

An embarrassing history.

This book is multiply disappointing. It lacks coherence. It is sloppy in its scholarship. It looks rushed. Its guiding themes suffer from two principal defects: they are not argued; and they are unoriginal. Its occasional tone of moralising prissiness is jarring, especially set against some of the materials dealt with. Its lack of methodological rigour is embarrassing. The book could have been better, but looks like a first draft.

These are tough judgements. My suspicion is that Professor Elliott may have been rushing to meet a UK Research Assessment deadline. That is mere speculation, something in which she often indulges, but she has been ill served by her publisher's decision to send out an uncorrected proof to reviewers. For that reason I will not comment on typographical errors that should have been corrected in the final production.

The book lacks coherence because it is unclear whether its objective is to address the history of the Catholics of Ulster (nine counties) or of Northern Ireland (six counties). Professor Elliott 'solves' this issue by treating Ulster as nine counties before partition and as six counties thereafter. That may explain why the bombing of Monaghan in 1974 appears to go without mention, but since I was sent no index I cannot be confident that I am correct in this impression.

This decision, on the meaning of Ulster, in practice means accepting a unionist view, rather than any other, and is insufficiently examined. It also drives the jumpy narrative: the partition of Ireland is taken for granted in a rather lazily teleological fashion. But it does not explain why the partition of Ulster and the boundary commission of the 1920s take a tiny proportion of the book's 600 pages.

Professor Elliott also never satisfactorily resolves whether her subject is that of northern nationalism and republicanism - which have been addressed by E. Phoenix and M. Farrell - or that of Catholicism in Ulster - tackled in O. Rafferty's *Catholicism in Ulster, 1603-1983: An Interpretative History*. The result is a self-indulgent mess.

Poor scholarly quality control is evident in general statements, and in the treatment of Northern Irish Catholics, where I can claim some professional competence. Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution were not 'removed' in 1999; they were changed (a very different matter, and not trivial). Internment without trial was introduced in 1971, not 1970. The removal of special category status was not part of 'the Thatcher government's 'criminalisation' programme': the Labour government removed the status at issue. Bobby Sands was not the first hunger striker to refuse food to win special category status: he was the first of a second team of hunger strikers (again not trivial). Bernadette Devlin was a psychology not a sociology student (checked with Queen's University Belfast). The papal *Ne Temere* decree went into effect in 1908 not 1907 (according to the Catholic Encyclopaedia).

References in the footnotes do not always confirm the assertions made, e.g. footnote 94 of chapter 12, on Catholic attitudes towards integrated education. I have checked the relevant pagination with the Linen Hall library and found, to my surprise, that the relevant citation appears to have nothing to do with integrated education. Incidentally,

some data in books cited in the bibliography that suggest that cultural Catholics are somewhat more disposed towards integrated education than cultural Protestants seem to have been ignored.

This general scholarly incompetence about Northern Ireland must undermine any willingness to defer to Professor Elliott in her treatment of pre-twentieth century Ulster. The book is very messy, but it does have several agendas, which generally lead to selective but unjustified jumps.

One agenda implies that Northern nationalists have a mythological conception of their past. This would not be a surprise; but it's less pervasive than some historians seem to assume, and when one constructs absurd strawpersons for public burning it undermines the credentials of the proudly revisionist 'historian'. Colonial dispossession, colonisation, religious persecution, and institutional discrimination under the Northern Ireland Parliament are, however, all duly recorded. This sets up a rather odd dissonance. Readers get the impression that colonial dispossession occurred, though not on the scale sometimes suggested; that settler colonialists were accompanied by voluntary migrants (who suggests otherwise?); that the Penal laws were not rigorously implemented (who says otherwise?). And so on. The net result is to reproduce what she complains about, i.e. specimens of 'maddening pettiness [that infuse] everyday attitudes ... in Northern Ireland'.

She does not so much argue against the salience of the colonial past in explaining the current political condition of Northern Ireland, but rather implies, casually, that it is insufficient or out-of-date. Does she have an alternative conception of the past that fits the data? To some extent: a tale of mutual religious intolerance. Granted, but the lack of rigorous linkage of this legitimate theme to the colonial past is a failure in political analysis and understanding. It may be convenient to imagine that the conflict of the last thirty years has been primarily an internal quarrel between religiously infused cultures, but it is not scholarly, nor accurate. It absolves past *and present* British and Irish state and nation-building failures, and fails to provide a comparative understanding of both historic Ulster and modern Northern Ireland.

The book looks like a first draft because of the very odd stylistic differences between its opening and closing sections. It opens in dense mode, full of opaque referencing, and unexplained names and places, rather like Ulster's once thick forests --- and we are simultaneously given the impression that we cannot know what the Catholics of Gaelic Ulster thought, but that Marianne Elliott does, and it was not what nationalists allegedly say they thought. The first four chapters will leave most readers no more enlightened than before, and even professionals will, I think, consider it heavy - but not tough - going. The review copy sent to me is devoid of a single table, so we can assume that the use and abuse of data is not an intentional speciality of Prof. Elliott.

The last two chapters, by contrast, are easygoing journalism in the poor sense: 'gut' feelings replace serious research and weighing of rival evidence, rather like the Opsahl Commission whose role she grossly exaggerates - no doubt because of her own participation in its ruminations. Some of the best contemporary historians of Northern Ireland are journalists, e.g. D. McKittrick, and F. O Connor, but Elliott lacks their sure touch and wit. And that is my last complaint. Prof. Elliott's book is witless

or should I say almost jokeless. It is an example of what she regards as Northern Catholic culture: whinging, embittered, and nursing grievances. Her grievances are those of a Castle liberal who thinks unionist and British authorities make mistakes, or overreact, in ways which feed the culture she despises. She writes that 'Northern nationalism was extraordinarily confused'. *Tu quoque*, Professor Elliott. Her confusions are only exceeded by the arrogant vanity that dominates this advertisement for courses in methods for aspirant historians.