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IRISH IDENTITY IN AN AGE OF GLOBALISATION

Michael Mays

In a quiet pub in Roundstone, County Galway, on a sunny summer afternoon in 1999, a patron of the pub, an American, explained to the barman that she and her husband had escaped Dublin and embarked upon a biking trip around the west in order to experience, as she put it, 'the real Ireland'. As she recounted her tale of rustic simplicity discovered, of turf cutters, Gaelic speakers, and mud huts, just outside the pub, models working on the film set of an Irish Spring commercial came and went from the luxury hotel next door. Just to the south across Galway Bay, nestled near the mysterious lunar beauty of the Burren and the grandeur of the Cliffs of Moher, sits a massive cliff-top estate, complete with helipad. Development seems to be the name of the game in that part of Clare, as it is elsewhere throughout the west: not only castles owned by rock stars and actors but also, especially, the more modest—comparatively, at least—weekend retreats springing up seemingly everywhere, standing side-by-side with, or replacing altogether, the Famine huts that had stood for a century-and-a-half as silent testimony and mute memorials to the hundreds of thousands who perished during the time of 'the great hunger'.

Some months later, late on St Patrick's Day night, I am ensconced in the only remaining pub in Dublin where my companion and I can still squeeze through the door, probably because it didn't exist the week before. At least not in this incarnation. The dusty, derelict, long-vacated remains of an old pub have been miraculously transformed into a 'traditional' pub, replete with burnished brass, frosted glass, quaint snug, and new wood stained to look old, built to resemble the smoky atmospheric bar it no doubt used to be, only without the smoke or atmosphere. To his and its credit, however, the barman has recognised us from the night before—a first over the course of a year in Dublin—and he starts our pints immediately. It's a friendly place, and the friendliness isn't diminished by the stylistic striving for authenticity. We've returned too late from Limerick where we've dropped people at the airport to catch the parade (though we've been compensated by the sights of local parades at virtually every small town and village we've passed through on the way back to Dublin). So I can only surmise that the three or four midgets who enter the pub after us have been playing the parts of leprechauns on the 'traditional' Budweiser St Patrick's Day float. Or at least this is what the Budweiser girls—blonde twenty-something models—that accompany them seem to suggest.

In place of a conclusion about the future of nationalism and national identity in Ireland, a conclusion that could only be hopelessly inadequate to the task of summary and closure, I offer instead these two images, personal and idiosyncratic, ephemeral yet hopefully illuminating tableaux reflecting some of the many incongruities wrought, in Ireland as elsewhere, by a set of processes we have come to call globalisation. In his engaging travelogue around the west of Ireland, *McCarthy's Bar*, the journalist Pete McCarthy provides a humorous atlas of the shifting realities and discordant juxtapositions that characterise this new Ireland. At Bunratty Castle, for instance, the landlord at the B & B he has checked

himself into warns McCarthy away from Durty Nellie's, the quaint, ancient pub just outside the Castle. It is very much an 'authentic' place, in the sense that it retains much of its original character, including its thatched roof and sawdust floors. It is also the first stop for huge numbers of arrivals at nearby Shannon airport. 'Let me give you a tip', the landlord confides to McCarthy as he is headed out the door for a quiet drink. 'Don't be going to Durty Nellie's. It's just a tourist trap these days. If you want to meet some locals, go to Mac's pub instead.' 'The pub in the theme park?' McCarthy asks incredulously. 'In the Folk Park. That's right. The park is closed but the pub stays open till late. 'Tis very popular.' Sure enough, a short while later in Durty Nellie's, while enjoying a quiet meal and a pint, he suddenly finds himself engulfed entirely by Americans feverishly clapping and singing along to such 'old Irish favourites' as 'My Way' and 'Copacabana'. In response to the incongruous scene, McCarthy pretends, he writes, 'that I'm in an Irish theme bar in New York, and immediately start to get powerful feelings of nostalgia for Ireland, which seems a perfectly valid way of getting something positive out of the situation'. Later, at Mac's, the Folk Park pub, and after a misadventure involving the Medieval Feast at the Castle itself, he is astonished to discover that his landlord was right: 'The pub is the only fake building I've been in this evening, but it's the only one that feels real. Little groups of Irish people are drinking here, having ingeniously escaped the all-embracing grasp of the Bunratty tourism industry by hiding in the last place anyone would think of looking for them.'¹ If there's a certain tongue-in-cheek quality to this anecdote, as there is to much of the book, *McCarthy's Bar* nevertheless identifies, albeit humorously, many of the serious dilemmas facing Irish society in the effort to manage the transformative processes of globalisation.

'Authenticity' has always been a specious category, a construct more honoured in the breach than in the observance, yet it isn't simply a matter that the 'real' Ireland sought by our fellow tourist and her husband has ceased to exist. On the contrary, many small towns and villages throughout the country offer an abundance of unadorned but congenial pubs, friendly chat, and the occasional random encounter with the local eccentric. Yet that Ireland is no more or less real than the Ireland of helipads, and sky-rocketing real estate prices, of new 'old' pubs and fashionable new pubs decked out in high modern style, with chrome and glass and leather. The quiet country lane—immortalised for tourists in the postcard depicting a herd of sheep obstructing a single car and whose text reads 'traffic jam in Ireland'—coexists, more or less easily, with snarled traffic in Dublin and massive weekend and holiday congestion on the newly constructed trunk roads (courtesy of the EU's generous Structural Funds) fanning out to the west.

Yeats's famous description of a country transformed, 'Changed, changed utterly / A terrible beauty is born', though written to commemorate the bloody, wrenching birth of the Irish nation early in the twentieth century, is in many important respects an equally apt description of that nation's coming of age, in the context of the less bloody but no less extensive changes which have fundamentally transformed Irish life at that century's end. Where emigration, anaemic standards of living, and endemic underemployment had been (with some brief periods of exception) national afflictions from the time of the Famine all the way up until the early 1990s,² by the end of that decade Ireland had become the second most prosperous country in Europe, trailing only Luxembourg. With the Irish economy thriving, buoyed by its two major growth industries—the go-go fields of information technology and tourism—Irish citizens have come to enjoy lucrative, abundant, and environmentally-friendly employment opportunities, while émigrés are being lured home from England, Europe and the USA to help meet the needs of an ever-expanding labour

market. This new-found affluence, moreover, has helped fuel reform in the areas of sexual reproduction, of divorce, and of women's and of gay and lesbian rights. At the same time, that affluence has brought about problems unimaginable in Ireland just a few short years before: traffic congestion, soaring housing prices, clerical scandal, and, most remarkable of all, an immigration crisis that has inspired an outpouring of racist vitriol. Reflecting neither the total domination of global homogeneity on one hand nor the final liberation of local culture from the constraints of an illiberal national state on the other, these tensions are indices of the discrepant pressures wrought within contemporary Irish society by shifting global flows of cultural, informational, and economic exchange.

To be sure, these tensions are far from unique to Ireland. Few countries have been able to avoid the ever-expanding reach of the new global networks. Those that have, either because they are too poor and thus lack the necessary resources, infrastructure or organisational capacity to get 'plugged in', or because of protectionist policies designed to insulate an indigenous culture from outside influences, have been relegated in this new world order to pariah status. The questions of what, exactly, globalisation is, or when it began, remain contested issues. In one important sense, globalisation is as old as the migratory tribes, though more precisely its origins are rooted in the voyages of discovery and the colonial enterprises that ensued. With the 'discovery' of new worlds and the intensification of trade between disparate peoples came the first major cultural exchanges laying the groundwork for the flows of people, goods, and traditions that constitute our contemporary understanding of the term. Hence it is anachronistic to argue or insinuate, as much of the discourse surrounding globalisation has tended to do, that it is a new or novel phenomenon. Nor is it accurate to equate globalisation with cultural imperialism or, even more narrowly, with Americanisation, though there are no doubt many family resemblances between these varied phenomena. Rather, globalisation refers, as John Tomlinson and others have argued, 'to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterise modern social life'³—part of the larger trajectory of capitalist development, and its history is inseparable from colonial and imperial domination and exploitation. Nonetheless, this later stage of global penetration does have a number of unique features that differentiate it from its earlier manifestations. What is new about the modern global system, David Held contends,

is the chronic intensification of patterns of interconnectedness mediated by such phenomena as the modern communications industry and new information technology and the spread of globalisation in and through new dimensions of interconnectedness: technological, organisational, administrative and legal, among others, each with their own logic and dynamic of change.⁴

To many of its critics, global culture represents a distinct threat to the sovereignty of the nation-state and the autonomy of distinctive national identities and cultures, while to others, the unprecedented speed and scope of the new information technologies paving the global superhighway undermine states' abilities to foster and support local culture industries.⁵ Even more nefariously, a globalised mass culture is perceived to threaten to eradicate all traces of regional and local difference, promoting instead a set of common values and images that makes of the world a 'McWorld'. In his controversial essay 'Jihad Vs. McWorld', Benjamin R. Barber opines that the globalised political future offers two paths, both threatening to democracy: the first, 'a retribalization of large swaths of humankind by war and bloodshed' pitting culture against culture, people against people, tribe against

tribe; and the second, a fully integrated and uniform culture characterised by 'fast music, fast computers, and fast food—with MTV, Macintosh, and McDonald's pressing nations into one commercially homogeneous global network: one McWorld tied together by technology, ecology, communications, and commerce'. 'The planet', Barber ominously concludes, 'is falling precipitantly apart *AND* coming reluctantly together at the very same moment'.⁶ In response to this unilateral notion of globalisation that emphasises imposition and coercion, audience passivity, and the increasing coherence of both exporters and importers of culture, a growing number of critics have begun to focus on the ways in which cultural transmission operates as a two-way exchange.⁷ This view looks to the ways in which diverse communities appropriate, adapt, transform, and retransmit the dispatches they receive, concluding that, as nations in the past have maintained their distinctive identities and traditions despite the onset of pervasive supranational media forms, so regional and local cultures today are not really on the verge of extinction despite the pressures of globalisation. Cultural nationalism and international culture, these critics maintain, continue to coexist, however uneasily, at the beginning of the twenty-first century much as they did at the beginning of the twentieth.

Regardless of whether one takes the pessimistic or the optimistic view of globalism's ramifications, what remains clear is that these intensified flows have irrevocably reshaped traditional forms of national identity. Where the Enlightenment concept of citizenship was seen to be a right conferred by birth and almost preternaturally linked to the related concepts of nationhood and powers derived from the state, globalisation, in multiplying and overlaying the centres of power, legitimacy, and allegiance which the nation-state once monopolised, diffuses the more rigid forms of self-identity conveyed by nationality. The accelerating pace of transportation and communication has altered our experience of geography, making it less a barrier to cultural interaction and communication. As cultures come to interact more and more intensively, so an intricate field of tensions results, producing unpredictable and unforeseen consequences for and within those cultures themselves. And in this important respect, national culture remains just what it has been in the past (though subject, of course, to different modalities and pressures): a contested space where issues of language, culture, and representation get articulated together in complex ways. Neither homogeneous nor static, and increasingly unconstrained by territorial boundaries, national identities have become far more stratified and regional, in constant flux, contradictory, open, and porous.

If the Irish case is far from an isolated one, its dilemmas are nonetheless illuminating for a number of reasons. First, as Luke Gibbons has argued, Irish society had suffered many of the adverse effects of modernity and the diasporic effects of globalism, including social disintegration and fragmentation, for generations before the term 'globalisation' had entered the critical lexicon.⁸ The tragic history of emigration and the Irish diaspora have in a very real sense made Irishness long since a global identity; hence, Terry Eagleton notes that, while on one hand, Ireland signifies 'roots, belonging, tradition', it has also spelled at the same time 'exile, diffusion, globality, diaspora'.⁹ Then, as an advanced European state, Ireland has benefited disproportionately from the fluidity of global capital. Yet its colonial past, and the social and economic obstacles it has been forced to confront and overcome, aligns it with other developing postcolonial countries. Finally, and most importantly, the lightning-fast, head-spinning rate of change in Ireland exemplifies the speed with which the new processes of globalisation are capable of effecting their transformations.

No change has been more significant, or had a greater impact—culturally, politically, and economically—than that which constitutes the relationship to Britain. For Fintan O'Toole, one of the more reliable guides to the topography of the new global Ireland, 1996 represents a watershed in Irish history. In that year, for the first time, he writes, 'it became possible to understand the Republic of Ireland without reference to Britain'. Seventy-five years after the creation of the Irish Free State 'it was no longer possible to blame British colonialism, the nightmare of a benighted past, for the country's problems. With the old attachment to Britain irrevocably severed, it was faced with the necessity, not just to think again, but to find a whole new way of thinking. In terms of mental geography, Ireland ceased to be an island off Britain. After centuries of sending people into exile', he concludes, 'it became itself an ex-isle.'¹⁰ The sea-change to which O'Toole refers was itself the product of many other changes, changes which happened not, of course, all at once, suddenly, overnight, but had been set in motion, rather, long before they came to fruition in the form of the celebrated Celtic Tiger economy.

By the middle of the 1950s, with most of the rest of the Western world in the midst of an unprecedented economic expansion, de Valera's protectionist policies had driven the Irish economy into the ground: living standards in the country were actually in decline, and an estimated 400,000 of its citizens had, over the course of the decade, opted for emigration as the lesser of two evils. Things had begun to change by the end of the decade, however. Giving voice to the growing discontent with the conservatism that had been a hallmark first of the Free State government and later of the Republic under de Valera, T. K. Whitaker published, in 1958, *The Grey Book on Economic Development*. Whitaker, dubbed 'the architect of modern Ireland' by the *Irish Times*, had been influenced by the success of state planning in France and Italy, and he became the leading advocate of an economic modernisation that, if not quite heretical, was still vastly unpopular to many in the Ireland of the time. The report, which the new Taoiseach Sean Lemass would make the centrepiece of his government when he succeeded de Valera in 1959, urged the abandonment of protectionism and an acceptance of free trade, foreign investment and planned growth, and proved to be a critical juncture in Ireland's relations with the outside world. Under Lemass's leadership, the state assumed a much more active role in industrial development and sought to encourage foreign investment through a range of new incentives, and in the process positioned itself to benefit from the ongoing post-war boom, thereby reversing the emigration trend.

Other less strictly economic developments helped foster the country's shift away from de Valerian protectionism, from its isolationism towards Lemassian *laissez-faireism* and a more worldly engagement. British television had been a presence, if not an extensive one, for some years before the creation of Ireland's own national broadcasting service in 1962. Free secondary education for all was introduced in 1967, while that same year saw a loosening of the censorship of literature. But what had the greatest impact was Ireland's admittance, in 1973, into the European Community. Membership in the EC not only created new foreign links and new attitudes, but greatly reduced Ireland's economic over-dependence on Britain. For some, including traditional nationalists and those favouring a more neutralist position, union with Europe heralded the demise of Irish identity, through the potential absorption of a distinctive Irish culture into a homogeneous European state and threats to hard-won Irish self-determination and independence. Others, including many environmentalists, have cautioned against a highly industrialised and centralised Europe in which Ireland would be condemned to reoccupy the marginalised position in

the periphery from which it had only recently escaped. Yet these have been minority voices. For the bulk of Irish citizens, alignment with Europe has been a godsend, and not merely because of the exorbitant subsidies that are channelled to the island from their European neighbours—and Germany in particular—by way of Brussels.

In addition to those very substantial benefits, and the reduction in the economic over-dependence on Great Britain, membership in the EU has brought many other benefits as well. Markets have been greatly expanded, growth has been strong, and modernisation generally has brought about important and much needed social and environmental reforms. But, arguably, the most salutary effect of the association with Europe and the move away from protectionism has been cultural and psychological. For Garret FitzGerald, the former Fine Gael Leader and long-time proponent of free-market policies, Ireland's entry to the EC had a profound affect on the country's collective psyche. 'With the ending of economic dependence', FitzGerald contends, 'we acquired a new self-confidence and became an equal partner with Britain, in the new multilateral context of the EC.' For FitzGerald, multilateralism diffused the pressures inherent in the old Manichean colonial relationship: 'In the EC, we are in ad hoc alliance with different countries on different matters, and we are no longer traumatised by the old intense bilateral relationship of a dependent character'.¹¹ O'Toole, too, has noted the remarkable effect of the change in the relationship. Commenting on the successful summit meeting of the EU held in Dublin in 1996, O'Toole detected a profound reversal in the relationship between the two rival states. 'Britain', O'Toole writes,

was so obviously an inconsequential and edgy presence on the margins while Ireland, holding the presidency, was at the centre of things, comfortable and competent. For centuries, England was phlegmatic, assertive and businesslike, while Ireland was unsettled, uncertain, fretful about its national identity and place in the world. Now, the roles have been reversed: it was in England . . . that questions like nationality, sovereignty, and identity were sites of confusion and contest, while the Republic of Ireland seemed, in 1996, to have gone beyond all that.¹²

As the remarks of both FitzGerald and O'Toole suggest, 'Europe' represents a mediating space between the local and the international: EU membership fundamentally reshaped Ireland's engagement with the world in two vital ways; locally by recasting the context of Anglo-Irish relations, and internationally by diminishing the UN as the focal point for Irish foreign policy. And in this respect, Europe is in some sense a model for what globalisation might beneficially become.

Yet if 'Europeanness' has been an unqualified success for free-marketer FitzGerald, for O'Toole it has been a far more ambivalent process, and its successes in Ireland have come at a high price. 'One of the things that culture reminds us of', he writes, reflecting on emigration in the Irish past and its role in the construction of concepts of home and homelands, 'is that home is much more than a name we give to a dwelling place. It is also a whole set of connections and affections, the web of mutual recognition that we spin around ourselves and that gives us a place in the world.'¹³ Emigration in the nineteenth century may have meant that 'home' was necessarily always elsewhere, 'not so much the place you were as the place you wanted to be', but it remained nevertheless, even if only in the imagination, somewhere concrete, tangible, rooted in an idea of the soil that was as literal as it was metaphorical. Today, however, emigration and exile have taken on a whole new and very different set of meanings within the context of the rapid social changes that

have transformed the country since the 1960s. 'The speed and scale of those changes', O'Toole maintains,

have induced a sense of internal exile, a sense that Irish people feel less and less at home in Ireland, that Ireland has become somehow unreal. In one way or another, very many Irish people have experienced a sense of the familiar becoming unknown, unrecognisable. Ireland has become so multi-layered, so much a matter of one set of images superimposed on another, that it is hard to tell home from abroad.

The process of alteration, of change, O'Toole concludes, 'has also been a process of estrangement. Home has become as unfamiliar as abroad.'¹⁴

For O'Toole, it is because of the extensive changes at home that 'the difference between home and abroad has shrunk to virtually nothing'. Yet as McCarthy recognises, the process cuts both ways: abroad has become, paradoxically, in many respects as familiar as home. McCarthy discovers in his travels, and is drawn to, a set of qualities—a combination of hospitality and sociability, of *laissez-faire* acceptance and a relaxed good naturedness—an 'Irishness', that is indeed genuine, palpable, real. And in no short supply. He finds it in pubs and country lanes, and from Donegal to Cork. Yet 'Irishness', as McCarthy discovers, is equally a commodity available for trade on the open market. Call it oirishness, celticism, blarney, or what you will, what the hugely successful Irish tourist industry has been selling to all those 'buyers', those tourists from North America and Europe, to Asia and the South Pacific, McCarthy contends, is an Irishness genuinely suffused with 'warmth and conviviality'. Nor is that trade confined to the local market: it is not a fixed native good, like the mountains of Connemara or Dingle Bay. Rather, it is a commodity that has proved itself time and again, and long before the concept of globalisation had ever been dreamed up, to be remarkably portable, far and away Ireland's most valuable, and at times its only, marketable export.

The popularity of that commodity can be measured in the proliferation of 'Irish pubs' mushrooming into existence in locations as far-flung as Uzbekistan and Abu Dhabi. Trying to account for their popularity, the marketing manager of a tremendously successful Dublin-based company that manufactures and installs these pubs in cities around the world tells McCarthy that 'people are buying into the concept of sitting down and talking to someone you haven't met before. We're creating an atmosphere that persuades people to go and frequent a pub in countries where they don't frequent pubs. We're changing habits.'¹⁵ O'Toole has described tourism as a 'useless endeavour' involving 'an immense amount of activity for no palpable gain'. For O'Toole, this is its point: 'a holiday is good', he contends, arguing against a group of proposed interpretive centres, 'in inverse proportion to its resemblance to our everyday economic activities'. 'We go to the trouble and expense of holidays', he continues, 'to become three year-olds again, to experience the sense of being hauled away from something which we cannot return to everyday.'¹⁶ On one level, the sociability that the Irish pub both represents and embodies provides, for tourists from countries that lack a pub culture, just this sort of diversion from daily habit and isolating routine. Yet on another level, the type of tourism that O'Toole describes, one in which 'the search of the tourist is not for different places, but for a different sense of time, for moments of time that are present and then gone, rather than for the endlessly returning moments which make up our daily lot', is pre-modern, a tourism of a different order. What the endlessly replicable and transportable Irish pub represents, on the other hand, is a global model of tourism: have it here or take it with you, even if, in the act of relocation,

the meaning changes altogether. 'You have to remember', the marketing manager tells McCarthy in response to the latter's wondering about the nature of the Irishness being sold, 'in many of these places [where Irish pubs are being installed] they have no idea where Ireland is, and may never have heard of it.' What matters for global tourism is not distance but proximity; not the sense of having left behind, spatially and temporally, the familiarity of the everyday, but of meeting the everyday wherever one goes; not the loss of leaving home, but the surplus of being at home everywhere. From Kazakhstan to Las Vegas and Helsinki to Hong Kong, every Irish pub that the company creates plays the same piped music in the same sequence: 'Planxty at lunchtime, then Enya in the afternoon so [the customers] will chill out and stay longer.'¹⁷ Stylistic modifications adapted to local tastes and circumstances—the newly made Victorian furnishings go overseas, while the modern steel and chrome stuff stays in Dublin—are mere surface differences. The experience itself remains infinitely repeatable.

More Irish pubs can hardly be considered a bad thing, even if the cost is more Enya. Yet there are dangers too, as McCarthy notes. Wandering around Cong, where *The Quiet Man* (which was filmed in the town in 1951) has become the fetishistic focal point of its thriving tourist business, McCarthy wonders:

Now the Irish economy is so driven by tourism, will every special little place end up like this, as they see what's to be earned by marketing their idiosyncrasies, leaping aboard the Celtic Tiger, and getting the builders in? A successful tourist industry can quickly turn a place into a parody of itself.

Of more pressing concern is what the pressures of a global tourist industry will do to what is positive and unaffected in the culture. 'The fear must be', McCarthy writes, reflecting on the success of Irish tourism, 'that the process will change the reality; that warmth and conviviality, like other resources, may turn out to be finite. Marketing, of course, is eternal.'¹⁸

McCarthy's concerns are legitimate, and there can be little doubt that reproducibility and simulacra are potentially worrisome symptoms of an increasingly globalised world culture. And it may well be true, too, that, as Dennis Altman has argued, far from levelling cultural differences, globalisation has in fact had the opposite effect, reinforcing class distinctions transnationally. For Altman,

globalization does not abolish difference as much as redistribute it, so that certain styles and consumer fashions are internationalized while class divides are strengthened, often across national boundaries. The Yuppie Businesswoman with her portable phone in Kuala Lumpur or Sao Paulo has more in common with her counterpart in Stuttgart or Minneapolis than do either with the rural or urban poor of their own societies.¹⁹

But it is also surely the case that such fears are only part of the story. For the cultural and communication flows that have caused such hand wringing—Hollywood films, MTV, Sky One—do not demonstrate in any simple or unilateral way the exercise of power or domination over those with whom they come in contact. Flows travel in multiple directions, and with unpredictable valencies, rippling out and reverberating back and forth. Nor are these or other cultural products simply passively consumed by people independent of such considerations as their class, gender, race, or cultural background. On the contrary, virtually every encounter involves some form of creative engagement; these cultural forms and styles are appropriated and adapted to suit local needs, desires and tastes. Moreover, if globalism has effected a decentring of the nation-state's hegemony, national identities and

national cultures, far from being extinguished, are reconstituted and renewed, and thereby reinforced and recentred, in the productive interchange between the global and the local. The reality of criss-crossing cultural flows, of hybridity, and of multiculturalism is far more differentiated and complex than the cultural homogenisation argument can allow.

Likewise, if there is substance to concerns about internal exile and estrangement from the familiar; if the dark side of the hybridity, syncretism, and fluidity of the new cultural political economy celebrated by proponents of globalisation are just the types of ruptures and disjunctions O'Toole notes; and if, finally, our very experience of space and time themselves has changed in dramatic and disconcerting ways, so that no aspect of our lives remains untouched by global forces; still, the salient fact remains that most people operate within, and identify themselves as part of, a distinctive national community. McCarthy, himself no great advocate of globalisation, has nonetheless identified an important, liberating aspect, a silver lining, to the deterritorialisation that O'Toole and others deplore. Searching for an 'ancestral genetic memory', an identity linked to his Irish ancestry, the English-born McCarthy discovers in his travels through the west of Ireland all sorts of people—Germans, Scandinavians, even English people, *many* English people—with no ancestral ties at all who have felt themselves to be, and made themselves, at home in the country. As McCarthy comes to recognise, there is nothing either ancestral or genetic about the not-easily-identifiable sense of belonging that he is in search of. Unconnected to the place of one's birth, more affiliative than filial, and rooted not in the soil but in the ethereal sense of at-homeness he feels in Ireland, this is a notion of identity which is uprooted from traditional ties to place and landscape, and rerouted through the unanchorable global flows that stand traditional forms and markers of identity on their head.

Hence, while the grounds of cultural identity, and those identities themselves, have become increasingly groundless, more fluid and multidimensional, as mobility has increased, its importance remains undiminished. No more or less reducible to a single monolithic or fixed entity than ever, national identity continues to be what it always has been: the site of contestation and struggle. If Irish identity took shape in the nineteenth century oppositionally against a rubric of Britishness, and in the twentieth out of its own internal struggles, in the twenty-first century that identity is being refashioned again, still, more diversely, perhaps, yet no less vitally. Similarly, the 'real' Ireland remains just as uncapturable within any single image, any one tableau, any individual or single-stranded narrative as ever. Pluralistic, complex, sophisticated: the modalities may be different, but the global pressures that are reshaping the new Europeanised Ireland, like the nationalising ones that prevailed for so long, are creating new forms, new formations of national culture.

NOTES

1. McCarthy, *McCarthy's Bar*, 196, 198, 205.
2. As late as 1993, the country remained, along with Greece and Portugal, one of the three poorest countries in the EU in terms of GDP per capita.
3. Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, 2.
4. Held, 'Democracy, the Nation-state, and the Global System', 145.
5. See, for example, Bauman, *Globalization*.
6. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld*, 3.

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7. See, in particular, the seminal work of Roland Robertson, *Globalization*, and of Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*.
8. 'One of the consequences of [the disjointedness of Irish history] is that Irish society did not have to await the twentieth century to undergo the shock of modernity: disintegration and fragmentation were already part of its history so that, in a crucial but not always welcome sense, Irish culture experienced modernity before its time. This is not unique to Ireland, but is the common inheritance of cultures subjected to the depredations of colonialism' (Gibbons 1996, 6).
9. Eagleton, 'The Ideology of Irish Studies', 7.
10. O'Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin*, 11.
11. Ardagh, *Ireland and the Irish*, 88.
12. O'Toole, *The Ex-Isle of Erin*, 12.
13. *Ibid.*, 136.
14. *Ibid.*, 173.
15. McCarthy, *McCarthy's Bar*, 329.
16. O'Toole, *Black Hole, Green Card*, 46, 49.
17. McCarthy, *McCarthy's Bar*, 329.
18. *Ibid.*, 239.
19. Altman, *Global Sex*, 21.

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