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Author: Lindsay Proudfoot and Dianne Hall

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Memory, Place, and Diaspora: Locating Identity in Colonial Space

Lindsay Proudfoot and Dianne Hall

As a mode of explanation for past and present patterns of international migration and settlement, *diaspora* has recently gained considerable currency but it remains a contested and problematic term. Earlier emphases – following the paradigm of Jewish experience – on population movements that were forced, exilic, and driven by ethnic or religious persecution, have been supplemented by discussion of 'almost any expatriate group … regardless of the conditions leading to the[ir] dispersion'.[1] Recent studies have identified dispersed political minorities, economic migrants, trans-national language groups, religious communities, ethno-cultural and nationally-defined solidarities, as well as gays, whites, rednecks and fundamentalists, as all deserving diasporic status. As Brubaker notes, however, this more inclusive usage carries its own dangers: 'if everyone is diasporic, then no-one is distinctly so … The universalisation of diaspora, paradoxically, means the disappearance of diaspora'.[2]

At the core of these conflicting inclusions and definitions lies the issue of the geographical locatedness – or otherwise – of individual identity. To what extent are the identities of people in diaspora in any sense bounded, whether by their sedentary diasporic present or the 'remembered' places of their past? Alternatively, as critical scholarship suggests, are people in diaspora so thoroughly displaced that they always occupy 'in-between' space, neither here nor there? Robin Cohen has argued that however diasporas are caused, they all share certain common characteristics: a mythic 'memory' of the homeland and an aspiration to return there; a distinctive ethnic consciousness; empathy with co-ethnics in other host countries; and a troubled relationship with the host society in the country of settlement.[3] Individually, people in diaspora possess both a sense of dislocation and of wider belonging. Grounded in core beliefs and memory that are external to their present situation, this atavistic

[1] William Safran, 'Deconstructing and comparing diasporas', in W. Kokot, K. Tölölyan and C. Alfonso (eds), *Diaspora, Identity, and Religion: New Directions in Theory and Research* (London, 2004), 2–29.

[2] Richard Brubaker, 'The "diaspora" diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28, 1 (January 2005), 2–4.

[3] Robin Cohen, *Global diasporas: An introduction* (London, 1997), 177–196.

wider 'belonging'—the sense of being 'rooted' elsewhere—positions these individuals in 'two worlds': their expatriate or expatriate-descended present, and their imagined past.

For Cohen, diasporic identities are necessarily grounded in a variety of time-place moments: the experiential reality of the 'now', and invocations of the remembered 'then'. Similarly, William Safran grounds the diasporic present within the wider frame of memory. He suggests that people in diaspora habitually retain some sort of memory of their place of origin, create religious and cultural institutions that are its mirror, and continue to engage with it in symbolic or practical ways. However, because many emigrants doubt whether they are totally accepted by their host country, they preserve an aspirational belief in the possibility of returning to their homeland. Consequently, diasporic life is characterised by an underlying dialectic arising from being in one place physically but thinking regularly of another place far away. Thus people in diaspora are characterised by a spiritual, emotional, and cultural attachment to their perceived but distant homeland. Viewed thus, diaspora provides a useful 'metaphorical designation' that encompasses the widely differing experiences of 'expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants and ethnic and racial minorities *tout court*'.[4]

Both Safran and Cohen assume that collectively, diasporic identities depend on some form of bounded locality, a country or region say, as a defining point of reference. Critical representations of diaspora as a 'transnational' state of being and consciousness challenge this assumption. The key issue is essentialism. Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk, for example, dismiss Cohen's ethnographic distinction between victim/refugee, imperial/colonial, service/labour, trade/business/professional, and cultural/hybrid/postmodern diasporas as 'essentialist primordialism'. Claiming that this accommodates neither the possibility of multiple diasporic moves nor the absence for some of any memory of a homeland, they emphasize instead the potential capacity of transnational movement to 'de-territorialize' the individual. Instead of being 'absolutist notions' based on 'prescriptive locations in territory and history' (that is, a homeland), diasporic belonging and identity invoke shared experience and practice, and the consciousness that derives from these.[5] In short, diasporic consciousness invokes 'routes' rather than 'roots'.

Each approach offers considerable insights into what Patrick O'Farrell once described, in the context of Irish migration to Australia, as the emigrants'

[4] Safran, 'Deconstructing and comparing diasporas', 9–14.

[5] V. S. Kalra, R. Kaur and J. Hutnyk, *Diaspora & Hybridity* (London, 2005), 29–34.

capacity 'to live in a jumble of worlds, past and present, near and far, real and imagined' or, as Seamus Heaney put it, 'to live in two places at the one time, and in two times at the only place'.[6] Both, in short, seem capable of recovering something of the unstable, changing transnational worlds inhabited by first-generation migrants and their descendents, and of the ways in which their presentist daily existence was inevitably framed by past experience. How may we best combine these insights? How can we bring together anti-essentialist notions of diaspora which see it as a continuous process or practice 'that makes claims, articulates projects, mobilises energies, and appeals to loyalties' on the one hand, with the idea, stressed by Kokot *et al* that while diaspora may transgress boundaries of culture, identity and locality which are themselves diffuse, the 'essences' of (diasporic) identity remain implicated within and reflected by the 'realities of sedentary diasporic life'?[7] With the idea, in other words, that no matter how complex and unstable the sense of identity constructed by diasporic people, nor how strong their sense of non-belonging, their diasporic lives still impart meaning to, and acquire meaning from, the material circumstances of their daily life?

Place and Identity

In this paper we argue that current critical geographical understandings of *place* offer precisely this degree of accommodation.[8] They allow us to embrace the idea of diaspora as practice and experience, in other words, as a performative process of changing agency and identity, and to locate this within the material framework of the lived world people in diaspora encounter. In this way we retain the key idea of geographical difference that, common sense seems to suggest, must inflect any process of movement through space and time. Thus our conception of place is more than simply a synonym for a particular location in the physical landscape. We conceive place to be a subjectively constructed site of agency, identity and memory. Place exists in the imagination as a set of cultural meanings which individuals attach to the behaviour they observe in others at different locales. Meanings of place are therefore intensely personal

[6] Patrick O'Farrell, 'Defining Place and Home: Are the Irish Prisoners of Place?', in David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Home or Away Immigrants in Colonial Australia* (Canberra, 1992), 6.

[7] Kokot *et al* (eds), *Diaspora, Identity, and Religion*, 1–7.

[8] The extensive Geographical literature on place is usefully summarised in Tim Cresswell, *Place: a short introduction* (Oxford, 2004).

and reflect the contingency of the individual's positionality and experience. For this reason, meanings of place are never essentialist or singular. They reflect the individual's own sense of who they are and, perhaps more importantly, who they are not; in short, their sense of 'self' and 'other'.

These 'grounded' constructions of identity thus form part of the individual's internalised 'world view' or *mentalité*. As such, they are capable of being expressed in a variety of material and non-material ways, and are susceptible to recovery via both the archive and the material cultural landscape. By combining both strategies, we may explore the ways in which people in diaspora 'performed' place in their countries of settlement and the different forms of memory these performances invoked. In the remainder of this paper we exemplify this by exploring the ways in which two members of the Irish diaspora, Michael O'Reilly and William Wall, performed place in the Australian town of Belfast(Port Fairy) during the second half of the nineteenth century. We begin by outlining the history of the town and its importance as an early centre of Irish settlement in Western Victoria. Thereafter, we consider the meanings which O'Reilly, a first-generation Catholic migrant and local newspaper owner, and Wall, a local government official and second generation 'native' of Catholic immigrant stock, attached to the public and private semiotic spaces there between the 1850s and 1880s. We conclude by briefly considering what these suggest about the construction of diasporic place generally.

Contexts: Belfast (Port Fairy) 1843–1899

Belfast (Port Fairy) was established as part of a land alienation process which offered the founding landowner a unique opportunity to erect tenurial structures which mirrored those in Ireland.[9] Overlooking a natural anchorage at the mouth of the River Moyne in the far south-west of Victoria, the site was first occupied by Europeans as a seasonal whaling station, named Port Fairy and settled from Van Diemen's Land, in the late 1820s. Urban settlement began in 1843, when James Atkinson, a Sydney-based lawyer of Irish gentry stock, consolidated his title to the land he had been acquiring in the area since at least 1837 by purchasing its freehold as a 'Special Survey'.

[9] This paragraph draws upon and expands our earlier account of the history of Belfast in Lindsay Proudfoot and Dianne Hall, 'Memory and Identity in "Irish" Australia: Constructing Alterity in Belfast (Port Fairy), c. 1857–1873', in Mark McCarthy (ed.), *Ireland's Heritages Critical Perspectives on Memory and Identity* (Aldershot, 2005), 89–104.

Designed to promote well-capitalised systematic settlement, four of the ten Special Surveys granted in the Port Phillip District had significant Irish gentry involvement. Under their provisions, anyone who purchased a Land Receipt for at least 5120 acres, either from the Land and Emigration Commissioners in London or the colonial government in Sydney, could demand a survey of that amount of land in the locality of his choice, provided it was at least five miles from Melbourne, Geelong or Portland. Under these regulations, Atkinson established himself as landlord of some eight square miles of relatively rich agricultural land, all area capable of supporting what was – for this part of Australia – an unusually numerous population of tenant farmers. He named the new town and survey after Belfast in Ireland. This act of toponymic commemoration mirrored the actions of a neighbouring Irish land speculator, William Rutledge, who had, in 1841, already acquired a survey adjacent to Atkinson's. Rutledge named this the Farnham Survey, after the major landowning family in his native Co. Cavan.[10] Atkinson remained owner of the Belfast Survey until his death in 1864, when it passed to his son, Nithsdale. The family retained ownership until 1883, when they sold their remaining lands to a local business syndicate, who two years later sold the property to the sitting tenants and others.[11]

As Atkinson and Rutledge developed their surveys, they adopted practices that were redolent of the discourse of improvement in Ireland.[12] Like many Irish landowners, Atkinson was an absentee landlord in Belfast. Nevertheless, by 1846 his surveyors had begun to lay out the town and farm allotments, and by 1848 the town's grid-iron plan had begun to take shape. Over the next ten years Atkinson followed the customary practice of many Irish landlords in repeatedly endowing his town with sites for the various public buildings necessary for its well-being and prosperity, including church sites for all the local denominations.[13] Arguably, however, it was the

[10] The name of 'Belfast' survived until 1887, when the borough council voted to alter the town's name back to 'Port Fairy'.

[11] C. E. Sayers (ed.), *Earle's Port Fairy: A History by William Earle* (Olinda, 1973), 24, 35–6.

[12] Among an extensive literature, see: Toby Barnard, *Irish Protestant Ascents and Descents 1641–1770* (Dublin, 2004) and, *Improving Ireland? Projectors, Prophets and Profiteers 1641–1786* (Dublin, 2008); Lindsay Proudfoot, 'Spatial Transformation and Social Agency: Property, Society and Improvement, c 1700 to 1900', in Brian Graham and Lindsay Proudfoot (eds), *An Historical Geography of Ireland* (London, 1993), 219–57, and *Urban Patronage and Social Authority. The Management of the Duke of Devonshire's Towns in Ireland 1760–1890* (Washington DC, 1995); W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords & Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), 103–37.

[13] For example, sites were given for St Andrew's Presbyterian church in 1849 (built

tenurial practices forged on the Belfast and Farnham Surveys which may have invoked the most powerful cultural memories for the 40 per cent or so of the town's population who were of Irish stock.[14] Atkinson's absenteeism was accommodated by means of a delegated patronal authority which closely matched the managerial structures on many Irish estates. Until 1848, William Rutledge acted as James Atkinson's middleman in Belfast. Responsible to Atkinson for payment of the head rent, he was empowered to negotiate leases with individual tenants, and was himself Atkinson's major merchant tenant in the town.

When Rutledge withdrew from this arrangement to concentrate on his other business interests, James Atkinson replaced him with his own nephew, Robert Woodward, who had partnered Rutledge in establishing the Farnham Survey. Woodward continued his association with Rutledge while he acted as agent for James and Nithsdale Atkinson, exercising day to day managerial control over Belfast and the surrounding agricultural land.[15] On both the Belfast and Farnham Surveys tenures were introduced which mirrored customary practice in Ireland. James Atkinson offered twenty-one-year building leases for urban plots in Belfast, and like Rutledge adopted the conacre system among his agricultural small holders. From 1854 he also instituted a generally unsuccessful programme of freehold sales to sitting urban tenants.[16] Despite the local tradition that Atkinson's influence hindered Belfast's growth, the population grew steadily from a few hundreds in the late 1840s to 2,325 in 1873. The subsequent temporary decline to just over 1,750 by the early 1880s probably owed more to the energetic expansion of Belfast's eastern neighbour and rival, Warrnambool,

1853–4); for St John's Anglican church in 1853 and for its predecessor in 1846; and for St Patrick's Roman Catholic church in 1857. See Marten A. Syme, *Seeds of a Settlement: Buildings and Inhabitants of Belfast Port Fairy in the Nineteenth Century* (Melbourne, 1991), 70, 96, 102.

[14] If one accepts the conventional historical assumption that in colonial Australia Catholic affiliation was more or less synonymous with Irish origins, then the 1857 Census suggests that 21 per cent of the district's population were Irish. This rose to over 30 per cent in 1891. In 1857 24 per cent of the population were Presbyterian, and among these a significant proportion were likely to have been Ulster-Scots, hence the estimate of 40 per cent for the total population of all Irish cultural traditions. See Syme, *Seeds of a Settlement*, 7–8.

[15] Jack Powling, *Port Fairy: The First Fifty Years* (Melbourne, 1980), 219–20.

[16] James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-Century Cork* (London, 1975), 9–72; Martin W. Dowling, *Tenant Right & Agrarian Society in Ulster 1600–1870* (Dublin, 1999), passim; Powling, *Port Fairy,* 52–3, 56–7; Proudfoot, *Urban Patronage and Social Authority*, 125–238; Vaughan, op.cit.

than to the effects of landlordism.[17] As the town expanded, so too did the institutions of local government. The Belfast District Road Board was declared in 1843, and was responsible for early road and other improvements. Recognition of Belfast's growing importance as a regional centre came with the declaration of its municipal status in 1856, followed by its borough status in 1863.[18] Like his counterparts in Ireland, Woodward played various roles in this institutional development, ensuring all the while that the Atkinsons' interests were preserved. Elected as a member of the Road Board in 1843 (when James Atkinson was also elected as a Magistrate), he was subsequently both a Municipal and Borough Councillor, and latterly Lord Mayor (in 1866–7).[19] 'Landlord authority', it seems, operated in south-west Victoria in similar fashion to Ireland, and with the same potential for discrimination.

Place and Memory: Michael O'Reilly, Landlordism, and the Catholic Church

It was as part of this material narrative that Michael O'Reilly, William Wall, and every other person whose life connected in some way with Belfast, performed the town as place. Each brought their own understanding, grounded in their own values and experience, to the material spaces they shared–and to the behaviour others' enacted in these spaces. In turn, these meanings drove their own behaviour or 'performance'. Because these understandings of place were framed by personal experience, they inevitably invoked memory of various kinds. As a first-generation member of the Irish diaspora, Michael O'Reilly's remembered Ireland possessed a personal immediacy which William Wall's, as an Australian-born 'native', did not. O'Reilly also possessed an acute political consciousness, which may account for the character and intensity of his representations of Ireland and the way these framed his behaviour in Belfast. Prior to emigrating, O'Reilly had been a member of both the Young Ireland movement and the Irish Confederation of 1847, and in 1848 he had the unlikely distinction of being jailed for protesting against Queen Victoria's visit to Dublin in that year. Following his arrival in Sydney in 1853, O'Reilly

[17] Sayers, *Earle's Port Fairy*, 24, 36; Powling, *Port Fairy*, 121, 257, 284; C. E. Sayers and P. L. Yule, *By These We Flourish A History of Warrnambool*, 2nd edn (Warrnambool, 1987), 118–29.

[18] Powling, *Port Fairy,* 77, 140, 206.

[19] Ibid., 77, 209, 219–20.

moved to Kilmore, a predominantly Irish town north of Melbourne, where he obtained work as a master in the Catholic school before falling out with the local priest.[20]

The dispute was prescient, and prefigured one of the major issues that drove O'Reilly's own performance of place during his early ownership of *The Banner of Belfast*. Arriving in the town in 1857, O'Reilly established the paper as a radical organ that, while it privileged news from Ireland and frequently framed its interpretation of local events in terms of Irish experience, also championed what it conceived to be wider social justice. Two themes dominated the paper's early columns: the continuing influence of the landed minority ('the squattocracy') in Victorian life and politics, and the ways Atkinson, Rutledge and Woodward exemplified this locally; and the alleged moral deficit in the way the (predominantly Irish) Catholic clergy behaved in the colony. In each instance, O'Reilly invoked memories of the behaviour of similar groups in Ireland, inviting his (Irish) readership to judge local squatters and clergy in that light. The comparison was rarely favourable; nor was it intended to be.

For O'Reilly, the squatters' monopoly of Crown leases offered the real prospect of the creation of an Australian landlord class capable of the same predatory behaviour as its counterpart in Ireland. Atkinson and Rutledge's freehold possession of their respective special surveys simply enhanced the local likelihood of this happening. *The Banner*'s editorial returned to the point repeatedly prior to the Victorian legislature's land reforms in the early 1860s and after.[21] In February 1857, the paper castigated Woodward for allegedly dispossessing some English tenants of Atkinson's, leaving 'the little homestead[s] they raised by their savings clutched in the merciless grip of landlordism'.[22] A year later, commenting on the Derryveagh evictions in Donegal, the paper warned Charles Gavan Duffy, ex-Young Irelander and now Minister of Lands in Sir John O'Shanassy's second Victorian government, of the broader danger of a resurgent landlordism in Australia:

Mr Duffy justly regarded landlordism as the main cause of the miseries of his countrymen at home, and we presume that his sagacity as a statesman will point out to him that the same effects may be had from the same causes in Australia.[23]

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[20] Proudfoot and Hall, 'Memory and Identity in "Irish" Australia', 92–3.

[21] The Victorian land legislation is discussed in detail in Joseph M. Powell, *The Public Lands of Australia Felix* (Melbourne, 1970), passim.

[22] *The Banner of Belfast*, Editorial, 10 February 1857.

[23] *The Banner of Belfast,* Editorial, 12 May 1858.

In August 1858, *The Banner* presumed on the cultural memory of its Irish readership to assert that none would dispute the 'wretched condition' to which Irish landlordism reduced Ireland's peasantry.[24] Four years later, the social consequences of widespread harvest failure in Munster were graphically described in morally-charged terms, which again indicted the Irish landlord class:

> The aged parents sent to die by the ditch side by the landlord or his agent, the grown up sons and daughters emigrated and none but the helpless little ones left, who writhe in hunger by their sides. How many such pictures are still fresh in the recollections of hundreds of their countrymen?[25]

The Banner's message at this early stage in its history was clear. Landlordism was a malign social force, more than capable of the same economic predation in Australia as had characterised it in Ireland – as any Irish settler could affirm, or so O'Reilly claimed. Similar invocations of memory – and similarly negative assessments – inflected the paper's representations of the Catholic clergy in the colony during the late 1850s. With the decline of English Benedictine influence in Australia earlier in the decade, the Catholic Church became increasingly Irish in temperament and membership.[26] The creation in 1847 of the separate diocese of Melbourne under its first (Irish) bishop, James Alipius Goold, had already begun this process in Belfast, as it had in Victoria generally. The Catholic community in the town benefited from Goold's twin priorities, church building and religious education, but not without controversy.[27] Arguably, the problems arose from the senior diocesan clergy's failure to recognise the fundamental differences between the colonial circumstances in which the Church now operated and those that had 'naturalised' its authority in Ireland. While the Church continued to demand the obedience, loyalty and support of the laity in Belfast, as elsewhere in Victoria, it appeared incapable of recognising that, in return, it needed to demonstrate some openness in its dealings with them. Among Irish migrants, the customary deference shown to the clergy in the closed and introverted spaces of rural Ireland was in danger

[24] *The Banner of Belfast*, Editorial, 5 August 1858.

[25] *The Banner of Belfast*, Editorial, 9 September 1862.

[26] Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History* (Sydney, 1977), 40–137.

[27] J. R. J. Grigsby, 'Goold, James Alipius (1812–1886)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 4 (Melbourne, 1972), 265–7.

of dissipating in a colonial environment characterised by widespread mobility, opportunity, and egalitarianism.[28]

In the eyes of *The Banner* at least, Goold's heavy-handed attempts to maintain his authority were entirely inappropriate, as was the culture of episcopal secretiveness and arrogance which surrounded them.[29] Matters came to a head at Belfast over plans to build a second, larger Catholic church, St. Patrick's. The need for a replacement for the wooden structure built on the site given by Atkinson in 1847 had quickly become apparent, and when Fr William Shinnick arrived in the town as priest in 1853 some £1000 had already been collected by the parishioners.[30] Shinnick had a reputation for drunkenness and high-handed behaviour, and by the time he was removed from Belfast by Goold early in 1856, he appears to have alienated many of his parishioners.[31] Nothing, consequently, had been done about the new church. Shinnick was replaced by another Irish priest, Fr Patrick Dunne. Dunne had been one of three priests sent to Geelong, where they had established a reputation as vocal critics of what they saw as Goold's mismanagement of the diocese.[32] Quite why he was given charge of a parish which had become disaffected from his predecessor is unclear, but he was nevertheless given responsibility for erecting the new church. By this time, Atkinson had provided another, larger, site to the west of the town, which was in the process of being conveyed to the Church. Dunne established a building committee of 'good and zealous Catholics', called for tenders, and found that the cost of the new church was likely to be £2,500. Given the government grant of £1,000, this left a balance of £500 to be found by further local subscription.[33]

Shortly after Dunne's appointment, Goold cancelled the proposed building for that year. Instead, Dunne was instructed to raise another subscription to cover £250 of unreceipted costs Shinnick claimed to have incurred while building the new presbytery at Belfast, and which Goold now proposed to meet out of the money already subscribed for the church.[34] Dunne voiced the

[28] Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the Present,* 3rd edn, (Sydney, 2000), 39–42; Roger C. Thompson, *Religion in Australia: A history* (Oxford, 1998), 10, 25–8.

[29] O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 114.

[30] Syme, *Seeds of a Settlement*, 97.

[31] Entry for William Shinnick, 'Port Fairy Priests', Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, DH 20/5/23.

[32] O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 112–14.

[33] 'Copy of a Statement Addressed by the Rev. P Dunne, late of the Diocese of Melbourne, to the Most reverend Dr Polding, Archbishop of Sydney and Metropolitan of Australia', Melbourne Diocesan Historical Commission, DH 20/5/23, 1.

[34] Ibid., 2.

Belfast subscribers' objections to having any of the money they had raised for the new church used to defray Shinnick's costs, but in a way which Goold evidently thought challenged his authority. By suggesting that lay trustees should be appointed from among the Belfast parishioners to manage the sums already collected, Dunne trespassed on Goold's claim to 'absolute diocesan control, with no public accountability, of all parish funds'.[35] Despite Dunne's attempts at explanation on the grounds of conscience and his repeated affirmations of loyalty and veneration to the bishop, he was eventually removed from Belfast in September 1856 and Shinnick reinstated.[36] Shinnick's tenure was brief. In April 1857 he was replaced by the first of a succession of Irish priests, each holding the cure for relatively short periods. Meanwhile, despite Goold's concerns about how the money would be found to pay for the new church, its foundation stone was laid by the bishop with considerable ceremony in July 1857, and the nave and turret were duly completed in 1859.[37]

The Banner's role in all of this was as both protagonist and commentator. When Dunne's removal became public, the paper's pronouncements were entirely in line with its self-appointed task of defending social justice:

> The removal of this reverend gentleman has caused considerable indignation throughout the entire Catholic community in this district. The proximate cause of this step on the part of the Rev Dr Goold was, we believe, the refusal of the Rev Mr Dunne to identify himself with the misappropriation of the Church Building Fund, to which the Rev Mr Shinnick laid claim for unauthorised expenditure on his private dwelling alleged to amount to £250, and to liquidate which the people subscribed £200. The Bishop also requested that the names of public trustees should not be inserted in the conveyance of the church lands, and this proposition the proprietor and the people utterly rejected … It is, in fact, for acting straightforward and independent that the Rev Mr Dunne has been sacrificed … In the meantime, the Catholic body have unanimously resolved not to support the Rev Mr Dunne's successor, and the fact of the Rev Mr Shinnick being appointed to succeed him, has made them still more firm in their resolve, as they attribute to his want of candour and independence the entire disorganisation that prevails … [38]

In fact, *The Banner's* statement caused further problems for Dunne. The statement's republication in the decidedly Protestant (and hostile) Melbourne

[35] O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community*, 113.
[36] 'Copy of a Statement Addressed by the Rev. P. Dunne', 13.
[37] Syme, *Seeds of a Settlement*, 97.
[38] Quoted in 'Copy of a Statement Addressed by the Rev. P Dunne', 14.

Argus led Goold to demand that Dunne issue a public disclaimer, which he duly did.[39] O'Reilly, however, did not stop there. In February 1857 he took the opportunity of news of Bishop Goold's impending visit to Belfast to renew his attack on Shinnick. Dismissing rumours that the bishop was to announce the start of work on the new church, O'Reilly concluded that one reason why this could not be so was because 'no one would trust the Rev Mr Shinnick with subscriptions towards it lest he build another row of stables with it. Indeed we scarcely think (though not indeed a very bashful man) that after the recent exposé he would venture into one house in Belfast to collect it. The Rev Mr Shinnick has done irreparable injury to the Catholic body and it is not likely that during his stay there will be any church built'.[40]

Nor was there. On this occasion at least, O'Reilly's personal reading of events in Belfast seems to have been in accord with wider public feeling in the town. From the outset, the new church's meaning as 'place' was contested at the most fundamental level. Different groups, the local Catholic laity, individual priests, the diocesan hierarchy, even James Atkinson, each brought their own understanding– grounded in their different values and experience–to bear upon what the church, and the issues surrounding its construction, signified for social, cultural and religious discourse in the town. But as a site of agency, memory, and identity, the meanings the new church held for each of these groups themselves changed. For Alipius Goold the church initially was a place of intolerable opposition to his Episcopal authority, but latterly became marked as one where he ultimately prevailed. For Patrick Dunne and the Catholic laity who supported him, the early phases in the church's construction were redolent of the interventionist nature *of* that authority; an unwelcome reminder, perhaps, of less egalitarian days in the home country. For Fr Dunne it was also, personally, a site of official rejection, as well as a place of considerable popular support.

How might O'Reilly have 'read' the new church as place? Undoubtedly in different ways as time progressed. Initially, as a site of Shinnick's duplicity and Goold's interference in local affairs, its meanings are likely to have been negative, but once the church was completed and the controversy surrounding its construction was relegated to memory, we hear little more of it in the pages of *The Banner*. In short, although it seems to have constituted one of the most profoundly negative spaces in O'Reilly's construction of Belfast as place in the late 1850s, thereafter it fades from view as other issues, other

[39] Ibid., 14.

[40] *The Banner of Belfast*, District Intelligence, 13 February 1857.

aspects of Belfast as 'place', came to the fore. In 1862, however, O'Reilly fired a parting shot on the subject. Commenting on Goold's continuing demands for funds for the on-going reconstruction of St Patrick's cathedral in Melbourne, he concluded:

> Nothing can be more strange to Catholics coming to this country than to find themselves excluded from any control over funds which they contribute so liberally … We have always upheld the right of the Catholic body to have a public statement of funds collected by public subscription. Such is the practice in the old country (where the name of the priest is synonymous with gentleman) … [41]

But as a contested site of agency and identity, St Patrick's (Belfast) had lost its purchase on O'Reilly's sense of place, or rather had changed its meaning. Much the same was true of his initially fiery attitude towards Victoria's landowning class. As the deficiencies in Duffy's 1862 Land Act, which *The Banner* supported, became increasingly apparent, and 'land jobbers' distorted the market for small holders and pastoralists alike, so the paper grudgingly acknowledged the latter's right to defend their livelihoods against such speculation.[42] Its rhetoric became more inclusive, and squatters were no longer denounced as the reincarnation of the 'curse of Irish landlordism'. All of which points to a fundamental truth about place and diaspora. For first-generation emigrants like O'Reilly, the importance of personal cultural memory in constructing place altered as their diasporic experience widened. It might weaken or be reinvented; it could not remain the same. What of those people in diaspora with no personal memories of a homeland, of a cultural 'there and then', the native born?

Place and Inheritance: William Wall and the Business of Being Irish

William Wall was born in Belfast in 1859, and died there, prematurely from cancer, in 1899. He was the son of Catholic Irish emigrants who ran first the 'Commercial Inn' (from 1852) and subsequently the 'Farmers Inn' until 1880. In that year they bought land adjacent to the nearby village of Kirkstall, which Wall subsequently referred to – with perhaps conscious irony – as 'the estate'.

[41] *The Banner of Belfast*, Editorial, 7 January 1862.
[42] *The Banner of Belfast,* Editorial, 14 January 1862.

His father, John Wall, was among the top ten per cent of ratepayers listed in the 1854 rate return, paying £6.5.0 for a hotel, premises and land in Sackville Street, which was by then already developing as the town's commercial hub.[43] Wall senior appears to have been an active figure locally. In 1852 he was prominently involved in organising anti-squatter meetings in Belfast as part of the 'Unlock the Lands' campaign instigated by the Melbourne press, and when the town was proclaimed a municipality in 1856 he was one of the assessors called upon to verify the results of the first council election.[44] Between them, father and son exemplify something of the social mobility that could characterise successive generations within this 'pubs, pints and pastures' model of Irish immigrant settlement. Their careers also bear witness to David Fitzpatrick's characterisation of emigration as achieving for many Irish migrants and their descendants the modest success and comfort that may have been denied them in Ireland.[45]

The evidence for William Wall's performance of Belfast as place derives from the diary he began in 1878 at the age of 19, which he kept until four months before his death in April 1899.[46] It provides a detailed account of the quotidian practice of his daily life, his changing professional role and status within the town, and his subjective reaction to the social behaviours he encountered in others and the semiotic spaces this created. His career, and thus this aspect of his identity in Belfast, encompassed twin trajectories: first as someone who became increasingly involved in local government, and who was therefore privy to the hegemonic perspectives of civil authority; and second, as a businessman. He began his career, however, as a schoolmaster. In January 1878 he was appointed as a primary teacher in the government school at Rosebrook, but in September that year moved at the parish priest's request to St Patrick's Catholic school in Belfast. He remained there until he was elected Shire Secretary in 1881, a post he held until 1885 when he was elected Shire Auditor. He remained Shire Auditor until 1889 and held various additional posts, including that of Rabbit, and later Road Inspector. In 1894 Wall qualified as Municipal Auditor, and the following year was appointed as

[43] J. R. Carroll, *Harpoons to Harvest* (Warrnambool, 1989), 184; Powling, *Port Fairy*, 101, 120, 128, 140, 145.

[44] Ibid., 140.

[45] David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration 1801–1921* (Dundalk, 1984), 31–7; Idem, *Oceans of Consolation Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Cork, 1994), 14–19.

[46] William J. Wall, 1859–1899, Diaries (Manuscript) 1878–1898, State Library of Victoria, Ms 12444, Box 3295/1–12.

a Justice of the Peace. He was elected as a Borough Councillor in 1896.[47] As Wall became more prominent in local government so his commercial interests widened. In 1888 he joined the Boards of various local companies as auditor, and became local agent for others. Two years previously he had been involved in ultimately unsuccessful talks to establish a new Catholic newspaper in Belfast.[48]

Wall's varied professional roles defined only part of his agency and identity in Belfast and consequently the ways he performed the town as place. From his youth, his life was also framed by membership of numerous associational networks, some of which were Irish ethnic solidarities, but many were not. Thus, while he was an active member of the Hibernian Association and the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society (he was elected local president in 1897), raised funds locally for the Irish Land League in 1881 and supported Home Rule, he was also a member of the local militia (where he rose to the rank of sergeant), the rowing club, the Belfast Debating Society, the 'Christy Minstrels', the Mechanics' Institute, and the 'Australian Natives' Association, which he helped to found in 1890.[49] All of this should alert us to the fact that however Wall conceived of his 'Irishness' and whatever its importance to him, it only ever formed part of his sense of identity, of who he was and was not. In short, Wall's identity, like that of anybody else, was complex and multiple, rather than primordial and singular. He enacted his life through a multiplicity of different socially-constructed 'imagined spaces'—whether of sport, music, the militia, the Church, politics, or his professional role in local government, each of which inflected the others and reflected a different aspect of his own sense of self.

But, as with Michael O'Reilly, so too William Wall's sense of selfhood was contingent on circumstance and thus subject to change, as were his readings of place. As a second-generation 'native born' member of the Irish diaspora, his identification with Ireland (which he frequently describes as 'home') was learnt behaviour. It was not a primordial 'given' founded in personal experience, but rather a set of values that he had actively acquired, and which could therefore be relatively easily modified in the light of experience. His diaries suggest that this is precisely what happened. As a young man in the late

[47] Wall, Diaries, entries for 23 July, 2 September 1878; 11 February 1881; 2 February, 13 August 1885; 20 February 1894; 18 November 1896.

[48] Wall, Diaries, entries for 6, 26, 29 March, 10 April 1886; 14 May, 16 October 1888.

[49] Wall, Diaries, entries for 1, 18 May, 6 June 1878; 26 March 1879; 12 March, 27 August 1880; 16 July 1881; 13 July, 22 October 1883; 3 October 1884; 25 January 1887; 3 April 1890.

1870s and early 1880s, his sense of 'Irishness' was enacted primarily through Hibernian Dinners, St Patrick's Day races at Koroit, and the maintenance of an extensive social circle of Irish emigrants, mainly of his parents' generation.[50] Significantly, although Wall's involvement in St Patrick's church was already important to him at this stage, his diaries make no explicit reference to the Irish background of many of his co-religionists. They present his involvement in Catholic affairs as a socially-framed religious duty, a question of Faith not Nationality. For example, in describing Father Hennessy's mission to Belfast in 1881 Wall wrote:

> Father Hennessy's mission closed today … sermon til 2 o'clock. Grand spectacle at night about 400 people attended, among them a great number of protestants. Each catholic held a lighted candle and renewed his baptismal vows … The mission will be productive of great good. Numbers have attended daily and sincerely. Even protestants appeared en masse on several occasions. The instruction was such as to dispel doubts not only of protestants but catholics who did not thoroughly understand the ceremonies and rites of their own religion.[51]

None of this seems to have posed Wall any problems regarding his militia membership and his occasional participation in 'loyal' ceremonial duties. Indeed, his early enthusiasm for these is clear. Writing in May 1881, he evidently approved of the good comradeship engendered in the militia by the Queen's birthday celebrations: 'Her Majesty Queen Victoria's 62nd birthday … went to drill at the Orderly Room. After dismissing went inside on the invitation of the Captain to drink the health of the Queen which we did very enthusiastically'.[52] Seemingly, at this stage, Wall saw no contradiction between these expressions of imperial loyalty and his support, for example, for the activities of the Irish Land League. As the 1880s progressed, however, Wall's attitude towards expressions of imperial sentiment hardened as his support for Irish and Irish-Australian causes increased. His early political activism in support of Sir John O'Shanassy as local member for the Victoria Legislative Assembly in 1880 and 1883 continued. At successive elections between 1889 and 1897 he

[50] Wall, Diaries, entries for 1–31 January 1878 passim; 26 March, 6 July, 15 August, 1 October, 17 December 1879; 1–31 January passim, 17 March, 8 November 1880; 6 January, 17 March, 1–31 December passim, 1881.

[51] Wall, Diaries, entry for 15 May 1881.

[52] Wall, Diaries, entry for 24 May 1881.

actively campaigned in support of Sir Bryan O'Loghlen, and he also played a prominent local part in the visits of the Redmond brothers in 1883 and of Home Ruler Sir John Esmonde in 1889.[53]

Seemingly, as Wall charted his 'route' through the imagined spaces of the Irish diaspora in south-west Victoria, so these ethnicised spaces became – for him – increasingly politicised. This was reflected in the ways he began to perform his identity in the material landscapes of Belfast. By the end of the 1880s, his diary entries had become increasingly ambivalent about the 'loyal ceremonials' performed by the militia and other bodies in the town, and he was less willing to participate in them. For example, in 1887, in contrast to the enthusiasm he exhibited in 1881, he refused to attend either the ball or the banquet held to celebrate Queen Victoria's 50th Jubilee, even though he was Shire Auditor. As a member of the Hibernian Australian Catholic Benefit Society, he had also been party to that organisation's decision not to take part in the celebratory parade which marked the occasion.[54] In short, by the time he had reached his late twenties, Wall had begun to distance himself from public expressions of loyalty to the British Crown at much the same time as he was becoming more deeply involved with expressions of Irish Nationalist politics in the colony.

It was during this period that Wall also began to privilege his 'native Australian roots'. In 1888 he became a member of the 'Australian Natives' committee set up to organise celebrations of Australia's centenary. Two years later he became a founder member of the local branch of the Australian Natives Association.[55] This assertion of his Australian identity, locally grounded in the imagined and material spaces of Victoria, speaks of both the contingent and multiple nature of identity construction among people in diaspora. A 'native' Australian identity was, of course, one denied O'Reilly and other first-generation emigrants. There were also other differences between their constructions of Belfast as place. During O'Reilly's early career in Belfast, the town was a site of memory that embodied echoes of his own remembered past in Ireland. These he found troublesome. As time passed, however, these troubling memories seem to have faded, at least as far as the pages of *The Banner* were concerned. William Wall possessed no such trajectory of

[53] Wall, Diaries, entries for 1 – 31 July 1880 passim; 1 – 28 February 1883 passim; 9, 12, 13 March 1889; 16, 18, 19, 20 April 1892; 1 – 30 September 1894 passim; 1 – 31 October 1897 passim.

[54] Wall, Diaries, entries for 24 May, 4, 14, 21 June 1887.

[55] Wall, Diaries, entries for 17, 26 January 1888; 3 April, 29 May, 16, 18 September 1890.

memory. His 'Irishness' was constructed, an acquired set of behaviours which became increasingly politicized as time passed. But even this self-conscious politicization had limits, and towards the end of Wall's life, his inherited sense of ethnic belonging gave way to a more presentist understanding of his Australian identity – and of his authenticity as a 'native'.

Conclusion

So what is to be made of all of this? Michael O'Reilly and William Wall have been presented as two case-studies of how people might perform place as a means of locating their identity in the 'here and now' and 'there and then' of diaspora. O'Reilly and Wall's lives overlapped, briefly, in the material spaces of Belfast. There the connection ends. Despite the similarity in their religious and ethnic backgrounds, the different meanings with which they imbued Belfast demonstrate a fundamental truth: the diasporic condition, like place itself, was singular and subjective. For Michael O'Reilly, Belfast began as a site of contested memory, a place where the worst (for him) aspects of his own personal 'remembered' Ireland might revivify. As time passed, it became a place of accommodation, where the realities of Australian life and the increasing time distance from those memories weakened their purchase on his colonial present. For William Wall, much the reverse was true. Despite his engagement in a wide variety of non-ethnic solidarities and his evident professional success – which one might have expected would ground his identity ever more deeply in the colonial present – his learnt ethnic consciousness became ever more politicised in the cause of an Ireland he had never known. Moreover, his was only one possible Ireland among many. Irish emigrants of his parents' and other generations had not left 'one Ireland', a place of primordial uniform experience and unchanging, essentialist, values. They had left 'many Irelands', each an intensely personal construction deriving from their memories, values, and sense of self. They and their descendants in diaspora, like William Wall, created sites of meaning – places – beyond number.

Queen's University, Belfast