Materiality and Mutable Landscapes: Rethinking Seasonality and Marginality in Rural Ireland

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Abstract Drawing on examples from Achill Island, County Mayo and from the north Antrim uplands, notions of marginality, isolation, and cultural stagnation associated with upland landscapes are explored in light of contradictory material and documentary data, raising questions about the materiality of marginality and challenging static, nationalist presentations of rural Irish life in the post-medieval period. Discussion of the Irish evidence is contextualized with reference to the twentieth-century construction of marginality in southern Appalachia.

Keywords Marginality · Landscape · Ireland · Appalachia

Introduction: Whither Marginality?

Archaeological efforts to quantify "marginal" landscapes have long relied upon an uncritical imbrication of environmental, economic, and social factors. As noted by Coles and Mills (1998, p. vii), "the concept that certain environments are inherently marginal is one that has had an inordinate, almost subliminal, influence on British archaeology since the nineteenth century," reflecting the continued influence of the colonizing "gaze" (Bender 2006; Pratt 1992). The situation is little different in Irish archaeology. Long investment in the development and application of scientific analysis of environmental data continues to steer Irish archaeology towards interpretations dependent upon materialist paradigms. Colonial texts, from Elizabethan condemnations of the wild Irish and their inhospitable boglands, to the appalled reports of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travelers confronted by rural poverty,

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still color our understanding of rural subsistence strategies. Archaeological data from upland landscapes (Fig. 1) on Achill Island, County Mayo and north County Antrim, however, contradict essentialist notions of marginality, isolation, and cultural stagnation; challenge static, nationalist presentations of rural Irish life; and echo Barbara Bender's recent observation that "the land itself, because of its materiality, 'talks back'" (Bender 2006).

A Cautionary Tale from Appalachia

Before directly addressing marginality in post-medieval Ireland, it is instructive to take a quick trip to the *other* side of the Atlantic by way of a cautionary tale about the construction of marginality and the materiality of landscape. The setting for this tale is the Virginia Blue Ridge, the place is southern Appalachia—that quintessential heartland of isolation-bred American backwoods culture. The establishment of Shenandoah National Park in 1936 necessitated the contentious eviction of more than 500 families from a 36,422 ha (90,000 ac) swathe of fields, forests, villages, mines, and meadows. Bolstering this monumental process was the publicity
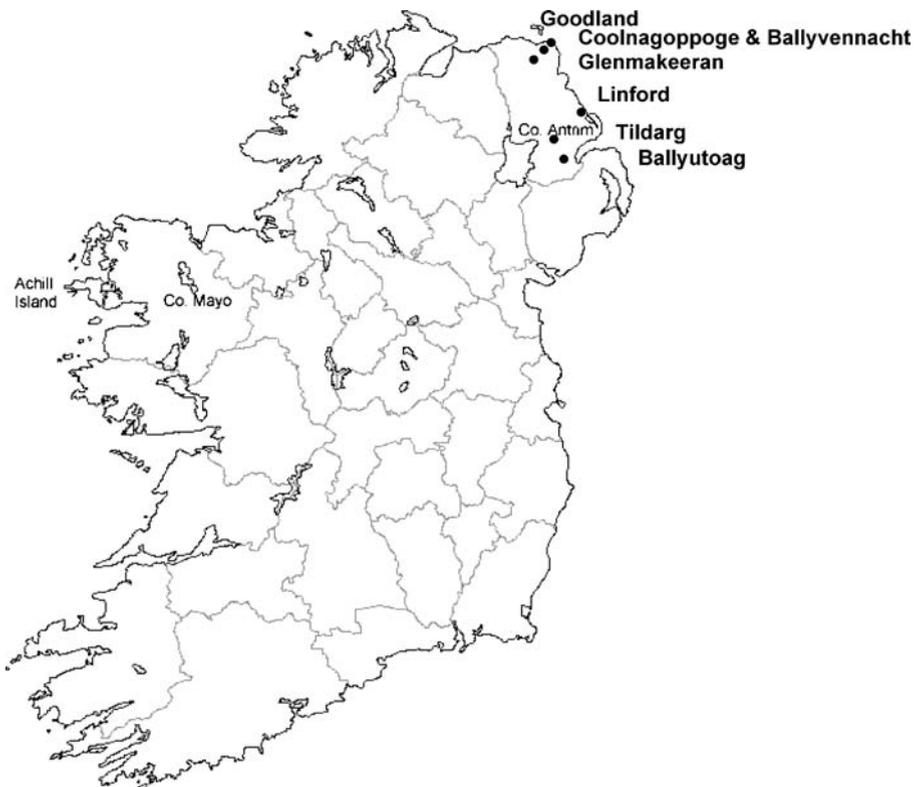

Fig. 1 Map of Ireland showing location of sites

generated by *Hollow Folk*, a University of Chicago sociological study examining five mountain communities in the proposed park:

> Here, hidden in deep mountain pockets, dwell families of unlettered folk, of almost pure Anglo-Saxon stock, sheltered in tiny, mud-plastered log cabins and supported by a primitive agriculture. One of these settlements...has no community government, no organized religion, little social organization wider than that of the family and clan, and only traces of organized industry...the community is almost completely cut off from the current of American life. It is not of the twentieth century" (Sherman and Henry 1933, p. 1).

This characterization, with subsequent studies expounding upon the "marginal" existence of Blue Ridge inhabitants (e.g., Jolley 1969), echo a long tradition of literature on the "otherness" of the Appalachian South, including classic gems such as Will Wallace Harney's 'A Strange Land and Peculiar People' (Harney 1873).

Archaeological examination of three of the five hollows from *Hollow Folk* contradicted accepted understandings of Blue Ridge isolation, and provides an instructive caution about the fallacious linkage between presumed environmental marginality and social stagnation (Horning 1999, 2001a, 2002, 2004a). In addition to a twenty-fifth century toy ray gun, a vast array of consumer goods, automobile parts, and 78 RPM bakelite records litter the mountain home sites. The archaeological project also revealed distinct community and household identities within the study area, and highlighted a considerable degree of conscious subversion on the part of the hollow folk. Residents were not blind to the widespread interest in their "marginal" existence, and rapidly learned to capitalize upon their outward appearance as "different." For example, former Nicholson Hollow resident George Corbin used to haul his widely-celebrated (if illicit) corn whiskey and peach brandy 144.8 km (90 mi) to Washington, D.C., in the trunk of his Model T Ford. Yet when he sold it to the local resort, Skyland, he carted it on his own back—presenting himself as the very epitome of a mountaineer (Corbin 1966, 1969, 1977). Similarly, neighboring children routinely donned their oldest clothes and headed off to Skyland and the newly built Skyline Drive to sell wildflowers and berries to gullible tourists, much to the annoyance of newly appointed park rangers (Lambert 1972, pp. 87, 95; Lassiter 1936).

The very establishment of the park imposed the boundaries and the physical isolation that did not exist when hollow residents went about their daily (pre-park movement) lives: laboring in the fields, in the mills, the mines, and the local general stores, and journeying to nearby towns and to cities as far away as Washington, D.C. for jobs, for family visits, and for medical treatments. The act of bounding the landscape and branding disparate groups of people "hollow folk" precipitated a new unified identity, which has now become valid in local memory and outside perception (Horning 1999, 2000). The now-codified notion of Blue Ridge marginality (and concomitant folk "authenticity") is reinforced through the materiality of today's "natural" park (Fig. 2). In the 1930s, the majority of homes and farm buildings were dismantled or burned to in an effort to recreate "nature," although a selection of the most "authentic" homes were retained. Authenticity was determined through adherence to outside understandings of folk housing. Thus, Haywood Nicholson's ten-room, three-storey stone and frame house was burned down, while George Corbin's three-room log cabin—the smallest dwelling in Nicholson Hollow—was preserved.

Fig. 2 Constructed marginality: the restored Corbin Cabin, Shenandoah National Park, Virginia

As the scant remains of other log houses were allowed to burn in a forest fire in 2000, Corbin Cabin was protected because it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a "typical" example of Blue Ridge vernacular architecture. Preserved within what now appears a forested, inaccessible, and at times inhospitable wild place, Corbin Cabin (as it is now called) presents a stark portrait of marginality that denies its former context as 1 of 37 farms capitalizing on the fertile Hughes River bottomland within the linear Nicholson Hollow (Horning 2004a). The abandonment of roads, the growth of forests, the subverted materiality of the architectural remains, a fulsome body of park literature and a constructed folk memory bolster this perception—yet it is wholly a creation of the twentieth century. Hence the caution within this tale—it is imperative that we guard against imposing marginality on past peoples by virtue of finally looking at sites that are situated within *today's* "marginal" landscapes—landscapes that through their perceived and even intentionally constructed "marginality," serve particular cultural needs.

Marginality and Irish History

In considering the experiences and distinct identities of people in what today look like marginal rural areas in Ireland, we need to consider the influence of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romanticism in much the same way that we must account for the influence of local color writings about the Appalachian South in examining Blue Ridge identity. Over the last decade, a host of scholars have endeavored to dismantle the nineteenth-century construction of "Celtic fringe" identities, focusing particularly upon evidence from the Iron Age (e.g., James 1999; Ó Donnabhaín

2000) as well as addressing the influence of nationalism and capitalism upon the construction of Highland identity (e.g., Chapman 1978; Sims-Williams 1998; Symonds 1999; Webster 1999). The conscious creation and use of a unifying Celtic identity, articulated through literature, by nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalists (e.g., O'Grady 1878, discussed by Lanters 2003) has also been thoroughly examined. While the role of nationalism and romanticism in the creation of Celtic identities is undeniable, understanding of "Irishness" is further complicated by the lingering and often insidious influences of colonial and postcolonial text and rhetoric in the Republic and sectarian narratives in the north. The roots of the contemporary conflict which feed such texts lie in the expansion of English, and subsequently British, control over Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

While England maintained a degree of political and economic control over Ireland from the Anglo-Norman invasions of the twelfth century, it was the Reformation, fears of Spain, and the increasing commodification of nature inherent in the genesis of Wallerstein's capitalist world system, that conspired to strengthen England's grip on the island (Mrozowski 1999; Wallerstein 1974). Under Queen Elizabeth, a policy of planting English settlers on forfeited land, "plantation," was initiated. Following the defeat of Irish forces led by Hugh O'Neill in 1601, his submission in 1603, and the subsequent 'flight of the earls' of Tyrone (Hugh O'Neill) Tyrconnell (Rory O'Donnell), and Fermanagh (Cúchonnacht Maguire) in 1607, the six Ulster counties of Armagh, Cavan, Coleraine, Donegal, Fermanagh, and Tyrone came under Crown control, alongside counties Antrim and Down, which had already experienced limited plantation (Canny 2001). Plans for an Ulster Plantation were put into action under James I (James VI of Scotland). Grants were made to individual "under-takers," often loyal former soldiers, while lands in the newly created County Londonderry were allocated to the Livery Companies of London as reward for their financial support (Bardon 1992; Canny 2001; Moody 1939; Robinson 1984).

Political uncertainty and involvement in the War of the Three Kingdoms in the mid-seventeenth century ensured that the ambitious goals of the plantation scheme were never achieved. Protestant control over the affairs of Ireland was not assured until after the Williamite Wars of 1688–1690, when (the Catholic) James II lost his challenge to the royal claim of (the Protestant) William of Orange (Canny 2001; Kennedy 1996; Ohlmeyer 1993). The eighteenth century witnessed increasing Anglican control, precipitating the emigration of thousands of non-conformist Protestants from the north of Ireland, descendants of Scots planters, many of whom eventually made their homes in the Virginia Blue Ridge and the Shenandoah Valley (Horning 2002).

Interpretations of native Irish life from the plantation period to the 1916 Rising invariably focus upon oppression and marginality. Separating analysis of historic experience from the politics of twentieth-century nationalism remains an uphill battle, most notably illustrated by the querulous nature of scholarship focusing upon the Famine (see, for example, discussions in Foster 2002; Kennedy 1996; Kinealy 2005). Whatever the political spin employed in historical interpretation, however, it is clear that as Ireland's population swelled, previously uncultivated mountain and bog lands were targeted for "improvement." As noted by agricultural historian Jonathan Bell (1998, p. 39), "during the second half of the eighteenth century cultivation increasingly encroached on these waste areas." Thinking about such

"waste" areas takes us back to consideration of marginality. "Reclamation" of these lands in the nineteenth century was consciously viewed as a solution to rural poverty (and potential social unrest), and supported by a variety of government and landlord sponsored initiatives. Yet such lands are only "waste" when viewed from the perspective of intensive farming. Bog lands still provide fuel in the form of peat, and in the contemporary Irish economy, bolster tourism through their natural qualities and historical associations. How were these lands viewed before Ireland's population nearly trebled (Cullen 1972)? To what use, if any, were these "marginal" places put on the eve of the violence and displacement wrought by warfare and plantation at the close of the medieval period?

Seasonal Transhumance and Sectarian Narratives

In addressing marginality in the late medieval landscape of Ireland, it is instructive to consider seasonal transhumance, or booleying, and what sites associated with the practice do or do not tell us about rural life in the late medieval and post-medieval periods. The word "booley" derives from an Irish word defined as "an enclosure, field or building where cattle are kept for milking," and can be tentatively traced throughout Ireland using place name information (Graham 1954). Much of our understanding (or misunderstanding) of the practice is based upon English descriptions. In 1608, as King James I prepared to repopulate the north of Ireland with loyal British settlers, Lord Deputy Arthur Chichester insisted that the Ulster Irish be "drawn from their course of running up and down the country with their cattle...and are to settle themselves" (Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1608–1610; Russell and Prendergast 1872). Despite Chichester's criticism, seasonal transhumance was not nomadism. Cattle were only moved twice a year, with summer pasturage often being in upland zones, where small shelters were constructed for the benefit of those tending the herds. This practice also occurred in the Virginia Blue Ridge in the nineteenth century. German-American farmers in the Shenandoah Valley moved their cattle up to the grassy meadows in the Blue Ridge each summer, where they were tended by local mountain residents (Lambert 1972; Horning 2004a). Considering that seasonal transhumance was also practiced throughout the British isles in the late medieval period (Bil 1990; Ramm et al. 1970), English commentators must have misrepresented the practice to bolster their own claims to this "wild," land, uncultivated by its 'nomadic' inhabitants. What better advertisement for prospective settlers?

English accounts invariably associate Irish building types with booleying, and our understanding of late medieval housing and rural life in Ireland remains principally based upon these descriptions, both textual and pictorial (Gailey 1984; Horning 2001b; O'Conor 1998, 2002). Archaeologists and geographers routinely associate a particular type of architecture with the practice of booleying—single-room structures, built with stone or sod, possessing no chimneys or windows, situated in clusters on high ground near water (Graham 1954; Hannan and Bell 2000). The best known examples are the sub-rectangular stone-walled huts found on Achill Island, County Mayo (Fig. 3). The Ordnance Survey Memoirs for Achill note that "It is a great habit among the people of the island to have two townlands and houses built on each where they remove occasionally with their cattle" (O'Donovan and O'Conor

Fig. 3 Bunowna booley village, Achill Island, Co. Mayo

1867). Both rectangular and oval examples survive, with an oral tradition tracing their use with seasonal pasturage well into the twentieth century but providing little illumination regarding their antiquity (Evans 1957; Graham 1954; McDonald 1997; McNally 1973).

Sites associated with transhumance are also recorded in the north of Ireland. Of the 46 "booley" sites currently listed on the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record, 38 are located in County Antrim, six in County Down, two in County Londonderry, and none for Counties Fermanagh or Tyrone. The landscapes of these latter counties are hardly celebrated for their flatness—rather the disparity relates entirely to a non-systematic survey strategy in the 1980s, when County Antrim was selected for intensive scrutiny. The available evidence from County Antrim further obscures the presumed correlation between transhumance, booley huts, and marginality.

The north County Antrim landscape is characterized by the basalt of the Antrim plateau rising to a height of over 360 m, and the deep cuts of the nine glens of Antrim as they descend to the sea (Aalen et al. 1997, p. 15). The recorded booley sites are found at higher elevations, many predictably in association with freshwater streams or rivers. Seasonal use of these sites, if indeed that was their original function, had ceased by the time of the Ordnance Survey in the 1830s. As recorded in the Ordnance Survey memoirs, local understandings of these sites, as least as reported by the surveyors, was "quite opposite and unsettled":

> Many call them Bolia houses, as being erected for summer dwellings by the local
> inhabitants, who, in the latter seasons of the year, repaired with their cattle to
> mountain grazing and there remained themselves in care of them during the season
> and sheltered themselves and produce of their cattle in the above temporary

habitations....Others ascribe their erection and occupation to the Danes and other strangers who in ancient times so frequently infested different parts of the kingdom. Others ascribe their foundation and original occupation to the ancient Irish at periods when the lowlands were in general under woods and likewise the seats of wolves and other ferocious animals" (Day et al. 1994, pp. 78–79).

Case Studies: Seasonal Landscapes of County Antrim

A number of recorded booley sites in north County Antrim have undergone archaeological investigation. In Tildarg townland, on the lower slopes of Big Colin Mountain, Nick Brannon excavated a sub-rectangular hut with low sod and clay walls surviving as a raised platform earthen and stone hut, situated within an 82× 53 m earthen enclosure consisting of a bank and external ditch (Brannon 1984). Its upland location [just under 274 m (900 ft) above sea level], association with an enclosure presumably for the protection of livestock, and its architectural form support interpretation as a seasonal habitation in a marginal zone. However, a 1265 radiocarbon date "roughly coincides with the (British) thirteenth-century temperature peak, when the exploitation of sub-marginal land, such as this site now occupies, was more practicable than in the following centuries" (Brannon 1984, p. 170). The local environment, then, could have easily supported a year-round occupation. On the north side of Big Colin, in the same townland, two more sites are identified as booleying sites. Are these sites associated with the medieval usage of the land? Or are they later in date? Could they too be sedentary rather than transhumant?

Even earlier dates of occupation were acquired for a complex of 23 houses in Ballyutoag townland, situated in a cluster some 274 m (900 ft) above sea level. Recovered samples yielded dates in the seventh and eighth centuries, at a time when the principal settlement pattern relied upon dispersed raths, or defended farmsteads. As discussed by Brian Williams (1984, p. 47), "if all 23 houses were occupied simultaneously, the site would have had potential accommodation for at least 100 people, and on this basis it is reasonable to suggest that it was an upland village," most likely used seasonally. However, Williams (1984, p. 47) also notes that the "presence of cultivation ridges which indicate that crops were being grown at the site, strongly suggest that there may indeed have been a milder climate." Like Tildarg, then, assumptions of environmental marginality based upon present day perceptions and climactic conditions cannot be imposed upon the past.

In late 1982, Brian Williams conducted a rescue excavation near a quarry site in Glenmakeeran townland (Williams and Robinson 1983). In addition to a Bronze Age cist burial, the remains of three sub-rectangular, sod-built house were encountered, and one excavated. The only datable artifacts recovered were six sherds of everted rimware—placing occupation anywhere between the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries. A seventeenth- or eighteenth-century date for the site is suggested by sixteenth-century map data indicating that the area was heavily forested. The lack of associated cultivation ridges suggests that the building was only seasonally occupied, supported by references in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs indicating that land in Glenmakeeran Townland still served as mountain grazing (Day et al. 1994).

More recently, two post-medieval upland structures, one stone built and the other sod-walled, were excavated in Linford townland by Brian Williams and Dermot Moore, in the course of examining a prehistoric site (Williams and Moore 2002). Their interpretation was that the stone house represented a Plantation farmhouse of the early-to-mid seventeenth century, while the sod house was a booley. Both structures were associated with cultivation ridges. Artifacts (Fig. 4) recovered from the sod house include local lead-glazed coarse earthenwares, clay tobacco pipe stems with bore diameters indicating an early to mid-seventeenth-century date, and fragments of a Rhenish stoneware jug in association with sherds of Irish everted rimware. Objects excavated from the stone house and an associated pit include a 1691 William and Mary coin, post-1650 wine bottle glass dated after 1650, and imported Staffordshire slipware of very late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century date. The slipware sherds appear to be from a chamberpot, contradicting images of rural peasants forever perpetuating medieval mores.

The data from Linford strongly suggest that the sod and stone structures are nearly contemporary, possibly reflecting a transition from Gaelic to English style housing; but more likely underscoring the range of housing choices available to individuals within a particular socio-economic strata, irrespective of cultural affinity or local identity. The evidence suggests a year-round occupation, with subsistence based upon agriculture and cattle or sheep raising, while the mix of native and imported ceramics and architectural styles reflects a pattern of material blending that speaks to significant discourse between natives and newcomers. All the evidence calls into question assumptions about upland zones as marginal landscapes.

Fig. 4 Artifacts from Linford excavations (*clockwise from top left*: William and Mary coin, Staffordshire slipware, kaolin tobacco pipe fragments, Rhenish stoneware)

Because of their architectural form, upland dwellings such as those at Linford are readily assumed to be booley houses, associated with marginality and a degree of insulation from the broader forces of economic and political uncertainties in early modern Ireland. Such assumptions reveal more about modern attitudes towards upland environments than they inform about the experiences of people in the past, people who were marginalized in colonial writings, and people who are at risk of being further marginalized in archaeological writings.

By way of an analogous example about how little we understand upland archaeology, recent research carried out by Frank Coyne on Mount Brandon, County Kerry, located a series of unusual huts at high altitudes which may be pilgrimage shelters (Coyne 2005). Similarly, a series of structures have recently been surveyed on the upper reaches of Slievemore Mountain on Achill Island by Erick Laurila and John Bennett (Laurila and Bennett 2005). Exactly what these sites are—their chronology, their function, and until quite recently, their very existence—is completely unknown. Even Achill's most well-known booley villages, associated with documentary and ethnographic data supporting their seasonal use, present a range of variations which may indicate chronological and functional differentiation, or just as likely reflect different local building traditions and representational intentions. It will only be through excavation that a more nuanced understanding of these sites may be attained. These sites may hint at a continuity of early medieval settlement, and thus rural Gaelic society, into the post-medieval period. But on the other hand, there is as yet no physical evidence to indisputably indicate an age of greater than 200 years for Achill's booley houses. Similarly, place name data linking Achill Island's "permanent" villages with "booley" villages cannot be pushed back in time much earlier than the eighteenth century (McDonald 1997).

The relative richness of the Linford assemblage also contrasts with accepted understandings of upland sites as the seasonal abodes of the rural poor, serving as a reminder of the variation in material comfort in post-medieval rural households. Similarly, excavations of nineteenth-century dwellings in the Deserted Village on Slievemore Mountain, Achill Island, continue to unearth thousands of sherds of industrial ceramics, commercial food containers, and a range of other commercial goods belying the comments of nineteenth-century chroniclers, as discussed in greater depth below.

Returning to the County Antrim study area, one dozen huts dotting the banks of Tullybrennan Burn, Coolnagoppoge townland, are recorded as booleys. Here, a single rutted track runs through the bog, marred by rubbish and punctuated by the skeleton of a burned-out automobile. Looking beyond the desolate materiality of the present, it is possible to discern the foundation traces of a substantial rectangular masonry dwelling incorporating a chimney—far larger and more elaborate than a single-celled booley hut. Walking along the side of the burn to examine the smaller, chimney-less hut platforms brings one to another unexpected structure: a flax-retting dam. In use in the early twentieth century (Williams and Robinson 1983), this industrial feature reminds us of the widespread influence of the Ulster linen industry, which provided additional income for the families resident in the clachan which still stands less than a mile away. Marginality in Coolnagoppoge is clearly a mutable construct.

In the adjoining townland of Ballyvennacht lies another cluster of hut remains. Situated in a small valley sheltered by hills on three sides, this is clearly an ideal

locale for seasonal pasturage, as the valley provided protection and shelter for cattle. Finds of bog butter reported in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs (Day et al. 1994) support use of the site for summer booleying. Again, like Coolnagoppoge, the traces of sub-rectangular sod and stone built houses are accompanied by at least one which incorporates a stone-built chimney; indicating a post-medieval date and possibly suggestive of year-round occupation. Reference to Henry Butler's "mountain farm" rather than "mountain grazing" in Ballyvennacht townland in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs (Day et al. 1994) is similarly suggestive of permanent occupation, while the slopes above this cluster of houses are currently used as pasturage associated with a twentieth-century farm.

The most well-known County Antrim site interpreted as a center for booleying activity lies to the north of Coolnagoppoge, and incorporates at least 129 huts in Goodland, Torglas, Knockbrack, and Bighouse townlands on the cliffs above Murlough Bay (Evans 1945; Graham 1954; Horning 2004b; O'Keeffe 2000; Williams and Robinson 1983). Excavations by Jean Graham in 1949 and 1950 and by Humphrey Case in 1952 and 1953 unearthed evidence for Neolithic use of the chalk land, but demonstrated that the huts were of post-medieval date (Case 1969, 1973; Case et al. 1969; Graham 1954; Proudfoot 1958; Sidebotham 1950). Extensive surveying was carried out in 2003, identifying three settlement clusters (Horning and Brannon 2004; Horning 2004b). The houses exhibit a similar degree of deterioration, several are associated with cultivation ridges, and one of the clusters includes compound huts wholly unlike the prototypical single-unit booley houses discussed by geographers (e.g., Evans 1945; Graham 1954; Hannan and Bell 2000).

Evidence suggests that rather than a booleying site, Goodland is an early seventeenth-century Highland Scottish plantation village. In 1620, leases for Goodland were granted to Islay brothers Alexander and Donal Magee by the Scottish Earl of Antrim, Randall McDonnell. Material connections between Islay and Goodland are evident in the landscape survey from the Finlaggan Project, carried out by the National Museum of Scotland (Caldwell et al. 2000), while sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps note the use of the cliff top for Scottish beacons or warning fires (Hamilton 1822; Horning 2004b). Although the significant prehistoric to medieval linkages between the north of Ireland and the Scottish Isles have long been acknowledged, less attention has been paid to incorporating the Highland (Roman Catholic) Scots in twentieth-century narratives about the Ulster Plantation, reflecting the pervasiveness of sectarian memories (Horning 2004b; 2006).

From this re-analysis of booleying sites in north Antrim, we now have a situation where the Tildarg and Ballutoag sites may represent year-round occupation, albeit medieval and early medieval, respectively; while the Glenmakeeran site seems to indicate seasonal occupation sometime between the thirteenth and eighteenth century; the Linford site is permanent and associated with an agricultural as well as a pastoral regime; while Coolnagoppoge and Ballyvennacht appear to have been used both seasonally and on a more permanent basis. The houses in Goodland and adjacent townlands almost certainly are not associated with booleying, and may be part of a long-forgotten, seventeenth-century village peopled by Scots from the Isles. Few of these sites exhibit any clear chronology, or any obvious association with seasonality and marginality if defined solely by environmental factors and

geographical location. Given the dearth of archaeological information on these evidently complex and variable sites, a real danger lies in complacency—we overlook the potential complexity of rural sites because we think we already know all there is to know.

Mutable Landscapes in the West of Ireland

Moving from the complexities of historical understandings of landscapes of transhumance in Northern Ireland, understandings of so-called marginal landscapes in the Republic of Ireland are colored by nationalist postcolonial rhetoric and compounded by Celtic Tiger-fuelled uncertainties and anxieties (Horning 2006). The abandoned cottages which dot the landscape, particularly in the west of Ireland, are an ever present reminder of poverty, discord, and to some, cultural oppression. Even emotive survivals such as the Deserted Village of Slievemore (Fig. 5), on Achill Island, County Mayo, inspire discomfort, conjuring received memories of a shameful past. Described by the German writer Heinrich Böll (1957) as "a body without hair, without eyes, without flesh and blood—the skeleton of a village, cruelly distinct in its structure," the evocative remains of the houses draw the eye from afar. Yet little is apparently known or remembered about their history, rendering archaeological investigation coupled with documentary research the chief means of disentangling the various strands of romance, whimsy, and disinterest that separate the tangible presence of the dwellings, associated roadways and field systems from the lived experiences of those families who once placed flesh on the bones of the houses and breathed life into their seemingly stark frames.

Fig. 5 Deserted village of Slievemore

Architectural and artifactual data associated with the dwellings and field systems suggest a date no early than the late eighteenth century. However, the landscape itself represents a palimpsest of human activity from the Neolithic period through the twentieth century (McDonald 1998). Therefore, the nineteenth-century cultivation and habitation of Slievemore mountain cannot be easily dismissed as the inevitable consequence of the movement of the potato-fuelled island population onto inhospitable, marginal land. Probably the most intriguing aspect of the village is the disjuncture between presumptive memory and archaeological reality. Looking at the village, it appears to be a stark reminder of the impact of the Famine on an already marginalized community in the west of Ireland. Stories abound on Achill about the underhanded dealings of the Protestant Mission at Dugort, whose founder Rev. Nangle lured desperate converts with promises of maize and manual labor (Comerford 1998, 1999; Kingston 1990; McNally 1973; McDonald 1997; Whelan 1987). Cholera, starvation, and emigration undoubtedly claimed a percentage of the Achill population, but according to archaeological data, did not result in the abandonment of the village on the slopes of Slievemore Mountain. In fact, the artifacts suggest a continuity of use into the early twentieth century—into the period of living memory—a memory which appears silenced by a contradictory postcolonial imperative to simultaneously commemorate and obliterate.

Beginning in 1991, the Achill Archaeological Field School, under the direction of Theresa McDonald, took as its mission the recording of this multi-period cultural landscape of which the post-medieval village represents only the most visible element (McDonald 1998). From 1991 to 2003, archaeological work at Slievemore concentrated upon defining the full chronology of human activity on the mountain. More recently, the research design focused specifically upon the potential of the material culture associated with the nineteenth-century village to inform our understandings of daily life in rural Ireland during this period of political, economic, and social turmoil (McDonald and Horning 2004; Horning and Brannon 2005). Excavations (Fig. 6) concentrated on a single structure, House 23, in an effort to gain an emic perspective upon the experiences of those individuals who spent a significant portion of their lives living in and working around this particular dwelling and its associated garden.

As recently noted by Mary Beaudry (2004, p. 254), "the household is a critical social unit and vital medium for understanding innumerable aspects of social life. Indeed, it is within the context of the household, whatever form it may take, that cultural consciousness and notions of personhood are initially forged." Household approaches address how daily activities shape and are shaped by the home itself and the immediate outside environment (however marginal it may be judged by outsiders.) The guiding principle is the recognition that an individual's daily experiences and interactions serve to define concepts of self and other, as much if not more so than the individual's participation (knowingly and unknowingly) within a broader social, political, and economic system.

For Slievemore, individual households were not separate, discrete entities, given the extent of family ties throughout the village and the practice of periodically redistributing land. Although the former occupants of the dwelling have not as yet been identified, it is more than likely that a number of different families occupied the house throughout the nineteenth century. Thus our definition of a household must be

Fig. 6 Excavations at house 23

stretched to recognize the fluidity of land use, while at the same time acknowledging community ties. The actions of individual families are writ into the fabric of House 23, as are the traces of daily work inscribed in the agricultural soils adjacent to the dwelling. Each of these individuals were members of an extended family, which itself was part of a community collective. Documentary sources reveal the names of some of these families: Lavelle, O'Malley, Kilbane, and O'Mulloy (McDonald 1997). Read critically, archaeological evidence associated with House 23 and its environs can inform us about each group and identity, and allow us to address issues of marginality and materiality.

House 23 appears to have been occupied from the early nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. Evidence for daily practice is plentiful. In the garden, trenches were dug and the soil piled up on the adjacent surfaces to create raised beds, or "lazy beds." These beds appear to have been continually turned, also fertilized and replenished with household waste—evidenced by the presence of discarded and broken glass and ceramics as well as fragments of partially-burned turf (peat), and also by the presence of sandy patches which most likely indicate the enrichment of the soil through the use of seaweed as fertilizer. The gathering of seaweed has been described as "a customary social event rather than a casual activity in nineteenth-century Achill" (McNally 1973, p. 73). Traces of this 'social event', and the pragmatic reasoning behind the activity, survive in the seemingly innocuous patches of sand within the garden soils at House 23. The use of lazy beds and seaweed fertilizer must be viewed as successful if labour intensive method of protecting and nourishing mountain soils.

Investigation of the interior of House 23 revealed how the past occupants altered the original uniform house plan. A stone bench was added alongside the hearth on the north gable and a secondary drainage system was constructed. Architectural

materials included a nearly complete strap hinge, a range of cut and wire nails, wood fragments that may have originated in household timbers or furnishings, and traces of roofing material trapped below a layer of collapsed rubble within the house. The roofing material consists of turf scraws that likely were employed as an "under-thatch," placed atop the roofing timbers to support thatch and provide additional insulation. Such scraws may have been supported by flat branches, as was common in Donegal (Symmons and Harkin 2004, p. 35). The thatch would have been both pinned to the scraws and also tied down with thatching ropes (Aalen et al., p. 153; Gailey 1984), such as those unearthed at House 36 in the Deserted Village (McDonald 2003). Partial scraws, some burned, were found within the rubble deposits in House 23 and at the interface with subsoil.

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century descriptions from the west of Ireland provide the basis for popular understandings of marginal rural life, and also continued a long tradition of viewing the Gael in the same terms as the Native American. Campbell (1778) lamented the condition of rural peasants: "the common people are most wretchedly poor. The man, his wife and his children, a calf, a goat and a porket and some poultry lye all together in a worse cabin than you read of among the Creeks and Cherokees of America." While descriptions such as Campbell's clearly indicate a dearth of material possessions and a lack of interaction with a so-called outside world, the piece-plotted artifact assemblage from House 23 is replete with decorated tea wares, manufactured glass, and commercial food jars and cans, totaling 1,718 objects. Echoing the findings from similarly 'remote' households on South Uist (as discussed by Webster 1999), the vast majority of the ceramics are refined white earthenwares, predominantly brightly-colored, underglaze sponge-stamped and hand-painted wares produced in Scotland and in the Staffordshire potteries (Emery 1999; Kelly 1993). Very few (less than ten from the 2004 excavations, and only six from 2005) sherds of black glazed coarse earthenware were unearthed, even though this plain ware type represents those utilitarian forms such as milk pans, and storage jars which would be expected to be present in a nineteenth-century rural household. Two fragments of recognisable cast iron cooking ware were unearthed, along with a range of yet to be identified ferrous objects which may also relate to household utensils and cookware.

The quantities of industrially produced ceramics—including teacups and saucers and teapot fragments—recovered from the House 23 excavations suggest that the occupants of House 23 placed some importance on setting a colorful and welcoming table, and that the consumption of tea was likely not an uncommon occurrence. First introduced in the seventeenth century, tea and its associated social rituals was common in urban areas and in the households of the moderately wealthy by the mid-eighteenth century in Ireland, to judge from travelers accounts and inventories Lysaght (1987) has noted that the consumption of tea was relatively rare in western parts of Ireland in the 1830s as reflected in the reports of the *Commissions for Inquiry into the Conditions of the Poorer Classes in Ireland*, but that by the end of the nineteenth century, "tea had reached all levels of society along the west coast" (Lysaght 1987, p. 45). Tea certainly was common on Achill by the beginning of the twentieth century, to judge by one disparaging report about the drinking habits of islanders: "Tea is drunk until it becomes a vice. Morning, noon, and night, tea, tea, tea. It seems to be more liked after a long course of boiling, the pernicious effect of which is apparent in the prevalent indigestion" (Stone 1906).

How long tea was boiled, or how many times a teapot may have been used and for what purpose, is impossible to determine from archaeological evidence. Teawares only enter the archaeological record at House 23 in a broken condition, and many of the sherds exhibit wear in the form of chips and of scratches from stirring. Such scratches suggest that milk and sugar may have been added to whatever beverage filled the cups. Regardless of what the villagers were drinking from the multitude of refined earthenware teacups, they clearly exercised some degree of choice in acquiring these wares. While the possession of tea wares hardly ameliorates the genuine economic and political inequities at play on Achill, it should force us to re-evaluate our black and white understanding of the rural Irish experience.

In a recent contribution to an edited volume on nineteenth-century Ireland entitled *Was Ireland a Colony?*, Charles Orser (2005) interprets the presence of a similar assemblage of teawares on mid-nineteenth-century County Roscommon tenant sites as evidence that the occupants "readily bought into their oppressor's material culture... and used their withheld rent money to enter the marketplace." The buying of teawares, in Orser's view, constitutes a conscious act of resistance by oppressed, marginalized people against a British colonial power. While this may indeed have been the singular motivation driving the purchases of the Roscommon tenants, there is a danger of oversimplifying the ways in which individuals may choose to respond, engage with, and position themselves in relation to the inequities of economic and political power. Emphasizing a unified resistance through purchase power also prioritizes the simple *possession* of the "material culture of oppression" over the individual meanings ultimately attached to industrially produced commodities. Furthermore, Orser's interpretation of the meaning of potsherds seems to presume more universal and oppositional identities: "authentic," materially impoverished peasant Irish versus "inauthentic" materially rich, high culture, British.

Such dichotomous identities permeate a century of nationalist musings on Irish history. If Irish peasants indeed consciously employed ceramics as tokens of consumerist resistance, why is there such evidence of individual choice reflected in the range of decorative patterns found at House 23? Why do the patterns selected by the household vary from those recovered from House 36, excavated by McDonald (1997)? Individual choice may be unimportant in a global sense, but it should be central to an archaeology which seeks to understand (and not only explain) past human actions. Does the consumption of tea from a decorated tea cup in front of the fire in a byre dwelling on an island off the west coast of Ireland belie the "authenticity" of Achill folk culture? Does the fact that Wesley and Ada Corbin's children played with a raygun on the slopes of Corbin Mountain in the Virginia Blue Ridge make them traitors to their mountain identity? For me, the answer is an obvious no. It is only when we are applying etic notions of marginality and expectations of either cultural stagnation or folk purity that contradictory material evidence becomes something to explain away.

Presenting Irish Identity: Marginality and Nationalism

Far worse than merely being explained away, data from rural Irish sites—including tea cups and their multiple meanings—is simply being ignored. In 2001, the

National Museum of Ireland opened up a stunning new facility in Castlebar to highlight its considerable and irreplaceable ethnographic and folklife collections. On display are handmade chairs and baskets, fascinating videos recording processes of currach construction and thatching, thoughtful juxtapositions of folklore and material culture. Yet the tone of interpretation is swiftly established by the signage and welcoming comments at the museum's entrance at the Victorian manor, Turlough House. Here the visitor is treated to a far from subtle juxtaposition of the lavish lifestyle of the Lord of the Manor with that of his oppressed tenants, the Irish country "folk" whose lives are explored in the museum proper. The adversarial and dichotomous character of the colonial relationship is swiftly, physically, and insidiously codified for every visitor. Looking around the meticulously designed museum, Achill Island is quite well represented in images, objects, and stories. Yet nowhere is the Achill Island as revealed through archaeology. There are no tea cups, broken or otherwise. Household life is presented as materially impoverished except for what people could make themselves, as visitors are repeatedly told by enthusiastic guides and carefully designed display boards. The reason it is worth displaying these products of isolation and poverty-induced creativity is because the bonds of colonialism have been broken, first through Independence and then by the economic successes of the Celtic Tiger. In the act of commemorating a lost way of life, a triumphal postcolonial note is inevitably sounded.

Such a presentation is deeply unfair to the former Slievemore inhabitants, people who constructed their lives in a multitude of ways; incorporating the material products of global industrialization and negotiating their meanings in a locally rooted fashion. If their lives are worth more than a footnote in an endless rehashing of the material inequities of the capitalist world system, then their lives are also worth more than a simplistic casting as forgettable pawns or marketable, marginal "folk" in the postcolonial commodification of Ireland's rural heritage. If we are too quick to assume marginality from a reading of privileged documentary sources, or an emotional response to places which to us seem remote, or by celebrating that which seems most "authentic," we are in danger of destroying the history and lives of the people we purport to study; be they nineteenth-century Irish peasants, sixteenth-century Gaels and English servitors, or twentieth-century Appalachian "hillbillies."

Concluding Thoughts

To close, it seems appropriate to return to the Blue Ridge with a final insight from the experiences of George Corbin. In the early twentieth century, Corbin's grandfather, Aaron Nicholson, gained notoriety in the writings of local resort owner and keen park promoter, George Freeman Pollock (Pollock 1936; Pollock [Brown] 1960). According to Pollock, Nicholson was a fierce, barefoot squatter, given to bellowing out false claims to land. In an interview shortly before he died, George Corbin repeated one of Pollock's tales about his grandfather: "Pollock owned 5,271 acres and my grandfather, he claimed it all. And come to find out, he [only] owned five acres" (Corbin 1966). George Corbin died not knowing that deeds lodged in the local county courthouse established that Pollock was mortgaged up to his ears while his grandfather Aaron Nicholson owned 93.5 ha (231 ac; Madison County Deed

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Book 24: 243; 35: 371; 36: 313; Madison County Chancery Files, 1886, file 36; Perdue and Martin-Perdue 1979; Pollock 1936; Reeder and Reeder 1991). George Corbin's past was distorted and marginalized not only through the loss of physical community through eviction, but through the annihilation in print of his own family history. Archaeological treatises on upland landscapes which presume marginality based upon contemporary economic perceptions of environment risk a similar annihilation of past human experience.

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