Negotiating postcolonial legacies: shifting conservation narratives and residual colonial built heritage in Ireland

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Abstract

Where they evolve in contentious political contexts, conservation and heritage can be framed by competing priorities reflecting collective remembering, cultural politics and identities intertwined with the symbolic representation of the built environment. Drawing on postcolonial experiences in Ireland, this paper explores the shifting representations of built heritage over the post-independence era and the extent that a residual colonial legacy can perform a role in framing contemporary place-making processes. Empirically, we focus on representations emerging within contemporary 'elite discourses' – built heritage policy-makers, leading conservation practitioners and civil society conservation groups – to explore how they negotiate this postcolonial context.

Introduction

As recorded by Pendlebury and Strange (2011, 361), in the post-war era, urban conservation moved centre-stage as a planning goal, shifting conservation practice from the margins to the mainstream, and in this shift, 'urban conservation has become an inescapable element of the way cities remake themselves in the twenty-first century'. In this context, conservation professionals have long enjoyed an overarching technical remit and privileged knowledge within built heritage policy decision-making, with 'experts' able to control decision-making through an Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006; Waterton *et al.*, 2006). Based on this technical rationality, conventional conservation practice typically conceives buildings as objects constructed under the gaze of a single architect that retain exemplar properties worth preserving (Tait and While, 2009); in other words conservation based on an appreciation of the craftsmanship, historical and artistic value in an artefact based on professional knowledge.

Within place-making strategies, however, conservation policy and practice are framed by competing and often overlapping rationalities beyond technical discourses, from nostalgia for traditional urban forms and appreciation for intrinsic aesthetic properties of buildings, to neoliberal place-marketing strategies whereby conservation of built heritage performs a role in

urban competiveness agendas in an era of globalised urban homogeneity. Moreover, in addition to competing policy agendas, the values represented by built heritage can also be contested, underpinned by latent social conflicts reflecting collective remembering, cultural politics and identities, intertwined with the symbolic representation of the built environment. Though there is a longstanding tradition of examining how literature has been used to express the postcolonial experience in Ireland, the role of the built environment has been neglected (Kincaid, 2006). Therefore, drawing on postcolonial experiences in Ireland, this paper explores the shifting representations of built heritage over the post-independence era and the extent that a residual colonial legacy can perform a key role in framing contemporary place-making processes, involving character, place distinctiveness, heritage and identity. These relationships are not fixed, but are in constant flux (Neill, 2005; Moore and Whelan, 2007). In this context, different groups in society, through time, have constructed their own alternative and competing heritage narratives relating to the meaning and value of the historic built environment. Some of these groups, in various positions of power (e.g. politicians, policymakers, etc.), have shaped heritage discourse – and thereby national policy.

In this paper, we firstly examine the evolution of built heritage priorities in post-independence Ireland, from antipathy towards colonial legacies, towards ambivalence, and a more recent revalorisation of built heritage. We then focus on representations emerging within contemporary 'elite discourses' – built heritage policy-makers, leading conservation practitioners and civil society conservation groups – to explore how conservation practitioners negotiate this postcolonial context, mobilising heritage discourses within everyday practices and to understand the implications of this in planning for the urban environment in postcolonial contexts. We argue that conservation policy actors downplay the symbolic meaning of the built environment, instead focusing on architectural qualities and the intrinsic building properties framed within expert knowledge, leading to a narrow prioritisation of heritage values, excluding vernacular architecture or buildings of limited 'architectural' value, but with significance for Irish nation-building and in the formation of local identity. However, we also chart efforts within the heritage sector to counter a perceived lack of public ownership or

interest in colonial built environment legacies, by attempting to mobilise an 'Irish identity' surrounding the historic built environment to create a more inclusive heritage discourse with wider public support. In this case, postcolonial representations of the built environment are not simply the inevitable product of history, they are the result of deliberate, discursive action. To achieve this, a series of in-depth semi-structured interviews have been conducted with key actors involved in shaping built heritage discourse at a national level, employing visual prompts alongside more traditional interview techniques. Critical discourse analysis has been chosen as the analytical approach because of its potential to reveal the role of discourse in maintaining patterns of power and inequality. Accordingly, the paper is structured as follows: firstly we contextualise the research by examining the literature surrounding heritage and identity in postcolonial societies. Secondly, we examine the evolution of heritage practice in Ireland vis-à-vis competing narratives of development. Then, we outline our research approach based on qualitative interviews, critical discourse analysis and photo-elicitation, before discussing the empirical material in relation to contemporary heritage practices and the role of residual postcolonial legacies. Finally, we develop conclusions with relevance to identity and heritage in contested contexts.

Heritage and Identity in Postcolonial Societies

Much of the work on identity and cultural politics in the built environment has emerged from research on deeply divided cities characterised by hyper spatial segregation on the lines of class, religion or race (see for example: Peach, 1996; Murtagh, 2004; Murtagh and Keaveney, 2006; Shirlow and Murtagh, 2004; Yiftachel, 2002, 2004; Yiftachel and Ghanem, 2004). For example, Neill (2004), in his study of cultural identity and planning in Belfast, Berlin and Detroit, explores the role of contested symbolism and discourses within urban planning conflicts. Neill stresses the importance of collective remembering in shaping urban processes (see also O'Keeffe, 2007). This can take various cultural, ritualised and embedded forms, adding to the symbolism of places which holds a major sway over the imagination. Yet the relationship between identity and place is not static; as Agnew (1991, 53) argues, spatial

identities are developed through particular cultures constituted by a 'set of practices, interests and ideas subject to collective revision, changing or persisting, as places and their population change or persist in response to locally and externally generated challenges'. Similarly, within policy-making, identities may also be open to mobilisation and manipulation by policy actors.

Undoubtedly, in the Irish context, the experience of English/British domination and imperialism provides a key framework for collective remembering since achieving effective independence in 1922 (see Ferriter, 2005). Independence was achieved through a violent campaign against colonial power, and this was swiftly followed by a civil war resulting from divisions within the Irish republican movement following the partition of Ireland that enabled Northern Ireland to remain as part of the UK. Contemporary Irish political parties can largely be traced from these traumatic divisions.

In this context, postcolonial narratives and 'collective memory' (cf. Rothstein, 2005) perform a role in shaping shared norms and culture, which may explain how and why actors develop different mental maps that affect how they perceive other actors. As Kearns (2006, 177) outlines, postcolonial perspectives on Ireland rest upon three main claims. First, that for much of its history, Ireland was a British colony. Secondly, that colonial subjects have constricted agency and hybrid identities; what they can do is limited by the colonial power and what they aspire to is formed in part by that same power. Finally, to adopt a postcolonial perspective is to search for the ways post-Independence Ireland was shaped by the legacies of colonialism. Although vigorously debated within academic literature, 'colonialism' and 'postcolonialism' are frequently cited within the popular discourse and political debates in Ireland, from the continuing use of British symbols to debates on sovereignty, European influences on policy and Northern Ireland (see Howe, 2000). Although the limitations of postcolonial perspectives have been recognised (see for example, Young, 2001), the focus of this paper is to examine the extent to which postcolonial narratives frame contemporary conservation debates.

There are arguably four key dimensions of the colonial built environment legacy in Ireland. Firstly, Ireland's urban centres have their historical roots in successive waves of

colonial settlement. Secondly, and related, buildings within these urban centres were inevitably tools of colonial oppression, representing the colonial state and power and domination of colonial capital interests. Thirdly, the built environment was shaped by the tastes and preferences of the colonial elite, particularly in relation to prominent residences in the urban landscape. Fourthly, outside of the main urban centres, landlord estates represented domination of landownership and agricultural production, manifested in large estate houses (referred to as the 'big house') and remodelled rural villages. In the postcolonial context, the built environment can, therefore, be associated with colonial power (Whelan, 2001, 2002, 2003), but also becomes a nation-building and political tool (Kincaid, 2006; Moore and Whelan, 2007). Thus, residual colonial memories are not necessarily the inevitable product of history or cultural conditions, but may be the result of deliberate and strategic action by political actors within policy struggles. In this sense, collective memory may be interpreted both as an orientation that is socially constructed, but also what actually happened in the past informs an understanding of the present, whereby people's beliefs about the past are deeply rooted in their own personal experiences, or in experiences handed down over generations. Furthermore, within Ireland, the meaning of modernity and its relationship with both colonialism and local tradition are complex (Schwarz, 2005, 17). Colonialism brought modernity and imposed a break with traditional cultural and social norms that later led to nationalism's re-assertion of nativistic tradition, and to popular antipathy towards aspects of colonial modernity, still evident in Irish contemporary discourse (Scott, 2012). However, historically, nationalism simultaneously offered a progressive vision, underpinned by the values of modernity: 'enlightenment, pluralism, democracy, and progress' (Kincaid, 2006, 8). The built environment thereby becomes the focus of a shifting and multifaceted power-struggle between competing interests at different times in history. Kincaid (2006) further argues that Ireland's position is unique, as the only Western European country colonised by another.

Porter (2010, 12) points out that while much has been written with regard to territorial, economic and political projects of colonisation and their consequences for postcolonial societies, generally, urban planning was integral to each of these, and there is little material

examining the role of planning in postcolonial contexts. She argues in strong terms that the colonial roots of planning endure and a failure to theorise the cultural position of contemporary planning in postcolonial contexts can render efforts at public involvement a 'new form of colonial oppression'. While this may conjure images of slavery and nineteenth-century imperial policies, Porter's argument does not mean that contemporary planning is a continued, deliberate instrument of colonial power. Rather, many of the assumptions on which contemporary planning is built are rooted in colonialism, and it would be inappropriate to presume that a model of planning built, at least in part, on these assumptions is fully responsive to contemporary local realities in postcolonial societies, despite the many evolutionary changes that the planning system may have been subject to over time.

With regard to the Irish context and to built heritage protection, specifically, though it developed considerably later in Ireland than in many Western societies, Porter's argument is as relevant to heritage practice here as it is to the wider field of planning. Legislative protection of historic buildings in fact began in Ireland earlier than in England, in the form of provisions contained within the Irish Church Act (Government of the United Kingdom, 1869, section 25). This legislation separated the church of the Anglo-Irish elite Ascendancy from the state but, in so doing, also sought to protect structures of 'architectural character or antiquity' which had been owned by the church. Indeed, heritage protection today operates within the Irish planning system, itself significantly derived from earlier English legislation (Bannon, 1989, 46). This paper therefore seeks to address the deficits in the literature highlighted by Porter and Kincaid by examining the discourse that frames national heritage policy in the contemporary postcolonial context in Ireland. Much of the discussion that follows is around the operation of the system of built heritage protection and management in Ireland, and the expert practices associated with it. This might be more simply termed 'heritage practice'. This, therefore, is the expression used throughout the paper.

Built Heritage Protection in the Modern Irish State

Whelan (2001, 2002, 2003) argues that the urban landscape takes on a particular significance where it evolves in contentious political circumstances. It becomes subject to, and influenced by, a struggle between conflicting interest groups in search of dominion over an environment, such as through the erection and destruction of public monuments, street nomenclature, buildings, and through new planning initiatives. The urban landscape of Ireland is one such example of this struggle, and can be seen in different media and spheres, such as through planning or political discourse, or through the development of the physical urban environment. Since the formation of the Irish state in 1922, issues surrounding physical development have been central to political discourse (Kincaid, 2005). On the one hand, this relates to economic realities of the new state, whereby development was prioritised over other environmental concerns. On the other hand, urban development issues became central in terms of nation-building, reflecting the new political elite's desire to forge new place-identities. In this section of the paper, we chart the emergence of competing representations of the built environment and the tension between development and nation-building and newly emerging preservation rationalities.

In the years after independence, it is clear that nationalist political discourse had begun to bear upon the built environment to an increasing extent, as seen in comments such as those of John McBride TD (*Teachta Dála*, a member of *Dáil Éireann*, the lower house of the *Oireachtas*, the National Parliament of Ireland), in a 1924 *Dáil Éireann* debate on a temporary location for the *Oireachtas*:

> *Dublin is really a foreign town. The streets, as you pass along, speak of the foreigner and of the foreigner's power...the seat of the Government of this country should be far removed from the atmosphere of Dublin...and from its foreign mode and method of thought...we are going to start from the beginning* (McBride, 1924, Vol.6, Col.2901, cited in Kincaid, 2006, 74, after Campbell, 1994, 48).

Some forty years later, Dublin's historic townscape was still contested, though by the 1960s there was a growing appreciation of the value of older buildings, as can be seen from the words of Dr. James Ryan TD, Minister for Finance, in a 1963 *Dáil* debate in relation to the demolition of a terrace of Georgian Houses on Lower Fitzwilliam Street:

> *A certain amount of irrelevant argument has crept into this issue. Some people who had no thoughts about the matter began to have them as soon as the Earl of Pembroke indicated his objection. Then they said: 'What is Irish is good; what is foreign is bad and therefore Fitzwilliam Street must go.' I can think of no stronger evidence of poverty of thought if that is the kind of attitude that is to determine what the architectural future of this city is to be.* (Ryan, 1963, Vol.205, No.3, Col.431).

The 1960s witnessed contrasting political discourses in relation to colonial symbolism, with attempts made to embrace the historic built environment as part of *Irish* heritage, rather than as symbolic of former colonial rule. For example, a 1961 *Seanad Éireann* (Senate of Ireland) debate indicates a major shift in public discourse, firstly, in the specific reference to buildings as architectural heritage, but also in a willingness signalled, at least amongst Senators Edward Maguire and Denis Burke, to accept the architecture of the Ascendancy as part of Ireland's heritage:

> *…we have very good reason to be proud of our fine examples of Georgian architecture. … Our Georgian houses are part of our heritage. Some of these houses are wonderful examples of architecture, decoration and stucco-work. Great European artists and architects worked on many of them. We should now use them as a tourist potential because they have become our heritage.* (Burke, 1961, Vol.54, No.16, Col.1596)

In this debate, Maguire and Burke may have been among the earliest to explicitly refer to Ireland's wider stock of buildings with no archaeological significance as 'heritage'. Maurice Dockrell, *Fine Gael* TD for Dublin South-Central, and grandson of Sir Maurice Dockrell, a Unionist MP prior to independence, was similar in his sentiments two years later:

> *These very beautiful 18th century buildings which we still have in Dublin are very valuable from a tourist and a cultural point of view. They were built by Irish workmen, designed by Irish architects and lived in by Irish people. They are relics of a very elegant age. They are part of our history, part of the tradition of Dublin as an 18th century European capital. There are very few capital cities that have the heritage we have and it is worth spending some money and going to some trouble to maintain it.* (Dockrell, 1963, Vol.205, No.6, Col.932)

Nevertheless, identity and the architectural legacy of colonialism still very much framed competing representations of the built environment and underpinned related arguments, as evidenced in the discourse of Joseph Lenehan a number of days earlier, independent TD for Mayo North (formerly *Fine Gael*, and later *Fianna Fáil*):

> *There is also the famous Fine Gael architecture. Anything that was built by the British, such as Nelson Pillar and the famous Fitzwilliam Street building which the ESB [Electricity Supply Board] want demolished, they want to preserve. Anything the British built should be knocked down as far as it can be if the last big storm did not knock it down. I make no apology to any Irishman for saying that. We are now our own bosses and it is time we showed them we are not afraid to take down the buildings they put up with the blood of Irishmen* (Lenehan, 1963, Vol.205, No.3, Col.496).

Lenehan very much saw the same buildings as primarily a reminder of colonial rule and oppression and, as such, argued in favour of their destruction, not least to send a signal of defiance to the British.

Against this contested political backdrop, conservation as public policy in Ireland was relatively slow to emerge in comparison with many other European countries (Pickard, 2002). The first piece of post-independence legislation to specifically deal with the protection of built heritage was the National Monuments Act 1930. This was, for the most part, an update of the pre-independence legislation, and therefore related almost exclusively to pre-1600 structures, i.e. those of archaeological interest. While legislative protection was scant, the 1940s and 1950s witnessed the beginning of a conservation movement in Ireland, notably the establishment of *An Taisce* (the National Trust for Ireland) and the Irish Georgian Society.

An Taisce was set up in 1948 following a meeting of leading members of civil society concerned with the impacts of modernisation and development (Mawhinney, 1989, 94) and, as such, arguably represented the interests and concerns of the elite of the day. The first president of *An Taisce*, the naturalist Robert Lloyd Praeger (1865-1953), in an address given on *Radio Éireann* in 1948 encapsulates the professional establishment's concern:

> *In all but the more backward countries, organisations exist which have for their objective the protection and preservation of things of natural beauty or of human interest within their boundaries. These need protection against dilapidation, against sequestration for private ends, and in recent times against the actions of public bodies. There are other aspects too – the provision of open spaces, the care of much that is in the national interest, the prevention of disfigurement of the towns and of the countryside by injudicious building, by advertisement and by the ruthless claims of industrialism… To watch over such matters An Taisce was founded.*
> (Praeger, 1948, 7)

Praeger's discourse reveals his own elite cultural position. His suggestion that only 'backward' countries lack organisations such as *An Taisce*, and that *An Taisce* should 'watch over' Ireland, implies firstly that Ireland was in some respects perhaps not very far removed from being 'backward' in Praeger's eyes. Secondly, the narrative also implies that the broader populace could not be trusted to look after these aspects of the country.

An Taisce was not alone at this time in reflecting the birth of a conservation movement. In 1958, the Irish Georgian Society was founded by the Hon. Desmond Guinness, a member of the elite Irish 'Ascendancy', and was the first nationwide independent body set up in the state whose primary aim was the protection of architectural heritage (Tovey, 1993). Initially founded following a public outcry against the demolition of two Georgian houses on Kildare Place, Dublin, in 1957, its upper-class origins resulted in a preoccupation with Georgian architecture and with the architectural legacy of the landed classes; even the society's name betrays its prejudices explicitly.

Initially, the conservation movement in Ireland was preoccupied with a narrow range of priorities, primarily surrounding the residences of the upper class. Indeed, the shift to wider conservation concerns was slow: it would not be until the late 1970s that *An Taisce*, for example, would begin to campaign for the conservation of more modest works of architecture, recognising the collective value of groups of buildings which would not be worthy of protection on their own (Mullally, 1980, cited in Negussie, 2004), and not until the early 1990s that industrial heritage would be protected to any significant extent (Dublin City Development Plan, 1991).

Another key shift in the representation of built heritage relates to the increasing internationalisation of architectural heritage protection in Ireland, reflecting wider political developments. Ireland had been a founder member of the Council of Europe (1949), and acceded to the EEC in 1973 alongside the United Kingdom (though Ireland had initially applied to join in 1960) (Kennedy and O'Halpin, 2000, 11). These memberships signalled the wider internationalisation of Ireland, and a new social, political and cultural epoch, not least in

Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom. The influence of cultural nationalism in political, architectural and planning discourse was waning, to be replaced by an increased openness towards – and enthusiasm for – international trends and developments, from international style architecture and a revalorisation of built heritage as increasingly *Irish* heritage, central to place-making and as potential tool in urban regeneration. Over time, a number of international charters and conventions sought to establish key principles in relation to built heritage conservation. Key among them with regard to the protection of architectural heritage in Ireland is the 1985 Granada Convention (Council of Europe, 1985). This was a seminal moment in the protection of architectural heritage that would lead to fundamental changes in its protection under the development control system.

A further significant shift can be seen with the *Planning and Development Act, 2000* (Government of Ireland, 2000) and related *Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities* first published in 2004 (DAHG, 2011), providing for the first time comprehensive protection guidance in Ireland. Of particular note is that certain words and phrases have become standard and accepted in heritage discourse: 'structure', 'cultural significance', and the word 'heritage' – which did not appear once in legislation, policy or guidance relating to the built environment until the late 1960s. This in itself illustrates the extent of the shift in cultural meaning assigned to objects and spaces and the definition of heritage. The remainder of the paper focuses on contemporary heritage practices, and the role of shifting representations of a residual colonial legacy within the conservation sector.

Research Approach

Discourse, in Foucauldian terms, is the way in which a group with a specific area of knowledge understands and controls the social world which they inhabit. It is based on the group's shared assumptions and meanings, and is embedded in the language they use in both speech and text. The critical discourse approach (CDA) (see Fairclough 1993; van Dijk, 1993; after Foucault) argues that text and talk both reflect and influence structures of dominance and inequality in the wider socio-political context, so the context of language is also analysed, rather than only

focusing on patterns of language use. CDA allows examination of the underlying meaning of language used in both written and spoken forms. On this basis, semi-structured qualitative interviews were chosen to allow in-depth exploration of specific research questions with national conservation policy actors.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews were based around a series of inter-related themes to investigate how elite actors negotiate and operate within a built heritage postcolonial terrain, particularly focusing on the (competing) representations and narratives of the built heritage deployed by policy actors to in the pursuit of particularly interests, to frame action, practice and policy. Key interview themes included:

- What are the heritage prejudices and preferences of the group? Where do their priorities lie? What do they regard as being the purpose/function of heritage?

- What is their 'world view' of heritage, the built environment, conservation, architecture, etc.? What is the self-view of the heritage 'establishment', the way it is constructed, the way it operates, and the policy it makes?

- Are there any areas of conflict within the heritage community or with other groups? How does the heritage establishment regard alternative representations of heritage (e.g. alternative conceptions of heritage and alternative – and potentially competing – heritage priorities)?

- Do any particular representations or associations cause conflict in dealing with heritage?

The interviews also employed the visual sociological technique of photo-elicitation. When used alongside traditional semi-structured interview questions, photo elicitation can more effectively reveal informants' views on the intangible qualities of place (Tweed *et al.*, 2002; Tweed and Sutherland, 2007; Stewart *et al.*, 2004; Van Auken *et al.*, 2010). The photographs also help to break down differences in power, class and knowledge between the interviewer and the informant. Semi-structured interviews were complemented by a series of twenty-two photographs aimed at eliciting information relevant to the broader interview themes. Some verbal prompts were included, but without at first explicitly stating the topic

concerned, so as to provide some structure, but to leave interpretation as open as possible to the informant. Figures 1-4 are examples of the photographs used in interviews, each accompanied by an explanation of what each intends to elicit, and the prompts that were used where necessary.

<Insert figure 1 about here>

Figure 1: 16 Moore Street, Dublin

Aim
Assess attitude to the heritage value and protection of buildings due to 'historical' significance

Prompts
- 16 Moore Street is the building from which the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising surrendered to British forces
- The building is a national monument
- Is the building of value?
- Should it be protected?

<Insert figure 2 about here>

Figure 2: Lifford Old Courthouse

Aim
Assess attitude to the architectural legacy of the former ruling elite in Ireland prior to independence

Prompts
- Old courthouse in Lifford, Co. Donegal
- Refurbished and now used as a café, library and offices

<Insert figure 3 about here>

Figure 3: Buildings in small Irish towns

Aim
Assess attitude to the heritage value and protection of:
- Buildings not of outstanding 'architectural' significance
- General townscape in small towns in Ireland

Prompts
- Are these buildings of value?
- Is the townscape of value?
- Should they be protected?

<Insert figure 4 about here>

Figure 4: Vernacular farm buildings

Aim
Assess attitude to heritage value and protection of vernacular buildings

Prompts
- Building is unprotected and unlikely to be protected
- Are vernacular buildings of value?
- Should they be protected?

Interview informants were chosen from the group of elite actors involved in defining built heritage discourse at a national level. In relation to this kind of group, Gaskell (2000) highlights the importance that interviews are representative of the full range of the expert group. In the context of this research, this means identifying those with either a formal role in the formation of national built heritage policy, or other key actors in the national built heritage sphere in contemporary Ireland. The list assembled therefore includes government departments and bodies; statutory and professional planning, architectural and heritage bodies; and voluntary campaigning organisations. The organisations with which selected individuals are associated, is listed in table 1. Following the identification of national-level organisations, eighteen national level policy actors were interviewed, reflecting the limited size of the elite/expert policy community in a small country (Ireland). Each informant referred to by a codename (e.g. N2) to protect his or her identity.

<Insert table 1 about here>

Residual Colonial Legacies: A Gradual Fade in Antipathy and Relevance

The applicability of the terms 'colonial' and 'postcolonial' to the Irish context is contested in academic discourse (see, for example, Kenny, 2004; Kincaid, 2006). However, postcolonial discourse has shaped, and continues to frame, identity and narratives of the built and wider environment in Ireland (Scott, 2012). Given the established relevance of postcolonial narratives

in framing planning and heritage conflict, exploration of their action in the contemporary conservation and development arena is important. Policy actors were therefore asked for their views on the topic in open-ended terms. Later, photographs included images of buildings that may have had – or still have – a resonance in relation to Ireland governed as part of the United Kingdom or by the elite Irish Ascendancy. Relevant comments that arose at any other point of the interviews were also noted in the coding and analytical process.

Opinion amongst elite policy actors was divided on the extent to which colonial history has a bearing on heritage practice in contemporary Ireland, and even whether it has any relevance whatsoever. Informant responses can be characterised under two broad, but closely inter-related categories: firstly, a view that postcolonial narratives impact today (though informants generally disagreed with the narratives they discussed); and, secondly, the expression by informants of narratives that actively attempt to adopt and include the colonial architectural legacy within the definition of *Irish* national heritage (and in so doing, downplay the relevance of more dissonant narratives). These are discussed in the next four sub-sections.

Dissonant Narratives of Colonialism: The Architecture of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy
Fifteen informants made a range of arguments that legacies of British rule still have a substantive impact in a variety of ways in relation to built heritage. In simplistic terms, informant N7 gets to the core of the traditional difficulty with acceptance of structures associated with colonial rule as the heritage of the people of Ireland, referring to the Hiberno-Norman FitzGerald family:

> *In relation to Carton House – now open to the public as a golf course and luxury hotel – [the Irish property developer] said 'we have it now'. He didn't fully appreciate that the owners of the house were Irish – the FitzGeralds. It's perception.* (N7)

Here, informant N7 chooses and uses a narrative that defines the FitzGeralds as Irish, and thereby also defines the buildings associated with them as the heritage of the Irish nation. The net result is the building of wider public support for their protection. Why should this be? Informant N7 is employed in the public sector, so may arguably have some level of vested interest in framing conservation as neutral and expert-driven, and therefore in avoiding debates around symbolic meaning and identity. However, although this informant regularly deals with built heritage, it is not their primary professional preoccupation, so any personal vested interest in maintaining elite values may not be as deeply-rooted as for many other informants. Further, overall, their discourse more generally tended to include rather than exclude. Although the action of the narrative here may be instinctive, rather than part of a wider, conscious and deliberate strategy, the outcome is the same.

With regard to the above debate, informant N4 (who works in the heritage campaigning sector) contends that the broad argument has shifted, and that the Irish public now have the capacity to appreciate architectural and historical significance in a more objective manner than previous generations. As a heritage campaigner, informant N4 has a vested interest in downplaying the relevance of narratives hostile to architectural heritage. Nevertheless, despite trying to downplay or dismiss the relevance of colonial legacies, informant N4 acknowledges that colonial legacies can still frame public discourse, and gives specific examples – even if they do not agree with the reasons. Lissadell House is a neoclassical estate house in Co. Sligo in the west of Ireland, built in the 1830s for Sir Robert Gore-Booth, a member of the ruling Ascendancy. The house was also made famous as the childhood home of Countess Markievicz, leading revolutionary republican in the early twentieth century (Gore-Booth *et al.,* 2003). Here, *Sinn Fein*, an Irish republican party organised both north and south of the Irish border, took a particular view that informant N4 downplayed:

> *At the time when Lissadell was put on the market, Sinn Fein released a press*
> *release advocating that the government should buy Lissadell. They ticked all the*
> *boxes; they said the right thing, until the very last paragraph, when they said,*

'and the government needs to put in place a policy to acquire all of the estates owned by the Anglo-Irish, as they are the descendants of the colonial elite' and all that… And that was in 2005, 2004. Not so long ago. Very much alive and kicking in that regard. … But for Sinn Fein to recognise the cultural interest of Lissadell. And recognise that that needs to be preserved. But then muddying the waters at the end of their press release [laughs]. (N4)

In contrast, informant N6 argues that policymakers and practitioners must bear people's perceptions in mind, and certainly not dismiss or ignore them:

…but I kind of think that, from the heritage community's point of view, that they need to be careful about how they present things…and you know, without making a value-judgement about it, you know, we are an independent state and that relationship of the big house to the countryside was a difficult relationship. You know, and being able to understand that's quite important. … So let's move on, but I think it is important that the heritage community see that, and understand that you have to be a bit subtle about how the thing is put forward. (N6)

Informant N11 also acknowledges that, though any outright antipathy towards colonial heritage may often now be absent, many Irish people simply feel no connection with, or sense of ownership of, these places – no matter how hard heritage campaigners may try to raise public appreciation, '*it is hard to get the broad mass of Irish people to go and visit these houses*'. There is therefore some acceptance amongst these informants that colonial legacies exist and *can* have an impact, but an inference that the impact should not or need not hinder conservation of these sites. Nevertheless, if heritage, or cultural patrimony, is that which we as a society inherit, and if only a small minority of the Irish people feel a sense that this heritage is theirs, wider questions arise over what heritage is and who it is for. This is not to say that the

architectural legacy of the Ascendancy is not of value, but disengagement from that heritage is not necessarily rooted in supposed 'ignorance'.

Dissonant Narratives of Colonialism: Rurality and the Imposition of Urbanisation

Another five informants discussed how some rural groups, notably the Irish Rural Dwellers Association (IRDA), argue that Ireland as an intrinsically rural society, and that urban development and planning (and, therefore, many types of built heritage) are legacies of colonial rule. Much of Ireland's urban development arose through successive waves of settlement, from Viking, to Anglo-Norman, to the Plantations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when huge numbers of English and Scottish settlers were given lands confiscated from the native population. At the time of the Plantations, smaller towns were often built to serve the estates of wealthy colonial landlords and, both these, and larger towns and cities, were dominated and controlled by British settlers (see Ohlmeyer, 2004). This leads to a rural discourse where the urban is thus associated with the pre-independence ruling elite Ascendancy and the British, and rural society with the Irish. As such, these rural groups question the legitimacy of planning and urban development, and use these narratives to further their own interests (cf. Scott, 2012). Each of these five informants dismissed the validity of this narrative, instead portraying urbanisation and the need for environmental planning as universal – as characteristics of human development and modernity. Of course, the historical fact is that waves of settlers came to Ireland and brought their cultural and social norms with them – the legal system, for one and, as already mentioned, the Irish planning system is substantially based on that of England (see Bannon, 1989). This history has shaped many of Ireland's contemporary cultural and social norms and, in simplistic terms, it is *de facto* a postcolonial legacy. So, these arguments can be made either way, depending on the perspective of the speaker, their values, priorities and vested interests. In the case of these five informants, they are all trained or employed in heritage conservation, so each has a vested interest in dismissing or downplaying arguments antagonistic to architectural or urban heritage:

I think there's a bit of an argument – a rather silly argument – which says, oh, we have British systems of planning and all of this, and I just think that's silly. I don't think it's a colonial system. Like, in most countries of the world, you have to plan – whether you're an ex-colony or not an ex-colony. … It is made, but it is a silly argument. I mean, there is this kind of urban rural divide that sometimes can, you know, some of the associations involved in rural settlement really push that and... I did a debate with one of them at one stage and I said that, look, ok, you're defending rural life, and I said ok, that's fair enough. But where do your kids live? 'The kids live in Dublin'. Your kids go to college in Galway. You know. They go and live in New York – you know. You know. 'What are you on about [smiling]?' So, you know, this notion that we are an ingrained, rural society is a load of codswallop. (N6)

Informant N2 is similarly dismissive of the same representation:

*It's a cheap trick, but I think as time passes, I think it's less of an issue. Nevertheless, I think that the idea that's embedded in the new state, that cities are essentially British constructs – which is bullshit. You know, **cities happen**. The sheer fact that – we pure Irish would never live in those horrible places – that idea is so embedded, and was conveniently used; they were seen as the garrison town, and whatever. That language pervades, and it will probably take a few generations for that to be flushed out.* (N2)

Informant N7, similarly, emphasised distinctions between British and Irish planning and dismissed the postcolonial arguments made by the IRDA as racist, though claims that substantial numbers of people subscribe to this representation, including many local councillors:

This argument is put forward by the Irish Rural Dwellers Association. They argue that the existing system is colonial. However, it's clear that Irish planning is quite different from British planning. Racist. There is lots of popular support amongst councillors for this point of view. (N7)

The language used is so strongly dismissive, it seems that these informants do not simply want to downplay the rural-colonial argument; their own narrative implies that they genuinely regard the opposing view as nonsense. Nevertheless, Irish identity and colonial memory allow the representation of urban development and Irish planning as foreign impositions, brought to Ireland by a community of settlers characterised by their foreign identity, practices, and oppression. This view of planning, which emphasises the relationship between the people and the land, is deeply embedded in Ireland's political and social culture and is also, arguably, *per se*, a legacy of colonialism. For example, it is manifest in *Fianna Fáil's* party constitution, *Corú Agus Rialacha*, which aims 'to maintain as many families as practicable on the land' (*Fianna Fáil*, 2013: 2). It is also manifest in the protection afforded to individual property rights in the *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (Constitution of Ireland) (Government of Ireland, 2012) which, as six informants highlighted, conflicts with the principle of collective 'ownership' of material assets (e.g. buildings, land) that heritage bestows upon society at large. The principle of collective ownership arising from heritage is central to the expert heritage representation and central to conflict between heritage experts and rural groups as discussed here. Given the tendency of these groups to define Ireland's essence as rural, and the blurring between urban and rural (see Campbell, 2003), this specific conflict also has implications for heritage policymaking in Ireland more generally.

Inclusive Postcolonial Narratives? Downplaying the Dissonant Narrative of Colonialism

Fourteen informants actively used narratives to build meanings, specifically to include the built colonial legacy within the definition of Irish heritage. In various ways, these informants simultaneously downplayed the relevance of more dissonant narratives. Of these informants, five argued that the involvement of local Irish craftspeople in the construction of buildings associated with the Ascendancy allows them to be accepted by the nation as Irish heritage today. This narrative aims to bestow collective ownership of these buildings upon the Irish nation through the involvement of 'native' craftspeople who were not part of the ruling elite. Though the broad categories of special interest in Irish legislation seemingly accommodate this under the 'social' category, this tribal sense of ownership is distinct from the expert representation of 'big house' heritage, which arguably prioritises architectural significance above all else. However, these distinct expert and tribal representations co-exist, allowing the object to be embraced by all, facilitating agreement to statutorily protect. This may seem to be a reasonable state of affairs but, given the shifting nature of heritage meaning, it would be a risky strategy to assume that these current expert attempts at meaning-making will continue to neatly dovetail with tribal arguments in changed future circumstances. The tribal argument holds the potential to exclude, devalue or even endanger built heritage perceived to lack 'native' Irish historical involvement, just as the expert discourse may reject non-expert representations of the built environment. The founders of the Irish Georgian Society similarly showed little interest in Victorian or industrial heritage at first, and *An Taisce* likewise initially ignored vernacular buildings (Negussie, 2004). Herein lies potential for conflict in heritage practice.

Related to this, informant N4 quoted, both former *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) Albert Reynolds, and former *Uachtarán na hÉireann* (President) Mary McAleese, as both having made the argument that the Irish 'big house' has come to be regarded as part of Ireland's heritage. In so doing, the dissonance of any colonial legacy is again downplayed. The subjective reality presented, where the Irish nation is portrayed as having collectively woken up to its colonial heritage, of course suits the interests of informant N4, who works in the heritage campaigning sector:

But, in 1996, a conference on the future of the country house in Ireland.
And Albert Reynolds was the keynote speaker, or launched it. And at that
time, he said that. He identified the fact that the big house in Ireland was
very much a part of Ireland's heritage. As Newgrange. As the
archaeological sites around the country. ... I understand that that was the
first time that that had been said publicly by a Taoiseach. Now, another
time that President McAleese...two or three years ago, launched, or
announced the opening of a new archive. ...and she said something rather
interesting then, too. She said that, when she was a child, she was not taught
to love these buildings, but now, times have changed, and perceptions have
changed. (N4)

It is also notable that another former *Taoiseach*, Bertie Ahern, is attributed as having made the same argument in his foreword to the government-sponsored report, *The Historic House Survey* (Dooley, 2003, 2), in which he explicitly emphasised the involvement of Irish builders and craftspeople:

Once considered not to be part of our patrimony, these magnificent 18th and 19th
century houses, built by Irish builders, are now increasingly valued for their
architectural significance and for the wealth of superb interior decoration created
mainly by Irish craftspeople.

Here, the narrative is part of a discursive strategy to create a cultural and historical link between the colonial architectural legacy and the wider population, through emphasising the artistic, the architectural, and a sense of shared 'ownership' arising from these values. This is arguably a pragmatic and deliberate, adopted in order to win support from the wider public for the government's architectural policy – and for the values of the heritage elite. It suits the interests of the former Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to try and win

support for its policies in this way. The two sets of values are clear in the discourse here: the 'big house' is accepted as Irish heritage because of a 'tribal' connection, but it begs the question whether all in the expert group would feel so comfortable in the case of a similar argument being made to protect structures of limited architectural merit and with no elite history, but of social value arising from a role in creating a sense of local identity, for example (see DAHG, 2011, 30). However, the reasons for making the argument are clear: the fact that two *Taoisigh* (Prime Ministers) and a President should be compelled to publicly present this as 'official' national discourse is indicative of the extent to which the Irish public felt – or still feel – alienated from this form of heritage. As mentioned earlier in this paper, informant N11 addresses this directly, and acknowledges that many Irish people feel no sense of ownership of the 'big house'; in other words, it does not figure in their sense of identity. However, perhaps more significant than the shifts in heritage discourse alluded to here by informants and those they quote, is that the *notion* of a collective 'national heritage' is accepted *de facto*, even where the object is contested. Each narrative focuses on a sense of national ownership (and national identity) and does not consider the role that other levels of cultural patrimony and identity (regional, local, individual) might play. This issue is discussed further, below, in relation to non-expert representations of heritage.

Inclusive Postcolonial Narratives? Objective Expert Assessment

Of the fourteen informants who expressed inclusive narratives of national built heritage discussed above, four contended that factors possibly perceived to be negative or dissonant should simply have no bearing whatsoever on whether or not something is regarded as heritage. For example, informant N5 argued that heritage is everything inherited, regardless of how people feel, and baldly stated that: '*Your heritage is your heritage whether you like it or not.'* Informant N5 is employed in the public sector – which is responsible for assessing heritage – and therefore has a vested interest in defending objective expert assessment. Informant N10 (also employed by the state) contends that heritage can be unpleasant and dissonant, and gave

an extreme example, mirroring debates about dissonant heritage arising from the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland (see Crooke, 2010):

And even you – and now I'm not saying we're taking this one – what was that report? What was the report published about two years ago about children being treated terribly by religious orders? Somebody on the radio, some commentator was describing that, 'this is part of our heritage'! So, you know, it needn't always be good, healthy and fluffy, and everybody being happy. (N10)

Informant N18 elaborates on the argument for all-encompassing and objective assessment of heritage, referring specifically to Lifford Old Courthouse (one of the visual prompts used in the interviews; see Figure 2), a building once associated with colonial power, again playing down the relevance of a residual colonial legacy, or other dissonant factors:

I mean it's a fine piece of architecture, it's an expression of good architectural values, and it is an important building to the community. And it is not who built it, or why it was built...

While the general tone of the discourse of informant N18 (employed in the heritage campaigning sector) is inclusive and often critical, the narrative here is exclusive, though probably unintentionally, given the character of their discourse elsewhere in the interview. Informant N18 is arguing for objective assessment, seemingly so that heritage is equitable and inclusive. However, as part of this narrative, they dismiss the building's original use, and its original owner/builder, as potential reasons for its protection. This is arguably evidence of how deeply embedded in the Authorised Heritage Discourse the notion is that heritage should be defined by experts – and according to expert values.

In contrast, eight informants specifically highlighted the tendency for heritage meaning to shift and vary over time. Here, informant N17 uses the example of the GPO (General Post

Office) in Dublin, which has been associated with Ireland's former government within the United Kingdom, but is now primarily a symbol of Irish nationalism resulting from its use by the leaders of the Easter Rising in 1916.

> *I think what's striking about this is that the image of a colonial legacy of these [buildings] has long passed on...If you look at the Obama visit, Obama – and previously Clinton – being televised in front of the Bank of Ireland, the old Parliament House. If you look at the GPO, [it] was [later] associated with the 1916 rising.* (N17)

Informant N17, also involved in the heritage campaigning sector, is using an inclusive heritage narrative in order to win support for protection of the colonial architectural legacy, rather than in seeking to embrace alternative, non-expert values. Nevertheless, in the context of these shifting representations, the point made by informant N5, above, is important; heritage assessment must have a rational basis, based on objective values, and cannot simply rely only how people feel at a particular time. However, this argument should not mean the exclusion of local, non-expert values; heritage importance derived from rational or professional values need not be diminished by inclusion of non-expert values.

The discussion above around the acceptance of elite Anglo-Irish buildings, and objective assessment of heritage, points to the current lack of an adequate framework in legislation and guidance to act as a sound basis for meaningfully including non-expert values in heritage assessment. Though the attempts of national leaders to include once dissonant elite Anglo-Irish heritage, and the striving of professionals for objective assessment are seemingly well intentioned, these trends are in danger of exacerbating the exclusion of alternative representations of heritage. In this context, shifting and competing expert and non-expert representations of the historic built environment continue to hold the potential for disagreement, not least in designation, planning decisions, or the allocation and prioritisation of grant

assistance. Also, it is evident that the potential for conflict lies not only between expert and non-expert groups, but also within the expert group, itself.

There was also explicit prejudice expressed by four informants against consideration of reasons for ascribing heritage protection other than architectural – even where those reasons are already enshrined in legislation. For example, informants were shown a photograph of the house at 16 Moore Street, Dublin – a national monument and protected structure most notably of historical importance (though also of some less well-known architectural interest internally). The historical interest arises from the events of the 1916 Easter Rising, an armed republican insurrection against British rule. During the Rising, the revolutionary leaders were headquartered at the General Post Office (GPO), however this suffered fire damage and the leaders retreated to 16 Moore Street, from where they surrendered to British forces (Townshend, 2006). Informants were shown a photo of this building to explore their views on protection of buildings due to historical significance, specifically, distinct from architectural reasons for protection. Informant N16 was particularly outspoken about the notion of protecting the building:

> *N16: Yeah, well, that's always been a funny one, in my view.*
>
> *INT: Should the building be protected?*
>
> *N16: From what, like? … There's nothing else to be done with it, other than just leave it there. So it's a waste of resources. … I'm not somebody who necessarily believes that everything that has had a significant past has to be retained. And, eh, so, if somebody says, 'oh! It was a place where the 1916 people were hanging out, or did this, and that, and the other.' I say well, right, ok. Now, what does that mean in terms of this floor and this wall [said in tongue in cheek manner]? You know? I'm not so sure. I'd like to hear that argument made.*

The discourse here is strongly focused on architectural matters and the dismissive tone shows contempt for the opposing view, which sees the building as being of value due to the significant

historical events that took place there. Informant N16 is a heritage expert working in the public sector, and therefore may have a vested interest in maintaining an 'official' Authorised Heritage Discourse. However, they go further than this because historical and social value are, in fact, already represented in legislation and guidance. Why should informant N16 take this view? It is perhaps because, if other values are given equivalence to architectural values in legislation, they are potentially placed in competition with each other for receiving scarce heritage funding, and the attention of local authorities, for example. This is indicative of views held by ten (a narrow majority) of the group. Though there is variation in opinion and approach amongst the entire group, the dominant influence of a relatively narrow set of professional values is therefore evident in the way language is used to dismiss opposing views and values in heritage practice. In some cases, this may result in a lower likelihood that competing, non-expert priorities will be taken into account in heritage decision-making.

Conclusion

The Irish case demonstrates that built heritage values are far from static, with representations of the built environment, and in particular buildings associated with past colonial domination, subject to ongoing revalorisation over time, reflective of wider political contexts. This can be seen in a continuous shift in notions of heritage, ranging from 'ownership' of buildings symbolic of British power, such as Dublin Castle, to the dissipation of collective memories of colonialism from mainstream political discourse, towards an evolving relationship with the UK in the context of a more outward-looking, confident and Europeanised Irish state. While representations of the residual colonial built environment have shifted, it is clearly noticeable that these meanings are open to manipulation or mobilisation, from seeking to justify demolition of Georgian streetscapes in the 1960s on the basis of forging a new, Irish built environment identity, to a more recent embracing of an inclusive narrative of Irish heritage to foster wider 'ownership' of the historic built environment.

Within this shifting political and societal context, heritage policy elites have constructed their own narratives, framing policy and development outcomes. From our

analysis, heritage policy elites have tended to focus on framing conservation debates within a technical rationality, which has two primary impacts. Firstly, by emphasising technical aspects of conservation practice, heritage policy actors prioritise expert knowledge, language and vocabulary in defining heritage discourses. This approach focuses on intrinsic building qualities, but pays limited attention to social, economic and historical contexts and the symbolic meaning of built heritage. Secondly, a technical rationality has been deployed to depoliticise contentious aspects of built heritage, particularly in relation to built environments that reflect British colonialism. The legitimacy of a representation of the postcolonial built environment, constructed by the expert elite through deliberate discursive action to win support for elite values and preferences, should be questioned. Conservation and heritage practices are framed as neutral and expert-driven, enabling policy actors to negotiate colonial legacies from a narrowly defined 'technical' perspective. In this context, conservation decision-making has been based on and biased towards architectural substance – the aspects you can observe, measure, classify – downplaying wider debates surrounding symbolic meanings of built heritage. While heritage experts stress a need for objectivity in heritage assessment, neither the instinctive downplaying of symbolic meaning, nor deliberate discursive action to win support for expert values, suggest that policy actors have fully embraced a wider responsibility to stimulate heritage imaginations beyond a narrow elite group. Moreover, this perspective also raises questions over the role of local identity in place-making processes in contested contexts. How does local identity figure in heritage and place-making processes where expert actors use their power/knowledge to appropriate and accentuate a specific heritage discourse?

While the wider planning system and legislation in Ireland now recognise that architectural heritage can be defined in broad terms, comprising structures of 'special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest' (Government of Ireland, 2000, section 10(2)(f)), our interviews suggest that heritage policy actors have maintained a position prioritising heritage based on architectural and artistic values. Buildings associated with historical events (such as the republican Easter Rising), and of limited architectural merit, have often been dismissed. This position has perhaps been

understandable in the context of an unfolding relationship with the UK, with the Northern Ireland conflict from the late 1960s to mid-1990s providing a modern political context that has perhaps discouraged an inclusive debate concerning wider heritage meanings embedded in the built environment. However, the Northern Ireland peace process and continued Irish-UK relationship building (for example, 2011 witnessed the first official visit to Ireland by a British monarch since independence), has facilitated a wider political willingness to debate notions of heritage and identity. Within this context, heritage policy actors have a responsibility to move beyond a longstanding retreat into technical rationality to reimagine heritage narratives that embrace place identity, memory and symbolic meaning.

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Figures

Figure 1: 16 Moore Street, Dublin

Figure 2: Lifford Old Courthouse

Figure 3: Buildings in small Irish towns

Figure 4: Vernacular farm buildings