

Spurlock, R. (2015) Catholics in a Puritan Atlantic: the liminality of empire's edge. In: Gribben, C. and Spurlock, R. (eds.) *Puritans and Catholics in the Trans-Atlantic World 1600–1800*. Series: Christianities in the trans-Atlantic world, 1500–1800. Palgrave Macmillan: 2015, pp. 21–46. ISBN 9781137368973

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/111683/>

Deposited on: 04 January 2019

## Catholics in a Puritan Atlantic: The liminality of empire's edge

R. Scott Spurlock

Catholicism in the early modern British Atlantic has drawn far less scholarly interest than Puritanism, especially outside England and, for obvious reasons, Ireland. This occlusion is in a number of ways problematic, but is the product of several factors, including the rhetoric of seventeenth-century British politics and the recent historiography which has been optimised by Linda Colley's well-articulated argument that by the end of the eighteenth century Britain's constituent populations had developed a united identity based on a shared Protestant ideology.<sup>1</sup> While not wholly new, Colley's approach seemingly surprised historians in the early 1990s by arguing that religion did indeed have a prominent role in the formation of Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Subsequently Carla Pestana applied this paradigm to the expansion of British influence into the Atlantic world in the seventeenth century, arguing that by 'only weakly establishing the Church of England, [the English] oversaw an increasingly diverse religious landscape. Yet [they] . . . established a broadly shared culture that united believers from different Protestant churches (and different ethnic and racial backgrounds) into a common Anglophone spiritual orientation'.<sup>2</sup> So even while the policy of a state church that extended into its colonies failed, the English government managed to corral illicit Protestant communities into advancing the state's cause. This story of Protestant

---

<sup>1</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Carla Pestana, *Protestant empire: Religion and the making of the British Atlantic world* (University Park, PA, 2009), p. 6.

England's triumph over its Catholic rivals for dominance in the Atlantic has its merits, but it has also served to overshadow the important fact that a very significant number of Catholics played a critical role in the expansion of the British Atlantic in the seventeenth century. Yet the role and, more importantly, the experience of these Catholics has, until very recently, remained an understudied component of the colonial and trans-Atlantic story. Although Aubrey Gwynn and others focussed on the role of the Irish, as a largely Catholic, component in the early modern English Atlantic, other historians have failed to highlight the importance of their religious persuasion.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, studies focusing on Catholics centred on Maryland and the strongly Catholic nature of that colony's development, almost without reference to any Catholic presence beyond the Chesapeake.<sup>4</sup> It is only in the last few years that

---

<sup>3</sup> Aubrey Gwynn, 'Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies (1612–1643)', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1929), pp. 377–393; *idem*, 'Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies: Part II', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1929), pp. 648–663; *idem*, 'Cromwell's Policy of Transportation', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1930), pp. 607–623; *idem*, 'Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies', *Analecta Hibernica* (1932), pp. 139–286; *idem*, 'The First Irish Priests in the New World', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1932), pp. 213–228). More recent studies focused on the Irish in particular geographical locations such as Barbados (Hilary Beckles, 'A 'riotous and unruly lot': Irish Indentured Servants and Freeman in the English West Indies, 1644–1713', *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47 (1990), pp. 503–522) and Monserrat (John C. Messenger, 'The influence of the Irish in Montserrat', *Caribbean Quarterly* 13 (1967), pp. 3–26; Donald H. Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World: Montserrat, 1630–1730* (Montreal, Quebec, and Kingston, ON, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> John LaFarge, 'The Survival of the Catholic Faith in Southern Maryland', *The Catholic Historical Review* 21 (1935), pp. 1–20; R. J. Lahey, 'The Role of Religion in Lord Baltimore's Colonial Enterprise', *Maryland Historical Magazine* 72 (1977), John D. Krugler, 'Lord Baltimore, Roman Catholics, and Toleration: Religious Policy in Maryland during the Early Catholic Years, 1634–1649', *Catholic Historical*

scholars have begun to take the Catholic presence seriously and to contextualise it within the aims of British colonial policies and practicalities.<sup>5</sup> This chapter does not intend to return to these very useful attempts to reassert the important place of British and Irish Catholics in the Atlantic world. Instead it will seek to reposition Catholics by arguing that they were not an unwanted spillage into the colonial Atlantic; instead, the position of Catholics as ‘half-subjects’ deserving ‘half rights’, as James VI/I famously said of Irish Catholics in 1613, afforded them a degree of liminality which, while making them marginal or undesirable in the British Isles, made them central to policy for pushing and holding the fringes of the British empire.<sup>6</sup>

---

*Review* 65 (1979), pp. 49–75; Gerald P. Fogarty, ‘Property and Religious Liberty in Colonial Maryland Catholic Thought’, *Catholic Historical Review* 72 (1986), pp. 573–600; John D. Krugler, *English and Catholic: The Lords Baltimore in the seventeenth century* (Baltimore, MD, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Jenny Shaw, ‘Island Purgatory: Irish Catholics and the Reconfiguring of the English Caribbean, 1650–1700’ (unpublished PhD thesis, New York University, 2008); Shona Helen Johnston, ‘Papists in a Protestant World: The Catholic Anglo-Atlantic in the Seventeenth Century’ (unpublished PhD thesis, Georgetown University, 2011); Kristen Block and Jenny Shaw, ‘Subjects without an Empire: The Irish in a Changing Caribbean’, *Past and Present* 210 (2011), pp. 33–60; Jenny Shaw, *Everyday Life in the Early English Caribbean: Irish, Africans, and the Construction of Difference* (Athens, GA, 2013); Robert Emmett Curran, *Papist Devils: Catholics in British America* (Washington, DC, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> C. W. Russell and John P. Prendergast (eds), *Calendar of State Papers relating to Ireland of the Reign of James I. 1611–1614* (London, 1877), p. 474. Kristen Block and Jenny Shaw have described the Irish in the English Atlantic as in a ‘liminal’ space, in reference to being between the English and Spanish Empires, and therefore unable to become ‘equal partners’ in any European colonial expansion (Block and Shaw, ‘Subjects without an empire’, p. 34). While using a similar terminology, this

Two trends have dominated the historiography of global Catholicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first is that the Catholic faith was principally disseminated within an imperialistic and colonial paradigm. That is to say, in the wake of the 1494 Treaty of Torsadillas, and with Papal approval, Portugal and Spain divided the world to be discovered and converted. In some respects, this process had already begun with the Portuguese missions to the Kingdom of Bakongo in West Africa from the 1480s. By the 1540s, half of the 2 million subjects of Bakongo had been baptised into the Catholic Church.<sup>7</sup> Spanish and Portuguese expansion into the Americas and Asia were equally fuelled by colonialism and missionary fervour. Religious orders worked tirelessly, but they served as the glove for the hand of European conquest.<sup>8</sup> This has led to a historiographical tradition that has been

---

chapter stresses that Catholics more broadly inhabited a liminal space being subject to the English crown and serving as an important vanguard for colonial expansion, while at the same time facing marginalisation, and potentially dispossession, for their Catholic faith. This did not, however, mean Catholics were wholly disempowered in their colonial contexts.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Steed and Bengt Sundkler, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Oxford, 2000), p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> James Muldoon, *The Americas in the Spanish world order: The justification for conquest in the seventeenth century* (Philadelphia, PA, 1994). Alejandro Cañeque, 'Imaging the Spanish Empire: The visual construction of imperial authority in Habsburg New Spain', *Colonial Latin American Review* 19 (2010), pp. 29–68. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, in *The world of Catholic renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge, 2005), discusses the differences between the early modern Italian experience encouraging charity and the Spanish experience of re-conquest of the Iberian peninsula underpinning a more militaristic interpretation of Spanish Catholicism (pp. 43–81). For an interesting counter discussion focusing on the legacy of the Catholic faith as a triumph of Spanish imperial expansion in the face of the 'black legend', see Luis

dominated by the study of top-down policies and organisational structures. For this reason, the presence of Catholicism in the British Atlantic has been largely overlooked outwith the theatres of first Spanish and latterly French missions, except for very specific and local studies, such as Aubrey Gwynn's work on the Irish in the West Indies. In other words, as Patrick Carey has put it, unlike their Spanish and French coreligionists, Catholics in the English Atlantic world 'planted and sustained their religion ... without the benefit of governmental financial and legal support and without the burden of serving in vast geographical territories'.<sup>9</sup>

The second trend in Catholic historiography is closely related to the first: the history of Catholicism has been predominantly presented as clerical and thus the story has often been that of clergy and missionaries, retold by subsequent generations of clergy. This has something to do with the nature of Catholicism and the crucial role of the clergy, as well as the ways in which the records of early modern Catholicism were produced, preserved and accessed. Yet, like all other religions Catholicism has always been comprised of more lay adherents than clergy, and this was more true of Catholic experience within the British Atlantic world than elsewhere. For this reason the Catholics residing in the early modern British Atlantic were often isolated from the official Propaganda-sanctioned clerical missions and have remained largely peripheral not only to the story of Catholicism, but also to that of the British Atlantic.

---

N.Rivera, *A violent evangelism: The political and religious conquest of the Americas* (Louisville, KY, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport, CT, 2004), p. 10.

So why is this problematic? A number of studies in recent years have demonstrated that Catholics could be found throughout the English colonies during the seventeenth century. Sometimes they might exist in very small numbers or even in isolation, such as the Dutchman Jan van Loon, who at times in the late seventeenth century may have been the only Catholic in Albany, New York.<sup>10</sup> At the opposite end of the spectrum, as in the well-known cases of Montserrat and Maryland, Catholics could represent dominant social positions.<sup>11</sup> More frequently, however, the presence of Catholics in the early modern English Atlantic did not fall into these categories of complete isolation or social dominance. Yet Catholics were present in every social level of colonial society, although not necessarily in every colony, as proprietor, governor, or attorney general of a colony, or assembly member, leading planter, smallholder, or labourer. This need not contradict Pestana's claim that Protestantism trumped politics, economics or militarism as the success story of England's Atlantic empire, but some clarification as to how Catholics inhabited and contributed to this system is required.

### **Access to the Colonies**

---

<sup>10</sup> Peter R. Christoph, 'The Time and Place of Jan Van Loon: A Roman Catholic in Colonial Albany', *De Halve Maen* 60:2:8; 60:3:9 (1987); Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts And Possessions* (Boston, 1689), reprinted in George Lincoln Burr (ed.), *Narratives of the New England Witchcraft Trials* (Mineola, NY, 2002), p. 104.

<sup>11</sup> See Akenson, *If the Irish ran the world*, and Krugler, *English and Catholic*.

It is worth considering how Catholics gained access to the English colonial Atlantic. This generally took place in one of three ways. The most famous example is the proprietary endeavours of the Calvert family. In 1623 George Calvert, Lord Baltimore, received a charter for establishing a colony in Newfoundland. In 1628 he sailed with his family and forty Catholic settlers as well as Catholic priests to found Avalon. The venture was short-lived, due in part to the fact that despite its remote location the colony experienced fierce competition from rival fishing ventures, as well as extremely harsh winter weather. After just one year Baltimore relocated the band to Virginia before his son, Cecil Calvert, secured a charter – after his father's death in 1632 – for the establishment of Maryland in 1635. Historians have debated whether the Calverts' motives were primarily religious or economic; however, as the settlement of New England by Puritan-minded people during the same period demonstrates, the two motives need not be mutually exclusive.<sup>12</sup> Both religious and economic aims could be pursued and attained, sometimes to the affirmation of one another.<sup>13</sup> The most recent scholarship on Baltimore's vision for Maryland has argued that he sought to secure a space where the Calverts and fellow Catholics could be free from the legal strictures of penal laws, by establishing a broad religious toleration while at the same time seeking to cash in on the vast economic opportunities of the colonies, which they managed to do in Ireland, Newfoundland

---

<sup>12</sup> John Frederick Martin, *Profits in the wilderness: entrepreneurship and the founding of New England towns in the seventeenth century* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Valeri, *Heavenly merchandize: How religion shaped commerce in Puritan America*, (Princeton, NJ, 2010).



and Maryland.<sup>14</sup> Not all scholars have accepted the argument of balanced pursuits. Some have suggested the status quo in Maryland fell short of George Calvert's initial ambitions of establishing Catholicism as the official religion of the colony; however, the canniness of endowing Catholic clergy with land and thus establishing their civil rights does diminish such criticism, as does the influence of Catholic laypeople in the shaping of the colony.<sup>15</sup> Maryland did indeed become a foothold for Catholics – although the faith was primarily practiced behind closed doors – and a base for Catholic missionaries who worked within Maryland and Virginia, and even as far as Pennsylvania. The primarily Jesuit staff of the mission made some attempts to convert the indigenous population, but spent most of their energies ministering to a settler population which, Edward Terrar argues, may have represented 25 per cent of the population, which in 1650 was 682 residents, a figure that corresponds with contemporary Jesuit accounts.<sup>16</sup> The missionaries even purchased the indentures of Catholic servants working in Virginia to bring them to Maryland where their souls could be cared for, though the number of indentured servants being brought into the colony decreased after 1638.<sup>17</sup> Maryland was, however, both an exceptional

---

<sup>14</sup> Krugler, *English and Catholic*; James Lyttleton, 'The Lords Baltimore in Ireland', in Peter Pope and Shannon Lewis-Simpson (eds), *Exploring Atlantic Transitions: Archaeologies of Transience and Permanence in New Found Lands* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 259–69.

<sup>15</sup> Fogarty, 'Property and Religious Liberty in Colonial Maryland', p. 574; Edward F. Terrar, *Liberation Theology along the Potomac: Social, Economic, and Religious Beliefs among Maryland Catholic People During the Period of the English War 1639–1660* (Silver Spring, MD, 2007), *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> Terrar, *Liberation Theology along the Potomac*, pp. 92–3.

<sup>17</sup> Terrar, *Liberation Theology along the Potomac*, p. 119.

case, and a context not always friendly to Catholics, as was demonstrated in Ingle's Rebellion (1645–46), the disenfranchisement of Catholics in 1654, the discontent in Charles County (1676–77) and the Fendall and Coode uprising (1681).<sup>18</sup> Yet the colony did manage to overcome a series of rebellions and the displacement of the proprietary regime by appointing a Protestant governor and by becoming, in 1649, the first colony to establish religious toleration for all Trinitarian Christians.<sup>19</sup> The colony even appeased the fears of the Interregnum Parliament in England and in 1657 Oliver Cromwell restored Lord Baltimore's proprietorship over Maryland, who re-established religious toleration that year, although the Catholic population of the colony waned in the later seventeenth century.<sup>20</sup> Yet despite this trend, the Irish Catholic George Talbot still managed to amass an estate of 32,000 acres and to welcome 640 transported servants over a twelve-year period.<sup>21</sup> Maryland certainly serves as an important example of the role Catholics could play in English colonial

---

<sup>18</sup> Timothy B. Riordan, *The Plundering Time: Maryland and the English Civil War, 1645–1646* (Baltimore, MD, 2003); Francis X. Curran, *Catholics in Colonial Law* (Chicago, IL, 1967), pp. 29–30; John D. Krugler, ‘“With promise of Liberty in Religion”: The Catholic Lords Baltimore and Toleration in Seventeenth-Century Maryland, 1634–1692’, *Maryland Historical Magazine* 79 (1984), pp. 21–43. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), p. 52.

<sup>19</sup> Curran, *Catholics in Colonial Law*, pp. 25–29

<sup>20</sup> Curran, *Catholics in Colonial Law*, p. 31; John Tracy Ellis, *Catholics in Colonial America* (Baltimore, MD, 1965), pp. 324–45.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Graham, ‘Popish Plots: Protestant Fears in Early Colonial Maryland, 1676–1689’, *Catholic Historical Review* 79 (1993), pp. 197–216; Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, *White Cargo: The Forgotten History of Britain's White Slaves in America* (New York, NY, 2008), p. 138.

endeavours, however, the majority of Catholics in the English Atlantic were not to be found in this 'Catholic haven'.

The second way in which Catholics entered the Atlantic world was through voluntary migration to colonies which were not Catholic in their ethos. Here too we have an exceptional example of a Catholic stronghold in the English Atlantic, in the Irish-dominated island of Montserrat. By the time Andrew White, a Jesuit who served the mission in Maryland, reached the Leeward Islands in the mid-1630s a sizeable Irish Catholic population was already well established. In his report to Lord Baltimore, White stated that the Irish had settled in Montserrat because they had been expelled from Virginia, which is probably not true. Unlike Maryland, Virginia officially posed an unwelcome destination, although recent archaeological evidence such as a crucifix suggests that Jamestown did have some privately practicing Catholic inhabitants from the first wave of settlement.<sup>22</sup> Of the colony's early settlers, Francis Maguel (1607) was certainly a Catholic, and Dionis Oconor (1608) may have shared his faith.<sup>23</sup> This may not be wholly surprising, as numerous of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Travis G. Parno and Brent Fortenberry, 'Catholic Artefacts in a Protestant Landscape: A Multi-Vocal Approach to the Religiosity of Jamestown's Colonists', in James Symonds, Anna Badcock and Jeff Oliver (eds), *Historical Archaeologies of Cognition. Explorations into Faith, Hope and Charity* (Sheffield, 2013), pp. 15–27 (p. 26).

<sup>23</sup> 'Francis Maguel's Relation of the First Voyage and the Beginnings of the James Town Colony', in Philip Barbour (ed.), *The Jamestown Voyages under the First Charter* (Cambridge, 1969), I, pp. 151–157; William M. Kelso and Beverly A. Straube, *1997 Interim Report on the APVA Excavations at Jamestown, VA* (Jamestown, VA, 1998), p. 23; Frank E. Grizzard, *Jamestown Colony: A Political, Social, and Cultural History* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2007), p. 263.

early settlers had strong links to Ireland through the campaigns of the Nine Years War, and a number of the leading English figures were themselves Catholics.<sup>24</sup> Others, like Simon Tutchin, whom the governor of Virginia described as ‘stonglie affected to Popery and Banished owt of Ireland’, were turned away.<sup>25</sup> But among those involved in supporting the plantation, there were hopes that Ireland would offer a steady stream of settlers, and by the 1630s recruiters were active in the ports of southern Ireland seeking transporters.<sup>26</sup> The transport of people should not be surprising, as ships with other provisions were arriving from Ireland by the 1620s.<sup>27</sup> Yet the case of George Kendall serves as a strong reminder that the real fear in English minds was not the faith of a Catholic, but their possible political allegiances. In 1608 the governor had the English Catholic ship captain executed for serving as a double agent for the Spanish crown.<sup>28</sup> Yet despite the examples of Kendall and Tutchin, evidence for a Catholic presence remains in the records of the Virginia

---

<sup>24</sup> Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), pp. 198–209; Edwards, ‘A Haven of Popery’, p. 101; John McGurk, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: The Irish Privy Council and the Expansion of Tudor rule, 1556–1578* (Dublin, 1993); Nicholas Canny, *Making Ireland British 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 79–82; Hiram Morgan, *Tyrone’s rebellion: The Outbreak of the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland* (Dublin, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Susan Myra Kingsbury, *The Records of The Virginia Company of London* (Washington, DC, 1935), IV, p. 509.

<sup>26</sup> Grizzard, *Jamestown Colony*, p. 150.

<sup>27</sup> Wesley F. Craven, *Dissolution of the Virginia Company: The Failure of a Colonial Experiment* (New York, 1932), p. 587; Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York, 1985), p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> Philip L. Barbour, ‘Captain George Kendall: Mutineer or Intelligencer?’, *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (1962), pp. 297–313; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, pp. 219–20.

colony in wills and court cases into the 1640s.<sup>29</sup> As Edward Bond notes, even with the establishment of an anti-Recusant statute in 1641, the denunciation of Catholicism is muted. While the statute orders the removal of priests, it allows Roman Catholics laity to remain in the colony.<sup>30</sup> In this respect, Virginia may not have been a welcoming destination for Catholics, but the evidence does indicate that Catholics from England and Ireland did make their way to the colony.

By the 1630s a significant number of Irish men, women and children were migrating to the West Indies. We can get some insight into this movement from the correspondence of Malachy O'Queely, the archbishop of Tuam from 1631, one of the few sources to describe the trend. In 1637 he reported to Propaganda Fide that two secular priests had been sent to the Caribbean. Most historians who have referred to these reports have chosen to focus on the sending of clergy to minister to an Irish population already in the region, but the report also states that the priests travelled with a group of 600 migrants striking out for the Caribbean. Therefore the Catholic Church was not simply responding to a status quo, but was actually working alongside migrants to support the process. By 1639 Catholic sources estimated 'that the number of Irish Catholics in those regions [the English Caribbean, not in French

---

<sup>29</sup> Edward L. Bond, *Damned souls in a tobacco colony: Religion in seventeenth-century Virginia* (Macon, GA, 2000), p. 133; Ralph T. Whitelaw, *Virginia's Eastern Shore: A History of Northampton and Accomack Counties* (Richmond, VA, 1951), i. 425, ii. 1403; Ames, *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia, 1632–1640* (Charlottesville, VA, 1954), vii. 54.

<sup>30</sup> Bond, *Damned souls*, p. 139. For the statute see William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia* (Richmond, VA, New York, NY and Philadelphia, PA, 1809–1823), i. 268–9; Curran, *Catholics in Colonial Law*, pp. 21–2.

or Spanish territories] exceeds three thousand'.<sup>31</sup> This was at a time when the trustees of the recently deceased earl of Carlisle petitioned the Privy Council and suggested that the population of the English Caribbean was approximately 20,000.<sup>32</sup>

### **Forging Catholic communities**

The question must be asked: where were all of these people going and why and how were they allowed to stay? We know that many of these Irish migrants made their way to St Christopher (now St Kitts) – where both French and English colonised the island – and Montserrat. Both islands oscillated between English and French control during the seventeenth century. Through the 1630s and into the 1640s these people were voluntary migrants to the Caribbean, although this did not mean that they experienced all of the freedoms for which they hoped. While Catholics were not permitted to worship in public, they did receive visits from a priest resident on St Christopher, an Irish Jesuit named John Stritch. He made regular trips to Montserrat between 1650 and 1660. After initially constructing a chapel on St Christopher, which the English authorities destroyed in 1653, he sought refuge in the French portion of St Christopher, to which Catholics from the English quarter travelled to attend Mass. This only fuelled official opposition to his mission, because its clandestine nature operating out of the French part of the island heightened fears

---

<sup>31</sup> Aubrey Gwynn, 'Documents Relating to the Irish in the West Indies', *Analecta Hibernica* 4 (1932), pp. 139–286, p. 190.

<sup>32</sup> W. N. Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1574–1660* (London, 1860), p. 295.

that it represented political rather than religious intrigue. However, it was in fact the precarious nature of this frontier existence that enabled the Irish to make a life at the coalface of the English empire and why the colonial authorities allowed their continued presence. This was a liminal space, in the sense that the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as 'characterized by being on a boundary or threshold, esp[ecially] by being transitional or intermediate', and Irish Catholics fulfilled a necessary role for the English regime by occupying a contested space at the outer limit of the empire.<sup>33</sup> This may perhaps be the very reason why so many Irish Catholics voluntarily entered the English Atlantic in the 1630s and 1640s. The possibilities of the West Indies outweighed the risks as well as the limited fortunes, repressions and limitations of life for Catholics in Ireland. In fact, Daphne Hobson has claimed that by around 1630 the English government recognised the Catholic Irish as a potential 'fifth column' for advancing their position and claims in the West Indies.<sup>34</sup> By 1667 the governor of Montserrat described the island as 'almost an Irish colony'.<sup>35</sup> In 1678, 69 per cent of the white population of Montserrat was Irish, and overwhelmingly this population was Catholic, comprised mostly of indentured servants and waged freemen. Based on the detailed census taken that year, the

---

<sup>33</sup> 'liminal, adj.'. *OED Online*. March 2015. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/108471?redirectedFrom=liminal> (accessed May 12, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Daphne Hobson, 'The domestic architecture of the earliest British colonies in the American tropics: A study of the houses of the Caribbean Leeward Islands of St. Christopher, Nevis, Antigua and Montserrat, 1624–1726' (unpublished PhD thesis, Georgia Tech University, 2007), p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, CO 1/21, no. 55.

white population of the island was 2,682, of whom 1,644 were bonded or indentured servants.<sup>36</sup> However, Catholics also accounted for a number of the island's leading planters and governors. While the case of Montserrat is exceptional, it is important to highlight the integral role a predominantly Catholic population played at the frontier of colony. For, most importantly, many of these individuals had arrived voluntarily in the Caribbean.<sup>37</sup>

Yet life in the colonies did not sweep away the political tensions that had been experienced at home, and tensions persisted between the various ethnic groups drawn to populate the colonies from Britain and Ireland. The island assembly of Montserrat found it essential to control the production of rum on the island, for when the colonists became drunk they called each other names like 'English dogg, Scots dogg, Tory, Irish dogg, Cavalier and Roundheade'.<sup>38</sup> In 1666, the Irish on St Christopher mutinied with the French to overthrow British rule: the island remained under French control for two years until it was ceded back by the Treaty of Breda. According to an eyewitness reporting events to England, at a crucial moment of the battle for the island in 1666 'the Irish in the Reare (allwaies a bloody and perfidious people to the English Protestant Interest) with Comand near 100 deepe ... fired Vollyes into the ffront and killed more (then ye Enimy) of our owne fforces'.<sup>39</sup> In 1667 the Irish of Montserrat also overthrew the British establishment in favour of

---

<sup>36</sup> Frank Senauth, *The Making of Barbados* (Bloomington, IN, 2011), p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed study of Montserrat see Akenson, *If the Irish ran the World*.

<sup>38</sup> Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1972; 2000), p. 125.

<sup>39</sup> Gwynn, 'Documents relating to Irish in the West Indies', p. 244.



French rule, but by June this rebellion had been quashed. But the Irish were not removed to be replaced with a more loyal population; instead, the Irish Protestant governor was replaced by an Irish Catholic, William Stapleton, with the expectation that he would better understand how to 'govern his countrymen'.<sup>40</sup> Nor was this an exceptional occurrence for Catholic advancement. By 1672 Stapleton had been appointed as governor over all the Leeward Islands, a post he held until 1685.<sup>41</sup> The possibility of Catholic sympathies realigning with foreign powers highlights the tension and risk at the frontier edge of empire for both Catholics and the State. However, this potentiality also gave Catholic subjects a degree of power, for the policies of the government needed to tread a fine line between making things inhospitable enough at home for Catholics to seek possibilities in the Caribbean, and yet colonial policies needed to both uphold loyal Protestant subjects' feelings of superiority while at the same time not overly marginalising Catholic subjects to the point that they might seek a better deal from a foreign sovereignty.

Although the presence of this Caribbean Catholic community flies in the face of the Protestant-dominated ideology that underpinned the rhetoric of British Atlantic expansion, the fact that Catholics were permitted to play an integral role in English colonial policy should not be surprising, for one need not look far to see other examples of similar policies. We gain further insights by looking at Ireland as a

---

<sup>40</sup> Rodgers, 'The Irish in the Caribbean', p. 146; Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, pp. 55–8.

<sup>41</sup> J. R. V. Johnston, 'The Stapleton Sugar Plantations in the Leeward Islands', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1965), pp. 175–206 (p. 176); Block and Shaw, 'Subjects without an Empire', p. 53.

laboratory for later English imperial expansion, as Nicholas Canny and Jane Ohlmeyer have encouraged us to do.<sup>42</sup> The approaches to plantation in Ireland, like Pestana's model of Atlantic expansion, were thoroughly Protestant in their rhetoric. However, it has been demonstrated that such a paradigm did not prevent Catholic immigration to Ireland and that the new opportunities afforded through plantation might actually prove as attractive to Catholics as to Protestants in both England and Scotland. In fact, in some ways, the prospect of migration to Ireland could prove more attractive to Catholics than to Protestants. David Edwards has shown that for many English Catholics the prospect of relocating to Ireland proved an attractive option, because they perceived the practice of their faith – although officially discouraged – would be easier.<sup>43</sup> For the government's part, little effort was made to prevent known English Catholics from going to Ireland for it was believed their Englishness would trump their Catholicism. In other words, Protestant faith was not

---

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Canny (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 1, The Origins of Empire* (Oxford, 1998); *idem*, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650* (Oxford, 2001); *idem*, 'Writing Early Modern Irish History: Ireland, Britain, and the Wider World', *Historical Journal*, 46/3 (2003), pp. 723–47; Jane Ohlmeyer, 'Seventeenth-Century Ireland and the New British and Atlantic Histories', *The American Historical Review*, 104:2 (1999), pp. 446–62; *idem*, 'A Laboratory for Empire? Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism', in Kevin Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 26–60; J. Cleary, 'Amongst Empires: A Short History of Ireland and Empire Studies in International Context', *Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 42 (2007), pp. 11–57; John Gibney, 'Early Modern Ireland: A British Atlantic Colony?', *History Compass* 6.1 (2008), pp. 172–182.

<sup>43</sup> David Edwards, 'A Haven of Popery: English Catholic Migration to Ireland in the Age of Plantations' in Alan Ford and John McCafferty (eds), *The Origins of Sectarianism in Early Modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 95–126.

the most important factor when determining who could help serve the government's objectives of planting a loyal population in Ireland. Similarly, the movement of Scots to Ireland also included a significant Catholic component. Fuelled by James VI's policies of displacing the MacDonalds from Kintyre, Mull and Islay, as well as anti-Catholic pressure in the lowlands, a significant number of Catholic Scots migrated to Ireland in the early seventeenth century. In addition the personal plantation policies of James Hamilton, earl of Abercorn, and Sir George Hamilton of Greenlaw meant they actively, and sometimes exclusively, brought Catholic families from Scotland to settle in Ulster. This led Michael Hill to conclude that 'When we consider the number of Catholics in Ulster in 1625 – most of the Irish and about 20 percent of the Scots settlers – it is difficult to characterize the province as Presbyterian, or even Protestant', despite the official policies imposed by the government.<sup>44</sup> The frustration generated by planters' failure to adhere to the government's terms resulted in official criticism of their negligence.<sup>45</sup> According to Brian Mac Cuarta, the common Scottishness of the planters facilitated a "porousness" to any "denominational divide".<sup>46</sup> Despite the great increase of Protestant settlers under the official Plantation policies, the significance of Catholics is evidenced even in the late 1630s by the exemption from Thomas Wentworth's Black Oath which was extended to Scots in Ulster if they professed a Roman Catholic faith.<sup>47</sup> So even in an

---

<sup>44</sup> J. Michael Hill, 'The Origins of Scottish Plantations in Ulster to 1625: A Reinterpretation', *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993), pp. 24–43, pp. 32, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Houghton Library, Harvard University, HOU GEN MS Eng 890.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Mac Cuarta, *Catholic Revival in the North of Ireland 1603–41* (Dublin, 2007), pp. 68–75, 129–149, 236–249, p. 102.

<sup>47</sup> 'Hamilton Manuscripts', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 3 (1855), p. 141.

endeavour traditionally understood to be at its very heart sectarian, the rhetoric and the ideal did not always match up with the reality.

Even outside of Ulster, concern about religious difference did not inherently prevent Protestants collaborating with Catholics, if it served broader purposes and ambitions. For example, when Sir William Alexander sought for potential settlers in his new colonial endeavour in Nova Scotia in 1622 he enlisted Catholic peasants from Galway. Similarly, from the 1630s agents sought Irish volunteers to emigrate to Virginia. Therefore, despite the rigorous anti-Catholic rhetoric and statutes used in official policy, there was still a place for Catholics within private and official colonial schemes, either participating voluntarily or involuntarily.

Other Catholics entered the Atlantic frontier of their own volition and with the desire to seek their fortunes. Sir Henry Colt, an aristocratic adventurer, perceived that his Catholic faith might work to his benefit in the complex multinational flavour of Caribbean trading. As a loyal English citizen and with resources at his disposal, he could get a solid start; as a Catholic, he thought he might find sympathy with the Spanish. All of this was tested when the ship he travelled on had a dangerous encounter with a Spanish fleet and narrowly avoided being sunk. While this raised concerns and resulted in some soul-searching for Colt, the experience led him to put on paper his thoughts about being a Catholic in the Atlantic world, which are illuminating for the present study.<sup>48</sup> While expressing a complete loyalty to the English crown, he also expressed a great respect and affinity

---

<sup>48</sup> Henry Colt, 'The Voyage of Sir Henry Colt', in Vincent T. Harlow (ed.), *Colonizing Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623–1667* (London, 1925), pp. 54–102.

to the King of Spain because of his service to the Catholic faith. This might seem contradictory, but the early modern period – according to sociologists – marked an important watershed. Work by James Cote and Charles Levine on identity formation in pre-modern societies has argued that identities were 'ascribed' on the basis of some inherited status such as race, sex, the status of the parents or even religion. However, in the early modern period identity came to be something that was 'accomplished'. Cote and Levine explain that:

During the early modern period, we can see how the cultural parameters of the life course changed, making the individualization axis relevant. Over this period, it became increasingly permissible for individuals to be self-directed in their life-course trajectories and to develop more differentiated selves and identities ... Accordingly, it became more important for individuals to build their own lives as adults, separate from their parents or wider community of origin.<sup>49</sup>

People like Colt possessed not simply multifaceted identities, but multi-layered identities. This multiplicity of identities functioned like playing cards that could be used in changing conditions. The context of colonial expansion provided spaces and opportunities for maximising 'the differentiated selves and identities' that people possessed. This is why for a man like Colt, the possibilities for a Catholic Englishman

---

<sup>49</sup> James E. Côté and Charles G. Levine, *Identity, formation, agency, and culture: A social psychological synthesis* (Mahwah, NJ, 2014), p. 62.

in the colonies seemed robust in relation to the cards he had to play. Catholic faith could play an important role in such processes, and not merely in an international context between Spanish, English or Irish merchants. April Hatfield has alluded to the kinds of personal and economic networks that could form between English Catholics. She notes that the Londoner William Webb wrote letters of introduction for Thomas Cobbs who sought to settle in the Chesapeake in 1642 – one of which was addressed to the Jesuit Andrew White. Webb emphasised Cobbs’ Catholic links, which included his share of a plantation on St Christopher he co-owned with his Catholic uncle Captain Pellham. Webb’s Catholic links led Susie Ames to postulate that Cobbs may have in fact been an alias for the Jesuit Thomas Copley.<sup>50</sup> So the links between Catholics in the Chesapeake and the West Indies might perhaps need to be understood as more than just coincidental or incidental.

### **Forced migrants**

However, not everyone who entered the Atlantic world did so voluntarily. A third category of Catholics found themselves shipped to the colonies involuntarily as

---

<sup>50</sup> April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA, 2007), pp. 89, 259 n. 15; Susie May Ames, *County Court Records of Accomack-Northampton, Virginia, 1640–1645* (Charlottesville, VA, 1973), x. 251–2. Pelham appears to have been sent by the Earl of Carlisle to St Christopher with reinforcements to protect the planters from French incursions in 1627; Awnsham Churchill and Jean Barbot, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts, Others Now First Published in English: With a General Preface, Giving an Account of the Progress of Navigation, from Its First Beginning* (Walthoe, 1732), ii. 361.

indentured servants. The term 'slaves' has been applied to this population, but according to Abbot Smith's enduring study on indentured servants, there is no evidence of whites serving in perpetual servitude.<sup>51</sup> The debate about the nature of forced indentured servitude is a highly contested one. The methods and purposes employed to remove large numbers of people from Britain and Ireland continues to generate emotional engagement, but the process went something like this. From 1646 the English government advocated the transport of labour from England to the colonies to fulfil an increasing demand for labour.<sup>52</sup> In essence this established the trade in indentured servants. Those who volunteered would be transported to the colonies in exchange for five to seven years of labour for the master who paid for their travel. At the end of this period of indenture, the servant was set free and given land and often a dwelling place. However, the increasing demand for labour in the colonies coincided with the sudden availability of unwanted segments of the population as a result of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. Political prisoners, criminals, and vagrants were exported to the colonies as indentured servants to help quell the political problems at home and to satisfy the growing need for both labour and population in the colonies. Both of these factors were important, for colonies that were unproductive or unpopulated could not be held. During the late 1640s and 1650s a very large number of men, women, and children were transported from

---

<sup>51</sup> Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in bondage: White servitude and convict labor in America, 1607–1776* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1947).

<sup>52</sup> Hilary MacDonald Beckles, 'White labour in black slave plantation society and economy: a case study of indentured labour in seventeenth Barbados' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1980), p. 69.

England, Ireland, and Scotland to Barbados, New England or the Southern Colonies in indentured servitude. The overwhelming majority of these people were removed under vagrancy laws and while similar laws were in place in England and Scotland during the Interregnum, the nature and the toll of war in Ireland – enhanced by the problem of wives and children left by the 40,000 Irish men who left for service abroad – left a far greater degree of poverty which in turn meant that more individuals could fall foul of the definition of ‘vagabond’. This policy certainly was subject to abuse and some innocent people were most definitely ‘barbadozzed’ – the term used for being spirited away in the seventeenth century, before being ‘shanghaied’ replaced it in the nineteenth century – but the government intervened when they had knowledge of it. A record from sometime in 1656 declares: ‘Robert Bonker and Edward Smyth apprehended for seizing men & women & carrying them aboard the ship bound for Barbados, without Warrant from the Justices of the Peace’.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, ordinances were put into place as early as 1654 that ships should be inspected to ensure there were no unwarranted passengers on board.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> ‘Commonwealth Records’, *Archivium Hibernicum* 7 (1918–21), pp. 20–66, p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Robert Dunlop (ed.), *Ireland under the Commonwealth* (Manchester, 1913), ii. 467.

For recent reassessments of the Interregnum policy in Ireland, see R. S. Spurlock, ‘Cromwell and Catholics: towards a reassessment of lay catholic experience in interregnum Ireland’, in M. Williams and S. Forrest (eds), *Constructing the Past: Writing Irish History, 1600–1800* (Woodbridge, 2010), pp. 157–179; John Cunningham, ‘Lay Catholicism and Religious Policy in Cromwellian Ireland’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 64.4 (2013), pp. 769–786.



The number of Irish men, women, and children who were shipped to the Atlantic colonies is contested. Estimates have ranged as high as 100,000, but the figure that has generally been accepted by historians – based on the work of Aubrey Gwynn – is 50,000.<sup>55</sup> On the face of it, this estimate may include the 40,000 Irish soldiers who the Commonwealth allowed to enter military service with any foreign power not hostile to England. If this is indeed the case, then the remaining 10,000 were sent to Atlantic colonies.<sup>56</sup> Sean O'Callahan, on the other hand, has taken Gwynn's figure to mean that the 50,000 were in addition to the 40,000 soldiers.<sup>57</sup> This would explain the higher estimates. But there is a significant problem with these figures – that is, where did all these people go? Granted, this chapter is not about the presence of Irish in the Atlantic, but it is about the presence of Catholics in the Atlantic, in which space it must be assumed the policy of transportation would have been applied overwhelmingly to Catholics. Royalists (some of whom were Protestants) were also sent to Barbados, as Cromwell's report following Drogheda implies, but it would have been counterproductive to the overall aims of

---

<sup>55</sup> Aubrey Gwynn, 'Cromwell's Policy of Transportation', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1930), pp. 607–623; *idem*, 'Cromwell's Policy of Transportation Part II', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 20 (1931), pp. 291–305.

<sup>56</sup> Gwynn, 'Cromwell's Policy of Transportation Part II', p. 301. Referring to an earlier estimate, Gwynn states, 'It would be rash to accept so rhetorical a description at its face value: the number which the author of the MS. gives as having been transported 50,000 in one year, counting the transportations to the Continent as well as to the West Indies is certainly an exaggeration, though it may be a fair estimate for the whole period of Commonwealth administration.'

<sup>57</sup> S. O'Callahan, *To Hell or Barbados: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ireland* (Dingle, 2001), pp. 77–88.

Interregnum policy to send Protestants out of Ireland. Nevertheless, the Interregnum government knowingly and willingly exported between 10,000 and 50,000 Irish (predominantly Catholics) into what historians have generally agreed was a Protestant Atlantic empire.<sup>58</sup> What also needs to be kept in mind is that the population of England's Atlantic colonies in 1660 was approximately 130,000. Hence the Cromwellian policy, if we want to call it that, ensured that between 8 and 40 per cent of the population of its colonies were Catholic. A precise figure cannot be ascertained, because the requisite records simply do not survive. Even if they did, Akenson's study of Montserrat highlights the difficulties in making sense of even reasonably detailed surveys.<sup>59</sup>

However, here a second point needs to be addressed. John Blake interpreted the exportation of the Irish to the English New World based on a contemporary seventeenth-century interpretation: 'By transporting Irish rebels the English government might hope to kill two birds with one stone. They might, as the Venetian secretary in England recorded, simultaneously destroy Catholicism in Ireland and satisfy the labour hunger in the Colonies'.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, such a simplistic interpretation fails to make sense of the staggering implications of transportation is that it flooded the colonies with Catholics, especially when the population in the colonies was quite low. Moreover, these statistics do not reflect the large population

---

<sup>58</sup> It has been claimed that up to 20 per cent of the Irish shipped to the New World died en route. See A. B. Ellis, 'White Slaves and Bondservants in the Plantations', *Argosy*, 6 May 1883.

<sup>59</sup> Akenson, *If the Irish Ran the World*, pp. 189–204.

<sup>60</sup> John W. Blake, 'Transportation from Ireland to America, 1653–60', *Irish Historical Studies* (1943), pp. 267–281, pp. 268–9.

of Irish individuals who were already in Montserrat and St Christopher, nor do they take into account the unknown number of other Catholics from the British Isles – and other origins – who had set out for the colonies and arrived in places like Maryland and Virginia, and even Massachusetts. The higher end of the figures is not impossible, for the population of the English Caribbean in 1640 has been estimated at 30,000 and the population of English North America at 26,000.<sup>61</sup> Twenty years later the population had doubled, although the rate of growth was much greater in North America as its population had risen to 75,000. Catholics were sent to all of the North American colonies, even Massachusetts. At least 400 Irish servants arrived on the ship the *Goodfellow* in the 1650s, mostly women and children.<sup>62</sup> One report from the period states that the Massachusetts colony rejected the arrival of Irish Catholic priests, although not labourers, but by 1654 Massachusetts passed legislation requiring a 50 pound fine be paid for any male Irish servant brought into the colony, on account of their known 'hostility to the English nation'.<sup>63</sup> The particular opposition to priests would have been consistent with a 1647 law prohibiting Jesuits entering the colony on pain of death, but also combined with a belief that the presence of a small number of Catholic servants within the colony would be safe if they were restricted from access to Catholic clergy. With regards to the labour force in the Caribbean, we must also remember Hilary Beckles's claim that Barbados required an influx of 6,000 servants a year to ensure that its labour force did not

---

<sup>61</sup> Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> John P. Prendergast, *The Cromwellian Settlement of Ireland* (New York, 1868), Appendix VI, pp. 244–246.

<sup>63</sup> Michael J. O'Brien, *Pioneer Irish in New England* (New York, 1937), pp. 32–48.

decrease, although as the century progressed this was ameliorated by the increased trade in black slaves.<sup>64</sup> No systematic records exist for the flow out of Ireland, but Bristol kept very good records for the traffic of indentured servants. Between 1654 and 1686, 10,394 indentured servants left Bristol for the colonies.<sup>65</sup> In this respect, even the smaller estimate of 10,000 Irish in less than a decade represents a large number.

The bulk of those transported by the Interregnum policy from Ireland arrived in Barbados, so it is no wonder that Richard Dunn asserts that by the mid-seventeenth century the Catholic Irish 'constituted the largest block of servants on the island'.<sup>66</sup> Anthony Biet, a French Jesuit who visited the island in 1654, estimated the Catholic population of Barbados to have numbered about 2,000.<sup>67</sup> This certainly included the Irish contingent, as he noted in his diary that an Irishman recognised him to be a priest and despite a lingual impasse spoke to him in the 'corrupt language' of Mediterranean sailors and 'almost fell to his knees in front of me, once again making the sign of the cross, and recited the Lord's Prayer in Latin, the Hail Mary, and Credo and the De Profundis to certify that he believed in the prayer for the dead, and he told me he was Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman'.<sup>68</sup> The story gives some insight to the desperation Catholics on the island felt due to the lack of a

---

<sup>64</sup> Beckles, 'White labour', p. 72.

<sup>65</sup> Beckles, 'White labour', p. 71.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 69.

<sup>67</sup> Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', p. 38.

<sup>68</sup> Jerome S. Handler, 'Father Antoine Biet's Visit to Barbados in 1654', *The Journal of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society* 32 (1965–1966), pp. 56–76, pp. 60–1.

clerical presence and the centrality of clergy for access to the sacraments. There were, however, at least a few Catholic priests shipped to Barbados in the 1650s to serve as indentured servants and they no doubt ministered where they could, but being servants their movements would have been strictly limited.

By 1657 the governor of Barbados estimated that half of the 4,000 militiamen on the island were Irish.<sup>69</sup> The evidence suggests that even in unaccommodating circumstances, the Irish Catholics maintained their adherence to Catholicism and the colonial government of Barbados seems to have done little to oppose or alter this, apart from restricting the travel abilities of priests. Of course changes in political circumstances could affect this. The outbreak of war between England and Spain in 1654 prompted the governor of Barbados to declare:

Myself and Council having taken into consideration (amongst other reasons inducing them hereunto); the considerable number of Irish, freemen and Servants, within this Island, and the Dangerous consequences, in this Juncture of time, of Wars betwixt the Common wealth of Englande and Spain, both in Europe and here in America, that may ensure to this Place upon the appearance of an Enemy, if the Irish and such others as are of the Romish Religion, should be permitted to have any sort of Arms or Ammunition within their Houses or Custody, or at any time to wear or go Armed: have thought it necessary for the better security of this Place, and continuance of Peace

---

<sup>69</sup> Hilary M. Beckles, 'A 'Riotous and Unruly Lot', p. 508.

thereof, to order, that all such as are of the Irish Nation, or known or reputed to be Recusants, be forthwith Disarmed.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that the Irish and other Catholics were known to persist in their faith seems to have troubled the councillors little. Only the prospect of solidarity with an immediate enemy on religious grounds appears to have brought the matter any degree of urgency. Of greater concern were the sheer number of Irish and the potential threat they posed should they unite in opposition to the authorities. This sentiment was voiced by one member of the Barbadian Assembly in 1667, when he declared, 'We have more than a good many Irish amongst us, therefore I am for the downright Scott, who I am certain will fight without a crucifix about his neck'.<sup>71</sup> The governor confirmed that year the presence of 2,000 Irish on Barbados.<sup>72</sup> Such concerns were not simply the product of paranoia, for in the 1640s an Irish servant was identified as the ringleader in a rebellion. Their increasing number simply heightened concerns. By 1660 40 per cent of the white population of Barbados was Irish.<sup>73</sup> In 1668 the white population of Barbados was approximately 20,000. John Grace, an Irish Jesuit who had spent three years travelling through the Caribbean, reported to his superiors in 1669 that there were 8,000 Catholics on Barbados.<sup>74</sup> The figures match up neatly and are plausible.

---

<sup>70</sup> Gwynn, 'Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies', p. 238.

<sup>71</sup> National Archives, American and West Indies Colonial Papers, CO 1/21, fol. 108.

<sup>72</sup> W. N. Sainsbury (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and the West Indies, 1661–1668* (London, 1880), p. 466.

<sup>73</sup> Beckles, 'White Labour', p. 66; Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', p. 39.

<sup>74</sup> Gwynn, 'Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies', p. 257.

The concern over the threat of Irish insurrection as well as their replacement by a heartier African slave class, which came to be preferred and better treated than indentured servants, marginalised the Irish to the lowest class on the island. Another report from 1667 claimed they had largely been relocated to the poorer land, in the north of the island where 'are thrust together ye poore Catholiques on 2017' acres – a small area considering that contemporary estimates measured the whole island at 135,076 acres.<sup>75</sup> This group was largely comprised of Irish who had completed their indentures and had been freed, but what characterised them was that they were 'Catholique'. However, as Aubrey Gwynn has asserted, 'liberty of conscience' continued to be extended, no doubt because there was little alternative and because access to priests was sporadic and limited.<sup>76</sup> Despite this, Jennifer Shaw has argued that the community maintained Catholic practices, particularly around birth and death.<sup>77</sup>

### **Opportunities for Catholics**

Another case study is enlightening with regard to the place of Catholics in the English colonies. Jamaica, which was taken from the Spanish in 1655, presented the English governing authorities with a substantial challenge in terms of control. The island was significantly larger than any of its other Caribbean colonies and contained a large Maroon population hostile to their presence and which waged guerrilla campaigns

---

<sup>75</sup> Gwynn, 'Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies', p. 252.

<sup>76</sup> Gwynn, 'Documents relating to the Irish in the West Indies', p. 253.

<sup>77</sup> Shaw, 'Island Purgatory', p. 131.

from the mountainous interior. A major component of the military force that took the island had been collected by the English fleet from Barbados and comprised freemen and indentured servants – fully 3,300 of them. Upon successfully dispossessing the Spanish, these men were offered freeholds on the island. How many stayed is difficult to ascertain, but the demand for bolstering the population remained. In 1662 the crown, at the request of the governor of Jamaica, Thomas Windsor, ordered the Assembly of Barbados to advertise in every parish that Jamaica offered 30 acres of land to any freeman who settled there and that they would be transported at the government's expense. Among the incentives extended was religious freedom for Catholics and Quakers.<sup>78</sup> This policy no doubt appealed to the poor Catholics reported in the north of Barbados. To sweeten the deal, the transport of servants garnered an additional 30 acres per freeman and 30 acres for the servant after completion of a specified period of service. It was a successful policy, and in 1670 Thomas Modyford submitted a report of the planters on the Island.<sup>79</sup> O'Callaghan has interpreted this information to suggest that 10 per cent of the island's 717 planters were Irish.<sup>80</sup> Importantly this only included the planters, and many of these individuals no doubt brought labour with them, including other Irish and Catholics. In the first half of the 1670s at least another 500 Irish servants arrived.<sup>81</sup> The growing population became an important constituency on the island,

---

<sup>78</sup> Sainsbury (ed.), *CSPC, America and the West Indies, 1661–1668*, pp. 96–7, 181 (# 635).

<sup>79</sup> Sainsbury (ed.), *CSPC*, 1669–74, pp. 99–103.

<sup>80</sup> O'Callaghan, *To Hell or Barbados*, p. 159.

<sup>81</sup> Smith, *Colonists in Bondage*, p. 334.



to the extent that by the 1680s the heavy handed governor Christopher Monck, second duke of Albemarle, marshalled the support of the island's Catholic Irish population and the remnants of the buccaneers to counteract the recent ascendancy of the large planter class.<sup>82</sup> Again on Jamaica Catholics comprised a significant portion of the militia and when John Taylor visited Port Royal in 1687 he found Anglicans, Presbyterians, Quakers, Catholics and Jews all worshiping in their own buildings.<sup>83</sup> In 1688 a building in St Iago, called 'the Convent', was given to Catholics to use as a chapel.<sup>84</sup> But life in the colonies did not disconnect the inhabitants from the wider political sphere. News of James II's removal prompted 130 armed Irish servants to rise up in the name of the king and to sack the English owned plantations.<sup>85</sup> Hence the clout of the Catholic Irish presence on the island was significant.

Apart from these cases of large Catholic groups, Catholics also served as an important source of labour in other colonies. Edward Terrar has argued that more Catholics made their way to Virginia and the West Indies than Maryland, due to the large number of Irish who entered indentured service.<sup>86</sup> However, Catholics could even be found in the rigorously Puritan towns of Massachusetts. The case of Goody

---

<sup>82</sup> Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 160.

<sup>83</sup> Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 184; Kingston, National Library of Jamaica, MS 105, John Taylor, 'Mulum in Parvo or Taylor's History of his Life and Travells in America and other parts . . .', 3 vols (ex-Phillipps MS 9251), f. 504.

<sup>84</sup> James Robertson, 'Re-writing the English Conquest of Jamaica in the Late Seventeenth Century', *The English Historical Review* 117 (2002), pp. 813–839, p. 833.

<sup>85</sup> Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 134.

<sup>86</sup> Terrar, *Liberation Theology*, p. 93; Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', p. 48.

Glover, a Gaelic Irish speaking washerwoman in Boston tried and executed for witchcraft in 1688, is interesting in this regard. Goody was accused of bewitching children, and found to be in possession of dolls and unusual images, but, scholars have argued, may only have been attempting to replicate the material and devotional culture of the Catholicism of her youth.<sup>87</sup> Isolated from an established Catholic community, she may have been doing the best she could to maintain her cultural traditions. But it is unlikely that Goody was alone, as 400 other Irish children had arrived in the 1650s and were likely to have remained. Moreover, a French Huguenot in Boston in the 1680s reported that French Catholics in the city attended the French-speaking Huguenot church. In this situation it appears the lure of worshipping in a familiar language in a foreign culture overrode the outstanding doctrinal issues.<sup>88</sup> Yet the situation is more complex than this, because the report also noted that Catholic Irish also attended the church. Perhaps in this regard the liturgy of Huguenot worship offered another marginalised community a less officious option than the Puritan churches. Moreover, attending a Protestant church likely alleviated the concerns of the magistrates. Albeit this raises another issue, which is that the availability of ministration – and its quality – no doubt affected some people's religious choices. A governor of the Leeward Island colonies observed in 1677 that the population entertained 'as many Various Religions as at home, but as

---

<sup>87</sup> Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England, from Its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698* (Hartford, CT, 1820), ii. 458.

<sup>88</sup> E. T. Fisher, *Report of a French Protestant Refugee, in Boston, 1687* (Brooklyn, NY, 1868), p. 30.

all, or most doe frequent the Churches when they like the parson, or when a fitt of Devotion Comes vpon them ... I Cannot tell the Variety of their Religions'.<sup>89</sup>

Accessibility to the ministration of Catholics was at best patchy. The two priests that accompanied the groups of Irish migrants in the archbishop of Tuam's 1637 report were dead within two years. Immediate support did not come from Ireland.<sup>90</sup> The English missions focused on Maryland, while a number of priests passing through the Caribbean during the century submitted reports emphasizing the need for priests to serve the Catholic populations on the English islands. Spanish priests made few inroads and the only other real support came from occasional French ministries. Visits to Catholics on English islands were only ever peripheral trips and in certain contexts complicated the situation, particularly for Catholics on St Christopher. The general rule is that Catholics population persevered for long periods without the ministry of a priest.<sup>91</sup> The only internal factor that significantly affected the treatment of Catholics was the sudden rise and fall of James II. His open Catholicism and indulgence for Catholic worship was adopted in several colonies, including Barbados and St Christopher, and led to the appointment of Catholics to high profile positions. However, the Glorious Revolution necessitated a swift about face and the need for colonial governments to distance themselves from their previous leniency.

---

<sup>89</sup> TNA, CO 1/38, No. 65, fol. 167; Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', p. 30.

<sup>90</sup> Matteo Binasco, 'The Activity of Irish Priests in the West Indies: 1638–1669', *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* 7:4 (2011), [http://www.irlandeses.org/imsla2011\\_7\\_04\\_10\\_Matteo\\_Binasco.htm](http://www.irlandeses.org/imsla2011_7_04_10_Matteo_Binasco.htm) (accessed 15 November 2014).

<sup>91</sup> Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, p. 55; Aubrey Gwynn, 'Early Irish Emigration to the West Indies (1612–1643)', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* (1929), pp. 377–393.

This primarily took the form of destroying places of worship that had been constructed, cracking down on masses occurring in private residences, and removing Catholic priests. Persecution of individual Catholics was predominantly limited to those who had rapidly risen to favour under James.<sup>92</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter is not simply about locating Catholics geographically in the early modern British Atlantic, although it has been argued they could be found throughout. Instead, the point is that the Catholics inhabited a liminal, but integral, space at the frontier of English colonial expansion. While their faith made them undesirable at home, the need for a population to secure English control of contested spaces in the New World made them a useable resource. For Catholics, the limitations imposed upon them in Britain and Ireland could make the colonies appear as an option in which possibility outweighed familiar limitations. The role of Catholics in this space was not valueless or even powerless. Catholics represented a necessary mortar in the building of empire. Their presence was essential to providing a physical presence (a population), labour, and military strength as militiamen in what was in many ways throughout the seventeenth century a vastly over-extended colonial project. While the authorities of the metropolis and their rhetoric may have denigrated the Catholic faith, it had to be tolerated, personally if not institutionally – and that beyond the expectations of a great deal of historiography. Early backers of

---

<sup>92</sup> Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', pp. 115–21.

colonisation in Virginia articulated the importance of accepting 'colonists from every source', including Catholics and other religious nonconformists.<sup>93</sup> This was because, as Kevin Butterfield has articulated, the 'exigencies of life in the New World required a certain amount of flexibility'.<sup>94</sup> Others scholars have noted how the exportation of Catholics and separatists to the New World served the double-edged purpose of removing undesirables from England and Ireland, while providing bodies for the struggle against Spain for New World expansion.<sup>95</sup> It was in this respect that Sir Francis Crosby proposed in 1628 for ten regiments of Irish soldiers, in which the majority of officers were Protestants, to be sent to a 'rich and fruitful part of America, not inhabited by any Christians'.<sup>96</sup> Thus, in the right context, Irish Catholics could possess a distinct value.

This was not a new phenomenon. It is indicative of what David Edwards has argued for late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century Ireland, where English Catholics were allowed to settle to secure English rule. Yet there is another side to this coin. English Catholics chose to go to Ireland because they believed they could practice their Catholic faith more easily and political and financial advancement could be attained without the limitations their Catholicism represented in England.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Theodore K. Rabb, *Jacobean Gentleman: Sir Edwin Sandys, 1561–1629* (Princeton, NJ, 1998), p. 346; Kevin Butterfield, 'Puritans and Religious Strife in the Early Chesapeake', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (2001), pp. 5–36, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> Butterfield, 'Puritans and Religious Strife in the Early Chesapeake', p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Rabb, *Jacobean Gentleman*, p. 322.

<sup>96</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial, America and West Indies (1574 – 1660)*, p. 95.

<sup>97</sup> David Edwards, 'A Haven of Popery: English Catholic Migration to Ireland in the Age of Plantations'.

In Ireland, being English trumped being Catholic in the eyes of the state. In the New World, an individual's being a subject of the crown could trump concerns over his or her religious confession. The argument by Shaw and Block that the Irish represented an Atlantic people without an empire must be qualified. The fear for the English government reflected the possibility that Catholics, and Irish Catholics in particular, would opt for allegiance to a Catholic foreign power such as Spain, or latterly France. However, most Irish men and women did not pursue this course, probably because in so doing they would have been dispossessed of any claim to citizenship in an empire. The experience of those numerous Irish men who served in Spanish military service and profited by Spanish titles and estates is not typical of the majority.<sup>98</sup> Instead, those British or Irish Catholics who cast in their lot with Spain, with the exception of members of the military or mercantile elites, became traitors and outcasts from the English empire and found an equally marginalised position with no guarantee of rights in the Spanish empire.<sup>99</sup> In the case of Montserrat, such uncertainty was used to encourage the Irish not to side with the French in 1689, but instead 'by cordially uniting with us they may rationally promise to themselves to secure the island and for the future to live happily and with esteeme among us, and even as to their Religion may have some toleration and allowance'.<sup>100</sup> By the early 1670s Catholics played an important role in the military potential of a number of

---

<sup>98</sup> Block and Shaw, 'Subjects without an Empire', pp. 59–60

<sup>99</sup> For a recent study of the limitations of Irish admission into Spanish society see Ciaran O'Sceá, 'Special Privileges for the Irish in the Kingdom of Castile (1601–1680): Modern Myth or Contemporary Reality?', in David Worthington (ed.), *British and Irish Emigrants and Exiles in Europe: 1603–1688* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 107–124.

<sup>100</sup> Block and Shaw, 'Subjects without an Empire', pp. 57–8; TNA, C)152/37 no. 83.

islands. According to Sir Charles Wheler's 1672 report, Irish (presumably mostly Catholic) comprised: 'near all' the 800-1,000 men on Monsterrat; 'the greater part' of the 120 militia men in the Leeward Quarter, most of the 60 in the English Quarter and two-thirds of the King's two regiments on St Christopher; at least half of the 200 men on Guadaloupe; and, one-fifth of the 1,200 mustered on Nevis.<sup>101</sup>

Even those Catholics who arrived in Barbados as the weakest and lowest rung in the colonial milieu had a high value in the planters' social structure. And some, particularly those that participated in the conquest of Jamaica or the subsequent policy of relocating planters to Jamaica, gained land, wealth, and freedom that would have been beyond the prospects available to them in the British Isles. Yet life abroad did not necessarily sever ties to home or to culture. Some who found financial success made generous donations to the communities that they left at home. The brothers Nicholas and George Rice arrived in Barbados in the 1660s and at their respective deaths in 1677 and 1686 they left money for the Catholic clergy and the poor of their hometown of Limerick. They also left small fortunes to their fellow inhabitants in St Philips parish on Barbados, including 50,000 pounds of sugar for establishing a hospital and an annual grant of 10,000 pounds for its sustention. While the Rices were unusual, they do illustrate how Catholics could profit from colonial opportunities.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps an even more important example is Cornelius Bryan, an Irishman who famously received twenty-one lashes in 1656 for declaring while refusing to eat a tray of meat 'that if there was as much English Blood in the

---

<sup>101</sup> Sainsbury (ed.), *CSPC* 1669–74, pp. 444–7.

<sup>102</sup> Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', pp. 247–8.

Tray as there was meat he would eat it'.<sup>103</sup> While this declaration has often been used to highlight the antipathy between English planters and the Irish transportees of Interregnum policies, Block and Shaw have demonstrated an important and often overlooked fact. Despite being ordered to leave Barbados, Bryan stayed and prospered. At the time of his death in 1686, he left his wife and six children a "mansion house", twenty-two acres and 'eleven negroes with their increase'.<sup>104</sup> Although an unwilling arrival in Barbados, Bryan prospered in the West Indies.

This is not to argue that the colonies represented a land of milk and honey. Most free planters sought to make their fortunes as quickly as possible and then to return home. Life in the colonies could be brutal and degrading, as the majority of Catholic migrants knew, but even then they fulfilled essential roles in the colonial world and the authorities in the colonies knew they depended heavily upon them – and as long as the English colonial Atlantic remained a frontier, they were essential and indispensable. Only when increasing competition for space within the colonies arose in the eighteenth century did the anti-Catholic rhetoric increase, but even then it was viewed in many places as a deviation from past realities. When in Antigua, for instance, the harshest anti-Catholic legislation in the colonies was attempted by the island assembly in 1718–9, a number of their Protestant neighbours objected on the grounds that numerous Catholics had been long established on the island, had

---

<sup>103</sup> Bridgetown Public Library, Lucas MSS, Reel 1, 179. Barbados Minutes of Council, Law against 'persons that give out mutinous language, 15 January 1656'; Cambridge University Library, Royal Commonwealth Society Library, Davis MSS, Box 12, no. 1, cited in Beckles, 'A Riotous and Unruly Lot', p. 513.

<sup>104</sup> Block and Shaw, 'Subjects without an Empire', pp. 33–4.



proven their loyalty to the government, were important to the community and that their departure threatened to depopulate the island.<sup>105</sup> On this occasion the assembly, representing plantation owners eager to extend their holdings, did not agree. However in many places in the English Atlantic world, despite official policies of state, Catholics continued to be accommodated.

---

<sup>105</sup> Johnston, 'Papists in a Protestant World', pp. 285–9.