireland."\(^{113}\) Morrissey reads the controversy between reconquest and reform as the difference between colonialism in *theory* versus colonialism in *practice*.\(^ {114}\) The focus on biopower suggests that we need to consider a third possibility of reconquest through reform. To paraphrase John Mitchel we might say that there was real attempt to ameliorate the "Irish Question" out of existence. This is relevant to what historians usually refer to as the Whig or liberal tradition which sought legislative answers to colonial questions.\(^ {115}\)

In the next section I want to analyse this development in colonial rule in the period after the political union of Great Britain and Ireland. My argument is that the structure of exclusion through inclusion is played out during the pre-Famine period primarily through acts of economic exploitation that have direct bearing on the situation in Ireland during the eighteen-forties.

**Acts of union: Irish Questions and Colonial Answers**

On New Years Day, 1801 the Act of Union came into effect and a new political entity, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, was born. The immediate motive for the act was an unsuccessful insurrection in 1798 which nearly proved the axiom that ‘England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity.’ The American colonies had been lost and a war of attrition was about to get underway with Napoleonic France. The rebellion might have been crushed, but the knowledge that Irish rebels marched to the tune of the ‘Marseillaise’ (they were assisted by French armaments, troops and money and ‘infected’ by Republican ideology) remained seditiously fresh. Any future Franco-Hiberno alliance had to be pre-emptively snuffed and the Act of Union was fashioned and promoted as a useful soft pillow. Since the Act was neither popular nor consensual a divide-and-rule strategy was important: if the Protestant Ascendancy could be bought and maintained, then the Catholic majority could be ignored. The former feared the latter more than the British Government and the promise of cushy administrative posts proved enough to secure the deal.\(^ {116}\)

Cecil Woodham-Smith writes: “After bribery on a scale..."
such as history seldom witnessed, and a generous distribution of places and titles, 'Union titles,' the Act of Union became law.\textsuperscript{117}

The Act effectively wrested formal political autonomy from an Anglo-Irish (and almost exclusively Protestant) minority in Dublin and placed it under the guardianship of Westminster. The "injured lady" of Ireland, to employ Jonathan Swift’s sobriquet, was now married at last.\textsuperscript{118} Other contemporaries described the act as a brutal rape comparing Ireland to an "heiress whose chambermaid and trustees have been bribed, while she herself is dragged, protesting, to the altar."\textsuperscript{119} "From the present perspective," one historian writes, "the act seems most startling for its assumptions that union could be decreed, that Ireland could be made politically one with England [sic], and that modern politics and economic necessity could override the enduring distinctions between both islands."\textsuperscript{120} In fact the naming of the new political and legal entity, the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland," unwittingly crystallised these "enduring distinctions." The awkward conjunction ‘and’ actually inscribes difference even as it attempts to erase it.\textsuperscript{121} Indeed, as Stephen Greenblatt and others have shown, colonial acts of naming — like territories themselves — are always unstable and open to contestation.\textsuperscript{122} For this reason they require additional rituals of authentication, ranging from the re-narration of history to the execution of military and economic policies. For this reason I chose to follow Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan’s emphasis on "acts of union" — serial performances which attempt to make good an original claim of possession.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{117} Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 10. For another perspective on the union at odds with the claims made here see Kennedy, op. cit. Kennedy’s account is problematic for a number of reasons but none so important as the fact that it completely skips over the famine period. As Kennedy candidly admits, his own scholarship vis-à-vis the historiography of the Union is quite exceptional in that it considers the principal fault of the Union is the fact that it did not go far enough.


\textsuperscript{119} Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 10.


According to the labour historian W.P. Ryan, the Union legislated Ireland “into a dreary absurdity.”\textsuperscript{124} Ireland was to be represented by a mere 100 MPs out of a total of 656, whereas by population and revenue the people were entitled to 175 MPs.\textsuperscript{125} On religious grounds the vast majority of Irish remained politically rightless. As part of the relaxation of the anti-Catholic penal laws a forty shilling franchise had been extended to Ireland in 1793. This gave Catholics (with at least a forty shilling freehold) the right to vote, although they were still disqualified from sitting in parliament. The full repeal of the Penal Laws and the granting of Catholic emancipation had been promised as a condition of Union; however, within weeks of the Act the government reneged on its promise following serious pressure from King George III. In the absence of direct political control through a home parliament policing the franchise was pivotal to maintaining Protestant hegemony. This was usually achieved through intimidation and threat. In the days before secret ballots “tenants were generally the obedient electoral followers of their landlords, who held over them, in the social way, the power of life and death.”\textsuperscript{126} Demographically this was a volatile situation and increased Catholic pressure — headed by Daniel O’Connell (see Figure 1.5) and the Catholic Association — led to the eventual granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829. In a cynical move, however, the government used the occasion to raise the franchise from forty shillings to £10, hoping to undercut O’Connell’s electoral base. Moreover, according to Ryan the smallholders were no longer politically functional. Previously “the more voters the greater the political power and influence of the landlords; so small holdings found favour in their eyes. But along with Catholic Emancipation went the sinister scheme of raising to £10 the rating value that gave the tenant the vote. The small holders were of electoral consequence to the landlords no longer.”\textsuperscript{127} “At one foul stroke,” wrote Charles Gavan Duffy, “the electors of

\textsuperscript{124} Ryan, op. cit.: 30-31.


\textsuperscript{126} Ryan, op. cit. Compare this contemporary description: “The Irish landlords are ... still worse than the great Polish and Russian proprietors; for they so far take an interest in the affairs of their dependents, as to assist the peasant in the repair of his cabin; and are also compelled to furnish him with sustenance in time of famine. But this is not done by the Irish landlord. Yet his tenant is a free man: he can go away whenever he chooses. He has almost all the inconveniences of slavery (he is entirely dependent on his master; the lash only is wanting — a fact which must be thankfully acknowledged,) without enjoying the advantages resulting from the sympathy and kind foresight of his master. So, also, he has all the inconveniences of freedom, (want, care, hunger,) without being able to enjoy one of its advantages.” J. G. Kohl. Ireland, Scotland, and England. London: Chapman and Hall, 1844: 20-1.

\textsuperscript{127} Ryan, op. cit.: 19-20.
Ireland [were] reduced from 200,000 to little more than twenty thousand."  

Even after the Reform Act in 1832 only about one person in every eighty-three was entitled to vote, while the Franchise Act of 1850 increased this to one vote for every forty persons.  

In other ways, the Act of Union proved to be a political setback for the majority of Irish people. The Union rolled back grudging concessions granted toward the end of the eighteenth-century. The Renunciation Act (1793); for example, recognised the jurisdiction of the Irish courts and acknowledged the exclusive right of Ireland to legislate for itself. The Union demolished these concessions by simply making them irrelevant. Although the British parliament maintained a right to repeal the Union, Ireland — as O'Connell perceptively accused — was denied this same privilege. Moreover, O’Connell’s aggressive agitation for Catholic Emancipation did nothing to diminish the widespread grievance at having to pay tithes for the upkeep of the Established Church of Ireland. Under Penal legislation anyone working the land had to pay a tax or tithe, usually amounting to 10 per cent of the agricultural produce, for the maintenance of the Anglican Church (the knowledge that this practice was all too common in countries where the Catholic Church was in ascendancy did little to ingratiate Irish Catholics). In any case, many Irish were simply unable to make payment, and tithes were regularly collected under force of arms by the Irish Constabulary (‘Royal’ from 1867). The distraiment of property and the seizure of livestock in order to line the pockets of protestant clergy “whose ministrations they never attended and whose religion they detested” became the source of great bitterness and sectarian strife (see Figure 1.6). Moreover, the same clergy were often ministers of ghost parishes. In 1834, for example, the Anglican population in Ireland was less than that of the diocese of Durham. Yet it was superintended by no less than four archbishops and twenty-two bishops, and claimed national revenues amounting to nearly £800,000. Three-quarters of this sum came from tithes paid by more than six million Roman Catholics, while their own priests depended entirely on voluntary contributions. These

129 S. J. Connolly, op. cit.: 35.  
131 See Mitchel, op. cit.: 29.  
132 James Connolly, op. cit.: 146.  
134 Ibid.: 146  
135 See the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography entry on Richard Whately (1787-1863)
difficulties led to the so-called Tithe War of 1831-1836, or what James Connolly anachronistically refers to as the “first movement against the forces of privilege” in Ireland.

These tensions are important, but by far the most divisive issue of the post-Union period remained the vagaries of economic amalgamation. After securing Catholic Emancipation, Daniel O’Connell — “The Liberator” — began a campaign of mass mobilisation for the repeal of the Union with Britain. Undoubtedly, his most persuasive platform was that the Union made and kept Ireland poor. Descriptions of Ireland during this period invariably agree on the country’s dire poverty, although there has always been considerable dispute regarding its causes. Clearly, the issue of poverty needs to be considered in a number of ways. Cultural prejudices were certainly significant. At a time when England was becoming the most industrialised nation in the world, Ireland was regularly depicted as one of the poorest countries in Europe. Of course there was destitution in England, but it wasn’t perceived in the same light as Irish poverty. Irish poverty was frequently depicted as a dearth of character rather than resources or wealth and in this way it worked as a yardstick to measure civilisational development. Indeed

it is arguable that poverty became the civilisational discourse *par excellence* in the immediate post-Union period (see the following chapter). In an important quantitative survey the economic historian Joel Mokyr has reasonably hypothesised that Irish poverty reduced the people’s resilience to cope with “exogenous shocks.”¹³⁷ This argument surely needs to figure in any analysis of pre-Famine conditions, but it also seems important to question the economic conditions in Ireland in light of the colonial history and geopolitical logics I have just sketched. The increased marginalisation and vulnerability of a significant portion of the Irish population might be seen as another stage in the amplification of colonial rule thereby blurring the boundaries on what we might consider to be an “exogenous shock.”¹³⁸ In the analysis that follows I attempt to make this case.

The Union established a free trade zone between Ireland and Britain with a few duties preserved for a finite time in order to protect Irish manufacturers. Originally, the financial systems (including coinage) of the two countries were to remain distinct, but shortly after the end of the Napoleonic wars, in 1817, the British and Irish exchequers were amalgamated and 1826 a common currency was legislated. Whether an independent Ireland would have been able to withstand the competing might of its rapidly industrialising neighbour is of course debatable, but the union of two vastly unequal trading blocks, the exposure of Irish industry to international competition, and the shift from domestic production to large-scale manufacturing, amounted to something akin to ‘shock therapy’ for Ireland. The market logic of specialisation and rationalisation contributed to the decline of the rural, largely cottage-based spinning industry. The linen trade especially suffered, while the cotton industry eked out a more protracted existence owing to the continuance of duties for the first two decades after the Union. “By the 1820s the Lancashire cotton industry, like the Yorkshire woollen, was gradually strangling all opposition in the British Isles.”¹³⁹ The exception to this story was an industrial belt based around Belfast, where a *mechanised* linen trade greatly profited by the new faith in the market.¹⁴⁰ In the next chapter we shall see that many contemporary travellers viewed this

¹³⁷ Mokyr, *op. cit.*: 6.
¹³⁸ Mokyr analysis of Irish underdevelopment is brilliant, although he is somewhat sceptical of the more “radical tradition” of Irish historiography. Mokyr, *ibid.*: 286. But see Eagleton. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger, op. cit.* 1-26; Gibbon, *op. cit.*: 131-39.
¹³⁹ Dudley Edwards and Hourican, *op. cit.*: 186.
instance of industrial success as proof of racial superiority rather than as a change in comparative advantage.141

Other urban centres were not so fortunate. Dublin was particularly hard hit. Its traditional manufacturing sector in shipbuilding and silk were virtually wiped out while its coachmaking, glass and tannery industries were substantially reduced.142 Henry Inglis reviewed the situation in 1834: “Dublin formerly possessed an extensive, safe, and very lucrative commission trade from both the West Indies and England; but the facilities of steam-navigation are now so great, that the country dealers throughout Ireland, who formerly made their purchases in Dublin, now pass over to England, and there lay in their stocks.143 This pattern was echoed in many of the smaller Irish towns where rural emigration only added to the general misery.

Even so Ireland was a predominantly rural society where the potato economy reigned supreme. The root was introduced to Ireland sometime in the late sixteenth-century reputedly by Sir Walter Raleigh, although debate over precise origins still flourishes.144 It originally functioned as a supplementary food (and ironically as a standby to famine) amidst a more varied diet of vegetables, milk, butter and, occasionally, where wages permitted, pork and fish. However, during the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth-century the Irish diet underwent “profound changes” as the reliance on the potato substantially increased.145 Ireland produced a variety of foodstuffs, including various grains, cattle, pigs and dairy produce; however, as alternative sources of income vanished, the produce that would have diversified the Irish diet was sacrificed to feed an export trade in “cash-crops” and livestock. At Youghal in Co. Cork, for instance, Inglis observed that the exports — corn, cattle, pigs and butter — far exceeded the

141 And not just contemporary travellers. Crotty cites Collison Black’s “quasi-racial” account for industrial progress in the north: “Why Ulster has so much growth when the rest of Ireland had so little ... it seems to me in most instances personal initiative overcame comparative lack of natural advantage.” Raymond Crotty. Ireland in Crisis: A Study in Capitalist Colonial Undevelopment. Dingle: Brandon, 1987: 15. Collison Black’s later work — which I employ in this study — seems to me to be far more sociologically based.
142 Mokyr, op. cit.: 14.
145 Mokyr, op. cit.: 11.
imports for the year 1833.\textsuperscript{146} This charge was echoed by many persons of different political persuasions and its importance in the context of common hunger and poverty can hardly be overstated. At any rate, in such circumstances the potato proved a practicable alternative: it was highly productive, relatively free from disease, suited to the Irish climate, easy to grow and required minimal capital investment since it produced its own seed for next season’s crop.\textsuperscript{147} In short, it was the perfect subsistence crop for a subsistence life. Over time the Irish perfected an indigenous means of cultivation, which was rather unfortunately referred to as the “lazy bed” system. Efficient rather than ‘lazy’ might have been a more fitting epithet, for the system had distinct advantages in wet and poorly drained soil, while almost all the farming was completed by hand using a spade called a “loy” or “fack.”\textsuperscript{148} Travelling through Ireland in 1837, Charlotte Elizabeth was struck by the ingenuity and quaintness of the system:

With us a potato field is a very homely affair: our straggling ridges, the single rows of plants placed length-wise, and the flat confusion of the whole thing defy all idea of the ornamental. But paddy knows better: he separates a rising ground into parcels of about two or three yards in width: digging between them a very deep trench, say two feet over, running in as straight a line as the eye of mathematical precision could desire. Across the bed thus divided, he sets the root; so that the ridges do not appear on a front view; and thus long, wide, highly raised bed of very rich plants stretches from the road-side to the hill, well defined by the spreading trenches, and these again supplying a singular ornament to the scene; for the prevailing weed, which bears a bright flower of the deepest yellow, is carefully eradicated from the beds, but allowed to grow on either edge, which it does most thickly; and so beautiful is this belt of rich gold exactly bordering the spacious slips of emerald green, with its uniform tufts of pure white, or else of pure purple, that I am in doubt whether it is not the effect of design.\textsuperscript{149}

Employing this agrosystem the potato quickly became “the staff of life” for the Irish poor.\textsuperscript{150} Sir Walter Scott thought Irish men “stout and healthy,” and the women “buxom and well-coloured” even though for food “they have only potatoes, and too few of them.”\textsuperscript{151} Though contemporary estimates of potato consumption vary (ranging from 7 pounds to 15 pounds per diem) recent research has concluded that the pre-Famine diet was nutritionally sound, especially when supplemented with milk or butter (the popular mode of consumption), and occasionally with

\textsuperscript{146} Inglis, op. cit.: 102-03.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.: 24-25.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.: 224.
\textsuperscript{151} D.J. O’Donoghue. Sir Walter Scott’s Tour in Ireland in 1825. Glasgow: Gowans & Gray, 1905: 92.
oatmeal, fish or eggs. Although monotonous, this diet became the mainstay for the poorest two-thirds of Irish society. On the eve of the Famine, Irish potato acreage amounted to 2.1 million statute acres; however, as Mokyr reminds us, much of this crop, as much as thirty three per cent (or 0.7 million statute acres), was indirectly exported through the fattening of livestock for overseas markets. Pigs were the farm animal of choice for the poorest classes and small stocks were sold at Ireland’s many fairs in order to make up rent. Yet even here Inglis saw evidence which suggested that the abrogation of duties — in this case salt — adversely affected the Irish bacon industry by lessening the expense of English curing.

As the potato crop rose in importance so did the possession of land. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the vast bulk of Irish people worked on the land but did not own it. Pre-Famine Ireland had between 8,000-10,000 landlords most of whom were Protestant and tended to imitate their peers in England. Although the problem of landlord absenteeism was pronounced before the Union the politico-economic decline of Dublin, coupled with the grandeur of London life (and in some cases the duty to attend parliament), kept many more landlords away from their Irish estates. Most landlords preferred letting their estates under long leases and in the absence of restraint individual tenants sublet the land creating the notorious “middleman” system:

The pressure of population, and the lack of alternative occupations, so increased the demand for land that sub-division was universal, and two or three under-tenants might intervene between the actual cultivator and his landlord. The cultivator’s rent per acre might be several times greater than that of the middleman, and his status was that of a mere tenant-at-will. Moreover, the state of law made it possible for the landlord to distrain against any of the tenants, so

152 Crawford., op. cit.: 60; Mokyr, op. cit.: 7-8.
153 It should be noted that the Irish acre was larger than the statute acre. One Irish acre being equal to 1.619835 Statute. Mokyr, op. cit.: 7.
154 Inglis, op. cit.: 75.
155 Mokyr cites Jonathan Pim’s testimony that there were 8,000 landlords, whereas both Hoppen and Collison Black cite the significantly higher figure of 10,000. R. D. Collison Black. Economic Thought and the Irish Question 1817-1870. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960: 5 footnote 2; K. Theodore Hoppen, Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity. London: Longman, 1999: 39; Mokyr, op. cit.: 16.
that a cultivator who had punctually paid his rent to the middleman might find himself subject to distress or eviction through the middleman defaulting.\textsuperscript{157}

It was commonly argued that subdivision made rich and poor landholders alike.\textsuperscript{158} “Although there are thousands of landlords who are without direct tenants,” James Johnson declared in 1844, “there is not a single tenant without a landlord of some kind.”\textsuperscript{159}

In 1826, the same year Ireland abandoned its own currency, the government passed an Act of Parliament which proscribed lessee subletting.\textsuperscript{160} The ensuing war on the middleman system gifted head landlords with an opportunity to consolidate holdings and introduce methods of “scientific farming.”\textsuperscript{161} Consolidation had long been popular in economic circles; however, legal curbs (leases), political expediency (the forty shilling franchise was reason enough for many landlords to preserve subdivision), and aristocratic custom (absenteeism), often stymied these developments.\textsuperscript{162} The Subletting Act of 1826 and the raising of the freeholder franchise in 1829 further facilitated the Anglicisation of Irish farming practices. In some places, the changes were already apace. In 1823, for instance, a Select Committee reported that consolidation had serious humanitarian effects: “That this alteration of system [consolidation] may ultimately be beneficial, and that it was actually necessary to prevent the indefinite subdivision of land, before in progress, may be admitted; but the first effect of the alteration has been to make a sudden change in the peasant’s mode of life, depriving many of their former homes, and making it extremely difficult for them to obtain a new habitation.”\textsuperscript{163}

Most landlords simply refused to grant long leases, or any lease whatsoever, making evictions easy and the type of internecine terror that typified the Tithe War more prevalent. More indulgent landlords paid for their tenants to emigrate. Indeed, emigration proved a thriving

\textsuperscript{157} Collison Black, \textit{op. cit.}: 5-6.
\textsuperscript{158} Mokyr, \textit{op. cit.}: 17.
\textsuperscript{159} Johnson, \textit{op. cit.}: 212.
\textsuperscript{160} Collison Black, \textit{op. cit.}: 6.
\textsuperscript{161} James Caird narrative is an excellent example of this literature. Moreover, Caird’s narrative includes a map of a “model farm.” James Caird. \textit{The Plantation Scheme, or, the West of Ireland as a Field for Investment}. Edinburgh: London, 1850: 171.
\textsuperscript{162} Charles Gavan Duffy, \textit{op. cit.}: 1003-29. Mokyr challenges the centrality of Catholic Emancipation and the raising of the franchise. Certainly the consolidation was underway before 1829. A Select Committee reported in 1823: “Many of the evils of Ireland, moral and political, as well as the depressed state of the Peasantry, may, in the judgement of Your Committee, be traced to the mischievous and frequently fraudulent multiplication of the elective franchise. The subject is highly deserving of notice, if not the interposition of legislature.” “Select Committee on Condition of Labouring Poor in Ireland”, \textit{op. cit.}: 337. Joel Mokyr, \textit{op. cit.}: 83.
\textsuperscript{163} “Select Committee on Condition of Labouring Poor in Ireland”, \textit{op. cit.}: 337.
industry in the post-Union period proving that “free trade” did in fact develop some Irish businesses. Travelling around Ireland in 1823 John Griscom recorded passenger fares as low as £2 owing to increased competition. Moreover, he duly recorded the lies fed to hungry emigrants and the perilous packing of ships, allegations that were all too common during the Irish Famine. According to Henry Inglis, Youghal recorded its highest ever rate of emigration in the first six months of 1834. Those who left were “chiefly agriculturalists” while those who remained were often the poorest and most vulnerable members of society: “I noticed in one of the poorest cabins, in the neighbourhood of Youghall [sic], where scarcely any furniture was to be seen, one of the printed bills, announcing the approaching departure of a ship for Canada, stuck upon the wall. This is a very little circumstance, but it is full of meaning.” Despite the obstacles, emigration remained the only hope for many — reminding us of Frederick Engels’s comment that the only solution the bourgeoisie can ever find to its problems is to move them around. Indeed, David Lloyd has recently argued that Irish emigration ought to be considered “as a distinctive form of disciplining that differentiates the Irish colonial experience from most others.”

Although most tenants now held land directly from their landlord (who typically employed an agent to manage their properties) few landlords granted leases and absenteeism continued. Indeed on the eve of Famine — and the year before the Devon Commission published its findings on the occupation of land in Ireland — James Johnson echoed a widely held belief: “ABSENTEEISM appears to be, in some respects at least, to Ireland what POETRY was to Goldsmith. ‘It found him poor, and helped to keep him so.’” However, the truth of the matter is that resident landlords would have made seriously little difference to the welfare of Irish tenants so long as tenure remained insecure. Peasant proprietorship was almost non-existent in Ireland and in contradistinction to England and Scotland Irish landlords leased the bare soil to their tenants. This had two precipitous effects on peasant livelihoods. Firstly, prospective tenants — who were invariably without capital — were responsible for all the

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165 Inglis, op. cit.: 103.
166 Cited in, Harvey. Spaces of Hope, op. cit.: 154
167 Lloyd is responding to Liam Kennedy’s sanguine view of post-Famine Irish development. As Lloyd correctly points out, Kennedy’s overview omits the massive effects of Irish emigration thus skewing the empirical figures. Lloyd, op. cit.: 56-57.
169 Plumptre, op. cit.: 342.
improvements on their property. Moreover, the law “afforded no right of compensation to the tenant for such investments, which became the property of the landlord at the conclusion of tenancy.” This encouraged apathy and thrift since the least sign of improvement might force an increase in the rent. Secondly, incumbent property arrangements led to a practice known as “the hanging gale.” “Gale” was the term used for the regular payment of rent. The hanging gale allowed an incoming tenant to leave his rent in arrears — in other words ‘hanging’ — in order to finance rudimentary investments on the property (bearing in mind that not infrequently a cabin had to be erected). Edward Wakefield, a well-known economist of the period, described the practice as “one of the great levers of oppression … the lower classes are kept in a kind of perpetual bondage … this debt hangs over their heads … and keeps them in a continual state of anxiety and terror.” The striking exception to this rule was Ulster where some security of tenure was indirectly afforded by the tradition known as “tenant-right.” By custom an outgoing tenant was entitled to sell his “good-will” to an incoming tenant, making it possible to recover monies spent on improvement. In other words, “tenant-right” implicitly recognised the accumulation of capital and “dead labour” in the land. Elsewhere in Ireland this custom was scarcely recognised.

To understand the lives of the majority of Irish tenants it needs to be remembered that in an overwhelmingly pastoral society (six people out of seven lived in rural areas) where the non-agricultural sector had been demolished, and the land-letting system was hugely discriminatory, the production and control of space was a deeply political affair. As Proudfoot elaborates “the fundamental division in Irish society lay between a minority class of property-owners and...

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170 Collison Black, op. cit.: 5.
171 Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 17.
172 Cited in Ibid.: 17.
174 There is evidence to suggest that when tenants felt secure improvements followed. En route to Dublin, for instance, N.H. Carter was perplexed by the sight of a number of exceptionally clean cabins. A gentleman travelling on the same coach explained that the tenants were all freeholders “feeling the pride and ambition of citizens.” Nathaniel Hazeltine Carter. Letters from Europe, Comprising the Journal of a Tour through Ireland, England, Scotland, France, Italy, and Switzerland, in the Years 1825,' 26, and '27. 2nd ed. New York: C. & H. Carvil, 1829: 45. Tenure by “freehold” meant land held by a person in his own right, free from condition and limitation. Byrne, op. cit.: 119. The difficulty is, of course, how to define and measure the ‘security’ of tenure. Again Mokyr has provided the best systematic analysis. Mokyr, op. cit.: 81-111.
175 Mokyr, op. cit.: 8, 16. Mervyn Busteed has written that “the groups which occupy a hegemonic position in society will make the deepest impact on a landscape, since they have direct control over the land and they alone are capable of accumulating the necessary resources of human, artistic and engineering skill, capital and labour.” Mervyn Busteed. “Identity and Economy on an Anglo-Irish Estate: Castle Caldwell, Co. Fermanagh, c. 1750–1793.” Journal of Historical Geography 26.2 (2000): 175.
the majority who enjoyed only delegated rights of property use." Moreover, the fact that "the country was farmed by tenants rather than owners" had its origins in the plantations and confiscations which placed landownership almost exclusively in Protestant hands.\textsuperscript{177}

Even the fortunate few who held a lease lived in constant fear of eviction and starvation. Ireland sorely lacked a class of substantial tenantry. From the census data collected in 1841, Mokyr computes that over-two-thirds of the population were "proletarian": that is, labourers, smallholders, or other persons "without capital, in either money, land, or acquiring knowledge."\textsuperscript{178} If one includes the class above them (i.e. small farmers who held between 5-50 acres of land) this accounted for ninety-seven per cent of the entire population.\textsuperscript{179} The small farmers usually held land from a landlord (or middleman) and paid a money rent for it. Farmers lucky enough to hold above 40 acres typically required one permanent labourer in their service.\textsuperscript{180} Labour was hired at a nominal rate — usually between 6d. to 8d. (always varying regionally and seasonally) — although by most accounts money rarely exchanged hands. Instead the labourer was given a cabin and a small plot of manured ground to raise potatoes while the rent was to be worked out in labour.\textsuperscript{181} Given the immense competition for land, and the crippling necessity of planting some potato seed, labourers often agreed to the highest possible rent on small slips of land and the lowest possible value on the labour.\textsuperscript{182} Indeed, according to one contemporary estimate a tenant might work as much as two hundred and fifty days to pay for a cabin plus one acre of manured potato ground.\textsuperscript{183} Even so, few labourers were fortunate enough to have a permanent engagement of this kind, and many more had to find hard cash in order to hire land in "conacre." The terms of letting conacre varied (as do definitions), but in general it involved leasing manured land to a landless labourer for the potato season.


\textsuperscript{177} Moreover, it was no it until the Land Acts in the later part of the nineteenth-century that "any serious attempt made to give by law to all tenants those protections that were available in Ulster by custom..." Dudley Edwards and Hourican, \textit{op. cit.}: 156, 161.


\textsuperscript{179} Mokyr, \textit{op. cit.}: 18.


\textsuperscript{181} "In these transactions money often played the role of a unit of account but not of a means of exchange, the labour services being valued at a pre-determined rate and subtracted from the rent." Mokyr, \textit{op. cit.}: 21; Collison Black, \textit{op. cit.}: 7-8.

\textsuperscript{182} Ryan, \textit{op. cit.}: 17.

\textsuperscript{183} Thornton, \textit{op. cit.}: 94.
only. Here the English Quaker William Bennett summarised the tenure arrangements: "The average rent in Ireland at which arable land is let, is probably more than double the same in England; so that what with the conacre rent for his land, and Gombien [see below] price for his seed, and ditto for his food, while he tills the land, it is not surprising that the Irish peasant has been kept at the lowest verge of pauperism; for all the inducement to industry, beyond the barest living, is in fact withdrawn."  

Extravagant rents did not act as a disincentive to the occupation and subdivision of land, but for the poorest it did turn the balance between subsistence and starvation into deadly science. Since non-agricultural sector was destroyed tenants had little choice but to accept these miserable arrangements. It also meant that had "any landlord expelling tenants was probably condemning them to death."  

If life was a constant battle between penury and starvation, the summer months were especially grim. Potatoes did not keep after early summer while the new crop was not harvested until September. On occasion food was secured on credit from a larger farmer or money to purchase food from a local usurer called a "gombeen-man." Rates were often as high as 30 per cent above the market fee. According to English economist William Thornton indebted labourers still thought themselves "lucky," hoping that their creditor would employ them in order to ensure payment of the debt. But for most the prospects of local employment were usually slight and many labourers migrated to England and Scotland to work the harvest, while their families fell

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184 Peter Gibbon describes the essence of the system well: "Conacre was a form of exploitation of the labour power involving elements of sharecropping and boned hire. Landlords supplied fertilized land and seed for one crop of some subsistence food. In exchange, the labourer was obliged to work off his rent. On occasion, he additionally had to provide some money-rent." Gibbon, op. cit.: 136; Joel Mokyr, op. cit.: 21.


186 Dudley Edwards and Hourican, op. cit.: 156.

187 Mokyr, op. cit.: 9.

188 Thornton, op. cit.: 92.
to begging and charity to survive. Thornton relates how Irish women and children were seen to travel many miles before begging, “for the sense of shame is most acute, in spite of all their wretchedness.” Travel writers — most of whom arrived during the dismal summer months — regularly met crowds of ill-clad peasants lining the coach-ways and thronging the towns (see Figure 1.7). Those who could gain neither credit nor employment faced seasonal hunger. In desperation some dug their potato ground early, consuming potatoes “so small that only hunger could see them.” Others turned to the noxious weed called “pressagh” which gave its victims a shameful yellow hue. For these unfortunates it was hopelessness rather than shame that stood out. “What can we do? — can we starve?” declared one witness. If this would kill us, we should have been dead long since, for many’s the time we have put up with worse.”

It needs to be emphasised that the subsistence economy, although extensive, existed side-by-side with a class of substantial farmer-landlords that hired and leased land to the former. This is what economist’s tend to call a “bimodal” distribution pattern or “dual economy.” Throughout Leinster and Munster, for example, pasturage and tillage relied on cheap, boned hire from the subsistence sector forming a patchwork quilt of very large and very small farms “intertwined and mutually dependent.” Indeed post-Union Ireland exhibited all the hallmarks of uneven geographical development at a variety of scales. As surely as the Act of Union affected the political, social and economic conditions within Ireland it also facilitated wider networks of trade beyond it. As Christine Kinealy explains, the “pig and potato economy” fed a commercialised agricultural sector responsible for the maintenance of an industrial urban class in Britain:

Paradoxically, the reliance both of potato production and tillage on low subsistence wages (literally a potato wage) and labour intensive methods, also proved to be a barrier to technological and agricultural innovation within Ireland. Nevertheless, in the decades after the Union, high quality corn was grown extensively in Ireland (predominately in the south-east). Like linen, it was grown primarily for sale and export, mostly to the bread-hungry towns of industrial England. By 1841, oats was the largest single-item exported from Ireland and, in total, Ireland was exporting sufficient corn to England to feed 2 million people. This high level of dependence on Irish agriculture led to the description of

189 Select Committee on Condition of Labouring Poor in Ireland”, op. cit.: 336.
190 Thornton, op. cit.: 92.
191 Ibid.: 93, 102.
192 Ibid.: 93.
193 Mokyr, op. cit.: 20-21.
Ireland as the ‘bread basket’ of the United Kingdom. Ironically, it was the existence of the much despised potato economy which allowed English workers to enjoy cheap bread, probably ignorant of its origins.”

Whether English industrial labourers were altogether ignorant of this pig and potato economy is difficult to say, but certainly government ministers and many public intellectuals were well aware of the significance of the subsistence sector in Ireland. In 1819, for example, a Select Committee reported that a refined Irish transportation system should be top of the list of government priorities on the grounds that it would “insure to England supplies of grain at moderate prices, which might render it wholly independent of foreign countries for the food of its manufacturing population.”

Four years later another Select Committee reported on the circumstances of the peasantry. The potato crop had failed the previous season and although exact calculations were difficult, the committee reckoned that “the distressed districts were equal in extent to one-half of the superficial contents of all Ireland.” The poorest were starving even though “there was no want of food of another description for the support of human life.” “On the contrary,” they Commissioners continue, “the crops of grain had been far from deficient, and the prices of corn and oatmeal were very moderate. The export of grain from ports within the distressed districts of Ireland, was considerable, during the entire period from May to August, infinitely exceeding the imports during that period; and those districts in the south and west presented the remarkable example of possessing a surplus of food, whilst the inhabitants were suffering from actual want.” Food was exported as the poor were let starve. In these circumstances the Commissioners could only commend the “meritorious patience of the Peasantry” who kept the public order in the face of such blatant practices of unequal distribution and exchange.

Of course, the rich are forever praising the stoicism of the poor, although in the context of extensive hunger (“distressed districts” and “suffering from actual want” were conventional euphemisms) such praise rings especially hollow. Indeed, the same Select Committee unanimously agreed “that a state in which an inequality of conditions offers the natural rewards

195 Kinealy. A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 33.
197 "Select Committee on Condition of Labouring Poor in Ireland", op. cit.: 335.
198 Ibid.: 335.
199 Ibid.: 335. Compare this to German Köhl’s description: “Strange it is that this poor hungry Ireland, in which so many actually die of hunger every year, and in whose bills of mortality and hospital books ‘starvation’ is as regular a heading as any other cause of death; — strange it is I say, that this country should, above all things, be destined to feed so many strangers on her soil.” Kohl, op. cit.: 165.
of good conduct, and inspires widely and generally the hopes of rising and the fear of falling in
society, is unquestionably the best calculated to develope the energies and faculties of man, and
is the best suited to the exercise and improvement of human virtue.\textsuperscript{200} The Commissioners
were in fact (anonymously) citing none other than Thomas Robert Malthus, but the point is, of
course, that this championing of ‘ideal’ inequalities is difficult to square with their affected
sympathy for the general condition of the Irish peasantry. Indeed nationalist writers like John
Mitchel, Thomas Davis and James Fintan Lalor continually insisted that the system itself was
rotten, linking the worst excesses of “free-trade” to the imposition of colonial structures. For
example Mitchel writing in \textit{The Nation}:

\begin{quote}
The free trade and competition — in other words the English system — is pretty
well understood now; its obvious purpose and effect are to make the rich richer
and the poor poorer, to make capital the absolute ruler of the world, and labour a
blind and helpless slave. By free trade the manufacturers of Manchester are
enabled to clothe India, China, and South America, and the artisans of
Manchester can hardly keep themselves covered from the cold. By dint of free
trade Belfast grows more linen cloth than it ever did before; but the men who
weave it hardly have a shirt to their backs. Free trade fills with corn the stores of
speculating capitalists, but leaves those who have sown and reaped the corn
without a meal. Free trade unpeoples villages and peoples poorhouses,
consolidates farms and gluts graveyards with famished corpses.\textsuperscript{201}
\end{quote}

Mitchel’s account emphasises the destructive forces unleashed by free trade. It is, however,
important to recognise that capital also worked as a productive force, bringing economists,
philosophers, civil servants and planners together to debate the socio-economic transformation
of Ireland. Significant in this context are the many references to Ireland as a “backward”
country in a “transitional” state. For instance, a government report in 1830 observed: “The
present difficulties of the situation of Ireland rather appear to be incidental to a transition from
one system to another, than any which can be considered as permanent.”\textsuperscript{202} The same
Commissioners quoted Mr. Bicheno’s (who was later to become a vociferous member of the
Irish Poor Law inquiry led by Richard Whately) remark: “In examining the old authors, about
the time of Elizabeth and James, all the facts that are stated by them bear me out in saying that
the condition of the peasantry in this country [England] in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries
was very similar to what now exists in Ireland.” The Commissioners thought that “The analogy

\textsuperscript{200} \textit{Ibid.}: 339. Emphasis added.
\textsuperscript{201} Mitchel cited in, James Connolly, \textit{op. cit.}: 179-180.
certainly tends to establish the fact that Ireland is now in a transition state, the ultimate consequences of which will be useful to the country, however severe the pressure may be for the time on individuals.

Likewise an American visitor emphasised what he called Ireland’s “peculiar position.” “It [Ireland] is intimately connected with the ancient and the modern. It properly belongs to neither. The ravages of time have demolished the Old, but the spirit of progress has not constructed the New. Nor can it be ranked in the transition series. It is in a state of social and political abnegation.”

The flavour differs, but the effect is exactly the same. To view Ireland as backward, transitional or indeed something in-between was a powerful means of othering which ultimately helped galvanise a capitalist-colonial logics and its reterritorialising actions.

These were descriptions that invited prescriptions and in this sense they are part of a colonial ideology that over the centuries sought different ways to Anglicise and develop Ireland.

Conclusion

Pre-Famine Ireland is frequently depicted as a lack: a lack of wealth, potatoes, property, and so forth. However, the point to remember is that these are historical contingents and not a priori factors in the tale of hunger, death and displacement. Why and how did these conditions develop? Walter Benjamin once wrote that “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was.’ It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”

I have tried to show that such a “moment of danger” may last a long time, and certainly some of the severest critics of British policy were quick to point out that the struggle over the production of Irish space was a long and restless one. In following some of these struggles my aim was to describe how they marked the lives of a vast number of Irish people who were, to all intents and purposes, virtually rightless — “without control of the land

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and the means of life generally." It is in the context of an historical geography of rightlessness that the enormous tragedy of Famine must be understood.

The history of Ireland offers various examples of colonial aggression. However, it is worth recalling that colonialism often proceeds through a precarious synergy of coercion and reform and violent acts of dispossession are often augmented by more positive programmes of structural adjustment. The nineteenth-century variant of structural adjustment is what Mitchel described as the tyranny of “amelioration.” Mitchel was obviously referring to the social, political and economic structures that were designed to develop Ireland, but which he clearly saw in a more nefarious light. I have argued that these interventions were actually acts of inclusive exclusion — that brought life into the orbit of power whilst excluding it — and that this is where colonial governance evolved with biopolitics.

Colonialism is about capturing and controlling land, people and resources through acquisitive geopolitical stratagems. Such control usually requires broad interventions in order to create dependencies at multiple levels. James I thought that nothing short of a radical recomposition of Irish society would secure English jurisdiction. Successive sovereigns continued this dream through political, economic, legislative, administrative and socio-cultural interventions. Put another way, the tentacular inclusion of Irish life through the extension of English (and later British) rule effected a radical exclusion through Anglicisation. Later state-programmes for ‘development’ often worked toward the same end. Indeed, what lies at the base of these calculations and interventions “is not man as a free and conscious political subject but, above all, man’s bare life.”

Agamben’s theorisations invite a deeper consideration of the biopolitical developments involved in the management of the poor and hungry. Although he has suggestively written that “today’s democratico-capitalist project of eliminating the poor classes through development not only reproduces within itself the people that is excluded but also transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life,” his own work focuses on the philosophical contours rather than the material scars of this project. I have tried to show that Agamben’s

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208 Ryan, op. cit.: 13.
210 Agamben adds: “Only a politics that will have learned to take the fundamental biopolitical fracture of the West into account will be able to stop this oscillation and to put an end to the civil war that divides the peoples and the
figure of bare life is realised in capitalist-colonial policies that treat some lives as less valuable than others. As we have seen, decisions on value and non-value are operationalised through military tactics, racialist logics, juridical norms, and fiscal programmes. These are acts of political violence from the perspective of those who are considered to be too dangerous, too important, or too backward to be left to their own devices.

I have, however, focused most of my attention on how "bare life" is produced as opposed to how it is contested. This is serious lacuna. After all "if colonialism is a system, so also is resistance" as Declan Kiberd has observed. Reactions to colonial intervention in Ireland were, perforce, as heterogeneous as the interventions themselves often trading forceful and bloody resistance for subterfuge and strategic alliance. Ireland is certainly not unique in this respect. Several studies have emphasised the heterogeneity of subaltern responses to colonial conflict. Indeed such responses may also be considered in a performative sense. Don Mitchell reminds us that "any structured permanence remains permanent only to the degree that it is continually reproduced, and hence any moment can become a site of struggle. Indeed it is, by definition a site of struggle." Irish acts of resistance, though important, are beyond the scope of the present study. The aim was to show how Irish life was increasingly incorporated into the mechanisms of state power, an historical development which has considerable bearing on the British government’s management of the Irish Famine. Before turning to this topic I want to explore pre-Famine constructions of the Irish.

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211 Kiberd, op. cit.: 13.
Chapter Two
Making up People: Routes and Routines in the Production of Colonial Space

"Exploration was history because it made history."

"Every story is a travel story - a spatial practice."
— Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life.

"Poverty forces the free man to act like a slave."
— Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition.

Introduction
I want to begin with the fateful hanging that ends Chinua Achebe’s gripping anti-colonial novel Things Fall Apart:

"Take down the body," the Commissioner ordered his chief messenger, "and bring it and all these people to the court."
"Yes, sah," the messenger said, saluting.

The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he had planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the courts he thought about that book. Every day brought some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.¹

The story of a man who hanged himself is a great parable of colonial abjection and violence, but what I think is most interesting about this passage is the District Commissioner’s reaction to the

scene before him. To his imperial eyes, the suicide is a moral story to be retold as the dead native is assigned a use-value as “interesting reading” for future colonial instruction. Yet there are competing tensions here. While it is admitted that “one could almost write a whole chapter on him,” the tragedy will ultimately be paired back and restructured. After all “one must be firm in cutting out details.” Thus the death of another is abstracted and decontextualised until we are talking less about the reasons for violence and much more about the violence of reason. The title is promptly decided and the hanging becomes the colonial dream of “pacification.” It is only in the last line of the book that we learn were the story takes place.

The term “making up people” in my own title is borrowed from the philosopher Ian Hacking who in a number of publications has examined how certain ontological categories (for instance madness) are historically constructed. I employ the term to draw attention to the ways in which pre-Famine Irish life was imaginatively constructed and how an emerging “knowledge economy” on Irish society influenced the management of the Famine itself. In the last chapter, “Acts of Union,” I showed that the material basis of Irish society was radically different to the rest of Britain in the nineteenth-century and that vast proportions of Irish peasants faced hunger from a position of virtual rightlessness. It also seems important to understand how contemporaries responded to this situation. This chapter is premised on the idea that what I am calling “faminescapes” always exceed any narrowly defined institutional or bureaucratic reading. Indeed, referring to the example of the Irish Famine, the economist and Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, has said that it is absolutely crucial to consider the ways in which perceptions of other peoples, places and cultures profoundly influence and structure government conduct. In particular Sen discusses how racist attitudes inflect relief strategies, often creating or exacerbating human suffering.

Similarly I want to critically explore how contemporaries responded to the scene of pre-Famine Irish life: how a rhetorical space gradually opened up between ‘the satiated’ and ‘the emaciated,’ which disabled empathy and rationalised a death-dealing orthodoxy. Central to this “discursive faminescape,” is the appropriation of difference. How is otherness produced and what guarantees, so to speak, its political appeal and application? There was never any

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shortage of self-appointed experts on pre-Famine Irish life. Travellers, government commissioners, novelists, and scientists of all descriptions all ventured their opinion on the condition of Ireland. “If printer’s ink could have solved the problems of Ireland,” proclaimed T.W. Freeman, “it would have become an earthly paradise long ago.” In what follows I will be focusing on travel accounts written between the Act of Union and the Great Famine, although I will also make reference to more “official” narratives published either as political pamphlets or archived in the government’s Blue Books. Of the many accounts, it is fair to say that some undoubtedly reveal a genuine empathy for Irish poverty. However, like the District Commissioner in Achebe’s novel, there were many others who viewed Ireland as raw material for ideological instruction. The result is a form of “bracketed history” in which human suffering is frequently obscured, effaced and ignored. “There was so much else to include,” as Achebe’s fictional Commissioner reflected, “and one must be firm in cutting out details.” The clarity and harmony of the civilising message is almost always paramount.

Hannah Arendt long ago noted that language, in so far as it can be “created, continued and improved,” is also deployable as a political weapon. Thus the task is to uncover how particular discourses and imaginative geographies are mobilised, how they accrue degrees of importance — sometimes even reverence — and how eventually they may be deployed as political weapons in the transformation of society. As I intend to show, pre-Famine Ireland was

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6 I see no problem in considering “official” narratives alongside what Edward Said called the cultural stylists of empire. In his brilliant study of political violence in nineteenth-century Ireland, Charles Townshend reminds us that no state has ever held anything like a complete monopoly over the abstractions of politics, and therefore the study of power must always move beyond the tidy world of politicians and state papers (and the privileged walls of Whitehall and Westminster) to include the more obscure world of local determinants, popular opinion and so forth. Indeed, as I want to argue, getting to the grass-roots of government power (its “microphysics” if you like) means understanding that the modern state’s most compelling characteristic — and perhaps its greatest weapon — is its ability to circulate and insinuate itself into the knife-and-fork realities of everyday life. Charles Townshend. *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance 1848*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983: ix.

consistently referred to in terms of “improvement,” “development,” “transition,” and “amelioration,” and in the process, human lives were violently twisted into objects of reform. But I want first to chart the development of a “knowledge economy,” and second to outline why this is relevant to the advance of biopower and colonialism. To the degree that life and its living was coming under the aegis of power, it was also emerging under the tyranny of experts who, whether they realised it or not, were involved in the “massive inscription of social knowledge within the productive process.”

**Letterpress landscapes and the knowledge economy**

If “social reform” was rapidly becoming a colonial objective during the pre-Famine period, one of the impediments to this project was thought to be the woeful lack of accurate knowledge on the social, political and economic condition of Ireland. Toward the end of the eighteenth century the agricultural reformer and writer, Arthur Young (later to become staple reading for subsequent writers) declared that to be ignorant of the condition of the labouring classes, and the poor more generally, is to be wanting in the first rudiments of political knowledge. Yet nearing the end of the following century Arthur Bennett could still confidently announce: “At the root of Irish difficulty lies the prevailing ignorance concerning the country.” In the intervening years the thirst for instrumental knowledges was unrelenting. Between 1800 and the outbreak of the Great Famine, for instance, no fewer than 114 Commissions and 61 Special Committees were instructed by the British government to report on circumstances in Ireland. Indeed to offer one famous example, the Devon Commission required travelling 3,126 miles, sitting in 96 districts and examining a grand total of 1,100 witnesses, over 1,217 hours, across the length and breadth of the country. Indeed one economic historian has described the work of the Devon Commission as “the most thorough and comprehensive investigation carried out by any nineteenth-century ad hoc agency.” This is surely an excellent example of what Nicholas Thomas describes as state power “turned upon inscription, upon the absorption of events into a

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prodigiously dispersed writing machine." This letterpress landscape functioned not only to describe Irish life (its conditions of existence, habits, customs and so forth), but also to make life visible in particular ways that tended to strengthen the hand of government. Whatever else the government’s Commissions and Special Committees sought to accomplish they had the important corollary effect of creating new objects of political and economic calculation.

In his book Seeing Like a State, James Scott explains the major differences between the pre-modern and modern state: “Where the premodern state was content with a level of intelligence sufficient to allow it to keep order, extract taxes, and raise armies, the modern state increasingly aspired to ‘take in charge’ the physical and human resources of the nation and make them more productive. These more positive ends of statecraft required a much greater knowledge of society. And an inventory of land, people, incomes, occupations, resources, and deviance was the logical place to begin.” According to Scott, “society” was being incorporated into ever wider and deeper grids of surveillance and control. The modern state’s interest in the everyday required a form of governmentality which could circulate and gain access to peoples’ lives — through ‘discovering,’ defining, and investing them with meaning — and ultimately incorporating life within a powerful system of inscription and intervention. The state was now making up people.

These developments are of great import to the history of travel. Even a cursory look at the table of contents of most nineteenth-century travelogues (at least those produced in the West) demonstrates that travellers were also conducting inventories of “land, people, incomes, occupations, resources, and deviance,” and often in ways that broadly complement what Scott terms the “more positive ends of statecraft.” (See Figure 2.1.) Catalogues, inventories and descriptions are seldom objective and almost never benign; therefore it seems important to consider these productions as something more than mere descriptions of contemporary life. Moreover, as Nicholas Thomas makes clear, examining how other peoples, places and cultures are represented is less a matter of looking for biased perceptions and misconstructions than examining how objects of discourse are fabricated. “What requires attention,” he writes, “is the

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wider range of textual devices that present others in particular terms; difference is produced, not simply distorted.\textsuperscript{17} Thinking in this line, for instance, Stephen Greenblatt has remarked that the overriding interest and investment in colonial travel “is not knowledge of the other but practice upon the other.”\textsuperscript{18} Put simply, I want to follow Greenblatt in considering what might be gained in taking the study of travel into the realm of use. How do discursive patterns produce regimes of intervention? In what specific ways are “cultures of travel” related to a particular geopolitics of conquest?

CHAPTER XIII.

Return to Limerick—The New and Old Towns—Present State of the Trade of Limerick—Prosperity—Projected Improvements—Mr. Spring Rice—Public Institutions—The Lunatic Asylum—The Barrington Hospital—Antiquities—Condition of the Destitute Poor, and unemployed Artizans of Limerick—Minute Details—Poor laws—a Mont de Pitié—Loan Fund—Environs of Limerick—Lands and Rents—Embankments on the Shannon—The Village of Adair—Currah, and Dunraven ......... 168

Figure 2.1: Excerpt from Henry Inglis’s Table of Contents
Source: Henry Inglis, 1834: viii.

Of course, philosophers, social critics, journalists, economists, travel writers, missionaries, not to mention Irish intellectuals, poets and so forth, also contributed to imaginatively constructing Irish society in ways that appealed to the public’s imagination.\textsuperscript{19} But travel writing was peculiarly suited to this purpose. Unlike many other discourses it could (and did) lay claim to the privilege of presence, and even though travel writers often — and successfully — mimicked the investigations of state officials, they preferred to market their opinions outside any overt party line. Henry Inglis advertised his account as a “truth telling book” not a “party book,” detailing “stern realities” and opposing “poetical fancies.”\textsuperscript{20} “In narrating my investigations,” wrote Anne Plumptre, “I have looked to fidelity as my polar

\textsuperscript{17} Thomas, \textit{op. cit.}: 205 fn 6. Thomas’s approach complements Timothy Mitchell’s caveat on Derridian deconstruction: “Derrida’s work is usually employed to demonstrate, in the reading of a particular text, how [the] effect of meaning can be made to collapse ... Despite the ease with which such feats of deconstruction seem to be accomplished, what needs explaining is not why meaning collapses but why it does not.” Timothy Mitchell. \textit{Colonising Egypt}. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991: 149.


Of course these claims to objectivity were open to contestation. But from the point of view of influence, travel writing did possess a real advantage in that it was also an unrepentant commercial venture meant to be purchased and read more extensively than the government Blue Books. Indeed the “Times Commissioner” (Thomas Campbell Foster) mocked the numerous government reports which “have passed away like an Egyptian dynasty, buried under pyramids, not of stone, but an equally wasted material, — of printed paper.” In the introduction to his European tour, which included a visit to Ireland, John Griscom voiced a growing perception on the importance on travel literature: “it will be admitted, that books of travel, when written under the proper qualifications, are among the most useful kinds of literature; — that they furnish the principle means by which distant communities and nations become acquainted with each other’s peculiarities, by which the useful arts are extended, and morals and manners are rendered more diffused and impressive.” We might debate whether travel writing was really the “principle means” of contact between communities and nations, but its importance in managing knowledge about Ireland (especially “morals and manners”) is not in question.

Of course significance and influence are not the same thing and it is difficult to assess how Victorian readers would have responded to these views. With certain individuals this is a bit easier. For example, Thomas Campbell Foster’s writings were popular with the British political class. Indeed his articles for the Times were later revised and published as a manuscript and the historian Peter Gray claims that his views were more widely read, and incited greater controversy, than the Devon report. Henry Inglis’s travel book went through several editions and popular figures like Arthur Young, William Thackeray, and Harriet Martineau were likely to have been widely read. What readers thought of these productions is hard to know, although the uniformity and stability of certain discourses clearly lends some clue as to their popularity.

22 Self-characterisations of innocence and objectivity were a common feature in other arenas of colonial travel writing. Mary Louise Pratt very well describes (and gives examples) of what she calls the discourse of “anti-conquest”: “strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert their hegemony.” Mary Louise Pratt. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation. London: Routledge, 1992: 7. See also James Buzard’s account of the “anti-tourist” — the cultural practices that distinguished the true “traveller” from the more “vulgar tourist.” James Buzard. The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993: 18-79.
The influence of the government Blue Books has been challenged most recently by Oz Frankel, although again it is worth emphasising that in a centralised government system (as I show in chapter three) the opinions of a small coterie of officials and experts can wield an extraordinary degree of power.  

Clearly the type of “culture of travel” I am invoking here differs greatly from the routes and routines of the Grand Tour which, according to Bruce Redford’s impressive study, “drew and formed [Europe’s] impressionable young aristocracy-in-training.” This was travel conducted under the sign of Pleasure: promising the thrill of modern art, politics, and sexual awakening beyond the lights and limits of Victorian society. The heyday of the Grand Tour was the eighteenth and early nineteenth century and its gradual demise was precipitated by the Napoleonic Wars which effectively closed Europe to British travellers and undoubtedly heightened interest in Ireland. But this interest was of a different order. Indeed, Philip Luckombe’s declaration in 1779 that Ireland ought to be known “next to Great Britain,” suggests not only a decline in the importance of the Grand Tour, but also the increased pursuance of travel under the sign of Science and Utility. To paint in broad strokes: political and economic concerns were infiltrating the realm of aesthetic travel.

Here a couple of points might be helpfully registered. Although the repositioning and mobilisation of travel under the sign Science and Utility was never unambiguous or straightforward it does helpfully gloss why the middle-classes (and not merely the “impressionable young aristocracy-in-training”) were increasingly concerned with the role of government in ordinary life. In his book The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918 James Buzard helpfully traces a similar development through the historical context of industrialisation and the intellectual currents of Romanticism. Buzard ably shows how the social, technical and economic advancements unleashed by industrialisation might be productively read alongside the Romantics’ concern for the collapse of organic society. According to Buzard these developments explain how travel becomes embroiled in

27 Frankel, op. cit.: 309-18.
“how modernity itself might be characterised and confronted.” This was of course the age in which the traveller’s gaze turned toward life in the manufacturing districts in Britain and the wretchedness of the urban industrial class so memorably depicted by Engels. In other words, the inquisitive gaze turned toward the spaces in which the forces shaping society were most clearly evident and this included, of course, the administration of life in the colonies. In the next section, therefore, I want to briefly discuss certain technological developments that helped enlarge the space of cultural contact between Britain and Ireland.

**Routes and Routines of colonial travel**

The commercial viability of steam transport helped to regularize contact between Britain and Ireland. “Yesterday in London — an Englishman; and to-day in Dublin — an Irishman. Success to steam!” declared (the German) Jacob Venedey in 1843. Contrast this with Arthur Young’s journey in 1776 — which lasted twenty-two “tedious” hours — and we get a sense of the enormity of the transformation. Of the various routes between Britain and Ireland, Holyhead to Dublin was become by far the most popular. By the middle of the nineteenth-century thirty coach roads and two canals radiated from Dublin, giving travellers unique access to many of the country’s main towns and villages. By 1841 only a few areas on the remote western seaboard were more than ten miles from public transport. (See Figures 2.2 and 2.3.) The novelty of these technological developments and the travel ambitions they encouraged were routinely registered by travellers. Henry Inglis, who travelled around Ireland for nine months in 1834, was greatly impressed by the cheapness, convenience and efficiency of Irish transport:

> Although there are carriages of all descriptions in Ireland, and coaches too on many of the public roads, the jaunting car is the national vehicle; and Ireland would scarcely be Ireland without it. It may be said completely to supersede, as a private vehicle, the whole of the gig tribe, — dennet, tilbury, cabriolet, &c.; and to be a formidable rival to the coach, as a public conveyance. Throughout the

30 Buzard, *op. cit.:* 19.
33 Anne Plumptre fared worse. Her Irish journey to Ireland in 1814-15, began with a twenty-four hour trip from Liverpool to Holyhead and although by dawn the day after her departure she could see the Hill of Howth, it was not until six in the evening that she could step ashore: a total of fifty-seven hours of travel. Hadfield and McVeagh, *op. cit.:* 139. Plumptre, *op. cit.*
34 Hadfield and McVeagh, *op. cit.:* 135.
36 Freeman, *op. cit.:* 256.
Figure 2.2 : Canal and Road Services, c. 1841
Source: T.W. Freeman, 1989: 270, by permission of Oxford University Press

Figure 2.3 : Bianconi Services 1815 – 1840
Source: T.W. Freeman, 1989: 269, by permission of Oxford University Press
whole of the south, and a great part of the west of Ireland, the public, as well as the mails, are chiefly conveyed by cars; and it is no small convenience to the traveller, that he may travel post, by car, at eightpence, and in some parts, at sixpence per mile, throughout Ireland, as expeditiously, and, in fine weather, far more agreeably, than in post-chaise.37

Many travellers remarked favourably on the condition of Irish roads — except, of course, where they were ploughed through as part of public work programmes.38 Much of the ease of travel owed to the singular efforts of an Italian-born entrepreneur named Charles Bianconi who based his famous transport service in Clonmel, County Tipperary. “From thence his cars [popularly called “bians”] radiate in every direction — embracing nearly fifty of the chief towns of the south and west; and not only following the high-roads, but connecting these towns with each

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other by cross-roads. The establishment reckons between five and six hundred horses, and
upwards of two hundred vehicles.”39

New technologies of movement meant new scales of travel, and perhaps most
importantly, different intensities of engagement with other peoples and places. This too was
obviously part of a wider trend whereby the space-time of communications and politico-cultural
contact radically imploded, a process that David Harvey describes as “time-space
compression.”40 Obviously the development and growth of transport systems and the
concomitant “time-space compression” is a geographically specific phenomenon. To nineteenth-
century British travellers Dunbeg was always going to be more remote than Dublin. Yet,
“inaccessibility” was seen less and less as an “intrinsic feature of the natural landscape” —
technology was realigning that myth — and more in terms of a relationship which existed only
after “certain places had become centres or outposts of control.” Furthermore, as Nicholas
Thomas points out, the colonial state in particular had a “strong interest in bringing ‘isolated’
villages closer to such centres or to the government roads.” 41 This claim is strongly borne out in
the John Ashworth’s travel narrative:

Now that the internal communications are daily opening out the country, and the
proximity of England is so marvellously increased by railways in every direction,
it becomes a self-evident fact that Ireland cannot remain as it is; propinquity to
better things will induce imitation; and that spirit of enterprise which has already
converted so many far distant deserts of the earth into smiling and prosperous
colonies, cannot and will not suffer one of the loveliest and most fertile islands of
the world, only a few hours’ distance from our own shores, to remain a mere
waste, inhabited, as it is, by a hardy, intelligent, but ignorant and semi-barbarous
population.42

39 Inglis, op. cit.: 31. Bianconi was something of a local hero, a close friend of Repeal leader Daniel O’Connell, and
popular character in many travel accounts. Born on the 24th September 1786 at the village of Tregolo in
Lombardy, Joachim Carlo Giuseppe Bianconi (later Charles Bianconi), was dispatched to the United Kingdom by
his father in order to end an ill-fated love affair. Bianconi originally set-up in Dublin, moving to Carrick-on-Suir,
and later Clonmel. Early business ventures (print vendor, carver and guilder, bullion dealer) convinced the young
Italian of the need for greater communications in Ireland. In 1815 he started to carry passengers, goods, and mail,
in a one-horse, two-wheeled car on local routes. From meagre beginnings his business expanded rapidly. By 1832
he was conveying passengers and goods over 1,633 miles of road. Bianconi also played an important role in the
comments cited in O’Muirithé, op. cit.: 114-116; Freeman, op. cit.: 256.
40 David Harvey. Spaces of Hope. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000: 62; David Harvey. The
41 Thomas, op. cit.: 121.
42 John Hervey Ashworth. The Rambles of an Englishman in the West; or, the Saxon in Ireland. Boston: Patrick
Donahue, 1850: 115.
However, making peoples and places less remote — and opening them out to civilisation — was also a prerogative of writers. “Judging by myself,” wrote Inglis, “our ignorance about the second and third-rate Irish towns is extreme. There are only some few we ever hear of. Leaving Cork, Waterford, Limerick, and Belfast out of the list, less I think is known of the other towns, unless by the gentlemen of the army, than the same class of towns on the continent. Before the introduction of the Reform Bill, which somewhat enlightened us as to the size of the towns, less was known of the Irish towns than now; but even yet, our ideas of Kilkenny, Clonmel, Athlone, Mullingar, Mallow, Fermoy, Cashel, Thurles, Tipperary, Ennis, Galway, Sligo, and a host of others, are of the vaguest descriptions.” It is certainly interesting that Inglis acknowledges the role played by the “gentlemen of the army” in catapulting Irish towns and their inhabitants into the public imagination (the contribution of police and army officers to the Ordinance Survey and population census — other ventures in “making up people” — is well known and in both cases the accumulation of knowledge facilitated the accumulation of power); however, he is also implying that being rightly informed about the condition of Ireland (knowing the interiors of every “second and third-rate” town) is crucial to the successful administration of the country. This crusade for information was cultivated through performances in space — through enacting specific routes and routines — that made other peoples and places objects of attention and calculation.

It is an interesting if little noted fact that many travel writers self-consciously styled themselves as government officials. In his massive four volume travelogue on Ireland, for example, Arthur Bennett characterised himself as a sort of “amateur Commission of Enquiry.” This gesture was by no means flippant or facetious. In fact it had many precedents (Bennett’s account was published in 1890). Inglis’s only slightly slimmer two volume tour deliberately anticipated the government’s Poor Law Commission of 1834 by devoting a full chapter to his own un-commissioned “report.” Thomas Carlyle undertook two separate journeys to Ireland, first in 1846 and then again in 1849. Both tours are important on account of the different faminescapes Carlyle bore witness to; however, it is also significant that he penned his remarks under the ominous sobriquet “Eternity’s commissioner” (his emphasis). Indeed, as we noted above during one of the worst years of hunger the Times newspaper dispatched a special

43 Inglis, op. cit.: 50.
44 Bennett, _John Bull and His Other Island_, op. cit.: 13.
journalist to Ireland to submit weekly reports as the "Times Commissioner." Thus it is clear that in many instances the line distinguishing "correspondent" and "commissioner" was increasingly blurred. Many travellers saw themselves as contributing to what today we might call "actionable intelligence," a fact which obviously renders any uncritical acceptance of these narratives as "source material" problematic.

**An amateur commissioner**

Henry Inglis's sprawling account of Ireland, published in 1834, is a case in point. Having dabbled as a journalist, editor and novelist, more-or-less without notice, Inglis turned to foreign travel and reporting to earn a living. At the time of undertaking his Irish tour he had published a number of travelogues — including *Narrative of a Journey through Norway, Part of Sweden, and the Islands and States of Denmark* (1826), *Solitary Walks through Many Lands* (1828), *A Tour through Switzerland* (1830), *The South of France and the Pyrenees* (1831), *The Tyrol, with a Glance at Bavaria* (1833) — and had met some critical and commercial success. Inglis managed to fill two volumes with thirty-two chapters, researched over a period of nine months (the Spring, Summer and Autumn of his title). Indeed, by his own admission Inglis managed to journey through virtually every county in Ireland. Throughout the book the author is at pains to point out that his book stands in contradistinction to his previous travelogues:

I have not studied to make this an agreeable book, so much as a useful book. It has neither the romantic incident, which, *malgré moi*, diversifies my work on Spain, nor the scenic which I have introduced into my books on the Tyrol, or on

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46 Foster, *op. cit*. The *Times* was not unique in employing "commissioners." Alexander Somerville, for example, was dispatched to Ireland by the proprietors of the *Manchester Examiner*. Alexander Somerville. *Letters from Ireland During the Famine of 1847*. Ed. K.D.M. Snell. Dublin: IAP, 1994: 13.

47 Evidently not all travellers and journalists preferred to depict themselves as government officials. Indeed, The Rev. Sydney Godolphin Osborne's (later Lord Osborne) important travel book *Gleanings in the West of Ireland* (1850) was embroiled in some controversy because he was presumed to be another specimen of "Times Commissioner" and *ipso facto* in the pay of government. One Irish newspaper went so far as label him a "penny-a-liner." In the preface to *Gleanings* Osborne rehearses these accusations only to rebut them: "For many years the Editor of the 'Times' has kindly indulged me with space in his journal, when it has pleased me to write, what it has pleased him to publish; I never yet touched one farthing, or received any personal favour from him, or the Editor of any other journal, beyond that simple favour of making public for me, what I wished to publish." The rebuttal was only partially successful. On the opposite page Osborne declared, "I have no hesitation in avowing, that I am very grateful for the assistance the 'Times' has afforded me in my efforts to ameliorate the condition of my poorer fellow-creatures. I feel no shame in being called a 'correspondent' of that paper." Of course Osborne had not been written-off as a correspondent of that paper, and one wonders whether this bit of legerdemain was appreciated by his opponents. At any rate, it seems clear that both factions perceived the line distinguishing "correspondent" and "commissioner" to be increasingly blurred. Sidney Godolphin Osborne. *Gleanings in the West of Ireland*. London: Boone, 1850: vii.

Norway. This is not because I could not find romance to amuse the reader with, or scenery to describe to him; it is I trust, for a better reason. Irish legends, Irish novels, we have in abundance. Irish character, condition, and manners, have been presented to us in many agreeable forms of fiction: but it is not romance, or a caricature, nor even the most beautiful union of truth and fiction, that we want. I could, perhaps, have made my readers oftentimes merry, by narrating the curious and witty eccentricities of Irish character. But why jest, when occupied with so grave a subject? why endeavour to amuse, when I desire to interest? why raise a smile, when I would rather induce meditation, and serious thought? God knows, there is little real cause for jocularity, in treating of the condition of a starving people. We have been amused with fiction long enough; I aspire in these volumes, to be the narrator of truth. 49

The self-appointed “narrator of truth” was not unaware of the challenges: “I was everywhere informed that Ireland is a difficult country to know.”50 Such obstacles could be met, he believed, by perseverance and precision. To avoid making a “shipwreck of truth,” Inglis carried from Dublin an arsenal of “upwards of one hundred and thirty letters of introduction,” and during his journeying he claimed to have had occasion to deliver at least three times in excess of this number.51 These letters of introduction permitted two essential practices. First, they allowed Inglis to stage himself from mansion to mansion among the network of the Anglo-Irish ruling class.52 Secondly they were decisive in obtaining useful information on the nature and cause of Irish grievances. The letters permitted access “to persons of all ranks, from the peer to the farmer” (to the peasant he introduced himself); and to individuals of all opinions, “from the orange magistrate of Down and Derry, to the Catholic repealer of Kilkenny and Tipperary; from the protestant dignitary to the country curate; from the Catholic bishop to the parish priest.”53

The trails of these introductory epistles are just as important as the construction of roads, canals and railways. They too produced routes and routines making certain peoples and places accessible (and visible) and particular representations possible.54

Nabokov once remarked that only a single sibilant separates the cosmic from the comic. This charge might be levelled at Henry Inglis’s panglossian labours to record the exact nature of Irish life. Although he was frequently cited (the Dictionary of National Biography records that

49 Inglis, op. cit.: 396.
50 Ibid.: 2.
51 Ibid.: 13.
52 Hadfield and McVeagh, op. cit.: 135.
53 Inglis, op. cit.: 13.
he was quoted as an “authority” in parliament) at least two other contemporaries — G. F.G. Mathieson and James Johnson — criticised Inglis’s elaborate reliance on letters of introduction, with Johnson complaining that the only notes he found useful for procuring information were of a monetary kind. But to dismiss Inglis entirely would be to miss the point. When the author speaks of “our ignorance about the second and third-rate Irish towns,” he is implicitly pointing to an apparent disconnect between sound knowledge and good policy. Indeed, as Inglis said himself his travelogue was meant to be a “useful book.” But useful to whom and for what ends?

It so happens that 1834, the year Inglis undertook his tour, was also the year the British government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland. Inglis was well aware of this fact and through the kind intercession of friends he was able to procure “all the papers which the government intended should guide the inquiries of the commissioners.” Indeed, as mentioned above, the penultimate chapter of his book is devoted to addressing the terms of the Commission. Moreover, though many Commissions had been sent to report on Ireland, there was an exceptional degree of anticipation surrounding this report. The English Poor Law had been reformed in the same year and it was widely thought that a similar structure would be extended to Ireland.

Inglis’s penultimate chapter is therefore of some significance. The author takes great care to qualify his “extraordinary presumption” that “the statements of an humble individual like myself are more entitled to carry weight with them than the report of the government commissioners.” The reasons offered are both strong and varied, ranging from his “practice and experience” to his cagey admission that he conducted the entire journey in the company of his

55 Mathieson thought that places receiving public monies ought to be open to public inspection, regardless of any introductions. He did admit, however, that Inglis “was not a party man, and he has always been quoted as an impartial authority.” Mathieson also admits he has not read Inglis’s book. G. F.G. Mathieson. Journal of a Tour in Ireland, During the Months of October and November 1835. London: Bentley, 1836: 186-188.
56 Johnson declared: “Some of our Ministers of State could certify, that the little ‘Billets’ from the Strand have unlocked secrets that no other letter of introduction could effect.” The American philanthropist, Asenath Nicholson, greatly disliked letters of introduction because they placed two parties in constraining conditions and because she had no wish to be “peddled about as a second-hand article.” James Johnson. A Tour in Ireland with Meditations and Reflections. London: S. Higley, 1844: 2; Asenath Nicholson. The Bible in Ireland ("Ireland's Welcome to the Stranger or Excursions through Ireland in 1844 and 1845 for the Purpose of Personally Investigating the Condition of the Poor"). Ed. with an introduction by Alfred Tresidder Sheppard. New York: John Day Company, 1927: 6-7.
57 "First Report of the Royal Commission on Condition of Poorer Classes in Ireland." Parliamentary Papers. 1835 (369) XXXII.
58 Inglis, op. cit.: 175
wife (if an Englishman in Ireland immediately begets suspicion “the appearance of a female as quickly disarms it”). Foremost is Inglis’s belief that the “unpretending traveller” elicits none of the suspicions of government officials: “There is one sad omission in the instructions delivered to the commissioners. — There ought to have been printed in the front, and in large characters, these words: ‘Upon no account, let your official character be known among the country people, from whom you wish to receive true information.’” Unlike government officials, Inglis writes:

I had not to cloak my dignities, and achieve a triumph over my own importance, before I could make myself useful. I could freely take a glass of illicit whiskey with the farmer, and a potato with the labourer; and take a turn with him, in digging his turf: I could sit down in the hedge whiskey-house; and jest with the landlady, and dance a jig with the daughter; — all of which would be very unseemly in a government commissioner. In order to win the confidence of an Irish peasant, the free and easy is absolutely essential.

Inglis also pointed out that he possessed the advantage of being able to work comparatively. Typically government officials were dispatched to different counties or districts to report on local conditions, leaving the general report “framed from materials unequal in their value” and lacking any real synthetic quality. It was Inglis’s opinion that a lone reporter with sufficient “practice and experience” possessed distinct advantages.

What to say about all of this? I spend some time discussing Inglis’s travel book because the terms of its production outline a number of important points regarding the dissemination of knowledge on Ireland. First, Inglis’s lengthy rationalizations establish truth itself as a journey — it is something to be “arrived at” (as Inglis put it) in and through particular performances. Even so, there is the strong sense that the landscape is dead without Inglis’s presence and Irish

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59 Ibid.: 364-365. William Thackeray also found that the Irish evince “a peevish and puerile suspiciousness, which is worthy of France herself” toward the English. William Makepeace Thackeray, The Irish Sketch Book. 1869. London: John Murray Ballantyne Hanson, 1985: 95.

60 Inglis, op. cit.: 364.

61 Inglis was not adverse to using bribes (chiefly money and tobacco) to gain information. Ibid.: 365.


63 This was especially important since the Irish were reputed to be incorrigible liars. For instance, William Thackeray wrote: “Ask about an estate you may be sure almost that people will make misstatements, or volunteer them if not asked. Ask a cottager about his rent, or his landlord; you cannot trust him. I shall never forget the glee with which a gentleman in Munster told me how he had sent off M. M. Tocqueville and Beaumont ‘with such set of stories.’ Inglis was seized, as I am told, and mystified in the same way. In the midst of all these truths, attested with ‘I give ye my sacred honour and word,’ which is the stranger to select? And how are we to trust philosophers who make theories upon such data?” Thackeray, op. cit.: 364.

64 Inglis, op. cit.: 364.
voices are almost entirely absent. The Irish appear as so many ventriloquised subjects since local opinions, where ventured, are invariably filtered by Inglis. In fact Stephen Greenblatt’s remark — issued in another colonial context — that the ‘natives’ often seem “most silent at those rare moments in which they are made speak” seems entirely apposite here.\textsuperscript{65} In common with other literature from the “contact zone” documents about the people were seldom for the people. Indeed the “public” addressed by Inglis — always in the singular — is resolutely British. This does not mean that Inglis’s statements are ipso facto misrepresentations, but it does make it necessary to question his conclusions in light of his objectives.

Inglis’s reaction to Ireland was a mixture of sympathy and repulsion. For instance, he was “not at all surprised that a people suffering all the extremities of human privation, should catch at straws.”\textsuperscript{66} Yet he never thought it harsh or contradictory to deplore a poor nation for making marriage “a very commercial concern.”\textsuperscript{67} Although he thought that “the chief wealth of the poor, seemed to be the dung-heap before their door,” he distressed over “too many evidences of idle, slovenly habits.”\textsuperscript{68} He was appalled by the clear examples of perjury witnessed at an Ennis assize, but he also had the perspicacity to observe that where the law had lost its legitimacy “false oaths are the substitutes for weapons.”\textsuperscript{69} He protests that he is not anti-Catholic, though he concludes that Lough Derg (a Catholic pilgrimage) is a “famous resort of ignorance and superstition” and believed “Protestantism the better religion for the people, and

\textsuperscript{65}Greenblatt is reflecting on the important question “can the subaltern speak?” Since this is doubtlessly important, but beyond the bounds of the present study it is worth hearing what he has to say: “The responses of the natives to the fatal advent of the Europeans survive only in the most fragmentary and problematical form; much of what I would like to learn is lost forever, and much of what is not lost exists only through the mediation of those Europeans who for one reason or another – missionary, commercial, military, literary, historical, or philosophical – saw fit to register the voices of the other. The natives themselves often seem most silent at those rare moments in which they are made speak.” Greenblatt, \textit{op. cit.}: 145-146. Greenblatt’s comments ignore those unmediated moments when the other writes back – although this is problematic too because of what Leerssen calls auto-exoticism: “a mode of seeing, presenting and representing oneself in one’s otherness.” Leerssen. \textit{Remembrance and Imagination, op. cit.}: 37. In \textit{Imperial Eyes} Mary Louise Pratt offers another approach. Her book is part of an effort to decolonize knowledge and “revindicate” the lifeways of the oppressed, and their struggles with Euroimperialism, androcentrism, and white supremacy: “The effort must be among other things, an exercise in humility. For one of the things it brings forcefully into play are contestatory expressions from the site of imperial intervention, long ignored in the metropolis; the critiques of empire coded ongoingly on the spot, in ceremony, dance, parody, philosophy, counterknowledge and counterhistory, in texts unwitnessed, suppressed, lost, or simply overlain with repetition and unreality.” Pratt, \textit{op. cit.}: 2. See also Clive Barnett. “Sing Along with the Common People: Politics, Postcolonialism, and Other Figures.” \textit{Environment and Planning D: Society and Space} 15 (1997): 137-54.

\textsuperscript{66}Inglis, \textit{op. cit.}: 58.

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid.: 73.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.: 53, 38.

\textsuperscript{69}According to Inglis excessive litigation was due to "an inherent defect of character; and competition for land." \textit{Ibid.}: 166, 361.
safer for the state.”

At times he could apprehend the grim realities of poverty yet he christened some of the poorest regions in the west “the land of romance,” and a place where “gallantry and superstition divide life between them.” Can we, and indeed should we want to reconcile these statements? Nicholas Thomas has said that “any travel account is likely to embody both exoticizing and familiarizing gestures,” but what is evident here is a curious combination of both, or what might be usefully described as an engaged estrangement. How to explain it? The vagaries of cross-cultural interpretations, although important, are simply not adequate. The knowledge that Inglis commonly had to speak on Ireland exactly as he saw it — en passant — is again relevant, but nine months was considerably more than most foreigners spent in Ireland. Clearly, other interpretations are needed.

In a relevant passage from The Birth of the Clinic, Foucault observed that “since disease can be cured only if others intervene with their knowledge, their resources, their pity, since a patient can be cured only in society, it is just that the illness of some should be transformed into the experience of others ... What is benevolent towards the poor is transformed into knowledge that is applicable to the rich.” In a similar way the connective dissonance opened up between traveller/subject and native/object is directly related to what we might call the “governmentalisation of knowledge” whereby poverty, disease, and hunger are abstracted from their material realities and reinserted in histories and debates aimed at compelling social change. Inglis frequently made reference to the “misdirection of human energies” to be found in Ireland. This explains why, like other visitors, he focused his attention on particular sites/sights such as visiting asylums, prisons, foundling hospitals, and court rooms (see Figure 2.1 above). It was in these spaces that a woeful “misdirection of human energies” was thought

71 Ibid: 212.
72 Thomas, op. cit.: 53. Derek Gregory describes the “twists and turns of engagement and estrangement” which need to be understood in order to understand the political and military violence done in the service of freedom and democracy. Derek Gregory. The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004: 256.
74 Inglis, op. cit.: 92.
76 Inglis, op. cit.: 99.
77 Later, travellers added the Poor Law workhouses to their “must-see” repertoire.
to be most evident. It is as if, as Foucault was to assert, the struggle against debility, disorder and malady must begin with a war against bad government.\textsuperscript{78}

What Inglis called “objects of compassion” were clearly also objects of reform, and words offered as descriptions of contemporary life were also prescriptions for change and government action.\textsuperscript{79} This is also why biopolitical production plays a very important role in much of nineteenth century travel writing. Indeed it is under the guise of development and improvement (and the knowledge that forms this basis) that the poor are transformed into so many objects of calculation.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed the logic that informs this discourse of “engaged estrangement” turns on an inside-outside dialectic: between core and periphery, subject and object, civilisation and barbarism. The role of language in producing intimate strangers is thus very revealing of biopolitical fractures more generally. Before I turn to other accounts of pre-Famine Irish life I want to explain this connection more precisely.

\textbf{History and life}

In the introduction I spent some time outlining the contours of a new technology of power that Michel Foucault called biopower. Foucault explains how toward the end of the eighteenth century state power began to focus more and more on the administration of the social body — “the calculated management of life” — bringing the biological into the domain of political reckoning.\textsuperscript{81} I argued that the politicisation of natural life initiates a series of important developments in the relationship between geography, knowledge and power. Of particular note is the establishment of important connections between patterns of inscription (that invest life) and regimes of intervention (that produce objects to be modified), which are also, perforce, productions and orderings of space. It will also be recalled that the entry of life into “knowledge’s field of control and power’s sphere of intervention.” was neither seamless nor unproblematic. This development unleashed what Foucault called a “new mode of relation between history and life” — a “dual position” — that placed life “at the same time outside of

\textsuperscript{79} Inglis, op. cit.: 342.
\textsuperscript{80} Mitchell. \textit{Rule of Experts}, op. cit.
history, in its biological environment, and inside human historicity, penetrated by the latter's techniques of knowledge and power."\textsuperscript{82}

I also want to argue that the tension between life and history (as Foucault describes it) makes clear that colonialism is a biopolitical project \textit{par excellence}. Indeed colonialism is particularly adept at fabricating "insides" and "outsides" — precarious geographies that cordon human subjects from mere biological objects (see box 2.1). In chapter one, for example, I tried to show that these partitions were established through a series of colonial moments, beginning with occupation and conquest, but later internalising the structures of violence within colonial law.\textsuperscript{83} Here I would like to extend this debate by considering how insides and outsides are fabricated through imaginative geographies of peoples and places. One powerful means of producing difference is to compartmentalise certain others in a "biological environment" set apart from the living field of "human historicity." Indeed such a colonial project radicalises the Manichean geography discussed so memorably by Frantz Fanon in \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}.\textsuperscript{84}

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\textbf{Box 2.1: Abnormality and the production of Manichean geographies}

I would not want to suggest that colonialism is the only arena in which biopower plays out this crippling geography. The "dual position" that Foucault describes is also present in the West's fascination with deviancy. According to Foucault, abnormality must be continually evoked in order to justify the brutalities of punishment: "capital punishment could not be maintained except by invoking less the enormity of the crime itself than the monstrosity of the criminal, his [sic] incorrigibility, and the safeguard to society.\textsuperscript{85} In order to establish this essentialised and intractable otherness, a panoply of inscriptions and interventions are required, involving psychiatrists, attorneys, criminologists, judges, a body of law and so forth. According to Foucault, self-appointed experts no longer face a legal subject, but an object: "In short, the function of expert opinion is to double the author of the crime, whether responsible or not, with a delinquent who is the object of a specific technology."\textsuperscript{86} Here life passes into the sphere of knowledge and power only to be placed beyond it in a shady biological zone of criminality — what Foucault called "a region of juridical indiscernibility."\textsuperscript{87} In order to justify the death function in
\end{minipage}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid.: 143. Emphasis added.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Frantz Fanon. \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Foucault. \textit{The History of Sexuality, Volume 1}, op. cit.: 138.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Ibid.: 21.
\end{itemize}
biopower, criminality is actually conceptualised in racist terms. A "biocriminal" is born.\textsuperscript{88} This also makes clear why so many scholars have found Foucault's thoughts on the western penitentiary system germane to the administration of the colonial world. Indeed some colonial policies were first developed and deployed in European metropolitan centres before being exported to the colonies. In Ireland this has been brilliantly demonstrated by Bernhard Klein's \textit{Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland}.\textsuperscript{89} This might also explain why the pauper, criminal, and subaltern (as "abnormals") are often managed in remarkably similar ways.

It is worth thinking about how all this relates to the contemporary descriptions of Irish life in the pre-famine decades. In his enormously rich survey of literary representation in nineteenth-century Ireland the Dutch cultural historian, Joep Leerssen, remarks that the image of what he terms "Real Ireland" is "partly situated in the past and partly in the peasantry."\textsuperscript{90} "Despite their great differences," Leerssen later adds, "these two elements, past and peasant, become linked and even conflated ... [moreover] both are imagined as situated outside factual history: the one the mythical prelapsarian past, the other in de-historicized chronotope situated on the margins of the world as we know it."\textsuperscript{91} This is very insightful, and I agree that the Irish past and peasant are indeed "imagined" as radically different. However, they are not always or equally "situated outside factual history" as Leerssen's comments suggests. To locate "Real Ireland" in the past (that is, in an historical environment) is decidedly different to locating "Real Ireland" in the peasant (that is, in a biological zone). In fact, as I have detailed above, it is precisely this zone of contestation and indeterminacy — between past and peasant — between history and biology — that runs to the very core of biopower.

Seen in this way, Leerssen's comments provide an important window into how pre-Famine Irish life was captured and represented and how imaginative geographies might appeal to particular geopolitical strategies. In pre-Famine descriptions of the Irish there seems to be a clear tension between nature \textit{and} culture, past \textit{and} peasant, history \textit{and} biology. The Irish were seldom depicted as completely incorrigible creatures of nature since this view invalidates the


\textsuperscript{90} Leerssen. \textit{Remembrance and Imagination, op. cit.}: 10.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Ibid.}: 225.
raison d’être of the civilising mission: the conversion of nature to culture, zoë to bios. A tension is always evident, and this is what needs to be explored.

If Foucault and Agamben are right and our natural life is increasingly at stake in biopower it becomes important to understand the role of language in describing and differentiating between various ways of life. “For anyone undertaking a genealogical study of the concept of ‘life’ in our culture,” Agamben professes, “one of the first and most instructive observations to be made is that the concept never gets defined as such. And yet, this thing that remains indeterminate gets articulated and divided time and again through a series of caesurae and oppositions that invest it with a decisive strategic function ... That is to say, everything happens as if, in our culture, life were what cannot be defined, yet precisely for this reason, must be ceaselessly articulated and divided.”92 Likewise the race to articulate the ‘real’ contours of Irish life also participates in producing “a series of caesurae and oppositions” that mark certain lives as being of more ‘value’ than others. I want to consider this proposition more generally in regard to pre-Famine accounts of Ireland and the Irish.

**Landscapes of disaffection and reform**

Following the Act of Union a noticeable paradox seems to suffuse British opinions on Ireland.93 On the one hand, Ireland was habitually proclaimed “an object so near to us as a SISTER” (just so in Anne Plumptre’s words); while, on the other hand, Ireland seemed all the more anomalous and strange because its supposed semi-barbarous traditions continued to confound the “grand plot called œuvre civilisatrice.”94 As distinct from previous centuries, however, the so-called “Irish Question” became less and less about military security and much more about “agricultural malaise, proto-industrial collapse and rural over-population” — all of which were linked to the

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93 Joep Leerssen speaks of another “momentous, immediate and disruptive effect of the Union”:

It pulled the parliamentary rug from under the ideological feet of Irish Patriotism. The failure of Patriotism in Ireland is, I think, one direct cause of the latter absence of an effective Irish liberal party: incipient liberalism was to be transmogrified into Home Rule movements and nationalism, whereas its ideological opposite number, the anti-revolutionary ideology which elsewhere in Europe was to develop into various brands of conservatism, took the guise, in Ireland, of Unionism. Thus, the ideological field, one of the long term consequences of the Union was a violent jolt in the alignment of a party-political spectrum: what elsewhere in Europe was to become a left-right polarity turned, in Ireland, into a unionist-nationalist one.

Today in the Republic the enduring divide is less one of unionism and nationalism, than a pro-treaty Fine Gael and anti-treaty Sinn Féin/Fine Fáil. Leerssen. Remembrance and Imagination, op. cit.: 20.

97
small matter of governance. This was the “great question” of the day: “How can Ireland be rendered prosperous, and her people tranquil and happy?” According to Charlotte Elizabeth the answer was “a tormenting enigma, baffling the utmost skill of worldly men, and paining the hearts of those who look beyond the passing pageant of time,” a sentiment that certainly found numerous sympathisers throughout the long history of British-Irish relations.

Of course the question presumed that Ireland, in its assigned role as younger sibling, was not meeting expectations. The so-called “partial famines” of 1816-17, 1821-22, 1830, 1838, and 1842, not to mention the migrating army of Irish suddenly alighting in British towns — as Malthus predicted and Thomas Carlyle polemicised (see chapter four) — confirmed British suspicions that Ireland was, in a word, “underdeveloped.” Lord Grey stated the matter plainly in 1846: “Ireland is the one weak place in the solid fabric of British power; Ireland is the one deep (I had almost said ineffaceable) blot on the brightness of British honour. Ireland is our disgrace.” Grey was writing during the second year of the Great Famine, but his telling blend of property and propriety — “our disgrace” — was based on commonly held views about Ireland that stretch back to pre-Famine times. Commission after commission had collected and reproduced evidence on Irish poverty. Almost all were in agreement that Irish poverty was intolerable.

Passing through Dublin in 1804 an anonymous writer found that “on every street the most shocking spectacles present themselves.” The thoroughfares were “crowded, in the daytime, with the lowest prostitutes, whose appearance betray squalid misery; and who either starve, or by their numbers prove the city to be depraved to an almost incredible extent.” In Dublin’s hinterland, the author found a “land of misery” before him: “I would not have given sixpence for the whole apparel of any man, woman, or child whom we saw all along the road.”

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95 Gray, op. cit.: 2.
97 Ibid.: 415. According to Thomas Carlyle, “[t]he aspect of Ireland is beyond words at present. The most thoughtless here is struck into momentary silence in looking at it; the wisest among us cannot guess what the end of these things is to be.” Cited in, Duffy, op. cit.: 131.
98 Ibid., op. cit.: 36.
100 Ibid.: 20.
101 Ibid.: 36.
His conclusions were stark: “To the poor, no experiment can be hurtful: for in comforts and in morals, they are already in the lowest state of degradation to which it is possible for the people to be sunk.” In 1817 Anne Plumptre travelled Ireland “to understand ... its customs and manners, its civil and political state, that we may be enabled to compare them with our own, and judge between them and ourselves.”

She found reason enough for dismay. At Skibbereen, a town which later became synonymous with starvation, she witnessed “whole streets, and not very short ones, consisting entirely of the wretched mud cabins of the peasants.” As part of a protracted European tour the American, John Griscom, arrived in Belfast on 4th of April 1819. Making his way toward County Armagh he witnessed a ragged, barefoot population, the worst anywhere, “save some Italian villages.” At Lurgan he found “deplorable appearances of wretchedness” and houses that were literally “hovels of mud.”

Walter Scott, who had long promised to visit Ireland (according to his correspondence with the novelist Maria Edgeworth), eventually arrived in 1825. By this time Ireland was virtually synonymous with degrading poverty, yet Scott was completely unprepared for the extremities of want and hardship:

There is much less exaggerated about the Irish than is to be expected. Their poverty is not exaggerated; it is on the very verge of human misery; their cottages would scare serve for pig-styes, even in Scotland; and their rags seem the very refuse of the rag-shop, and are disposed on their bodies with such ingenious variety of wretchedness that you would think nothing but some sort of perverted taste could have assembled so many shreds together. You are

102 Ibid.: 66.
103 Plumptre, op. cit.: v.
104 Ibid.: 255.
105 Griscom, op. cit.: 422,449.
constantly fearful that some knot or loop will give, and place the individual before you in all the primitive simplicity of Paradise.106

Likewise, William Thackeray had frequent occasion to describe a “shabby sauntering people,” who got about “barelegged” and “bareheaded.”107 Significantly he could not sketch them: “[b]ut it is impossible for the pencil to give due raggedness to the rags, or to convey a certain picturesque mellowness of colour that the garments assume.”108 Jacob Venedey “had often, when looking at the garments of the beggars in Dublin, been greatly puzzled to think, how it was possible for them to find their way, right into them, through the labyrinths of holes and rents.”109 Andrew Bigelow echoes the remark that he never knew what the paupers of London did with their clothes until coming to Dublin.110 Thus, the ‘bareness’ or ‘nakedness’ of everyday life is consistently invoked, combined with a sense of fear that “some knot or loop will give,” as Walter Scott expressed it.

During the Great Famine eyewitnesses also resorted to the trope of fear to describe the decrepit and wasted state of starvation. For example, the miserable attire of the peasantry was remarked by Thomas Carlyle in 1849: “Scarecrow figures all busy among their peats, ragged all, old straw hats, old grey loose coats in tatters, vernacular aspect all,” while only a few pages later he gave the metaphor added flavour, “Scarecrow boatman, his clothes or rags hung on him like a tapestry, when the wind blew he expanded like a tulip: first of

![Figure 2.6: Miss Kennedy distributing clothing at Kilrush](Source: Illustrated London News, December 22, 1849)

107 Thackeray, *op. cit.*: 8.
108 Ibid.: 208.
109 Venedey, *op. cit.*: 291.
110 Andrew Bigelow. *Leaves from a Journal; or, Sketches of Rambles in North Britain and Ireland*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd and G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1824: 86. For a vivid, detailed and comparative description of the miserliness of the peasants’ habiliments see Kohl, *op. cit.*: 47-48. In Kohl’s account “Paddy” is by far the most beggarly.
many such conditions of dress.” But arguably in such cases what was feared was not so much the naked body, but the inescapability of “bare life,” which is revealed in all its “primitive simplicity” in the colonies. Ireland was now constitutionally linked to the world’s most rapidly industrialising society, also hailed as one the most democratic and interventionist governments of its day. The Union was supposed to be cathartic, but the inescapability of hardship and the apparentness of uneven development meant that eye-witnesses had to frequently confront what has been called the “darker side” of civilisation. This confrontation with the underbelly of colonial-capitalism could have a rousing effect as in Sidney Osborne’s comment: “The British lion has indeed here so mangy an appearance, that every Briton of common decency would have inclined to disclaim all connection with the unhappy animal.” However, more often it did not. Indeed in most accounts “Ireland” served to reflect civilisation precisely by being the site of its absence.

The picture of poverty painted by the many government commissions was virtually the same. In 1830 a Select Committee recorded that nearly three-quarters of the population of Kerry were “destitute of the means of subsistence.” We are told how desperate peasants built their hovels on cliff-fronts in order to spot ship wrecks off the stormy coast: “they considered them part of their means of subsistence.” Similarly, Asenath Nicholson was told how storms blow good luck for the poor because they threw up seaweed which could be used for food and

114 Osborne, *op. cit.:* 51.
115 In an excellent discussion of how the colony is represented in travel literature Catherine Nash writes: “The imperial centre remains the absent and enabling signifier and, despite the detailed reportage of landscape and customs, the superior imperial centre is privileged as the norm against which difference is measured.” Catherine Nash. "Embodying the Nation" — the West of Ireland Landscape and Irish Identity." *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*. Eds. Barbara O’Connor and Michael Cronin. Cork: Cork University Press, 1993: 89 (my emphasis) Judith Butler makes a similar same point regarding the relational function of the bride to masculinity. Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1999: 50.
manure for conacre land. Another individual giving evidence before the Select Committee recalled groups of peasants employed as “lifters.” Their job was to assist the cattle in the district who were so starved they could not rise without aid. Besides descriptions of habitual hunger, the wretched hovels of the peasantry were consistently remarked upon. The 1841 census identified four grades of housing in Ireland. The fourth grade consisted of single-roomed, windowless mud cabins, which nearly half of all the rural population occupied (see Figures 2.7 to 2.9). Living standards were appalling as William Bennett’s narrative makes clear:

Many of the cabins were holes in the bog, covered with a layer of turves, and not distinguishable as human habitations from the surrounding moor, until close down upon them. The bare sod was about the best material of which any of them were constructed. Doorways, not doors, were usually provided at both ends of the bettermost — back and front — to take advantage of the way of the wind. Windows and chimneys, I think, had no existence. A second apartment or division of any kind within was exceedingly rare. Furniture, properly so called, I believe may be stated at nil ... as far as memory serves, we saw neither bed, chair, nor table, at all. A chest, a few iron or earthen vessels, a stool or two, the dirty rags or night-coverings, formed about the sum total of the best furnishing. Outside many were all but unapproachable, from mud and filth surrounding them; the same inside, or worse if possible, from the added closeness, darkness and smoke.

Figure 2.7: Common Mayo Mud Cabin
Figure 2.8: Worst sort of Mayo Stone Cabin

Source: J. Barrow, 1836: 159
Source: J. Barrow, 1836: 162

118 Nicholson, op. cit.: 217.
119 Select Committee on State of Poor in Ireland, op. cit.: 16.
121 By the mid-nineteenth-century the image of the decrepit peasant hovel was firmly fixed in the Victorian imaginary as William Thackeray’s comments make clear: “One fancies that the chairs and the tables inside are broken, and that the teapot on the breakfast-table has no spout, and the tablecloth is ragged and sloppy, and the lady of the house is in dubious curl-papers, and the gentlemen with an imperial to his chin, and a flaring dressing-gown all ragged at the elbows. To be sure, a traveller who in ten minutes can see not only the outsides of houses but the interiors of the same, must have remarkably keen sight; and it is early yet to speculate.” Thackeray, op. cit.: 8; William Bennett. Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland. London: C. Gilpin, 1847: 25. The German Kohl declared that he could see into the interior of Irish cabins without leaving his coach seat owing to the holes in the roof. Kohl. op. cit.: 20.
Some travellers were so perturbed that they did their best to avoid such scenes of misery. Sydney Osborne confessed that he enjoyed Clifden all the more because of the absence of people. Similarly Thackeray took pleasure in Turk waterfall at Muckross because “savages won’t pay sixpence for the prettiest waterfall ever seen, so that this only was for the best company” The “ruinous supplications” of beggars was notorious. In a rare moment of scorn the American philanthropist, Asenath Nicholson, declared: “They are like Pharaoh’s frogs; they compass the whole length and breadth of the land, and are almost as much to be dreaded as the whole ten plagues; they leave you no room for escape on any hand; dodge where you will, they are on the spot, and the ill-fated stranger needs a fathomless bag, who ventures on a tour among those hunger-armed assailants.” In intelligent letters addressed to his former wife, the Prussian Prince, Pückler-Muskau, described Irish beggar boys “humming about like flies and unceasingly offering their services.” Travellers used different ploys to rid themselves of this poor onslaught. Some scattered coins and food. During the Famine Alexander Somerville went everywhere armed with bread though we can be sure this tactic was less widely used.

But it was clearly difficult to avoid what was everywhere present as Archibald Stark was to learn. “It [poverty] involves the very existence of every class of society. It meets the tourist at every turn, whether he will or no; it is written in legible characters on the roofless cabin of the

Figure 2.9: Hovel near the Foot of the Reek
Source: J. Barrow, 1836: 180.

122 Osborne, op. cit.: 68.
123 Thackeray, op. cit.: 136.
124 Nicholson, op. cit.: 22. Strangely enough — considering his overall distain for the Irish poor — James Johnson notes an important irony lost on nearly every other Victorian traveller: “Wherever there is an afflux of strangers, there will be an afflux of beggars.” Johnson, op. cit.: 102.
125 Unlike most travellers the prince found this practice endearing: “They are the best brought-up and most cheerful street boys in the world.” He felt the Irish “have others to thank for their faults, but for their virtues, only themselves.” Hermann Fürst von Pückler-Muskau. Tour in England, Ireland, and France, in the Years 1828, and 1829. With Remarks on the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants, and Anecdotes of Distinguished Public Characters. In a Series of Letters. Philadelphia: Carey Lea and Blanchard, 1833. Catherine O’Connell reversed the charge blaming “carelessly-generous Englishmen” for teaching Irish beggars how to earn a quick shilling. Catherine M. O’Connell. Excursions in Ireland During 1844 and 1850. With a Visit to the Late Daniel O’connell, M.P. London: R. Bentley, 1852: 9.
126 Somerville, op. cit.: 7.
peasant — on the counter of the shopkeeper — on the desk of the merchant — and on the marble pillars at the threshold of the aristocrat. If the tourist were blind, it would be rung in his ears in a thousand different cries of agony; therefore, the tourist who has any regard for truth, may not pass it over.”

In a sneer aimed at William Thackeray he added that even “the frivolous butterfly-class of travellers, who float from place to place on pinions of pleasure” could not possibly avoid the worn face of dearth.

The barb was mostly justified. In this extract Thackeray describes the ubiquity of Irish poverty and the price this exacts on the “traveller for pleasure”:

In the midst of your pleasures, three beggars have hobbled up, and are howling supplications to the lord. One is old and blind, and so diseased and hideous, that straightway all the pleasure of the sight round about vanishes from you – that livid ghastly face interposing between you and it. And so it is throughout the South and West of Ireland. The traveller is haunted by the face of popular starvation. It is not the exception, it is the condition of the people. In this fairest and richest of countries, men are suffering and starving by millions. There are thousands of them at this minute, stretching in the sunshine at their cabin doors with no work, scarcely any food, no hope seemingly. Strong countrymen are lying in bed ‘for the hunger’ – because a man lying on his back does not need so much food as a person a-foot. Many of them have torn up the unripe potatoes from their little gardens, to exist now, and must look to winter, when they shall have to suffer starvation and cold too. The epicurean, and the traveller for pleasure, had better travel anywhere than here; where there are miseries that one does not dare to think of; where one is always feeling how helpless pity is, and how hopeless relief, and is perpetually made ashamed of being happy.

This is a significant passage. The author admits that suffering and starvation are not the exception but the rule and the knowledge that other human beings are reduced to conditions of bare subsistence made one perpetually “ashamed of being happy.” However, this anomie is never openly and honestly confronted. A genuine politics of recognition is foreclosed and a bleached rhetoric of “complaint” is introduced. Pity is “helpless,” relief “hopeless.” This is

128 Ibid.: 117. Thackeray’s account was well known. He was quoted with approval by James Johnson and Harriet Martineau. In fact Pete McCarthy’s more recent — and massively successful — travelogue makes frequent use of Thackeray. Pete McCarthy, McCarthy’s Bar. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2000.
129 Thackeray, op. cit.: 86-7. See also B. G. MacCarthy. “Thackeray in Ireland.” Studies: An Irish Quarterly Journal 40 (1991): 55-68. Archibald Stark also found that “The country from Skibbereen to Bantry ... presents little to gratify the traveller who is in the habit of regarding the presence of material happiness as necessary feature in a landscape.” Stark, op. cit.: 186.
important, not least because very similar strategies were employed during the Great Famine when the biopolitical production of bare life was uniquely visible to roaming eyes.

Like many other observers, Thackeray’s shame quickly switches to intolerance and bigotry. He frequently blackballed the Irish: “a doubtful, lazy, dirty family vassal — a guerrilla footman”; “very mean, mealy-faced, uneasy looking subaltern” a tendency which led to a fall-out of sorts with the Irish novelist Charles Lever. Thackeray thought the Irish were poor guardians of their futures: “the people like their freedom, such as it is, and prefer to starve and be ragged as they list.” Similarly John Griscom remarked that the Irish have acquired “an habitual indifference” to destitution “and will make no exertion themselves to live in greater decency and comfort, when it is in their power.” James Johnson lamented a distinctly Irish “patience in poverty,” while Anne Plumptre described an acquiescent peasantry, who exhibited “patterns of patient endurance, suffering but scarcely complaining, almost even kissing the rod by which they are scourged.” The sociability and stoicism of the poorer classes clearly confused observers. The ever-sceptical German, Jacob Venedey, confessed that “wherever we see it we consider it unnatural, and we immediately believe there must be hypocrisy in them, and deceit practised upon ourselves.” Concern for the misery of others vied with widespread fears of “dissimulation and dishonesty” as well as suspicions regarding an innate indifference to improvement. These impressions were hugely influential in delimiting a Poor Law capable of responding to endemic poverty and managing traits thought to be uniquely Irish. Indeed the nationalist writer John Mitchel was to claim that “vague and blundering idea that an impudent beggar was demanding their money with a scowl in his eye and threat upon his tongue,” helped shift the course of relief policy during the famine.

131 Thackeray, op. cit.: 86.
132 Griscom, op. cit.: 449-50.
133 Johnson, op. cit.: 278; Plumptre, op. cit.: 342. The Devon Commission also commented on the “patient endurance” of Irish labourers. “Royal Commission of Inquiry into State of Law and Practice”, op. cit.: 12.
134 According to Johnson, however, hospitality was not proof enough of civilization. “It is rather the contrary; for we often see if burn with a brighter flame in the hut of the peasant than in the palace of the prince.” Johnson, op. cit.: 183.
135 Venedey, op. cit.: vii.
136 Griscom, op. cit.: 456.
Irish poverty was also frequently attributed to “improvidence.” According to James Johnson: “Whiskey-drinking swelled and accelerated the stream of population, not by making the people more productive, but by rendering them less prudent, less wise, less cautious in the contracting of early and improvident marriages.”\(^{138}\) There was an underlying sense that Irish poverty was a result of Irish nature. Thackeray pointed out: “Kings and law don’t cause or cure dust and cobwebs; but indolence leaves them accumulate, and imprudence will not calculate its income, and vanity exaggerates its own powers, and the fault is laid upon that tyrant of a sister kingdom. The whole country is filled with such failures; swaggering beginnings that could not be carried through; grand enterprises begun dashingly, and ending in shabby compromises or downright ruin.”\(^{139}\) Likewise, Ireland boasted an “imaginary commerce” that reflected the profligacy of the people rather than the asymmetries of the market: “Mill-owners over mill themselves, merchants over-warehouse themselves, squires over-castle themselves, little tradesmen about Dublin and the cities over-villa and over-gig themselves, and we hear sad tales about hereditary bondage and the accursed tyranny of England.”\(^{140}\) Archibald Stark ironically noted “Irish ‘enterprises of great pith and moment,’ between splendid beginnings and indifferent results.”\(^{141}\) “Everything in Dublin is pomp or poverty,” wrote another traveller, who blamed the Irish gentry for having “no notion of economy, or of the frugal high living of the English.”\(^{142}\)

Discourse was swinging from hunger to habit. This personalisation of poverty helps explain the importance attached to descriptions of Irish cabin life. In his famous essay on “governmentality” Foucault suggested that after the eighteenth century, the family became more an *instrument* rather than a model of government and that this development had a deep impact on the role of economic thought.\(^{143}\) These calculations are evident in Nassau Senior’s *An Outline of the Science of Political Economy* first published in 1836: “We have no doubt that a well regulated gentleman’s family, removing the prejudices, soothing the quarrels, directing and

\(^{138}\) Johnson, *op. cit.*: 169. According to William Forster: “The farmers frequently marry their daughters at twelve of thirteen, for fear of accidents, and the peasants marry nearly as soon. Girls are generally mothers at sixteen.” T.W. Reid, *Life of the Right Honourable William Edward Forster*, Vol I. London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1888: 181. However, Joel Mokyr’s statistical analysis demonstrates that the propensity to marry before the famine was not exceptionally high: “The real difference between Ireland and the rest of Europe is in their marital fertility, not in their propensity to get married.” Mokyr, *op. cit.*: 36.

\(^{139}\) Thackeray, *op. cit.*: 83.

\(^{140}\) Ibid.: 232.

\(^{141}\) Ibid.: 232.

\(^{142}\) Ibid.: 232.

stimulating the exertions, and awarding the praise or blame to the conduct of the villagers round them, is among the most efficient means by which the character of a neighbourhood can be improved.” Senior was reminding his readers of the negative influence of absentee landlords (thought to be an acute problem in Ireland), but the same arguments were regularly translated from the country estate to the peasant cabin. On the eve of Famine, for example, James Johnson provides this “exact survey” of an Irish cabin’s “internal economy”:

It was twelve feet in length, by eight in breath — the walls of mud, and the roof of wattles, thatch, and sods, black with smoke and soot. There was a little fireplace, in one corner, under the tin-pot chimney — a few shelves in the other corner — and I found that the bedstead, which was raised a foot from the ground, occupied half the cabin. It was therefore eight feet in length (being across the hovel) and six in breadth. The bed consisted of heath and hay, covered by a clean coarse cloth. On this bed eight people slept at night — the woman — six children — and the child of a neighbour, whose parents were down with the fever.

Why were foreign travellers preoccupied with such specifications and detail? “Whenever information is required concerning the population (sexual behaviour, demography, consumption, and so on), it must be obtained through the family,” wrote Foucault. Thus one sees emerging a series of connections between an “internal economy” and a national economy, between domestic space and national territory, between the body proper and the body politic. As governments became increasingly interested in the intimate spaces of domestic life so too did social commentators. Of course, accounts

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145 Johnson, *op. cit.*: 50.
146 The English traveller Ashworth observed how the “half-naked, half-starved” peasants “throng the door; while the pig, fat and sleek, and reserved, I suppose, for the rent day, pushes his nose out of the same portal, as if asserting an equal right to be there.” Ashworth, *op. cit.*: 12.
147 Foucault. "Governmentality", *op. cit.*: 216.
describing mounds of manure in front of cabin doors and animals living cheek-by-jowl with
peasants did little to endear Victorian readers to the Irish peasantry (see figure 2.10). Moreover, these descriptions were often mixed with moral prescriptions as this account demonstrates:

to enter their cottages, and to talk to them about the mismanagement of their children and their domestic concerns: to shew them economic modes of preparing their meals; to point out the mischief of uncleanness and idleness; to set them an example, to rebuke and commend them according to circumstances, and to exercise that beneficial influence which higher position, and the power to do little acts of kindness, and the voice free from harsh tones of party and religious difference, naturally give.\[149\]

Distributing aid during the Great Famine, William Bennett confessed that “Sometimes we thought proper to exercise the right of lecturing; and made the levelling of the mud floor, the filing in some filthy puddle, or the removal of some abominable heap from in to outside, the condition of our gift.”\[150\] The English writer and journalist Harriet Martineau also thought that Irish people needed domestic instruction: “There seems to be nothing wanting, as far as the visitor can see, but the presence of a matron, or the occasional visits of ladies, to see the opening and cleaning of windows, and some domestic niceties; and we emphatically declare the encouragement of a wider notice and appreciation of this highly important institution a matter of national concern.”\[151\]

It is difficult to assess how the Irish reacted to having their homes “surveyed,” or how they felt being rebuked for the apparent “mismanagement” of domestic space.\[152\] A rare conversation is detailed by the American philanthropist Asenath Nicholson: “‘Why don’t you,’


\[150\] Bennett. \textit{Narrative of a Recent Journey}, op. cit.: 73.


\[152\] The local response is difficult to estimate. James Hack Tuke noted the peasant’s timidity on being approached, while various other travellers agreed with Thackeray’s conclusion that the Irish feel “a peevish and puerile suspiciousness” toward all things English. Thackeray, \textit{op. cit.}: 95. Furthermore, in other colonial contexts it has been shown how travel writers very often eviscerate the local knowledges they rely on, turning compound relations between peoples, places and cultures into “a thing depicted or described … immediately subject to [the traveller’s] gaze.” Thomas, \textit{op. cit.}: 112.
said I to a widow who had an acre of ground, ‘make things about your cabin look a little more tidy? You have a pretty patch of land, well kept.’ ‘But, lady, I have but one little slip of a boy of fifteen years of age, and he toils the long day to rair [sic] a bit of vegetable to carry to market, and he helped me to put up this little cabin, and if I make it look nice outside, the agent will put a pound more rent on me, or turn me out and my little things; and I couldn’t pay the pound.’” To this testimony Nicholson remarked: “These are the facts all over Ireland. If the poor tenant improves the premises, he must be turned out or pay more. If he do not improve it, he is a lazy, dirty Irishman, and must be put out for that.” However most observers conveyed an unmistakable level of repulsion by what they saw. “What can be expected from ideas first formed in an Irish cabin?” quipped Anne Plumptre. She was stating the increasingly popular viewpoint that the ‘Irish Question’ was as much personal as political.

In fact one sees emerging two popular ways for judging Irish backwardness. The first was the growing tendency to see poverty and read peasantry. This was a more-or-less biologising account of difference that involved the use of race to explain conditions in Ireland. It saw Irish poverty in terms of Irish nature and demanded reform of the former through greater management of the latter. The second method was to read Irish poverty as a measure of past social circumstances. On the eve of the Great Famine, for instance, the Devon Commission argued that the history of “confiscations and colonisations,” and other “extrinsic events,” meant that the Irish labourer bore “sufferings greater, we believe, than the people of any other country in Europe have to sustain.” There were also those, like Spencer Hall, who adopted an indeterminate middle-ground. After talking to a young Irish woman who travelled nine to ten miles daily to sell milk at a measly profit, he wrote: “There is one question which all those who charge the Irish with idleness ought to solve or be silent, — viz. — how is it that they work so hard everywhere else but at home?” Hall concluded that the situation “is one of circumstance

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153 Likewise, Nicholson was unusual in that she considered the peasant’s rags were “the remuneration for days of faithful toil,” not the product of idleness. Nicholson, op. cit.: 241, 267. Balch also criticised the narrow judgements about the poor. Describing the cottier-class he wrote: “From the pores of his skin oozes out the sweat which circulates life and fashion up to the nobleman who sits in the, House of Lords, figures at the exchequer, bears the trail of Mrs. Victoria Guelph, or loiters, with his family, about the cities and watering places of the continent. He supports the petty aristocracy, so abundant in all Irish towns, in addition, and then is called lazy, indolent, and worthless, and sneered at as unfit to live in such a bountiful and beautiful country.” Balch, op. cit.: 231.

154 Plumptre, op. cit.: 342.

155 “Royal Commission of Inquiry into State of Law and Practice”, op. cit.: 7, 8, 12.

as much as race." Some commentators expressed both positions on the same page. Charlotte Elizabeth took the distinctly Whiggish view that Ireland could be made prosperous, tranquil and happy if the government would substitute “methods of compulsion” for “mode[s] of moral management.” Yet a few pages later she exclaimed: “Oh, surely the Englishman is a favoured man, and surely he may bless God every hour of his life for it, who comes to Ireland, and settles her soil, alike minded and enabled to be a blessing to her children!” There was an evident tension between social circumstance and moral failings, but the scales were tilting.

“A different race of men”: the racialisation of poverty

In his influential study *Apes and Angels* L. Perry Curtis Jr. argued that racial depictions of the Irish were uncommon until the latter half of the nineteenth-century. This viewpoint has been challenged most recently by scholars such as Luke Gibbons, Joep Leerssen, Edward Lengel, Joseph Lennon, and Amy Martin (see also figure 2.11). In different ways they argue that racialised depictions of difference existed, but operated in ways outside the politico-scientific model bequeathed to us by Darwin and his acolytes. Amy Martin has argued that after the ratification of the Catholic Emancipation Bill (1829) state discrimination on the basis of religion decreased, while racial and cultural constructions of difference became more common. This is true to a point, even though it is not difficult to find evidence of anti-Catholic bigotry after

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157 Hall, *op. cit.*: 24.
158 Charlotte Elizabeth, *op. cit.*: 301.
159 *Ibid.*: 315.
162 Martin. "Becoming a Race Apart", *op. cit.*: 191.
1829. Thackeray wrote several disparaging passages about the Catholic clergy in 1842 and the rabidly anti-Catholic Charlotte Elizabeth believed that the priests were actively fomenting rebellion: “Take away Popery,” she was convinced, “and Ireland as she ought to be will stand out in all the beauty that is now shrouded in corruption.”

Even so, Martin’s thesis is helpful in assessing how race was mobilised to explain poverty. Especially important are travellers’ responses to the northern counties of Ireland, especially the area around Belfast. The vast majority of visitors approached the north having already visited the south and west of the country, and usually having witnessed depressed scenes of poverty. In the circumstances it is unsurprising that the relative prosperity of this region would be highlighted. Assessing the countryside between Derry and Coleraine in 1804, one traveller recorded that shoes, stockings and chimneys were more common and that “the natives” appear “more civilized.” James Johnson enthused, “is the Athens of Ireland — the Manchester of Ulster — the Glasgow of Antrim” He found that the “fiery excitability” he witnessed in the rest of Ireland was in the north “softened down to sober sense.” Travelling this direction Henry Inglis also noticed that “The poverty-stricken appearance of the Irish towns was fast disappearing. I perceived that I was verging towards the

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163 This was not an isolated comment. “We are bound to commiserate the priests; we are bound to seek every means of enlightening them; but till that be effected, we are also imperatively bound to disarm them.” Elizabeth, op. cit.: 138, 55. Not all remarks were as irrational as Elizabeth’s or as biting as Thackeray’s, but it was commonly assumed that the priests lorded over the peasantry in dangerous ways. In a document ostensibly on the Poor Law, Nassau Senior singled out the importance of “improving the education of their educators, the Priests” as a means of effecting social change in Ireland, while Herr Venedey related the “habit of the priest interfering in all matters — in extending his views from the church to the forum, and from the forum to the fire-side, until at last he is engaged not only with political affairs, but also with domestic concerns, and thus may be induced to think more of his dominion than his doctrine.” “Letter from Nassau W. Senior to his Majesty’s Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department on the Third Report from the commissioners for the Inquiring into the Condition of the Poor Law in Ireland.” Parliamentary Papers. 1837 [69] L1: 252; Venedey, op. cit.: 164.

164 Anon., op. cit.: 41.
165 Johnson, op. cit.: 351.
166 Ibid.: 328.
north, and getting among a different race of men.” As he approached Strabane in County Tyrone he was “greatly struck by the course of the day’s journey, with the very improved appearance of the peasantry. A ragged, rather than a whole coat, was now a rarity: and the clean and tidy appearance of the women and the girls, was equally novel, as it was an agreeable sight. The farm-houses, too, were of superior order; I do not mean merely that they were larger, or better built; this can be accomplished by an improving and considerate landlord. The improvement was visible in things which depend of the occupant. Most of the houses had closures, and clumps of sheltering trees: and the epithet, ‘slovenly,’ could rarely have found any subject for its application.” These initial impressions were later confirmed: “It is impossible that Cork, Limerick, or Waterford, should ever become altogether like Belfast because the character of the Scotch and the Irish is essentially different.”

While it is true that non-British travellers like Venedey also found Belfast “clean, broad, and well lighted,” they tended not to attribute this fact to racial superiority. Another Scotsman, Thomas Carlyle, visited Lord George Hill’s estate in Donegal as part of a longer tour in 1849. At this time Lord Hill’s estate was a favoured topic of conversation around drawing-room tables owing to his radical acts of improvement. He had enlisted Scotsmen to teach local farmers the advantages of consolidation and new agricultural techniques. Perhaps predictably, such “improvements” were not universally welcome and some farmers vigorously resisted. Although Carlyle has often been depicted as a “champion of labour” and a critic of capitalist modes of production more generally, he clearly saw local tensions as a racial battle: “Lord George and his Aberdeens versus Celtic nature and Celtic art” The “Times Commissioner” also visited Gweedore where he praised how “this former desert and bleak wilderness — this example of barbarism and starvation” was converted into “fertile corn fields, the seat of industry and content, and into a humanized abode.” This, he discovered, was the social influence of the “Saxonizing” gentry who are not “for the most part Celtic.”

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167 Inglis, op. cit.: 305.
168 Ibid.: 306. My emphasis.
169 Ibid.: 343.
170 Venedey, op. cit.: 285.
173 Foster, op. cit.: 127.
174 Ibid.: 126-128. Foster also made much of the inferior height of the “Celtic Irish.” In chapter four I discuss the similarities between Carlyle and the “Times Commissioner’s” account.
Moreover, Anne McClintock reminds us that English racism “drew deeply on the notion of the *domestic* barbarism of the Irish as a marker of racial difference.” Referring to “an exemplary image,” of an Irishman lethargically sitting in front of his hovel (see figure 2.13) McClintock writes:

The house is out of kilter, the shutter is askew. He lounges cheerily on an upturned wash-basin, visible proof of a slovenly lack of dedication to domestic order. What appears to be a cooking pot perches on his head. In the doorway, the boundary between private and public, his wife displays an equally cheerfully slothfulness. In both husband and wife, the absence of skin color as a marker of degeneration is compensated for by the simianizing of their physiognomies: exaggerated lips, receding foreheads, unkept hair and so on… the iconography of *domestic degeneracy* was widely used to mediate between the manifold contradictions in imperial hierarchy — not only with respect to the Irish but also to other ‘white negroes.’

McClintock is of course referring to an image composed in 1882, when scientific racism was clearly manifest. However her emphasis on the Irish domestic scene helps explain how race was mobilised to explain poverty and why the poor hovels were so captivating for pre-Famine English travellers. Where skin colour proved “imprecise and inadequate” as a marker of difference, the wretched Irish hovels acted as a surrogate sign of barbarism.

Race was a particularly popular tool for travellers to approach the realities of poverty in the south and west of Ireland. For instance, Archibald Stark found the boys and girls at a Waterford Poorhouse “as ignorant as Ojibbeway Indians.” James Johnson frequently used racial language to represent the Irish. The guides in Killarney he compared to

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176 *Ibid.*: 53.
177 Stark, op. cit.: 59.
“Hindoos and Mahomedans on the beach at Madras” while the houses in the poor fishing village of Claddagh were “wig-wams.” Spencer Hall described peasant dwellings in County Clare as “partaking somewhat in their style of the united orders of the Indian wigwam and the Hottentot kraal.” In Bantry Thackeray found the “beggars’ houses” impossible to sketch: “one might as well make a sketch of a bundle of rags ... I declare a Hottentot kraal has more comforts in it: even to write of the place makes one unhappy, and the words move slowly.”

Racial language was clearly used to portray socio-economic conditions. Irish poverty was obviously at odds with the relative wealth of Britain and this material difference was expressed as civilisational distance. The Celt was more like distant tribes in Africa because they were so obviously not what the Act of Union professed them to be: namely, on a par with the rest of Britain. However, these rhetorical gestures could also surprisingly boomerang. Asenath Nicholson noted the frequent comparisons between the Irish and American slaves and declared: “What but oppression could produce this similitude.” It is also notable that the American abolitionist and ex-slave, Frederick Douglass, compared the degradations of Irish poverty to the servitude of the black American slave. These interpolations remind us that racial comparisons can be radically and subversively inverted.

Racial arguments were sometimes laudatory. “Amid the extreme neglect and indigence,” wrote William Bennett in 1847, “the fine figures, the elevated features, and the native grace and beauty of many a Kerry peasant girl, is often striking. The whole race of peasantry are perhaps among the most simple and affectionate, harmless and peaceable, hardy and intelligent, of any

178 For Johnson Irish murders reminded him of “the most gloomy wilds of the most savage tribes that ever roamed in Asia, Africa, or America.” Later he expressed the obduracy of the Celt in explicitly racial terms: “An Hibernian, like a Mahommedan Cadi, seldom contemplates more than one side of the question — and that will naturally be his own side. Hence it is, that, even now, when sober, he is much attached to the Court-house as he used to be the pot­house, and would, though poor and naked, prefer a suit of law to a suit of frieze.” Johnson, op. cit.: 105, 181, 144, 283.
179 Hall, op. cit.: 59.
180 Thackeray, op. cit.: 103-4.
181 Significant here too — although I don’t discuss it — is the Orientalisation of the Irish. Like scores of other visitors William Bennett observed a “considerable mixture of the old Spanish blood — transmitted likewise in the name of many of the places — all along the western coast of Ireland.” Bennett, Narrative of a Recent, op. cit.: 122. Bennett was articulating the popular view that the “Celtics or Milesians had first colonized Ireland via Spain and Egypt and were related to various ‘ancient’ eastern cultures: Egyptian, Carthaginian, Etruscan, Phoenician, Armenian, Hebrew, Chinese, Indian and others.” Lennon, op. cit.: 130. On the significance of the Milesian myth to the “Scytho-Celtic model” of early Irish civilisation see Leerssen. Remembrance and Imagination, op. cit.: 68-156; Iftikhar H. Malik. “Ireland, Orientalism and South Asia.” Asian Affairs 32.2 (2001): 189-95.
182 Nicholson, op. cit.: 271.
within our islands.” These honeyed words — what Luke Gibbon describes as “romantic primitivism” — were not exceptional. Certain peculiarities of Irish life were represented in mawkish terms (for instance Irish bulls and peasant clothing,) while other features were discussed with a mixture of fear and revulsion (such as funeral keening and faction-fighting). The contrast between Bennett’s noble “race of peasantry” and Carlyle’s feckless Celts reminds us that racism invariably rests on a series of movements between the strange and the familiar, proximity and distance, engagement and estrangement, inside and outside — what Edward Said (with admirable economy) described as a “geographical disposition.” For this reason Nicholas Thomas argues that racism “ought to be seen as discourse that engages in conceptual and perceptual government, in its apprehension and legislation of types, distinctions, criteria for assessing proximity and distance, and in its more technical applications — in, for instance, notions stipulating that certain forms of labour are appropriate to one race but not another.”

Thomas’s notion of “conceptual and perceptual government” usefully suggests how racial discourse is always imbricated in biopower. Here two points might be registered. First, racial theories assume that “The proper study of mankind is man.” This last citation is from Alexander Pope and is quoted as an epigraph in Robert Knox’s influential study The Races of Men: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Influence of Race over the Destinies of Nations. This is a significant book not only because it contains some very revealing thoughts on the Irish (and Celts more generally), but also what Knox reveals about racism more generally. The motive for the book is neatly encapsulated in the epigraph by Pope together with Knox’s own mantra repeated in various formats throughout the book: “Race is everything: literature, science, art — in a word, civilization, depends on it.” According to Knox it is our biological make-up, zoological history and propensity to act as a living, racialised being that holds the key to

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184 Bennett. Narrative of a Recent Journey, 1847, op. cit.: 122. Anne Plumptre also emphasised Ireland’s apparent Milesian background: “Here was the country where the Milesians from Spain, according to all traditions, both written and oral, were first established. Now the dark complexions, eyes and hair, have ever been, and still are, the distinguishing characteristics of all the Southern nations of Europe; as fair complexion, blue eyes, and light hair, sometimes deviating into red, were, and are still, of the Northern.” Plumptre, op. cit.: 345.


187 Thomas, op. cit.: 79.


189 Knox, op. cit.: v.
understanding life in its totality. To this extent, racial theories quite literally seize hold of bare life by channelling it inside a system of power-knowledge (acts of "conceptual and perceptual government" including the will to describe, categorise and so forth), while at the same time placing it outside the zone of positive influence since our species being is seemingly pre-given. This tensile relationship or "dual position" introduces my second point that racism invariably recreates fractures between a biological environment and a "zone of historicity," between an inside and an outside, between bare life and politically qualified existence.

Hence what Nicholas Thomas describes as a "legislation of types" actually works to divide and isolate the human from the non-human. This much is clear from Knox's own account in which biology — what is apparently common to all human beings — is not a leveller but a differentiator. Knox saw in the "Celts" "Furious fanaticism; a love of war and disorder; hatred for order and patient industry; no accumulative habits; restless, treacherous, uncertain: look at Ireland." He added, "As a Saxon I abhor all dynasties, monarchies and bayonet governments, but this latter seems to be the only one suitable for the Celtic man." Knox's arguments were published in 1862 — well after the Famine — but the lecture tour from which the book derived began in 1846. In fact in the introduction to The Races of Men Knox insinuates that Thomas Campbell Foster (the "Times Commissioner") crudely appropriated his original arguments, travelling to Ireland to 'discover' what Knox had already revealed: namely, the existence of two separate and distinct races in Ireland. Clearly the line between scientific racism and more 'cultural' appropriations of racial arguments was always blurred.

It should be said that racial theories were not the only discourse that was embroiled in acts of "conceptual and perceptual government." Indeed, in terms of its significance to biopower next to racial theories of degeneracy is the Malthusian theory of overpopulation. Malthus is significant in at least three respects. First, as has been noted by Donald Winch, Malthus shifts "the terms of debate from political culture towards biology by grounding his laws of nature on a population principle — an ever-present propensity for population growth to outstrip the means

191 Ibid.: 27.
of subsistence." Secondly, Malthus hypothesised that population growth is a function of the difference between income and some fixed level called the "minimum of subsistence." This zero sum level that Malthus describes as the "minimum of subsistence" is precisely the dangerous grey zone that Agamben identifies as bare life. Thirdly, just as we said that racial arguments seize hold of the life at the species level, after Malthus it was increasingly relevant to think of people as populations with inherent propensities. Henceforth behind every democracy lurks a demography, as Agamben formulates it. And increasingly, the role of government is to safeguard society from itself — to keep demography in line with democracy.

These are striking examples of how a form of power-knowledge — biopower — fixes upon human life at the population level and at the species level, making this move the foundation for particular political principles and particular political strategies. History records, however, that in each case biopower's "rage to make in the realm of the biological" (as Bruce Jennings describes it) was a brutal and deadly affair. With Malthus we associate the contempt for "superfluous" and "redundant" populations and with racial theories we associate the blood bath of race war. It is as though biopower's attempt to grasp life (and regulate the body proper and body politic) reintroduces an original fracture between bare life and politically qualified existence. This study does not assess the impact of scientific racism or the influence of Malthusian thinking on the discourse of political economy. What is interesting from my point of view is how these ideas filtered down into everyday attitudes about Irish society and how various public intellectuals, travel-writers and civil servants lay claim to these knowledges. As acts of "conceptual and perceptual government" these knowledges clearly spill beyond the realm of calculation and into the realm power.

194 Mokyr, op. cit.: 43.
196 Ever since Malthus first claimed that famine is a necessary check for overpopulation, debate on Ireland's population, and its influence of the outcome of the famine, has loomed large in Irish historical scholarship (the weight of the Malthusian perspective led Joel Mokyr to proclaim "Irish history is demographic history." Mokyr, op. cit.: 30). Earlier studies tended to affirm the Malthusian logic that Ireland was seriously "overpopulated," and that a population cull through famine was unavoidable. However, Malthusianism has always had its fair share of critics. Susan George cautions that whenever you hear the word "overpopulation" you should reach, "if not for your revolver, at least for your calculator." Cited in, Mitchell. Rule of Experts, op. cit.: 212 (as Mitchell elaborates, the problem is that we cannot be sure as to what norm "over" is supposed to relate). Mokyr's own landmark study, Why Ireland Starved? takes this injunction seriously and after a detailed quantitative analysis he concludes that "The burden of proof has now been shifted to those who still consider the history of Ireland in the nineteenth century to be a classical case of Malthusian disaster." Mokyr, op. cit.: 51.
Malthus himself said surprisingly little about conditions in Ireland although in an oft-cited letter to Ricardo in 1817 he wrote: “the land in Ireland is infinitely more peopled than in England; and to give the full effect to the natural resources of the country a great part of the population should be swept from the soil.” Moreover, in the sixth edition of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* the author reaffirms this position: “If, as in Ireland, Spain, and many countries of the more southern climates, the people are in so degraded a state, as to propagate their species without regard to consequences, it matters little whether they have poor-laws or not. Misery in all its various forms must be the predominant check to their increase.” This argument was more often appropriated rather than argued for. For instance, although James Johnson slightly satirised the writings of Malthus (and Harriet Martineau) he clearly borrowed their alarmist flavour when describing Ireland on the eve of the Great Famine: “Wealth does not accumulate; but men do — teste nine million of population — two million of paupers — and four million of the ‘finest pisantry in the world’ living on wet potatoes, with or without salt.”

“In no country on the face of the globe,” he wrote, “is emigration more necessary or more beneficial than in Ireland, where the very poverty and idleness of the inhabitants tend annually to swell the streams of a redundant population!” Likewise during the Famine William Bennett considered how the Irish “population is nurtured, treading constantly on the borders of starvation; checked only by a crisis like the present, to which it inevitably leads, and almost verifying the worst Malthusian doctrines.”

The influence of Malthusian logics is also abundantly clear in many government commissions (see box 2.2). In the previous chapter we have already seen that an 1823 Select Committee anonymously cited Malthus’ opinion “that a state in which an inequality of

197 Cited in, Mokyr, op. cit.: 38.
199 Johnson, op. cit.: 282.
200 Ibid.: 273.
201 William Bennett. *Narrative of a Recent Journey,* op. cit.: 25.
202 For example James Glassford. *Notes on Three Tours in Ireland, in 1824 and 1826.* Bristol: W. Strong & J Chilcott, 1832: 241-246. Glassford discusses the “great complaints of the theoretical politician and economist,” rejects the panacea of emigration (because “it would need to recur without ceasing”), and favours the “moral remedies” directed at the population."
conditions offers the natural rewards of good conduct, and inspires widely and generally the hopes of rising and the fear of falling in society, is unquestionably the best calculated to develope the energies and faculties of man, and is the best suited to the exercise and improvement of human virtue. The first Poor Law Commission led by Richard Whately reported on the immense surplus of labour in Ireland and thought it “extremely advantageous to draw off the redundant population.” The report concluded that this “drawing off” would always be difficult (one witness lamented the “foolish attachment to home” among the Irish) but nonetheless “essential to commencing a course in amelioration.” Published the year the potato blight appeared the Devon Commission summarised the immense debate on emigration in Ireland and expressed its own “conviction that a well organised system of emigration may be of great service, as one amongst the measures which the situation of the occupiers of land in Ireland at present call for.” John Mitchel argued that “redundancy” and removal were two sides of the one argument. He heavily criticised the Devon report citing in particular the commissioners’ “Digest of Evidence” which claimed that the “consolidation of the small holdings up to eight acres would require the removal of about one hundred and ninety-two thousand three hundred and sixty-eight families.” “That is,” as Mitchel interposed, “the removal of about one million of persons.”

Box 2.2 Overpopulation and the naturalisation of disaster

In his History of the Irish Poor Law, George Nicholls produced the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1821</td>
<td>6,801,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>7,767,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>8,175,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>6,522,385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Nicholls acknowledges the impossibility of “predicting” how much the “present decrease” owed to emigration, want and disease he nevertheless hastens to add: “The universal and almost exclusive use of the potato as an article of subsistence, led to a rapid increase of the population — its

205 ibid.: 13, 17.
206 “Royal Commission of Inquiry into State of Law and Practice”, op. cit.: 29.
207 Cited in, Mitchel, op. cit.: 72.
208 Ibid.: 72.
209 Nicholls, op. cit.: 387.
failure led to a still more rapid decrease, accompanied by an amount of suffering and privation for which it would be difficult to find a parallel in the history of any people. In this sense the charge of "overpopulation" not only influenced specific government policies, by laying the problem at the door of nature it was possible to agree with Malthus that famine was the "ultimate recourse of nature."

By 1841, the year the third census was taken, Disraeli could assert that Ireland was the most densely-populated country in Europe. On arable land, he declared, the population was denser than that of China. The idea that emigration could be used as a "temporary PLACEBO" and "a safety valve to allow the redundant population to flow through," was therefore routinely argued for before the Famine. In an important article Peter Gray brilliantly shows how these ideas infiltrated a diverse stratum of British politics. In particular Gray distinguishes between advocates of settlement colonies and those like John Stuart Mill and William Thornton who promoted an 'internal colonisation' involving the removal and replacement of some 200,000 families on viable plots in order to construct a substantial class of yeomanry in Ireland. These theories of internal and external colonisation ought to be distinguished, but what is more interesting from my point of view is how these large-scale "ameliorative" projects — which were promoted as development strategies or what today we would call state-sponsored projects of "structural adjustment" — later become embroiled in relief practices apparently designed to address the failure of the potato crop. In short one finds that theories tagged as "ameliorative" were later wielded as tools to radically transform Ireland. This is where I think acts of "conceptual and perceptual government" can dangerously dovetail with biopower. What is reinscribed in these theories is the figure of bare life on which political strategies are routinely imposed.

**Conclusion**

There are a number of conclusions that may be drawn from the foregoing discussion. The first relates to the production of knowledge. I have tried to illustrate how incorporation of life into

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212 Woodham-Smith, *op. cit.*: 26.
213 Johnson, *op. cit.*: 298.
the mechanisms of state power extended to the level of discourse: what Agamben called the
"massive inscription of social knowledge within the productive process." However, this
production of knowledge about Ireland was usually based on the assumption that the Irish
people, and especially the poorer classes, could not represent themselves. This assumption is
common in other colonial situations. In his influential book, Orientalism, Edward Said invokes
Marx’s dictum: “They must be represented, they cannot represent themselves.” According to
Joep Leerssen, in choosing these words Said was trying to emphasise “how the garrulous
discourse of representation interposes itself between the curious reader and the silent (silenced)
subdued/passive Orient.” Equally when Harriet Martineau argued for the importance of
educating the Irish “till they shall have become qualified for the guardianship of their own
interests,” she also presumed that such guardianship extended to the level of discourse and the
right to make such pronouncements. Likewise when Inglis declared himself the “narrator of
truth” he presumed that “truth” was a unilateral matter with little or nothing to do with what the
Irish might think and say about themselves.

This is no small matter. As I have also tried to show these asymmetries extended to more
official networks of knowledge. For instance, the government requested the Devon Commission
to enquire into the nature of land tenure in Ireland; however the commissioners were exclusively
landlords. Indeed, most government commissions were thoroughly unrepresentative. The first
Poor Law commission under Whately debated the difficulty of selecting persons knowledgeable
on Ireland yet sufficiently impartial: “The only mode of combining the national knowledge
possessed by the one, with the impartiality almost certain of the other, appeared to be joining in
the inquiry a native of Great Britain with a resident native of Ireland.” When discussing
themselves the Irish were deemed incapable of objectivity. In language as in political life Irish
autonomy was utterly unthinkable. Asenath Nicholson was one of a few foreign writers to

215 Agamben. Means without Ends, op. cit.: 11.
219 The fact that a hugely popular “Home Rule” movement was consistently scoffed at exemplifies this point.
Johnson’s thoughts on the matter were not atypical: “A repeal of the Union resembles a divorce between man and
wife. A separation would be the inevitable consequence, in both cases. A repeal of the Union would effectually
divorce Hibernia from John Bull ’a mensa et thoro’ — and that without alimony or maintenance ... When England
wishes to be dismembered, and reduced to an appendage to France, it will consent to a disunion and separation
from Ireland.” Johnson, op. cit.: 132.
express this opinion in print: "Yes, the poor Irishman has a mind that can and does think; but, like the American slave, he is told by his master, and he is told by all the world, 'You do the working, and I'll do the thinking.'" Equally, Arundhati Roy reminds us that "there's really no such thing as the 'voiceless.' There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard." The use of discourse to produce this 'silence' — this apparent lack of political voice — is the first point to be remembered.

I have also tried to chart the development of a culture of travel able to enlarge (and contract) the space between the have-nots, the satiated and the emaciated. On the one hand, Irish life was minutely surveyed and represented, while, on the other hand, what was intimately recorded was also profoundly abstracted and distanced often reaffirming the ideological position of the writer. This was partly due to the authority of prior imaginative geographies born from centuries of inter-cultural contact, but equally if not more important is the fact that intellectuals, travel writers and government commissioners now came to Ireland to take issue with poverty in order to mobilise improvement. In other words, what is important to understand is the dialectics of concern and calculation that simultaneously unites and separates observer and observed, subject and object.

Two good examples of this process, as I have tried to show, are the racialisation of Irish poverty and theories of overpopulation. These discursive forays constructed bare lives that were subject to radical reform. In each case what is both presupposed and reaffirmed is the necessary subjugation and Anglicisation of the Irish. If racial nature explained Irish backwardness then it was Irish nature which must be reformed. If demographics were the key to Irish poverty then population reform was required. In other words, racial and population theories facilitated the subjugation of life to the mechanisms of power by producing objects of political and economic calculation. This biopower — which seizes the human being as species and population — was directed not only at the 'amelioration' of Irish poverty, but also toward the better management of the social body, the greater stewardship of life and ultimately the elimination of Irish backwardness. To this extent it actually reproduces within itself a fracture between "bare life" and politically qualified existence: biopower 'discovers' a life that is to be thoroughly

ameliorated out of itself. As Ned Lebow has summarised: “Britain’s mission was not to alleviate Irish distress but to civilize her [sic] people and lead them to feel and act like human beings.”222 Gradually the focus of the problem has changed from hunger to habit and it is this development — this discursive faminescape — that is crucial for understanding the politics of relief during the Great Irish Famine.

“To the poor, no experiment can be hurtful: for in comforts and in morals, they are already in the lowest state of degradation to which it is possible for the people to be sunk.” Thus wrote an anonymous traveller from Britain in 1804.223 A similar view was echoed by Trevelyan during the Famine (“They have already reached the lowest point in the descending scale, and there is nothing beyond but starvation or beggary”) and, as we shall see, by Thomas Carlyle as he toured Ireland for the second time in 1849. In each case, this loaded pessimism gave licence to particular reactions to Famine both discursive and administrative.224 Indeed, exactly thirty years later, in 1834, the British government despatched the first Poor Law commission to Ireland under the leadership of Richard Whately. Their task was to present yet another report on the state of Irish poverty and to deliver the most appropriate ‘experiment’ in amelioration. Four years later in 1838 the Irish Poor Law came into effect and was to play a decisive role in directing the course of the Irish Famine. In the following chapter I want to discuss this new experiment in pauper management and in so doing I hope to connect more clearly what Anne Plumptre termed the “crusade of information,” and the administration of hunger.225

223 Anon., op. cit.: 66.
224 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 9.
225 Plumptre, op. cit.: 340-1.
Chapter Three

The Administration of Hunger

“The principle of the Poor Law is, that rate after rate should be levied for the preservation of life.”

— Charles E. Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis.*

“Dialectical thought arises because it is less and less possible to ignore the fact that civilization, in the very act of realizing some human potentials, also damagingly suppresses others.”

— Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture.*

“Necessity and life are so intimately related and connected that life itself is threatened where necessity is altogether eliminated.”

— Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition.*

**Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to critically review the system of ‘relief’ during the Irish famine. I am interested in how famine ‘relief’ operations came to be developed, organised, managed and administered through mechanisms and at scales never before conceived. The scare-quotes wrapping the term ‘relief’ seem to me to be entirely warranted. During the 1840s — as it is still in this century — the mechanisms of relief, and the power politics involved, were profoundly implicated in the catastrophes they resolved to manage.¹ This perspective is not new. When Sidney Godolphin Osborne visited several workhouses in 1849 he noted that “the evils encountered [there] are worse than the evils fled.”² Archibald Stark felt that “the project of meeting the evil of poverty by confining the paupers in houses, built for the purpose, and feeding and clothing them in perfect idleness, was in theory as clumsy and expedient for encountering a difficulty as in practice it was revolting to humanity.”³ Indeed the Reverend

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Peter Daly went so far as to say: "My own private opinion is that more would scarcely have died if there had been no relief afforded. And I am quite convinced there would have been less of human misery. They would have died more quickly." These were not atypical charges, nor as we see were they confined to the national or radical press. Indeed their consistency and regularity beggars the interesting question of how might relief measures be related to the Famine itself? I want to try answering this question by advancing a biopolitical reading of the institutional landscapes of famine, which perhaps most notoriously includes the machinery of the Poor Law workhouses. However, before I turn to the institutions themselves I will need to clarify biopower's role and explain some important details regarding British interest and investment in Irish life prior to the Famine.

As recounted in the introduction, Foucault discusses racism, the state, and the right of death and power over life in the context of two technologies of power: "anatomo-politics of the human body" and "a bio-politics of the population." The former applies to the discipline and administration of individual bodies, while the latter involves the regulation of the entire social body. Foucault's earlier work demonstrated that the discipline of the individual body (or anatomo-politics) operates in and through 'disciplinary spaces' like the asylum, prison, schoolhouse, army barracks and so forth. It works at the micro-level of the body through distribution, separation, and surveillance using techniques like inspections, bookkeeping, reporting, and drilling in order to exact dependencies. However, in *The History of Sexuality* Foucault goes on to argue that a new technology of power emerges at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. Unlike anatomo-politics, which is addressed to bodies, the new non-disciplinary power is applied "not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living being ... to man-as-species." We no longer have simply an "anatomo-politics" of the human body, but a "biopolitics" of the human race. What is important to grasp about all this is the deployment of political techniques in order to "invest life through and through." Giorgio Agamben builds on this analysis of biopower in ways that I outline in introduction.

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7 Foucault. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, op. cit.*: 139.
It goes without saying that these are complex, often abstract theorisations; yet even at this remove we might note that the very terms Foucault (and Agamben) employs suggest a potential richness for shedding new light on the administration of the Irish Famine. We might ask, for example, how anatomo-politics and biopolitics might apply to the “spaces of relief” operationalised by the government during the Famine? In what ways does the state seize control of “bare life” during the Famine and how might the “machinery” of relief actually facilitate this prerogative? How does what Foucault termed “the naked question of survival” become a matter of political arbitration and bureaucratic strategy? And what is the relationship between Agamben’s “bare life” and the political economy of capitalism? These questions are important because as soon as sovereign power seizes hold of natural life, and once “bare life” becomes a legitimate target of political power, then the “naked question of survival” and the “guarantee [of] an individual’s continued existence” can be radically called into question. That is to say, the discipline and regulation of life in some sense involves control over life. According to the theorists of biopower the right of death is always already inscribed in the power over life, and as such biopolitics is set in dialectical tension with what Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitics.” It is for precisely these reasons that we must now examine the various ways in which “the entry of life into history” became a reality of the British state in Ireland.

The laboratory

Recently Ann Stoler has urged scholars of colonialism to examine Europe’s colonies less as “sites of exploitation” than as “laboratories of modernity.” In the context of Irish Studies this approach has an impressively long genealogy. As early as 1945 D.B. Quinn considered the confiscations and plantations in the sixteenth and seventeenth century as an “experiment” in English colonial theory. Likewise, historians Nicholas Canny and Jane Ohlmeyer have found the “laboratory” model useful for discussing the development of colonial government in early

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8 Ibid.: 137.
modern Ireland. The laboratory model has also being used in referring to Victorian Ireland. In 1949 W.L. Burn declared that nineteenth century “Ireland served as a social laboratory, the scene of daring an ambitious experiments.” Even “the most conventional of Englishmen,” Burn avers, “were willing to experiment in Ireland on lines which they were not prepared to contemplate at home.” Burn’s original argument has been most rigorously developed by Oliver MacDonagh (although it is worth noting, en passant, that MacDonagh prefers the term “improvisations” to “experiments”). MacDonagh argues that between 1815 and 1840, the local authorities in Ireland lost the bulk of their power: “Thus, whereas the first stage of the administrative reform in English local government represented an attempt to broaden the relevant electorates, break the Anglican monopoly of power and recruit JPs [Justices of the Peace] from outside the ranks of the traditional gentry, the equivalent phase in Ireland was marked by the passage of some of the old and almost all of the new functions of government from local to central control.”

MacDonagh demonstrates that a similar “divergence” was also apparent in urban government and public order in Ireland. In 1814, for example, Robert Peel established a professional trained police force in Ireland (hence the nickname “peelers”) which predated the English metropolitan force by fifteen years. Law enforcement was reformed again in 1836 and the Irish Constabulary was born, introducing a uniform system of management, standardised rules, and centralised control to the force. As MacDonagh memorably describes it: “Thus Ireland possessed a coherent, stratified, paramilitary police at a time when the lonely, untrained

village constable was still the instrument of law enforcement over most of rural England."\textsuperscript{18} Later the force served as a model for policing systems in other colonies. Other developments were no less impressive. In the same year the government refined the law establishing salaried magistrates who were expected to be resident in their localities. This was in contradistinction to England where the amateur, unpaid magistrate was still very much the norm. A national schools system, introduced in 1831, established a state supported system of elementary education in which two-thirds of the cost of buildings, equipment, and salaries were garnered from the public purse. In a recent analysis of the education experiment David Fitzpatrick follows MacDonagh's earlier assessment depicting it "as a classic example of 'cultural imperialism,' directed towards the moral and intellectual advancement of a hitherto backward people."\textsuperscript{19} In 1851 the government overhauled the dispensary system establishing a network of salaried part-time doctors, a centralised, national system of inspection which brought "the rating powers and the machinery of the poor law" in line with medical relief.\textsuperscript{20} The act assigned a medical practitioner to every district in the country and established medical relief outside the workhouse.\textsuperscript{21} "In contrast to the British," MacDonagh concludes, "Irish government was remarkable for the extent to which centralisation, uniformity, inspection and professionalism spread throughout the system before 1850."\textsuperscript{22}

For the most part MacDonagh attributes these impressive deviations to the familiar tale of religious bigotry. "Any step to democratise Irish local government," he writes, "would have admitted Catholics to a share in power, and introduced factional struggles in the representative institutions."\textsuperscript{23} Similarly allowing a Catholic educational system to develop was tantamount to sanctioning and institutionalising 'superstition' and 'sedition.'\textsuperscript{24} However MacDonagh's argument simplifies matters too much. In fact, from the beginning "the laboratory" was much more than an experiment in sectarianism. Centralised political administration, a unified police

\textsuperscript{22} MacDonagh. Ireland, op. cit.: 37.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.: 30.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.: 35.
force, paid magistrates, public dispensaries, a unified and regulated network of lunatic asylums, and state-backed elementary schooling — this was a massive undertaking requiring new regimes of calculation and surveillance, which ultimately made life a target of power, and its meticulous management, the notable characteristic of colonial politics.  

Here the issue of security was paramount and many of these developments were mobilised and advanced under the flexible rubric of threat. In this sense, MacDonagh is right to emphasise the dangers of an educated Catholic revolt, even though the ‘crisis’ was always more pervasive than this. According to the prevailing political imaginary, dispensaries could aid the health of the population in so far as they eliminated or contained the threat of disease; paid magistrates and a centralised paramilitary force checked the threat of civil disobedience and agrarian unrest; indeed, in his report on the Irish Poor Law, George Nicholls could call attention to “the necessity of repressing vagrancy and mendicancy as a measure of police.”

In a Foucauldian sense then, it is as though society itself must be defended from multifarious endogenous threats. These ‘experiments’ on life — more frenetic, scrupulous, and regulated — were vicariously threaded by a mixture of colonial hubris and biopolitics. It is in this principal sense that we need to frame the problem of poverty in Ireland which after 1838 was increasingly managed by a state-supported Poor Law system that eventually played such a crucial role during the Famine.

**Under the eye of a paid officer**

Notwithstanding these remarkable developments in nineteenth century government, MacDonagh has called the Irish Poor Law “the great exception to the rule that Irish government deviated increasingly from English until the close of the nineteenth-century.” The English Poor Law of 1834 was “simply translated across St George’s channel fours years later.”

Given the preceding discussion one might have expected the government to propose an experimental

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27 MacDonagh, *Ireland, op. cit.*: 33.
programme of reform to tackle Irish poverty, especially “in a country in which a great portion of the population are always bordering upon famine,” as Isaac Butt stated. In so far as MacDonagh’s characterisation is (mostly) correct we should ask why this did not happen and whether indeed the Irish Poor Law was “the great exception to the rule” of British intervention in nineteenth-century Ireland. In relation to this two points might be registered. First, it should be remembered that the capacity to decide the exception is very often the reserve of the powerful especially in a centralised pattern of government. The reasons for transferring the English Poor Law to Ireland are both interesting and complicated, but they also demonstrate an ability of the powerful to deviate from the ‘norm’ of Irish exceptionalism under rules of their own choosing. Secondly, and most importantly, on some of the most important issues the Irish Poor Law of 1838 was remarkably different to the Irish Poor Law of 1852. This point alone warrants a more careful consideration of the changes to the Poor Law system.

As the preceding discussion illustrates (chapters one and two), by the eighteen-thirties it was widely assumed that Irish poverty was indelibly tied to moral corruption, economic underdevelopment and agrarian agitation. In 1833 the government established a Royal Commission to report on the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland with a view to practical legislation. The commission was to be chaired by the Archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whately. Holding the second most senior office in the Church of Ireland, Whately’s appointment was bound to make him controversial, although in his favour his professional credentials were unimpeachable: he had held the chair of Political Economy at Oxford (1829-1831) and came on good recommendation from Nassau Senior, a former student of Whately’s, and an influential economist in his own right. Whately was an complex character. His well-known personal eccentricities stood at odds with his theoretical orthodoxy: his mission to Christianise secular teaching at Oxford contradicted his firm belief that politics must be secular; he supported Catholic Emancipation whilst also endorsing foreign missionary work (he helped establish the first Irish branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts); he was a self-proclaimed “divine right Tory,” although he might be more accurately described as Whiggish in sensibility. Such paradoxes might be taken as a proof of inconsistency, but with Whately they signified a consistent questioning that was his hallmark.

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Almost from the outset Whately’s commission was doomed. For a start he misread (or just as likely ignored) the government’s intentions and conceived his charge in bold terms. The great challenge, so he divined, was to prevent destitution rather than simply manage poverty:

We feel that endeavouring to prevent destitution, we shall more strictly fulfil Your Majesty’s Commission; than if we merely devised means for alleviating misery after it had arisen. We shall feel deep pain should we ultimately be compelled to leave to any portion of the Peasantry of Ireland a continuation of distress on the one hand, or a mere offer of charity of the other …

Looking beyond the physical condition of the working classes, we are also desirous of guarding against the moral degradation which might follow in the train of measures benevolently intended, but ill-judged, when applied to a nation possessing the habits and being in a peculiar situation of the People of Ireland …

An Inquiry as to whether any measures can improve the condition of the people, might and would include an investigation into the immediate and remote effects, both on morals and production, of every law and every usage. It must embrace every class of the community, in every district of the country.

Investigating “immediate and remote effects”; “every law and every usage”; “every class” and “every district”; preventing destitution and alleviating poverty whilst not promoting moral degradation — this was a broad canvas, and according to one economic historian Whately’s commission produced the “most thorough survey of the condition of the Irish Poor yet attempted.” Such thoroughness exacted its price. The considerable delay vexed the government and forced the commission to publish its conclusions in advance of the full report (the first volume was published in 1835; the third report, containing the conclusions and recommendations, in 1836; while the second report appeared in 1837). More seriously, however, while Whately and his cohorts were busily gathering evidence a new report on the Poor Law was published in England. Its provisions where to seriously impact the definition of an Irish Poor Law and therefore it merits some attention.

Unlike Ireland, England had a Poor Law system that dated at least to the time of Elizabeth I. However, by the eighteen-thirties the system had been under attack for over a
quarter of a century. The rising burden of the poor-rate, rural unrest (including the so-called Swing riots of 1830-31) and electoral reform hastened calls for a reassessment of the system. The government sanctioned a high-profile Royal Commission to enquire into the administration and practical operation of the poor laws. The commission was led by Edwin Chadwick and Nassau Senior and they presented their multi-volume report to Parliament in 1834. The English Poor Law report proposed serious changes, to be based upon the broadly reformist principles of definition and distinction. That is to say, the object of reform was to “dispauperise” the poor by creating a legal distinction between poverty and indigence. The “indigent” or “able-bodied” pauper was a person who could no longer guarantee his or her means of subsistence, whereas the “labouring poor” defined all those who laboured to live more or less hand to mouth. According to the terms of the New Poor Law if an able-bodied pauper did not possess the means of support he or she would no longer receive out-door relief from the parish, but would have to up and shift their entire family into the workhouse. This was to be known as the “all-or-nothing” principle. A second principle, known as the principle of “less eligibility,” sought to make conditions in the workhouse less eligible (that is, less preferable) than the conditions of the lowest paid labourer outside. This was to be guaranteed by making the instrument of relief — the workhouse — also the test for relief. Through the control of space and the conditions therein (including an institutionalised food regime, supervised labour, strict discipline, human classification and segregation) the principle of less eligibility could be enforced. “All by a simple idea in architecture,” as Jeremy Bentham famously put it. A person would be compelled to find work rather than commit his or her family to the harsh conditions of the workhouse. The application of these two principles became known as the “workhouse test.” The result of this legislation was, inter alia, to create a new status or category of person known as pauper.

In effect the New Poor Law planned to exclude the poor from the law because it was the pauper class, not the labouring poor that required reform. “Dispauperising” the poor meant defining and institutionalising the pauper. This, according to Gertrude Himmelfarb, might be grounds enough to speak of a “pauper law” rather than Poor Law: “One could argue that it was

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33 Hannah Arendt has written that: “all our definitions are distinctions, [which is] why we are unable to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else,” Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958: 176.
34 Himmelfarb, *op. cit.*: 165.
35 Burke, *op. cit.*: 18-22.
precisely to sharpen the distinction between pauper and poor, to give that distinction all the force of law, that the [English Poor Law] commission chose the course of reform rather than abolition. By providing for the pauper, even the able-bodied pauper, not outside the law (by private charity) but within it — within the framework of what would be, in effect, a pauper law — the commission proposed to legislate and institutionalize the distinction itself."\(^{36}\) Himmelfarb concludes: "The whole of the report was, in effect, an exercise in definition and distinction, an attempt to establish that line theoretically and to maintain it institutionally."\(^{37}\) It is worth emphasising what Himmelfarb is saying: what is being captured and established (that is, institutionalised and legalised) is neither the pauper nor the poor but the "line" that demarcates the two — the very "distinction itself." In effect, the English Poor Law initiated what seems like a pattern of incongruities: a Poor Law that excludes the poor and a "dispauperising" law that institutionalises the pauper. Moreover, it is worth noting that such iterations of inclusion and exclusion run to the very core of biopower.

While Whately and his commission laboured to produce their three volume report political opinion in England was steadily shifting. The new English workhouse system was constructed to wage war on pauperism (often depicted as a disease) and not poverty. Any Irish commission that proposed an alternative solution to poverty was unlikely to curry favour. As it turned out Whately's report played directly into the government's hands. The commission rejected the transplantation of an English poor law system in Ireland on the grounds that the "poorer classes in Ireland may be considered as comprehending nearly the whole population" and high unemployment made it virtually impossible to distinguish the able-bodied pauper from the labouring poor.\(^{38}\) Moreover, they reasoned, Ireland stood on a different scale of civilization and legislation ought to have "reference to circumstance as well as principles."\(^{39}\) Instead of a poor law modelled on English lines the commission recommended assisted emigration for "redundant labour," not as "the main relief for the evils of Ireland" but as "for the present as an auxiliary essential to a commencing course of amelioration."\(^{40}\) In addition they proposed to establish a Board of Improvement to superintend various tasks ranging from drainage and

\(^{36}\) Himmelfarb, op. cit.: 161.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.: 163.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.: 17. See also chapter two.
fencing to more radical measures of improvement such as tearing down "cabins which may appear unwholesome, or calculated to generate or continue disease."\textsuperscript{41}

True to his original intentions Whately's report recommended sweeping (and costly) changes that went far beyond elite opinion on poor relief. In the interim the government solicited the opinion of Nassau Senior and George Cornwall Lewis on the contents of Whately's report. Although the principal author of the English Poor Law, Senior was in fact against legislating a poor law for Ireland for much the same reasons as Whatley. Irish poverty was too extreme and pervasive for a poor law to work successfully.\textsuperscript{42} Senior had also recommended Whately for the job, and though he ventured to raise some disapproval, his criticisms were essentially minor.\textsuperscript{43} In contrast to Senior's "Letter," Cornwall Lewis's report is a point-by-point indictment of Whately's recommendations.\textsuperscript{44} Unlike Senior he concluded in favour of extending the English Poor Law to Ireland; however, like Senior, Lewis was clearly prejudiced by association: his father was then chairman of the Poor Law Commissioners in England.\textsuperscript{45} On the back of these comments Lord Russell instructed George Nicholls, an English Poor Law Commissioner, to proceed to Ireland to test the applicability of extending the English Poor Law, and in particular, to ascertain "whether any kind of Workhouse can be established which shall not, in point of food, clothing, and warmth, give its inmates a superior degree of comfort to the common lot of the independent labourer."\textsuperscript{46} Nowhere in his report does Nicholls state exactly how long he spent in Ireland, but since we know he received his instructions from the government in August 1836, and he presented his first report to Lord Russell in November of that year, it is fairly safe to assume that his recommendations were projected rather than detected. Indeed it is hardly surprising to learn that as early as January 1836 (that is before the final volume of Whately's report appeared), Nicholls had contacted the government to express his confidence that the English Poor Law system could be applied to Ireland with only a few minor amendments.\textsuperscript{47} Knowledge of this bit of legerdemain left Whately feeling sour. He

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.: 21.  
\textsuperscript{42} Himmelfarb, \textit{op. cit.}: 157.  
\textsuperscript{44} "Remarks on the Third Report of the Royal Commissioners on the Condition of the Poor in Ireland, by G. C. Lewis." \textit{Parliamentary Papers. 1837 [91] LI}.  
\textsuperscript{45} Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 38.  
\textsuperscript{46} "Report of George Nicholls", \textit{op. cit.}: 201.  
\textsuperscript{47} Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 38; Collison Black, \textit{op. cit.}: 108.
described Nicholls’s terse deliberations in Ireland as no more than getting “one bottle of water out of the Liffey and one out of the Shannon.”

Nicholls’s report became the foundation for the Poor Law Ireland Act, which became law on 31st of July, 1838. The aim, scope and provisions of the act merit particular attention bearing in mind that after June 1847 the Poor Law became, to all intents and purposes, the principal means of state relief during the Famine. In hindsight, the pithiness of Nicholls’s enquiry appears inversely proportional to the magnitude of his proposals. Moreover, Nicholls frankly admitted that he did not collect new evidence. There was, he said, enough gathered by the late commissioners. His efforts took him to a number of towns and villages where he enquired into the “conditions and habits” and “character and wants” of the people. In marked difference to the English Poor Law (of which Gertrude Himmelfarb has said: “It is difficult to think of any comparable legislative act in recent English history that was so long and so thorough in its preparation”) Nicholls favoured “practical conclusions, with a view to early legislation.” A central authority was to be the “responsible body” that commands “the machinery of the poor law.” Such a machine required Herculean men at its helm — not just exclusively men but exclusively Englishmen since Nicholls doubted that experienced and responsible Irishmen could be found. The hired hands must be accustomed to “unceasing and excessive work.” Indeed their commitment and moral fibre was to be beyond reproach because “nothing but the hope of accomplishing a great public good” would render bearable the duties of office. If Ireland was indeed “in a period of transition,” as Nicholls frequently said, what it

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49 1st and 2nd Vict., cap. 56. “An act for the more effectual relief of the destitute poor in Ireland.”
50 Considerable sums of money were donated for famine relief by individuals around the world (these sums are partly detailed in Charles E. Trevelyan. *The Irish Crisis*. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848. The Quakers and the Catholic Church also raised large sums of money. The role of religious organisations in the relief process is complex and vexed. There are claims and counterclaims of proselytism. However, where monies were donated to the government its use was also determined by the government. Moreover, the government took charitable grain and refused to allow the groups that had donated it to determine its release from the government’s provision stores. For discussion see John Newsinger. “The Great Irish Famine: A Crime of Free Market Economics.” *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 47.11 (1996): 11-20.
51 In his report Nicholls states that he visited Dublin, Carlow, Kilkenny, Thurles, Cashel [sic] Tipperary, Clonmel [sic], Cork, Killarney, Limerick, Galway, Connemara, Westport, Castlebar, Ballina, Sligo, Enniskillen, Armagh and Newry, enquiring into the “conditions and habits” and “character and wants” of the people. “Report of George Nicholls”, op. cit.: 205.
52 Ibid.: 214; Himmelfarb, op. cit.: 154.
needed most, he thought, were men of good character committed to superintending the socio-economic reconstruction of Ireland.\textsuperscript{54}

In his report Nicholls criticises the “superabundant population,” the extreme subdivision of land and, above all, the blightful presence of a tenacious cottier class “too often reduced to a level little above that of a mendicant.”\textsuperscript{55} “The occupation of a plot of land,” he wrote, “has now gotten to be considered by a great portion of the Irish people, as conferring an almost interminable right of possession.”\textsuperscript{56} This position must be broken: “labour, the only protection against actual want, the only means by which a man could procure food for his family, was by getting and retaining possession of land: for this he has struggled — for this the peasantry have combined, and burst through all the restraints of law and humanity.”\textsuperscript{57} Like many political and social commentators, Nicholls believed that progress could only be achieved by eliminating the cottier and small tenant class, creating a landless labour pool, thus ‘freed’ to earn their living on consolidated farmlands organised according to scientific principles. Although Nicholls understood that “land is to them the great necessary of life,” and that the peasant “must get possession of a plot of land, on which to raise potatoes, or starve,” he was perfectly impatient to have farms redrawn and resettled in more commercial ways — which is to say in less communal and less egalitarian ways.\textsuperscript{58} Here it is very important to observe how Nicholls’s report effortlessly slips from discussing the control of mendicancy to the regulation of the cottier class and from enthusing over the machinery of the Poor Law to speculating on much broader social transformations. This was a particularly powerful tool of association that did not begin with Nicholls but certainly gained a new orthodoxy from this point on. It also and crucially gave the Poor Law a wide mandate to govern and regulate society far more generally.\textsuperscript{59} In other words,

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.: 236.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.: 206.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.: 206.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.: 207.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.: 207.
\textsuperscript{59} In England, for instance, Edward Lytton Bulwer (later known as Bulwer-Lytton) announced that the Poor Law established a new theory of government, what he christened “directive government”:

At present, my friends, you only perceive the government when it knocks at your door for taxes; you couple with its name the idea not of protection, but of extortion; but I would wish that you should see the Government educating you children, and encouraging your science, and ameliorating the condition of your poor; I wish you to warm while you utter its very name, with a grateful and reverent sense of enlightenment and protection; I wish you to behold all your great Public Blessings repose beneath its shadow.

Doubtlessly its “shadow” — like Adam Smith’s “hidden hand” — was not seen so as to be all the more effective. Cited in, Himmelfarb, \textit{op. cit.}: 173.
the slippage between mendicancy and the cottier class, and between the Poor Law and social transformation, marks an essentially moveable boundary between an anatomo-politics of disciplinary measures and a new biopolitics of regulatory functions. The factors that inform and direct this shift animate much of the discussion that follows.

The moral tone of Nicholls’s report is also noteworthy especially since the problem of poverty became inseparable from questions of character reform. Of the peasant class Nicholls wrote: “They seem to feel no pride, no emulation; to be headless of the present, and reckless of the future … Their cabins still continue slovenly, smoky, filthy, almost without furniture or any article of convenience or decency” (notice the connection with earlier travel narratives). Reflecting a broad discursive trend, the peasantry and not poverty was considered to be the root cause of Irish misery. Nicholls felt assailed on all sides by the “desultory and idle habits of the Irish peasantry,” and it is to these moral suspicions that his report continually turns. Character reform was clearly necessary: “One of the circumstances that first arrests attention in Ireland, is the almost universal prevalence of mendicancy. It is not perhaps the actual amount of misery existing amongst the mendicant class, great as that may be, which is most to be deprecated; but the falsehood, the trickery, and fraud, which become a part of their profession, and spread by example.”

Nicholls proposed a drastic reterritorialisation of the country into a series of administrative units, totalling one hundred and thirty (later to be increased to one hundred and sixty-three), to be known as “poor law unions” (see figure 3.1). Each union was to have a workhouse to be administered by an elected Board of Guardians and financed by rates which were to be levied locally: in effect a poor law tax. However, the Irish Poor Law Act differed in

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60 Nicholls evokes a spiralling vision of vice worthy of Dante’s Inferno: “Ireland is now suffering under a circle of evils, producing and reproducing one another. Want of capital produces want of employment — want of employment, turbulence and misery — turbulence and misery, insecurity — insecurity prevents the introduction or accumulation of capital — and so on. Until this circle is broken, the evils must continue, and probably augment.” It is not surprising that the originary sin should be a “want of capital.” First because Nicholls associates capital with individual industry — “capital we are told is the accumulation of savings, which are the fruits of industry, which again is nourished and supported by its own progeny”— and secondly because Nicholls, as I detail above, wished to convert the cottier class into wage labourers. “Report of George Nicholls”, op. cit.: 214, 211. Nicholls, op. cit.: 91.


62 Nicholls rationalised: “In forming the country into unions, it will I think be necessary to observe the civil rather than the ecclesiastical boundaries of parishes, but cases will arise in which it may be requisite to disregard all such boundaries — it being obviously more important that the district to be united should be compact, convenient and accessible, and be naturally connected with its centre …” Ibid.: 224.
Figure 3.1: Poor Law Unions created between 1838 and 1850

Source: Kennedy et al., 1999: 20-1
some crucial respects to its prototype in England. Irish relief could only be provided to whole family units within the confines of the workhouse, no provision being made for outdoor relief (in Britain this clause had to be dropped. In 1842, for example, the Outdoor Relief Act was passed to meet miserable conditions). Secondly, and crucially, no "right to relief" existed in Ireland. Nicholls was very clear on this in his recommendations: "I do not propose to impart a right to relief, even to the destitute, but to place the ordering and directing of all relief in the hands of the central authority." Hence "the claim to relief [is] to be founded on prescription," and not "legislative enactment." The poor law and its directives were not intended to secure a right to life free of crippling poverty; rather they aimed toward "ordering and directing" life or, in other words, they enshrined the right to govern. "Relief," as Nicholls wrote, "is only to be administered by receiving the applicants into the house [sic], and subjecting them to the regulations established for its government." The Irish poor law, therefore, was based first on a total adherence to the workhouse test: relief was available only within the confines of a strictly administered workhouse; and secondly the management and disciplining of the Irish pauper population.

Figure 3.2: Elevation of Main Building of the New Workhouses of Castletown and Dingle
Source: First Annual Report for the Relief of Poor in Ireland, 1847-8

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64 Kinealy. A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 8. During the first quarter of 1839 almost one hundred thousand people were granted outdoor assistance in England and Wales. Burke, op. cit.: 99.
65 "Report of George Nicholls", op. cit.: 223.
66 Ibid.: 223. Moreover, one commentator has argued: "George Nicholls' rejection of the Scottish system was founded less on its unsuitability to Irish conditions than on the more fundamental point that recipients of such relief came to regard it as a right rather than as a gift." O'Brien. "A Question of Attitude", op. cit.: 161.
The workhouses were designed to be austere and imposing (see figures 3.2 and 3.3). They were to be preferably located in the centre of the district near a chief police station. Ideally a school should be close by and a dispensary ought to be beside if not attached to the Workhouse. The German visitor, Kohl, provides a useful description:

I have designated the workhouses as fortress-like, and for this reason — they are generally situated on elevated ground, outside the town, probably for the sake of the fresh air; they are built of a gray, firm stone, are surrounded by loft walls, and provided with small turrets and other little castellated appendages. They command an extensive prospect over the country, and are the terror of the beggars, who prefer the independence of a mendicant’s life to confinement in one of these houses. Some places, in which workhouses have not yet been erected, are at this moment swarming with beggars, who have there retreated to escape from these dreaded buildings.

Figure 3.3: Aerial View of Parsonstown Workhouse, Co. Offaly
Source: Margaret Hogan (http://users.ox.ac.uk/~peter/workhouse/Ireland.shtml)

68 "The workhouses are as handsome in their outward elevation, as their contents are the contrary," commented one tourist. Osborne, op. cit.: 51.

According to Nicholls: "The Union established would thus become like a colony, a kind of centre of civilization, and the Unions collectively might be made important engines for effecting improvements in the condition and habits of the Irish people, in whose clothing, cottages, and domestic economy as well as in their agricultural and other management, there now appears a lamentable deficiency of the faculty happily so common in England." The colonial rhetoric complemented the biopolitical logic. The union was supposed to function exactly like a colony — or more precisely, a colony within a colony — a sort of "a centre of civilization" manipulating not just the lives of individual paupers but more general arrangements like habit and dress, rural-life and domestic economy. The workhouses were to be the showpiece of this "rational landscape" which sought to place character reform firmly in the field of government calculation.

As I have intimated above, entrance into the workhouse involved an elaborate matrix of human segregation and classification. "Confinement of any kind is more irksome to an Irishman, than it is even to an Englishman," thought Nicholls, and as we shall see this aim was provoked by a series of spatial techniques set to mark and individuate inmates whilst instantiating the doctrine of the "workhouse test." From the moment an applicant and his or her family stepped foot in the workhouse they agreed, at least in theory, to surrender control of their lives and submit themselves to its edicts and norms. In fact the entire "administration block" of the workhouse — furnished with a separate yard and sleeping quarters and comprising what one historian has called a "workhouse within a workhouse" — was devoted to the purpose of human isolation and categorisation. Here male and female members of an applicant's family were divorced and transferred to separate "receiving rooms" or "probationary wards" to await...

70 "Report of George Nicholls", op. cit.: 220. My emphasis.
72 Nicholls understood that the application of the "workhouse test" presented obvious problems in Ireland where the standard of living was already so low that the establishment of still lower conditions would be almost impossible, or in Nicholls' words, "inexpedient." Hence confinement and segregation acted as a sort of surrogate workhouse test. "Report of George Nicholls", op. cit.: 216.
73 It is important to recall that power is never unidirectional and at certain times/places individual agency might distort, reverse and oppose these edicts and norms. Dymphna McLoughlin reminds us that: "In practice the amount of control functionaries had over their inmates varied considerably." Dymphna McLoughlin. "Workhouses." The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vol. V: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions. Eds. Angela Burke, et al. New York: New York University Press, 2002: 723.
interview. "Pauper lunatics" were typically transferred to the "idiot ward." Gerard O'Brien describes in detail the subsequent "screening" process:

In these rooms details were recorded of the identity, sex, age, status, employment or trade, and religion of the applicants, who would then be examined by the workhouse doctor ... Medical examination was followed by 'purification,' during which the applicant's clothes were removed for cleansing and storage and the applicant washed under supervision before being clothed in a workhouse uniform. From this moment until his presentation before the board the applicant was subjected to the full rigours of workhouse life and discipline, but was not allowed any contact with inmates other than fellow applicants of the same sex.

According to the testimony of one Poor Law Inspector any applicant "eaten up with vermin" or affected with "cutaneous disease" was received in a special "probationary ward" where his or her head was "closely cut" and a "thorough ablation" administered. Arriving on "admission day" at the Kilrush workhouse, Lord Sidney Godolphin Osborne found "ample evidence" that the workhouse test functions as "a real test of destitution." The appearance of the applicants — "infants at the breast of mothers, with the skin and visage of advanced, careworn childhood; children whose sores and dirt and squalid famished looks, told of the loss of all the elasticity of their age, of their premature acquisition of that stolid care-blunted nature, which years in common suffering alone can give" — made clear that the workhouses were indeed what Donegal man Hugh Dorian called "the last game of all." Admitted paupers were classified into five categories: males above the age of 15 years; boys aged 2 to 15; females above the age of 15; girls aged 2 to 15; and children under 2 years of age. Idiots and lunatics as well as women who had children outside marriage were placed apart. Each morning the pauper inmates were woken at 6:00am by the ringing of a bell. They assembled in the dining area for prayer, were

74 Nicholls, op. cit.: 286-287.
76 See Colonel William Clarke's testimony, "Correspondence between Poor Law Commissioners of Ireland and Inspectors Relative to the Statements in Extract from Book, Entitled, Gleanings in the West of Ireland." Parliamentary Papers. 1851 (218) XLIX.
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they were inspected to ensure all were present and suitably clean. Breakfast was served and eaten in silence. Afterwards the children were sent to the workhouse school and the able-bodied men began stone-breaking, corn-milling, oakum-picking, pipe-laying, digging — tasks that were exceptionally hated — while the women pitted themselves and their energy to sewing, knitting, carding, or in some cases, performed housework (washing, scrubbing), mending clothes and tending to the sick.\footnote{Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 231. At the Ennis workhouse in 1849, Osborne observed that every article of clothing had been made from raw materials spun at the workhouse. Osborne, \textit{op. cit.}: 38-39.}
The workhouses were designed to incorporate as best as possible the entire fabric of ‘everyday’ living, from vaccinations and industrial schooling to “useful auxiliaries [and] a well directed plan of emigration.”\footnote{Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 287.} Nicholls was impressed with the results: “little more can be done in the way of preparation than to send them forth imbued with habits of industry, their frames strengthened and inured to labour, their tempers and mental faculties duly cultivated, and above all their minds duly impressed with a sense of their moral and religious duties.”\footnote{Ibid.: 254.}

If Irish workhouses were “essentially punitive in nature” — as Dympna McLoughlin suggests — they were intended to be so in an entirely novel way.\footnote{McLoughlin, “Workhouses”, \textit{op. cit.}: 722.} Nicholls was very critical of the Houses of Industry, semi-official relief institutions that predated the Poor Law workhouses, stressing that the rules therein were so severe, and “the privations so calculated,” as to excite the inmates to acts of resistance. This was apparently akin to seventeenth-century laws whereby “rogues,” “vagabonds” and “sturdy Beggars” were disciplined by “putting fetters or gyres upon them and by moderate whipping.”\footnote{Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 28. In 1804, an anonymous traveller described a Dublin House of Industry as a “horrid scene of filth, profaneness, and obscenity ... a great seminary of prostitution, thieves, plunderers, and rebels.” Anon. \textit{Ireland in 1804}. Ed. Seamus Grimes. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1980: 25-6.} The Poor Law administration of workhouses was to be entirely different. According to Nicholls, the “excitable” Irish could be “easily governed, and easily led,” if power could be wielded — above all — \textit{economically}.\footnote{For example Nicholls objects to the older Houses of Industry because “the inmates [were] being subjected to privations calculated, perhaps, more than any other, to excite them to resistance.” “Report of George Nicholls”, \textit{op. cit.}: 215.} Hence Nicholls called for “more enlightened benevolence”: “the real friends of the people of Ireland are those who lead them, even where necessary by compulsory measures, to active, independent exertion, to a reliance upon themselves and their own efforts for support.” The Poor Laws aimed “to restore,
or create, the feeling of self-confidence — to revive; or establish, the habit of reliance ... [and] compel them to acts of local self-government.” Power here is not simply punitive, but a relationship that provokes something like a new field of response (“independent exertion”), and works on affecting what Foucault calls the “conduct of conduct.” This is not just legislation as moral navigation; it was also, undoubtedly, another variant of the classic colonial ruse of coercion made over as gift.

In addition to enforced segregation and task labour, dietary regulation formed “the backbone” of workhouse discipline. It was widely assumed that potato cultivation and barbarity went hand-in-hand in Ireland. Certainly Thomas Carlyle was not unusual in mocking Ireland’s “potato culture” and its “potato-phagus” peoples. These ideas had long permeated the corridors of power. In The Irish Crisis, Charles Trevelyan wrote that “there is scarcely a woman of the peasant class in the west of Ireland, whose culinary art exceeds the boiling of a potato.”

By Famine times the age-old adage ‘you are what you eat’ had become a fully-fledged political mantra, a sort of “dietary determinism” (in Terry Eagleton’s phrase) that was deployed as an justification for advancing a succession of institutional measures. “In every way it is desirable to teach him [sic] the use of a more substantial diet, both to enable him to give a proper amount of labour for his hire, and in order to raise him to a higher standard as a social being,” continued Trevelyan. Analysing the management of a pre-Famine workhouse in Cork, Gerard O’Brien

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90 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 7-8. On this observation the economist Amartya Sen issued the sharp comment that “it is rather rare for an Englishman to find a suitable occasion for making international criticism of culinary art.” Moreover, Sen says, the “pointing of an accusing finger at the meagreness of the diet of the Irish poor well illustrates the tendency to blame the victim.” Amartya Sen. Development as Freedom. New York: Anchor Books, 2000: 175.
92 Moreover, Trevelyan wrote: “One main cause of the fact which has been so often remarked, that the Irishman works better out of Ireland than in it, is, that when he leaves his native country and obtains regular employment elsewhere he commences at the same time a more strengthening diet than the potato.” Trevelyan, op. cit.: 195-196. For the Commissioners dietary recommendations see “Second Annual Report of Commissioners of Inquiry into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws.” Parliamentary Papers. 1836 (595) XXIX: 63-66.
observed that "between March 1840 and December 1841 the diet was interfered with no less than a dozen times." In order to strengthen the principle of "less eligibility" meat was prohibited in rural workhouses and by the first year of the blight the potato diet had been replaced in sixty-nine out of one hundred and thirty workhouses with frugal portions of rice, soup, bread, oatmeal and corn (See figure 3.5.). It is as though the very soul of mankind could be tapped via the intestine. The crucial point being, however, that this is not just old-fashioned colonial paternalism. Its context is pure biopolitics: the imposition of norms and rules on a radically depotentiated form of life.

![Table of Provision Check Account](image)

Figure 3.5: The Poor Law Commissioners' dietary recommendations
Source: Sixth Annual Report of the Poor Laws 1840: 257

The extent to which the state was endeavouring to regulate the "bare life" of its subjects cannot be underestimated. For vast numbers of people even the most mundane aspects of living such as sleeping, eating, moving about, were now subject to minute attention and control. Seemingly marginal matters regarding the administration of workhouses achieved a general importance. Take for instance the controversial subject of classification and proximity in the workhouses. Guardians, Commissioners, Chaplains and politicians alike were greatly concerned about the "moral contamination" spread from the "promiscuous mixing together of women of all

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characters."95 As a strong opponent of the Irish workhouse system, Sidney Osborne was incensed by what he observed. "There is, and there must be, a constant wholesale process of female degradation going on, where married women and single women — girls of 16 — women of 40, are associated in hundreds in idleness by day; lay down to rest — but too often in nakedness, by hundreds together in a room at night."96 In Cork Archibald Stark observed that "the separation of the sexes is as nearly as possible complete" and if during the hours of labour male and female paupers occasionally met, they did so "under the eye of a paid officer."97 The annihilation of the inscrutable was not a pipe-dream but a panoptical dream deployed to incite precise and programmatic action against the alleged promiscuity of 'notorious' women. These concerns which, as I said, were pervasive and well-formulated, should not be dismissed as Victorian prudishness run wild.98 They gave voice to more fundamental concerns directed towards disciplining the life of the body and regulating the biological life of the species. Sexuality, as Stuart Elden perceptively notes, is "situated at the crossroads" of anatomo-politics and biopolitics: "sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species" (Foucault's words) and it is arguably for this reason that it assumed such general importance in the running of workhouses.99 Sexuality was another instrument to expose life, seize hold of it, and make it a target of power.

But what does it mean to say life is a target of power? And what is a stake in this seizure? It might be helpful to return for a moment to some arguments outlined in the introduction. Giorgio Agamben has suggestively argued that in cases such as this when sovereign power seizes control of "bare life" — the natural life of a person — it does so through a radical act of abandonment — an "inclusive exclusion" — that he also calls "a state of exception." This is entirely relevant, but needs some explaining. Foucault was interested in how the care of life came to be, more and more markedly, a prerogative of government. Agamben

96 Osborne, op. cit.: 56.
97 Stark, op. cit.: 111.
seizes this moment of danger in which power penetrates subjects' very bodies and forms of life, characterising it as the ultimate expression of sovereign power and nothing less than the hidden matrix of modern life: "The puissance absolue et perpétuelle, which defines state power, is not founded — in the last instance — on political will but rather on naked life, which is kept safe and protected only to the degree to which it submits itself to the sovereign's (or the law's) right to life and death." In Agamben's reading, "bare" or "naked" life is not simply the terms on which the state assumes control of life; it is also, and crucially, what is at stake in state (sovereign) power.

According to Agamben this "paradox of sovereignty" is played out in what he calls the "space of the exception": a temporary suspension of the rule of law that is revealed instead to constitute the fundamental structure of the legal system itself. Trading on the philosophy of Carl Schmitt, Agamben writes: "Sovereign is he who decides on the state of the exception," leading him to surmise that the law appears to be in force in the figure of its own dissolution ("its realization therefore coincides with its own abolition"). All this is tremendously important because, if Agamben is correct, and "the originary relation of law to life is not application but Abandonment," then right and wrong, law and violence, the exception and the rule become the effect of "boundary promulgation and boundary perturbation." In other words, a moveable series of inclusions and exclusions describe the originary relation of law to bare life, which now occupies the centre of biopolitics.

Agamben’s “metaphysics of power” (the phrase is Derek Gregory’s) aids my analysis of Irish Famine relief in two significant ways. In the first place, if “politics is about the border,” then we need to pay special attention to the relays, delegations, and caesuras that attempt to diminish politically qualified life to bare life. Secondly, I think it is important to consider how a “state of exception” or radical abandonment is created through political actions. In other

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words, we need to take stock of the fact, long ago noted by Hannah Arendt, that a condition of complete rightlessness needs to be produced before the right to life itself is challenged. Indeed Agamben’s thought is deeply influenced by the political philosophies of Arendt and it is as such unsurprising that the production of a “perfectly superfluous” population is strikingly similar to Agamben’s capturing of bare life in the politico-juridical structure of abandonment. It is this political process of abandonment as “inclusive exclusion” that we must now examine.

**Violent geographies: bare life and abandonment**

Over nine million pounds were expended in building the workhouses, but the target of one hundred and thirty had not been achieved when the blight struck Ireland. Indeed, the immense suffering in the wake of the crop failure forced a serious reassessment and by the time the worst of the horrors were over, Ireland had a total of 163 unions each with its own workhouse (see above figure 3.1). The context of these developments is important and needs to be examined in some detail.

Although the damage to the potato crop was partial in 1845, the announcement of the arrival of blight in Ireland was deeply worrying for many officials. The dependency of the poor on the potato harvest was well established, but perhaps more troubling was the acknowledgement that the new Poor Law system would not be capable of addressing the needs of the destitute. Thus George Nicholls recorded his views:

The strict limitation of relief to the workhouse may possibly be objected to, on the ground that extreme want is found occasionally to assail large portions of the population in Ireland, who are then reduced to a state bordering on starvation; and ought therefore, it may be asserted, to be relieved at the public charge,

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106 The links between the thinking of Agamben, Arendt and Foucault are unmistakable and yet mostly overlooked. In regards to Arendt, Agamben argues that a biopolitical perspective is “altogether lacking” in her study of totalitarianism, although he also laments that her work “remains, even today, practically without continuation.” With Foucault the charge is reversed. Although the importance of biopower is addressed Foucault ignored “the exemplary places of modern biopolitics”: the concentration camp and the totalitarian states of the twentieth-century. This isn’t exactly true — although Foucault himself admitted that “the non-analysis of fascism is one of the important political facts of the last thirty years.” See Agamben. *Homo Sacer*, op. cit.: 3-4; Foucault. *Society Must Be Defended*, op. cit.: 275, 239-263. The intellectual affinities between these thinkers are central to this study. In particular Arendt’s figure of *animal laborans* (and Agamben’s acknowledgement that it captures a fundamental aspect of “biological life”) connects “the spaces of exception” to the spaces of capital in ways that I find illuminating. As I note in the introduction, Foucault, like Arendt, pays far more attention to the ways in which bodies are connected to the productive processes of capital. But see David Harvey. "The Body as an Accumulation Strategy." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16.4 (1998): 401-21.
107 By 1845 one hundred and twenty three workhouses were operational.
without being subjected to the discipline of the Workhouse. This, however, is an extreme case, and it would not, I think, be wise to adapt the regulation of Poor Law administration in Ireland, to the possible occurrence of such a contingency. In a period of famine the whole population become in a great degree destitute; but it surely would not be expedient to hold out an expectation, that if such an event should unhappily occur, support for all would be unconditionally provided at the public charge. This would lessen the inducements to a provident economising of their means of support on the part of the people, by a timely resort to which the occurrence of actual famine may be averted, although dearth and much consequent distress may arise. This must in fact be the case in all countries, whenever a season of scarcity occurs.\textsuperscript{108}

Nicholls wrote these words in 1837, some eight years prior to the arrival of \textit{Phytophthora Infestans}, and in hindsight its conclusions on “provident economising” and the probability of “dearth and much consequent distress” are chilling.\textsuperscript{109} Indeed very similar calculations influenced the government’s response to “extreme want” when it eventually did arrive in the autumn of 1845.

The early part of the potato harvest mostly escaped, but the late or what was commonly called the “people’s crop,” which was dug in late autumn, was heavily spoiled.\textsuperscript{110} Early optimism shrivelled as it became clear that about one-third of the harvest was destroyed. The Irish press reflected “an atmosphere of terror and despair.”\textsuperscript{111} The government had to react, but like Nicholls they worried over conceding a \textit{right to relief} by permitting outdoor employment through the Poor Law.\textsuperscript{112} Moreover, Prime Minister Peel was convinced that the crop failure was “qualitatively different and infinitely more serious” than previous periods of extreme dearth, and as such warranted an original response.\textsuperscript{113} These factors guided the Prime Minister’s

\textsuperscript{108} “Report of George Nicholls”, \textit{op. cit.}: 223.
\textsuperscript{109} Moreover on 21st May 1838 during a debate on the Irish Poor the Duke of Wellington stated: “There never was a country in which poverty existed to so great a degree as it exists in Ireland. I held a high station in that country thirty years ago, and I must say, that, from that time to this, there has scarcely elapsed a single year, in which the Government has not at certain periods of it entertained the most serious apprehension of actual famine. I am firmly convinced that from the year 1806, down to the present time, a year has not passed I which the government has not been called on to give assistance to relieve the poverty and distress which prevailed in Ireland.” Cited in, Trevelyan, \textit{op. cit.}: 17.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.}: 38.
\textsuperscript{112} In his second report (Nov. 3, 1837) Nicholls states that to authorising outdoor relief implies forfeiture of control which will ultimately create more paupers. Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 197.
initial step to establish relief measures outside the parameters of the Poor Law. This he attempted in three ways.

First, in November 1845 the government established a “Temporary Relief Commission” which was, in Helen Burke’s words, an entirely “new administrative structure” for dealing with the crisis. The immediate effect of this move was to create local Relief Committees responsible for fundraising and encouraging apparently indifferent landlords to provide employment for the destitute. In addition to these measures the government, through the Board of Works, established a Public Works programme. The works typically included road improvements, rail and pier constructions as well as arterial drainage schemes, half the cost of which was to be met by a government grant and the remainder to be repaid as loan over twenty years. Under the scheme, local Relief Committees were responsible for distributing tickets to those “considered unable to provide food for their families.”

Second, as an immediate precaution the Prime Minister ordered £100,000 worth of maize — which was commonly called Indian corn — from North America. Peel conducted this transaction in secret, even concealing the matter from members of his own cabinet. The Prime Minister considered it vitally important that the government should not been seen to be intervening in the markets. Although Indian meal had been used in previous seasons to stay the effects of famine the commodity was practically unknown in Ireland at the time. Indeed, this reason guided government practice since private merchants “could not complain of interference with a trade

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115 Cited in, Burke, op. cit.: 108.
that did not exist, nor could prices be raised against the home consumer on an article of which no stock was to be found in the home market." In order to distribute the supply the government established a chain sub-debots under the charge of the Irish Constabulary and the Coast Guard (see figure 3.6). The idea was that when local markets were “deficient” the corn could be sold to Relief Committees for distribution. It is most important to understand that the supply could not (nor was it meant to) replace the nutritional gap left by the failure of the potato harvest. Accounts that claim that Peel’s intervention was motivated by altruism ignore the very explicit aims of his policy: to redirect the dietary aims of the Irish poor. As Peter Gray relates: “In October and November 1845 leader after leader castigated the potato as a crop and those who exploited mass subsistence upon it. Diet was the benchmark of civilization, and those dependent on the potato were in a debased and savage state, equalling that of the ‘untutored Indian’ and the ‘ocean islander.’ Providence intended that civilized man live on foodstuffs of a higher order — defined less in terms of nutrition than of viability as a commercial good.” In other words, from the beginning aid practices where fused with the prerogatives of the civilising mission.

Third, and most controversially, on October 31 1845 Peel called an emergency meeting of cabinet where he proposed that the government would repeal the Corn Laws. The Corn Laws were a series of legislative measures which protected British farmers from cheaper imports of grain. In truth Peel had been edging toward the idea that trade tariffs on grain where an ‘unnatural’ impediment to economic growth that ought to be removed. The appearance of blight on the potato harvest helped consolidate these suspicions. Now it was argued that the difficulties in Ireland were the result of a shortfall in cheap grain and not the more immediate failure of the potato harvest. In other words, *Phythophthora Infestans* was turned into a “divine indictment” against protectionism. Debate began in earnest in November and the ensuing embroilments and factionist scuffles succeeding in turning Irish relief into a party question. The repeal of the Corn Laws was a hugely significant moment in political and economic history. “Short of the civil war,” write Woodham-Smith, “no issue in English history has provoked such passion as Corn Law repeal.” My appraisal is necessarily short. For further discussion see Christine Kinealy. "Peel, Rotten Potatoes and Providence: The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Irish Famine.” Free Trade and Its Reception. Ed. Andrew

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116 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 46.
117 Ibid.: 47.
119 These arguments are brilliantly developed in Gray, Ibid.: 80. For the providentialist view see Acraeus. God’s Laws Versus Corn Laws: A Letter to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury from a Dignitary of the English Church. London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1846.
120 The repeal of the Corn Laws was a hugely significant moment in political and economic history. “Short of the civil war,” write Woodham-Smith, “no issue in English history has provoked such passion as Corn Law repeal.” My appraisal is necessarily short. For further discussion see Christine Kinealy. "Peel, Rotten Potatoes and Providence: The Repeal of the Corn Laws and the Irish Famine.” Free Trade and Its Reception. Ed. Andrew
protectionists accused the Peelites of embellishing the extent of famine in Ireland and the free traders charged their opponents with obstreperousness in the face of the divine laws of political economy. In a political pamphlet published in 1847 Isaac Butt wrote: "The potato famine in Ireland was represented as the invitation of the agitators on either side of the water ... Men's politics determined their belief. To profess belief in the fact of the existence of a formidable potato blight, was as sure a method of being branded as a radical, as to propose to destroy the Church." Peel's push toward laissez faire policies eventually won out, even though the issue dragged on until the summer of 1846 and it took a further three years for the Corn Laws to be entirely dismantled. Nevertheless, as Woodham-Smith asserts, it would be difficult to exaggerate the influence of laissez faire ideology on the political management of the Irish Famine.

How did these initial relief measures perform? Both historians and contemporaries are mixed in their reviews. There is the incontrovertible fact, acknowledged by almost all factions in the debate, that deaths by starvation were mostly avoided in the first season of famine. Isaac Butt declared that "whatever estimate may be formed of his [Peel's] measures ... provision was made with the most consummate skill." However a number of reservations ought to be registered. As already noted Peel clearly saw these measures as vital pre-requisite for the reconstruction of Irish society, a practice which was to have a profound impact on the administration of hunger. By a very early stage it was also clear that econocentric thinking was to be a decisive force in shaping the direction of relief, even when it was suspected that the dictates of the market might increase the vulnerability of the Irish agricultural sector. Indeed Peel was not unaware of these consequences: "if there be a part of the United Kingdom which is to suffer by the withdrawal of protection ... it was Ireland," he coldly declared Christine Kinealy points out that the surplus in European grain (resulting from the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars) was exhausted by the eighteen-forties which meant that repealing the Corn Laws was both a safe and ideologically attractive option for England.

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121 Butt, op. cit.: 3.
122 Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 49.
123 Butt, op. cit.: 4.
125 Cited in Kinealy. A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit. 58.
126 Cited in Ibid.: 58.
toward *laissez faireism* — and what Isaac Butt appropriately calls “an experiment in social economy” — deserves further qualification.\(^{127}\) Although the government had now decided that the market would naturally supply food to Ireland, they failed to extend the policy of free trade to the Navigation Laws which meant that the importation of corn was impeded by freight charges which had soared to three times the normal rate.

The public works established under the Temporary Relief Commission were also controversial and allegations of local abuse were routine. Writing shortly after the Famine Donegal man Hugh Dorian claimed that local “committee men” often enforced their own arbitrary laws to keep their un-favoured off the relief list.\(^{128}\) He also alleged that tickets were sometimes obtained through humiliating supplications: “The applicant for relief presented himself at the committee man’s dwelling, got an hour or so at some job, then was supplied with the desired ticket drawn out of favour of some petty shopkeeper at some distance, and having reached that place, would have to wait his turn. All this circuitous way of doing good was more like hard labour or convict punishment.”\(^{129}\) This method of aid was designed to be provisional. As soon as the “probationary season of distress” was over the works were to close.\(^{130}\) Moreover, it was increasingly alleged that Irish labourers otherwise engaged in regular employment abandoned it in favour of the public works schemes. Thus began a long litany of claims (and counter-claims) of deceit, duplicity, and simulation which gained wider currency as the Irish Famine wore on. Nevertheless by August 1846, 97,000 people were employed on the government works.

The distribution of food was hampered by two principal factors, the first and most obvious being the underdevelopment of the food and provisions trade in Ireland. As Trevelyan explained to his readers:

> A large proportion of the people of Ireland had been accustomed to grow the food they required, each for himself, on his own little plot of ground; and the social machinery by which, in other countries, the necessary supplies of food are collected, stored, and distributed, had no existence there. Suddenly, without

\(^{127}\) Butt, *op. cit.*: 8.

\(^{128}\) “There were private laws made by the ‘committee’ men and those who had the distribution of relief; amongst their law acts was one that any man possessing a four-footed animal — not dog or cat — one which could be sold at fair or market, was in consequence debarred from government aid as long as he had such.” Dorian, *op. cit.*: 217.

\(^{129}\) Dorian, *op. cit.*

\(^{130}\) Trevelyan, *op. cit.*: 49.
preparation, the people passed from a potato food, which they raised themselves, to grain food, which they had to purchase from others, and which in great part, had to be imported from abroad; the country was so entirely destitute of resources applicable to this new state of things, that often, even in large villages, neither bread nor flour was to be procured; and in country districts, the people had to sometimes walk twenty miles before they could obtain a single stone of meal.\(^{131}\)

Moreover, “Shops and organizations for importing foodstuffs and distributing them on the English model were generally found only in the more prosperous districts in north-east Ulster, Dublin, some places in Eastern Ireland, and the larger towns, like Cork. Where relief would be most needed, the means by which it was to be supplied seldom existed.”\(^{132}\) This disorganised state was compounded by the fact that Indian corn could not be treated like most grain. It was exceptionally hard and ordinary mills were inadequate. The solution meant that the corn had to be ground twice which slowed procedures (unloading, drying, milling, distributing) to a considerable extent.\(^{133}\) Filling debots turned into an ordeal. The second significant reason, calamitously misunderstood by relief officials, was the fact that the destruction of the potato crop involved a “double misery” for the poor: “It destroyed their food, and at the same time it took from them their income.” “The poor man’s store was altogether gone,” continued Butt, “a purchaser of his provisions he never had been — the means of purchasing them he never had.”\(^{134}\) The poor had not the means to afford the ‘aid’ that was being offered to them.

Just as it was becoming clear that the new harvest was more severely blighted than the previous year, Robert Peel lost his ministry. The government did not fall over the contentious repeal of the Corn Laws — as is often stated — but rather over the attempted imposition of another Irish Coercion act meant to stay the growing unrest in the country.\(^{135}\) The new Prime Minister, Lord John Russell, decided to overwrite Peel’s relief strategies. In August 1846

\(^{131}\) Ibid.: 55.

\(^{132}\) Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 49.

\(^{133}\) Ibid.: 59.

\(^{134}\) Butt, op. cit.: 7. Jonathan Pim declared: “Potatoes were not merely the food of the people, but in many places they supplied the place of capital and of a circulating medium.” Cited in, E. Margaret Crawford. “William Wilde’s Table of Irish Famines.” Famine: The Irish Experience, 900-1900, Subsidence Crises and Irish Famines. Ed. E. Margaret Crawford. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1989: 24. For sharp observations on “the potato truck system” see Jasper W. Rogers. The Potato Truck system of Ireland: The Main Cause of her Periodical Famines and of the Non-Payment of her Rents. London: J. Ridgway, 1847. It seems that Carlyle was influenced by the latter’s writings.

\(^{135}\) Hoppen points out that during the half century after the Union, Ireland was governed under ‘ordinary’ law for only five years. K. Theodore Hoppen. Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity. London: Longman 1999: 49.
Trevelyan, disbanded the Temporary Relief Commission. Now government efforts were to be concentrated on Public Works, a move sanctioned by the so-called Labour-Rate Act. At the same time the government declared its intention not to interfere any further with the supply of food. Secretive shipments were to be ended. The government stores would no longer be used as a weapon to counteract price inflations on the local markets. Some historians have overemphasised the degree of 'policy departure' evident in these decisions which in many respects were entirely consistent with Peel's relief strategy. Peel never intended government imports to meet the deficiencies caused by the partial destruction of the potato harvest. Indeed, as I have stated already, Indian corn was purchased precisely because it was an unknown commodity in Ireland and its discriminate distribution was meant to placate the merchant class whilst encouraging the dietary regeneration of Ireland. Now the merchants were promised that the government would no longer act as a trafficker in food. In the remote western parts of the island debots remained operational, although they were intended “to be a last resort to supply the deficiencies of trade and not to take the place of trade.” Perhaps more callously this so-called non-intervention extended to exports as well as imports and right throughout the Famine shipments left the country. By abandoning the poor to the market the government intended to act as “pioneers [in] trade, and lead the way to habits of commercial enterprise where before they had no existence.” Isaac Butt provided a stinging condemnation of what he characterised as a “most miserable misapprehension.” It is worth quoting at some length:

By what delusions could any man persuade himself, that by the natural operations of this process, Indian corn could find its way to the wilds of Mayo, or the village of Carberry? There were neither retail dealers nor merchants in the article required. The people whose food was gone were, in fact, beyond the pale of mercantile enterprise to supply a country so circumstanced, was to expect men suddenly to embark in the trade of supplying Ireland with food, not by any of the ordinary processes by which merchants are led into the affording of additional

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136 Burke, op. cit.: 114.
137 9th and 10th Vict., cap. 107. “An Act to Facilitate the Employment of the labouring Poor for the limited Period in the distressed Districts in Ireland.”
138 This policy is particularly emphasised in nationalist historiography. John Mitchel exaggerates the extent of exportation but recent work by Christine Kinealy has questioned earlier work on export figures by Austin Bourke. Kinealy makes three relevant points. First, she contends that the figures are problematic. After the Act of Union Irish exports to Britain were considered to be inter-regional rather than international. As such precise figures were not recorded. Second, the fact that Ireland also exported outside the United Kingdom has been unduly ignored when compiling the figures. Third, most of the historical debate has focused on grain, ignoring exports in other foodstuffs (and one might add, so-called “indirect exports” through the fattening of livestock to be sold). Christine Kinealy. "Food Exports from Ireland, 1846-47." History Ireland 5.1 (1997): 32-36; Kinealy. A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit: 79.
139 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 78.
supplies, by orders coming in the usual way of trade, but upon some vague and uncertain speculation that a country of which they knew nothing would have a demand for corn, and the still more uncertain speculation that the pauper inhabitants of that country would have the means of paying for that demand.\textsuperscript{140}

Although local Relief Committees continued to function their powers were seriously curbed in favour of a centralised chain of command that consolidated the Treasury’s authority.\textsuperscript{141} Historian James Donnelly reviews the most important effects:

The new system, devised mainly by Trevelyan in August 1846, was intended to avoid inefficiency, waste, and extravagance that in the official view had characterised earlier operations. Instead of allowing the grand juries to initiate and direct a significant proportion of the employment projects, it was decided that the board of works should assume complete responsibility for all public schemes. Rather than continue the practice that under which the treasury paid half the cost of projects controlled by the board of works, it was decided that in future all charges should ultimately be met out of local taxation. Though the treasury would advance the money for public works in the first instance, the county cess was to be used to repay these loans in full. Irish property must support Irish poverty; much was to be heard of that maxim, a favourite of British politicians and civil servants, during the famine years. In sum, then, the government created a system that combined local financial responsibility with thoroughgoing centralised control of employment projects.\textsuperscript{142}

The new “monstrous system of centralisation” (Trevelyan’s words) had the unfortunate effect of slowing relief procedures considerably.\textsuperscript{143} It also stripped Irish rate-payers of any control over relief expenditure. In his account of the Irish Famine Trevelyan glossed these new relief efforts in Panglossian terms: “The Board of Works became the centre of a colossal organization; 5,000 separate works had to be reported upon; 12,000 subordinate officers had to be superintended. Their letters averaged upwards of 800 a-day.”\textsuperscript{144} Trevelyan was at pains to explain the enormous scale of the administrative mission that befell him and what one observer called his “tribes of superintendents”: “to advance the funds, to superintend the work; to pay the people weekly; to enforce proper performance of the labour; if the farm works were interrupted, to ascertain the quantity of labour required for them; to select and draft off the proper persons to perform it; to settle the wages to be paid to them by the farmers, and see that they were paid; to

\textsuperscript{140} Butt, \textit{op. cit.}: 9. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{141} Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 114.
\textsuperscript{143} Trevelyan, \textit{op. cit.}: 59.
\textsuperscript{144} Trevelyan gives the example of the following days’ mail: January 4th — 3,104; February 15th — 4, 900; April 19th — 4,340; May 17th — 6,033. \textit{Ibid.}: 59.
furnish food, not only for all the destitute out of doors, but in some measure for the paupers of the workhouses, were the duties which the government and its officers were called upon to perform.”

In general, though, it seems that the drudgery of useless labour was preferred to the humiliation of workhouse rule. By December 1846 440,000 were employed on the works. This inadvertent combination was deemed harmful. “Huddled together in masses,” complained George Nicholls, “they screened each other’s idleness.” Nicholls also felt that many fled to the works for the attraction of “the Queen’s pay.” A more stringent “test” was needed and thus the Labour-Rate Act substituted a system of “task labour” for the daily wages previously paid. It was advised that payment should be below what was normally provided in the district. Significantly, these calculations actually increased government control over what George Nicholls diplomatically termed “sensitive points”: the wages and food — and hence the entire means of subsistence — of a starving population.

According to Hugh Dorian, locals particularly hated task work: “These efforts to construct ‘new lines’ of road served but one end: the sending of many a poor honest man to the untimely grave through hunger and cold, for if he did not put in an appearance on the ground in all kinds of weather, no matter what the distance might be, or if he was not present at every roll call, his pay, small as it was, was reduced one-half or one-fourth.” Dorian’s indictment minces no words: “Here is where the government advisers dealt out the successful blow — and it would appear premeditated — the great blow for slowly taking away human life, getting rid of the population and nothing else, by forcing the hungry and the half-clad men to stand out in the cold and in the sleet and rain from morn till night for the paltry reward of nine pennies per day. Had the poor pitiful creatures got this allowance, small as it was, at their homes it would have

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146 Trevelyan, *op. cit.*: 61.
147 Nicholls, *op. cit.*: 314. Nicholls is almost certainly drawing on Trevelyan’s account. The latter complained: “Huddled together in masses, they contributed to each other’s idleness, and there were no means of knowing who did a fair proportion of work and who did not.” Trevelyan, *op. cit.*: 61.
148 Nicholls, *op. cit.*: 314.
149 Trevelyan wrote: “The opposition to task-work was general, and the enforcement of it became a trial of strength between the Government and the multitude.” Dorian, *op. cit.*: 216; Trevelyan, *op. cit.*: 59.
been relief, it would be charity, it would convey the impression that their benefactors meant to save life, but in the way thus given, on compulsory conditions, it meant next to slow murder.”

Hungry, tired and naked many labourers were physically unable to perform the assigned work and the grim scenes which inevitably ensued clearly unnerved some of the rank-and-file in Trevelyan’s “tribes of superintendents.” One officer of the Board of Works who witnessed “the emaciated condition of the labourers,” protested to Trevelyan “that, as an engineer, he was ashamed of allotting so little task work for a day’s wages, while, as a man, he was ashamed of requiring so much.” But according to the logic of political economy, relief was to be “determined by the value of the workman’s labour, not by his wants.” This cynical move was meant to curb the widespread indolence which was popularly assumed: “As a punitive incentive designed to win acceptance for task work, those labourers who were unwilling (or unable) to do it were to be paid no more than 8d per day. This was from one-fifth to one-third less than previous daily rates for customary unmeasured work, even though food prices were already rising when the reduction was ordered.” To some observers the conditions were worse than feudal. Even vassals were “weaponed and fed, at the lord’s expense,” commented the America traveller W.M.S. Balch, whereas “they [the labourers] are sent into the field to work and starve.”

By this time endemic destitution and starvation were very much in evidence. In early December Captain Wynne expressed the horror before him:

I must again call your attention to the appalling state in which Clare Abbey is at present; I ventured through that parish this day, to ascertain the condition of the inhabitants, and although a man not easily moved, I confess myself unmanned by the extent and intensity of the suffering witnessed, more especially amongst the women and little children, crowds of whom were to be seen scattered over the turnip fields, like a flock of famished crows, devouring the raw turnips, mothers half naked, shivering in the snow and sleet, uttering exclamations of despair,

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150 Dorian, op. cit: 216-217.
151 Trollope, op. cit.: 63.
152 Foulett Scrope. The Irish Poor Law, op. cit.: 41.
153 Donnelly, “The Administration of Relief”, op. cit.: 300. Isaac Butt agreed with the charges of idleness but for very different reasons: “The Irish are an acute people ... They knew that the labour was but a pretence for giving them wages, and they made as little of the pretence as possible suffice.” Butt, op. cit.: 15.
whilst their children were screaming with hunger; I am a match for anything else
I might meet here, but this I cannot stand.155

What are we to make of government policy in light of such descriptions? It might be argued
that the government simply underestimated the extremity of the situation in Ireland and that the
response to extreme want was a reflection of unwitting ignorance rather than calculated actions.
However, the former argument is in need of nuance. First, the principle of local responsibility
meant that relief efforts were increasingly sponsored by those who could afford it least. Second,
women were excluded from the works regardless of how many mouths they were expected to
feed. Third, “the jobbing and flagrant abuses that prevailed” drastically undermined existing
relief practices. Fourth, the worst affected areas often did not get the relief schemes. Fifth,
government thinking was profoundly econocentric in nature: the works were designed to be
‘useless’ lest they interrupt the normal course of employment and the importation of food was
abandoned in favour of the rights of private trading. Sixth, in the context of a debilitating
famine, hungry weakened labourers were forced to labour to survive. Moreover, as Helen Burke
argues, the ideology behind the Public Works was entirely in keeping with the principles of the
Irish Poor Law and its “test” of destitution. Trevelyan’s request that the wages paid on the
works be less than the lowest wages paid locally was really just another method of deploying
the principle of “less eligibility.”156 All this attests to a series of political and economic
calculations that decisively shaped relief operations.157

Here ‘aid’ has obviously become something else. Michel Foucault suggests that there is
a subtle exchange of rights at play in these decisions. Human beings are asked to exchange the
product of their labour, not for another product, but for the right to live. In Foucault’s words it is
economic man as the “exchanger of rights” that founds society and sovereignty.158 This is a
process that Jacques Rancière has recently characterised as “the inscription of rights [the right to
survive] to situations of denial” which, according to him, always depend on relations of

155 Cited in, Burke, op. cit.: 115.
156 This decision was made in spite of the fact that cash was infrequently used among the labourer classes, most
labour being paid in kind by the provision of land. Ibid.: 108. In an already deeply polarised society, the haves and
the have-nots were becoming even more distinguishable. At a packed market in Limerick, Spencer Hall observed
“vociferous buyers” cheek-by-jowl with many more “longing lookers-on.” Spencer T. Hall. Life and Death in
157 Citation from, Poulett Scrope. The Irish Poor Law, op. cit.: 34. Burke, op. cit.: 116. Cormac Ó Gráda. The Great
society. Trevelyan, op. cit.: 5.
158 Cited in, Elden, op. cit.: 139-140.
inclusion and exclusion. For Giorgio Agamben, the subject behind this exchange is neither economic man, nor what Hannah Arendt terms animal laborans, but rather, the human being stripped to “bare life.” When the Board of Works engineer complained to Trevelyan that as an engineer he was ashamed of assigning so little task labour, while, as a man, he was ashamed of requiring so much, we have a very precise acknowledgement of this exchange of rights and the degradations it involved.

It was increasingly the case that these “temporary relief measures,” mobilised to alleviate “exceptional” circumstances, were directed at the biopolitical body and not the body proper even though, as one exasperated member of the Board of Works protested, the problem was “one of food, not labour.” In other words, individual requirements for food were increasingly superseded by ideological concerns regarding the “evils of leisure” and the improvidence of the landed classes who were relying on the government to care for the hungry. This presumed complacency had to be broken.

By the new year of 1847 the government began to reel somewhat from its previous policies of affording relief. With little in the way of options the poorest were pouring onto the works schemes. By February over 700,000 persons were employed by the government. Chairman of the Board of Works, Lieutenant Harry David Jones, wrote to Trevelyan: “The fact is that the system ... is no longer beneficial employment to many; their bodily strength being gone, and spirits depressed, they have not power to exert themselves sufficiently to earn the

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159 Rancière, op. cit.: 304.
160 Arendt. The Human Condition, op. cit.
161 Cited in, Ó Gráda. The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.: 54.
162 George Bernstein has recently claimed that the “Irish mythology” of the Famine ignores “a basic fact”: “the government’s principal famine policy was a programme of public works, which at its peak, employed nearly 715,000 men and thus supported 3.5 million people, nearly half the population of Ireland.” Bernstein closely reflects Trevelyan’s claim that by March 1847, 734,000 people were employed on the Board of Works “representing, at a moderate estimate of the average extent of each family, upwards of three millions of persons.” Trevelyan, op. cit.: 64-65. However in both cases, to offer 3.5 million without critically engaging with all the known deficiencies of the public works — the late wages; the task labour system; deductions for broken days and illness; prohibitive “famine prices” for necessary provisions; the jobbing and flagrant abuses that accompanied the selections etc. — amply demonstrates the political nature of “basic facts” about state intervention during the Famine years. See George L. Bernstein. "Liberals, the Irish Famine and the Role of the State." Irish Historical Studies 24.116 (1995): 513. Bernstein explains that his figure of 3.5 million comes from a multiplier suggested by James Donnelly. James S Donnelly. "Famine and Government Response, 1845-6." A New History of Ireland V: Ireland under the Union, 11801-1870. Ed. W. E. Vaughan. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989: 284. Lord Dufferin’s stirring account mentions the exorbitant prices and some of the deficiencies of the public works system. Lord Dufferin, and G.F. Boyle. Narrative of a Journey from Oxford to Skibbereen During the Year of the Irish Famine. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847.
ordinary day's wages."\textsuperscript{163} Indeed, the slow and devastating process of starvation made a mockery of Victorian Reason, for it soon became clear that the "idleness of the idle" could no longer "be distinguished from the feebleness of the weak and the infirm."\textsuperscript{164} How could relief procedures based on sharp distinctions operate in such circumstances? On the 20th of March 1847, and in response to mounting criticisms, the government "took matters into its own hands" as Trevelyan directed that 20 per cent of persons employed on Public Works should be summarily "struck from the lists."\textsuperscript{165} The government now wished to focus on more "direct" relief measures in the form of the Soup Kitchens. In reality this was to prove yet another "temporary" measure — at once expedient and cheap — while the Poor Law system prepared for an overhaul of epic proportions. Suitably called the Temporary Relief Act (but more commonly known as the "Soup Kitchen Act"), came in operation on the 26th of February 1847.\textsuperscript{166} It was to last a mere seven months before being superseded by the provisions of the Irish Poor Law Extension Act.\textsuperscript{167} Trevelyan summarised the termination of the existing relief works with the following words: "The [public] works were therefore brought to a close in the manner so described: and it was determined to complete the system of relief by the distribution of food, to give it legal validity, and to place it more decidedly on the basis of the Poor Law."\textsuperscript{168} As we shall see, however, Trevelyan's legal validation of aid practices continued to rely on what Rancière calls "the space of a test or verification" which not only made relief conditional, but also managed to fabricate "the world where ... rights are valid and the world where they are not."\textsuperscript{169}

Philanthropic societies, such as the "Society of Friends," had been using soup kitchens for quite some time (see figure 3.7). However their collective success was only partially responsible for the government's new enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{170} The Soup Kitchens were favoured for three additional reasons. First, its cheap production costs. Second, cooked food acted as a sufficient

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\textsuperscript{163} Cited in, Donnelly. "The Administration of Relief", op. cit.: 305.
\textsuperscript{164} Cited in \textit{Ibid.}: 306. Indeed Nicholls also observed that the differences between the small holders and "the destitute is often so little perceptible, that Ireland seems to constitute an exception to the general rule [that all property should contribute to the poor rate] in this respect..." Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 290.
\textsuperscript{165} Trevelyan, \textit{op. cit.}: 65.
\textsuperscript{166} 10th and 11th Vict., cap. 7. "An Act for the temporary relief of the destitute persons in Ireland."
\textsuperscript{167} 10th and 11th Vict., cap. 31. "An act to make further provision for the relief of the destitute poor in Ireland." See also Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 116.
\textsuperscript{168} Trevelyan, \textit{op. cit.}: 84. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{169} Rancière, \textit{op. cit.}: 304.
\end{flushleft}
“test” of destitution because unlike seed or grain, cooked food was virtually impossible to resell. “Stir-about,” Trevelyan enthused, “becomes sour by keeping, has no value in the market, and persons were therefore not likely to apply for it, who did not want it for their own consumption.”

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the soup kitchens bought time to prepare the Irish Poor Law Extension Act.

The new strategy was not without its critics. Like other centralised systems of aid the official procedures were protracted and cumbersome. As Donnelly points out: “the mere preparation, printing, and distribution of the forms and documents considered necessary — over 10,000 account books, 80,000 sheets, and 3,000,000 ration tickets — constituted vast undertaking in itself, consuming valuable time.”

Moreover, the soup itself was controversial,

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171 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 86.
some insisting that it wasn’t so much soup for the poor as poor soup.\textsuperscript{173} \textit{The Lancet} journal complained that the soup could not be considered a food capable of sustaining the “manufactury of blood, bone, and muscle which constitutes the ‘the strong healthy man.’”\textsuperscript{174}

Trevelyan continued to emphasise the enormous bureaucratic machinery this project required: “Organised armies, amounting altogether to some hundreds of thousands, had been rationed before; but neither ancient nor modern history can furnish a parallel to the fact that upwards of three millions of persons were to be fed every day in the neighbourhood of their own homes, and by administrative arrangements emanating from and controlled by one central office.”\textsuperscript{175} Trevelyan also added that this was the second occasion whereby so many millions were fed “out of the hands of the magistrate.”\textsuperscript{176} The \textit{governmentalisation of famine} was now wholesale. Indeed this obvious fact prompted Isaac Butt’s astute criticism. The Soup Kitchen Act, he professed, “contemplates a complete departure from the policy of leaving the supply of food to the people to the ordinary operations of commerce, since it authorises the distribution, the sale, and even the culinary preparation of food under the direction of these committees.”\textsuperscript{177} In other words, it demonstrated that the principles of ‘free trade’ were utterly rescindable so long as the government considered it expedient.

As we might expect prescriptions of inclusion and exclusion primed this mode of state assistance. Under the act four categories of person were entitled to relief: (a) the destitute, the helpless, or the impotent (b) destitute, able-bodied though not holding land (! destitute, able-bodied and holders of small tracts of land and (d) earners of very small wages. Only the destitute were to be fed free of charge. Those earning insufficient wages to purchase food at market prices could receive relief at a low cost while children aged nine and under were given

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\textsuperscript{173} Donnelly. “The Soup Kitchens”, \textit{op. cit.}: 313.
\textsuperscript{174} Cited in, E. Margaret Crawford,. “Food and Famine.” \textit{The Great Irish Famine}. Ed. Cathal Póirtéir. Dublin: Mercier Press, 1995: 69. The bio-industrial register of these criticisms is also striking.
\textsuperscript{175} Trevelyan, \textit{op. cit.}: 90.
\textsuperscript{176} In an extraordinary piece of revisionism Trevelyan declared that the famine was not only “stayed” but now over: “The ‘affecting and heart-rending crowds of destitutes’ disappeared from the streets; the cadaverous, hunger-stricken countenances of the people gave place to looks of health; deaths from starvation ceased; and cattle-stealing, plundering provisions, and other crimes prompted by want of food, were diminished by half in the course of a single month.” \textit{Ibid.}: 89.
\textsuperscript{177} Butt, \textit{op. cit.}: 26.
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half-portions.\textsuperscript{178} Soup kitchen relief could also be refused if the workhouses were not entirely full.\textsuperscript{179} Most importantly the soup kitchens were endorsed as a \textit{temporary} expedient. Influential commentators felt that the Irish were being “indiscriminately fed in idleness” and not soup.\textsuperscript{180} Between August and September 1847 the soup kitchens were closed and, in Trevelyan’s words, the “multitude was again gradually and peacefully thrown on its own resources…”\textsuperscript{181} The entire Irish relief operation was abandoned. The main provision was to be the machinery of the newly amended Poor Law, funded by the Irish rate-payers.

The Irish Poor Law Extension Act involved a complete reorganisation of the Poor Law. George Nicholls ceased to be a commissioner and became a permanent secretary instead while the Poor Law commission for Ireland was moved to Dublin and Edward Twisleton, an Englishman, was appointed as Chief Commissioner.\textsuperscript{182} Perhaps the most significant change was the provision for outdoor relief through the new Poor Law. This was a contentious shift. In his original report Nicholls was abundantly clear on the necessity of restricting outdoor relief in Ireland (that is relief administered in money or in kind to parties out of the workhouse or in their own homes), although this was in some instances granted under the terms of the English Poor Law.\textsuperscript{183} Although Poor Law relief outside the workhouse was now allowed — and a right of relief was thus recognised for certain groups — the Act itself operated according to strict exclusions. In the first place, the government made clear that indoor relief, that is, workhouse relief, was to be prioritised. The emphasis was on the ability of the local rate-payers to finance famine aid and workhouse relief was far more cost effective. According to Donnelly: “reasons of economy and not humanity basically controlled the near-tripling of the workhouse places from slightly more than 114,000 in March 1847 to almost 309,000 by March 1851.”\textsuperscript{184} Section one of the Act declared that three kinds of “destitute poor persons” were entitled to relief either inside or outside the workhouse: destitute poor persons, disabled by old age or infirmity; destitute poor persons who being disabled by severe sickness or serious accident; and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{178} Crawford, "Food and Famine", \textit{op. cit.}: 67.
\item \textsuperscript{179} Christine Kinealy, "The Role of the Poor Law", \textit{op. cit.}: 111.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Poulett Scrope. \textit{The Irish Poor Law, op. cit.}: 9.
\item \textsuperscript{181} Trevelyan, \textit{op. cit.}: 88.
\item \textsuperscript{182} 10th and 11th Vict., cap. 90. “An act to provide for the execution of the laws for relief of the poor in Ireland.” Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 127.
\item \textsuperscript{183} As we noted above, George Nicholls felt that allowing outdoor relief would mean forfeiting control and creating permanent paupers. Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 197.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Donnelly, "The Administration of Relief", \textit{op. cit.}: 320.
\end{itemize}
destitute poor widows with two or more legitimate children dependent upon them.\textsuperscript{185} Thus widows with dependents, the maimed and the disabled, as well as those who were seriously ill did not have to suffer the rigours of workhouse life. Everyone else who had not the means to keep themselves and their families alive had to apply to the workhouse. There was however, one final and important exception. Outdoor relief for the “able-bodied” was authorised under Section two of the Irish Poor Law Extension Act, and was to be reserved for situations of “unusual distress.”\textsuperscript{186} In practical terms this meant that the “able-bodied” could receive relief in the form of cooked food only in the most desperate circumstance for a period of not more than two months provided also that the workhouses were full or infected with fever. Only the Poor Law Commissioners had the authority to grant outdoor relief to the “able-bodied,” although this neat distinction was fast becoming absurd.

George Nicholls explained the import of these new provisions: “The concession made in the 1st and 2nd sections [to provide outdoor relief] must however be regarded as exceptional, and as being intended to meet an exceptional case; for the necessity of workhouse relief being the established rule, never perhaps commanded more general assent, than at the time when a departure from it was thus sanctioned.”\textsuperscript{187} The exception explained the rule: workhouse relief was to be the new norm of famine aid. Guardians were urged to expend every effort in finding accommodation within the workhouse, even if it this meant emptying the workhouse of the infirm, sick and the old.\textsuperscript{188} Noncompliant Board of Guardians could be summarily dismissed, a practice which was enforced on a number of occasions.

To carry out the new burden of outdoor relief five additional assistant-commissioners were appointed and the local Boards were provided with extra staff. In a directive the Commissioners outlined the duties of relieving officers:

It will be his duty forthwith to examine into circumstances of every case by visiting the home of the applicant, by making all necessary inquiries into the state of health, the ability to work and the means of such applicant; and he will have to report the result of such inquiries, in a prescribed form, to the Board of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 130; Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 131.
\item 10th and 11th Vict., cap. 31. “An act to make further provision for the relief of the destitute poor in Ireland.” Burke, \textit{op. cit.}: 131.
\item Nicholls, \textit{op. cit.}: 335-336.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Guardians at the next meeting. Under ordinary circumstances, the amount of relief to be granted in each case will be fixed by the Board of Guardians exclusively.\textsuperscript{189}

Relief decisions were final. There was no apparatus of appeal — including the courts — and very little effort was made to seek out those who were in serious need of assistance. Put differently, this was an ideal situation for systemic abuse since there was, in Guy Debord's words, little or no "danger of riposte."\textsuperscript{190} Even the successful applicant was not granted outdoor relief indefinitely. As Helen Burke points out "an eligible person's situation was kept continually under review."\textsuperscript{191} Moreover, the Commissioners ordered a systematic "thinning" of outdoor relief lists (as they had previously done when they wished to wind-up the public works programmes) based on the ill-informed notion that employment could be readily obtained at harvest time.\textsuperscript{192} Relief was effectively defined by its constant capacity to be revoked, meaning for those whose very lives depended upon it, nothing was so certain as uncertainty itself. Those being relieved found the procedures degrading and in 1848 the situation was exacerbated when the government decided to publish and publicly display a list of all peoples receiving indoor and outdoor relief.\textsuperscript{193}

As I have been arguing, "pauperism" itself involved a definitive exclusion from the political community and thus from the realm of meaningful action. As Thomas Humphrey Marshall has written: "Pauperism was a status, entry to which affected not merely a part of a man's life, but the whole of it. He [sic] became a pauper for all purposes and he carried his family with him. Paupers formed a distinct group of second class citizens, deprived of the most important rights of citizenship ... firstly the loss of personal reputation, secondly, the loss of personal freedom and, thirdly, the loss of political freedom by suffering disfranchisement."\textsuperscript{194} Under such conditions one can scarcely imagine any pauper holding the central authorities accountable for inappropriate treatment or specific inequalities. "How is a pauper to prosecute?"

\textsuperscript{189}Burke, op. cit.: 132-133.
\textsuperscript{191}Burke, op. cit.: 135.
\textsuperscript{193}Burke, op. cit.: 135.
wondered Sidney Godolphin Osborne.\textsuperscript{195} Indeed Edward Twisleton seems to have been factually correct when he defended his behaviour as Chief Poor Law Commissioner: “I confess that it does not appear to me that the responsibility of deaths from starvation outside the workhouse rests either with the Board of Guardians or the Commissioners.”\textsuperscript{196} Twisleton’s statement is an accurate account of relief protocol, its duties and obligations, but also, and crucially, its derogations and exclusions. As Nicholls had emphasised, the new norm was workhouse relief. What happened beyond these new limits was an exception to relief operations, a shadowy grey zone of non-responsibly, where those who were not provided for were literally abandoned to their fate. What really beggars explaining is this non-coincidence between death and accountability which actually guarantees situations of structured, continuous violence. Isaac Butt immediately recognised this danger when he wrote of the amended Poor Law: “never was there an act passed, the result of which so much depends on the administration, because every thing is left to the arbitrary power of those who are to carry its provisions into practice.”\textsuperscript{197}

However, let us return to the relief efforts for the moment. When “able-bodied” persons were granted outdoor relief the tasks (typically stone-breaking for ten hours per day) were designed to be as ‘unattractive’ and ‘useless’ as possible.\textsuperscript{198} Again it was thought that if the relief was ‘attractive’ Irish labourers would abandon normal employment. Furthermore, if the labour was ‘productive’ it would adversely affect the sanctity of private enterprise (“speculators would not have risked their capital to feed the people” wrote one contemporary).\textsuperscript{199} Thus “ample work should be required in exchange for the means of livelihood.”\textsuperscript{200} This was bourgeois cynicism in the extreme. “The truth is that when useless and merely penal work is preferred as being ‘unattractive,’ what is meant is, that it is ‘repulsive,’” declared George Poulett Scrope.\textsuperscript{201} Indeed in a letter to Charles Trevelyman, Twisleton confirmed that relief tasks were deliberately

\textsuperscript{195} Osborne, \textit{op. cit.}: 145. In Scotland a pauper could complain directly to the central authority of inappropriate treatment. O’Brien, “A Question of Attitude”, \textit{op. cit.}: 168.
\textsuperscript{196} Cited in, Kinealy, “The Role of the Poor Law”, \textit{op. cit.}: 111.
\textsuperscript{197} Butt, \textit{op. cit.}: 25.
\textsuperscript{198} This work was often completed in terrible conditions with little or no shelter. Osborne describes the conditions he witnessed in Balinasloe: “I went into the yard where about 140 men were employed in stone breaking; the state of all their clothing was bad enough to be quite disgraceful, one in particular, was in a condition of the grossest indecency. I ascertained from one of these men, \textit{that for nine days past, not one of them had had one drop of water either to wash with, or to drink, day or night}.” Osborne, \textit{op. cit.}: 45.
\textsuperscript{199} Trollope, \textit{op. cit.}: 8.
\textsuperscript{200} \textit{Ibid.}: 15.
\textsuperscript{201} Poulett Scrope, \textit{The Irish Poor Law, op. cit.}: 47.
designed to be “as repulsive as possible consistent with humanity.” Moreover, the “able-bodied” on outdoor relief were not entitled to shelter, fuel or clothing. It is hardly surprising that Irish labourers found this form of relief repulsive. In February 1848 applicants for outdoor assistance in Newcastle Union declared that “they would rather die than break stones,” a threat many undoubtedly fulfilled.

In his tour of Ireland S.G. Osborne noted that “the so-called ‘able-bodied,’ were [the] most wretched samples of ‘starved in’ humanity” he had seen, adding that “it was clear they had fought the battle of life without the hated [workhouse] wall, until all power to contend had left them.” Writing in 1847 an angry William Forster pondered what the people had to live on: “My father’s wonder and my own is, not that the people die, but that they live.”

Despite the refusals at the Newcastle Union by July 1, 1848 over 800,000 people were on outdoor relief. “Thousands are content to walk miles daily to break stones” wrote a somewhat awed Anthony Trollope. Likewise the numbers being admitted into the workhouses continued to rise. What explains this rush for assistance, at a time when it must be remembered the government had declared the famine officially over?

The war on dwelling and the miserable ejected

As part of the revised poor law’s adoption into law, the government introduced the infamous Gregory Clause, named after its author William Gregory and sometimes called the ‘Quarter Acre’ or ‘Conacre’ clause. This provision prevented tenants holding more than a quarter acre of land from receiving relief without surrendering possession of their property. Recall that the potato blight had involved a double calamity for the poor: it destroyed their food and their income. Now in exchange for government assistance the poor where being asked to

203 See the evidence given by Edward Twisleton: “When you relieve them out of the workhouse, have you any means of affording them shelter, or fuel, or clothing? — No, not able-bodied men. Not their families? — No.” Cited in, Poulett Scrope. The Irish Poor Law, op. cit.: 25. See also Poulett Scrope. Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland, & Ireland, op. cit.: 30.
204 Cited in, Donnelly. "The Administration of Relief", op. cit.: 323.
205 Osborne, op. cit.: 53-54.
207 Burke, op. cit.: 136.
208 Trollope, op. cit.: 6.
209 10th and 11th Vict., cap 31. “An act to make further provision for the relief of the destitute poor in Ireland.”
210 Butt, op. cit.: 7.
relinquish their homes. According to historian James Donnelly the Gregory clause “arm[ed] landlords with a weapon that would enable them to clear their estates of pauperised smallholders who were paying little or no rent.” Historian Peter Gray is even more damning stating that the clause turned the machinery of the poor law “into a charter for land clearance and consolidation” and that this objective was clearly calculated. In his autobiography, published in 1894, William Gregory remained defiant: “though I got an evil reputation in consequence, those who really understood the condition of the country have always regarded this clause as its salvation.” The clause itself ought to be understood alongside an amendment to the rating of the Poor Law in 1843 which made landlords liable for paying half the poor-rate on tenements or holdings over £4 a-year, and the whole rate for holdings under that annual rent. Hence the small holders were effectively taxing the landlords. Taken together these provisions “served as a major inducement to the mass eviction of bankrupt smallholders so that the landlords would not have to endure simultaneously both heavy rates and unpaid rents.” K.T. Hoppen reminds us that such policies were acts of “outright interventionism” that prove the lie (pace Margaret Crawford) that it is “simply anachronistic” to believe that the government could interfere with private markets.

The poor rates were slowly bleeding the landed gentry and tenant-farmers dry. As early as 1847 William Bennett had noted the levelling effect of placing the burden of relief on Irish

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211 “The drawbacks [of these policies],” Donnelly concludes, “were quite serious even from the administrative viewpoint and that they were no less than murderous from a humanitarian perspective.” Donnelly. "The Administration of Relief", op. cit.: 317, 323-324.
214 6th and 7th Vict., cap. 92. "An Act for the further Amendment of an Act for the more effectual Relief of the destitute Poor in Ireland." There seems to be some confusion in the secondary literature about these changes to the poor-rate. For instance Tyler Anbiner claims that this new form of rating was introduced in 1847 seemingly with the Poor Law Extension Act. Tyler Anbiner. “Lord Palmerston and the Irish Famine Emigration.” The Historical Journal. 44.2 (2001): 455. However, Desmond Norton — in a critical article on Anbinder’s claims — rightly argues that the new rating was introduced in 1843 as an amendment to the Poor Law. Desmond Norton. “On Lord Palmerston and the Irish Famine Emigration.” Centre for Economic Research Working Paper Series (WP01/19). Department of Economics: University College Dublin, 2001: 4, 6.
215 Donnelly. "The Administration of Relief", op. cit.: 326. For instance, Anthony Trollope wrote: “Labour is suspended and cultivation is abandoned, as farmers declared it was impossible to pay both rates and wages.” Trollope, op. cit.: 19.
216 Hoppen, op. cit.: 61; Crawford. “Food and Famine”, op. cit.: 64.
landlords. "Here is society dislocated at both ends," he wrote. In the same year another witness wrote: Famine is creeping up in society — men who had some little money stored have been living on their stores, and one by one they will drop into the class of paupers, and become victims of famine." Indeed for many landlords the coffers were stretched if not empty when the government produced two further pieces of legislation — Rate in Aid and Incumbered Estates Acts — which decisively affected their fortunes and that of their tenantry. Irish landlords were fast losing favour with the British political class even though many of them identified with or were part of this class. There was now widespread reporting of evictions in the Irish and British media and this sullied their reputations. In pre-Famine narratives, travellers politely inserted ellipses to disguise the identity of the landed gentry, now most visitors adopted a name and shame policy to highlight the evictions and cruelties they witnessed. As with the poor tenants and cottiers, landlords were increasingly depicted as 'improvident.' It was just that their improvidence concerned an apparent propensity to live above their means and neglect their tenantry, whereas the peasant’s improvidence lay in their idleness, propensity to marry young, get drunk and produce too many children. The first was improvidence toward idle luxury, the second toward idle misery. In any case, relief policies were now beginning to squeeze the landed class as well, although it bears remembering that for most it was a portion of their incomes, and not their lives that was at stake. No landlord is known to have starved during the Great Famine, a fact which is surely revealing of the relationship between “the varied geography of destitution” and excess mortality.

Incumbered Estates Acts were enacted in 1848 and 1849. These Acts were the legal expression of ideas previously advanced by the Devon Commission, and now pushed by Robert Peel, in order to facilitate the sale of incumbered estates and force the eviction of insolvent landlords. According to Drummond’s well-known censure, property was to have “its duties as

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218 Butt, op. cit.: 29.
219 Poulett Scrope. Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland, & Ireland, op. cit.: 33.
221 11th and 12th Vict., cap. 48. “An Act to facilitate the sale of Incumbered estates in Ireland.” 12th and 13th Vict., cap. 77. “An Act to further facilitate the sale and transfer of Incumbered estates in Ireland.”
well as its rights.”

There are two significant points to note about this legislation. First, the 1849 legislation placed the duties of the act beyond the jurisdiction of the Court of Chancery and into the hands of three Commissioners. The familiar pattern of centralisation, government by administration, and the deployment of exceptional powers were now extended to the policy of free trade in land. In Sir Robert Peel’s words:

I believe, although the ordinary courts of law are admirably suited for the conduct of ordinary proceedings and for the administration of justice between man and man, without extraordinary courts, yet I must say, when great social difficulties have to be contended with, my belief is that you should step beyond the limit of those ordinary courts of justice and establish some special tribunal, unfettered by reference to technical rules, for the purpose of solving those difficulties.”

W.L. Burn explains what Peel had in mind: “The powers of the Commissioners were absolute. They were empowered to make their own rules of court, subjected only to the sanction of the Irish Privy Council; they could decide whether or not to sell and at what price; there was no appeal from them except by their own leave.” Secondly, as Peter Gray observes, the language Peel used in promoting the act — “suggesting a ‘new plantation’ of Connacht by British landowners and capitalist farmers,” was in fact “the logical climax of response to the Irish crisis that had made ‘free trade in corn’ so vital in 1845-6.” The fact that many officials believed that a “heavy blow of friendly confiscation” was long overdue demonstrates the mixture of colonial hubris and capitalist logic guiding the legislation. Burn estimated that in less than one decade about one tenth of the total acreage of Ireland was placed under new ownership and that the “success of the policy ... was a matter of almost unanimous acknowledgement in Parliament and outside.” In this manner scores of landlords were cut adrift, “pulled from their

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223 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 158.
225 Burn, op. cit.: 70. I draw heavily on Burn’s interpretation in what follows.
226 Cited in Ibid.: 70. Irish exceptionality constantly demanded new departures in law. As the popular economist Harriet Martineau wrote: “Up to a very recent time — probably up to this hour — there has been discussion among English political economists as to whether, in consideration of the Irishman’s passion for land, there might not be, in his case, some relaxation of established rules, some suspension of scientific maxims, about small holdings of land...” Martineau, op. cit.: 217.
227 Burn, op. cit.: 70.
229 Cited in, Gray, Famine, Land and Politics, op. cit.: 202 footnote 313.
230 Burn, op. cit.: 71, 73. The Englishman John Ashworth came to Ireland in 1850 in a bid to buy land after the selling of incumbered estates. His account is therefore deeply interesting, although I do not deal with it here. John
position as men of property, and exposed to the world as men of none.”

“The farmers became peasants,” declared Anthony Trollope, “they have since become paupers.”

Rate-in-aid became law on the 24th of May 1849. Properly speaking it was part of a long-standing Whig policy to place the burden of relief squarely on the shoulders of the Irish. The legislation made all Irish Poor Law Unions taxable for the relief the stricken western regions as well as for the loans dispensed by the government. Irish indignation rose to new heights. The call for “Irish property to support Irish poverty” seemed to confirm that the Act of Union was hardly worth the paper it was written on. Many thought it grossly unfair that the better-off districts should be dragged down to the levels of destitution found in the south and west of Ireland while others complained that this policy amounted to a curious lesson in self-reliance then being advocated. To Irish nationalists this relief policy made a mockery of William Pitt’s speech to celebrate the passing of the Act of Union: “We all have in our mouths a sentence that every good Englishman and good Irishman feels — we must stand or fall together, we should live and die together.” They were no longer standing together or dying together. If Ireland was truly an equal partner, why wasn’t the rest of British property equally taxed to alleviate an equal burden? Indeed, to speak of an English treasury, declared Isaac Butt, is to declare the Union repealed: “If the Union be not a mockery, there exists no such thing as an English treasury. The exchequer is the exchequer of the United Kingdom.” With palpable anger Butt goes on to question how: “when calamity falls upon us we are to be told than [sic] we then recover our separate existence as a nation, just so far as to disentitle us to the state assistance ... If Cornwall had been visited with the scenes that have desolated Cork, would similar arguments have been used?” John Mitchel echoed these criticisms: “Assuming that Ireland and England are two integral parts of an ‘United Kingdom,’ (as we are assured they are),
it seems hard to understand why a district in Leinster should be rated to relieve a pauper territory in Mayo — and a district in Yorkshire not."^{238}

However, much of this ignored the obvious question of how the country was to support these new taxes. The travel writer James Johnson satirised a certain mood well when he wondered if it would not be more prudent to collect the poor instead of the poor-rates and "drown them quietly in the Shannon."^{239} Indeed, it was widely acknowledged that these acts provided landlords with clear incentives to turn the poor from their land. For many landlords it became a case of "Evict their debtors or be dispossessed by their creditors."^{240} "Death would release them from their sufferings, and the landlord of his burden," wrote J.H. Tuke.^{241} Sir John Benn-Walsh who owned substantial territory in Cork and Kerry wrote in his journal in August 1849: "The fact is that the landed proprietors are now the mere nominal possessors of the soil. All the surplus produce is levied by the poor law commissioners."^{242}

If the landed gentry suffered we can be sure that the position of the small farmer and cottier class was abysmal in the extreme. This is reflected in many eye-witness accounts. Sidney Godolphin Osborne, who toured Ireland at this time, witnessed first-hand the affects

![Village of Moveen](Image)

Figure 3.8: The Village of Moveen, three miles west of Kilkee

Source: Illustrated London News, December 22, 1849

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^{238} John Mitchel. *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps).* Glasgow: R & T Washbourne Ltd, n.d: 212. Again it must be insisted that these charges were not only emanating from the nationalist press. The Irish Poor Law Commissioner Edward Twisleton resigned over rate-in-aid for the much the same reasons. Before a Select Committee he declared: "If Ireland is not taxed to the amount that it ought fairly to be taxed, then introduce a separate measure to tax Ireland accordingly; but what I object to is, taking money merely from Leinster and Ulster to assist the distressed unions in Connaught and Munster," "Fifth Report of Select Committee on Poor Laws." Parliamentary Papers. 1849 (148) XV: 333.

^{239} Johnson, *op. cit.*: 98. These reflections bring to mind Swift’s famous "A Modest Proposal," and anticipate Thomas Carlyle’s harsh conclusions. See below and chapter 4 *passim*.

^{240} Donnelly. "Landlords and Tenants", *op. cit.*: 336.


of this legislation and passionately criticised the state-sponsored "war on dwelling." Describing the scene of eviction at Oranmore in Galway he wrote "the whole town seemed like a hospital for dwellings, in which they had been kindly received from some field of deadly war." Travelling through Kilrush, County Clare about the same time George Poulett Scrope reported the devastating traces of the "levellers" in similar terms: "at times a whole street in a village had been destroyed. I seemed to be tracking the course of an invading army" (See figure 3.8.).

At the fishing village of Kiel, Tuke observed at least one hundred and fifty evicted persons: "A crowd of these miserable ejected creatures collected around us, bewailing, with bitter lamentations, their hard fate. One old grey-headed man came tottering up to us, bearing in his arms his bed-ridden wife, and putting her down at our feet, pointed, in silent agony to her, and then to the roofless dwelling, the charred timbers of which were scattered in all directions around" (See figure 3.9).

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Figure 3.9: The Ejectment of Irish Tenantry: troops help evict tenants and their houses are 'tumbled'

Source: Illustrated London News, December 16, 1848

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243 Osborne, op. cit.: 36, 47.
244 Poulett Scrope. Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland, & Ireland, op. cit.: 28-29.
245 Tuke, op. cit.: 11.
Where did the miserable ejected go? For those who were evicted, as well as others who ‘voluntarily’ gave up their holdings to qualify for public assistance, emigration or the workhouse were often the only options. Some unwilling or unable began desperate efforts to convert ditches and bogs into new dwellings called “scalpeens” (See figures 3.10, and 3.11.). Osborne offers a vivid description of this harrowing escarpment:

On our journey we had ample opportunity of seeing to what shifts the peasantry will resort before they will face the Union House, after they have been evicted, and seen their homes ‘tumbled.’ Their usual practice is, with thatch and some of the roof sticks to build up a dwelling called a ‘scalpeen,’ the most common form of this species of dwelling is, what I suppose the Englishman would call, ‘the lean to.’ The construction is simple; some of the roof-sticks, or beams, are places, so that one end of them shall rest on the ground, while the other end of them rests against the side wall of one of the ruins, or failing this, against a bank on the road-side: on these beams, with the help of a few short sticks, the old thatch is heaped up; stones and more wood are laid on it, to keep it together; one end is closed up with a heap of thatch and stones, the other end left just open enough for the inmates to have egress; into this stye a whole family will crowd, and even take a lodger; and in a few hundreds of such, would often be found a population of many thousands. Sometime they will make a sort of stye with the walls and between the gables, keeping it so low as to avoid observation, and into this stye they will creep, and dwell till their utter want forces them out, or they die, are found by the police, and carried out.\(^{246}\)

In these holes families existed until they were discovered and driven on.\(^{247}\) “Eviction, as carried on in this part of Ireland, is very much the same as extermination,” he concluded.\(^{248}\) Likewise James H. Tuke wrote that “the loss of little plots of land has been and still is a question of

\(^{246}\) Osborne adds “It is a rare thing to find any males at these scenes of desolation; and in the majority of cases, I fear, they desert their families, go seek work at a distance, perhaps in England; very often they start for America as soon as they find they are to be ejected. A very large proportion of the families in the workhouses are deserted families.” Osborne, op. cit.: 31-32. See also Tuke’s description of scalpeen huts at Erris. Tuke, op. cit.: 21-23.

\(^{247}\) Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 67.
existence. Undoubtedly exposure in inclement weather carried off many already weakened frames. Tuke described the winter roads as “charnel houses”: “several car and coach drivers have assured me that they rarely drove anywhere without seeing dead bodies strewn along the road side, and that in the dark they had even gone over them.”

One gentleman informed him that an inspector of roads near Clifden had to remove and bury 140 bodies found scattered along the highway. Much of the subjective evidence collected in Cathal Póirtéir’s *Famine Echoes* corroborates the perspectives of these Englishmen.

The figures on eviction are controversial. The number of evictions between 1846 and 1848 are based on extrapolations from court proceedings. Beginning in 1849 the local police took note of evictions. However, the evidence is complicated further by the fact that evictions continued well into the eighteen-fifties; the constabulary records do not account for so-called ‘voluntary’ surrenders; and as Tim O’Neill has more recently argued, the complexity of the law pertaining to ejectments may have obscured the true extent of the problem. Cormac Ó Gráda claims that one quarter of a million people were ejected between 1849 and 1854. James Donnelly agrees with this figure, but adds that “If we are to guess at the equivalent number for 1845-8 and to include the countless thousands pressured into involuntary surrenders during the

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248 Osborne, *op. cit.*: 155.
249 Tuke, *op. cit.*: 27.
253 O’Neill explains that the Irish laws pertaining to evictions differed substantially with the laws in England. In Ireland the summons had to notify not just the tenant in possession but all persons who had a claim, right, title or interest in the property (significantly, however, cottiers were excluded from the protections afforded to other categories of tenants). This leads O’Neill to suggest that one writ of *habere* could lead to many more evictions. Since most historians base their figures on the processes entered rather than on the numbers served they may underestimate the amount of people affected. Tim P. O’Neill. "Famine Evictions." *Famine, Land, and Culture in Ireland*. Ed. Carla King. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2000: 29-70.
whole period (1846-54), the resulting figure would almost certainly exceed half a million persons. Tim O’Neill’s revised figure is higher again. Writers closer to the event were not burdened with the complexity of the archive and their conclusions, though subjective, are worth quoting. In his vivid evocation of nineteenth-century Irish life, Hugh Dorian claimed a “war upon cottiers” was underway. It was “eviction on the plea of giving to other men their rights.” According to him the word “ejectment” was the best understood word in the English language — understood by “young and old who had not a second word of English.” John Mitchel also claimed that the ejectment laws were used “to clear off the ‘surplus population,’” while Isaac Butt condemned them as “a measure of confiscation.” In one of the first histories of the Great Famine Canon John O’Rourke insisted that ejectments were “purely for the sake of clearing the soil of its human incumbrances.”

Other eyewitnesses emphasised the “truly affecting” tide of emigration that rapidly developed in the wake of these policies. William Bennett noticed that “the obvious strength of the country is departing with those who go.” Although pre-Famine emigration was substantial — between 1815 and 1845 Ireland contributed one third of all voluntary trans-Atlantic movements — the swelling of evictions and the resulting destitution forced many more to seek a livelihood elsewhere. Between 1845 and 1855 2.1 million Irish left the country.

257 These conclusions have been challenged by subsequent historians. O’Neill provides an excellent summary of the competing claims about the significance of ejectment. Ibid.: 29-70.  
258 Dorian, op. cit: 237-238.  
259 Ibid.: 252.  
262 William Bennett. Narrative of a Recent Journey of Six Weeks in Ireland. London: C. Gilpin, 1847: 53 In contrast Harriet Martineau was disgusted by the emotional scenes of farewell: “When we saw the wringing of hands and heard the wailings, we became aware, for the first time perhaps, of the full dignity of that civilization which induces control over the expression of emotions. All the while that this lamentation was giving a headache to all who looked on, there could not but be a feeling that these people, thus giving vent to their instincts, were as children, and would command themselves better if they were wiser.” Martineau, op. cit.: 140.  
mainly for America, Britain, Canada and Australia. As historian Kerby Miller has written "more people left Ireland in just eleven years than during the proceeding two and one-half centuries." Indeed, from the point of view of numbers, Irish emigration was the most significant outflow from any European country during this period. Landlords who were able and willing assisted their stricken tenants to emigrate; others were assisted through the poor law; more were cast adrift to fend for themselves.

The flight from the land is perhaps one of the most enduring memories of the famine and as I have been suggesting there are good reasons to conclude that in many instances these were calculated actions. It is well established that small holdings had lost favour in contemporary economic opinion and many persuasive voices had concluded that Ireland was “overpopulated.”

If “the wealth of Ireland was almost entirely territorial,” then a radical restructuring was necessary in order to maximise utility. Indeed these ideas were expressed by a broad spectrum of political opinion in Britain. Many politicians were willing to contemplate a fair degree of sacrifice in order to achieve the regeneration of Ireland. The Foreign Secretary Palmerston (who was engaged in clearances on his own estate) informed the cabinet on 31 March, 1848: “Ejectments ought to be made without cruelty in the manner of making them; but it is useless to disguise the truth that any great improvement in the social system in Ireland must be founded upon an extensive change in the present state of agrarian occupation, and that this change necessarily implies a long continued and systematic ejectment of Small Holders and of Squatting Cottiers.”

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Wood, wrote “Except through a purgatory of misery and starvation, I cannot see how Ireland is to emerge into a state of anything approaching to quiet or prosperity.” Indeed Charles Trevelyan viewed the Famine as

265 Ibid.: 353.
267 Rate-in-Aid carried a clause to apply money toward assisted emigration, but since most unions were so hard pressed it was little availed of. Collison Black, op. cit.: 129. This continued earlier relief policies. For example, on the 24th of June 1823 the government gave £15,000 to “facilitate emigration from the south of Ireland to the Cape of Good Hope.” Trevelyan, op. cit.: 15.
268 Trollope, op. cit.: 10.
270 Cited in, Gray. Famine, Land and Politics, op. cit.: 192.
“a salutary revolution in the habits of a nation.” Describing the scene in 1848 he declared “Supreme Wisdom has educed permanent good out of transient evil.”

These calculations mark the rise of a form of “disaster capitalism” which uses catastrophes to engage in radical social and economic engineering. Statesmen were evidently not just thinking about delivering aid and saving lives. In fact their statements and policies were intimately concerned with restructuring the very fabric of Irish society. The Englishman John Ashworth — who came to Ireland in 1850 in a bid to resettle his family — clearly voices the widespread conviction that the small holders of Ireland stood in the way of progress: “The small subdivision of land which have caused so much misery and moral degradation in Ireland are on all hands condemned, and better were it that the present race of occupants should emigrate and leave the whole country to be re-colonised, than such a scandalous and demoralising system should be continued.”

These calculations were the culmination of long held views on the occupation of land in Ireland. On the eve of the Famine, for example, James Johnson was able to cite a very frank article in the Times:

Why, what is this grand question of the ‘occupation’ of land in Ireland? The ‘occupation of land’ is a simple-sounding phrase. But what if we say, instead of it, a ‘war for land’ — land against life — and both against law! — for so, if we call things by their proper names — so it stands — a bloody war, which rages against rich and poor, and against the laws that are insufficient for the defence of either — a mutual war of the stomach against the purse, and vice versa — of desperate passion, on behalf, and for the relief, of inevitable hunger — of the right to live, original and inalienable, against the right to possess, the creation of conventional society.

Indeed this commentary sums up much, but in actual fact the striking feature about these “war for land” policies — which further ‘pauperised’ and exposed people’s lives — is that they occurred under the protection of legal enactment, giving substance to Agamben’s claim that under biopolitical norms the originary relation of law to life is abandonment. Thus in a stinging letter to the Prime Minister, the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam John MacHale protested: “the people received only the chilling assurance that in those deaths, however numerous, there was nothing illegal or unconstitutional! It is, then, it seems, no matter what may be the amount of the

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272 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 1.
274 Ashworth, op. cit.: 221. My emphasis.
275 Cited in, Johnson, op. cit.: 218-19.
people's sufferings, or what may be the number of those who fall victims to the Famine, provided that nothing illegal or unconstitutional is done in vindicating the rights of property."\textsuperscript{276}

The English MP Poulett Scrope subjected the legislature to more damning censure: "'Public indignation' has little or no effect on the authors of these atrocities. I want to direct the public indignation against the state of law which permits them. They are murders in the common sense of the term; but they are murders sanctioned by law. Then, it is the law that is responsible for the crime, and that should fall before the just indignation of the public."\textsuperscript{277} The words of Hugh Dorian are strikingly similar: "Murder though it was in reality, but sanctioned under the name of law."\textsuperscript{278} Osborne was also horrified by the complicity of the law in driving the peasantry from the land, and he realised only too well that this overruled the possibility of legal redress for those who were thrown from the land: "Rats might as well hope for the conviction of ferrets by a jury of rat-catchers, as the peasantry to obtain redress for manslaughter against drivers, from juries, many of whom daily employ them."\textsuperscript{279} According to these observers, it was this rightless situation which meant that thousands of Irish men and women were now "doomed to the workhouse, to banishment, or to death."\textsuperscript{280}

In chapter one I argued that colonial violence worked through a series of inclusions that were also exclusions. This same configuration applies to the administration of hunger which brought huge numbers of Irish under the control of government whilst at the same time radically excluding them. Indeed parallels have been drawn between these "clearances" and the colonial "confiscations" of previous centuries.\textsuperscript{281} As in earlier moments of colonial conflict there was a very real filiation between a policy of clearances and the reformation of the Irish society. The Famine drastically changed the land holding pattern in Ireland. The editors of the book \textit{Mapping the Great Irish Famine} observe that the number of plots under or equal to one acre

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{276} Donnelly. "Mass Eviction", op. cit.: 163.
\item \textsuperscript{277} Poulett Scrope. \textit{Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland, & Ireland}, op. cit.: 25.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Dorian, \textit{op. cit.}: 242.
\item \textsuperscript{279} Osborne, \textit{op. cit.}: 257.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Ibid.: 204.
\item \textsuperscript{281} Recently, Liz Young has compared government policy with clearances in the Scottish Highlands in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Liz Young. "Spaces of Famine: A Comparative Geographical Analysis of Famine in Ireland and the Highlands in the 1840s." \textit{Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers} 21 (1996): 666-680. This same comparison was made much earlier in the pages of \textit{The New York Daily Tribune} by Karl Marx. On the colonial-capitalist logic of expropriation Marx wrote: “The process of clearing estates which, in Scotland, we have just now described, was carried out in England in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Thomas Morus already complains of it in the beginning of the 16th century. It was performed in Scotland in the beginning of the 19th, and in Ireland it is now in full progress.” Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. \textit{Ireland and the Irish Question}. Ed. C. Desmond Greaves. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971: 53. See Butt's comments on the "measures of confiscation." Butt, \textit{op. cit.}: 25.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
declined by almost 75 per cent between 1845 and 1851. A reduction on a similar scale took place among holdings between one and five acres, while farms in the category of five to fifteen acres fell by one quarter. The number of farms between fifteen and thirty acres increased by almost 80 per cent, whilst farms bigger than thirty acres increased threefold.\textsuperscript{282}

It needs to be borne in mind that these structural developments had been widely promoted before the Famine. Theodore Hoppen tellingly called this Britain’s “sovereign remedy” to the Irish Question: “For some time the leading British politicians had touted a sovereign remedy for the Irish rural discontent, namely, the ‘reduction’ of cottiers and smallholders to the status of wage labourers.”\textsuperscript{283} More recently Peter Gray has convincingly shown that the core of Anglicisation lay in the extension of the tripartite division of labour between landlord, capitalist tenant farmer, and landless wage labourer.\textsuperscript{284} Obviously the small holdings presented a serious impediment to the general ‘advancement’ of Irish life through consolidation and a realignment of the Irish class structure. Trevelyan berated the “old barbarous Irish tenure called Rundale ... which stops short of the institution of individual property, and by making the industrious and thriving responsible for the short-comings of the idle and improvident, effectively destroys the springs of improvement.”\textsuperscript{285} This “visionary geography” (Catherine Nash’s phrase) was evident in earlier policies, such as the 1826 act which proscribed subletting, but through the framing of the Poor Law and the administration of the Famine this ideological vision became entwined with aid strategies meant to alleviate the suffering of the poor and vulnerable.\textsuperscript{286}

This is precisely where biopower infiltrates aid practices. Like “disaster capitalism” which uses catastrophes to engage in socio-economic engineering, biopower assumes and produces a bare life that needs to be reformed. It is a civilising force \textit{par excellence} powerfully

\textsuperscript{282} I am basing these figures on the Liam Kennedy, et al., eds. \textit{Mapping the Great Irish Famine: A Survey of the Famine Decades}. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999: 162ff. The authors wisely point out three important caveats regarding the figures. First before the Famine many of the small plots had been measured in Irish acres, whereas from 1847 sizes were recorded in statute acres (one Irish acre being equal to 1.619835 Statute). Second, the earlier assessments excluded so-called “wastelands” which was not the case after 1847. Thirdly the figures for 1845 refer to the number of persons holding land while the figures for 1847 and 1851 refer to the number of holdings. These facts make clear computations difficult.

\textsuperscript{283} Hoppen, \textit{op. cit.}: 61.

\textsuperscript{284} Gray. \textit{Famine, Land and Politics}, \textit{op. cit.}: 9-10.


present in both colonial and development discourse. Above I have examined a series of legislative moves that were propelled by biopolitical prerogatives. In the last section of this chapter I want to focus once more on the operations of the workhouse and in particular how the production of “bare life” — life that is seized and abandoned — enacted a ferocious geography of exclusion which decimated the very fabric of rural Irish society.287

Breaking into jail

Relief for the able-bodied outside of the workhouse was suspended in 1849.288 This fact — in conjunction with the legal enactments I outline above — led to a massive increase in the number of pauper inmates in Irish workhouses (see Table 3.1). By January 1849, two years after Trevelyan declared that the Famine had been stayed, over one million people were being afforded relief in the workhouses. “Before it was go to hell. Now, it is go to the poorhouse,” recalled Séamus O’Riordan.289 But what was life like under such awful terms? Numerous accounts point to the wretchedness of Irish existence. “They have already reached the lowest point in the descending scale, and there is nothing beyond but starvation or beggary,” wrote Trevelyan.290 Other observers were less sure. Nonetheless, two points are immediately striking about commentaries concerning the workhouses and I would like to deal with each in turn before I conclude. The first concerns a series of issues connecting pauperism, prisons and criminalisation, while the second point concerns the pattern of language used to portray workhouse existence.

Table 3.1: Workhouse and Outdoor Relief291

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Workhouses in operation</th>
<th>Expenditure during the year (£)</th>
<th>Total number of persons relieved during the year</th>
<th>Total no. receiving outdoor relief during the year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37,057</td>
<td>10,910</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>110,278</td>
<td>31,108</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>281,233</td>
<td>87,604</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>244,374</td>
<td>87,898</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>271,334</td>
<td>105,358</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>316,026</td>
<td>114,205</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>435,001</td>
<td>243,933</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

290 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 9.
291 Adapted from Nicholls, 1967 [1856]: 323, 395.
In his robust indictment of the poor law system Poulett Scrope divulged a considerable body of evidence which suggests, *inter alia*, that during the Famine years, criminalisation obviously carried considerable advantages. The evidence which he cites was given before the House of Commons Committee on the May 3, 1849 by the Assistant Barrister in County Mayo, Mr. O'Shaughnessy. It is only necessary to select from a portion of this:

Dominick Gimelly was indicted for larceny of hempen ropes, and convicted. The police man who arrested him said, that the prisoner told him that he wanted to rob and get into gaol. He had been convicted twice before, and had been only just discharged from gaol. I asked him if he wanted to be transported, and he said ‘Yes;’ he should do the same thing again if let go...

John, Austin, and Charles Ruddy, three boys, whose ages were stated to be 8, 12 and 15 years, brothers, pleaded guilty of stealing sheep. Mr. Walsh, the police inspector, said they were starving, and would not have done it if they had not been starving. They were the children of the honest people in Clare Island; and that the census, from January 1847, to January 1849, shewed [sic] that there were 576 deaths out of a population of 1,700...

Michael Gavan pleaded guilty to sheep-stealing, he having been convicted before; he wished to be transported; he said he should do the same thing again if let go: he was transported...

Michael Eady pleaded guilty to stealing a shawl; he had been convicted before, and had been only just out of gaol; he said he should do the same thing again, as he had no means of living, and wished to be transported...

Owen Eady, his brother, pleaded guilty to stealing linen; he was about 18 years old, and wished to be transported; he said he should rob again if let out. I asked him if he knew what transportation was; he said he knew he would be kept at work for seven years, and that at the end he would have liberty in another country, which would be better than starving, and sleeping out at night; he was told he might have chains on his legs; ‘If I have,’ he said, ‘I will have something to eat.’ he was transported for seven years... 

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292 Poulett Scrope. *The Irish Poor Law, op. cit.*, 14-15. The German traveller, Kohl, noted before the Famine that “without exaggeration, that for the commission of a wicked crime, an Irishman is removed from a hole to a palace.
As late as the spring of 1849 at an assize court in County Kerry, two men who were discharged due to insufficient evidence refused to leave custody. The judge observed that "to them their acquittal was a punishment." More damning still is the commentary of the American, W.M.S. Balch, who cast his eyes over a leading story in a local newspaper while touring the country in 1850. The print related how:

In the once thriving town of Newcastle, in the county of Limerick, during the recent quarter sessions, there were over twelve hundred prisoners to be tried, and it occupied the court but three days to try them all. And why? Simply because they all plead guilty, in the hope of being detained in prison; and two who were discharged were the next day accused of riot in an attempt to break into gaol.

The same crime pattern was recorded amongst the substantial Irish emigrant population in England. Indeed, Trevelyan recorded this in The Irish Crisis without grasping its profundity:

His diet is also, in general, very much improved; for while he remained at home, with unimpeached honour, he had only watery potatoes; but as an offender in prison, he receives daily two pounds of bread and an allowance of milk along with it. It would, indeed, be difficult to make Paddy more uncomfortable in gaol than he is at home.” J. G. Kohl, op. cit.: 171-2.


294 Balch, op. cit.: 84. At the village of Bansha Archibald Stark observed: “The shooting of landlords and incoming tenants has given place to acts of petty larceny, undertaken by the perpetrators to mitigate the horrors of starvation, or with the undisguised intention of getting transported.” Stark, op. cit.: 43.
Previously to this, there was very little crime among these poor people, not even in petty thefts; but it soon appeared that they preferred being sent to prison to being sent back to Ireland. In the year ending 30th September, 1846, 398 natives of Ireland were committed to the borough prison at Liverpool for begging, pilfering about the docks &c. In the year ending 30th September, 1847, 888 were so committed. In the month of October 1846, 80 were committed. In the same month of 1847, 142.

As it turns out the government made the commission of a crime especially easy when the amended Irish Poor Law in 1847 included a Vagrancy Act, which effectively made begging illegal (George Nicholls had pushed for this in his 1837 report). The “criminalisation of begging” meant that the number of people convicted for begging increased from 24,810 in 1847 to 49,717 in 1848 — an increase of 93 per cent. The Inspector of the Galway Union reported that ninety-two paupers were caught begging, which they had done in the hope of being sent to prison. Moreover, Margaret Crawford cites an irate Inspector-General of prisons complaining that: “insubordination in workhouses [was] committed solely for the purpose of obtaining gaol dietary.”

In sum then, how are we to make sense of the peculiar fact that a prison sentence was eagerly sought?

295 Trevelyan, op. cit.: 139. Still in 1847, 15,008 Irish were removed from Liverpool to Ireland. As Christine Kinealy correctly points out the Removal Laws — which were part of the English, Welsh and Scottish Poor Laws — demonstrate that Irish ‘immigrants’ in Britain “were there under sufferance rather than right.” Christine Kinealy. “Was Ireland a Colony? The Evidence of the Great Famine.” Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland. Ed. Terrence McDonough. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005: 59.

296 10th and 11th Vict., cap. 84. “An act to make provision for the punishment of vagrants, and persons offending against the laws in force for the relief of the destitute poor in Ireland.”

297 “The suppression of mendicancy is necessary for the protection of the peasantry themselves,” Nicholls wrote. This is, of course, a classic colonial gesture. Nicholls, op. cit.: 206. The traveller James Johnson also thought a vagrant act “absolutely necessary.” “Open and unchecked mendicancy does infinite mischief in Ireland,” wrote James Johnson. “These peripatetics are active agents in the dissemination of lies, sedition, and misrepresentation, as well as the contagion of typhus, and the more fatal and poisonous example of laziness and dirt!” Furthermore “To erect asylums [i.e. workhouses] for mendicants without prohibiting mendicancy itself, is not merely ridiculous but injurious. It gives the beggar two strings in his bow — private and parochial charity — on the former of which he will be sure to play till it breaks, when he will have recourse to the latter.” James Johnson. A Tour in Ireland with Meditations and Reflections. London: S. Highley, 1844: 167.

298 Kinealy. The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.: 137.


300 Crawford. “Food and Famine”, op. cit.: 70. Sydney Osborne observed a man out of jail who “proved in how superior a condition the criminal is kept, to that of the pauper.” Touring Ireland in 1843 James Johnson observed a Galway jail — a “large operative Pantechnicon” — in which the diet “is nearly the same as that in the workhouses.” According to Johnson the provisions were “quite sufficient for people accustomed to a low scale nutriment from infancy.” Johnson, op. cit.: 173. Osborne, op. cit.: 74.

301 A number of scholars note this trend, but fail to make the connection between these actions and the production of bare life. Ó Grada comments on the “upside-down world” that leads two defendants to “break into jail.” Ó Grada. Black '47, op. cit.: 41.
The Political philosopher Hannah Arendt has written that “the best criterion by which to decide whether someone has been forced outside the pale of law is to ask if he would benefit by committing a crime.”  

I have already detailed above how entry into the workhouse deprived an inmate of very basic rights, remembering of course, that even a “right to relief” was carefully evaded in drafting the Poor Law Act of 1838. For the hundreds of thousands of Irish now reclassified as “paupers” the jails held conceivable advantages: no arbitrary test of destitution, equal if not better meals, and of course the chance of being deported to “the colonies.” As Arendt brilliantly understood, under exceptional circumstances being labelled a “criminal” actually meant recapturing certain rights that were forfeited on entry into the workhouse: even a petty criminal could claim a right to ample sustenance independent of any test of destitution. For many it was a conscious decision to “face the jail, rather than the grave.” If before the rightless pauper was included within the law by being excepted from many of its protections, only now by being excepted from it — as an offender against the law — can the pauper-criminal be included under its protections. It is crucial that we understand this liminal vortex as the political achievement of relief policies that have embraced the techniques of biopower. It proves that the Irish workhouses were not, in the last instance, spaces of confinement but in fact spaces of exception.

The workhouses were places which, at best (and despite their ultra-surveillance and regulatory functions), maintained an ambiguous relationship to the law. Paupers could be

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303 Osborne, *op. cit.*: 198.
304 The government was aware of this liminal grey zone. When asked whether it was desirable to maintain a broad distinction between paupers and criminals Edward Twisleton responded “I do not know that I would draw a very broad distinction: there should be some distinction, and I think there is a sufficient distinction in giving paupers the power to leave the workhouse whenever they please on giving three hours notice.” Cited in, Poulett Scrope. *The Irish Poor Law*, op. cit.: 46. Likewise George Cornwell Lewis regarded the duration and voluntary nature of confinement as the distinguishing factor between the workhouse and the prison: “There is ... one great and essential difference between a prison and a workhouse, that a prison is a place where a man is confined till his sentence has expired; whereas a workhouse is a place where a man is only confined till he will undertake to maintain himself.” *Remarks on the Third Report*, op. cit.: 260
punished for minor offences including playing cards ("or other games of chance") and not duly cleansing themselves. Punishment for such "disorderly" and "refractory" behaviour often involved being forced to go without rations, severe floggings, or solitary confinement in the "Black Hole," and according to Gerard O'Brien, it was deemed far "more desirable to settle serious offences within the confines of the workhouse rather than in the courts." Of course this created the perfect conditions for perfect misconduct. Complaints of excessive cruelty were frequent. O'Brien documents the death of a heavily pregnant "pauper" in the "Black Hole" who, contrary to regulations, had been locked in without bedding. The death was accepted without official enquiry and in fact the last words on the matter were that of Guardian Lyons who claim that "the woman was a most infamous character" and that the child was in any case already dead. In male-dominated workhouses women were particularly vulnerable. Sexual assault was often excused as a momentary lapse in the master's code of conduct, "a breach in his position of trust rather than an act of criminal violence." No doubt the increased bureaucratisation of relief helped convert relief officials into what Scrope characterised as "passive instruments of law." Only then could institutional violence and neglect be considered as a mere lapse in "regulations," rather than a crime. The point is that similar to the ways in which the workhouses managed human conduct, ill-treatment itself became a symptom of a nebulous 'mismanagement.' What Trevelyan called "the preservation of life" had become a matter of official procedure and nuance, and something that rights had apparently very little to do with. This much is clear from contemporary accounts of the workhouses, which brings me to my final point.

Over and over again contemporary accounts stress the utter neglect of those receiving relief. At a meeting of the Society of Friends the situation under the Poor Law was summed up in the following words: "The paupers are merely kept alive, either in the crowded workhouses, or in alarming numbers dependent on out-door relief. But their health is not maintained. Their physical strength is weakened; their mental capacity is lowered; their moral character degraded. They are hopeless themselves, and they offer no hope to their country, except in the

306 Article 43 of the Poor Law states that pregnant women were not to be punished by confinement or by alteration of diet. See also Article 44. "Orders of Poor Law Commissioners", op. cit.: 610; O'Brien. "The Poor Law", op. cit.: 48.
308 The phrase belongs to Poulett Scrope. Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland, & Ireland, op. cit.: 25.
prospect, so abhorrent to humanity and Christian feeling, of their gradual extinction by DEATH!”

Sidney Godolphin Osborne leaves us the following description after visiting one of the “Leviathan workhouses” at Limerick:

I have no words with which I can give any real idea of the sad condition of the inmates of two large yards at the parent house, in which were a very large number of young female children; many of them were clothed in the merest dirty rags, and of these they wore a very scanty allowance; they were in dirt collected on their persons for many weeks; there was not about them the slightest evidence of any least care being taken of them; as they filed before me, two and two, they were a spectacle to fill any human heart with indignation: sore feet, sore hands, sore heads; ophthalmia [a famine related disease which affects the victims eyesight] evident in the case of the great portion of them; some of them were suffering from it in its very worst stage; they were evidently eat up with vermin — very many were mere skeletons: I know well what the appearance of a really famine-stricken child is; there were, it is true, some here who had brought their death-like appearance into the house with them; but the majority were as the type in which the word neglect was printed, in no mistakeable [sic] characters — the neglect of their latter state, not the consequence of their former state.

After describing a whole panoply of abuses — unchanged bed linen, lack of clothing, dangerous overcrowding, inadequate diets, physical punishments (including the use of hunting whips) — Osborne concluded that “no human ingenuity could contrive more powerful machinery to degrade human nature than that now contained.” The Irish pauper class he described as “mere ‘wrecks’ of life,” human beings at the very “last stage of existence.” Like other eyewitnesses he employed zoomorphisms: “Dogs would have had more attention paid to them,” he declared. All around him he saw people now “living as beasts,” and bodily frames that were a “mere anatomy of a human being.” Osborne concludes in frightening language: “it is mere animal vegetation, it is not human life, in any common accepted sense of the term.” According to Agamben what Osborne is referring to “is neither an animal life nor a human life, but only a life that is separated and excluded from itself — only bare life.” This is the same

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310 Osborne, *op. cit.*: 7.
311 *Ibid.*: 133.
312 *Ibid.*: 22, 40.
313 And again: “A state of things which treats large bodies of women as mere animals, except in the matter of apparently caring less for their lives than most men do their dogs.” *Ibid.*: 7, 10.
314 *Ibid.*: 190, 169.
315 *Ibid.*: 126.
316 Agamben proclaims: “In our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man. That is to say, in its origin Western politics is also biopolitics.” Giorgio Agamben. *The Open: Man and Animal.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004: 38, 80.
“barely protracted existence” which haunted Scrope and what Edward Twisleton coldly referred to as “the minimum capable of sustaining life in health.”\(^{317}\) In each of these descriptions we are confronted with a human life which is no longer recognisable as such.

**Conclusions**

According to Oliver MacDonagh “Ireland was merely exhibiting, in particularly interconnected and dramatic form, general features of mid- and late nineteenth century government and life.”\(^{318}\) This is certainly true — although MacDonagh has little or nothing to say about colonialism, biopolitics or capitalist political economy, factors which would certainly help explain the “particularity” of these more “general features.” It is difficult to do justice to all of these themes, but in this chapter I have tried to suggest that it is in fact the interconnectedness of these power relations that explains some of the more perplexing facts of the Famine.

Reflecting on the government’s efforts during the Irish Famine Trevelyan declared “The day has gone for letting things take their course.”\(^{319}\) During the Irish Famine ‘things’ did take their course — which is far from saying its development was inevitable. State power continually grappled with the exigencies of famine life, regulating and transforming relief operations in tune to popular ideologies and political prerogatives. The difficulties of directing a colonial population during an ecological crisis became a powerful reason to expand “the social laboratory,” placing the Irish population at the centre of what Trevelyan characterised as “extensive experiments in the science, if it may call it so, of relieving the destitute.”\(^{320}\) The scale of this experiment was staggering. When Osborne visited his first workhouse in Ireland he compared the spectacle to the elaborate grid of a mini-town: “Food, clothing, shelter, education, medicine, religious teaching, industrial teaching, are to be found for this mass; grave-ground for a very large portion of it: the law has undertaken this monster task.”\(^{321}\) This “monster task”

\(^{317}\) Poulett Scrope. *The Irish Poor Law*, op. cit.: 51, 46.

\(^{318}\) MacDonagh. *Ireland*, op. cit.: 39.

\(^{319}\) Trevelyan, *op. cit.*: 158.

\(^{320}\) Burn, *op. cit.*: 61-74; Trevelyan, *op. cit.*: 185.

\(^{321}\) Osborne, *op. cit.*: 120. It must have hard for Victorian readers to grasp the scale of these Leviathan workhouses and unions. Here is James Tuke trying to impress upon his readers the enormity of a union in the extreme west of Ireland: “The union of Ballina, (County Mayo,) is about 60 miles in width by 30 in breadth, or nearly three times the size of Middlesex, containing an area of 509,154 acres, with a population of 120,797 persons, and a net annual value of £95,774. Let us suppose a union stretching from London to Buckingham or Oxford in one direction, and from London to Basingstoke in another, with a poor-house at St. Albans, and we shall have a good idea of the extent of the Ballina union.” Tuke, *op. cit.*: 19.
required a monster laboratory where the law and the state assumed control over the direction of Irish life.

In other words, over the course of the Irish Famine the state had manoeuvred itself into a very powerful position vis-à-vis the famished. The aid programmes (the workhouses, soup kitchens, public works, and outdoor relief schemes) ultimately permitted institutions, laws, and disciplines to target the famished body. Through the strict superintendence of diet, the “task labour” system, and the principle of “less eligibility” the state virtually monopolised the means of subsistence for vast numbers of people, thus producing — and assuming control over — a radically depotentiated and bare life. In this way the machinery of relief became an important technology of biopower. Furthermore, the productive force of this process needs to be emphasised. Relief procedures gradually mobilised a reterritorialising project that involved the shift from tillage to pasturage, the ejectment of Irish small holders, and the realignment of class relations. Famine was used as an engine of historical transformation.322

Above all, I have tried to depict what Slavoj Žižek calls the “constitutive limit” that marks the “ultimate traumatic point of biopolitics,” where the regulation of life manages to combine administrative rigor and moral certitude with an array of injunctions, prohibitions, and exceptions.323 At this limit biopolitics becomes necropolitics, and a vast body of people appear, to all intents and purposes, “perfectly superfluous.” Agamben calls this the “state of exception” and its production during the famine constitutes what one English writer characterised as “a very ugly page in the history of the exercise of man’s power, over those who are themselves powerless.”324

324 Osborne, op. cit.: 30.
Chapter Four
Rationalising Disaster: Thomas Carlyle and the Irish Question

"The writer has a place in his age. Each word has an echo. So does each silence."
— Jean Paul Satre.

“All his methods included a good deal of killing.”
— Ralph W. Emerson on Thomas Carlyle.

De-humanised geographies
In recent years much of discussion on the Irish Famine has focused on the political motivations behind present reconstructions of the Irish past.\(^1\) Especially important here are the revisionist and post-revisionist discussions that have sparked so much acrimonious debate in Irish Studies, much of it focusing on the Famine.\(^2\) However, far less attention has been devoted to how the Famine was sanitised and naturalised as the event unfolded. Of course there have been several studies that have examined the foundational role of particular ideologies during the Famine. Nevertheless our understanding of how famine was constructed in situ is clearly lacking. It is interesting, therefore, to think further about what it is that representations actually do and also what sorts of political roles representations are made to play.

Achille Mbembe recently described a modern form of rationality that produces de-humanised subjects through its very terms of description.\(^3\) Mbembe’s argument might be usefully applied to particular administrative accounts of the famine. Here I offer two short, but revealing examples. The first observes a criticism levelled at Charles Trevelyan by the English M.P., George Poulett Scrope. The latter took Trevelyan to task for his exculpatory account of the Famine in The Irish Crisis. Poulett Scrope wrote: “A stranger to the real events of the last

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\(^1\) This chapter is a substantially revised version of my forthcoming article David Nally. "Eternity's Commissioner: Thomas Carlyle, the Great Irish Famine and the Geopolitics of Travel." Journal of Historical Geography. Forthcoming.


two hundred years might read through the whole hundred pages without ever finding out that during the ‘Irish Crisis’ several hundred thousand souls perished in Ireland of want, through the inefficiency of those ‘colossal’ relief measures.’ Trevelyan is very clearly accused of sanitising the disaster by overlooking the deaths caused by the relief system itself. This is accomplished by revealing the ‘colossal’ efforts of government whilst obliterating the machinations of power behind them. One further significant point might be added to Poulett Scrope’s criticisms. In a short footnote Trevelyan states that his narrative does not extend beyond 1847: “progress of events after that date will form the subject of a separate article.” This article was never written. Thus the Famine is packaged as a short-lived “Irish Crisis” and events after 1847 — when excess mortality was highest — are consigned to a paratextual footnote promising a discussion never to be articulated. Hence, as Derek Gregory has said, narratives, and the imaginative geographies they engender, are almost always “double spaces of articulation ... in which connections are elaborated in some registers even as they are disavowed in others.” In this sense, this small note at the foot of Trevelyan’s page might be read as a sharp mise-en-scène of colonial relations. The capacity to render invisible, silent and remote is a powerful political tool. One faminescape can bury a thousand others.

A similar sort of criticism might be applied to George Nicholls’s History of the Irish Poor Law which is, nonetheless, far more comprehensive than Trevelyan’s short narrative. Given the fact that the very institutions Nicholls helped establish turned into citadels of disease and death, it is not surprising that he might wish to minimise Irish suffering. In fact it is only toward the end of his long account that Nicholls really begins to focus on the Famine period. When the issue of famine mortality can no longer be ignored Nicholls directs the interested reader to two tables (printed on the final page of his account) which summarise the numbers relieved in and out of the workhouse, the total relief expenditure, and the extent of mortality under these aid schemes (see Appendix 2). Nicholls explains that these two tables are meant to condense “the character of the period — the waxing and waning of distress ... so that the state of the country at several periods is as it were mapped out before the reader, and can be taken in at one glance, requiring nothing further in the way of explanation; and to this table the reader’s

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attention is directed." Thus the entire trauma of Famine is packaged in two condensed tables which are supposed to demand "nothing further in the way of explanation." Nicholls's own book would scarcely be needed if we took what he said at face value. Nevertheless, these tabulations — abstract, clinical and deliberately terse — remind us that a critical study of the Famine needs to consider not only of the reasons for violence but also the violence of reason.

These sorts of considerations frame my discussion of Thomas Carlyle's visits to Ireland and his subsequent comments on these journeys. In 1846 and again in 1849 the Scottish born historian and social critic travelled around famine-stricken Ireland. Both journeys are obviously important on account of the different faminescapes Carlyle bore witness to. But the most important point is that Carlyle was also caught in a political moment and therefore I consider much of what he has to say to be less the cursory thoughts of a traveller than the calculated reflections of a political individual. The knowledge that Carlyle did not travel alone makes this last point all the more significant.

The prominent Irish nationalist Charles Gavan Duffy provided help, advice and companionship on each occasion. Moreover, Duffy happened to publish his own detailed account of their sojourn, which at times adds a vivid counterpoint to Carlyle's perspective. In many ways their tête-à-tête provides a unique opportunity to further examine how powerful political rationalities are produced at the 'contact zone' of two cultures.

It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that Carlyle's published memoirs of his travels, and his various political pamphlets on Ireland, have merited little scholarly attention. Even granting the abundance of Victorian tours in Ireland, it is difficult to find a precedent to the man they reverently christened the "Chelsea sage." Indeed it is also noteworthy that the few scholars who

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8 *Ibid.*: 389, 404.
9 At a very late stage during his second tour (Sunday, 29 July) Carlyle and Duffy were joined by William Edward Forster. In September and October, 1846 Forster toured the south and west of Ireland; and again in January the following year Forster accompanied his father to Connemara as a distributor of the Society of Friends relief fund for the famine. Forster later served as the Chief Secretary for Ireland (1880-1881), where his repression of Parnell and the Land League earned him the nickname "Buckshot Forster." Forster called Carlyle "the greatest modifying force of this century." T.W. Reid, *Life of the Right Honourable William Edward Forster, Vol I*. London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1888: 166-167. For a very helpful account see Jeanne A. Flood. "The Forster Family and the Irish Famine." *Quaker History* 84.2 (1995): 116-30.
have taken the time to study Carlyle’s observations on Ireland are remarkably divergent in their summaries. For instance, Clayton Mackenzie highlights “the hyperbolic verbal texture of the argument” as well as Carlyle’s “powerful and frightening views.” In stark contrast, K.J. Fielding notes “Carlyle’s active understanding and sympathy for Ireland.” Malcolm Brown claims that Carlyle’s thoughts on Ireland “intertwined platitude and hysteria” while Andrew Hadfield and John McVeagh call Carlyle’s published memoir of his tour in 1849 “a bitter reaction to a bitter land,” adding rather perfunctorily, that the text “still retains its power to puzzle and antagonise the reader.”

These conclusions do not adequately explain Carlyle’s complex response to the unnatural deaths of over one million people. Taking inspiration from recent theoretical approaches to what Stuart Elden helpfully describes as “the politics of calculation,” I want to place Carlyle’s behaviour within a much broader debate on the geopolitics of travel. Since the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* it has become common to consider travel as an event suffused in the ideological assumptions of colonialism; however, it seems markedly less common to accord travel its own unique appeal and application in relation to state power. In chapter two we began an exploration of this idea taking note of Charles Townshend’s prescient remark that no state has ever held a complete monopoly on the abstractions of politics; therefore a full study of state power ought to move beyond the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster. Moreover, just as Marx understood capitalists as individuals who personify the power of capital (“an individual possessor of money becomes a capitalist ... when the expansion of capital through exchange becomes his subjective aim”) we can also position particular travellers vis-à-vis state power if and when their principles and rationality begin to coincide with the

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prerogatives of government.\textsuperscript{15} Thus in chapter two I examined how certain pronouncements strengthened the hand of government.

In this chapter I am also concerned with how Carlyle’s judgements find their “principles and ... specific domain of application in the state.”\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, Carlyle’s interventions make clear that during the Famine representations developed the lethal capacity to make sovereign pronouncements on what counts as \textit{valuable life}. But Carlyle is particularly significant for two reasons. As we shall see, Carlyle was frequently perceived to be a defender of labour. In fact the famous “cash nexus” phrase that appears in the \textit{Communist Manifesto} was appropriated from Carlyle and the early Engels was somewhat taken with the “Chelsea sage.”\textsuperscript{17} Yet faced with Ireland, Carlyle shifted from being a severe critic of \textit{laissez faireism} to being a defender of property. Below I argue that this move is made possible by Carlyle’s growing propensity to qualify human value through environmental and racial readings of the political situation in Ireland during the Famine. Secondly, it is often argued that under the direction of Russell and the Whigs, government veered substantially toward a policy of ‘non-intervention’ — what the \textit{Times} newspaper chillingly called “the trial by letting alone.”\textsuperscript{18} However, as I demonstrate in chapter three, a tremendous amount of work was involved in this strategy of \textit{laissez faireism}: laws were enacted, ideologies were mobilised, new relief strategies were constructed, while others were dismantled and discontinued. In an analogous way Carlyle’s ultimate ‘silence’ on Ireland might be read as an act of political violence not too dissimilar to Trevelyan’s footnote, Nicholl’s tabulation and the government’s policy of ‘non-intervention.’ That is, it was a calculated act of \textit{abandonment} that was arrived at through specific rationalisations and calibrations.

\textbf{Carlyle’s sickly ‘Irish Question’}

It has been said of the ‘Irish Question’ that each time Britain moved to solve it the Irish changed the question. Whatever the truth of this popular aphorism, it certainly captures the level of


unease and frustration felt on both sides of the Irish Sea. By the time Carlyle turned his attention to Ireland it had become increasingly palpable that a resolution was needed — and needed urgently. The Act of Union may have been in effect for some time, but the memory of the 1798 Rebellion was still seditiously fresh. The swell in the rank and confidence of the Young Irelanders at the expense of Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association, and at a time when revolution seemed rife in Europe, added a new set of anxieties to an already stretched list. If Britain could not safeguard its interests in Ireland, "her oldest possession," how could order be maintained in the rest of the empire? The will to solve the 'Irish Question' was matched by a passion to preserve the empire.

In his exceptional reading of Carlyle's literary career, Chris Vanden Bossche argues that Carlyle's growing interest in Irish affairs should not be removed from his early recognition that the 'Irish Question' was freighted with political clout. Carlyle's treatise on The French Revolution (1837), and even more significantly, his massive tome, Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches (1845), were different attempts to come to terms with one problem: what form of authority was needed to curb the widespread destruction of values and social cohesion that seemed to encompass the new industrial order of the nineteenth-century. In other words, Carlyle was already asking some fairly specific questions regarding the nature of authority and political power. In The French Revolution, insurrection served to "recover rather than destroy authority," whereas in the Letters and Speeches, he visualized the salvation of England through the advent of an enlightened theocratic figurehead. Carlyle, however, felt that both works were deeply misunderstood and his disappointment reached a new nadir when his attempts to mould Robert Peel into a modern theocratic 'prophet' were dashed when Peel lost his ministry (Carlyle had sent Peel a copy of Letters and Speeches stapled with practical advice and encouragement). In light of Peel's failure, Carlyle was forced to espouse the role of the righteous prophet for himself. Vanden Bossche argues that these events crystallize in Carlyle's rhetorical shift from

22 Ibid.: 117.
a more “formal poetics of persuasion” to a language of “coercion and attack.” It is from within this political and intellectual bandwidth that Carlyle turned his attention to Ireland.

Perhaps as early as *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834), in which he depicted the poor as Irish peasants, Carlyle had considered Ireland a key to understanding the state of England. This theme was carried over into *Past and Present* (1843), in which Carlyle depicted what one critic called “the unforgettable story of the Irishwoman”:

A poor Irish widow, her husband having died in one of the Lanes of Edinburgh, went forth with her three children, bare of all resource, to solicit help from the charitable Establishments of that City. At this charitable establishment and then at that she was refused; referred from one to the other, helped by none; - till she had exhausted them all; till her strength and heart had failed her: she sank down in typhus fever; died, and infected her Lane with fever, so that seventeen other persons died of fever there in consequence. The humane Physician asks therefore, as with a heart too full for speaking, Would it not have been economy to help this poor Widow? She took typhus fever, and killed seventeen of you! - Very curious. The forlorn Irish Widow applies to her fellow creatures, as if saying ‘Behold I am sinking, bare of help; Ye must help me! I am your sister, bone of your bone; one God made us: ye must help me!’ They answer, ‘No impossible; thou art no sister of ours.’ But she proves her sisterhood; her typhus fever kills them: they actually were her brothers though denying it! Had human creature ever to go lower for a proof?

Such passages, according to Young, attained for Carlyle the status of a “champion of labour” and an honest voice on the evils of laissez-faireism. However, the new political economy is never the sole target of Carlyle’s allegory. Indeed, as several scholars have noted, the fear of contagion and the suggestion that the Irish are a mortal threat to the life and security of Britain is a recurring theme in very diverse body of Victorian literature. In *Latter-Day Pamphlets*

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24 Vanden Bossche, *op. cit.*: 126.

25 Cited in, Young, *op. cit.*: 197-198. Note Carlyle only mentions the pernicious effect of Irishmen, in marked contrast to the image of the deadly — and deadly — “Irish widow” of *Sartor*. Moreover, the gendered trope of misrule and contagion, which is historically speaking both verbal and literal, was grounded in the very homes of the English elite by the irrational fear incited by the depiction of the Irish wet-nurse and the Irish mother. See Ann Rosalind Jones, and Peter Stallybrass. "Dismantling Irena: The Sexualizing of Ireland in Early Modern England." *Nationalism and Sexuality*. Eds. Andrew Parker, et al. New York: Routledge, 1992: 157-171.

(1850) Carlyle is even more contumelious and paranoid about the ruinous effects of the Irish. This time, however, it is not pestilence but hunger that lays waste to metropolitan life: “The Irish Giant, named of Despair, [who] is advancing upon London itself, laying waste all English cities, towns and villages ... I noticed him in Piccadilly ... thatched in rags, a blue child on each arm; hunger-driven, wide eye-mouthed, seeking whom he may devour ... prophecy of him there has long been; but now by the rot of the potato ... he is here in person!”

The trope of contagion is particularly important here because it expresses a terror of *proximity*. This also explains the importance of racial and ethnic indicators of difference which Carlyle is clearly relying on. After all, racism is the dream of quarantining that which is dangerously other. Between the publication of *Sartor* and the *Pamphlets*, Carlyle had travelled to Ireland twice to examine the scenes of disease and hunger more intimately. These experiences were vital in developing these ideas.

In April 1845, Frederick Lucas (then editor of the *Tablet*) introduced Carlyle to three young Irish law students who were, moreover, enthusiastic nationalists. Charles Gavan Duffy, one of the three impressive youths, forged an immediate and for the most part, cordial relationship with Carlyle and his wife Jane, which spanned almost an entire generation. Carlyle described his first impressions to his mother:

> On Saturday Night I had three redhot Irish Repealers here; one of them Duffy, a fellow Prisoner of O'Connell — a really interesting young man. Full of zeal, of talent and affection; almost weeping as he spoke of his country, — and taking this plan for relief of it, poor fellow! They are all sworn disciples of mine they say; which astonished me beyond measure. They came to complain of my unfairness to Ireland; I had called them all 'liars and thieves,' which was hard talking! — I liked this poor Duffy very much. They are all ready for 'insurrection,' for 'death' &c&c I strongly advised them to make a general insurrection against the Devil first of all, and see what came of that!”

Despite these sceptical remarks, Carlyle was enough taken with Duffy to send him a brief letter in early September 1846 stating that he would be en route to Ireland forthwith and politely

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28 The other two guests were John Pigot the son of the Irish Chief Baron, who wrote for the *Nation* under the pen name “Fermoy” and who afterwards became a successful advocate at the Indian Bar, and John O'Hagan, who edited the pro-O'Connell newspaper, *Newry Examiner*; afterwards Mr. Justice O'Hagan who headed the Land Commission. Charles Gavan Duffy. “Conversations and Correspondence with Thomas Carlyle.” *The Contemporary Review*. 61 (1892): 120-123.

29 Cited in, Seigel, *op. cit.:* 198.
requesting an “intelligent monitor” to instruct him on what to look at. Duffy duly obliged and ensured that Carlyle met with “most of the writers and orators whom their contemporaries bestowed the soubriquet of Young Ireland,” before he sailed home to England on the 9th of September just four days after his arrival. Indeed his brief stay prompted Carlyle’s wife Jane to write: “Irland [sic] Young and Old is surely too large a thing to be done in a couple of days! I know you beat the world for the quantity of even correct impressions which you bring away... but the material and spiritual aspect of Ireland should be looked at more leisurely even by you”.

Indeed Carlyle’s first tour was short. Arriving in Belfast, he quickly made haste southwards to join Duffy and John Mitchel who also, incidentally, revered Carlyle. No doubt, exigency curtailed further perambulations, although he did observe the “poisoned air” and “fateful smell” of rotting potatoes that came to mark the familiar dearth of famine. His few brief letters during this time demonstrate a budding abhorrence for pretence and “Irish balderdash” that was to so incense him upon his second tour. Daniel O’Connell, whom he heard orate at Conciliation Hall, he considered to be the “the Prince of Humbugs,” a “chief quack,” and in many ways a monstrous expression of Irish platitudes. For the most part, however, Carlyle appeared to enjoy his visit and spoke very highly of both Duffy and Mitchel.

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30 Duffy, op. cit.: 130.
32 It is difficult to assess Carlyle’s appeal for these two young men. Joel Hollander speculates that both Duffy and Mitchel perceived Carlyle to be “the voice of revolution” and therefore “minimized their political differences with the older man,” op. cit.: 112. Interestingly, Duffy later blamed Carlyle for having “taught Mitchel to oppose the liberation of the negroes and the emancipation of the Jews.” Carlyle replied that Mitchel would be “found right in the end.” Cited in, T. Peter Park. “Thomas Carlyle and the Jews.” *Journal of European Studies* 20 (1990): 6. Malcolm Brown agrees “he [Mitchel] resembled Carlyle himself, whose downward path from Chartism to the Latter Day Pamphlets after the shocks of 1848 was an exact parallel to Mitchel’s course from the *United Irishman* to the *Southern Citizen.*” op. cit. See also Fielding’s relevant but ultimately misguided assessment of Carlyle and Mitchel’s friendship. Fielding, *op. cit.*: 131-43. Jules Seigel, offers a particularly useful discussion of the Young Irelanders and Carlyle, *op. cit.*: 181-95. James Quinn. "John Mitchel and the Rejection of the Nineteenth Century." *Eire-Ireland* 38 (2003).
On the face of it, Carlyle's brisk tour seems *ad hoc*, even capricious. It was, nonetheless, instrumental in nurturing his interest in the condition of Ireland and its people. In a letter written to American poet and essayist, Ralph Emerson, some months after his return, Carlyle elaborates on the significance of his recent trip:

I saw Ireland too on my return; saw the black potato-fields, a ragged noisy population, that has long in a headlong baleful manner followed the Devil's leading, listening namely to blustering shallow-violent Imposters [sic] and children of darkness, saying, "Yes, we know you, you are Children of Light!" — and so has fallen all out of elbows in body and soul; and now having lost its *potatoes* is come as it were to a crisis; all its windy nonsense cracking suddenly to pieces under its feet: a very pregnant crisis indeed! A country cast suddenly into the melting pot, say into the Medea's-Cauldron; to be boiled into horrid *dissolution*; whether into new *youth*, into sound healthy life, or into eternal death and annihilation, one does not yet know.36

Apparently the 'Irish Question' revived a similar crisis of authority that freighted Carlyle's earlier discussions on Cromwell and the French Revolution.37 In a letter to Duffy, Carlyle states this pretext quite clearly: "[t]he aspect of Ireland is beyond words at present. The most thoughtless here is struck into momentary *silence* in looking at it; the wisest among us cannot guess what the end of these things is to be."38 Most importantly, however, these letters are the first rumblings of Carlyle's resolve to arrange human beings into groups and subgroups ("ragged noisy population" and "blustering shallow-violent Imposters") the function of which, as we shall see, is to allow judgements on what forms of life deserve "eternal death and annihilation." Carlyle was beginning to formulate a racial politics based on a *hierarchy of human worth* and the 'Irish Question' was to become the political fulcrum upon which his authority — as sovereign arbiter on life and death — apparently hinged.

38 Cited in, Duffy, *op. cit.*: 131.
After his brief excursion and in the wake of the European revolutions and an unspectacular uprising by the Irish nationalists, Carlyle quickly set down to work.\textsuperscript{39} In April and May of 1848 he produced a series of articles that appalled and annoyed many of his Irish acquaintances and prompted one Henry M'Cormac, a physician, philologist, and humanitarian from Belfast to reply.\textsuperscript{40} In these essays Carlyle asserts that repeal of the union between England and Ireland would be yet another instance of the British government shirking its “divine” responsibility to govern. Moreover, in arguing what was needed in Ireland is not less government but more government, Carlyle (as Vanden Bossche correctly perceives) was acting in a manner that is entirely consistent with his earlier writings. What is new, perhaps, is his belief that the messianic role Britain ought to play in Ireland must now include Carlyle.

Moreover, Carlyle's writings of this period demonstrate that Ireland not only needs saving from the Irish, so too does Britain. His writings continued to convey deep apprehension regarding the starving and pestilent Irish now arriving in their thousands on the shores of Britain. In his reply to the irate M'Cormac, Carlyle placates the latter by appealing to a mutual problem: “We are getting into fearful conditions on this side of the water, too, if nothing be done. The streets of London itself are getting studded with Irish beggars more thickly every day, presenting the ‘Irish Problem’, which no legislator will take up to the British community at large with intimation that they must either solve it or sink along with it to worse than death.”\textsuperscript{41} Later Duffy recalled Carlyle arguing more stringently: “Carlyle said, if there was dislike [for the Irish], it arose from the way Irish men conducted themselves in England. They often entitled themselves to disfavour by their private performances. Irishmen who knew better must teach these persons to live quite differently, and they ought not to feel the slightest necessity for championing blackguards because they happened to be Irishmen.” Duffy was quick to


\textsuperscript{41} Cited in, Tarr, \textit{op. cit.}: 256.
admonish, reminding Carlyle that he had only ever observed a population “resembling a famished crew just escaped from a shipwreck.”

The metaphors of disease, dirt and contagion are highly significant. As Hannah Arendt has pointed out, organic metaphors of a “sick society” can only promote violence in the end:

Nothing, in my opinion, could be theoretically more dangerous than the tradition of organic thought in political matters by which power and violence are interpreted in biological terms... the notion of a ‘sick society’ ... begins to sound ominously like a discussion between two physicians who debate the relative advantages of surgical as opposed to medical treatment of their patient. The sicker the patient is supposed to be, the more likely that the surgeon will have the last word.

In fact Carlyle frequently spoke in such biological terms. As early as Chartism he wrote of the Irish: “Such a people circulates not order but disorder, through every vein of it; — and the cure, if it is to be a cure, must begin at the heart; not in his condition only but in himself must the Patient be all changed.” Moreover it might be helpfully noted that this notion of the “sick society” has a long tradition in colonial thought on Ireland. In A View of the State of Ireland Edmund Spenser spoke of a “secret scourge which shall by her come unto England” while the character Eudox declares: “For were it not the part of a desperate phisitian to wish his diseased patient dead, rather than to apply the best indevour of his skill for his recovery?” Carlyle was contemplating much the same thing, almost in the same terms, at precisely the moment when a “secret scourge” was appearing in towns across the mainland. Moreover the perceived threat (“much to be feared”) of a diseased horde colonising Britain pressed Carlyle to act as sovereign arbiter on the ‘Irish Question.’

“Eternity’s commissioner”

Meanwhile, Carlyle’s hopes for a new social order were setback with the news that the 1848 revolutions in Europe had failed. In Paris a new government was reinstated after the dethronement of Louis Philippe while in Britain the crisis had not even been sufficient to unseat

42 Duffy, op. cit.: 455.
Lord Russell let alone provide an opening for Peel. Across the channel, the Young Ireland movement had been suppressed and Carlyle’s new confidant, Gavan Duffy, had been arrested and imprisoned. The potato blight which had been absent in 1847 reappeared. The Famine which the government declared over stalked the land once again. Temporarily undeterred, Carlyle decided that his ideas “might perhaps get nearer to some way of utterance if [he] were looking face to face upon the ruin and wretchedness that [is] prevalent” in Ireland. For some time he had thought about writing a book on Ireland: “Alas! a book is sticking in my Heart, which cannot get itself written at all; and till that be written there is no hope for peace or benefit for me anywhere.” In his journal on May 17th 1849 we find:

Am thinking of a tour of Ireland: unhappily have no call of desire that way, or any way, but am driven out somewhither (just now) as by the point of bayonets on my back. Ireland really is my problem; the breaking point of the huge suppuration which all British and European society now is. Set down in Ireland, one might at least feel, “Here is thy problem: In God’s name what wilt thou do with it?”

Initially the ‘Irish Question’ did not seem too perplexing to the Scotsman. In a fit of confidence he professed to Duffy: “Ireland is, this long while past, pretty satisfactorily intelligible to me — no phenomenon that comes across from it requiring too much explanation; but it seems worth while to look a little at the unutterable Curtius Gulf of British, and indeed European, things, which has visible broken there: in that respect, if not in another, Ireland seems to me the noblest

46 Vanden Bossche, op. cit.: 128-129.
47 Ibid.: 129.
48 Cited in, Duffy, op. cit.: 135.
of all spots in the world at present." What is notable about Carlyle's attitude at this time is his sheer lack of thought for the physical condition of the Irish people. Indeed the language Carlyle adopts suggests a profound withdrawal from the materiality of Irish suffering.

After a protracted flurry of dispatches, careful revision, and as usual, voracious preparatory reading, Carlyle began to define his second tour in Ireland (see Fig. 4.4).\(^5\) His correspondence with Duffy, who acted as his personal tour-guide for most of the journey, suggests his growing eagerness to begin his expedition. "Day after day," he writes, "the project is assuming a more practical form. Probably something really may come of it."\(^5\) Carlyle had already decided upon visiting the "famished Unions," Glendalough, Ferns, Enniscorthy, Doneraile and Wexford, to which he later added Dublin, Kildare, Maynooth and the "famine districts" to his must-see list.\(^5\) He was keen to assure Duffy of his necessary inclusion: "I mean that you shall initiate me into the methods of Irish travel, and keep me company so far as our routes, once fixed upon will go together. Your friendly cheerfulness, your knowledge of Ireland, all your goodness to me, I must make available. Define to yourself what it is you specially aim towards in travelling, that I may see how far without straining I can draw upon you."\(^5\) Carlyle was right to anticipate a degree of "straining" with Duffy who was an equally determined, self-confident and articulate character — but who did not, however, share the same politics.\(^5\)

Carlyle set sail for Dublin Bay on the last day of June in 1849. Never a content traveller ("Travelling suits me very ill, only the fruit of travelling is of some worth to me. Heaven, I think, among other things, will be a place where one has leave to sit still"), he was deeply

\(^{5}\) Cited in, Duffy, op. cit.: 135.
\(^{5}\) In a letter to Duffy dated May 29, 1849, Carlyle remarks that he has read Jocelyn's St. Patrick, St. Patrick's own Confessio and the "dreary commentaries" of the Bollandist's in preparation for a future tour in Ireland. Duffy, op. cit.: 136.
\(^{5}\) Cited in, Duffy, op. cit.: 136.
\(^{5}\) Cited in, Ibid.: 136-138.
\(^{5}\) Cited in, Ibid.: 139.
\(^{5}\) Duffy's relationship with Carlyle was at most times good-natured, although during his tour Carlyle did refer to him rather brusquely to his wife: "Indeed I rather think of parting with Duffy before long; who (in my sleepless state, he being a sleeper) does me almost as much ill as good. — He is beginning the Nation again [re-established in 1849]; is the idol, and sacred martyr of all the repeal population, which I think means all the mere-Irish population taken together, - something sadly canaillish in that kind of relation; but it shews me at present the inside of repeal, and has its worth for awhile." And again on the July 21: "I meant partly to have staid over Sunday, and bidden Duffy adieu by writing." By speech will do perhaps better; and that I rather think must soon do: his traitorhood [at this point Duffy had been charged with treason and imprisoned] is likely to be much in my way henceforth; nor is he otherwise worth much to me." Ryals and Fielding, op. cit. Vol. 24: 109, 140.
Figure 4.4: Thomas Carlyle's Second Tour of Ireland, 1849
unsuited for the physical nature of the journey. His well-known bouts of dyspepsia exacerbated the situation and often led to fickle and sharp mood swings. He describes himself as setting out from Scotland in “sad health and sad humour,” which Duffy thought was reason enough to absolve the cruel conclusions of his memoirs.

A few words are needed on the style, format and the context surrounding the publication of the travelogue. Carlyle did not begin to write *Reminiscences of my Irish Journey, 1849* until he had returned safely to his Chelsea home. His early hopes for an extensive treatise on the condition of Ireland proved to be drastically premature. Instead, aided only by hastily scribbled notes, a trove of letters, and the selective art of memory, Carlyle laboured hard between the 4th and 16th of October to bring to life the “ugly spectacle” he had encountered on his voyage. There is strong evidence to suggest that Carlyle countenanced this erratic method of work early in his tour. In a letter to his wife Jane dated July 8th, Carlyle instructs her to forward the letter to his brother Jack: “[y]es send it; - only bid Jack send it back to you, that it be not lost; for I cannot get the smallest leisure to jot a word on paper; and if this go on, all memorials of me on this expeditio may be useful one day.” The letters were to be preserved and organised for his return. To this suggestion Jane laconically remarked: “Mr Carlyle … is making me his human note-book for the moment.”

The circumstances surrounding the manuscript’s eventual publication are complicated. At some point Carlyle seems to have given the manuscript to Joseph Neumberg (a friend, who Duffy calls Carlyle’s “amanuensis”), who gave it to Thomas Ballantyne, who later sold it to an unidentified Mr. Anderson, from whom it eventually came to the publishers Sampson Low & Co. Carlyle died in 1881 and his memoir was published posthumously one year later. Duffy was quite sure that Carlyle would never have sanctioned its publication without serious revision and it should, therefore, have been suppressed. In an interesting twist however, Malcolm Brown claims that the decision to release the text originated in an anticipated “boost” for

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56 Cited in, Duffy, *op. cit.*: 127.
57 Carlyle’s illness was the subject of many letters; however, the physical and physiological strain became more marked in later life.
59 *Ibid.*: 119.
60 *Ibid.*: 95n; Duffy, *op. cit.*: 140. See also Froude’s preface to Carlyle, *op. cit.*: v-vii.
61 Duffy, *op. cit.*: 140-141.
Gladstone’s 1881 Irish Coercion Bill. If true this story certainly prolongs the geopolitical significance of the manuscript.62

The textual pattern of the document — Carlyle’s habit of excessive emphasis and exaggeration of speech; his highly idiosyncratic use of style (italics and capitalisation in particular) and frequent punctuation (comma, hyphen and semi-colon); his trenchant moralising and inappropriate humour — seem to incorporate the fitful physical nature of the expedition. However, Carlyle grumbled about much, and his Irish journey was no different. He complained of insomnia, the failure to procure “good food,” pitched battles with Duffy, and an inability to articulate the “wretchedness” of Irish life. Above all, I think, the document literally enacts the burden of a man who has recognised the stakes in the task he has assigned himself. Before he left for Ireland Carlyle revealingly wrote to Duffy: “In short, why shouldn’t I go and look at Ireland, and be my own (Eternity’s) commissioner there?”63 In a conflation that stands in line with his earlier writings (in particular his failed solicitation of Peel and his faith in theocratic government) Carlyle identifies himself with state power which was then in the throes of managing conditions of starvation, endemic disease, and mass emigration. Life and death were issues Carlyle condemned himself to decide.

**Governing starvation**

“The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away ... But what contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realization of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction.”


Ireland’s fortunes had changed for the worse since Carlyle’s first visit. The potato crop which failed in 1846, recovered in 1847, only to fail again in 1848 and 1849. Like most travellers, Carlyle arrived in Ireland during the summer months, which were the traditional season of distress. With the failure of the potato the scenes must have been awful in the extreme. Two days before Carlyle arrived, the government was administering Outdoor Relief to 784,367 destitute persons.64 As we have seen the policy overhaul under the new Whig administration

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62 Brown, *op. cit.*: 119.
63 Cited in, Duffy, *op. cit.*: 135.
meant that the greater cost of Famine relief would henceforth be met by local taxation. Both sides spoke of unsurpassed treachery. To Irish nationalists the call for “Irish property to support Irish poverty” nullified the Act of Union. If Ireland was actually an equal partner, why wasn’t the rest of British ‘property’ equally taxed to alleviate an equal burden? On the other hand, in Britain it was widely believed that when an Irish arm was extended it was out of want and not friendship. The bungled Irish uprising in 1848 and the continued evacuation of a diseased and starving population made it relatively easy for the popular press to depict the Irish as inherently treacherous, improvident and ungrateful (see Figures 4.5 and 4.6).  

Although the new Whig government led by Lord John Russell is usually considered as inaugurating a policy of ‘non-intervention’ it is perhaps more accurate to read this period of Anglo-Irish relations as an escalation in existing strategies of engagement. Most scholars overlook the crucial point that a policy of ‘non-intervention’ requires — paradoxically — a huge amount of will and interference.  

Government ministers, relief officials and public opinion had to be directed to the conclusion that the loss of human life is inescapable and, more significantly, this supposition must appear to be as ‘inevitable’ and ‘natural’ as famine itself. Indeed Giorgio Agamben’s theory that modern politics is based on an inclusion that is actually

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65 Peter Gray. "Punch and the Great Famine." *History Ireland* 1.3 (1993): 26-33. In 1849 Russell informed Clarendon: “The great difficulty this year respecting Ireland is one which does not spring from Trevelyan or Charles Wood but lies deep in the breasts of the British people. It is this — we have granted, lent, subscribed, worked, visited, clothed the Irish; millions of pounds worth of money, years of debate etc. — the only return is calumny and rebellion — let us not grant, clothe etc. any more and see what they will do.” Christine Kinealy. *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion.* Palgrave: New York, 2002: 88.

66 Bernstein states that there has been a lack of study of the post-1847 retreat from interventionism; particularly how this relates to the evolution of liberal attitudes toward the role of the state. He then makes the puzzling statement: “Understandably, these are not the concerns of Irish historians.” George L. Bernstein. "Liberals, the Irish Famine and the Role of the State." *Irish Historical Studies* 24.116 (1995): 514.
abandonment seems particularly appropriate here.\textsuperscript{67} "The day has gone for letting things take their course," declared Trevelyan, because "the necessity of self-preservation" disallows it.\textsuperscript{68} Ireland, he declared, needed "less politics and more ploughing."\textsuperscript{69} Likewise on the 5 March 1849 Robert Peel addressed the House of Commons: "I am quite willing to admit ... that the true lesson to teach a man who is able to work, and particularly an Irish man who is able to work, is that it is much better for him to rely upon his own exertions for his support, than to be dependent upon charity for the means of subsistence."\textsuperscript{70} By 1848 Carlyle had already begun to formulate his own version of this doctrine of decisive inaction:

Evidently there is nothing wanted but a just and good discernment as to this; for if the land and the people could be brought into true relation to one another, it seems admitted that there are ample resources then for them all; that there need not be, at this hour, one idle man in Ireland who could not handle his spade or hoe, and was willing to work. It is a tremendous reflexion that this should be the horrible fact, and that the actual one is what we see!\textsuperscript{71}

This "tremendous reflexion" points to two directions. First, it indicates Carlyle's belief in the salvation of humankind through earnest labour.\textsuperscript{72} Second, Carlyle's observations enact what Derek Gregory has called "imaginative cuts in the fabric of the world," which triumphantly partition a master culture from a dominated (and often feminised) nature.\textsuperscript{73} Carlyle's "true
relation” between nature (represented under the sign of “ample resources”) and culture
(represented under the sign of honest labour) was also entrenched within the ideology of
bourgeois mercantilism which was, to say the least, a fraught position for the “champion of
labour” to hold. Similar to a powerful section of the British political class, Carlyle instinctively
felt that the Irish needed more schooling. Neither man seemed to detect the aporia in their
argument: on the one hand, it was averred that Irish men and women ought to depend on their
own exertions; while, on the other hand, more and not less government was needed to achieve
this political objective. Trevelyan’s nostrum “less politics and more ploughing” was to be
achieved by more politics and less ploughing.

Moreover, Carlyle’s obsession with the cultivation of ‘wasteland’ reflects earlier travel
accounts of Ireland and an important aspect of colonial relations. As John Wilson Foster
explains, the old terms “bog-Irish” and “woodkerne” are revealing conflations that symbolise an
untamed and wild nature/people that have yet to be brought under the rule and thumb of colonial
order.74 What is novel here, however, is a dangerous suturing of racialist rationalizations to
existing environmentalist arguments. From the upper-deck of his ship en route to Dublin Bay,
Carlyle was still unusually optimistic noting that “if the Irish faculty be good, you can breed it,
put it among conditions which are fair or at least fairer.”75 By the close of his trip, however,
Carlyle had switched to terms far less flattering. In a not untypical example the Irish politician
Isaac Butt is described as a “terrible black burly son of earth: talent visible in him, but still more
animalism; big bison-head, black, not quite unbrutal: glad when he went off.”76 These racialist
conceptions calcified during Carlyle’s tour.

Once in Dublin Carlyle quickly sought out Duffy’s aid. Together they began their travels
over July and August which, according to Duffy’s testimony, was conducted almost always tête-
à-tête. In Kilkenny Carlyle was afforded his first opportunity to examine the workhouses —
those vast “citadels of mendicancy”77 — he so eagerly anticipated. His description is worth
citing:

75 Thomas Carlyle, op. cit.: 17.
76 Ibid.: 54. Elsewhere in Reminiscences Carlyle describes the Irish as “yellow-faced”; “clean-dirty face wrinkled
into stereotype”; “second-class”; “vernacular aspect”; “potato culture.” Ibid.: 2, 59, 64, 72, 73.
77 Ibid.: 204.
Workhouse; huge chaos, ordered “as one could;” ... Huge arrangements for eating, baking, stacks of Indian meal stirabout; 1000 or 2000 great hulks of men lying piled up within brick walls, in such a country, in such a day! Did a greater violence to the law of nature ever before present itself to sight, if one had an eye to see it? Schools, for the girls, rather goodish; for the boys, clearly bad; forward, impudent routine — scholar, one boy, with strong Irish physiognomy, — getting bred to be an impudent superficial pretender. So; or else sit altogether stagnant, and so far as you can, rot. Hospital: haggard ghastliness of some looks, - literally, their eyes grown “colorless” (as Mahomet describes the horror of the Day of Judgement); “take me home!” one half-mad was urging; a deaf-man; ghastly flattery of us by another, (his were the eyes): ah me! boys [sic] drilling, men still piled within their walls: no hope but of stirabout; swine’s meat, swine’s destiny (I gradually saw): right glad to get away.  

Later in their tour they visited Westport workhouse (located in an area more severely affected by the Famine) where Carlyle provides another extended commentary:

Human swinery has here reached its acme, happily: 30,000 paupers in this union, population supposed to be 60,000. Workhouse proper (I suppose) cannot hold more than 3 or 4,000 of them, subsidiary workhouses, and outdoor relief the others. Abomination of desolation; what can you make of it! Outdoor quasi-work: 3 or 400 big hulks of fellows tumbling about with shares, picks and barrows, “levelling” the end of their workhouse hill; at first glance you would think them all working; look

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78 Ibid.: 83-84.
nearer, in each shovel there is some ounce or two of mould, and it is all make-
believe; 5 or 600 boys and lads, pretending to break stones. Can it be charity to
keep men alive on these terms? In face of all the twaddle of the earth, shoot a man
rather than train him (with heavy expense to his neighbours) to be a deceptive
human swine.\textsuperscript{79}

Duffy recalled Carlyle's fierce indignation. He could not fathom "a greater
violence to the law of nature" than a workhouse where no one worked. The Union houses, as they were often
called, failed to 'unite' nature and culture. Carlyle thought it would be better to "shoot a man"
rather than allow him to become a human incumbrance on his neighbours. It's not clear who
"neighbours" refers to but it should be noted that at this time Ireland was largely footing its own
poor law bill.

Duffy countered that Carlyle's recriminations betray a serious misunderstanding of the
social and economic position of Ireland at this time. In the first place, those "big hulks of
fellows" were generally humiliated by the menial tasks they were forced to perform in order to
stay alive. Moreover, as we saw in chapter three, there were several additional reasons why the
Irish poor suddenly fell upon the workhouses including, the close of the soup kitchens, the
imposition of the Gregory Clause and the subsequent ejectments. Carlyle ignored or dismissed
this sort of social analysis, a practice which tested Duffy's patience though never his loyalty.
He remained convinced that the irredeemable spirit of the Irish character thwarted all attempts
toward improvement. Visiting Lord Kenmare's estate in Kerry, Duffy invited Carlyle to take
leave of their car and enter some hovels:

Bare, blue, bog without limit, ragged people in small force working languidly at
their scantlings or peats, no other work at all; look hungry in their rags; hopeless, air
as of creatures sunk beyond hope, look into one of their huts under pretence of
asking for draught of water; dark, narrow, two women nursing, other young woman
on foot as if for work; but it is narrow dark, as if the people and their life were
covered under the tub, or "tied in a sack"; all things smeared over too with liquid
green; - the cow (I find) has her habitation here withal. No water; the poor young
woman produces butter-milk; in real pity I give her a shilling. Duffy had done the
like in the adjoining cottage, ditto, ditto in Charcuter, with the addition that a man
lay in fever there. These were the wretchedest population I saw in Ireland. "Live,
sir? The Lord knows; what we can beg, and rob," (rob means scrape up; I suppose?):
Lord Kinmare's [sic] people, he never looks after them, leases worthless bog, and I
know not what. Bog all reclaimable, lime everywhere in it: swift exit to Lord
Kinmare and the leases, or whatever the accursed incubus is\textsuperscript{80}!

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.: 201-202.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.: 145-146.
Although the sight of the hovels visibly moved Carlyle, his harsh solution involved “laying a hearty horsewhip over that back of your’s [the Irish].” Vanden Bossche helpfully explains that Carlyle’s fondness for equine metaphors dates back to the 1830s. In *Sartor Resartus* Teufelsdröckh is described as a “colt” that has broken off the “neck-halter” when he discards the rule of the law and in *The French Revolution* the people are described as “gin-horses” who rear up when threatened with the “whip.” In regards to Ireland the metaphor found full service. After visiting another residence in Kerry, Carlyle informed Duffy that he often felt how alike the Irish were to his horse “Larry” that he kept at Craigenputtock in Scotland. Larry too, he opined, routinely broke into insubordination but was, on the whole, “generous, kindly, and affectionate.” Carlyle was (a little awkwardly) insisting that the Irish required firm masters. Duffy was having none of it, and quickly retorted that like the Irish Larry knew “when he was well treated, and had a decided objection to the perpetual whip and the spur.”

Moreover, Carlyle argued that the Irish were slaves of indolence rather than, as Duffy insisted, “serfs of a Parliament.” In December 1849 — five months after his second visit — Carlyle sent Duffy an essay entitled “Trees of Liberty,” which we may take as an accurate sample of his philosophy in this regard. With much satire, Carlyle beseeches all patriotic persons to plant one tree in the hope that Ireland will again be replete in woodland and industry. Thus “each man’s tree of industry will be, of a surety, *his* tree of liberty.” It must have been clear to many contemporaries that Carlyle was deliberately inverting an age-old association of nature as freedom:

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What is that in your hand?            It is a branch.
Of what?                             Of the Tree of Liberty.
Where did it first grow?             In America.
Where does it bloom?                 In France.
Where did its seeds fall?            In Ireland.
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82 Bossche, *op. cit.*: 134.
83 Duffy, *op. cit.*: 291-292.
84 *Ibid.*: 280, 290-292.
85 This essay was a response to Duffy’s own article in the *Nation* entitled “Wanted, A Few Workmen.” Both are reprinted in *Ibid.*: 434-437, 439-440.
87 As Whelan argues, the symbolism of the Tree of Liberty was easily grafted onto an existing “May bush” tradition, in which the colour green also had a powerful resonance. “In August 1795, soldiers had to be called out from Cork to Blarney ‘to prevent the planting of a tree of liberty, adorned with ribbons and mounted with a red cap by Irish caramagnoles.’ The tree was ‘a finely grown birch tree, the most stately found in the wood,’ and its planting was accompanied by ‘the playing of the Marseillaise, Reveil le Peuple, Ça Ira etc’ by a special requisitioned group
This sort of windy rhetoric — "terrible solecisms" — was, according to Carlyle, a blatant contravention of "the everlasting Acts of Heaven's Parliament!" Again Duffy pointed out that Carlyle's positions betrayed his ill-acquainted with Irish affairs. It was hopeless, Duffy said, to reforest a country where, if a tenant planted a sapling and tended it to maturity, the law declared it to be the property of the landlord. Carlyle remained unmoved. During his visit to Donegal, Carlyle lectured the well-known landlord Lord George Hill: "No hope for the men as masters; their one true station in the universe is servants, 'slaves' if you will; and never can they know a right day till they attain that." Clearly, Carlyle's belief in a divine ruling race allowed him to maintain his confidence in theocratic governance, but again it is worth emphasising that these blunt outbursts cannot easily be excused as personal ruminations or private political desires. Carlyle's support of colonisation — and emigration as a means to colonise 'wasteland' — was well-known and stretches as far back as Chartism (1839) and Past and Present. Furthermore in England, as Peter Gray's research ably shows, comparable ideas had been "thoroughly theorized, debated, experimented upon and publicly endorsed" by the eve of the Great Famine. During the Famine, political and scientific arguments about 'redundant' and 'surplus' populations blended very well with imperial codes concerned with defining inferior human species. In actual fact, the smoothness of this transition is evident in Carlyle reflections.

After visiting Killaloe in County Clare, Carlyle wrote: "everywhere in Ireland one finds that the 'Government,' far from stinginess in public money towards Ireland, has erred rather on the other side; making, in all seasons, extensive hives for which the bees are not yet found." As ever the metaphors are telling. Ireland is unregenerate because the Irish are degenerate. The problem is, therefore, one of genes and not geography as this extract illustrates:

89 Carlyle, op. cit.: 242-243.
90 Vanden Bossche, op. cit.: 114.
92 Thomas Carlyle, op. cit.: 178-179.
93 See also Foster. "Encountering Traditions." op. cit.: 28.
Ireland for the present is not to be accounted a pleasant landscape. Vigorous corn, but thistles and docks equally vigorous; ulcers of reclaimable bog-land lying black, miry and abominable at intervals of a few miles: no tree shading you, nor fence that avails to turn cattle — most fences merely, as it were, soliciting the cattle to be so good as to come through — by no means a beautiful country just now! ... Alas, it carries on it, as the surface of this earth ever does ineffaceably legible, the physiognomy of the people that have inhabited it: a people of holed breeches, dirty faces, ill-roofed huts — people of impetuosity and of levity — of vehemence, impatience, imperfect, fitful industry, imperfect fitful veracity. Oh, Heaven! there lies the woe of woes, which is the root of all.\textsuperscript{94}

These sorts of comments are common to other racialised nineteenth century accounts of Ireland. For instance, Thomas Campbell Foster — the “Times Commissioner” — wrote: “I have been over every part of Great Britain ... I have traversed the ‘Land’s end,’ in Cornwall, to ‘John-o’-Groat’s,’ in Caithness; but in no part of it have I seen the natural capabilities surpass those of Ireland, and in no part of it have I seen those natural capabilities more neglected, less cultivated, more wasted, than in Ireland.”\textsuperscript{95} Perhaps unsurprising then that Campbell Foster also concluded that “the people must be taught, and led and encouraged — nay, forced on to do that which will benefit themselves.”\textsuperscript{96} Indeed this logic complements the political hand-wringer of Lord Russell’s administration which had now embraced the callous logic that when faced with a degenerate peasantry determined inaction was the most legitimate course:

There can nothing be done, then, for the poor Irish people at present? Nothing by express enactment or arrangement; but they must follow the dumb law of their positions and sink, sink, till they do come upon a rock? I rather judge so ... Well, there is no help; we must all get down to the rocks; we are in a place equivalent to Hell ... Five-and-thirty years of parliamentary stump oratory, all ending in less than nothing; now let us try drill-sergeantry a little even under these sad terms.\textsuperscript{97}

Again the militant language is revealing. Caryle’s point is that doing nothing is an act of legitimate “drill-sergeantry.” Carlyle was working toward the idea of improvement through abandonment. This was the political doctrine of “Dr. Anti-Cant” — “wisdom bought at the cost of a million Irish lives,” according to literary critic Malcolm Brown.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{94} Cited in, Duffy, \textit{op. cit.}: 439-440.  
\textsuperscript{95} Thomas Campbell Foster. \textit{Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland}. London: Chapman and Hall, 1847: 49, 218.  
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Ibid.}: 296.  
\textsuperscript{97} Cited in, \textit{Ibid.}: 452.  
\textsuperscript{98} Brown, \textit{op. cit.}: 119.
It is hugely significant that Carlyle never did write an extensive book on Ireland. He concluded his journey “farther from speech on any subject than ever.” His imaginary, which secures Ireland’s salvation in death and which he likens to a “resurrection from the dead,” is little more than an extension of his earlier aspiration for a new theocratic figurehead. 

Carlyle did, however, develop his racial opinions in a series of pamphlet publications. “The Negro Question” and *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, draw upon Carlyle’s experiences in Ireland and his renewed faith in the necessity of slavery. Many of Carlyle’s close friends (including Mill, Emerson and Mazzini) were horrified by the tone and sentiment of these arguments. Carlyle was unapologetic and in typical fashion he responded by republishing “The Negro Question” under the revised and purposefully more provocative title “The Nigger Question.” After his return from Ireland, Carlyle once again confided in Emerson:

What is to be done? Asks everyone; incapable of hearing an answer, were there even one ready for imparting to him. ‘Blacklead those two million idle beggars’, I sometimes advised, ‘and sell them to Brazil as Niggers, — perhaps parliament, on constraint, will allow you to advance them as Niggers!’ — In fact the Emancipation Societies should send over a deputation or two to look at these immortal Irish “Free men,” the *ne-plus-ultrà* of their class: it would perhaps moderate the windpipe of much eloquence one hears on that subject! Is not the most illustrious of all ‘ages’; making progress of the species at a grand rate indeed?

Talk of freedom was inexcusable because it promoted sympathy (“cant”), the very qualities that had allowed places like the West Indies and Ireland to drift ‘free’ into barbarism: “really is there any such totally accursed sin as that (with no redeeming side at all): or even such general, nay universal one, in this illustrious thrice-hopeful epoch of Free Press, Emancipation, Toleration, Uncle Tom’s cabin, and the rest of it?” The “Divine Drill-Sergeant,” and “steel whips” could only “teach poor canting slaves to do a little of the things they eloquently say (and even know) everywhere, and leave undone.” However, even to Carlyle who began writing *Reminiscences*

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99 Cited in, Vanden Bossche, *op. cit.*: 129.
103 Mackenzie, *op. cit.*: 219-36.
105 Cited in, Duffy, *op. cit.*: 577.
as a “preparation for action” such words must have appeared to be little more than self-deprecating.\textsuperscript{107}

It is interesting to speculate a bit more on the likely cause of Carlyle’s ultimate ‘silence’ on Ireland (again it is worth emphasising that this was a remarkably voluble silence). Undoubtedly the old problems of political economy frustrated him. A short extract from his visit to Westport sufficiently illustrates:

No rents; little or no stock left, little cultivation, docks, thistles; landlord sits in his mansion, for reasons, except on Sunday: we hear of them ‘living on the rabbits of their own park.’ Society is at an end here, with the land uncultivated, and every second soul a pauper. – “Society” here would have to eat itself, and end by cannibalism in a week, if it were not held up by the rest of our empire still standing afoot!\textsuperscript{108}

The trope of cannibalism suggests much, especially in the historical context of famine. This extract has, however, other legitimate readings. The Irish body (in both the corporeal and socio-political sense) is clearly stigmatised because of its precarious relationship to free market imperialism. “Talk again England versus Ireland,” Carlyle wrote after another “vinaigrous” argument with Duffy, “a sad unreasonable humour pervading all the Irish population on this matter — ‘England does not hate you at all, nor love you at all; merely values and will pay you according to the work you can do!’”\textsuperscript{109} In line with bourgeois moral standards, human value and worth are assigned a price tag. The Irish are a ‘redundant’ people because they have failed to fulfil their end of the “capitalist symbolic contract” which, as one scholar put it, coldly dictates that they “contribute to the production of profits or starve.”\textsuperscript{110} These developments are crucial because they map a patent shift in Carlyle’s position from a moral critic of laissez-faireism to a staunch advocate of agrarian capitalism. By this reading Carlyle, the former “champion of labour,” has in fact worded himself into a corner.

This development should not be too surprising.\textsuperscript{111} As early as Chartism — and thus before his visits to Ireland — Carlyle had written: “A people [the Irish] that knows not to speak

\begin{footnotes}
\item[107] Carlyle, \textit{op. cit.}: 1.  \\
\item[108] Ibid.: 206.  \\
\item[109] Ibid.: 53.  \\
\item[111] In this context we might note Vanden Bossche’s remark that Carlyle’s anticipation that he would find little or no new knowledge in Ireland was not only fulfilled but desperately desired, \textit{op. cit.}: 129.
\end{footnotes}
the truth, and to act the truth, such people has departed from even the possibility of well-being. Such people works no longer on Nature and Reality; works now on Phantasm, Simulation, Nonentity; the result it arrives at is naturally not a thing but no-thing, — defect even of potatoes.”

Carlyle’s words are arresting. Here the famished Irish body — a “nonentity,” “not a thing but no-thing” — is discursively stripped down to what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life.” According to Agamben’s definition, bare life marks the site of an “incessant decision on value and non-value” — exactly the task Carlyle assigned himself as “Eternity’s commissioner” in Ireland. This debate on human value and non-value — which for Carlyle is inseparable from environmental and racial factors — marks his passage into the domain of biopower and capitalist political economy, two of the more powerful forces directing the course of the Irish Famine. Clearly this is also the domain of geopolitics and for this reason Melissa Fegan is surely correct in maintaining that certain travel writings are in fact “the literary equivalent of an estate clearance.”

**Conclusion: the language of legitimation.**

In her treatise *On Violence* Hannah Arendt warned of the immense dangers of talking in non-political, organic terms. These dangers are particular great, she says, where the racial issue is involved. “Racism, white or black, is fraught with violence by definition because it objects to natural organic facts — a white or black skin — which no persuasion or power could change; all one can do, when the chips are down, is to exterminate their bearers.” Hence she maintained that organic terms, such as the notion of a “sick society” can only promote violence in the end:

> The sicker the patient is supposed to be, the more likely that surgeon will have the last word. Moreover, so long as we talk in non-political, biological terms, the glorifiers of violence can appeal to the undeniable fact that in the household of nature destruction and creation are but two sides of the natural process, so that collective, violent action ... may appear as natural a prerequisite for the collective life of mankind as the struggle for survival and violent death for continuing life in the animal kingdom.

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113 Agamben, *op. cit.*: 153.


116 *Ibid.*: 75.
It is interesting to note just how closely this method of legitimising violence was deployed by Carlyle. In his thinking on Ireland the notion of the diseased body, a “sick society” and the concept of social regeneration are all powerfully present — as is the promotion of violent political action. “The time has come,” he declared, “when the Irish population must either be improved a little, or else exterminated.” The literal force of this argument may help explain why his writings invariably take the form of preaching rather than presentation. Indeed, his discursive strategy exactly corresponds to David Scott’s model of “colonial governmentality” whereby reason is given an explicitly “prescriptive and programmatic mission,” which entails “striking uncompromisingly at the presumed foundation of [human] error.”

Driven by the imperatives of social regeneration, Carlyle is asserting what sort of place Ireland ought to become and how Irish men and women ought to behave. We have moved from description to normative concerns and to this end Carlyle’s ideas find their most explicit appeal and expression in the delegation of state power now focused on re-forming subjectivities and re-territorialising social space. Indeed, when Duffy wrote that “the famine and the landlords have actually created a new race in Ireland” he certainly wasn’t, as some critics maintain, submitting to Carlyle’s racialist arguments. On the contrary, Duffy was trying to come to terms with a “repressed topography of cruelty” made immediate and public in the evident misery of the famished Irish. In contrast, Carlyle’s discourse — focusing as it does on non-political, biological terms — stifles the economic and socio-political context of this suffering by paring it back to functional, limit categories like ‘deserving’ life on which judgments are made. It was on exactly these points that Duffy and Carlyle argued so vociferously. By Carlyle’s logic sacrifices are deemed necessary because what are destroyed are not human beings, but “human

117 Cited in, John P. Harrington, ed. The English Traveller in Ireland: Accounts of Ireland and the Irish through Five Centuries. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1991: 255. For similar reasons Carlyle has been called an intellectual ancestor of Fascism. Park, op. cit.
120 Duffy, op. cit.: 120.
121 Mbembe, op. cit.: 40.
incumbrances” that no longer retain any value. In this sense, Carlyle was creating the political syntax for what Fiona Mackenzie calls “the language of legitimation.”

Moreover, as Arendt points out, where organic metaphors are promoted human destruction becomes practically indistinguishable from improvement in the collective life of humankind. In Chartism Carlyle spoke of “extermination” or “improvement,” but by the end of his tour in Ireland he saw both positions as virtually indistinguishable. Perhaps in some sense this also contributed to Carlyle’s ‘silence.’ After discovering that the Irish should be let die in order to commence the regeneration of Irish society what else was there to say? After all, as Cormac Ó Gráda has perceptively noted, “the rhetoric of fatalism is silence.” Like government policies under the Whigs, this position was a logical and rational consequence of nascent racism.

It is impossible to entirely ignore Carlyle’s conclusions. As Peter Park explains, “Carlyle was no marginal figure, no obscure crackpot agitator, but a respected and influential Victorian British historian and social critic, admired as a prophet of moral earnestness and social concern even by contemporaries who disagreed with most of his specific philosophical and political views.” Although, Carlyle can hardly be considered to be a ‘typical’ traveller to Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, his way of thinking does express a more general and advanced mode of racialising the ‘Irish Question.’ One sees precisely these calculations plainly in the ‘Times Commissioner’ reports printed to a large audience as the famine unfolded. The author endorses the same biological metaphors, the same preaching tone, and above all an identical faith in the logic of violence when dealing with the Irish. The following extract is a representative sample: “I do not hesitate to state my conviction, from what I saw and from what I learned, that for the greater part of the severity of this unhappy calamity, the people of Ireland have themselves to blame, and their own disgraceful apathy and laziness. But the Government ought to know this is their character, and ought to have taken measures to drive them on, if they were too lazy and

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125 Park, op. cit.: 18.
apathetic to follow when led.” In designating himself “(Eternity’s) commissioner” Carlyle was merely taking the logic of the “Times Commissioner” to its reasonable limit. Thus these pronouncements direct us to the geopolitical realm of governmentality and biopolitics, areas sorely neglected in the study of the Great Irish Famine. If tolerable sacrifice was an ideology introduced through the ruse of necessity, then it is history’s record — “the central reality of the Famine itself” — that necessity preached the ruin of “more than a million people under conditions of hunger, disease and indignity.”

126 Foster also shared Carlyle’s abhorrence of Irish “oratorical elegancies”: “How many rigmarole speeches in Conciliation-hall will manufacture one bale of cloth?” op. cit.: 404, 443.

Conclusions
Hungry tremors

“...and has been since decreasing, the results of the Irish census of 1851 are, on the whole, satisfactory, demonstrating as they do the general advancement of the country.”

— Reports of the Commissioners Appointed to take the Census for Ireland for the Year 1851.

“... our brothers of starvation:... Where is hope for us, or comfort, or salvation? Where, oh, where?”

— Jane Francesca “Speranza” Wilde, The Voice of the Poor.

A long haemorrhage

That the Great Famine had an enormous impact on Irish life is hardly in doubt. Besides the devastating loss of life there is the sustained socio-economic haemorrhage of mass emigration. Getting out of famine stricken Ireland was for many a matter of life and death. Between 1846 and 1850 approximately one million people left the country, and this figure was to nearly double over the next four years. By 1891 almost two out of every five persons born in Ireland (38.3 percent) were living outside the country. 1 Today, with 5 million people, the island of Ireland remains a “demographic exception”: the only country in Europe whose population is less than it was 150 years ago. Although pre-Famine emigration was significant, the suffering during the eighteen-forties established emigration “as part of the life-cycle of nineteenth-century Ireland” — what Ó Gráda accurately referred to as the “new normality.” 2

The culture and language of the people were also victims of this massive dislocation. The majority of emigrants came from rural, Gaelic-speaking areas of Ireland. Indeed, by 1851

the number of Irish speakers had already halved.³ This fast spiralling trend continued unabated.

It has been suggested that half the population in 1800 spoke Irish.⁴ By the end of the century the number of Irish speakers had dwindled to a mere 600,000 native speakers. To address the loss of the Gaelic language is to deal with the ‘death of the signifier’ far more seriously than postmodernists usually allow. “After the event,” as Terry Eagleton reminds us, “there were villages which could still speak Irish but didn’t; it was considered bad luck.”⁵ In Connemara William Wilde (the playwright’s father) observed the operation of the “tally-stick,” a rigorous system used to enforce the adoption of English.⁶ The English language became associated with socio-economic mobility while Irish increasingly symbolised backwardness, illiteracy and impoverishment. The incentives to retain the Irish language were dying. Today the Republic of Ireland remains the only European state to have gained its independence without recovering its hereditary language.

The systematic assault on the Irish diet, and the potato in particular, was somewhat successful. These results were achieved as part of a larger transformation in Irish agriculture from labour-intensive tillage to pastoral productions. By the end of the nineteenth century the acreage under potatoes and grain had halved as cattle, sheep and poultry played an increased role in the agricultural economy.⁷ In 1850 livestock amounted to £11.2 million of Irish agricultural output. By 1870 the share had risen to almost £29 million, or 71 percent of the total agricultural production.⁸ We have already seen (chapter three) that the Irish Famine substantially transformed the landholding system, noting also that the most immediate and biggest loses were dealt to the smallest holdings.⁹ Christine Kinealy states that one in every four agricultural holdings disappeared during the famine, most of them being less than 15 acres.¹⁰ In an important article on landscape change Kevin Whelan argues that “The privatisation and linearization of landscape spread a logical lattice of ladder farms over the west of Ireland.

³ Kinealy, A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 151.
⁴ Ó Gráda cites Garrett Fitzgerald’s figure. Ó Gráda, Black ’47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 216.
⁸ Kennedy, et al., op. cit.: 193.
⁹ The caveats I identified in chapter three apply to these figures as well.
¹⁰ Kinealy, A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 153.
obliterating the earlier informal networks of the rundale system." Indeed, the dispersal of the clachan system and destruction of rundale farming — based as they were on customary and collective modes of living — were the objective of Lord Hill’s celebrated “improvements” which won for him Thomas Carlyle’s admiration and respect (see Figure C.1). It is clear that the decimation of cottiers and small farmers facilitated the turn toward larger and more commercialised farming productions. Indeed, John Mitchel’s account of the Irish Famine ends by evoking Jonathan Swift’s macabre image of sheep replacing people: “the more sheep we have, the fewer human creatures are left to wear the wool or eat the flesh. Ajax was mad when he mistook a flock of sheep for his enemies; but we will never be sober until we have the same way of thinking.” Certainly some displaced tenants gave credence to this view: on the estate of Lord Hill, hundreds of sheep were savagely attacked in response to his clearances. “This fine old Celtic race is about being crushed to make room for Scotch and English sheep,” complained ten local priests in an appeal sent to Parliament. The view expressed by Lord Hill in his celebrated pamphlet Facts from Gweedore could not be more different: “The Irish people have profited much by the famine, the lesson was severe; but so rooted were they in their old prejudices and old ways, that no teacher could have induced them to make the changes which this visitation of Divine Providence has brought about, both in their habits of life and in their mode of agriculture.”

These livelihood developments also consolidated the power of the Irish merchant class who more or less successfully resisted any suggestion that the government ought to provide cheap food during the hungry eighteen-forties. Moreover, clearly some Irish landlords accumulated capital through the dispossession of others. In this sense the Irish Famine seems typical of many other famines where the differential geography of destitution leaves behind a

13 Catherine Nash provides an illuminating discussion of how these “visionary geographies” were intensely debated in post-famine period. For instance, Nash cites William Bulfin’s rejection of the “bullockdom, grazierdom, and grazierocracy” which he believed to have followed in the wake of conquest. Nash also shows how alternative visions animated the discourse of Irish nationhood and rural reform. Catherine Nash. “Visionary Geographies: Designs for Developing Ireland.” History Workshop Journal 45 (1998): 56.
16 Lord George Hill, op. cit.: xv.
Fig 1

Illustration of the evil of unrestricted subdividing farms and the difficulty of its correction afterwards.

This Downland contains 303 acres formerly held by 2 but now occupied by 322 lots by 289 tenants. 3 of whose scattered holdings are shown in different colours.

CLACHAN

Fig 2

Shows the arrangement proposed by the Proprietor, without turning out any tenant, and giving to each tenant one lot equivalent to his former scattered holdings.

Figure C.1: The Visionary Geography of an Improving Landlord

Source: Hill 1971 [1887]
tense faminescape of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ that burns deep into the consciousness of those who survive. Again the folk archive, although subjective — in fact precisely because it is so subjective — is indicative of these long, hungry tremors.

Kevin Whelan also argues — a little less convincingly — that a certain iron entered the Irish soul after the Famine period, although evidence collected elsewhere seems to suggest that communal life was deeply affected.19 Hugh Dorian observed his native Donegal as a place where “Friendship was forgotten [and] men lived as if they dreaded each other.”20 Fears of contagion and the terrors of fever and cholera led to cruel instances of stigmatisation and social outcasting. Communal attachments could be forged and mired around the (mis)fortunes of aid — who got it and who didn’t — and the shunning of stricken relatives and friends was a brutal debasement not easily forgotten.21 Certain episodes recorded in Cathal Póirtéir’s collection of folk memories — especially the ‘moral lore’ detailing how mean acts carried a curse to the wrongdoer — seem to suggest that communal attachments shuddered in the wake of the disaster.22 Perhaps Kevin Whelan is right about a certain amount of cynicism in the post-Famine period. William J. Smyth argues that the Famine forged a society where “extreme caution in property transfers” led to the deliberate deferral of marital relations.23 One contemporary ballad refers to young couples preferring to spend their dowries on a passage to America.24

Religious and political life was also impacted. According to Kinealy the decrease in population led to a higher proportion of priests to people resulting in greater clerical control.25 Allegations of ‘souperism’ (that is, making religious conversion a condition of aid during the

19 The possibilities and difficulties with the folk archive are helpfully discussed in Ó Gráda. Black ’47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 194ff.
21 Ó Gráda. Black ’47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 211.
23 Smyth, op. cit.: 8. Ó Gráda cites these words from an Irish ballad: “Ní Bheidh I Éirinn ach daoine aosta, I mbun staic ag aoireacht cois fallaf i ndrúcht; Ní bheidh pósaadh in aon bhall ná suim ina dhéanamh, Ach ‘tabhair dom an spré’ agus ‘raghad anonn’ [Ireland will be left with only the elderly, tending livestock by wall in the morning dew; there will be no marriages, nor interest in them, but ‘give me the dowry’ and I’ll head off.’]” Ó Gráda. Black ’47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 226.
24 The song is called “Amhrain an Ghorta” (The Famine Song) and is discussed by Ó Gráda. Black ’47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 221-22.
Famine), although now regarded as widely embellished, ignited ancient prejudices and contributed to acute devotional cleavages. What K. T. Hoppen called the “contours of rural society” were rapidly polarising and this also spilled over into politics. In Ireland the pre-Famine political scene was dominated by the Repeal movement led by the Catholic landlord Daniel O’Connell. However, it is often forgotten that the movement also attracted diverse figures in terms of religious creed. Prominent men included the Protestant poet Thomas Davis, the Catholics Charles Gavan Duffy and James Fintan Lalor, later joined by the Presbyterian republican John Mitchel and the Protestant landowner William Smith O’Brien. Of course there is a real danger of painting a consensus where cleavages were more important and there were real and significant differences between the physical force tradition of the Young Irelanders and the ‘moral force’ of O’Connell’s Repeal agitation. Nonetheless the wane of the Repeal movement, marked by the death of O’Connell and the transportation of many of the most influential leaders of the Young Irelanders, created a political void that was filled along more overtly sectarian lines. During the Famine the Rate-in-Aid programme was especially resented by the less destitute unions in the north-east where rate-payers question why they had to support the “improvidence” of the stricken western regions. In the post-famine period the economy in the north-east steamed past the rest of the country (riding the crest of the linen and shipbuilding industry), and seemingly vindicating these earlier assumptions. Irish unionists looked to British civic institutions as the guarantee of their freedoms whereas Irish nationalists increasingly demanded political independence. Both ideologies were coloured by devotional creeds, but they were also defined by their different imaginings of the traumas of the Irish past. In this respect the Irish Famine became, amongst other things, a resource for political manoeuvrings.


28 As Hoppen helpfully observes: “For Lalor the ‘people’ were essentially the farmers; for Davis they were Celtic rustics rather than deracinated townsfolk; for O’Connell they were, above all else, Catholics.” Ibid.: 35.

29 Daniel O’Connell died of ill health en route to Rome in 1847. He was seventy-two years old. John Mitchel, Thomas Francis Meagher, and William Smith O’Brien were tried for sedition and transported. John Blake Dillon fled to the United States. Between July 1848 and April 1849 Charles Gavan Duffy was arraigned five times, without conviction. Eventually, in April 1849, he was discharged. Believing that there was no hope left for the Irish cause he departed for Australia with his family, where he began an illustrious political career which saw him work closely with the Crown.

30 Kinealy. The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.: 216.
This is especially evident in the post-famine development of Irish nationalism. Indeed, some of the more important personalities were profoundly shaped by the event. For instance, Isaac Butt played a major role in the Home Rule movement and Michael Davitt, born in 1846, claimed to remember his family being evicted from their County Mayo home when he was just four years old. On a wider level, however, the Great Famine catapulted the ‘land question’ into British politics. The demand for the so-called three F’s — fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale — became the platform for popular politics as Parnellite nationalism mobilised a “rhetoric that equated the cause of the tenant farmer with that of the Irish people.”31 In other words, the demands of agrarian radicals like Lalor and Mitchel were mainstreamed as ownership of the soil was made into a national cause. These developments are inconceivable without the devastation of the Great Famine.

Famines, as Cormac Ó Gráda has concluded, “disappear from history with a whimper not a bang.”32 This certainly seems to be the case in the Irish experience. However, it was and is the ‘bang’ itself that remains so controversial. As might be expected the precise number of famine deaths has played a significant role in nationalist historiography. As in so many instances we ought to begin with John Mitchel who accused the government’s census commissioners of underestimating the number of Irish who died during the Great Famine. Mitchel shows how the census commissioners place the emigration of ten years (computed from data collected in 1841 and 1851) against the population loss of five years (1846-51) whilst failing to account for the births that would have taken place between 1841 and 1851. Mitchel estimates that one and half million perished, but adds that “This is without computing those who were born in the five famine years, whom we may leave to be balanced by the deaths from natural causes in the same period.”33 In registering these criticisms, Mitchel raises a problem that has troubled many economic historians since: should “averted births” be counted as part of the excess mortality during the Famine? More recently Joel Mokyr has circumvented this part of

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32 Ó Gráda. Black '47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 230. The Irish novelist Brendan Behan wrote: “Maybe they say that we Irish have long memories but the famine is not the kind of thing that can be forgotten in a day or a year.” Cited in, Andrew MacLaran. Dublin: The Shaping of a Capital. London: Belhaven Press, 1993: 52.
33 Mitchel, op. cit.: 218-219. Mitchel’s crude estimate is close to Mokyr’s upper-bound figure of almost 1.5 million deaths. In fairness, however, the Census Commissioners were not unaware that their estimate, “without making any allowance for a natural and ordinary increase of population, conveys but very inadequately the effect of the visitation of famine and pestilence.” Mitchel was clearly taking aim at a particular form of governmentality thoroughly on show in the Commissioners’ final remarks cited at the beginning of this chapter. Cited in George Nicholls. A History of the Irish Poor Law. 1856. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967: 387.
the controversy by presenting two sets of estimates. According to Mokyr excess morality for the period 1846-51 amounted to 1,082,000 persons if averted births are excluded and to 1,498,000 if averted births are included.\textsuperscript{34}

Mokyr’s analysis is widely regarded as the best estimate to date. This does not mean that his figures are unproblematic. In fact Mokyr registers a number of “ambiguities” some of which have been discussed by James Donnelly. However, Donnelly skips over one of Mokyr’s most important qualifications. Most computations of excess mortality — including John Mitchel’s simple estimate — assume that mortality and emigration were mutually exclusive. In other words, excess mortality rates are usually calculated by subtracting the number of emigrants. As Mokyr recognises: “The procedure employed completely ignores all those who died at sea or

shortly after arrival due to famine-related causes."\textsuperscript{35} Given the fact that emigrant mortality rates could be quite high during the Famine — as high as 17 per cent among emigrants to British North America in 1847 — this clearly lends a downward bias to Mokyr’s estimates.\textsuperscript{36}

It seems all too easy to get bogged down in this sort of analysis and it is worth emphasising that it was not the issue of “averted births,” or the vicissitudes of subtracting emigrants from population estimates, that outraged the critics of government during the famine years. On record are the strong protestations of parliament members who highlighted the fact that the administration was making no efforts to file returns on the number of Irish that were then dying of famine and famine related-illnesses.\textsuperscript{37} In the House of Commons in early 1847 the leader of the opposition, George Bentinck, repeatedly challenged the government on the extent of Irish mortality. The government’s initial rebuttal took the line that returns on deaths were seldom kept, even by religious organisations. Bentinck countered that this was untrue and that Archbishop MacHale could readily furnish the government with the records kept by the Catholic clergy. The government declined the offer on the grounds that the figures would likely be “conjectural.” At this point the Prime Minister entered the debate to point out that public servants were stretched enough and any robust efforts to tally the dead would be an inefficient use of staff time. In response to this Bentinck’s close ally, Benjamin Disraeli suggested that if a return had been requested on pig and poultry supplies it would have been speedily obliged. A similar charge was echoed on the other side of the channel by Isaac Butt: “How is it that the GRAND INQUEST of the nation has made no inquiry as to the death of thousands of the people?”\textsuperscript{38} In parliament the critics might have lost the argument but not without registering a

\textsuperscript{35} Mokyr, op. cit.: 266.

\textsuperscript{36} It is clear that deaths were regionally and socially determined with the highest levels of mortality in the impoverished west and the lowest levels in the east and north east of the country. According to Ó Gráda children under the age of ten years and adults over sixty were especially vulnerable. Although they amounted to less than one-third of the population, they made up an estimated three-fifths of the deaths. Moreover, Mokyr’s figures produce the “tentative conclusion” that the degree of dependence on the potato “mattered little” in determining the extent of excess mortality within Ireland. Of more significance seems to be the fact that those who died tended to be illiterate, often Gaelic-speaking, with desperately low levels of income. Donnelly, "Excess Mortality", op. cit.: 352, 356; Kinealy, A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 151; Mokyr, op. cit.: 271, 275; Cormac Ó Gráda, The Great Irish Famine. London: Macmillan, 1989: 50.

\textsuperscript{37} This neglect is curiously overlooked by most modern historians, even though it was vehemently protested at the time. Christine Kinealy’s research is an important exception. Indeed what follows draws heavily on Kinealy. The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.: 49.

crucial point. It was difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Irish dead were uncounted because Irish deaths did not count.\(^{39}\)

These protestations remind us that the reaction to the Great Irish Famine has always been conflicting and divergent. This holds equally true for the comments of bureaucrats, politicians and eye-witnesses during the Famine as it does for more recent historiography. Those who played a positive role in determining the state’s response usually tend to minimise government culpability. Charles Trevelyan’s *The Irish Crisis* is an obvious case in point. Not only is the government’s handling of the “crisis” commended; the horrific suffering is coolly embraced as an unfortunate necessity in the socio-economic regeneration of Ireland. More recently it has been suggested that too many accounts focus on Trevelyan’s influence.\(^{40}\) The charge is perhaps fair, but the implication is certainly overstated. Indeed, Peter Gray’s work convincingly demonstrates that Trevelyan’s brand of evangelical providentialism had a broad base in the more important government offices.\(^{41}\) However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these policies — and ideologies — also had their opponents. For example, when the government announced its new rate-in-aid policy, the Irish Poor Law Commissioner Edward Twisleton resigned in protest. The Lord Lieutenant wrote to the Prime Minister in private: “He thinks that the destitution here is so horrible, and the indifference of the House of Commons to it so manifest, that he is an unfit agent of a policy that must be one of extermination ... Twisleton feels that as Chief Commissioner he is placed in a position ... which no man of honour and humanity can endure.”\(^{42}\) Urged to account for his resignation before a Select Committee Twisleton left the following account for posterity: “I wish to leave distinctly on record that, from want of sufficient food, many persons in these unions are at present dying or wasting

\(^{39}\) This point has been made in other colonial situations. See Derek Gregory. *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.


\(^{42}\) Cited in, Woodham-Smith, *op. cit.*: 378.
away; and, at the same time, it is quite possible for this country to prevent the occurrence there of any death from starvation, by the advance of a few hundred pounds.”

George Nicholls was also opposed to the Rate-in-Aid Act and the deliberate effort “to make the property of Ireland answerable for the relief of Irish poverty.” In his important account of the Irish Poor Law he wrote:

We have seen the calamities to which Ireland had been exposed by the successive failures of the potato crop. Such failures were unprecedented and exceptional. The calamity had been designated as imperial; and if it were so, there would be no violation in principle, but rather the fulfilment of a duty, in one part of the empire coming to the assistance of the other. It was in fact a common cause, and was so regarded throughout England, until the repeated failures caused apprehensions as to the perpetuity of the burden, and seemed to point to the necessity of compelling the Irish to abandon the treacherous potato, which it was thought they would hardly do, so long as they could turn to England for help whenever it failed them. The rate-in-aid was calculated to effect this object, by casting the consequences of the failure entirely upon Ireland itself, which in such case would be unable to persist in its reliance upon a crop so treacherous and uncertain as the potato.

Nicholls was no champion of the Irish case, but on the issue of famine being a “common cause” his words echo Isaac Butt’s criticisms regarding the convenient setting aside of the Act of Union.

Eye-witnesses were very often profoundly affected by the scenes before them. Between Cratloe and Six-Mile-Bridge in County Clare, Spenser Hall met a starving men in front of their cabins: “They told me that they were almost unable to dig for want of food; that when the land was dug they would still be in the great difficulty of not knowing how to get seed to put into it; that it was quite certain they would not be able to afford potatoes; but that, as a greater breadth of parsnips than potatoes could be sown for the same money, they were doing their best to prepare the ground, on the forlorn hope that something unforeseen might occur to enable them at last to get a little parsnip seed.” Hall was obviously moved by their plight: “That evening, to the family I was visiting, my conduct must have seemed unaccountable. It was not merely what

43 Cited in, Kinealy. *A Death-Dealing Famine*, op. cit.: 145.
45 As we have seen Butt spoke in rousing terms about the failure of the imperial legislature and the calculated efforts to allow Irish poverty to “eat up” Irish property.
I had seen, but what was indicated by it as prevailing over a great part of the country, that was present to my feelings; and I sat at the table quite dumb, for had I attempted expression at all, it could only have been in compulsive weeping; and from that hour I resolved to return and plead in England, however humbly, the cause of Ireland among my countrymen.  

The Quaker accounts of the Famine are very similar: pity often making way for incomprehension and anger. “Ten thousand’ people within forty-eight hours journey of the metropolis of the world,” wrote James Hack Tuke, “living or rather starving upon turnip-tops, sand-eels, and sea-weed, a diet which no one in England would consider fit for the meanest animal which he keeps.” Other accounts very clearly censure government actions. Sidney Osborne wrote: “I cannot get rid of a very strong impression I entertain ... that there was a sort of tacit determination to let things take their course, at any cost.” With Mitchellite sarcasm Spenser Hall declared: “How unfortunate, that those who legislate for hunger should be unable to understand without really enduring it! I wonder what would be the act of parliament if it were kept for three days without food and with no prospect of any for the fourth!” The radical MP George Poulett Scrope wrote many harsh epistles on government policies, a reputation which earned him the sobriquet “Pamphlet Scrope.” In one such pamphlet he questioned whether the Irish poor ought to silently “perish on the highways of famine.” The following is an extract:

And who will say that the peasantry ought not, in such a state of the law, to combine for their mutual protection? Is there no point of oppression at which resistance to the law becomes a duty? ... allegiance is only due where protection is afforded, and that where the law refuses its protection it cannot claim allegiance. Does the law, then, protect the Irish peasant? Not from starvation! It does not protect him from being thrust out from his home and little holding into absolute destitution, to perish on the highways of famine, or to waste away in those abodes of filth, misery, and disease, in the suburbs of the towns, which Dr. Doyle so faithfully describes as the ordinary refuge and dying place of the ejected cottier and his family. It does not protect him from being visited by this fate at the command of an absentee landlord, who may desire to clear his property of some of the human incumbrances who God has brought into being upon it. The law affords the Irish peasant no protection from so horrible a fate.

49 Osborne also thought how much a difference it would make if the law dealt with poverty and property alike. Sidney Godolphin Osborne. Gleanings in the West of Ireland. London: Boone, 1850: 256, 258.
50 Hall, op. cit.: 73.
Hundreds are at present exposed. Millions know they are liable to it. Can the law justly require their allegiance? Can we expect them willing to pay it? No! the peasantry of Ireland feel that the law places their lives at the mercy of the few whom it invests with sovereign power over the land of their native country — with power to sweep them at will off its surface.  

It would be difficult to find a harsher review of the government's famine policy in even the more extreme nationalist literature. I extract and emphasise these condemnations for two important reasons. First, as I have had occasion to say before, it is important to understand condemnations of government policy are not the exclusive province of the nationalist canon. The historical record shows this common assumption to be wrong. Second, such accounts demonstrate that British reactions to the Famine were complex and heterogeneous. This is a faminescape of some significance. Indeed it is worth considering these protestations in light of positivistic assumptions that the Irish Famine was ultimately “unavoidable.” Clearly many contemporaries did not endorse this view. What needs emphasising is how certain knowledges are promoted while others are silenced, marginalised or wilfully ignored. This takes me back to the naturalisation of famine from which I began this work.

**De-naturalising famine**

It is quite often assumed that the Famine was a product of “malign coincidences” that were apparently ineluctable. This view is asserted in either of two ways. First, it is often supposed that particular ideologies (about the pathology of the Irish, the political economy of relief, or evangelical providentialism) were so deeply entrenched, and so wholeheartedly indulged, that they forged a political configuration which was somehow beyond alternatives. Clearly ideology was crucial (I have argued that exact point throughout these essays), but this does not mean that famine was unavoidable. As Terry Eagleton has written: “Most historians are unwitting positivists, wary of what Hegel called the power of the negative, reluctant to grasp what


52 Here I am really trying to underscore a valuable point made by Catherine Nash; namely that colonialism is usually contested in the ‘centre’ as well as being resisted in the ‘periphery.’ Catherine Nash. “Cultural Geography: Postcolonial Geographies.” *Progress in Human Geography* 26.2 (2002): 221.

53 Crawford, op. cit.: 1.


55 Ania Loomba suggests that the crucial point about ideology is not whether it is true or false, but rather “how it comes to be believed in, to be lived out.” Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism.* New York: Routledge, 1998: 29.
happened in the light of what did not.” Thus it seems more important to question why particular responses were taken — and deemed necessary, inevitable, or “providential” — and what alternatives were disregarded on account of such orthodoxies. Indeed we might say that the Great Famine is an historical legacy, but one that was constituted within history not derived from it. If we erase the contingency of history we invariably naturalise the disaster. The critical accounts I outline above highlight the capacity of individuals to think and act as moral and political agents who were also sounding alternative hopes and visions. How these voices were peripheralised and silenced is a question of some importance.

Second, there is a curious and persistent assumption that when dealing with the ‘natural causes’ of famine the unexpected and aleatory are necessarily followed by ‘inevitable’ human carnage. Cormac Ó Gráda has rightly pointed to the danger of historical analyses which assumes that what may appear inevitable after the event was also predictable before it. This is a fair and logical caveat, but its inverse is also quite true. Just because the blight was unexpected does not prove that its devastating effects were inexorable. Moreover it is now generally accepted that wars, droughts, and crop failures might be “trigger factors” though not necessarily an “underlying cause” of famine. To extend this point to the Irish Famine it seems important to distinguish that Phytophthora Infestans killed the potato harvest and not people. The question of mortality from hunger and disease is a larger one of poverty, vulnerability, entitlements and so forth, which are not merely socio-economic concepts but also political categories.

In both these instances, famine is naturalised by placing its causes beyond the pale of human agency. How can we de-naturalise the study of the Irish Famine? I think there are at least two interrelated ways. The first is to consider what was offered to aid the Irish and the second is to discuss what was withheld. In this respect most historians have focused on the contribution of the government towards the cost of famine relief in Ireland. Here the issue of comparative context really is paramount. Joel Mokyr has pointed out that Britain spent no less than £69.3 million on an “utterly futile adventure in the Crimea.” This and the £20 million spent

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56 Eagleton, op. cit.: 22.
57 Ernst Bloch has said that “Possibility has had a bad press.” Cited in, David Harvey. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000: 156.
60 Mokyr, op. cit.: 292.
compensating West Indian slave owners makes British famine relief — a combined total of £7 million — seem drastically paltry. Historian James Donnelly has drawn our attention to the fact that "the British government contribution was considerably less than what was raised in Ireland itself ... Altogether, expenditures under the poor laws from 30 September 1846 to 29 September 1851 amounted to almost £7.3 million." As Donnelly is aware these figures ignore the private subscriptions raised in Ireland as well as the employment created by landlords to relieve distress. Donnelly strongly condemns the "endowed but miserly treasury" while Mokyr concludes that relief funds were a "mere pittance."

The Philanthropic societies are important and certainly complicate things. In 1846 after the second successive failure of the potato crop money, food and clothing was shipped to Ireland. Private aid continued to grow throughout 1847 after which it slowly petered out. However, in terms of excess mortality this was also the worst period of famine, a salient reminder of the horrors that would have attended without this life saving support. Kinealy estimates that private donations probably amounted to two million pounds during the Famine.

The Whig government was generally quite supportive of these relief efforts, a fact which reflects another very real situation on the ground; namely, that aid relief was ultimately considered to be a charity and not a right as in England.

In assessing the deficiencies of aid schemes historians have generally turned to the issue of food supply and exportations. The issue of exportations has a high place in nationalist historiography. John Mitchel famously wrote that "a government ship sailing into any harbour with Indian corn was sure to meet half a dozen sailing out with Irish wheat and cattle" and in the House of Commons William Smith O’Brien protested that "the people were starving in the midst of plenty, and that every tide carried from the Irish ports corn sufficient for the maintenance of thousands of the Irish people." More recent historical arguments are starkly


62 To this, Donnelly reckons, "should be added about £300,000 incurred for poor law expenses in the first nine months of 1846." Donnelly. "The Administration of Relief", op. cit.: 329.


64 Kinealy. The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.: 63.

65 Ibid.: 89.

polarised. Cormac Ó Gráda has argued that the contentious issue of "grain exports is of more symbolic than real importance," and that during the famine "food imports dwarfed food exports." He also claims that transferring all the grains to the starving masses would have made "only a small dent" in the nutritional gap left by the potato blight. This leads him to conclude that the Irish Famine was "a classic case of food shortage."

Compare this to Christine Kinealy's assertion: "The Irish poor did not starve because there was an inadequate supply of food within the country, they starved because political, commercial and individual greed was given priority over the saving of lives in one part of the United Kingdom." Kinealy brings a range of new archival material into the debate which directly challenges Ó Gráda's view. In particular Kinealy stresses that the current debate occludes much. First, the decline in exportations need to be reckoned against poor harvests rather than increased home consumption. Nor does the availability of food imply entitlement as Amartya Sen has argued. Secondly the emphasis on grain actually amounts to a focus on corn, ignoring the exportation of other grains including oats (the largest single item exported in 1841) and wheat. Moreover Ireland exported other foodstuffs, including large quantities of livestock. Thirdly, the continued distilling of alcohol — which required grain — amounted to what Kinealy calls an "averted supply of food" (it might also be said that exportation of livestock amounted to a double "averted supply of food" since the livestock were fattened on food that could have been consumed by the population). Finally, Kinealy reminds us of a number of significant measures that were ignored. In the famine of 1740-41, an embargo was placed on food exports from Irish ports. Similar calls to prohibit exports during the Great Famine were met "very coldly" by the British government. Moreover, as alluded to in chapter three, the navigation laws, which legislated that food must be imported onboard British ships, remained in

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67 Ó Gráda. Black '47 and Beyond, op. cit.: 123-124.
68 Ibid.: 124.
72 Kinealy. The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.: 98, 115.
73 Kinealy. A Death-Dealing Famine, op. cit.: 43.
74 For O'Connell's relief proposals in 1845 and the government's reaction see Woodham-Smith, op. cit.: 43-44.
place until January 1847 thus contributing to exorbitant freight charges and an "artificial shortage of shipping."\textsuperscript{75}

All told there is, I think, a strong case to be answered. At the very least these arguments show that what was offered to Ireland in terms of aid was inadequate and niggardly and what was withheld from Ireland, by a supposed ‘non-intervention’ in the food market, had serious repercussions for the poorest and most vulnerable people in Ireland. However, these arguments in and of themselves do not adequately explain the Irish Famine. In the first place, the debate — at least presented in this abbreviated form — establishes what amounts to a false dichotomy between intervention and non-intervention. In reality, however, the practices, policies and programmes that make up relief are much more convoluted than this reading suggests. To Kinealy’s great credit she powerfully challenges the popular view that the move toward \textit{laissez faireism} amounted to a simple and stark policy of non-interference. The decision to close the food depots, the late suspension of the Navigation Act, the slow repeal of the Corn Laws, and the failure to ban food exports, are clear evidence of a series of politico-economic \textit{interventions} designed to direct trade and relief in a certain way. What emerges from Kinealy’s account of food supply is a series of “inclusive exclusions” that open the way for alternative explanations of the Irish Famine.

\textbf{An “artificial famine”?}

The harshest assessment of government policy is usually reserved for John Mitchel. In his retrospective on British government relief policy he wrote:

I have called it an artificial famine: that is to say, it was a famine which desolated a rich and fertile island, that produced every year abundance and superabundance to sustain all her people and many more. The English, indeed, call the famine a ‘dispensation of Providence;’ and ascribe it entirely to the blight of the potatoes. But potatoes failed in like manner all over Europe; yet there was no famine save in Ireland. The British account of the matter, then, is first, a fraud — second, a blasphemy. The Almighty, indeed, sent the potato blight, but the English created the famine.\textsuperscript{76}

There are at least two significant and controversial assertions in Mitchel’s statement. First Mitchel suggests that the Famine was created and that ideological reasons were used to obscure

\textsuperscript{75} Kinealy. \textit{The Great Irish Famine, op. cit.}: 103, 106.
\textsuperscript{76} Mitchel, \textit{op. cit.}: 219.
this fact. Secondly Mitchel suggests that the deaths by hunger and hunger-related disease were an act of wilful murder by the English. The vehemence and xenophobia of this second charge has usually led to an avoidance of the original claim of "artificial famine." This is regrettable since research outside Ireland suggests that famines are very often created.\footnote{Stephen Devereux, Paul Howe and Luka Biong Deng. "The 'New Famines.'" \textit{IDS Bulletin} 33.4 (2002): 1-11.} There is undoubtedly much to disagree with in Mitchel, but it does seem to me that this account needs to be reckoned with in light of the evidence I have reviewed above. In evaluating Mitchel's assertions I also want to include and reassess the claims made in the preceding chapters.

An important place to begin assessing the claim of "artificial famine" is the work of Amartya Sen. Sen emphasises that famines are not necessarily the endgame of food shortages, and are more related to issues of food distribution and entitlements. In short, Sen stresses the ability of hungry people to source food.\footnote{Amartya Sen. \textit{Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation}. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.} There are very many reasons why this ability might be curtailed including war, commercial infrastructures, hoarding, price inflations, collapse of so-called moral economies, ideological strictures and so on.\footnote{On the issue of moral economies and hunger see E. P. Thompson. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." \textit{Past and Present}.50 (1971): 76-136.} Sen's anti-Malthusian approach has allowed for a 'repoliticiation' of famine, although the terms and methods of this repoliticisation have often been very different and even conflicting. For instance Jenny Edkins argues that although Sen de-naturalises the narrative of famine, he unhelpfully clings to the notion of famine as a "failure," albeit a failure of the economic system.\footnote{Jenny Edkins. "Legality with a Vengeance: Famines and Humanitarian Relief in 'Complex Emergencies'." \textit{Millennium: Journal of International Studies} 25.3 (1996): 550.} Edkins claims that this presents two serious problems or "deferrals." First, Sen ignores the ways in which people are made to starve or choose to starve themselves. This "setting aside of the intentionality" strips starvation of its "transitive quality" and enables famines to be regarded as a failure.\footnote{Ibid.: 558.} Second, Sen acknowledges but minimalises non-entitlement transfers; that is, transfers that are deemed to be extra-legal such as looting and pillaging.\footnote{Ibid.: 559.} The originality of Edkins's criticism is the fact that she shows how Sen ignores "the force of law" and therefore indirectly legitimises the violence employed by the state to deny access to food. The fact that some people are not entitled to food
— and are as such “entitled to starve” — may be the result of the state intervening to uphold the rights of some at the expense of others.\textsuperscript{83}

At this point it is worth recalling Poulett Scrope’s argument (cited above), in which he eloquently questions: “Does the law, then, protect the Irish peasant?” And answers: “Not from starvation!” This leads Poulett Scrope to ruminate on whether there is a “point of oppression at which resistance to the law becomes a duty?” Elsewhere he took up the theme of legal ejectments which cast poor people from their homes, many of whom no doubt died as a result:

All is done in the sacred name of the law. The sheriff, the representative of the majesty of the law, is the actual exterminator. The officers of the law execute the process. The constabulary, acting under the orders of the magistracy, stand by to prevent resistance; and, if any is expected, the Queen’s troops are brought to the spot to quell, with all the power of the Throne, what would amount to an act of rebellion. It is absurd to cast the blame of these foul deeds, and the horrible results, upon a few reckless, bankrupt landlords. It is the law, or rather the Government and legislature which uphold it, and refuse to mitigate its ferocity, that the crime rightly attaches; and they will be held responsible for it by history, by posterity — aye, and perhaps before long, by the retributive justice of God, and the vengeance of a people infuriated by a barbarous oppression, and brought at last TO BAY by their destroyers.\textsuperscript{84}

Likewise the Lord Lieutenant Clarendon considered the evictions and clearances “‘horrible’ for being legal.”\textsuperscript{85} As we saw in chapter three these criticisms were not only confined to the operation of ejectments. Sidney Osborne’s account chronicles the “wanton contempt of life and decency” in Irish workhouses and the importance of “rising up, to publicly protest against such treatment of our fellow subjects, in establishments, supported under legal enactment, and supposed to be under official supervision.”\textsuperscript{86}

One might add to this a number of brief points. W. J. Lowe has shown that: “Crime was at its highest levels in ‘Black 47’ when reported offences increased by about sixty percent.

\textsuperscript{86} “In England one-fiftieth part of such conduct, would so rouse the indignation of the public, that a speedy end would be put to the abuse.” Osborne, \textit{op. cit.}: 78, 79.
There were 10,000 reports of cattle and sheep stealing, 1,200 incidents of plundering of provisions and more than 1,000 reports of stealing weapons in 1847. The incidence of killing and stealing livestock was so high that the police were permitted to perform expedited investigations. Clearly the state did interfere to prevent the hungry from violently appropriating food for themselves and their dependents. Furthermore there were also other, very direct interventions which I have detailed in the preceding chapters. The blight obviously triggered a subsistence crisis, but it would be mistaken to ignore the considerable impact of fiscal and legislative policies like the repeal of the Corn Laws, the initial failure to repeal the Navigation Act, the Labour Rate Act, the Quarter Acre clause, two Rate-in-Aid bills, two Incumbered Estates acts, the continued exportation of foodstuffs during the famine, not to mention (for the moment) politico-cultural factors such as racial stereotyping, notions about "redundant" labour and "surplus" populations and so forth. The linkages between famine and acts of government are clearly important, but seldom spelt out.

In this sense the dissertation confronts a persistent aporia of the Great Irish Famine: the historical reality of upwards of one million deaths under conditions of hunger, disease and indignity, at a time when Ireland was constitutionally part of one of the wealthiest and most industrialised nations ("the workshop of the world"), routinely hailed as one the most democratic and interventionist governments of its day. Relative wealth, government management, and political and legal interventionism sit oddly next to the lack of entitlements, extreme immiseration and abandonment which seem to scar the history of famine. The two developments appear to contradict one another. However, this is only the case if we continue to consider famine as something that happens outside the forces of industrialisation and government control rather than as an event that is constituted from within them. This is, of course, part of a larger argument the dissertation makes. Like violence, famine does not necessarily happen outside the law, but also operates from within it.

These theoretical arguments, in conjunction with the observations of Poulett Scrope, as well as the legislative policies discussed, invoke a new landscape of famine that I have tried to trace throughout these essays. This idea of ‘faminescapes’ is broadly related to materialist

\[88\] There were also many accounts that relate how farmers had to hire guns and dig ‘man-traps’ to prevent livestock and crops from being stolen.
approaches to geography. For example, Don Mitchell has explained how a landscape can function as an ideology that, precisely through the logic of 'naturalisation,' tends to conceal the very work that has gone into its production, the bodies buried beneath its surface, unmarked by its seemingly precise and objective contours. According to Don Mitchell, landscapes not only produce social realities; they also have the potential to manifest and mystify social relations. Similarly, the landscapes of famine I trace in these chapters have a history and a geography, but one that is very often obscured through their discursive, institutional, and politico-juridical formation. I want to turn to these faminescapes once more before concluding.

Faminescapes

As I stated in the introduction, famines are not only acutely corporal. They are also rooted in — and routed through — spaces that are material, imagined, and techno-political. In examining imaginative spaces of famine I have highlighted how discourses have the ability to produce the very objects they describe — a performative trait which very often conceals the potential of language to function as a political weapon.

The terms I employ here are taken from political philosophy (Hannah Arendt) and the field of Cultural Studies, but they also have a fair grounding in the historical literature. Let me offer two examples. Writing during one of the worst years of famine Isaac Butt declared: “With the withdrawal of the ... food in the potato garden beside their hovels, these people for the first time started into existence as elements of calculation in the economic problem of the supply of Ireland’s food.” Butt’s comment precisely captures how discourse produces objects of calculation that enable politico-economic intervention. I have tried to trace this idea through a pre-Famine discourse focusing on poverty and reform. The argument is that the massive state-led interventions in the fifty years prior to the Irish Famine were made possible by a series of discursive inscriptions.

Much of what I am saying suggests that reality is invariably tied up with discourse in so far as it is conditioned by the labels and descriptions we apply. Indeed, my second example is an

91 Butt, op. cit.: 12.
Ironic but telling remark from John Mitchel, which makes this exact point: "I may here mention that it was the English Government that invented paupers in Ireland, when they imposed on us their Poor Law. Before that time there had been plenty of poor men in Ireland, but 'no able-bodied paupers.' It is one of the very few English institutions in which they have made us full participants." The adjunct "full participants" is questionable since there were very real and important differences between the English and Irish Poor Laws; nevertheless Mitchel's claim about the invention of paupers carries two important propositions. First, it suggests that before 1838 there were no paupers in Ireland since (in the strictest sense) there were no Poor Law workhouses to enter, no pauper rules to be applied and no pauper populations to be reformed. Secondly, Mitchel's remark captures a very real connection between discursive inscriptions and biopolitical interventions. The label 'pauper' called into being an institutional landscape linked to individual and social control. During the eighteen-forties these institutions became a faminescape in their own right.

Clearly faminescapes are material as well as imagined. Dealing with the material for the moment, these essays (and chapter three in particular) have tried to highlight the organisation of material space as a strategy of social management. Included here are the workhouses, but also the food depots, soup kitchens, public work operations and outdoor relief schemes. If one were to take a larger (and longer) look at things we would have to add to this list the vast bureaucratic structure of the Poor Law, the wards of the fever hospitals, the sailing of 'coffin ships' and indeed the establishment of quarantine facilities at ports where the fleeing Irish attempted to enter (see Figure C.3). Indeed,

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92 Mitchel, op. cit.: 113.
Trevelyan made a point of remarking that the government's "war against famine and pestilence" was carried out on both sides of the Atlantic.\footnote{Charles E. Trevelyan. The Irish Crisis. London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1848: 144-45.} State-assisted emigration schemes were also attempted and Irish paupers were — with little success according to Trevelyan — funnelled into resettlement programmes that sought to convert "Paupers into Backwoodsmen by administrative measures."\footnote{On this issue, Trevelyan believed the policies failed. Ibid.: 147.} In England the Removal Laws were sometimes used to expel the famished Irish, another example of how strategies of famine management were carried out beyond the shores of Ireland.\footnote{On the Removal Laws see Christine Kinealy. "Was Ireland a Colony? The Evidence of the Great Famine." Was Ireland a Colony? Economics, Politics and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland. Ed. Terrence McDonough. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2005: 59.} There are obviously multitudinous spaces — and baroque circuits — through which the famished and the stricken were subject to administrative regimes and calculations based on political principles of 'amelioration.' I have really only provided a provisional sketch of these institutional faminescapes but this is, I think, an important direction for further study. At present we know relatively little about how these structures spatialised the project of pauper management, and more importantly, how this experiment continued as part of state-led 'aid' efforts.

Table C.1: Faminescapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>Expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making Up People</td>
<td>Discursive</td>
<td>Objects of Calculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration of Hunger</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Pauper Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of Bare Life</td>
<td>Politico-Juridical</td>
<td>Radical Rightlessness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, I have emphasised the techno-political and juridical spaces of famine. The degree of legislation passed during the various stages of government relief is truly staggering. Obviously these Acts (and acts) were influenced by discourse about how best to 'aid' the Irish. Indeed, the legislation itself invariably called into being new institutional programmes. In this sense it is rather difficult — and perhaps a bit artificial — to disentangle the discursive, institutional and techno-political (see Table C.1). Indeed a Poor Law workhouse, for example, is clearly a product of these three practices. However in focusing on the politico-juridical I aim to draw attention to three points. The first, already mentioned, is the tremendous work that went
into directing the Famine. It is misleading to characterise famine relief after 1847 as a policy of non-intervention. The many acts and amendments are testament to the various levels to which the government continued to involve itself in the relief process, even when the endgame of this intervention might have been a policy of inaction. In other words, following Agamben I argue that abandonment is above all a political category that is produced.

Secondly, I wish to emphasise the production of “bare life.” Here I analysed the pre-Famine production of bare life through capitalist-colonial relations (chapter one), and how this fact is central, not incidental, to the Famine itself. In chapter three I resumed this enquiry, suggesting that through the relief measures the state virtually monopolised the means of subsistence for vast numbers of people. George Nicholls observed that the government assumed control over what he delicately termed “sensitive points”: the wages and food — and hence the entire means of subsistence — of a starving population. John Mitchel clearly agreed with Nicholls’s interpretation: “Government might be all in all; omnipotent to give food or withhold it, to relieve or to starve, according to their own ideas of policy and of good behaviour in the people.” In other words, a series of legislative actions extended the governmentalisation of relief and in the process the state produced, and assumed control over, a radically depotentiated form of life. The Irish Famine was to be financed locally, but administered centrally.

My third point is related to this. The redoubled state supervision of famine also marked a move toward government by administrative norms as opposed to civic rights. As I have repeatedly emphasised no right to relief was recognised in Ireland. Although this changed with the introduction of the Poor Law Extension Act in 1847 the subsequent provisions — the Gregory clause, the strict exclusions on outdoor relief, the thinning of the relief list and so on — meant that this was literally what Jacques Rancière has termed “the inscription of rights to situations of denial.” Those receiving relief were undoubtedly in a very dangerous position of rightlessness. Again it is worth repeating that this situation was achieved through political, technical and juridical actions.

97 Nicholls, op. cit.: 314.
98 Mitchel, op. cit.: 108.
My fourth and final point is very important, but has been overlooked so far; namely the effects of emergency legislation in Ireland. It is important to register the fact that during the half century after the Union, Ireland was governed under ‘ordinary’ law for only five years.\textsuperscript{100} Indeed, \textit{Fraser's Magazine} claimed that constitutional rights and trial by jury were “as little suited to the actual conditions of the Irish people as they are to the condition of a horde of Bedouin Arabs or a tribe of Red Indians.”\textsuperscript{101} In fact it was emergency legislation of this sort that toppled Tory power in 1846 thus paving the way for the Whigs. The role of emergency legislation deserves more space (and research) than I can afford here, and it is certainly the case that use of exceptional legislation has affinities in other colonial situations.\textsuperscript{102} For my purposes it is worth remembering that force and emergency legislation were constantly deployed throughout the Famine. Without this forceful state backing, the operation of the food depots, the safe transportation of food, and landlord evictions would not have been possible.\textsuperscript{103}

In summary, the production of faminescapes can be viewed in three stages: \textit{making up people} (connecting discursive acts of inscription to state regimes of intervention); \textit{the administration of hunger} (examining the institutional landscapes of famine and the ‘government’ of state relief measures); and \textit{the production of bare life} (examining how the state produced, and assumed control over, a radically depotentiated form of life). Viewed in this way the Irish Famine is not reducible to any one factor — least of all that of a “tragic ecological accident” — but is, rather, a complex landscape involving political and economic systems of production, modalities of representation and regimes of power.

What connects these faminescapes? In the preceding chapters I have highlighted the productive forces of colonialism, capitalism and biopolitics. These forces are no doubt different, but they gather and converge around the human body in very significant ways. This requires a little explaining. In an insightful essay the Marxist geographer David Harvey has described the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[100] Hoppen, op. cit.: 49.
\item[101] Cited in, Kinealy. \textit{The Great Irish Famine}, op. cit.: 122.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
human body as a “battleground.” Harvey is above all interested in how capitalism continually pushes the capacities and possibilities of the human body in order to extract labour power and surplus value. Colonialism is often driven by commercial concerns, though seldom exclusively, and military, political, and religious prerogatives often weigh heavily. However, as recent studies have shown, colonisation also operates at the somatic level. It is a targeting of the subaltern as a body-object that is to be remade into the ‘civilised’ subject. Foucault, from whom we take the term “biopolitics,” was also deeply interested with how power battles with the human body. His earlier work on prisons focused on disciplinary procedures which worked at the level of the individual body. This research was augmented by a subsequent concern with ‘massifying’ measures and interventions aimed at the regulation of the social body or body politic.

Hence the human body is clearly not just a battleground, but also what Harvey calls an “unfinished project.” In each case, we are confronted with powerful systems that attempt to realign the body with productive forces. As such the human body, as animal laborans and colonised subaltern, harbours a very bare life that is to be transformed either into productive labour or the civilised subject — and oftentimes both. In this scenario the target of power — bare life — is “inclusively excluded”; that is, captured in a “space of exclusion [that] is now rigidly regimented and controlled.” In this sense an act of exclusion is really a carefully scripted “inside-outside dialectic,” another phrase of David Harvey’s that I have evoked throughout these pages. As strategies of power, colonialism, capitalism and biopolitics mobilise an “inside-outside dialectic” that constantly creates distinctions between value and non-value, zoë and bios, core and periphery, master and slave, in order to operationalise rules of government. Table C.2 presents a rough schematisation of this idea

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106 Harvey. Spaces of Hope, op. cit.: 98.
Table C.2: Inside-outside dialectics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside</th>
<th>Outside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colonialism</td>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Periphery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biopolitics</td>
<td>Politically qualified life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bare life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalism</td>
<td>The market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-capitalist social formations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the dissertation I have worked with this idea in a number of places. In chapter one, for example, I explored how an “inside-outside dialectic” operated through a series of military, political, and economic acts which revolutionised the system of landownership in Ireland and left the majority of population in an abject state of rightlessness. Moreover, the economic integration of Ireland and Britain in the years after the Act of Union was also an inclusive exclusion which paved the way for a bimodal economy based on cash crop exports and the potato as a subsistence food. The demarcation of centre and periphery is also played out in language and in the ability of some to speak on behalf of others. In chapter two I looked at how the discourses of race, overpopulation and poverty constitute and differentiate between spaces of development and undevelopment in ways that strengthened the hand of government.

Relief operations also deployed a structure of inclusive exclusion on at least two levels. The first and most obvious are the conditions of aid itself, which not only created distinctions, between poverty and destitution for instance, but often required applicants to abrogate rights in order to qualify for relief.\(^{108}\) Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, one finds that policies tagged as ‘relief’ were openly wielded as tools to transform Ireland. Again this involved constituting and differentiating an undeveloped ‘outside’ that is to be forcefully drawn ‘inside’ the pale of reform. In this way we have seen how an ecological crisis was used to implement laissez faire policies — free trade in corn swiftly followed by free trade in land. These apparent panaceas were clearly popular among the political elite at the time. Trevelyan clearly believed that “posterity will trace up to that famine the commencement of a salutary revolution in the

\(^{108}\) As I argued in chapter three, hunger and hunger related-diseases often unravelled the distinctions and exclusions on which Victorian notions of relief depended. For example during his visit to Ireland Lord Dufferin told of one man who had been refused relief on account of his respectable appearance and was found dead near the workhouse door one quarter of an hour later. Lord Dufferin and G.F. Boyle. *Narrative of a Journey from Oxford to Skibbereen During the Year of the Irish Famine.* Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847: 12.
habits of a nation.” In fact, shortly after the commencement of the New Poor Law, Trevelyan wrote to the *Times* to stoke up support:

That the change from an idle, barbarous, isolated potato cultivation, to corn cultivation, which enforces industry, binds together employer and employed in mutually beneficial relations, and requiring capital and skill for its successful prosecution, supposes the existence of a class of substantial yeomanry who have an interest in preserving the good order of society, is proceeding as fast as can reasonably be expected under the circumstances.109

It was not unknown that these programmes would have severe consequences for a considerable portion of Irish society. Benjamin Jowell, the renowned Master of Balliol, said he lost his respect for economists when he heard Nassau Senior say that the Irish Famine: “would not kill more than one million people, and that would scarcely be enough to do any good.”111 As we have seen Thomas Carlyle, the one-time critic of *laissez faireism*, and lionised by the physical force tradition of Irish nationalism, was willing to contemplate a fair degree of killing in order to reform the semi-barbarous Celt. Carlyle’s non-intervention, like aspects of the government’s relief policy, was actually a decisive inaction — an inclusive exclusion.

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from this. First, the colonial dimensions to the Famine are still too often ignored. The idea of Irish “regeneration” has a long genealogy which stretches far beyond George Nicholls’s drafting of the Irish Poor Law — which codified the idea of instituting a new class of yeomanry — to earlier moments when the Crown attempted to Anglicise Irish territory, by establish English law, promoting the English language, revitalising central government, and disposing the country on a more commercial footing.112 Moreover, there also is, I believe, a compelling case to be made for repositioning Irish Famine historiography *vis-à-vis* the devastating practices of proletarianisation at work in other nineteenth-century colonial famines. For instance, Mike Davis has powerfully argued that “synchronous and devastating drought provided an environmental stage” in which commodity markets, price speculation, and the “will of the state” shaped vulnerability to famine “and

determined who, in the last instance, died."\textsuperscript{113} Davis’s emphasis is on the late Victorian period, but his thoughtful extension of Michael Watts’ “political ecology of famine,” as well as his suggestive invocation of India and Ireland as a “Utilitarian laboratory” offer new lines of enquiry that are worthy of further study.\textsuperscript{114}

Indeed the Marxist tradition is almost wholly neglected in the study of the Irish Famine even though James Connolly warned that:

\begin{quote}
No man who accepts capitalist society and the laws thereof can logically find fault with the statesmen of England for their acts of that awful period...

They acted consistently upon the lines of capitalist political economy. Within the limits of that social system and its theories their acts are unassailable and unimpeachable; it is only when we reject the system and the intellectual and social fetters it imposes that we really acquire the right to denounce the English administration of Ireland during the famine as a colossal crime against the human race. The non-socialist Irish man or woman who fumes against the administration is in the illogical position of denouncing an effect of whose cause he is a supporter. That cause was the system of capitalist property.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

Connolly was following ground prepared by Friedrich Engels. In an incomplete manuscript on the \textit{History of Ireland} Engels pencilled in stark terms the capitalist logic behind the regeneration of Ireland: “Today England needs grain quickly and dependably — Ireland is just perfect for wheat-growing. Tomorrow England needs meat — Ireland is only fit for cattle pastures.”\textsuperscript{116}

However, one need not necessarily travel all the way with Engels and Connolly to appreciate the extent to which the discourse of political economy shaped thinking during the Famine period. We have seen for instance how Thomas Carlyle advanced a long line of thought which considered Ireland to be a diseased social body. The idea itself goes at least as far back as Edmund Spenser; however, during the Famine, and in line with capitalist thinking, the metaphor of disease was often equated with an inability to work. Carlyle added to this a racial tinge by emphasising not simply an inability to work, but a distinctly Irish \textit{refusal} to work. These


\textsuperscript{114} Charles Trevelyan also features in Davis's discussion on famine in India. Davis, \textit{op. cit.}: 31.

\textsuperscript{115} James Connolly. \textit{Labour in Ireland: Labour in Irish History; the Reconquest of Ireland}. Dublin: Irish Transport and General Workers Union, 1944: 162, 173.

convictions lent sustenance to a form of “disaster capitalism” that used catastrophes as engines for historical development. A new race of yeomanry tending cattle pastures was a powerful capitalist-colonial dream with distinct biopolitical hues.

**Hominès Sacri**

How then in light of these criticisms are we to deal with the second of John Mitchel’s claims regarding a policy of extermination? As we have seen some contemporaries did use language as strong as Mitchel’s. However, other Irish voices were far more wary. Isaac Butt strongly condemned the government’s “tender regard” for the merchant class which meant that “upon an experiment of social economy [are placed] the lives of thousands of Irishmen.”117 However on a compact of “wilful murder,” wrote Butt, “we acquit the ministers.”118 Modern historians have usually followed variations of this argument, but not always. Reviewing Cecil Woodham-Smith’s *The Great Hunger* — which rejects Mitchel’s claims — the English historian A.J.P. Taylor declared: “The English governing class ran true to form. They had killed two million people.”119 However, the best recent estimates show that Taylor’s figure of two million, even if averted births are included, is erroneous.

In a sense the debate proves just how polarised the study of the Famine has become. Clearly, one does not need to agree with the use of the term ‘genocide’ to accept that policies and government played an indispensable role in famine mortality. But where does this leave us? Peter Gray writes:

The charge of culpable neglect of the consequences of policies leading to mass starvation is indisputable. That a conscious choice to pursue moral or economic objectives at the expense of human life was made by several ministers is also demonstrable. Russell’s government can thus be held responsible for the failure to honour its own pledge to use ‘the whole credit of the Treasury and the means of the country … as is our bounden duty to use them … to avert famine, and to maintain the people of Ireland.’120

This is one of the strongest denunciations of recent years; however, since Gray introduces the language of legal imputability — “culpable neglect” — but rightly rejects the nationalist charge of genocide, we ought to ask in what sense does he use the term “culpable”?

117 Butt, *op. cit.*: 8, 10.
120 Gray, “Ideology and the Famine.”, *op. cit.*: 103
In the introduction I argued that famines are largely unpunishable atrocities and that this situation renders the “language of responsibility” almost meaningless. Here I am drawing on the ideas of Giorgio Agamben who has argued that the concept of responsibility is “irredeemably contaminated” by juridical procedures — to the point where today when someone declares that they “did nothing wrong” they usually mean that the law decrees that their acts do not constitute a criminal charge. Agamben’s concern (which I share) is that this ‘confusion’ opens up a “grey zone” in which law and fact, right and wrong seem to be dangerously blurred or “indistinguishable.” This charge has not gone unnoted in legal circles. Indeed in a recent article published in *The American Journal of International Law* David Marcus has argued that famines, either “created or manipulated” by human actors, are some of the worst human rights catastrophes. “When mass death results from hunger,” he writes, “governments, not God or nature, deserve scrutiny for their relationship to the catastrophe.”

Although Marcus’s analysis is confined to the twentieth century his efforts are hugely important and worth considering.

Marcus identifies what he calls four degrees of “faminogenic” behaviour responsible for creating and aiding famine. The fourth-degree he describes as the least deliberate. It usually involves “incompetent or hopelessly corrupt governments” who are faced with an endemic food shortage which they are unable to respond to effectively. Third-degree faminogenic behaviour is characterised by benign indifference: “Authoritarian governments, impervious to the fate of their populations even though arguably possessing the means to respond to crises, turn blind eyes to mass hunger.” Second-degree faminogenic behaviour is marked by recklessness. Governments either enforce or continue to pursue policies which engender famine. Lastly, first-degree faminogenic behaviour is intentional: “Governments deliberately use hunger as a tool of extermination to annihilate troublesome populations.”

Table C.3 is an attempt to schematise Marcus’s main points.

Marcus proceeds to analyse this typology of faminogenic behaviour in relation to the jurisprudence of ‘crimes against humanity.’ Most significant to my discussion is his justification for excluding third and fourth degree faminogenic behaviour from his analysis. The

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122 *Ibid.*: 245.
reason offered is that while this behaviour is "deplorable" it is "not criminal."\textsuperscript{124} Hence according to his own typology, third and fourth degree faminogenic behaviour constitutes a form of "famine crime" that is demonstrably not criminal. Furthermore while Marcus holds to the possibility of formally criminalising first and second degree faminogenic behaviour he also observes that the international community has never called for criminal trials for government officials responsible for "creating, inflicting, or prolonging famine."\textsuperscript{125} The conclusions are revealing and deeply troubling. On the hand we have behaviour that creates or aids in the creation of famines but does not constitute a criminal act; while, on the other hand, we have starvation crimes that are all but unenforceable as such.

Table C.3 \textit{Typology of faminogenic behaviour}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Famine crimes</th>
<th>Conduct</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fourth-degree</td>
<td>Incompetence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third-degree</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-degree</td>
<td>Recklessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-degree</td>
<td>Intentionality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notwithstanding some difficulties with this approach, it is interesting to consider how the British government's relief policies fare on his scale of accountability.\textsuperscript{126} As we have seen, judgement of the Irish Famine is deeply divergent and oftentimes polemical. Indeed, the British government has been charged with the entire range of faminogenic behaviour, with revisionist historians tending to emphasise incompetence, while those influenced by Mitchel see the Famine as an act of intentional extermination. It might be argued, however, that much of the debate is unconsciously polarised by the fact that the concept of responsibility is wholly contaminated by law. Indeed as Marcus surprisingly finds, to kill hundreds of thousands of people is perfectly permissible so long as we can demonstrate that something so benign as political indifference was the ultimate cause. The fact that some historians choose to see British

\textsuperscript{124} Marcus, \textit{op. cit.}: 247.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.: 246.
\textsuperscript{126} Most obviously, Marcus stresses the role of government and neglects the parts played private citizens, merchants and semi-official relief organisations. To be fair Marcus is not unaware of these shortcomings, and specifically designates what he implies by the term "government official." \textit{Ibid.}: 247fn 19.
'indifference' as an *excuse* rather than an *inrimination* of faminogenic behaviour is perhaps the best testament to this sort of confusion.

Perhaps the present has much to teach us about our past. "Never has an age been so inclined to put up with anything while finding everything intolerable," writes Giorgio Agamben, "Only that when someone actually risks giving a definition, one realizes that what is intolerable in the end is only that human bodies be tortured and hacked to pieces, and hence that, apart from that, one can put up with just about anything." Agamben’s work is an attempt to find the political terms for the fact that some of the worst human atrocities occur “precisely in the most profane and banal ways.” The bloody genocidal interpretations clearly do not fit the British handling of the Irish Famine, its just that some revisionist and nationalist historians seem to think that nothing short of such behaviour is worthy of censure. This is unfortunate since it is extremely doubtful that very many famines fit such a model of calculated genocide. This is precisely why Marcus’s attempt to delimit a typology of “famine crimes” must set aside so much deplorable faminogenic behaviour. The fact that nationalists ‘play up’ the Irish Famine and revisionists minimise government culpability might be an unconscious expression of this inability to find terms for awful acts of violence that happen in the most banal and everyday way. Indeed, if the figure of *homo sacer* — the “bare life” that can be killed without committing a crime — has any purchase on the Irish Famine it is, as John Mitchel has said, that thousands “were exposed before others, as having nothing but life to lose.” One of the more regrettable legacies of a deeply polarised, traumatic history is an inability to find common ground from which to interrogate this ‘moral black hole’ of accountability which ensures that hunger and famine are still very much part of our present. In many ways, we have yet to awaken from the nightmare in which the nineteenth century dreamed the twenty-first.

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129 Mitchel, *op. cit.*: 212.
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This work has utilised a diverse range of sources primarily British Parliamentary Papers, social and political pamphlets, travelogues, biographies, periodicals, newspapers and later works. Organising the bibliography proved challenging and in the end I opted to divide sources into "primary" and "secondary" materials. The former contains subsections for Parliamentary Papers as well as a list of newspapers and periodicals consulted. Such divisions are never straightforward (one might object to listing a biography as a primary source), but it is hoped that the simplicity of arrangement facilitates easy referencing from the notes.

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Appendix One

Workhouse Designs and Calibrations

Figure A1.1. Exhibiting the Enlargement of the Workhouse for Buildings for the Children
Source: First Annual Report for the Relief of Poor in Ireland, 1847-8

279
Figure A1.2: Elevation of Proposed New Building for Children

Source: Administering Laws for Relief; Appendix to First Annual Report of Commissioners of Irish Poor Laws App. A No. VI.. (2)
Figure A1.3: Union Workhouse. Drawing of Hot Plate
Source: First Annual Report for the Relief of Poor in Ireland, 1847-8 App. A No. VI .. (4)
Figure A1.4: Union Workhouses in Ireland: Ventilation
Source: First Annual Report for the Relief of Poor in Ireland, 1847-8 App. A No. VI .. (5)
DRAWING FOR AN ECONOMICAL BEDSTEAD, PREPARED FOR THE CENTRAL BOARD OF HEALTH - IRELAND.

END VIEW.

FAMILIAR VIEW OF BEDSTEAD.

Figure A1.5 Workhouse Bedstead
Source: First Annual Report for the Relief of Poor in Ireland, 1847-8 App. A No. VI . (5)
UNION WORKHOUSE. (B.)

DRAWING OF VENTILATORS FOR OUTER WALLS.

For escape of infected air from upper part of wing.

The openings are to be made of the form and size shown on the drawing, and the mouth of the opening made so as to be carried out with a close plate perforated with holes 8 inch diameter and 8 inch apart secured to a rebate and headed frame of deal 3 in. 2 in. securely set in the face of the wall. The openings outside to be found with chamfered steps about 6 in. thick, the sides and bottom of the openings to be rendered in cement. (These are to be four of these ventilators desirable in each wing, see preceding drawing [A.] for mode of admitting air at floor of the room.)

Scale: one inch to a foot.

Figure A1.6: Drawing of Ventilators for Outer Walls
Source: First Annual Report for the Relief of Poor in Ireland, 1847-8
Appendix Two

Nicholls's Tables

George Nicholls explains that these two tables are meant to condense "the character of the period — the waxing and waning of distress ... so that the state of the country at several periods is as it were mapped out before the reader, and can be taken in at one glance, requiring nothing further in the way of explanation; and to this table the reader's attention is directed." (Nicholls, 1856: 389)

Table A1.1: Numbers relieved in the workhouse in each of the weeks ending on the dates in the first column respectively; together with the number and the rate per 1,000 of deaths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks ending</th>
<th>Total number in the workhouses</th>
<th>Deaths in the week</th>
<th>Death rate per 1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 April</td>
<td>50,861</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July</td>
<td>50,691</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Nov.</td>
<td>74,175</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jan.</td>
<td>98,762</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Mar.</td>
<td>115,645</td>
<td>2,590</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 July</td>
<td>101,439</td>
<td>2,590</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sept.</td>
<td>75,370</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Nov.</td>
<td>102,776</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Dec.</td>
<td>172,980</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Jan.</td>
<td>191,445</td>
<td>1,477</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mar.</td>
<td>196,523</td>
<td>1,846</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 May</td>
<td>220,401</td>
<td>2,730</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 June</td>
<td>227,329</td>
<td>2,009</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Oct.</td>
<td>140,266</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Dec.</td>
<td>180,641</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Jan.</td>
<td>203,320</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Feb.</td>
<td>230,348</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mar.</td>
<td>237,939</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May</td>
<td>243,224</td>
<td>1,247</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 June</td>
<td>264,048</td>
<td>1,126</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks ending</th>
<th>Total number in the workhouses</th>
<th>Deaths in the week</th>
<th>Death rate per 1,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Jan.</td>
<td>203,320</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Feb.</td>
<td>230,348</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Mar.</td>
<td>237,939</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May</td>
<td>243,224</td>
<td>1,247</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 June</td>
<td>264,048</td>
<td>1,126</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jan.</td>
<td>168,248</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Feb.</td>
<td>196,966</td>
<td>594</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 June</td>
<td>187,003</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Sept.</td>
<td>111,117</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Dec.</td>
<td>134,476</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Feb.</td>
<td>160,774</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July</td>
<td>113,099</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Oct.</td>
<td>79,410</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A1.2: Numbers of destitute persons out of the workhouse under the 1st and 2nd sections of the Extension Act (10th and 11th Vict., cap.31) respectively, in each of the weeks ending on the dates in the first column; together with the weekly cost of such relief.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks ending</th>
<th>Numbers relieved under Section 1 of the Extension Act</th>
<th>Numbers relieved under Section 2 of the Extension Act</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Weekly cost of relief</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Feb.</td>
<td>337,665</td>
<td>107,811</td>
<td>445,476</td>
<td>12,788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mar.</td>
<td>425,949</td>
<td>228,763</td>
<td>654,712</td>
<td>17,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 April</td>
<td>408,923</td>
<td>235,076</td>
<td>643,999</td>
<td>17,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 May</td>
<td>485,364</td>
<td>266,430</td>
<td>751,794</td>
<td>18,786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 July</td>
<td>490,902</td>
<td>342,987</td>
<td>833,889</td>
<td>21,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sept.</td>
<td>279,567</td>
<td>96,523</td>
<td>376,090</td>
<td>5,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Oct.</td>
<td>192,401</td>
<td>7,202</td>
<td>199,603</td>
<td>5,925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Dec.</td>
<td>246,125</td>
<td>31,859</td>
<td>277,984</td>
<td>7,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Jan.</td>
<td>327,733</td>
<td>75,622</td>
<td>423,355</td>
<td>11,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mar.</td>
<td>422,693</td>
<td>170,012</td>
<td>592,705</td>
<td>15,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 June</td>
<td>402,184</td>
<td>239,229</td>
<td>642,413</td>
<td>19,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 July</td>
<td>492,503</td>
<td>291,864</td>
<td>784,367</td>
<td>21,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Sept.</td>
<td>425,197</td>
<td>50,796</td>
<td>475,993</td>
<td>14,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Oct.</td>
<td>114,316</td>
<td>1,647</td>
<td>115,963</td>
<td>2,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nov.</td>
<td>102,247</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>102,260</td>
<td>2,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Jan.</td>
<td>104,305</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>104,650</td>
<td>2,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Feb.</td>
<td>148,909</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>148,909</td>
<td>3,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 June</td>
<td>127,727</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>127,855</td>
<td>2,805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Aug.</td>
<td>73,127</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>73,167</td>
<td>1,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Sept.</td>
<td>3,794</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>3,794</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Oct.</td>
<td>2,249</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>2,249</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Jan.</td>
<td>2,713</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2,719</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Feb.</td>
<td>9,103</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9,123</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>11,145</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11,153</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 July</td>
<td>19,454</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19,482</td>
<td>486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Oct.</td>
<td>3,084</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>3,084</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jan.</td>
<td>3,170</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>3,170</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Mar.</td>
<td>3,396</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>3,396</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 July</td>
<td>3,579</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>3,579</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Oct.</td>
<td>2,491</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,492</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Dec.</td>
<td>2,998</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>2,998</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Feb.</td>
<td>4,152</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>4,152</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Oct.</td>
<td>1,977</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>1,977</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>