



ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT

The Politics of Outrage: Violence, Policing, and the Archive in Colonial Ireland

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century in Ireland, agents of the colonial state like the police, along with the administrators that they served, forged an association between political motivations and Irish agrarian violence. They did so not only through the policing of Irish violence, but through the methods used by the colonial state to categorize, process, record, and archive it. Central to this endeavor was the category of “outrage.” Using this category, the Irish Constabulary created a record that impressed an association between Irish violence or criminality and political resistance. Because the British colonial state had control over the production of the archive, it also dictated the metanarratives present in this “archive of outrages” that gave form and function to the colonial state’s fears that Irish violence represented a budding insurrection or a desire to fracture the Union. By perpetuating this logic in document and archival form, Dublin Castle (the seat of the British government’s administration of Ireland) helped create the very demon that it sought to exorcise—that of Irish nationalist action and sentiment.

On 3 December 1896, a widow named Bridget Salmon received notice from her landlord, the absentee Marquess of Sligo, that she was being evicted from her home in Carrowkennedy, County Mayo, for non-payment of rent.¹ Although she protested the eviction on behalf of herself and her eight children, she was ultimately replaced by the Scahill family. In response, Salmon spent the next several years harassing the Scahills. On 6 May 1897, she encountered the Scahill patriarch, Peter Scahill, in the town of Westport and proceeded to hit him in the back with a shovel. Police arrested her for assault, and she was sentenced to one month’s imprisonment.² When on 31 July 1898 about fourteen cartloads of turf belonging to Scahill were “maliciously set fire to,” the investigating constable maintained that there

¹ Bridget’s name is spelled as both “Salmon” and “Sammon” in the archive. I use “Salmon” throughout the article. “Prosecution of Mrs. Salmon,” 28 September 1898, “Bridget Salmon [Bridget Sammon], widow, Carrowkennedy, Westport, County Mayo: eviction,” CSO/RP/1918/737 [hereafter cited as Salmon File], National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland [hereafter cited as NAI]. Absentee landowners were common in Ireland (though not as universal as sometimes depicted). Often, they were Irish peers who spent little time in Ireland, preferring to hire local agents or “middlemen” to manage their estates in their stead. These agents collected rent (or employed someone for the purpose), oversaw evictions, and parceled out land for tenancy. For more about absenteeism and its prevalence in Ireland, see Michael J. Winstanley, *Ireland and the Land Question, 1800–1922*, 1st ed. (London, 1984), 11–13.

² The National Archives of the UK [hereafter cited as TNA]: CO 904/34, “Return of Prosecutions dated 1897,” entries for Bridget Salmon.

was “no doubt” that Salmon was responsible for this “genuine outrage” because she was “constantly annoying Scahill.” In the constable’s estimation, Salmon was “purposefully annoying Scahill in order that he may summon her [to court] and thereby make herself conspicuous.” This was not merely an interpersonal dispute, he implied. “She is no doubt encouraged by the [United Irish League] leaders in Westport,” the constable declared, “and expects to get some money from them.”³ There was some truth to this claim, as the Irish Member of Parliament William O’Brien founded the nationalist United Irish League in 1898 in part to advocate for people who shared Salmon’s fate.⁴

Salmon’s experiences with eviction and conviction, and those of others in a similar situation, were a catalyst for a much larger national political movement. In fact, Salmon’s case caused widespread agitation in Mayo where Scahill was constantly harassed and boycotted for being a “landgrabber”—a politically charged label applied to those who took over a farm from which the previous tenant had been evicted. An entire police barrack had to be established on the property to protect Scahill and to preserve peace in the region. This was done at great cost to the British administration, which estimated the expense of maintaining a police presence at somewhat over £2,000, an exorbitant sum compared to the rent Salmon owed, which totaled just over £14.⁵

Salmon’s numerous conflicts with the Scahill family generated a massive police file: nearly 250 pages of detailed police reports and other related records. This archive constructed Salmon as an individual with an agenda: an activist who sought to challenge the system of landlordism, deny the judicial authority of Dublin Castle, and work with, or on behalf of, political organizations that espoused a nationalist platform. Salmon was certainly willing to take the charity offered to her by William O’Brien, who helped raise funds to support her and her children and whose campaigning on her behalf gave her case widespread publicity. But when we strip back the nationalist politics attributed to Bridget by the very archive through which she has a historical afterlife, a much more complicated picture emerges.

Most likely Bridget Salmon was not a radical resister, despite police attempts to portray her as one. She was, however, a vulnerable widow and mother who was angry at her eviction and who bitterly resented the man who had taken over her home. Her behavior suggests motives that were not broadly political, but deeply personal. Yet the archive of Salmon’s infractions cast her as a calculating dissident and puppet of the United Irish League, transforming her from a victim of extractive land policies and coercive state power into a shrewd political operator. This metamorphosis was the effective work of the gravitational center of police knowledge in Ireland: the category of “outrage.”

As evidenced by the case of Bridget Salmon, the very methodology used by the colonial state in nineteenth-century Ireland to comprehend, categorize, process, record, and archive Irish violence was a political practice. The keystone of this practice was the category of outrage. By using this category, agents of the colonial state like the police, along with the administrators they served, associated and institutionalized Irish agrarian violence as inherently political in its meaning and subversive in its intentions. This effect is apparent from both the content of the archive of outrages and its form and function. Bridget Salmon’s file, one among innumerable such reports about outrages in Ireland, exemplifies how the category of outrage translated many forms of Irish aggression and discontent into sedition. Although Irish people developed indigenous forms of political resistance—nationalist or otherwise; violent and nonviolent—what might have been ordinary crimes or intensely local feuds were, once refracted through the prism of outrage, transformed into acts of political rebellion with nationalist implications. It was thus through its archive of outrages that the

³ “Report of Outrage,” 1 August 1898, Salmon File, NAI.

⁴ Philip Bull, “The Formation of the United Irish League, 1898–1900: The Dynamics of Irish Agrarian Agitation,” *Irish Historical Studies* 33, no. 132 (2003): 404–23, at 408.

⁵ “Co. Mayo Eviction: Reinstatement of a Former Tenant,” *Dublin Daily Express*, 5 June 1908, 4.

Irish Constabulary produced the very demon that it sought to exorcise: widespread Irish political resistance and anti-British sentiment.

Decoding Outrage

The term “outrage” has long been used in both Britain and Ireland, where it frequently described moral and social transgressions associated with gendered violence, especially rape.⁶ The term “outrage” radiated immorality and depravity; its origins as a descriptor for rape and other kinds of sexual crimes meant that those actions designated as outrages violated not just legal and socio-political norms, but also gender and sexual norms. This use of outrage as a byword for Irish violence thus conveyed an ever-present undertone of sexual offense that gave the term civilizational significance. In 1822, for example, the *Glasgow Sentinel* described the abduction and rape of Miss Honorah Goold as an “unparalleled outrage” that resulted from Irish people’s “thralldom” to a “lawless and horrid system” that was “unexampled in the annals of civilized society.”⁷ Maryann Valiulis has argued that Ireland claimed a right to independence based on its difference from England, specifically that Ireland was “virtuous” by comparison.⁸ The mobilization of the term “outrage”—communicating as it did civilizational degeneracy in terms of sexual violence, criminality, and barbarousness—was thus a potent weapon to attack Irish claims to virtuousness, to condemn the Irish as backward and uncivilized due in part to their base desires and lack of self-control, and thus to affirm their subservient status within the Union.

In Ireland, the term’s application to political activities gained traction in the mid-eighteenth century, when secret societies like the Whiteboys, active from the 1760s, and later the Rightboys used acts of violence to protest land issues such as enclosure.⁹ Contemporaries drew on outrage as an existing language of transgression to describe what they considered to be the horrors of illegal punishment, crimes against person and property, and crude peasant justice. For example, in 1787 Denis Browne, an Irish parliamentarian from County Mayo, gave a rather ominous portent about Rightboy outrages in Ireland: “a new power had risen in [Ireland], one who laughed at their edicts; a visionary monarch, a Captain Right, who seemed to have more real strength than the legislature ever had. This royal Will-o-the-Wisp, whom no man could catch, made laws infinitely more effectual, or better enforced, than those of parliament.”¹⁰ According to Browne, the elusive nature of Rightboy power made it impossible to comprehend the extent of the conspiracy and determine the number of participants. Furthermore, operating as it did within and among the Irish people, the Rightboy movement appeared omnipotent, conveying the sensation of an ever-present power that was simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Buttressed by conspiracies of silence, this additional authority within Ireland competed with the Irish

⁶ See, for example, Shani D’Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (London, 1997). For the use of the term in colonial contexts, see Jeremy Neill, “‘This is a Most Disgusting Case’: Imperial Policy, Class and Gender in the ‘Rangoon Outrage’ of 1899,” *Journal of Colonialism & Colonial History* 12, no. 1 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1353/cch.2011.0003>.

⁷ “Abduction of Miss Goold,” *Glasgow Sentinel*, 14 August 1822, 2. For more about abductions in Irish society and the case of Miss Goold, see Kiera Lindsey, “‘The Absolute Distress of Females’: Irish Abduction and the British Newspapers, 1800 to 1850,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 4 (2014): 625–44.

⁸ Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, *Gender and Power in Irish History* (Dublin, 2008), 100. On this argument, see also Averill Earls, “Unnatural Offenses of English Import: The Political Association of Englishness and Same-Sex Desire in Nineteenth-Century Irish Nationalist Media,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 28, no. 3 (September 2019): 625–44.

⁹ For more about the genealogy of the term “outrage,” see Jay R. Roszman, “The Curious History of Irish ‘Outrages’: Irish Agrarian Violence and Collective Insecurity, 1761–1852,” *Historical Research* 91, no. 253 (2018): 481–504. For more about the Whiteboys and Whiteboyism, see Michael Beames, *Peasants and Power: The Whiteboy Movements and Their Control in Pre-Famine Ireland* (Sussex, 1983).

¹⁰ Quoted in George Cornwall Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland and on the Irish Church Question* (London, 1836), 100–01. For more about the Rightboy movement in late eighteenth-century Ireland, see James S. Donnelly, Jr., “The Rightboy Movement, 1785–8,” *Studia Hibernica* no. xvii–xviii (1977): 120–202.

government for the loyalty (or the fear) of the Irish people. As reformer and British politician George Cornwall Lewis later claimed, Browne's histrionics embodied the government's fear that "peasants ... [sought] to substitute their own law for that of the state."¹¹

By the early nineteenth century, the category of outrage also served the interests of those intent on perpetuating British rule over Ireland in the face of nascent nationalist and Catholic agitation. In 1837, the Tory Earl of Roden alleged before the House of Lords that Irish "outrages" were symptomatic of a longstanding "system of conspiracy" that had as its "great and ultimate object" the "destruction of Protestant property, of Protestant life, and the extermination of the Protestant religion in Ireland."¹² The Duke of Wellington, former chief secretary for Ireland (1807–1809) and the prime minister who oversaw Catholic Emancipation in 1829, concurred that "agrarian outrage was the effect of political agitation."¹³ For these individuals, agrarian violence threatened to destabilize the Act of Union and reduce British power and control not just in Ireland, but throughout the world. If the nucleus of the British Empire could be fractured—or at least weakened—then the whole imperial project could implode. By using the category of outrage to highlight the conspiratorial or politically subversive nature of Irish violence and criminality, British and Irish powerholders could mobilize the colonial state to perpetuate the fragile Union, protect Protestant and British investment in Ireland, and preserve the integrity of Britain's imperial preeminence. Thus, the stakes around outrages in Ireland were high.

As Jay Roszman has argued, throughout the nineteenth century the term "outrage" thus communicated the state's "collective insecurity" about Irish violence. British authorities and their Irish allies considered outrages as embodying a "popularly conceived countervailing sovereignty that threatened the sovereignty of the state." Because Irish peasants relied on violence to "enforce their own notions of law and order," the word "outrage" conveyed the impression that Irish agrarian violence represented an alternative authority to that vested in Dublin Castle.¹⁴ The category of outrage therefore captured a fear for Irish—and later, British—powerholders that their control over the country was nominal at best. Yet, it could also be wielded against the state. Indeed, there was a long tradition, dating back to the earliest days of direct British rule in Ireland, of Irish people repurposing the language of outrage to argue for greater rights, to advance political agendas, or to decry state abuses. In 1833, for example, Joseph Hume, a Scottish politician and radical ally of Daniel O'Connell, used the terminology of outrage to denounce the injustice of the mandatory tithe paid to the Church of Ireland and to insist that fault for Irish "outrages" lay with British tithe laws. "Outrages ... were the consequence of the Tithe Bill," he asserted, "and [tithe policy] had converted Ireland from the abode of peace into a scene of confusion and outrage."¹⁵

If "outrage" was a multivalent term, in nineteenth-century Ireland it overwhelmingly described *political* activities that were believed to be impeding the effective administration of law in Ireland, undermining the sanctity of the Act of Union that bound together the heartland of the world's most powerful empire, and expressing a prevailing desire for an independent Ireland. This was especially true after the Home Rule movement gained momentum in the 1870s and the 1880s, after which several powerful and influential socio-political organizations took root in Ireland. These organizations advocated for economic, social, political, and property reform in Ireland and even, in some cases, espoused nationalist

¹¹ Lewis, *On Local Disturbances in Ireland*, 100.

¹² Lord Roden, State of Ireland, 27 November 1837, Parliamentary Debates, Lords, 3rd ser., vol. 39 (1837), cols. 215–16.

¹³ Duke of Wellington, State of Ireland, 27 November 1837, Parliamentary Debates, Lords, 3rd ser., vol. 39 (1837), cols. 281–82.

¹⁴ Roszman, "The Curious History of Irish 'Outrages'," 483.

¹⁵ Joseph Hume, Suppression of Disturbances in Ireland, 8 March 1833, Parliamentary Debates, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 16 (1833), cols. 407–08. The "Tithe Bill" refers to the Composition for Tithes (Ireland) Act of 1832 that mandated tithe composition throughout Ireland.

principles.¹⁶ “Outrage” was thus never a neutral or merely descriptive term, and it became ever more charged with meaning over the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed, as used by the Irish Constabulary, the category of outrage was part of a colonial epistemology that degraded Irish society as backwards or uncivilized and its people as violent or inhumane. But in seeking to interpret and record Irish violence and criminality, the archive of outrages itself produced its own object of surveillance. For, as Margaret O’Callaghan has argued, the British government’s response to the emergence of Irish nationalism was “as generative as Nationalist action.”¹⁷

Many scholars have wrangled with Ireland’s status within and relationship to both the United Kingdom and the British Empire.¹⁸ Between 1801 and 1922, Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and possessed formal legal equality with Scotland, England, and Wales. Ireland sent representatives to Parliament (some of whom occasionally wielded considerable influence) and dispatched soldiers, settlers, and administrators to colonies such as India and Australia.¹⁹ At the same time, however, Ireland’s cultural status was both ambiguous and labile. It was discursively rendered as different from, and inferior to, Great Britain,²⁰ and represented as both monster and maiden.²¹ As numerous scholars have shown, Irish activists seeking greater independence for their country shared nationalist aspirations, tactics of resistance, and political networks with their counterparts in other British colonies, most notably India.²² And, as was the case with other colonial contexts, the British positioned the Irish as racially inferior “others” to justify their subjugation and their exclusion from full participation in the Union.²³ If some scholars have thus positioned Ireland as an “internal colony,” others have argued that “whatever Ireland’s ontological status, examining the country as if it was a colony is analytically useful.”²⁴ A study of Ireland’s archive of outrages suggests that it is best understood in terms of colonial anxiety and alarmism that are not only present in this archive, but constitutive of it. The colonial state’s deployment of the category of outrage determined what constituted the “political,” what was political action, and who was a political subject. The cataloguing and archiving of outrage thus played an

¹⁶ For more about the early Home Rule movement, see David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (London, 1964); and Bruce Kelley, “Isaac Butt and the Founding of the Home Rule Movement,” *History Ireland* 28, no. 3 (2020): 24–27.

¹⁷ Margaret O’Callaghan, *British High Politics and a Nationalist Ireland* (New York, 1994), 7.

¹⁸ See, for example, Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford, 2002); Stephen Howe, “Minding the Gaps: New Directions in the Study of Ireland and Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 135–49; Kevin Kenny ed., *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2005); and Terrence McDonough, *Was Ireland a Colony?: Economics, Politics, and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2005).

¹⁹ See, for example, Barry Crosbie, *Irish Imperial Networks: Migration, Social Communication and Exchange in Nineteenth-Century India* (Cambridge, 2012); and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts and Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, *Ireland’s Imperial Connections, 1775–1947* (Cham, 2019).

²⁰ For an excellent volume on depictions of Ireland and the Irish, see Michael de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798–1882* (Madison, 2004). For a volume that shows the awkward position of the Irish relative to both Britain and other colonized spaces, see Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, 2004).

²¹ The classic work on this subject is L. P. Curtis Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts: A Study of Anti-Irish Prejudice in Victorian England* (Bridgeport, 1968). See also L. P. Curtis Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, 1997); and Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London, 1993).

²² Sikta Banerjee, *Muscular Nationalism: Gender, Violence, and Empire in India and Ireland, 1914–2004* (New York, 2020); Michael Silvestri, “‘The Sinn Féin of India’: Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal,” *The Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 454–86; and M. Silvestri, *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory* (London, 2009).

²³ On British racism against the Irish, see Curtis Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts*; H. L. Malchow, “Frankenstein’s Monster and Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *Past & Present* no. 139 (1993): 90–130; D. G. Paz, “Anti-Catholicism, Anti-Irish Stereotyping, and Anti-Celtic Racism in Mid-Victorian Working-Class Periodicals,” *Albion* (Boone) 18, no. 4 (1986): 601–16.

²⁴ Mark Doyle, *Communal Violence in the British Empire: Disturbing the Pax* (London, 2016), 6. On the “internal colonial” model to describe the United Kingdom in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (London, 1999), 8–12.

essential part in helping to shape the Irish political dissident, a capacious category that could include even Bridget Salmon. In doing so, the colonial state partly produced the very phenomenon it sought to eliminate.

Outrages and the Irish Constabulary

Nineteenth-century powerholders in Britain and Ireland were obsessively, almost fanatically, concerned with the occurrence of violence in the Irish countryside. In the years after 1801, the colonial state in Ireland generated thousands of “state of the country” reports to gauge the effectiveness of its rule based on the frequency and severity of so-called “outrages” in the Irish hinterlands. Dublin Castle apprehensively investigated these outrages for signs of “insurrectionary activity of a political nature” that might suggest a budding revolution.²⁵ While the whole colonial apparatus was concerned with outrages, no institution had as direct a relationship to them throughout the nineteenth century as the Irish Constabulary. Indeed, its foundational mission was to identify and counteract Irish outrages with an efficient, centralized, and thoroughly “modern” professional organization.²⁶ In classic nineteenth-century fashion, police pursued this assignment by generating massive amounts of paperwork, including constable reports, statistical compilations, responses to government inquests, and crime summaries. These genres of records were bonded by the perpetual quest of the Irish Constabulary to label, comprehend, and generate knowledge about outrages in Ireland.

The procedure for doing so was straightforward. Constables in the Irish Constabulary—the boots on the ground who investigated Irish agrarian violence and other crimes—determined whether any infraction constituted an outrage. If it was deemed as such, constables completed a specialized form: the “Report of Outrage,” in use from 1837. These documents were funneled up the chain of the constabulary command to administrators who compiled these reports by county, and then by province. These compilations ultimately ended up in Dublin Castle on the desk of the chief secretary, the head of government in Ireland.²⁷ Every month, intelligence about Irish outrages was assembled and sent to London, where they became hot topics of debate in Westminster.²⁸ At the end of each year, details about outrages in Ireland were distilled into statistical information, which passed through the same bureaucratic channels, eventually ending up in London. Material related to Irish outrages shaped attitudes towards, information about, and policy concerning Ireland and its inhabitants. The archive that contains this information—the archive of outrages—was therefore ineluctably shaped by the lens of police categories and specialized police knowledge, both of which were manifestations of the more general colonial appetite for domination through the control over, and production of, information.²⁹

Classifying and combating outrages was the keystone of policing in Ireland from its earliest inception. Beginning in 1822, Dublin Castle, with the assent of Parliament, created Ireland’s first professional police force, called the County Constabulary.³⁰ The County Constabulary was a well-disciplined, well-armed, and paramilitary force that had as its

²⁵ Galen Broeker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812–36* (New York, 1970), 7.

²⁶ Stanley H. Palmer, *Police and Protest in England and Ireland, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 1988); and Broeker, *Rural Disorder*, 1–7.

²⁷ The lord lieutenant of Ireland, also known as the Irish viceroy, was technically the person in charge of overseeing the country, though the second in command, the chief secretary, was often responsible for operating the state, implementing reforms, and managing the logistics of the British administration in Ireland.

²⁸ On the political consequences of outrages and the influence of the term in Westminster politics, see Jay R. Roszman, *Outrage in the Age of Reform: Irish Agrarian Violence, Imperial Insecurity, and British Governing Policy, 1830–1845* (Cambridge, 2022).

²⁹ For a classic text on this subject, see C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1997).

³⁰ See Broeker, *Rural Disorder*, ch. 8.

primary goals the protection of persons and property, as well as the prevention of outrages.³¹ The latter of these tasks proved troublesome for the new force, as the agitation surrounding the emancipation campaigns of Daniel O’Connell in the 1820s and the tithe war in the 1830s overwhelmed the police.³² In a particularly severe incident at Carrickshock on 14 December 1831, a battalion of thirty-eight police constables were escorting a tithe collector named Butler when a throng of some 1,000 people ambushed them. The mob killed thirteen constables in the immediate melee.³³ The Carrickshock confrontation demonstrated that, despite the evolution of policing, the constabulary did not control the countryside.

In response to the failure of the County Constabulary to quash outrages, the government implemented a further round of reforms in 1836. The engineer of these improvements was Thomas Drummond, whose position as permanent undersecretary (the most senior civil servant within the British administration) gave him immense power to shape and implement policy. With the support of his superiors—the Earl of Mulgrave as lord lieutenant and Lord Morpeth as chief secretary—Drummond helped pass legislation that consolidated the County Constabulary and Robert Peel’s earlier Peace Preservation Force (PPF) into a single professional policing unit: the Irish Constabulary.³⁴ The main effect of this reconstitution was to tighten central control, achieved by placing the Irish Constabulary under the supervision of an inspector general who headed a special police branch of Dublin Castle. In effect, the Irish Constabulary corrected older police systems by circumventing or overriding the authority local magistrates had over the organization and deployment of police power, which meant that by 1836, police power had been monopolized and centralized within Dublin Castle.³⁵ The Irish Constabulary survived in this form for the next century, earning an honorific for its role in suppressing the would-be Fenian Rising in 1867, after which it was known as the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).³⁶

In Ireland, the RIC was a polarizing institution, not least of all because the overwhelming majority of the constables who policed outrages and generated knowledge about the Irish people were themselves Irish Catholics.³⁷ To some, the RIC was a well-organized and efficient body that acted as the “public face of government in Ireland,” used not just for repression, but to “guarantee ... the functioning of civil law.”³⁸ To others, the RIC was an armed, occupying force that used brute strength to keep the Irish in a state of submission.³⁹ RIC duties encompassed everything from investigating crime and enforcing the law, to suppressing illicit distillation and collecting government statistics, to capturing stray dogs and enforcing pet licenses.⁴⁰ Through these duties, the RIC developed a sophisticated system for recording

³¹ Donal J. O’Sullivan, *The Irish Constabularies, 1822–1922: A Century of Policing in Ireland* (Dingle, 1999), 31.

³² For more about O’Connell and his role in Irish politics, see Fergus O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O’Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy, 1820–30* (Dublin, 1985). For more about the tithe war, see Noreen Higgins, *Tipperary’s Tithe War, 1830–1838: Parish Accounts of Resistance Against a Church Tax* (Tipperary, 2002); and Daniel J. Shaw, “An Economic Perspective on the Irish Tithe War of 1831–1838,” *The Journal of European Economic History* 44, no. 3 (2015): 91–140.

³³ Gary Owens, “The Carrickshock Incident, 1831: Social Memory and an Irish Cause Celebre,” *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004): 36–64, at 36–38.

³⁴ For more about the PPF, see Galen Broeker, “Robert Peel and the Peace Preservation Force,” *The Journal of Modern History* 33, no. 4 (1961): 363–73.

³⁵ See Robert Curtis, *The History of the Royal Irish Constabulary* (Dublin, 1871), ch. 5.

³⁶ For more on this history, see Jim Herlihy, *The Royal Irish Constabulary: A Short History and Genealogical Guide* (Dublin, 1997).

³⁷ Elizabeth Malcolm, *The Irish Policeman, 1822–1922: A Life* (Dublin, 2006). See also Elizabeth Malcolm, “Investigating the ‘Machinery of Murder’: Irish Detectives and Agrarian Outrages, 1847–70,” *New Hibernia Review* 6, no. 3 (2002): 73–91.

³⁸ Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848* (Oxford, 1983), 66.

³⁹ Alvin Jackson, *The Two Unions: Ireland, Scotland, and the Survival of the United Kingdom, 1707–2007* (Oxford, 2011), 213.

⁴⁰ See Juliana Adelman, *Civilised by Beasts: Animals and Urban Change in Nineteenth-Century Dublin* (Manchester, 2020), ch. 4.

information and generating knowledge, the nucleus of which was the category of outrage. Because determining and defining outrage was key to the form and function of the Irish Constabulary—and because outrage was intimately associated with political conspiracy against British rule—the purpose of the Irish Constabulary was the identification of Irish political unrest and the suppression of what the police understood to be resistance to British rule.

It is important to note that RIC constables were not the guardians of law or the preventers of crime. Instead, they functioned as shock troops for maintaining the colonial status quo and establishing colonial order. As Mark Neocleous notes, “enforcing order rather than the law ... drives police power.”⁴¹ As the premier colonial police force in the British Empire, the RIC influenced, if not directly inspired, colonial police in the Caribbean, British India, Africa, Palestine, and elsewhere.⁴² The RIC thus modeled how police-generated knowledge worked both to establish colonial order and to suppress political dissent throughout the British Empire. Therefore, as a site that was both at the center of global transformation and was also a “laboratory for empire,” nineteenth-century Ireland provides an important locus for critically examining how the knowledge produced by the police shaped the processes of colonialism, nationalism, and governmentality.⁴³

Policing and the Archive of Outrages

Historians of empire and colonialism know well that archives are subject to their own politics and histories.⁴⁴ As Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler remind us, the “colonial archives on which we are so dependent are themselves cultural artifacts, built on institutional structures that erased certain kinds of knowledge, secreted some, and valorized others.”⁴⁵ Those who work in the archives produced by empire now recognize that rationality and empiricism as organizing principles of the colonial archive are true only in the claims made by the institutions that produced them.⁴⁶ In other words, to claim a totality of archival power (what critics might deem archival fetishism) is to reproduce the hubris of empire through its archival afterlife.⁴⁷

Since much of the knowledge contained within the colonial archive was—and is—framed through the experiences, perspectives, and agency of white, male colonizers,⁴⁸ historians have refocused attention on the need to extract from the dominant archival narrative traces of resistance.⁴⁹ Some have done this by reading the colonial archive against the grain—by

⁴¹ Mark Neocleous, *A Critical Theory of Police Power: The Fabrication of the Social Order* (London, 2021), 19.

⁴² Georgina Sinclair, “The ‘Irish’ Policeman and the Empire: Influencing the Policing of the British Empire—Commonwealth,” *Irish Historical Studies* 36, no. 142 (2008): 173–87, at 179–80; Richard Hill, “Policing Ireland, Policing Colonies: The Irish Constabulary ‘Model,’” in *Ireland in the World: Comparative, Transnational, and Personal Perspectives*, ed. Angela McCarthy (New York, 2015), 61–80.

⁴³ Jane H. Ohlmeyer explains how Ireland served as a place wherein the English, and later the British, worked out their imperial techniques or tested their theories of empire. See Jane H. Ohlmeyer, “A Laboratory for Empire?: Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism,” in *Ireland and the British Empire*, ed. Kenny, 26–60.

⁴⁴ See Antoinette Burton, *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, 2005).

⁴⁵ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997), 17.

⁴⁶ For an excellent summary of many of these debates, see Durba Ghosh, “Another Set of Imperial Turns?,” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 3 (2012): 772–93.

⁴⁷ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993).

⁴⁸ Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London, 2019), 11.

⁴⁹ Subaltern historians were among the most forceful and insightful critics of the colonial archive. See Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (Oxford, 1988), 45–88; Ranajit Guha, “Chandra’s Death,” in *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis, 1997), 34–62; and, of course, the famous essay by Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, 1988), 271–313. For gender and the colonial archive, see Antoinette Burton, “Archive Stories: Gender in the Making of Imperial and Colonial

“mining the archive for knowledge that no one else has found, producing evidence of lives lived in the past that demonstrates something new and original.”⁵⁰ Others have read *along* the archival grain, analyzing the colonial archive not for its empiricism and surface logic, but for its *emotional* resonances.⁵¹ In this sense, colonial archives are organized according to the fears, the anxieties—the fallibility—of those who produced them and those who preserved them. Although the colonial archive reflects the very real power of the state to conceal, reveal, and exert power, it is also a site that expresses both the fears and imaginaries of its producers.⁵² The archive of outrages, then, is the product of its own colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial histories. Its contents reflect not only the investments of the colonial state but are the result of the division of the archive between Britain and Ireland, the destruction or theft of archival material during decolonization, and efforts in the twenty-first century to recover that which was lost.⁵³

The origins of the archive lie in the formation of the Irish Constabulary in 1836 and official attempts to update the arcane and haphazard method of reporting outrages that had existed previously. As part of the 1836 reorganization, Colonel James Shaw Kennedy drafted a standardized form for recording and categorizing outrages. Dubbed “Reports of Outrage,” these updated documents systematically ordered agrarian violence by categories and type.⁵⁴ This evolution in record keeping was the result of a historical moment in which the archive transformed from a container of documents into an active site of policymaking.⁵⁵

In 1837, when the new Reports of Outrage first debuted, there were three broad classifications into which the police sorted all varieties of offenses they deemed to be an outrage: Offenses Against the Person, Offenses Against Property, and Offenses Affecting the Public Peace. Along with the necessary catch-all “Other Offenses,” these general groupings remained consistent throughout the nineteenth century. Within these capacious categories were more focused ways to record and delineate between types of outrages. For example, “Homicide” and “Rape” exist as Offenses Against the Person, while “Incendiary Fire and Arson” and “Demand or Robbery of Arms” were respectively categorized as Offenses Against Property and Offenses Affecting the Public Peace.⁵⁶ Reports of Outrage, which persisted in one form or another until the end of British rule in Ireland, became the standard way to understand Irish agrarian violence; they allowed Dublin Castle to document patterns of resistance, structure them into a condensable format, and crystallize them into new forms of knowledge.⁵⁷

As a technology of documentation, Reports of Outrage were effective because they had an aura of authenticity and scientific, statistical legitimacy. A specialized police force could precisely and consistently keep track of Irish outrages, which in turn helped the government to

Histories,” in *Gender and Empire*, ed. Philippa Levine (Oxford, 2007), 281–94; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York, 1995). Considerable work on this subject has also been done by historians of slavery, such as Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, 2016).

⁵⁰ Ghosh, “Another Set of Imperial Turns?,” 790.

⁵¹ This concept was popularized in the now ubiquitous book by Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009).

⁵² Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2, no. 1–2 (2002): 87–109, at 97.

⁵³ Any person who has spent significant time working in the “Outrage Reports” within the Chief Secretary’s Registered Papers in the National Archives of Ireland is certainly familiar with missing documents, which is an intrinsic feature of this archive.

⁵⁴ TNA: HO 184/111/3, Chief Inspector Circulars, 23 December 1837.

⁵⁵ Asheesh Kapur Siddique, “Paperwork, Governance, and Archive in the British Empire during the Age of Revolutions” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2016).

⁵⁶ “Return of Outrages Specially Reported to the Constabulary Office: No. 6—Return of Outrages specially Reported during each Month of the Year 1880,” Return of Outrages, 1879–1887, NAI.

⁵⁷ For more about the history and usage of these forms, see Roszman, “The Curious History of Irish ‘Outrages,’” 498–502.

draw conclusions about the state of Irish society. Although the reports appear to be a precise chronicle containing accurate information organized in a rational manner, as an archive, we should read them as not reflecting Irish violence or even Irish discontent, but as a method through which the colonial state translated disparate Irish activities into politically motivated outrages.

This dynamic is observable in the design of the reports themselves. In using the category of outrage, the reports not only defined the limits of criminality and illegality, but also linked those unlawful acts to larger political motivations and/or subversive intentions. Often, however, such actions were intensely intimate or invested in local concerns or conditions rather than radically dissident acts of rebellion. For example, when an individual acted as a “landgrabber,” local residents might express their displeasure by boycotting the landlord or threatening the new occupant with violence if they did not return the original inhabitant to their home. Such punishments might include houghing—the cutting of an animal’s hamstrings or, more generally, the mutilation of an animal—which was a traditional method of punishment in rural Ireland that dated back to at least the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Another method, used by clandestine, oathbound fraternal secret societies like the Rockites or Ribbonmen, was the threatening notice or letter meant to intimidate an individual into complying with the organization’s wishes.⁵⁹ Both actions, and the numerous others that constituted traditional forms of agrarian violence in Ireland, were built into the reports as categories of outrage. “Killing, Cutting, or Maiming of Cattle” shares a page with “Administering Unlawful Oaths” and “Taking and Holding Forcible Possession.” Each of these categories was imbued with political meaning by state authorities who stripped these acts of their individual contexts and thus transformed localized and often interpersonal violence into transgressive moments of sedition.

In one poignant example, when evicted from his home in County Sligo in August 1886, Thomas Saunders barricaded himself inside with several others who supported his claim. By refusing to vacate, Saunders was committing forcible possession—a form of outrage that the police associated with the program of land reform and resistance to landlordism espoused by the Irish National Land League (1879–1882). Commonly called the Land League, this organization sought broad reforms in Ireland, especially around issues of land and tenant rights. With its goal of reforming along the “Three Fs”—Fair rent, Fixity of tenure, and Fair sale—the Land League was a response to the economic turmoil of the 1870s and 1880s that saw farmers and smallholders evicted from their lands at extraordinary levels. The Land League quickly gained a mass following within many sectors of Irish society, but particularly among the landless and poor. Its slogan, “the land for the people,” appealed to those who had grown tired of the exploitative system of landlordism, unfair rents, and arbitrary eviction. The resultant “Land War” was a defining moment in the political history of Ireland.⁶⁰ After the Land League was suppressed by the British government in 1882, two successor organizations arose to take its place: the Irish National League (INL, founded in 1882) and the United Irish League (UIL, founded in 1898).

Saunders’s case of forcible possession occurred against the backdrop of this agitation around land reform and property rights. The local sheriff twice unsuccessfully tried to

⁵⁸ For more about houghing, see Martyn J. Powell, “Ireland’s Urban Houghers: Moral Economy and Popular Protest in the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *The Laws and Other Legalities of Ireland, 1689–1850*, ed. Michael Brown and Seán Patrick Donlan (Ashgate, 2011), 139–62.

⁵⁹ For more about the Ribbon Society, see Tom Garvin, “Defenders, Ribbonmen, and Others: Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland,” *Past & Present* 96, no. 1 (1982): 133–55; J. Lee, “The Ribbonmen,” in *Secret Societies in Ireland*, ed. T. D. Williams (Dublin, 1973), 26–35. For more about Captain Rock and the Rockite movement, see James S. Donnelly Jr., *Captain Rock: The Irish Agrarian Rebellion of 1821–1824* (Madison, 2009). For a general history of secret societies and violence in Ireland, see Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, eds., *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest, 1780–1914* (Madison, 2003), “Part I: The Tradition of Violence”.

⁶⁰ For more about the Land War, see Anne Kane, *Constructing Irish National Identity: Discourse and Ritual During the Land War, 1879–1882* (London, 2011); and Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 2014).

evict Saunders, after which a “regular army” of police gathered to assault the farm. As if it were a medieval castle under siege, the RIC used ladders to scale the house, hoping to enter through holes in the roof. The garrisoned individuals hurled projectiles down onto the police, such as boiling water mixed with lime, stones, and even beehives, resulting in two swarms of bees that added to the bedlam of the raid. The police were eventually successful in breaching the farmhouse, arresting twenty-one individuals. One of these defenders of “Saunders’ Fort,” twenty-three-year-old Thomas Larkin, later died in Kilkenny Gaol while serving an eighteen-month sentence for his part in the affray.⁶¹

Although principally a story about an individual and community’s response to eviction, the narrative is contained within a folder of reports about nationalist activities and agrarian outrages in Ireland. When Saunders refused to vacate his smallholding after being evicted, the RIC considered his actions to be not merely the obstinacy of an individual farmer, but as evidence of a program of organized resistance in the region. Furthermore, the death of the young Thomas Larkin became a touchstone for Irish nationalists to critique the heavy handedness of the government and condemn the carelessness with which the colonial state treated Irish life. According to the nationalist *Freeman’s Journal*, “Thomas Larkin was a martyr for the cause of Ireland ... [He] was done to death by Irish landlordism and English misrule.”⁶² In response to such criticism, the RIC provided an “official report” about Saunders’s eviction and Larkin’s death in prison that, by its very inclusion within this folder about Irish nationalism and outrages, reframed Saunders and Larkin as political dissidents rather than obstinate farmers. Thus, through the institutional rationale of the RIC and its professional practices—through the very way that the RIC understood, recorded, and processed the eviction of Thomas Saunders—disgruntled tenants became scheming revolutionaries.

Furthermore, the Reports of Outrage were altered to fit the changing definition of what constituted “political” actions or offenses. The original 1837 Report of Outrages included two categories broadly defined under the umbrella term of party activities: “Display of Party Emblems” and “Playing Party Tunes.” These categories of outrage—although they hardly seem violent or incendiary on their own terms—were organized under the heading “Offenses Affecting the Public Peace” in 1837. Playing party tunes and displaying sectarian emblems were major concerns in the early nineteenth century when the Protestant Orange Order and various Irish Catholic organizations like Ribbonmen regularly clashed.⁶³ Both Orangemen and Ribbonmen had symbols and fables associated with their factions that would have roused the blood of their supporters and raised the hackles of their adversaries. Hence, categories that described factionalism as an outrage against the public peace appeared in the institutional record at a historical moment when the colonial government was particularly concerned with fraternal societies undermining its authority.⁶⁴ By 1880—just after the founding of the Land League—the category of “Threatening Notice or Letter” was divided into two parts and placed within the broader one of “Intimidation.” One half remained the same—intimidation by threatening letter or notice—but the other was intimidation by “other means.”⁶⁵ The addition of this category was a response to a massive undertaking by the Land League to boycott the businesses or properties of those who supported the system of landlordism in Ireland or in some way participated in exploitative land policies. By modifying the categories of outrage, the colonial state was not, however, merely tracking shifting tactics or behavior. The taxonomies through which the RIC understood and sorted the various forms of Irish violence or criminality were part and parcel of

⁶¹ TNA: CO 903/2, Miscellaneous Notes—Series No. I, No. 18, “Death of Thomas Larkin in Kilkenny Gaol,” 1887.

⁶² “Burial of Young Larkin, the Woodford Prisoner,” *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 October 1887, 5.

⁶³ See Sean Farrell, *Rituals and Riots: Sectarian Violence and Political Culture in Ulster, 1784–1886* (Lexington, 2015). For a general history of intra community violence in the British Empire, see Doyle, *Communal Violence in the British Empire*.

⁶⁴ See Roszman, *Outrage in the Age of Reform*, chs. 1–2.

⁶⁵ “Return of Outrages Specially Reported to the Constabulary Office during each Month of the Year 1880,” Return of Outrages, 1879–1887, NAI.

the colonial state's changing definitions of what constituted "political" unrest or insubordination, which remained a moving target.

Suppressing Outrage, Making Resistance

In the days of the Land League and its successors, the RIC unambiguously and tenaciously attempted to portray these organizations as the architects of agrarian violence to delegitimize them, as, at best, sponsoring violence or, at worst, explicitly wielding violence as a weapon for political purposes. The evidence for this connection was circumstantial at best. Even Michael Davitt, the revolutionary turned reformer, was a resolute and outspoken opponent of agrarian violence as a method of enforcing Land League decrees: in 1879 he exhorted that the rallying cry of the present should not be "agitate, agitate," but "organize, organize."⁶⁶ In the same year, Davitt gave a series of speeches in the west of Ireland—one of the areas most affected by agrarian violence—that denounced "personal violence or outrage of any kind against person or property."⁶⁷ Davitt's use of the language of outrage, like that of his fellow Land League leaders, expressed his concern that agrarian violence detracted from the "noble enterprise" of political organization, which could better ameliorate the "accursed system [of landlordism] which had blasted Ireland's prosperity."⁶⁸ By denouncing the Irish "outrage," Davitt borrowed the language of the British government to claim a legitimacy and morality for the Land League that elevated it above the British understanding of Irish politics as messy and marred by violence. Thus, the language and framework of outrage allowed Land League leaders to espouse their own vision of political resistance and activism that was separate from the state's construction of the Land League as political agitators.

Despite the Land League leaders' condemnation of violence, the RIC nevertheless doggedly attempted to connect agrarian violence with Irish reformist organizations. By forging this link, the police drew on a persistent anxiety that had tormented Dublin Castle since the height of the Ribbon, Rockite, Molly Maguire, and Terry Alt movements in the 1810s and 1820s: that nefarious, conspiratorial organizations possessed more influence and legitimacy over the Irish people than the colonial state.⁶⁹ Indeed, a compilation of confidential police reports dating from 1890 constructed exactly this image. One passage about County Cork describes a lengthy criminal conspiracy going back to 1880, when the Land League first appeared in the region. To the constable who wrote the report, the Land League, and later the INL, had created consistent confrontation over land that resulted in the moonlighting and boycotting of both civilians and police.⁷⁰ The report documented that the members of the local INL branch were immersed in this conspiracy, accusing them of "organizing outrage and intimidation." Another example from County Galway claimed that the introduction of the INL into the area saw "disorder revived, boycotting and intimidation became prevalent, and outrages were perpetuated ... to enforce the decrees of the conspirators." In all these doings, according to the report, the Galway branch of the Irish National League took "active part." The intervention of the police to suppress the League and to arrest the "conspirators" produced "quite marvelous results." The only remaining resistance, the report claimed, was a knot of "desperate ruffians" who were the "leading spirits" of the League branches. These men were "capable of committing any crime" and it was only the "constant supervision of the police and the stringent power of the law" that kept them quiet.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Quoted in Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland*, 114.

⁶⁷ "Other Aspects of the Man," *Wicklow People*, 2 June 1906, 6.

⁶⁸ "Other Aspects of the Man," *Wicklow People*, 6.

⁶⁹ James S. Donnelly Jr., "The Terry Alt Movement 1829–31," *History Ireland* 2, no. 4 (1994): 30–35; and Kevin Kenny, *Making Sense of the Molly Maguires* (Oxford, 1998).

⁷⁰ "Moonlighting" refers to clandestine acts of violence that took place under the cover of darkness.

⁷¹ TNA: CO 903/1, "Irish National League, Suppressed Branches: Memorandum as to the reasons which rendered it necessary to suppress the branches of the Irish National League in certain districts in Ireland," undated [hereafter cited as *Suppression of INL Branches*], 5–7.

In counties Kerry and Roscommon, the police went one step further in their assessment of the INL. According to their reports of recent outrages, in Kerry “a regular reign of terror had been established by gangs of moonlighters.” These moonlighters “acted as the police of the League, enforcing their decrees by outrages committed on obnoxious persons on their property.” In Roscommon, “boycotting conspiracies” were prevalent and “there was to a great extent a regular reign of terror in existence,” a state of affairs “absolutely and entirely attributable to the working of the branch of the National League in [the barony of] Castlerea.” It was only because of police support that boycotted persons in Castlerea were able to live, as the League kept the district in a “state of terrorism” that forced people to join their program because the locals “found they could not live in safety if they did not do so.” The report then detailed an archetypical example of such “terrorism.” One old couple, who paid their rents “honestly,” were cowed by moonlighter thugs to the point that they no longer felt safe in their home after dark. They fled, spending several November nights “cowering” in the open bog before finally complying with the League and refusing to continue paying rent to their boycotted landlord.⁷²

In Kerry, the police cited a series of statistics to show that suppressing the Irish National League had a demonstrable impact on the occurrence of outrages. According to their estimate, 209 instances of outrage occurred in Kerry in the year 1886, with 414 persons being partially or wholly boycotted. In 1889, after the suppression of the League in the region, the number of outrages decreased to sixty-three and the number of persons boycotted lowered to twelve. The change, the report assessed, “can be attributed to none other than the suppression of the League” and the “vigorous enforcement” of the law that not only “put down crime and boycotting, but has restored liberty of action to the tenancy.” In Roscommon, suppression and the prosecution of its leading members “crushed the power of the League” and made the district once again “peaceable and orderly.”⁷³

The entire folio is stuffed with such reports, which are themselves steeped in the language of “conspiracy” and the explicit interpretation of the INL as a criminal regime—as quite literally a shadow state positioned as the antithesis to the British government. As these examples show, the police tied the power of the INL to circumscribe an arena of extra-legal jurisdiction—defined by instances of outrage and intimidation—with their own power to discipline and exert authority over the Irish people. Whether local branches of the INL were indeed espousing such a platform or sponsoring the occurrence of violence and boycotting is less important than the fact that the Irish Constabulary made a range of activities and expressions of local discontent into a coherent metanarrative that justified particular forms of police action.

The knowledge that the police produced and the actions that they took in performing their duties relied on the criminalization of the activities of Irish reformist organizations. By mobilizing the category of outrage, the Irish Constabulary depicted itself as the embattled guardian of a just and lawful regime—one that protected the Irish citizenry from extreme nationalist leaders whose myrmidons terrorized the countryside, sowing violence and fear amongst the people. Thus, through the state’s politicization of outrage, we can also read the politicization of the police. Because the RIC had the power to define INL activities as outrages, it baked political subversion and resistance into the dominant narrative about Irish reform organizations like the INL.

This relationship was not just present in reports, however, but constitutive of the archive itself. A typical example that illustrates this point is a document titled “List of Recorded Outrages attributable to influence of the United Irish League.” Included in a folio about police surveillance of UIL activity, the document charged the UIL with implicitly consenting to agrarian violence. The very structure of the document was damning, as it explained an incident and then included a “Motive” section that necessarily linked the incident of

⁷² TNA: CO 903/1, Suppression of INL Branches, 8–11.

⁷³ TNA: CO 903/1, Suppression of INL Branches, 8–11.

“outrage” to UIL actions. For example, in an April 1898 event, Robert McAdams found that his ram’s forehead had been injured by some blunt instrument. In the motive section of the report, the police noted that McAdams held grazing lands at Carrowkeel and Fauleens in County Mayo and in February UIL members had asked him to give these up. McAdams refused. After that confrontation, the people of the town would not work for McAdams, which the report attributed to a UIL boycotting campaign.⁷⁴ In another incident on 4 March 1898, threatening letters were posted on the houses of Thomas and Tobias Joyce, who were graziers, and on the homes of those whose herds they tended.⁷⁵ The notices demanded that the recipients “give up minding stock for the grabbers you are working for, or if not you will be looked upon hereafter as an enemy of the country.” The police report claimed that the motive for the threatening postings was that the “herds were unpopular with the United Irish League by reason of their herding for graziers whose land the League wanted to have subdivided among the among the smallholders.”⁷⁶ In this case, then, police assumed the perpetrators wanted to bully these graziers into repurposing their land for human habitation rather than animal fattening. In both cases, the police entrenched a link between the UIL’s policy of land reform and these “outrages.” Police generated knowledge—petrified in archival form—condemned the UIL as orchestrating acts of “outrage,” which in turn facilitated the policing of the UIL and the criminalization of its tactics.

The letter posted against Thomas and Tobias Joyce, however, reveals that the state’s ability to ascribe political motivations to almost any Irish action by qualifying and cataloguing them as outrages existed alongside the rhetorical expression of Irish nationalist sentiment generated not by the colonial state, but by Irish people themselves. Given that the letter threatened that Thomas and Tobias Joyce would become “enemies of the country,” it clearly reflects underlying nationalist sentiment and political consciousness apart from the state’s construction of the notice as “political” or subversive. However, at the same time, the RIC constable who investigated the incident recorded this transparently nationalist rhetoric as a product of UIL interference rather than populist politics. By blaming the larger national organization for fomenting violence and resistance in the locale, the police circumscribed a domain of unacceptable and dangerous political behavior encapsulated within the organizational structure of the UIL. In doing so, the RIC made what was the palpable expression of existing political and/or nationalist thought into an identifiable problem with a practical solution: the surveillance and regulation of UIL activities. In this way, latent Irish nationalist sentiment and the actions it inspired, as a phenomenon distinct from and outside of state authority, became—through the category of outrage—a usable and useful tool of suppressing nationalism in Ireland.

The experience of Michael Coffey, a shopkeeper and farmer in County Sligo, sheds light on how this connection worked in practice. On 24 April 1886, Coffey took over a farm from which the previous tenant had been evicted after falling into arrears. According to the police report, the local branch of the Irish National League in the town of Gurteen (where Coffey had his business) took up the issue. The INL branch organized a public meeting to denounce Coffey as an enemy of the people and he was thereafter “rigidly boycotted.” Notices were posted that threatened anyone who bought goods in his shop and the police remarked that any person who “spoke to or in any way aided Coffey were boycotted, assaulted, or otherwise intimidated.” His servants and workers left his employ, and he could not buy at fairs or markets. His business was, the report claims, completely destroyed. According to the police, those bold few who did patronize or otherwise support Coffey were summoned before the INL and subjected to a sort of tribunal that browbeat the nonconforming into compliance

⁷⁴ TNA: CO 904/20, “Particulars of Outrages Included in Foregoing List,” No. 5, 13 April 1898.

⁷⁵ A grazer was someone who raised cattle for the market, while a herd looked after the cattle.

⁷⁶ TNA: CO 904/20, “Particulars of Outrages Included in Foregoing List,” No. 2, 4 March, 1898.

with INL protocols.⁷⁷ Ultimately, the police intervened on Coffey's behalf. Eight members of the Gurteen INL branch were charged with criminal conspiracy, four of whom were sentenced to prison terms of three months each. In addition, the editor of the local nationalist newspaper was charged with intimidation and material injury because he had published material about Coffey, and received a sentence of six months' imprisonment. Because of these actions taken by the punitive systems of the colonial state, Coffey's circumstances "commenced to improve" and he was "in no way interfered with" any longer. The police had "fully exposed the action of the League" and proved that its members "could no longer act with impunity."⁷⁸

Coffey's experience with the INL was included in a folio of reports that explained how "the decree[s] of the [Irish National] League" were "enforced by actual outrage committed upon persons who dared to break its rules."⁷⁹ By describing and categorizing the INL boycott of Coffey's business and his exclusion from public life as a case of INL "persecution" and "outrage," the RIC condemned Irish land reform as characterized by violence, intimidation, and illegal organizing. In doing so, the RIC both created and reified the institutional logic that linked together political motives, Irish illegal actions (in this case, boycotting), and INL activity. At the same time, however, by deeming the INL to be political conspirators, police were in fact producing the very enemy that they were trying to defeat. The archival logic of outrage depended on creating political rivals that could justify policing, coercion, and acts of state violence against these illegitimate forces. As an archival form, then, the category of outrage contains an implicit assumption about the political, nationalist motivations of Irish actions—especially those deemed criminal or illegal. The specter of the Irish political dissident and malcontented resister to state authority—summoned by the institutional rationale and professional practices of the Irish police—still haunts the archive of outrages.

Legacies

Beginning in 1919, the Irish War of Independence kicked off nearly two years of intense guerrilla warfare in Ireland between the nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the RIC, which was supplemented by British "Black and Tan" auxiliary troops.⁸⁰ In July 1921, British and Irish leaders called a delicate ceasefire to negotiate a treaty that would end the violence. The outcome of these arbitrations was that a faction of Irish nationalist leaders signed a peace treaty with Britain in December 1921, which effectively ended the Irish War of Independence.⁸¹ This peace treaty stipulated that Ireland would gain independence but would remain formally tied to the United Kingdom as the Irish Free State, which would comprise only twenty-six of the thirty-two counties in Ireland. The remaining six counties were to be partitioned into Northern Ireland, which would remain part of the United Kingdom.⁸² Irish republicans considered this treaty unacceptable. Inspired by the legacy of the martyred leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising, they wanted to preserve the ideal of republicanism and a unified, fully independent Ireland even if it meant continued

⁷⁷ For more about how the INL mimicked a legal system to enforce its authority, see Donald Jordan, "The Irish National League and the 'Unwritten Law': Rural Protest and Nation-Building in Ireland 1882–1890," *Past & Present* 158, no. 1 (1998): 146–71.

⁷⁸ TNA: CO 903/1, "Cases of Persecution and Intimidation that have been successfully grappled with by the Government, 1886–1892," 3.

⁷⁹ TNA: CO 903/1, "The Plan of Campaign: Its Origins, Progress, and Present Aspect," 19.

⁸⁰ See David Leeson, *The Black and Tans: British Police and Auxiliaries in the Irish War of Independence, 1920–1921* (Oxford, 2011).

⁸¹ For more about the Irish War of Independence, see Michael Hopkinson, *The Irish War of Independence* (Montreal, 2002); and Richard S. Grayson, *Dublin's Great Wars: The First World War, the Easter Rising and the Irish Revolution* (Cambridge, 2018).

⁸² For more about the partition of Ireland, see Robert Lynch, *The Partition of Ireland 1918–1925* (Cambridge, 2019).

fighting.⁸³ The result of this rift in Irish leadership was internal tension and violence that erupted into a civil war in 1922, when the Irish Free State came into existence, and ended in 1923.

One of the key moments of this conflict was when IRA troops, led by Rory O'Connor, occupied the Four Courts in Dublin on 13 April 1922, on the night of Holy Thursday. This Easter-adjacent date was significant as it linked the IRA campaign with the Easter Rising of 1916.⁸⁴ The Four Courts had been the principal court of Ireland under British rule, and it was not by happenstance that Irish Republican forces seized this building. "By the seizure, Mr. O'Connor probably hopes that he has put a stop to the British administration of justice at its fount," claimed an unnamed lawyer in the *Irish Independent*. "Even if he is wrong in this," noted this interviewee, "he has, at any rate ... struck a blow not alone at the prestige of the Four Courts, but also of the Irish Administration."⁸⁵ Thus, according to this unnamed lawyer, the Four Court's historical status as a site of power and a symbol of British oppression meant that the IRA rebels who occupied it sent a deliberate message to the Free State government, one that linked them to the injustices of the colonial period.

Free State forces, who established the Provisional Irish government in early 1922 and thus were the incumbent power in Ireland, had by June 1922 grown weary at the presence of the rebels. On 28 June they began an assault on the Four Courts to dislodge the rebellious IRA troops. Free State troops subjected the structure to a bombardment from howitzers.⁸⁶ The capture of the greater part of the massive building was done at midnight through difficult hand to hand fighting at close quarters. The remainder of the rebel forces retreated into a smaller wing under the leadership of O'Connor. At noon on 30 June, as Free State troops began to occupy the Four Courts, there occurred a "terrific explosion" that was of tremendous violence. Under unclear circumstances, O'Connor's troops sprung a mine that blew out the back of the building and caused an intense fire. Facing both gunfire and flame, O'Connor unconditionally surrendered to the Free State troops.⁸⁷

The conflagration destroyed the Four Courts. Observers from several streets away saw "a great flame leap into the air. The atmosphere for some distance around became dark. A thick pall of smoke" hung over the great copper dome. Debris showered all over Inns Quay.⁸⁸ Eventually the inferno was so destructive that the dome collapsed, leaving little more than a shell behind. The explosion had not only destroyed the building, but also everything within it. This proved the lasting tragedy, as the Four Courts contained the Public Records Office for Ireland and thus the records of its administration under British rule. The blast and the resulting fire destroyed "state secrets, church records, property deeds, tax receipts, legal documents, financial data, census returns," and many more precious documents that dated back to the medieval period.⁸⁹ After the explosion, charred remains of national records were picked up in the streets a mile away, some of which were doubtlessly police records because, during the haste of decolonization, the Public Records Office had been used to store a range of official documents.⁹⁰

The victory of independence, the creation of the body of the Irish nation, was scarred in numerous ways by the violence of colonialism—possibly the most significant of which is the annihilation of Irish heritage in archival form. It is undeniable that the destruction of the Four Courts, and the invaluable records contained within, marked a lamentable loss for the history of the Irish people. Perhaps, though, we should understand this moment in a

⁸³ See Bill Kissane, *The Politics of the Irish Civil War* (Oxford, 2005). The major work on the Easter Rising is by Fearghal McGarry, *The Rising: Ireland: Easter 1916*, centenary ed. (Oxford, 2016). For more about the Easter Rising in a global context, see Enrico Dal Lago et al., *1916 in Global Context: An Anti-Imperial Moment* (London, 2018).

⁸⁴ "The 1922 Fire," Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland, <https://virtualeasurey.ie/the-1922-fire>.

⁸⁵ "The Seizure of the Four Courts: Views of an Eminent Lawyer," *Irish Independent*, 18 April 1922, 8.

⁸⁶ "Fall of Four Courts," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 1 July 1922, 9.

⁸⁷ "Four Courts Blown Up," *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, 30 June 1922, 3; and "The Battle of the Four Courts," *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 1 July 1922, 1.

⁸⁸ "The Dublin Fighting," *The Scotsman*, 1 July 1922, 9.

⁸⁹ Ed O'Loughlin, "A New Chapter for Irish Historians' 'Saddest Book'," *New York Times*, 1 April 2024.

⁹⁰ "Fall of Four Courts," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9.

different way. When we read the burning of the Four Courts backwards into the history of the archive that it (partially) contained, it seems a fitting conclusion that one of the great sites of colonial authority in Ireland—represented by the imposing neoclassical structure of the Four Courts—was obliterated not in a powerful stroke of anticolonial action, but by the troubled remnants of colonialism itself. After all, the internecine conflict that destroyed the Four Courts was as much a contest over how to make sense of the legacy of British colonialism in Ireland as it was a battle over the country's future. The literal incineration of state documents symbolized the moment when the worst fears of the colonial state came true: highly politicized Irish violence directed against the British government and its agenda in Ireland imploded the Union and foreshadowed the political turmoil that would afflict the empire in the years to come.

The explosive violence of decolonization—including the Irish War of Independence, the Irish Civil War, and the bitter legacy of partition—suggests that the apparition of Irish political violence as conjured by the colonial state overpowered the confines of the very classification created to describe, delimit, and deny it. The great irony at play here is that by mobilizing the category of outrage to raise the ghoul of Irish political violence, the colonial state provided the Irish with a blueprint for resistance, activism, and nationalist action. Although Irish people generated their own forms of resistance and constructed identities in opposition to British rule—the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century being a prime example—the conceptual framework of outrage imbued every disgruntled Irish dissenter or disruptor with an aura of political significance.⁹¹ Thus, the category of outrage gave considerable power to the Irish resister—power that allowed the Irish to challenge, critique, or condemn British colonial rule in Ireland. In this sense, the incendiary possibility of Irish action was always contained within the category of outrage. Nothing better symbolizes this fact than the smoldering remnants of police knowledge that rained down on Dublin from the ruin of the Four Courts.

In 2017, the National Archives of Ireland, in partnership with the Irish Manuscripts Commission, began a survey of archival material salvaged from the Public Record Office within the Four Courts.⁹² With the assistance of libraries and archives across the United Kingdom, Ireland, the United States, and elsewhere, researchers have created the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland, a free to access online reconstruction of more than a quarter of a million pages of records lost to the fire. According to Dr Peter Crooks, a medieval historian at Trinity College Dublin, “[The project] shows that the collective culture of many countries can be brought together to achieve a goal.”⁹³ The restitution of the archival material lost in the fire at the Four Courts, along with the multinational partnership that has facilitated it, serve as a response to both the literal and the metaphorical ruptures created by colonialism. How historians approach the archive of outrages must now consider not only the power of this archive to characterize, conjure, and create violence, but also how the efforts to recover the invaluable records lost in the ravages of decolonization have worked to heal the scars left behind by British colonialism in Ireland. Bridget Salmon—who the RIC cast as a criminal political conspirator rather than a widow, mother, evictee, and fierce advocate for herself and her family—may yet be redeemed.

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⁹¹ For an excellent account of the Gaelic Revival and its relationship to Irish identity, see Aidan Beatty, “The Gaelic League and the Spatial Logics of Irish Nationalism,” *Irish Historical Studies* 43, no. 163 (2019): 55–72.

⁹² “Survey of Material Salvaged from the Public Record Office of Ireland in 1922,” NAI. <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/article/survey-material-salvaged-public-record-office-ireland-1922/>.

⁹³ O’Loughlin, “A New Chapter for Irish Historians’ ‘Saddest Book’.”