



Introduction: **Ireland in the World-System**

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In 2008 Ireland entered an economic free-fall. The collapse of the Celtic Tiger challenged some of the central tenets of mainstream political thought in Ireland, as the country was revealed to be less a deregulated mouse that roared, and more of a politically weak and underdeveloped semi-periphery whose elite had little real control over the country's economy. Since then, the Irish political elite, as well as the ECB-IMF-European Commission Troika, have shown themselves to be strong supporters of socially destructive austerity policies. This has prompted a slowly emerging backlash, most notably protests against government plans to privatize the water supply. And in the recent February 2016 elections, a process of serious electoral re-alignment along Left-Right lines has been clearly evident.



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This political moment is an apt one for radical reappraisals of the history of Ireland's economic development, of the structures of power in Ireland and of the structures of power within which Ireland is bound up; issues, problems and questions for which world-systems analysis provides a most useful set of theoretical tools.

Ireland, both historically and in the present, has exhibited traits of both peripheries and semi-peripheries. Indeed, the papers in this issue's symposium on "Race in the Capitalist World-System" point out that the early modern English conquest of Ireland was a seminal moment for the history of whiteness, racism and global structural inequality. While Ireland suffered de-industrialisation, destitution and famine in the 19th century, it did not experience a "second serfdom" in the early modern era, like Eastern Europe or Latin America, and in the closing decades of the twentieth century it appeared to have changed from "the poorest of the rich," as *The Economist* once labelled it, to one of the seemingly most successful economies in the European core. Investigating these phenomena can lead to a fuller understanding of world-systems and the patterns of global economic dependency. Therefore, the various papers in this symposium seek to use world-systems analysis to arrive at a fuller understanding of Ireland, while also seeking to use Ireland for a fuller understanding of the world-system as well as the characteristics of European semi-peripheries in relation to cores.

Aidan Beatty's study of "The Irish Revolution Without a Revolution" critiques what he sees as "the conventional view among Irish historians that a revolution occurred in that country between the passing of the Third Home Rule Bill of 1912 and the end of the Civil War in 1923." Irish nationalists spoke of a "break" with Britain, but in many respects what they demanded was simply the right to manage the country themselves along the same capitalist lines. The nationalist mainstream did not seek an economic or social revolution; this paper seeks to understand the structural reasons why this was so.

Thomas Murray's paper situates the history of the Irish constitution in the successive, international waves of constitution-making that have tended to correspond with decisive moments or ruptures in the contested formation of the historical capitalist world-system since the late eighteenth century. The changing nature of the Irish constitution, he suggests, owed to certain local manifestations of anti-systemic movements within the historical capitalist world-system and constitution-makers' attempts to contain—militarily, politically and ideologically—these movements' democratic and egalitarian ideals and practices. Various configurations of the balance of power in Irish society between "national" (core-peripheral) and "social" (capital-labour) forces crystallised in constitutional form.

Continuing the macro-level historical analysis, Tommy McKearney's "Northern Ireland: From Imperial Asset to International Embarrassment" places contemporary Northern Irish politics

and economics within a longer history of British imperialism and British rule in Ireland. McKearney has long been active within leftist and republican politics in Northern Ireland, and was involved in the hunger strikes in the H-Blocks Prison in the early 1980s. His paper is more in the style of personal observation than a conventional academic analysis; it is accompanied by a response piece by J.K. Jacobsen.

Sharae Deckard's "World-Ecology and Ireland: The Neoliberal Ecological Regime" argues for the usefulness of applying not only the tools of world-systems analysis, but also Jason W. Moore's world-ecological paradigm, to analysis of Ireland's role as a semi-periphery in the environmental history of capitalism. She observes that the socio-economic particularity of neoliberal capitalism in its Irish manifestation has increasingly been critiqued since the collapse of the Celtic Tiger, but little attention has been paid to neoliberalism as ecology within Ireland. Thus, her contribution explores the characteristics of the Irish neoliberal ecological regime during and after the Tiger, identifying the opening of new commodity frontiers (such as fracking, water, agro-biotechnology, and biopharma) constituted in the neoliberal drive to appropriate and financialize nature. She argues that what is crucial to a macro-ecological understanding of Ireland's role in the neoliberal regime of the world-ecology is the inextricability of its financial role as a tax haven and secrecy jurisdiction zone from its environmental function as a semi-peripheral pollution and water haven.

Maurice Coakley's "Ireland, Europe and the Global Crisis" explores Ireland's relationship to the European Union, and the background to the EU's imposition of austerity policies in the wake of the global financial crisis. He argues that the combination of the financialisation of Europe, consolidated by monetary union, alongside the collapse of the Soviet bloc has transformed the character of the European Union, turning it into an increasingly coercive formation that has undermined democracy across Europe. Ireland's attempt to establish itself as a bridge economy between the United States and Europe brought it a brief prosperity during the Celtic Tiger era; it is now paying the price for its extreme dependency on external capital.

Finally, we end with an extended interview with Denis O'Hearn. O'Hearn has pioneered the use of world-systems analysis and dependency theory for understanding Irish historical development, most famously with his 2001 book, *The Atlantic Economy: Britain, the US, and Ireland*. In this interview, O'Hearn discusses his views of Irish politics and economics since the publication of that work, his views of mainstream "revisionist" historiography, and recent developments since 2008, including the rise of the EU's *PIIGS* (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain) and the meanings of UK devolution for Ireland.

About the Authors

Aidan Beatty holds a doctorate in international history from the University of Chicago. His first book, *Masculinity and Power in Irish Nationalism, 1884-1938* will be published this summer by Palgrave-Macmillan, as part of their *Genders and Sexualities in History* series. He is currently a Post-Doctoral Fellow at the Azrieli Institute of Israel Studies and a Scholar-in-Residence at the School of Canadian Irish Studies, at Concordia University in Montreal.

Disclosure Statement

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