

# Contours of colonialism: Gaelic Ireland and the early colonial subject

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## ABSTRACT

The sixteenth century is critical to our reading of Ireland's subsequent colonial and indeed postcolonial geographies, yet has frequently evaded considered scrutiny for a variety of reasons, including the deficiencies of the evidence. Eschewing assumptions of colonialism as a 'given' and informed by postcolonial perspectives in geography and related disciplines, this paper interrogates the initial contours of English colonial endeavours in one region of Ireland from the beginnings of renewed Crown interest in the mid-sixteenth century. Using the example of the O'Dwyer family of Kilnamanagh in county Tipperary, the paper explores the interconnections as well as the conflicts of the worlds of the colonial 'newcomers' and Gaelic 'natives', and demonstrates how colonial discourses of civility, reform and the barbarous 'Other' were transcended on the ground by a complex set of locally dependent variables. Support is offered for the notion that expediency and survival were the fundamental imperatives of both the New English administration and Gaelic responses, and, by highlighting the absence of any consistent colonial relations, the discussion points to the contradictory and mutually constitutive nature of English and Gaelic worlds, co-existing by the end of the sixteenth century.

**Key index words:** Colonialism, sixteenth century, Gaelic Ireland.

## Introduction

English colonialism in Ireland, its spaces and politics, theories and practices, have all come under renewed scrutiny in recent years. Postcolonial perspectives, particularly, have signalled new and engaging lines of inquiry into Ireland's colonial past, ranging from the imperial production of geographical knowledges of Ireland to its postcolonial legacies of diaspora and transnationalism (Graham, 2001; Nash, 2002; Kearns, 2003; Carroll and King, 2003). Despite this, however, there remains a number of significant historical geographies that require further interrogation. These include the emergence, negotiation and articulation of the English colonial project itself in the mid-sixteenth century and the initial 'geographical encounters' with Gaelic Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Interrogating Gaelic/English relations in the sixteenth century represents an onerous task for a number of reasons, including the oft-cited dearth of necessary surviving documentation, and consequently the century remains somewhat marginalised in Irish historical geography. As Duffy *et al.* (2001: 29) observe, the study of post-Norman Gaelic Ireland has been particularly neglected due to the 'appallingly poor survival of documentary evidence'. As they rightly point out, however, this is not the sole reason for the lacuna in the historiography of the period. The intellectual Celtic revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the subsequent implicit imbuelement of cultural nationalism in the academic disciplines of archaeology, geography and history in post-independent Ireland have served to generate a 'poor historiographical heritage' of research on the period, which is characterised by an 'unsatisfactory representation' of the contemporary Gaelic experience (Duffy *et al.*, 2001: 38).<sup>2</sup> This has also resulted in a concentration of research on earlier periods, with works frequently focused on the exploration and recovery of

pre-colonial, ostensibly more authentic cultures of Irishness, and typified moreover by a search for their continuity in the modern cultural landscape. One of the consequences of this historiographic trend is that Gaelic Ireland has been falsely posited as a static, bounded entity in historical geographical terms, which in turn has served to dissuade an interrogation of the more problematic and fluid colonised and partially colonised worlds of late medieval and early modern Ireland.

The difficulties of interrogating the voices of resistance and accommodation inherent in the multiple historical geographies of the colonised worlds are not unique to Ireland. Withers, Routledge, Duncan and others have all noted the challenges of examining the practices of dissent and collaboration intrinsic to cultural groups situated in the context of an external ascendant hegemony (Withers, 1988; Routledge, 1997; Duncan, 1999). Taking the example of the Scottish Highlands in his study of Gaelic reaction to elements of British modernity, for example, Withers (1988: 327) argues that the 'relative paucity of historical documentation [...] makes it difficult to understand the cultural productions of the Gaels as opposed to the cultural productions imposed on them'. In the Irish context, 'there has been scarcely any detailed historical research into the nature and development of Gaelic society in the early modern period [...] from the native Irish viewpoint', although O'Byrne's recent work on late medieval and early modern Leinster signals one means by which this imbalance can be addressed (O'Dowd, 1986: 129; O'Byrne, 2003). By replacing the traditional historiographic narrative (with a focus on the extension of Crown authority and reform) with instead a reading of political events from within the Gaelic worlds, O'Byrne provides us with an invaluable lens of inquiry, and draws our attention to the complexities of the warring, political and social worlds of Leinster and their various interconnections both within and outside. An additional challenge in researching the Gaelic-Irish past, which O'Keeffe has alerted us to, is the danger of utilising simplified contemporary accounts of Gaelic society - accounts typically formulated externally and complete with generalisations, stereotypes and cultural prejudices. As he rightly points out, many contemporary 'testimonies' have not been 'subjected to the level of textual analysis or discourse analysis which might insulate historians from inadvertent acceptance of their prejudices' (O'Keeffe, 2001: 81). These 'knowledges', furthermore - as ostensibly fixed terms of reference - have all too often dissuaded us from interrogating the multiple nuances and complexities internal to Gaelic Ireland.

In attempting to offer a reading of the historical geographies of Gaelic sixteenth-century Tipperary, the research carried out for this paper has been undertaken with reference to what is essentially an eclectic array of evidence. Extensive use has been made of the diverse material contained within the *State Papers*, *Carew Manuscripts*, *Ormond Deeds*, *Fiants* and *Annals of the Four Masters*. Within many of these sources run the situated prejudices of specific political and administrative agendas, typical of any colonial administration (Duncan, 1990; Thomas, 1994; Duncan, 1999). Justifying early modern English expansion overseas, the Irish were 'imagined' in Tudor England as 'the richest and most enduring source [of] demonology', and hence are frequently depicted accordingly in State records (Daniels, 1993: 6). As noted elsewhere, it is important to recognise such politics of representation at work in colonial documents and that theorising their embedded ideological and power relations represents a key challenge (Morrissey, 2003). In writing this paper, particular attention has been paid to the dangers of what Duncan calls 'overly ambitious theorising', which can serve to 'bury even deeper indigenous knowledges and practices', and the approach within has also been mindful of the criticism that 'postcolonialism is too theoretical and not rooted enough in material contexts' (Duncan, 1999: 127; Blunt and McEwan, 2002: 5). It is suggested here that the

emergent and evolving discourse of English colonialism in Ireland was shaped by very real material encounters on the ground from the very beginning, and that discourse itself, as Blunt and McEwan argue convincingly, is ‘intensely material’ (Blunt and McEwan, 2002: 5).

As the New English administration attempted to rejuvenate Crown control in the latter half of the sixteenth century, they negotiated a number of frontiers, real and imagined, throughout the island, along a contact zone with both Gaelic-Irish and Old English cultural worlds. This paper focuses on New English encounters with the Gaelic-Irish by using the example of the O’Dwyers of Kilnamanagh in county Tipperary (seen in Figure 1). Within, it is argued that English/Gaelic relations in the latter half of the sixteenth century were constructed and negotiated in varying and contradictory ways in the context of diverse, pre-existing political, social and cultural geographies. By interrogating various points of contact of the New English administration in Tipperary with one of their early colonial subjects, the O’Dwyers, it is demonstrated how simplified notions of the coloniser and the colonised were

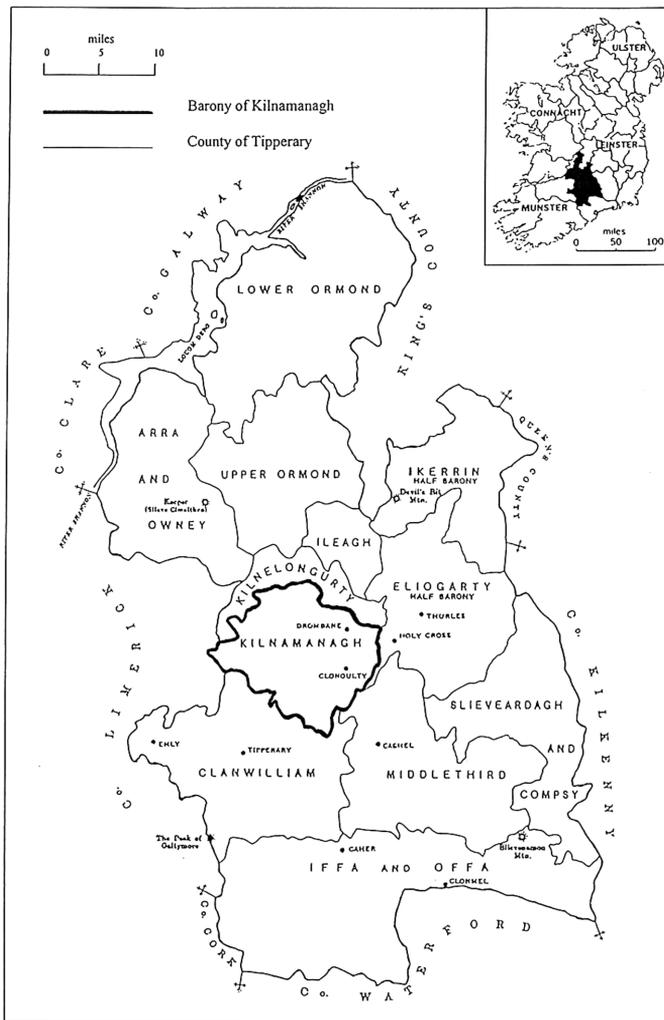


Figure 1: The barony of Kilnamanagh, county Tipperary. Adapted from *Civil Survey, county Tipperary, Vol. 2: i*.

transcended in practice by a dynamic and evolving realpolitik that ensured a high level of expediency in emerging ‘colonial’ relations.

### **The colonial project begins: reasserting Crown control**

*Other Irishmen's countries [...] as O'Kenedy and O'Dwyre and the Carrowlles, doth bear galloglasses to his Majesty without contradiction, which were wont to be mortal enemies to the English pale. So [it is] with small charge will be brought to civil obedience; and if all the countries were made counties that the law might have his course, then they would prosper; for the sheriffs would put back their Irish laws and election of captains – Sir Thomas Cusake, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, 1553. (Calendar of Carew Manuscripts (hereafter Cal. Carew MSS), 1515-1574: 237)*

In considering what was required to control Gaelic-Irish ‘countries’ such as the O’Dwyers, Lord Chancellor Cusake signalled above an integral part of the emergent discourse of English colonialism in Tudor Ireland; a discourse that was characterised initially by the policy of reform. As Edwards (2001) points out, there has been a common, erroneous tendency to define Tudor Irish society via the lense of the reform narrative, which serves to disallow, or at best marginalise, an interrogation of the complexities and nuances of everyday life *in practice* on the ground. Reconquest and not reform was, of course, the end narrative for Tudor Ireland. In *theory*, however, Tudor expansion was typified initially by a series of declared agendas of reform, and this process was to become a conflicting and inconsistent one as the Crown attempted to extend administrative control in an island characterised by a patchwork of self-governing Gaelic-Irish and Old English lordships. The barony of Kilnamanagh was one such lordship, the ancestral home of the O’Dwyers. Situated in west county Tipperary, it occupies a transitional location in Ireland between east and west in a region that was at the contact zone of ‘Anglo’ colonialism from the thirteenth century (Morrissey, forthcoming). In the late medieval period, Kilnamanagh found itself at the edge of the extended Butler territories in south Tipperary and Kilkenny. The O’Dwyers managed to survive in the barony and indeed regained territories as the early modern period approached, but contact with the Butlers and others was always present. Kilnamanagh, as a contact zone, was to be given renewed definition in Tudor Ireland.

Like many Gaelic-Irish families finding themselves facing a strengthening New English presence in the mid-sixteenth century, the O’Dwyers of Kilnamanagh sought to maintain their position in county Tipperary by forging strategic alliances with neighbouring Gaelic-Irish and Old English lords and continuing the medieval political system of faction by establishing marriage ties (National Library of Ireland, MFIC Pos. 8302). As the later sixteenth century progressed and Crown control expanded, however, they were compelled further to situate themselves in the ‘new order’ of the emerging colonial polity. Partially, at least, they had to become colonial ‘subjects’ in order to survive. From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, there began a sustained, albeit inconsistent, attempt to rejuvenate English Government in Ireland, with various contemporary strategic, political and religious imperatives cited by Brady, Cavanagh, Neville-Sington and others to explain Tudor expansion and the beginnings of English colonialism (Brady, 1986; Cavanagh, 1993; Neville-Sington, 1993). As early as 1540, a significant indenture is recorded for the O’Dwyer lordship of Kilnamanagh between ‘the King and Conohour O’Dowir [...] captain of his nation’, revealing a covenant whereby the chief agreed to pay a certain sum of money ‘out of every “carue” of land, and find 40 galloglas for a month’ for the New English administration in Tipperary (Cal. Carew MSS, 1515-1574: 158). Similar covenants were made to the King at this time from O’Brien of Arra

and O'Mulryan of Owny, to the north-west of Kilnamanagh, reflecting the degree to which the extension of the King's writ was being attempted in the region.

The reform process, however, was contradictory and piecemeal from the very beginning. The factional nature of existing Gaelic-Irish and Old English lordships served to inhibit the effectiveness of centralised Government. The New English administration in the county, for example, sustained an annual monetary tribute to the influential O'Carroll lordship of Ely in 1549 (*Cal. Carew MSS*, Books of Howth, Miscellaneous: 257). The chief of the O'Dwyers' indenture with the King in 1540 represented an integral part of the reforming agenda of successive New English administrations, which attempted to address the problem of allegiances and powerful independent magnates by seeking covenants with individual lords. Efforts to centralise control, however, continued to be impeded by the intricate system of faction. The O'Dwyers, for example – despite their indenture with the King – continued to come under the political influence of the powerful O'Brien overlordship of Thomond in county Clare (*Calendar of State Papers of Ireland* (hereafter *Cal. S.P. Ire.*), 1509-1573: 78).

In the later sixteenth century, the New English administration nevertheless sustained its commitment to reform in the region; its productiveness facilitated particularly by the Old English Butler Earls of Ormond's strong influence in the liberty of Tipperary. Successive Earls, maintaining their respective prerogatives as magnates of Royal authority in the region from the thirteenth century, enabled the dissemination of English political and socio-economic ideologies and heightened the awareness of English material practices and institutions. Spearheaded by Ormond, the local Government system in the county was rejuvenated and intensified as early as 1551, when the then sheriff summoned jurors 'for enquiring into the operation of the Statutes of Labourers and the presentment of felonies' (*Calendar of Ormond Deeds* (hereafter *Cal. Ormond Deeds*), 1547-1584: 62). The Earls gradually induced recognition from the O'Dwyers and others of the necessity to come to terms with the New English administration. The O'Dwyers' initial participation in the new order saw them upholding galloglasses in the King's forces by 1553, and by 1569 the Kilnamanagh lordship's standing forces were 12 horsemen and 120 foot; these forces serving with those of the tenth Earl of Ormond in suppressing the second Desmond rebellion in Munster of the late 1570s and early 1580s (*Cal. Carew MSS*, 1515-1574: 394; *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1574-1585: cx, 437).

The process of reform in the liberty of Tipperary did not constitute direct central Government administration, however, and had one central dependency: reliance on the Earl of Ormond. Elsewhere in Tudor Britain the establishment of regional organs of Government administration, such as the council of the north in England and the council of the marches in Wales, had effectively facilitated the consolidation of centralised control. However, no effective appointments were made in Munster until 1571 when Sir John Perrot took up office as President of the province, but as his Governmental directives for reform greatly surpassed the resources available to him, effectual administration was again compromised. The rejuvenation of English institutions in Munster, then, relied considerably on the influence of powerful Old English magnates, chiefly the Earl of Desmond (in north Kerry and west Limerick) and the Earl of Ormond. The Earls of Desmond and their extensive network of subordinate lordships throughout Munster had consistently resisted the New English presence from the mid-sixteenth century and were progressively mistrusted to oversee Government reforms; a process which saw them revolt against Crown control, initially in the late 1560s and early 1570s and again in the late 1570s and early 1580s. There was, however, a

substantial conflict of interests, too, between the New English administration and the tenth Earl of Ormond, Thomas Butler.

From the 1550s, it was felt by the New English Government, in Munster and Dublin, that Ormond's continued Royal jurisdiction and powers in the palatinate liberty of Tipperary served to inhibit the effectual execution of Government reform. Lord Deputy of Ireland, Sir Henry Sidney, wrote to Queen Elizabeth in 1567 reporting that the Earl of Ormond's palatinate privileges were 'productive of much mischief through the incompetency of his officers' (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1509-1573: 330). Sidney made known his plans to dismantle Ormond's jurisdictional liberty in Tipperary and consolidate strong Government control in Munster by setting up a presidential system. He informed the Privy Council in 1576 that the Queen's writ was not allowed currency in the liberty of Tipperary and conjectured that 'as long as any subject has any jurisdiction palatine [...] there will be no perfect reformation in Munster' (*Cal. Carew MSS*, 1575-1588: 41). Critically, however, the ineptitude of the New English administration in dealing with the two Desmond rebellions of the 1570s and 1580s – which Ormond was ultimately required to suppress – confirmed the Earl 'as the most effective defender of the Crown's interests in Ireland' (Brady, 1989a: 56). All Government efforts, thereafter, to abolish the liberty of Tipperary in the later sixteenth century were frustrated by the Royal favour Ormond enjoyed with Elizabeth.

With Ormond's position assured, he continued to exert substantial influence in the lordship of Kilnamanagh and inconsistencies in what was effectively piecemeal reform in the liberty of Tipperary remained. The jurors, for example, summoned by the sheriff of the liberty of Tipperary in 1551 – of which there were 138 collectively in the towns of Cashel, Fethard, Clonmel and elsewhere in Tipperary – were mostly from the south and east of the county and of Anglo-Norman origin (*Cal. Ormond Deeds*, 1547-1584: 60-62). This was clearly a reflection of the degree to which English institutional practices were preserved in the Old English areas, but was an illustration, too, of the initial, minimal involvement of the Gaelic-Irish in Government administration in the county. Despite standing loyally by their sovereign and fighting alongside the Butlers against the FitzGerald's in the Desmond rebellions, some members of the O'Dwyers also revolted against New English rule in Munster during the rebellions, which illustrates the impossibility of neatly delineating either the New English reform process or the Gaelic-Irish response (*Annals of the Four Masters* (hereafter *A.F.M.*), Vol. 5: 1629).

### **Discourses of barbarity and the justification of colonisation**

Broader Tudor attempts at reform in Ireland and its declared efforts to 'replace 'barbarism' with 'civility'', as Edwards (2001: 77) puts it, were met in Kilnamanagh by a substantial level of resistance from the mid-sixteenth century. The Irish Fiants of the Tudor sovereigns reveal a consistent series of pardons to prominent O'Dwyers from the late 1540s to the early 1600s (*Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns* (hereafter *Fiants Ire.*), *Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1521-1558: 363, 434; *Fiants Ire.*, *Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1586-1603: 6706-6707). The fiants uncover the extent to which strong residual elements of the old world persisted in Kilnamanagh – a world frequently at odds with the new one being devised and effected by the New English. Resistance was an inevitable and constituent part of the reform process, and pardons to the O'Dwyers were granted for such transgressions against New English authority as 'trading in horses, victuals, and arms, with the Irish enemy' (*Fiants Ire.*, *Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1521-1558: 966). In 1564, injunctions to apprehend and punish any rebels were issued to the O'Dwyers and others in Tipperary (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1509-1573: 243), and pardons and fines were issued

successively to foremost members of the O'Dwyers in the 1570s and 1580s (*Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1558-1586: 966, 1964, 2024, 2082, 3102, 3364, 4371, 4907; *Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1586-1603: 4937, 5085). The recorded pardons do not usually specify as to what offence was committed but they do point to deviations from the New English social norms that were being externally imposed on the O'Dwyer lordship in the later sixteenth century.

The pardons bring to light the degree to which the Gaelic system of landholding and associated social structure were in conflict with the English institutions of single ownership, primogeniture and the common law. The evidence highlights a fragmented and intricate Gaelic-Irish freehold system, and points to the subsequent difficulty of its assimilation into English legal, social and economic norms. The O'Dwyer landholders, through their practice of arbitrary exactions within the lordship, partnership farming and pastoral husbandry, simultaneously resisted the implementation of English material practices such as the establishment of a rent-based economy. This form of resistance was witnessed in the barony in 1582, for example, when the commandry of Clonoulty, which had passed into Crown control in the aftermath of the dissolution of monastic lands begun in the mid-1530s, 'remained waste above three years, in consequence of the troubles there by undutiful subjects' (*Calendar of Patent Rolls of Ireland (hereafter Cal. Pat. Rolls Ire.)*, *Eliz.*: 48-49). Furthermore, the rents initiated in Clonoulty had been lost and the lands had been 'burned, and other ways spoiled'. The pardons also reveal the extent to which the Kilnamanagh lordship was militarised, with both galloglasses and kerns evident. These groups represented a perennial disturbance to the peace and workings of the New English administration. Arbitrarily demanding lodging and protection within the lordships throughout the country, their mercenary activities, cattle-raiding and house-burning (wonderfully depicted in John Derricke's *The image of Irelande* in 1581) posed a significant threat to the new order.

The Gaelic-Irish world of Kilnamanagh and throughout Ireland constituted a frequently intractable impediment to Government reforms of the later Tudor period. Edmund Spenser – one of the most distinguished contemporary English commentators on Tudor Irish society – documented the perceived unruly, ungovernable and barbarous nature of the Gaelic lordships. Spenser's works, however, formed merely a fragment of a long-established series of colonial pamphlets and propaganda situated in the context of a justified 'reforming' and 'civil' mission. Numerous New English writers and travellers of the late-sixteenth century condemned Gaelic material practices such as tanistry, gavelkind, coign and livery as barbarous (Baker, 1993; Hadfield, 1993). These writings and intellectual currents provided the legitimisation of the agenda of reform set out by New English officials throughout the Tudor period, which included the extirpation of Gaelic-Irish customs and material practices deemed barbarous and ultimately detrimental to the effectual centralised Government of the lordships. Sir John Perrot, Lord Deputy of Ireland, 1584-1588, for example, believed that:

*[cutting] away the Captainries and Tanisthips used among the mere Irishry, to the end that the seignories of the Irish lords should descend from father to son, according to the common laws of England [and] surrendering of their land, and taking the same back again, must breed quietness, obedience and profit. (Cal. Carew MSS, 1589-1600: 27)*

Perrot belonged to the 'reform tradition' of Government officials and writers that advocated correction through education and assimilation. His writings and those of Campion, Gerard, Herbert and others collectively illustrate 'a confidence that the spread of the English legal system to Ireland would achieve the desired effect [of reform]' (Hadfield and McVeagh, 1994: 39).

From the mid-sixteenth century, successive confirmations of the town charters of neighbouring Cashel in 1554, 1557, 1584 and 1592 convey a pronounced opposition to Gaelic-Irish customs, and a determination to uphold English economic institutions and the common law in the town and its environs (*Cal. Pat. Rolls Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*: 340-341; *Cal. Pat. Rolls Ire., Eliz.*: 236-240). However, in Kilnamanagh itself, there is little indication of what Edwards (2001: 96) cites as the necessary evidence of direct reform in the localities – ‘English law courts and legal officials at work’ – until the later Stuart period. The Irish Fiants certainly highlight the extent to which attempts to bring the O’Dwyers into line with English norms had been occurring since the early 1550s. Successive pardons in the 1570s and 1580s, for example, reveal the manner in which New English attempts to secure its jurisdiction over the lordship in Kilnamanagh resulted in more stringent security provisions being stipulated with each pardon (*Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1558-1586: 2024, 3364, 5085). Acquittals frequently occurred provided that within six months the accused members of the O’Dwyers ‘appear before commissioners in their county, and give security to keep the peace and answer at sessions when called upon’ (*Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1558-1586: no. 3364). Clearly, however, such rigorous and uncompromising Government directives may merely suggest the ineffectiveness of their administration, given that we have no verification of compliance with any of these orders. The arguably nominal nature of Government administration in Kilnamanagh at this juncture is evident on other levels also. The break-up of localised Gaelic power bases by the removal of clan standing armies was an element of the reform process deemed critical to the success of the state centralising project. The O’Dwyers, however, were not stripped of their military capacity at any point in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Their pastoral economy, too, prevailed, and, similar to what Edwards (2001: 81) has shown for the MacGiollapadraig lordship in Upper Ossory in contemporary neighbouring Queen’s County, their territorial organisation ‘remained a vibrant Gaelic lordship throughout the sixteenth century, irrespective of the increasing proximity of the English Government and its official representatives’.

Notwithstanding the above points, in the later sixteenth century, the O’Dwyers evidently did participate more in the new order (albeit with contradictions), recognising and acting on its perceived benefits. In 1575, for example, ‘Philip O’Duire, captain of his nation and the country of Kellnemannagh’ oversaw and guaranteed the grant of ‘the castle, lordship and town of Grantestown with all the messuages, lands, tenements, etc.’ between members of the Burkes of Clanwilliam, immediately south of Kilnamanagh (*Cal. Ormond Deeds*, 1547-1584: 262). Significantly, this reveals the degree to which the O’Dwyers, in an effort to safeguard their position, identified the importance of law and order in the vicinity of Kilnamanagh, and were, in effect, seeking to redefine and present themselves as subjects capable of progressive involvement in the new society. The imperative to come to terms with the New English presence was clearly felt by the O’Dwyers since the dissolution of the Catholic monastic houses in the 1530s. Landed estates throughout Kilnamanagh were transferred to Crown control and leased to New English settlers through the course of the later sixteenth century. The rectory and affiliated lands of Clogher were leased as early as 1543, and were renewed in 1561 and 1569 (*Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1521-1558: 374; *Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1558-1586: 322, 1250). The parsonage and estate of Ballintemple were also leased in 1570 and renewed in 1582 (*Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1558-1586: 1643, 4013). In addition, the process inaugurated the channel of legal inquiry into landownership that underpinned later Government plantation schemes. One such scheme, the Munster plantation, affected large tracts of lands in neighbouring Clanwilliam barony to the south, which further illustrated to

the O'Dwyers the confiscatory powers of the New English administration and the necessity of fashioning an effective response to the emerging context of New English rule.

### **The English Self and the Irish 'half subject'**

As later sixteenth-century Government administration in Ireland became progressively more centralised and effectual, it simultaneously grew increasingly more intolerant of the Gaelic-Irish population (Canny, 1986; Cavanagh, 1993). The plans for the Munster plantation, for example, explicitly illustrate the exclusive ethnicity of the New English, wherein it is revealed that the grantees were expressly directed–

*not to marry with any but with some person born of English parents, or of such as shall descend from the first patentees [...] English people now newly to be planted there, not to set their estates to any Irish. (Cal. Carew MSS, 1575-1588: 419)*

Reform thought progressively yielded to an exclusivist and racialist rhetoric in the later sixteenth century, when writers such as Fynes Moryson, Barnaby Rich and, most notably, Edmund Spenser advocated the necessity of a complete reconquest of Ireland (Brady, 1989b; Hadfield and McVeagh, 1994). There are difficulties with the concept of a shift in the ideological underpinnings of the Tudor administration in Ireland, given the recurrence of inconsistencies in Government policy. Brady (1986: 23), for example, stresses that recognition of the idea of two disparate phases of Government generates an overstated sense of a 'simple division' of the sixteenth century into 'soft and tough phases of policy', which ignores the 'periodic oscillations and simultaneous inconsistencies which were a feature of Tudor Government in practice'. He goes on to question the 'propriety of applying such general conceptual categories as 'humanism', 'Calvinism', or colonial thought as direct influences in the formulation of particular Irish policies'. Bradshaw (1988: 162) too casts doubt upon 'the existence of a colonial consensus among the New English of Elizabethan Ireland', and argues that it is more appropriate to 'explore the tensions within the colonial ethos rather than search for a dubious consensus'.

Notwithstanding these important assertions, a continuum of exclusivist ideological thought can be traced back to the twelfth century, when the works of Giraldus Cambrensis comprehensively established the notion of 'Anglo' civility/superiority and 'Gaelic' barbarity/inferiority. His *Topographia Hibernica* and *Expugnatio Hibernica*, both written in the late 1180s, were to prove the benchmarks of later English colonial thought and writing on Ireland. Cambrensis' dismissal of Gaelic culture was unsurpassed by sixteenth-century English writers, who, as Gillingham (1993: 24) points out, 'were to do little more than play variations on themes already well and truly established in [his] writings'. The exclusiveness of the Tudor administration was not a 'New' English phenomenon, but was, in fact, an integral – albeit inconsistent – feature of English Government in Ireland from the twelfth century. Residual elements of reform thought were discernible in later English colonial discourse but these came to be superseded ultimately by more radical objectives (Durston, 1986; Carlin, 1993).

The exclusivist rhetoric intensified in Government circles in the late-sixteenth century. Political discourses advancing the idea that the 'only true subjects of the Crown' were those who were committed Protestants – the 'Self' of colonial relations – and that all 'others' were 'a threat to the security of the English Crown and its position in Ireland' were being increasingly designed by 'English-born officials and soldiers in Ireland; arguments that 'received a sympathetic hearing from senior officials in London' (Canny, 1993: 56). The New

English most palpably demonstrated the fundamental exclusiveness of their political agenda when their administration was strong enough to do so. However, given the piecemeal nature of Tudor Government in Ireland – which reflected both its logistical inability to carry out its programme of reform and its reliance on some level of cooperation from the existing population – complexities and contradictions in early modern Irish society were inevitable. Less than three years after the plan for the Munster plantation was originally drawn up, for example, it is seen that its implementation had degenerated into indiscriminate expropriation and extortion of profit, with little apparent Government control. Sir William Herbert, for example, writes in 1588 that:

*[o]ur pretence in the enterprise of plantation was to establish in these parts piety, justice, inhabitation and civility, with comfort and good example to the parts adjacent. Our drift now is, being here possessed of land, to extort, make the state of things turbulent, and live by prey and pay. (Cal. S.P. Ire., 1588-1592: 62)*

In Tipperary, corruption in local Government is evident in 1591, when Sir Richard Shea, Governor and Sheriff of counties Tipperary and Kilkenny, was accused of the ‘taking of black rents and other extortions and abuses’. The then chief of Kilnamanagh, Philip O’Dwyer, had paid him for three year’s surety in the liberty of Tipperary in the late 1580s (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1588-1592: 425).

The enterprise of the O’Dwyers and others in Tipperary in reconciling their lordships to the new order encountered a level of malpractice in Government administration that inevitably generated a level of distrust of the New English presence. The controversy in the 1590s over the payment of ‘cess’ (or purveyance) to Government administrators for the maintenance of Crown troops throughout the country, for example, illustrates the antagonism of both the Gaelic-Irish and Old English communities to the exclusive administration of New English Government. In county Tipperary, for instance, subsequent to ‘a composition in lieu of cess’ being imposed in 1592 when 100 footmen were ‘to be victualled in the said county’, Lord Deputy, Sir William Fitzwilliam, informed the Privy Council that attempts to ‘assemble all the gentlemen, freeholders, and tenants in the said county’ – to bring about their reform in relation to their opposition to the composition – were met with ‘dissent and disagreement to yield to Her Highness’ (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1592-1596: 7). In Kilnamanagh and throughout Tipperary, too, further unease was inevitably engendered by the manner in which the New English planters who effected the Munster plantation were perceived to have gained ownership of land through the unscrupulous use of the common law, which was frequently comprehended by the Gaelic-Irish and Old English to be in favour of the New English minority (Sheehan, 1983). The perceived grievances of the Gaelic-Irish and Old English – concomitant with the emerging exclusive style of Tudor Government – led to their increasing alienation and opposition. In a sense, both communities were already being marked out as only ‘half subjects’ as James I would later describe them (Morrissey, 2003).

### **To the Other side and back: resistance in the late sixteenth century**

Accordingly, a sense of unease had formed throughout the province of Munster in the mid-1590s that was exacerbated by the rising in Ulster of Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, and the advent of the Nine Years War. O’Neill, along with Hugh O’Donnell, Earl of Tyrconnell, and fellow dissidents of the newly-formed Ulster confederacy, attempted to nationalise the struggle to safeguard the existing political and landholding order within Ulster by championing himself as the defender of ‘Christ’s Catholic religion’ (*Cal. Carew MSS*, 1589-

1600: 179). A letter from the Privy Council to Sir George Carew, President of Munster, confirmed that by 1600 many settlers in the province 'had fled for fear of the rebels' (*Cal. Carew MSS*, 1589-1600: 457). Tyrone had also invoked Spanish assistance, offering King Philip II the Crown of Ireland and subsequently, as the President of Munster feared, the 'expectation of Spaniards' lifted up 'the spirits of the Irishry' and caused further stirring in Tipperary (*Cal. Carew MSS*, 1601-1603: 103; *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1600-1601: 425, 444). In late 1599 and early 1600, Tyrone marched through O'Dwyer country en route to the south coast of Ireland, where he would rendezvous with a Spanish expeditionary force and eventually meet an English army under the command of the new Irish Viceroy, Charles Blount, Lord Mountjoy, at the Battle of Kinsale in December 1601. That the English effectively completed the Tudor conquest of Ireland, in the wider context, by their victory at Kinsale is commonly attested. However, prior to Kinsale, Tyrone's march through Kilnamanagh and Tipperary and the ensuing exacerbation of revolt provides an excellent opportunity of interpreting the complex and contradictory dual process of resistance and compliance that characterised the attempts of Gaelic-Irish lords such as the O'Dwyers to survive in age of upheaval. Many of the O'Dwyers' Gaelic-Irish and Old English neighbours in Tipperary, such as the O'Mulryans of Owny and the O'Kennedys of Ormond to the north-west and the Purcells of Loughmore in Eliogarty to the east, were in revolt by 1599, by which time the town of Cashel was 'standing in great fear and danger, and intended by the rebels to be surprised and betrayed' (*Cal. Carew MSS*, 1589-1600: 299; *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1598-1599: 453-454). However, the O'Dwyers were to take a more complicated path, by essentially playing the roles of both recusants and loyal subjects.

Tyrone's activities in Munster prior to the Battle of Kinsale involved the harassment of those unwilling to join the Ulster confederacy. The O'Dwyers then were faced with the challenge of effecting a response to the presence of the northern forces. *The Annals of the Four Masters* record that:

*although these chieftains [the O'Dwyers] had for some time stood by their Sovereign, they were glad to obtain terms of peace from those strange warriors, who were traversing every territory. (A.F.M., Vol. 6: 2077-2079)*

The *Annals* proceed to refer to the cautious allegiance of the O'Dwyers to these Ulstermen: they formed 'a confederacy and friendship with O'Neill's people [who had] induced every territory [...] to join them' and who had for some time remained in the vicinity of Kilnamanagh (A.F.M., Vol. 6: 2149). By 1599, the chief of Kilnamanagh, Dermot O'Dwyer, 'having delivered his son in pledge for his loyalty, began to revolt' (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1599-1600: 45). Later that year, Queen Elizabeth herself wrote to the Earl of Ormond requesting him to take order with the chief regarding his appropriation of lands and goods belonging to the Anglican archbishop of Cashel, Miler Magrath, who had complained that O'Dwyer had pillaged his dioceses 'to the number of eleven towns and villages' (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1599-1600: 297, 471). Much of Magrath's accusations can be considered exaggerated humbug given the fact that he was later discredited by evidence of the corruption of his Protestant church activities in west Tipperary (see the letter from King Jas. I to Lord Deputy, Sir Arthur Chichester, 1609: *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1601-1603, Addenda: 655-656). However, the important consideration here is that O'Dwyer was now seen or suspected as a rebel. How he subsequently acted and was treated by the New English administration reveals as much inconsistencies in the notion of resistance as it does in the idea of subjugation and the colonial subject. The Self and the Other of English 'colonialism' in Tipperary were to emerge in a mutually constitutive manner.

Faced with escalating tension and resistance, a common tactic of successive New English administrations in the late sixteenth century was to actively seek the loyalty of Gaelic-Irish and Old English noblemen formerly in arms against the Crown. This mirrored the extent to which the Government throughout the country was not capable, as yet, of defending itself without the support of the existing lords. The President of Munster and the Earl of Ormond, for instance, continued to take pledges of loyalty in the late 1590s and early 1600s (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1598-1599: 454). This specific process crucially reflected a broader Governmental design whereby:

*many of the meaner sort in action should be bought over by protections and pardons, so that the enemy might be weakened and the pardoned men used for further service. (Cal. S.P. Ire., 1601-1603: 32)*

Accordingly, various O'Dwyers were pardoned successively in 1600 and 1601. In May 1601, a comprehensive pardon was issued to Dermot the chief, his free kinsmen and other leading members of the O'Dwyer lordship (*Fiants Ire., Hen. VIII-Eliz.*, 1586-1603: 6441, 6522, 6531). The O'Dwyers' loyalty to the Crown was required. They were effectively being asked to choose sides, and they subsequently responded by taking the opportunity to prove their conformity.

In early 1600, the tenth Earl of Ormond, so often a mediator for the O'Dwyers' connections to the New English world, reported to the Privy Council that Dermot O'Dwyer was 'a martial man (under correction) not meet to be urged for further surety of the peace' (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1600: 11). According to Ormond, O'Dwyer's 'correction' and reassertion of loyalty to the Crown was complete when he became Sheriff of the liberty of Tipperary for the year 1600, and indeed 'manifested his duty by killing and apprehending some of Tyrone's men, standing constantly with Her Majesty's service in all this time of rebellion'. In addition, throughout 1600 and 1601, O'Dwyer was commended for his service against the rebels in Tipperary and maintaining the loyalty of his kinsmen to the Crown, an unforeseen eventuality one year previously at which time he was in open rebellion against the Crown (*Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1599-1600: 428, *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1600: 165, 233; *Cal. S.P. Ire.*, 1601-1603: 33). The loyalty of the O'Dwyers and the involvement of their chief in Government demonstrates how aspects of an English colonial polity predicated on exclusivist grounds, and characterised by notions of Self and Other, were transcended by a series of fluid and contradictory power relations in practice. It illustrates, furthermore, the calculated expediency of both the New English administration and the Gaelic-Irish lords at the contact zone of English colonialism in sixteenth-century Ireland.

Barbarity replaced by civility? Was that what becoming a colonial subject essentially entailed? How had O'Dwyer situated himself within the new order to such an extent that he had managed to transform himself from dissident insubordinate to sheriff in such a short space of time? The simplest answer, of course, is that he had not really transformed himself, but had merely acted as opportunely as the administration had when they needed him. There is, however, a more telling explanation. In an important letter he wrote to Ormond in 1600, concerning his dispute over land with the archbishop of Cashel, O'Dwyer reveals how he had proved flexible enough to construct an effective response to the strengthening Crown authority and New English Government in the localities. He informed Ormond that he had:

*attended at the last assizes holden at Clonmell within the liberty, with [his] learned counsel, expecting the Lord Archbishop coming hither touching these causes [of dis-*

*pute] whereby they might be determined according the course of Her Majesty's laws; where the Lord Archbishop came not in person, nor by attorney, so as (by means of his absence) nothing could be done. (Cal. S.P. Ire., 1600: 378-379)*

If the beginnings of New English colonialism in Ireland was more akin to a localised, scramble for survival, then O'Dwyer had clearly recognised it. He had evidently acquired a sharp knowledge of both the New English legal and local government system and, moreover, the means to access it. His actions point us ultimately to how contemporary Gaelic Ireland was 'transformed and enhanced by its knowledge of colonial culture and by its experience of partial colonisation' (O'Keeffe, 2001: 80).

### Conclusion

One of the key challenges of researching and narrating sixteenth-century Gaelic/English 'colonial' relations is to account for their fundamental contradictions and complexities. Departing from more traditional, neater accounts of Tudor Ireland, frequently imbued with too many generalisations and certainties concerning English colonial expansion, reform and subsequent Gaelic struggle, this paper has drawn attention to the diverse and conflicting practices of accommodation and resistance that transcended society in a variety of specific and situated ways. In doing so, it has also challenged the broader dominant historiographic tradition of seeing the beginnings of English colonialism in Ireland via the lense of reform. Conversely, the O'Dwyer experience presented here supports Edward's (2001: 96) contention that 'Gaelic survival strategies' rather than 'English reform policies' typified Tudor Ireland. By interrogating contemporary discourses of barbarity and civility, the paper has sought to underline the absence of any consistent colonial relations in practice and thereby support the notion that '[e]very colonial encounter is different' and needs to be 'precisely located and analysed for its specific interplay' (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1998: 10).

Regarding our imaginings of 'colonial beginnings', Wylie (2000: 46) rightly points out that 'little attention has been paid by geographers to the question of the emergence of colonial expansion, and colonial discourse, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries'. The historiographic consequence is that, through this 'neglect', the formation of contemporary 'European colonial discourses' have been frequently understood in 'unproblematic' and 'overly linear' terms (Wylie, 2000: 46). By using the specific example of sixteenth-century west Tipperary, this paper has argued conversely that early English colonial discourse and its contestation by Gaelic Ireland were, in fact, characterised by both complexity and inconsistency from the very beginning. Consequently, contemporary society was typified by a high level of intricacy and fluidity, what Blunt and McEwan (2002: 4) observe as the 'multidirectional effects of colonial power'. Practices of both resistance and accommodation played integral parts in the differentiation and delineation of the O'Dwyers as an early colonial subject of the Crown. Gaelic-Irish worlds such as Kilnamanagh were not just encountered by New English expansion, they informed the nature of the colonial project itself and were a constitutive part in its construction, as others have shown for indigenous groups elsewhere (Lester, 1998; Young, 2001). The O'Dwyers' initial encounters with sixteenth-century English colonialism point us to the contradictions and pragmatism of survival practices in contemporary Gaelic Ireland, and reveal the extent to which the Gaelic-Irish, as England's first colonial subjects overseas, were negotiating with an emerging English colonial polity that was differentiated by specific, contingent localised geographies and characterised ultimately by expediency.

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### Notes

1. There are a number of other key elements within Ireland's colonial past that warrant further attention, including, for example, its multiple 'gendered, sexualized and racialized spaces of colonialism' (Blunt and McEwan, 2002: 2).
2. One example, indeed, of such works includes Sir Michael O'Dwyer's over-simplified and rather romanticised study of the Gaelic-Irish experience of the O'Dwyers considered here; see O'Dwyer, M. (1933) *The O'Dwyers of Kilnamanagh: the history of an Irish sept*. London: John Murray.