

BOOK REVIEW

BEFORE THE DELUGE

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Review of: *Racism in the Irish experience* by Steve Garner. London, EU: Pluto, 2004.

“Would it not be easier. In that case for the government. To dissolve the *people*.
And *elect* another?” Brecht

INTRODUCTION: THE DEEP STATE, IMMIGRATION AND COLONIALITY

Garner comes clean at the start (P 1); this is not a monograph but “a group of connecting interpretive and critical essays”, remarkably, for a book whose thrust is in favour of more immigration, he argues (P 3) for a “site for resistance to the neoliberal imperialism of the universal”. With difficulty (226) he attempts to find some redemption in neoliberalism’s war on national sovereignty (226); the ironies are profound, particularly as Pluto press has indeed published many leftist thinkers.

It sounds like an expedition into conspiracy theory to argue that globalized corporatism uses immigration as a weapon to keep wages down and manufacture a more compliant populace. The epithet “populist” has been used against Le Pen, Wilders, Trump and anybody else who intimates that this weapon indeed is real.

How better to prepare the ground for massive immigration into Ireland, which (perhaps not coincidentally) started at the time this book was published, coupled with unprecedented emigration of natives from 2008, than an apparently well-reasoned book about what racists the Irish would always have been, if only they had the chance!

The “Deep state” is now accepted usage for a congeries of military, bureaucrats,

financiers and politicians who acquire sufficient traction – or at least the capacity for inertia/corruption – to act outside the law and democratic process. As of 2017, what obtains in Ireland is arguably a power vacuum – with the erstwhile civil war parties in a coalition/criminal conspiracy/”supply and confidence” with each other – and no real opposition to a duopoly.

Yet the support for each member of the duopoly is close to all-time lows. They arguably have four aims in the /”supply and confidence” arrangement that bizarrely includes both the government, the leading opposition party, and a motley crew of independents;

1. Keep Sinn Fein away even from leading the opposition;
2. Continue the “peace process”;
3. Uphold the various colonial incursions - from the EU, silicon valley and so on
4. Continue the scams that have been in existence as long as these parties.

As of 2017, the deep state has co-existed with a virtual power vacuum. A whistleblower in 2001 would have been crushed immediately; we never rescued academic freedom, nor de-privatized the traditional music under private hands since 1998. since 2011, what has happened instead is a long, painful process as the whistleblower calls foul, gets fired/disciplined, and the process plays itself out in the public arena for years. And so the University of Limerick scandal; the Gardai whistleblowers; the penalty points system with firing of investigative journalists. (There is a description of all this in C+H (3) 2017; what was not clear when the special edition was compiled was that France would default to a new untested neoliberal party).

It is fact that since 1997 the “republic of Ireland” has inflicted the following processes on its “citizens”;

- an attempted e-voting proposal whose software developer did not actually know how Ireland’s voting system worked. This began in 2002 with a “trial run” at a general election and ended only in 2009;
- Two globalizing EU proposals (Nice and Lisbon) were defeated by the citizenry at referenda and promptly represented to them ie vote until you give us the result we want;
- An attempt was made, defeated only by mass and occasionally violent protest, to make water charges compulsory be redefining a citizen as a customer of a private company;
- Compulsory purchase was used for a private company in Mayo and Gardai functioned hand in glove with private security;
- deterritorialization with a pax Americana rescinding all our land claims on every part of the island;
- removal of the universities from the rule of law on the basis of a fanciful reading of the 1997 universities act, leading – as one might expect - to abuse

- of scholars and theft;
- allowing music companies like that owned by U2 to operate openly post dissolution, coinciding with the death of the independents;
 - turning the banks into private cash cows for a new elite, who burned through the state's wealth once their debt was shifted to the sovereign in financially unprecedented ways;
 - a quickening of corporatism, leading for example to new hires in the health services for administrators at a time when a freeze on hiring doctors and nurses – trained at great expense – meant there were less of them to administer, as they emigrated;
 - failed attempts at generating IP by dint of centralizing software in the Taoiseach's office, and indeed music and film in the Taoiseach's family
 - allowing “vulture funds” insist that the householders they evicted would still have to pay their full mortgage, while NAMA allowed the new elite regain possession of their empires for 40c on the euro on average;
 - deliberate state intervention in the housing market making homes unaffordable again after the 2007-2012 crash had allowed market forces reduce them.
 - In one of the few banking crisis cases that went to court, the defendants were found guilty but not sentenced by the judge because he ruled that the state had ordered them to commit crimes. The agent of the state, Neary, was never charged.
 - A private company was corruptly given a monopoly on music rights, and proceeded to privatize all of Irish music, while its chair amassed a horde of pirated copyrights.
 - There was attested abuse of Irish students at the universities, not responded to by the highest authorities when put to them in the Dail, coupled with their replacement for the elite academic jobs by foreigners.
 - When a whistleblowing Garda member revealed (inter alia) abuse of the driving penalty points system, he was not protected; in fact, he had allegations of penetrative sexual assault copied and pasted from another's file onto his and nobody has been charged for this clear fraud.
 - In an effort to get rid of academic tenure, DCU asserted a bogus contract with fraudulent signatures by dint of an alleged “comprehensive agreement” with the closed-shop union which the union never even discussed. 8 court case later even after rescission of an illegal disciplinary procedure, the illegal contracts are still being asserted and the employees dubiously employed – not to mention the perpetrators – still paid from the public purse.
- Finally, during unprecedented austerity, in 2016 the government refused a tax

windfall of €15 billion imposed on Apple for its activities in Ireland, but chose instead to appeal the verdict. When the Minister for Finance resigned a year later, the money remained uncollected despite demands from the European commission.

GARNER'S THESIS

Ireland, according to Garner, was indeed the unlucky victim of racist policies mainly oriented to clearing the land for colonists from the 16th century and later. However, what is novel about Garner's argument is that he insists that the Irish proceeded, willingly, to undertake similar land-clearing programs in the USA against Native Americans and in Australia out of white rage (147);

“The treatment of Travellers, Native Americans and Australians...backward and inferior to modern, capitalist society.”

(Please note “Travellers” are Ireland's gypsies, the best material for Garner to make his case for Irish racism in 2004, before the eastern European invasion). Suddenly, the Irish are “modern, capitalist”; even when not, their insistence on having their own culture, which is what English people like Garner have always feared about the Irish, means that James Connolly as quoted below becomes an indefatigable racist (152);

“Connolly regarded that Gaelic culture was ideally suited to socialism...the Gael reached the highest point of civilization and culture in Europe.”

So when we're capitalist, we're racist for that reason; when socialist, we're racist because we love our culture. Moreover, particularly in the Caribbean, Garner argues that the Irish quickly took advantage of their whiteness to join the elite and act as gatekeepers. Remarkably, he eventually comes clean with his own - wholly racist and in keeping with Tudor archetypes - definition of the Irish (158);

“sedentariness, Catholicism and Gaelic culture.”

And yet there is nothing distinctive about Gaelic games (153-4), and Garner imagines hurling being played all over Europe. While indeed the founder of modern Gaelic games, Michael Cusack, was rightly influenced by cricket, as of 2016 an international competition of Gaelic football in Dublin saw teams from China and South Africa comprised solely of citizens of those countries compete. Any outsider wondering why we have been at war with the English for a millennium may now better understand. Luckily Garner chooses not to comment on music.

“How the Irish became white” in the USA is almost an academic industry. Garner refers, undocumented, to Irish pogroms against African Americans, and forced evacuations of them from their homes. For the record, nobody is questioning that race riots happened at times of unemployment, or that forced relocation was practiced in

the USA; most recently by the gays in SF taking over the old Irish neighborhoods, as the great gay writer Randy Stilts(1982) confessed.

Garner has a tough sell. The great African American writer Ishmael Reed spoke at our first Irish studies conference. He was grateful for the 1842 petition against slavery sent from Ireland with 70,000 signatures. The great Australian writer Thomas Keneally (1998), in his exhaustive work, calculates that 144,000 Irish fought on the union side versus 30,000 with the confederates. The amount of medals of honour won by the Irish in the civil war on the union side is such that to this day the Irish still outnumber recipients from all other nationalities combined. It is difficult to imagine that such valour emanated from those who were ambivalent about slavery.

THE CONTEXT; 2004, CELTIC TIGER 2

Before going further, Garner – a travelling academic whom the Irish state encouraged, during its war against academic freedom, to bring up his family in Cork while firing Irish tenured academics like this writer without due process- cites mainly other mainstream Irish studies authors. (Gibbons, Lloyd, Kiberd, Cronin et al) and mainstream economists who can help make his case. One looks in vain in the reference section for Deleuze on deterritorialization, for Fanon (seen through Kibers's eyes), for Said, for Stoler, and indeed for any writer who can imbue this topic with the global patina it needs.

This is particularly the case, if as the author contends; one can be an unabashed racist bigot about the Other in the absence of Others! Specifically, “there can be racism without the presence of a racialized minority” (142). The author's gamesmanship reaches its climax in this passage (142-3), a Jewish mayor both of cork and Dublin, fine; and indeed, right now a gay half Indian Taoiseach who attended the non-Gaelic curriculum school at Wesley.

Yet anti-semitism was the norm in Gaelic Ireland (ibid.). why then did the chief Rabbi Herzog of Ireland, grandfather of the recently retired head of the Israeli labour party, speak Gaelic and support the 1919 first Dáil? In fact, there is quite a lot of evidence that his son Chaim before becoming president of Israel, pioneered the use of Gaelic (which sounds to many ears like a dialect of Arabic) in Israeli intelligence. What is for sure is that in his return visit to his native Dublin, he spoke Gaelic despite (like Varadkar) going to Wesley where it was not taught.

In short, the book is boring, but that does not stop it from being very mischievous indeed. It is Garner's one and only foray into Irish studies; his other books are on, (one suspects excoriations) “Whiteness” gender roles, ethnicity, etc. In similar vein, Tom Garvin (2004) forsook his pithy work on Irish nationalism with a now utterly

discredited thesis that wealth was always there in Ireland just for the asking. Deplorable nonsense like David McWilliam's (2006) cut and paste from his newspaper columns depicted a brave new world in which the 2 kids in the new Irish families simply had to learn how to spend their parents' money.

This was cultic tiger 2, with the honest gains of the 1990's, built on software and the arts, being destroyed by a new breed of conspicuous consumers. Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach of the time, does not deny that his electoral success was largely premised on builders' money emerging from the new housing estates for immigrants. The last remaining ethnic culture of western Europe was privatized (see above) and independent musicians saw their work being sold off to criminals at state-sponsored trade fairs for distribution, cut-price, at Wal-Mart in the USA. The native software industry was destroyed to make way first for the disastrous Medialab project, the author's first interview by the WSJ predicting this in July 2001, and then the truly gargantuan NSF clone called SFI.

CONCLUSION

"It might seem as if I have wandered a long way from the topic of racism" (253). Indeed; the book ends with musings on Irish identity at a time of economic bubble that, if developed, would have been an excellent monograph. All its speculations were essentially refuted by the fact that the UK blinked first, and - with an immigration level way below Ireland's - decided that the Poles were a drain on resources. We need thinkers like Garner, and it is a pity he wasted this opportunity.

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