Nationalism

The Case of Ireland—An Introduction

> At the dawn of the twentieth century, in the twilight of the continental empires, Europe's subject peoples dreamt of forming "nation states," territorial homelands where Poles, Czechs, Serbs and others might live free, makers of their own fate. When the Hapsburgs and Romanov empires collapsed after the First World War their leaders seized the opportunity.
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> A flurry of new states emerged and the first thing they did was to set about privileging their national "ethnic" majority—defined by language or religion or antiquity or all three—at the expense of inconvenient local minorities, who were consigned to second-class states.[1]

In these comments on the emergence of Europe's "subject peoples" Tony Judt does not mention Ireland. Yet Ireland provides a striking example of the power of nationalism. The British Empire, unlike the Hapsburg, Romanov, and Hohenzollern regimes, did not collapse after 1918 but the British government, during "the Troubles" of 1916–22 was unable to control the rising tide of Irish nationalism, backed as it was by powerful lobbies among the Irish Diaspora, in the United States and Australia. The Irish situation was no doubt unique in many ways but as an example of the political power of nationalism it provides an illuminating case study for students of the modern world.

The vision of a free and territorial homeland provided inspiration for all nationalists during the First World War. Unfortunately, for Irish nationalists, as for Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and Romanians, and other "subject peoples," their homelands were contested territories. The concept of "nation" itself was contested and it was unclear how membership should be defined. Was it by religion, ethnicity or language or was the

nation a civic unit? In the case of Ireland, much of the North-East as well as parts of Munster had been colonized during the Reformation period by Scottish and English settlers, many of whom were committed Protestants. Urban areas such as Dublin and Cork as well as Belfast had substantial and wealthy Protestant minorities. The distinctive character of the North East had been reinforced by the spread of industrialization in the Lagan Valley. When the rest of Ireland was hard hit by the Great Famine of 1845–48 the North East remained relatively, though not totally, unscathed and bitter memories of the Famine did not fuel resentment here as they did elsewhere in Ireland and among the Catholic Irish Diaspora in the United States. Despite Presbyterian involvement in the rebellion of 1798, and the prominence of such individuals as W. B. Yeats in nationalist circles, Irish nationalism did not take root in the North among Protestant sections of the population. Indeed, as Home Rule became dominant in the South during the 1880s, a British-centered counternationalism developed in the North. By 1912 Ireland seemed on the brink of civil war.

The outbreak of war in Europe postponed this crisis but not indefinitely. At Easter 1916 a small group of committed nationalists with the backing of Germany and some Irish-American groups, seized control of the Post Office in central Dublin and in the name of the Irish people, declared an Irish Republic. In doing so, however, they inevitably aroused the bitter antagonism of the Ulster Protestant population, whose relatives were in France on the Western Front, the eve of the Battle of the Somme (1 June 1916). The Rising of 1916 thus polarized opinion between North and South even more bitterly than had been the case hitherto.

In the rhetoric of the 1916 Proclamation there was little hint that such divisions existed. The self-proclaimed leaders of the rising, Patrick Pearse and his followers, addressed all Irishmen and Irishwomen in the name of an unproblematic Ireland.

> In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Pearse also referred to an apparently undivided “Irish people,” declaring that

> In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty; six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms.

Pearse went on to proclaim the Irish republic as a sovereign independent state and to pledge "our lives and those of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare and of its exaltation among nations." In a reference to divisions within Ireland the insurgents played down "the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past." In their conclusion, the insurgent leaders placed the cause of the Irish Republic "under the protection of the Most High God."

If we attempt to see this document in comparative terms, "ethnic" or "civic," there is no doubt that the Declaration of 1916 is an example of "civic nationalism."

> The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

The insurgents clearly attempted to include all the inhabitants of Ireland within their definition of "the Irish people." The reference to "the Most High God" is undoctrinal and is in sharp contrast with the appeal to the Trinity in the 1937 Constitution. Historians have drawn attention to the staunch Catholicism of most of the insurgent leaders, although the socialist James Connelly was a man without strong religious convictions, as was Tom Clarke, and all of them accepted Catholic ministrations before death. The fact remains, however, that the Proclamation of 1916 is an example of "civic nationalism" and as such was consciously in a nonsectarian tradition stretching back to the freethinker Wolfe Tone and including the Protestant Thomas Davis and Presbyterian John Mitchel.[2] As we will see below, however, the Rising of 1916 had unintended consequences not least in that it led to a political division between a largely Catholic South and a Protestant-dominated North. The Irish Free State which came into existence in 1922 became increasingly Catholic in its orientation, a trend reinforced by the 1937 Constitution. In Northern Ireland the state became ever more Protestant. "Ethno-religious" nationalism thus replaced the "civic" ideals of Pearse and Connolly. Nation-building in both North and South almost inevitably took a sectarian turn.

These tensions between civic and ethno-religious nationalism were paralleled in other parts of Europe, most notably in Czecho-Slovakia, Romania, and Poland. In Czecho-Slovakia, for example, the civic nationalism of Tomas Masaryk faced a challenge from "ethnic" Germans and his fellow Slavs, the Slovaks. A tragic denouement eventually followed with the ethnic cleansing of the Sudeten Germans after 1945. In due course Slovakia broke away and became an independent state. Thus Masaryk's imagined civic community collapsed in the face of ethnic realities.[3] The new states of Poland and Romania also faced similar problems and similar far-reaching consequences.[4] Ireland thus was far from being a unique case, and the history of Irish nationalism inevitably invites a comparative context.

What was the Irish nation? Who was included in it? Pearse spoke of "the Irish people" as an unproblematic entity, but the troubled history of Ireland cannot be ignored so easily. The impact of the Norman invasions, of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, of colonization, and not least the French Revolution left "the Irish people" deeply divided. These divisions emerged most clearly in the early seventeenth century when, in 1641, scores, possibly hundreds of settlers were killed by a resentful section of the Irish Catholic population. The myth that over a hundred thousand were killed swiftly became accepted as fact.[5] On the Catholic side, long-standing divisions between "Gaelic Irish" and "Old English" were accentuated after the 1641 rebellion by differences about the future role of the Catholic Church. In 1646 the papal envoy, Archbishop Rinuccini, excommunicated those members of the Confederate Supreme Council who had sought a compromise settlement with Ormond, Charles I's representative in Ireland. The history of Ireland during this period cannot be treated as an unproblematic tale of the resistance of the people of Ireland to an alien government. Rather the Confederates had risen in the name of God, the King, and the Fatherland (Pro Deo, pro Rege, et pro Patria). Indeed, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Stuart monarchy was able to count upon Irish Catholic support because of its Gaelic origins, stretching, so its historians maintained, back into the mists of time.[6]

But were the Irish a Catholic nation or could Protestants such as James Butler, Duke of Ormond, or Morrogh O'Brien, earl of Inchiquin, claim to be Irish? Some commentators, such as the Jesuit Conor Mahony writing in exile in the early seventeenth century, had no difficulty in equating Irishness and Catholicism, and on the basis of the Jewish example in Exodus XXXII advocated the expulsion of those not willing to accept Catholicism. He even congratulated the insurgents of 1641 in having killed 150,000

heretics.[7] Mahony, however, was very much in a minority. Catholics in general accepted the legitimacy of the rule of the Protestant Stuart kings, although bitter debates continued over the extent to which Catholicism was the basis of Irish nationhood. The troops of Owen Roe O'Neill proclaimed themselves the army of the Pope and the papal envoy Rinuccini found considerable support for his condemnation of the First Ormond Peace (1646). In contrast John Lynch backed the Protestant Ormond and distinguished in his writings between Puritans and Protestants, the latter being acceptable fellow subjects.[8] Others, such as Confederate spokesmen, in 1644 openly defended the idea of a comprehensive Irish nation, declaring:

> For he that is born in Ireland, though his parents and all his ancestors were aliens, nay if his parents are Indian[9] or Turks, is converted to Christianity, is an Irishman as fully as if his ancestors were born here for thousands of years. And by the laws of England, as capable of the Liberties of a subject.

Thus the distinction between ethnic-religious and civic concepts of nationhood was clearly not unknown during the period of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. It was not until the French Revolution, however, that the concept of citizenship took hold. France now came to provide the example of a nation in which the status of being a citizen overrode religious or ethnic differences. For many this symbolized liberation. In Ireland during the 1790s the United Irishmen saw the French model as pointing the way to a future Irish nation which would include Dissenters and Catholics alike. As the freethinker Wolfe Tone put it:

> To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter—these were my means. (1796)

It was this "imagined community" which inspired the rebellion of 1798 (itself preceded by an abortive French landing at Bantry Bay in 1796). For many, a civic, inclusive Irish nation seemed a real possibility. For others, however, including Catholic clergy alienated by the French civil constitution of 1792, France represented impiety and sacrilege. Thus in 1798 "the Irish people" were divided and the defeat of the rebels and the subsequent executions left bitter memories for some sections of the population.

Suppression of the Rebellion of 1798 paved the way for the passing of the Act of Union with Britain, a measure which, as envisaged by its

sponsor William Pitt, was to allow Catholics into the British Parliament. In the eyes of George III, however, such an Act of Union would have undermined the religious basis of the British monarchy, and hence, the concept of Britain as an ethno-religious unit. The conflict between ethnic and civic conceptions of the future United Kingdom could hardly have been clearer. It was a struggle from which George III emerged the victor. The Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland which had been under siege in the 1790s also emerged with its privileged position in place.

For the whole of the subsequent century and beyond, the Union remained a central issue and with it the question as to whether the Irish nation was an ethno-religious or a civic entity. This issue lay behind the political struggle between Daniel O'Connell's party, "Old Ireland," and the Young Irelanders led by the Protestant Thomas Davis. O'Connell himself changed his own political rhetoric from time to time, appealing on some occasions to a wider "civic" Irish nation, and on others to a Catholic nation which had suffered on such occasions as Mullaghmast (1577)[10] or been victorious, as at Clontarf (1014).

At a local level, the type of support upon which O'Connell could rely is illustrated in an appeal printed at Clonmel, Co. Tipperary in the 1820s. Leaders of the area urged local factions to show loyalty to O Connel's Catholic nation:

> The Catholic Association, which had been the means under Providence, of calling Catholic People into existence, as a Nation—which has taught the humblest Individual in the community to appreciate his Rights—the Catholic Association of Ireland, virtually representing the feelings, the opinions, and the interests of the duty they owe to you, to address the brave, the intelligent, and the docile People of Tipperary, on an occasion which they deem of great public importance, not only to the Inhabitants of Munster, but to the Catholic cause itself.[11]

It was this Catholic nationalism which became increasingly influential in the course of the nineteenth century, achieving an important political victory in 1869 with the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. For Church leaders such as Paul Cullen, archbishop of Dublin, the Irish were indeed a Catholic nation. Those who held a more civic view found Protestant leaders in such figures as Isaac Butt or Charles Stewart Parnell. In the United States, Catholic bishops played a key role in supporting Cullen, but there was also the Fenian movement advocating an Irish Republic with its implication of a more inclusive, civic polity.

To see Irish politics solely in terms of a clash between civic and ethnoreligious ideas of nationhood, however, is to run the risk of oversimplification. As Professor Theo Hoppen has shown, local issues were often the key to parliamentary elections. The rise of the Home Rule movement, first under Butt and then Parnell, showed that civic-minded leaders could exercise considerable power. After the fall of Parnell in 1891, however, there was bitter division between ethnic and civic nationalists. The great divide between North and South also widened.

Civic nationalism survived and in the early twentieth century, John Redmond, leader of the united Irish Parliamentary Party, attempted to meet the criticism that "Home Rule means Rome Rule" by denying that the party was essentially Catholic. In doing so he—a man who had taken Parnell's side in the Divorce Scandal of 1890—was following in the Parnellite tradition. He declared in a speech of September 1908:

> We are told that the Irish people of Great Britain owe a divided duty; they owe a duty, no doubt, to their country's freedom; but that alongside there is another duty which occasionally may be held, rightly, to override the first, a duty due to the Catholic religion and the Catholic Church. I say that THIS NATIONAL MOVEMENT IS NOT A CATHOLIC MOVEMENT. It is a National movement. It is not in conflict with the interests of the Catholic religion—God forbid—that is the religion of the overwhelming majority of our people. But the national movement is a National movement embracing within its folds men of all religions, and those who would seek to turn this National movement simply into a Catholic movement would be repudiating some of the brightest pages of our National history and forgetting the memory of some of the greatest of our national heroes who PROFESSED THE NEWER AND NOT THE OLDER CREED OF OUR COUNTRY.[12]

It is clear from these quotations that the question of the criterion of Irish nationhood remained contentious. Who was to be included? Was the criterion to be religious or linguistic or was it to be a civic commitment to the cause of Home Rule? How was the question to be decided? On these and other issues Ireland remained deeply divided in the decades before 1916. For a time, in the 1880s it seemed a possibility that the great majority would unite under the Protestant Parnell in a nonsectarian Home Rule Party. After the Divorce Scandal of 1890, however, bitter divisions appeared between clerical and anticlerical groupings. In addition, Protestant Ulster came to fear the establishment of a Catholic Ascendancy, their fears intensified after the publication of a Papal decree, *Ne Temere* (1904), imposing restrictive conditions upon mixed marriages. At the same time

Catholics had cause to feel that they were excluded from a just share of influential posts. The words of Eoin MacNeill, a Catholic northerner of great natural abilities, express this resentment:

> I entered the Accountant-General's Office (in Dublin) in 1887. I was then the only Catholic on the permanent staff of the office. The Accountant-General, the Chief Clerk, the senior clerk and all the junior clerks but myself were appointed before the competition law came into effect. They were all patronage men and they were all Episcopalian Protestants and garrison men![13]

The situation improved in some respects as a consequence of competitive examinations replacing patronage for entry into government service, but progress was slow. Attention-seeking journalists such D. P. Moran, editor of *The Leader*, were also able to capitalize on the still widespread sense of relative deprivation among Catholics in trade and industry where it was felt Freemasons were unduly favored. The religious divide in Ireland around 1900, with a substantial Protestant minority amounting to a quarter of the population, was clearly a problem facing the future nation-state. If Catholicism was the hallmark of Irishness in a future "Irish-Ireland," Protestants faced an uncertain future, much as Jews did in Romania and German-speakers in a Czech-dominated Czech republic. In the pages of *The Leader* D. P. Moran ceaselessly expounded the view that Irishness was synonymous with Irish Catholicism. In Moran's view the Protestant nationalism of Grattan, Tone, Davis, and Parnell had led Ireland in the wrong direction, toward accepting "the great canker of English ideas, ideals and manners." "The next few years will decide for all time whether the Gael is to lift up the Irish race once more, or whether the Pale is to complete its effacement."[14] Moran's ideal of an Irish-Ireland was a Catholic Ireland. Small wonder then if a Protestant Ulster was unwilling to commit its political future to a Home Rule Parliament.

The question as to what constituted Irish identity became more complex with the rise of cultural movements such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League. For members of these movements the test of "Irishness" was willingness to play Gaelic games and to speak or at least learn Irish. In 1903, for example, Arthur Griffith attacked the idea of inviting a Soccer Association to help with the fund-raising of a Christian Brothers bazaar. His editorial warned that "it would not be tolerated that the Christian Brothers should throw in their lot with the alien and all that he represents." The executive of Cumann na nGaedhal also spoke out in

the strongest terms, deploring "the action of the Christian Brothers in allowing their bazaar to be associated with the deadly Anglicising element connected with Association football playing."[15] The advocates of this policy were not a lunatic fringe but a group who saw themselves as the leaders of the Irish people. Griffith himself was a complex figure. He edited a popular edition of John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*, an action which suggests a sympathy with civic nationalism. He was also associated with anti-Semitism. Sinn Fein, the political party which he founded, was Catholic in its orientation and drew upon the support within the network of Christian Brothers' schools, a powerful and growing force in Irish secondary education. Thanks to such organizations as Sinn Fein, the exclusivist ethnic nationalism of what came to be called Irish-Ireland took root. In such an Ireland the Protestants of the North had no place.

In explaining the rise of anti-English sentiment during these years, some account must be taken of the rise of ethnic nationalism in England itself, not least during the period of the Boer War of 1899–1901. In their important book *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920* (1986), Robert Colls and Philip Dodd argued that it was during these decades that the modern sense of English identity took root when England became a "Land of Hope and Glory." One of their key points was that "the Celts" were seen by the popular English mind as a distinctive and inferior "race." Matthew Arnold's controversial view on the volatile and childlike temperament of the Celts help to fuel these attitudes, and not surprisingly there was a reaction in Ireland, leading in its turn to the idea of a Celtic Renaissance. Patrick Pearse's own idealization of the role of the Celtic warrior Cuchulain emerged from such crosscurrents.

Thus in the early years of the twentieth century there were several movements competing for a decisive say in what constituted Irishness and Irish identity in contemporary Ireland. John Redmond, as we have seen, spoke out for a civic conception of Irishness. In contrast, the Catholic clergy saw the Irish as a Catholic nation. For others, "ethnicity," that is, that the Irish were a distinct Gaelic race, was the key to national identity. The Gaelic League stressed the key role of language. Yet others such as Sir Horace Plunkett pressed for economic cooperation at the local level for Protestant and Catholic alike. The radical labor leaders, James Larkin and James Connolly, hoped to unite the Irish working class despite sectarian divisions. The vision of Yeats and the Abbey Theatre was of a nonsectarian Ireland.

A political shift to a more sectarian future, however, occurred in 1912 with the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, an organization formed to defeat Home Rule. The Ulster Covenant, a key symbol, drew upon the covenanting traditions of seventeenth-century Scotland for its inspiration. In reaction to this the National Volunteers formed in the South. For a time Redmond's authority was challenged but he managed to regain control. However, a breakaway group formed, calling itself the Irish Volunteers, within which there was a secret organization, the Irish Republican Brotherhood. After the outbreak of war, the IRB planned a rising against the British government. Early in 1916 it was by no means clear which of these various currents of opinion, civic or ethnic or ethno-religious, would prevail. In 1914 Redmond's vision of an inclusive Ireland was still a possibility.[16] After 1916, however, thanks in large measure to the miscalculations of the British government in executing the rebel leaders, his party began to lose ground. The Catholic episcopate, at first opposed to the rising, came increasingly to give its support to the cause of the insurgents. By 1918 all was "changed, changed utterly," in Yeats's words, but the new political reality both North and South lay with ethno-religious nationalism, in which such figures as W. B. Yeats found themselves increasingly marginalized.

The years following the Rising of 1916 witnessed a drastic shift in public opinion within Ireland. Perhaps most importantly, the gap between the mainly Catholic South and the Protestant population of the North widened to an apparently unbridgeable gulf. Secondly, within Catholic Ireland John Redmond's inclusivist civic nationalism lost ground to Sinn Fein, a party which the Catholic episcopate came to support for what it saw as the long-term interest of the Church. A common hostility toward the possible introduction of conscription in 1918 was another factor helping to link the Catholic clergy and the more "advanced" nationalists. By 1918 "Sinn Fein" was a Catholic party in all but name. An ethno-religious nationalist movement was now in control of much of Ireland.

The civic Proclamation of 1916 was a dead letter. In 1921 after the British acceptance of de facto independence for an Irish Free State (excluding six counties in Ulster), a peaceful future seemed possible. In fact, however, a civil war in the South broke out almost at once between those who accepted the compromises of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and those who held out for the full independence of a republic. At the same time what amounted to a second civil war broke out between the North and South. In the subsequent turmoil within the Irish Free State, Catholic churchmen in the

main supported the pro-Treaty groups, and in the polity which emerged after the civil war their influence was dominant in the spheres of education and public morality. Nation-building took an increasingly Catholic tone. In 1925 divorce was in essence ruled out within the new state and in 1929 a Censorship of Publications Act was passed. Perhaps most importantly of all, the role of the Church in primary and secondary education was fully recognized by the state. During these years also, as Peter Hart has shown,[17] what is now termed "ethnic cleansing" took place at the expense of Protestants in the South and in the border counties. Yeats himself was moved to protest about the plight of the Protestant community.

In February 1932 Eamonn De Valera's Fianna Fail party came to power after winning the general election but there was no shift toward a more inclusive sense of Irish identity. The new government took full advantage of the holding of a Eurcharistic Congress in 1932 to emphasize its Catholic credentials. In 1936 the sale and importation of contraceptives was made illegal. De Valera was more resolutely anti-English in his policies than his predecessor W. T. Cosgrave, but he was no less Catholic. The Fianna Fail newspaper, *The Irish Press*, showed itself as resolutely pro-Franco as its Fine Gael counterpart, *The Irish Independent*. In the new constitution which De Valera drew up for approval in 1937, the government followed the advice of John Charles McQuaid, a prominent figure in the Holy Ghost Order who in due course was appointed Archbishop of Dublin, not least because of De Valera's backing. The new constitution did not declare "Eire"[18] a Catholic state but it recognized the dominant position of the Catholic Church, it appealed to the Holy Trinity in the preamble, and it followed Catholic teaching in relation to the family and the role of women.

The key role of the Church was reinforced during the war years 1939–45 when "Eire" remained neutral. On 18 August 1940 (after the fall of France) special trains brought many to the Marian shrine of Knock Co., Mayo, in what was termed "a National Pilgrimage." The war was described as the "inevitable consequence of universal sin and infidelity" and the official preacher declared that

> A nation united stands at the "Ready" for Homes and Altars free, a nation *faithful*—who never bent the knee to gods however false—nor willed to taste forbidden flesh pots however sweet is represented here today to pray to God through Mary Immaculate to save us from impending peril.

It was clear that the nation referred to was indubitably Catholic.

The preacher Fr. John Power also spoke of Knock in terms of the rural ideal which inspired the official image of the new state. To Fr. Power, "those thatched roofs, those simple Irish countryside houses, the smell of turf as one watched the blue smoke rising from the cottage chimneys, carried one's mind back to the scenes we associate with Mary, the Lourdes of Bernadette's day."[19] "Here in this lush hillside we had everything that the Catholic mind associates with the name and character of Mary—the rural beauty, innocence, simplicity and deep lasting love of God."[20]

In August 1945 Fr. Angelus, a retired Capuchin friar, spoke of the "fervent rosaries recited by the vast throng of pilgrims." For him this was an image of the Irish nation. "It was the nation on its knees, praying for peace, praying to Mary, the Queen of Peace, Mary the Queen of Ireland." The preacher ignored the impact which the war had made in the North-East. He was quite clear that it was a punishment for the world "for its wickedness and sin." He also spoke of the island as if the industrial world of the Lagan Valley did not exist and that Belfast had remained untouched by German bombing. "All through its unspeakable horrors our little island home was sacred, our cities were untouched, our simple country homesteads were unharmed and our people in the enjoyment of peace continued to lead their innocent lives serving God and Mary his mother."[21] It was this note which De Valera had struck in his broadcast message of 1943 when he referred to

> A land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contents of athletic youths and the laughter of comely maidens, whose friends would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that a nation should live.[22]

The message of Faith and Fatherland was a powerful one during these years though it is well to remember that in thousands of Irish pubs throughout the land there was a less overtly religious tone to the conversation. In Ireland, as in Wales, there was a contrast between the cultures of the chapel and the pub and we may well ask: Which more realistically symbolized the nation? (Were the pubs the basis of another "Hidden Ireland"?)

In 1940 a German victory had seemed likely and with it an end to partition,[23] but as the years went by the main role of De Valera's government was the maintenance of neutrality. A strict censorship prevented the direct

reporting of war news in the newspapers although there was no way in which radios could be jammed. After the war, the Irish language remained a key issue. For example, during the years of the coalition government (1948–51), the minister for education Richard Mulcahy still saw language as the key to national identity.

> The aim is to have all know Irish and to let the nationalising and assimilating influence of the language and all it opens up work on all. It is stupid and shortsighted of the Protestants to be trying to segregate themselves from their fellow countrymen in this matter. More and more language is coming to be regarded as the badge of nationality. The Protestants must decide whether they wish to be thought English or Irish. Up to the present they appear to prefer to be thought English and their senseless opposition to Irish will in the end discredit them in the eyes of other countries. They are definitely cutting off their noses to spite their faces.
> [Memo from Dept. of Education to Richard Mulcahy, Minister of Education, 1948–51][24]

In the 1960s, however, change did come. A key shift occurred in 1959 with the retirement of Eamonn De Valera from the government. His successor as Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, was a man very different in character, much less religious and less committed to the cause of the Irish language than his predecessor. A Dubliner by birth, Lemass showed little interest in the rural and religious view of Irish identity which had inspired De Valera. Coincidently the 1960s in "Ireland" were marked by a rapid growth in urbanization, which led to a marked shift in the urban-rural balance in "Irish" society. Lemass was also behind the decision to encourage the Irish tourist industry, one which was to have far-reaching consequences for the Irish economy. The most important decision of Lemass's relatively short period of office was to plan for economic growth in alliance with a gifted civil servant, T. K. Whitaker. Lemass also took a conscious decision to improve relations with Northern Ireland and in 1965 paid a formal visit to Northern Ireland where he met the new prime minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill. This was a "New Departure" which, it was hoped, would lead to an amelioration of the position of the Catholic community in the North. In itself it was an episode which indicates the importance of the role of the state in the formation of national idenity.

To the influence of the political and economic decisions was added that of an extraordinary and totally unexpected religious event—the election of Pope John XXIII, "Pope John" as he came to be known in the world at

large, was elected as a stopgap appointment to the papacy. In fact during his short pontificate, by calling a General Council of the Church (Vatican 2) and by encouraging a better relationship with the other Christian churches, he inaugurated what turned out to be a revolution, not least so far as Ireland was concerned. During the 1950s John Charles McQuaid had routinely issued a Lenten pastoral letter condemning the evils of the modern world, including the admission of Catholic students to that hotbed of unbelief, Trinity College, Dublin. After the election of Pope John, John Charles McQuaid found himself in the position of having to take active steps to encourage good relations with the Protestant archbishop of Dublin. A more inclusive Christian policy now gradually replaced the exclusive Catholicism of the years since 1922.[25]

The conditions were now in place for the rise of a more "civic," more inclusive sense of Irish identity as a challenge to the established ethnic "Faith and Fatherland" image. Change was slow but it was occurring nonetheless. One of the first major signs of this was the gradual liberalization, from 1957 onward, of the system of literary censorship which had been set up in 1929. In 1967 a ban on over five thousand books was removed. The official teaching of the Catholic Church outlawed the practice of contraception (this is still the case in 2004), but it proved impossible to stem the flow of contraceptive information, especially after the invention of "the Pill."[26] A dramatic encounter took place in 1971 when a woman's group returning from Northern Ireland carrying contraceptives about their persons successfully defied the customs authorities. As late as the 1990s, however, contraception was still a hot potato for the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, who eventually handed over responsibility for the sale and distribution of condoms to regional health boards,[27] "an Irish solution to an Irish problem," as he whimsically remarked.

A battle was taking place between traditional and modern concepts of Irish identity over sexual morality, an area in which the Catholic Church since 1922 had exercised authority. Divorce had been outlawed in the Free State in 1925 and the official Catholic view of the indissolubility of marriage had been enshrined in De Valera's Constitution of 1937. It was not until the mid-1980s, however, that politicians such as Garrett Fitzgerald felt able to press for the removal of the ban. In the event a referendum held on the divorce issue in 1986 resulted in a defeat of the reformers by almost two to one.

The Irish Republic was far from being a secular state, a fact underlined with particular force during the 1979 visit of John Paul II, a pope with a

particular devotion to the Virgin Mary for whom a pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine at Knock was of special significance. In the 1980s, however, a number of scandals seriously dented the image of the Church and led to a marked decline in its influence. The first case involved the popular bishop of Galway who was shown to have concealed the existence of his illegitimate child. More significant were the apparently endless series of cases indicating that serious sexual abuse had taken place in orphanages run by the Christian Brothers and other religious orders. It had been accepted almost without question that it was the role of the Church to run such institutions. Now it was shown that abuse had taken place on a massive scale, to which the Church authorities turned a blind eye. (This was still a live issue in 2004.)

This spate of scandals created an undercurrent of anticlericalism within the Republic and did nothing to prevent the decline of religious vocations and of attendance at mass in urban areas. In 2002, however, the display of relics of St. Theresa of Lisieux in cathedrals throughout Ireland was an enormous popular success, with the state providing a ceremonial military escort. Clearly it was premature to say "Goodbye to Catholic Ireland." The tension between ethnic and civic conceptions of nationhood remained.

In the 1990s, however, with the rise of the "Celtic Tiger" and unprecedented economic growth it became apparent that De Valera's image of Ireland as a simple rural society had passed into history. In 1995 a referendum permitted the legalization of divorce. On the basis of a booming tourist industry, a well-educated work force, and a committed class of entrepreneurs, the republic has enjoyed remarkable economic success. New problems—those of drug abuse, soaring house prices, and racialism—replaced the old.

The course of events proved to be very different in the North. Since 1920 Ireland had been partitioned into two political units, the Irish Free State which was politically independent and Northern Ireland, a six-county statelet which enjoyed Home Rule status within the United Kingdom.[28] As we have seen, the Free State was almost wholly Catholic, a state of affairs which had been intensified by the loss of a third of its Protestant population as a consequence of what is now termed "ethnic cleansing."[29] In the North, however, a two-thirds Protestant majority was confronted by a Catholic minority of roughly one-third. In this ministate (pop. 1.5 m.) religion was regarded as the basis of identity and the opening gambit of any conversation with a stranger almost inevitably involved discovering "what foot he dug with," not by a direct question but by ascertaining what

the person's name was and which school he went to. "The North" was in essence based upon the coexistence of two ethno-religious communities, one of which controlled the machinery of government. In towns such as Derry/Londonderry (the very name is a matter of debate) a system of gerrymandering ensured that despite then being a minority of the urban population, there was a built-in Protestant minority on the city council. Lord Craigavon's slogan, "A Protestant parliament for a Protestant people," provided the counterpart to the Southern politicians' assumption that the Irish were a Catholic people. In this situation the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland seemed to have little choice but to aim at survival. More so even than in the South the Catholic clergy provided leadership, a role strengthened by their influence in the schools and the teachers' training colleges. The Catholic Church also encouraged pupils to play Gaelic games, hurling, and Gaelic football, rather than what were seen as the English games of cricket, soccer, and rugby which were played in Protestant schools. Thus there was in effect a system of cultural apartheid accepted by both sides as a means of preserving their respective ethnic identities.

In the North, radical change was almost impossible to conceive. Sporadic attempts by the IRA to arouse resistance among the Catholic population, the latest being in 1962, had little effect. Nevertheless the 1960s proved to be a decade of political movement. Rising expectations within the Catholic community arose in part as a consequence of the impact of the 1948 Education Act, which had made possible the growth of a small but active, university-educated Catholic middle class. Practices which had once been tolerated now seemed to be unacceptable abuses. A new political radicalism appeared within the Catholic community, inspired in part by the civil rights movement in the United States and a new generation of political leaders replaced the old-style "machine" politicians. The new leaders attempted to cross the sectarian divide and to seek support among the liberally minded Protestants. For a time indeed it seemed as if a Social Democratic and Labour Party founded in 1971 might develop along non-sectarian "civic" lines. Optimism was encouraged by the attitude of the new premier of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill, who appeared more liberal than his "hard-line" predecessors.

Thus in the mid-1960s there was a certain "civic" optimism in the air. It was hoped, for example, that a new university would be established in Derry/Londonderry on the lines of similar "new" universities in England and catering for the needs of the largely Catholic population of that area. In the event, however, these hopes were dashed despite jointly run

demonstrations by Catholics and Protestants and the new university was established in 1968 in the largely Protestant town of Coleraine. Similar hopes of a fresh start raised by plans for a new town established on English lines were ruled out by the choice of the name "Craigavon." A further blow to liberal hopes occurred in 1969 when a peaceful civil rights demonstration in Derry met with water cannon, used by the police with the backing of the hard-line minister of home affairs, William Craig. Police baton charges also broke up the crowd. The message being given to the reformers was the traditionally ethnic one of "No Surrender." The Catholic community, however, was in no mood to accept a return to a pre-civil rights situation and further incidents later in 1969 led to the arrival of a peacekeeping force of British troops in August of that year. The Labour government pressed for political reform in Northern Ireland, but the election of a Conservative government in 1970 brought about a political shift more favorable to the Unionists.

A detailed analysis of the course of events during the next thirty years lies beyond the scope of this brief overview. Mention must be made, however, of the botched attempt to introduce internment without trial in August 1971 and the fatal shooting of thirteen civilians by the British army on "Bloody Sunday" in January 1972. Official-backed terror now met with unofficial terror at the hands of the Provisional IRA, an organization run on traditionally ethnic lines, which had ousted its civic competitor, the Official IRA.

Unionist attempts to impose "normal" methods of repression which had worked in earlier decades now failed totally. Their only result was to create a determined spirit of resistance among large sections of the Catholic population. Official British policy over the years wavered between conciliation (as during the short period of the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973–74) and hard-line suppression (during the early Thatcher administration after 1979). An important turning point came in May 1981 when the IRA activist Bobby Sands died while on hunger strike. This was an event which may be seen in retrospect as the equivalent in Northern Ireland of 1916. Sands's death and his subsequent enshrinement in Sinn Fein mythology might well have been avoided, but the intransigence of Mrs. Thatcher paralleled that of her predecessors in 1916, despite the pleas of John Hume, the leader of the S.D.L.P. Within the Irish diaspora in the United States the IRA received renewed widespread support, although senior politicians such as Edward Kennedy pressed for compromise. On both the Republican and Unionist sides, however, bitterness increased with each incident of terrorism

and counterterrorism. It was only in the late 1990s after nearly thirty years of civil war and a number of false starts that, political compromise seemed to be a real possibility, with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998. At the time of writing (2004), however, the Agreement has been suspended and it is likely that hopes for a lasting constitutional solution to the problems of Northern Ireland will once again be dashed.

With relation to the main issue discussed in this introduction, namely the contrast between civic and ethnic nationalism, it seems clear that the fortunes of nationalism have been very different south and north of the border. In the South there has been a distinct shift away from the romantic, ethnic, Catholic nationalism of the De Valera period to a situation in which it is challenged by civic secular attitudes to Irish nationality. With the abolition of censorship, the legalization of divorce and contraception, and the acceptance of abortion, the Irish Republic faces a situation in which there is no single, unproblematic sense of Irish identity. The flow of Irish emigrants to England in the postwar years has led to the creation of multiethnic Irish-English identities explored by John Walsh in his book *The Falling Angels*. Irish interest in "English" sports such as soccer and rugby has vastly increased and the years when such involvement would lead to individuals being banned from Gaelic sports seem to belong to prehistory. The role of women is now increasingly recognized and here again the traditionalist role assigned to women in the Irish constitution is becoming a dead letter. Television programmes such as "The Late Late Show" opened up discussions on topics which had been taboo. Above all, massive immigration from Europe and elsewhere transformed the character of Iron society with extraordinary speed. The Republic like Britain now faced the challenge of multi-culturalism.

The Republic is not a secular state. The influence of the Church, though declining, is still important. Mass attendance, though now much lower than in the De Valera period, is still relatively high by European standards. It is still possible for scholars to argue that the basis of a "normal" sense of nationality is "religion, language, and race,"[30] but this view, though universally accepted in the first half of the century, is now under challenge. The new civic emphasis was clear in a speech in 1981 by the then Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald when he declared, "The fact is our laws and our Constitution, our practices, our attitudes reflect those of a majority ethos and are not acceptable to Protestants in Northern Ireland."[31]

All the changes which have been explored imaginatively by such novelists as John McGahern and Roddy Doyle, are in marked contrast with the

situation north of the border. In the 1960s a young Ian Paisley was regarded as a maverick fundamentalist. Over the decades, however, his influence has grown within Unionist circles to such an extent that his brand of ethno-religious British nationalism attracts wide support on the Unionist side, and his party, the Democratic Unionist Party, is now in 2004 the largest party in Northern Ireland. On the Catholic side, the moderate Social Democratic and Labour Party has lost ground to the strongly republican Sinn Fein, whose opponents see it as the political wing of the IRA. In 2004 Northern Ireland is thus as polarized on ethno-religious lines as it has ever been.

The hopes raised in the 1960s for a politics based on civic identities have been disappointed. In his rhetoric the Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams refers to Wolfe Tone but in practice it is the image of a Catholic nationalism which he puts to constant use. In the United States he refers to the way in which the British government created the Great Hunger and robbed "us" of our language.[32] Sinn Fein has hopes of making political gains within the Irish Republic but it will need to shift to a more class-based rhetoric if it is to appeal to a new urban proletariat. In the world of the Celtic Tiger, with its innumerable financial scandals, traditional nationalist rhetoric carries less weight than it does north of the border.

In the interview which he gave in October 1999 Seamus Heaney spoke of his experience as "a Catholic kid" in rural Derry putting on *Macbeth* or *The Tempest*.[33]

> On the one hand you can do the reading that says you were force-fed colonial matter and that you became a good little subject of the English language by acknowledging Shakespeare and that he was part of the cultural clinching of the power situation.
>
> That's one truth all right. But there is another truth, which is that there's some form of transformation or radiance. Admittedly he's a cultural icon and part of the hegemony and so on. But there is also the extra-ness that comes just from going into a school play and seeing yourself and your companions all for the moment carried away. There was an element of enlightenment bringing light into your life. So, is Shakespeare an imposition and a steady political Infiltration or is he a radiant transformer? Surely both.[34]

Heaney's multiethnic detachment is exceptional. In the political world of Northern Ireland the shift has been toward the creation of two ever more distant ethno-religious communities.

Postscript

To what extent does the history of Ireland in the twentieth century throw light upon the general phenomenon of nationalism? As a case study its significance surely cannot be denied. The fortunes of Irish nationalism offer clear parallels with those of similar political movements in Spain, Belgium, former Czecho-Slovakia, and Romania, not to mention other areas such as the Tyrol. The episodes of "1916" and of Bobby Sands are no doubt unique but the history of Irish nationalism raises general questions about the causes and course of such movements. In the 1980s there was a surge of interest in nationalism led by such studies as Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983), and Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (published in 1990 but based on lectures given in 1985). Before these works appeared nationalism had been largely neglected as a topic for serious historical analysis. Rather, class and class conflict had been a central focus of interest for historians. What these authors offered were new explanations for the rise of nationalism. Gellner linked nationalism with the rise of industrialization and its concomitant social changes. Anderson introduced the concept of an "imagined community." Hobsbawm analyzed nationalism from a Marxist standpoint, emphasizing its link with class. All three authors rejected the belief that nations owed their origins to some god-given principle. All stressed the "modernity" of nationalism.

So far as Irish nationalism is concerned it would seem that Anderson's concept of an "imagined community" has particular relevance. Such figures as Wolfe Tone, Thomas Davis, and Patrick Pearse envisioned a future Ireland which would be free from dependence upon Britain. This was the basis of their "imagined community." But one man's imagined community was not necessarily shared by all his fellowcountrymen. Such differences could lead to civil war between nationalist groups, as occurred in 1921 and again in Belfast in 1970.

What does not seem to work in the case of Ireland is Gellner's hypothesis linking nationalism and industrialism. On the contrary, Irish nationalism seems to have taken hold in rural areas. Hobsbawm's stress upon the importance of the French Revolution is somewhat undermined by his assumption that there was a Dual Revolution linking the French Revolution and the English Industrial Revolution. If nationalism did appear in Ireland it was in areas affected by deindustrialization.

Isaiah Berlin's brief essay on nationalism throws a good deal of light upon the case of Ireland.[35] Berlin argued that a group's experience of a "wound" creates a sense of deprivation. What he had in mind was the "stab in the back" theory as an explanation for the rise of German nationalism. A similar sense of relative deprivation in respect of the Great Famine took hold among the Irish diaspora in the United States. As we have seen, there was a sense of relative deprivation among lower-middle-class Catholics in Ireland around 1900. Among Catholics in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s the rise of nationalism was also fueled by the experience of discrimination.

Such general "causes," however, are not in themselves sufficient. What was needed was particular leadership or a particular course of events to create a vigorous political movement. This was as true of the rise of Hitler's brand of German nationalism in the 1920s as it was of Irish nationalism. For political success what needed to be called into being was a sense of national consciousness, and this depended upon a number of variables. Had the British authorities reacted more promptly to the threat of a rising in 1916 or had they behaved with greater circumspection afterward, the course of events might have been very different. An argument might be made on similar lines in the case of Zionism.

What is lost sight of in the work of Gellner, Anderson, and Hobsbawm is the extent to which all nationalisms are political movements which aim at gaining or retaining power. All such movements raise questions of leadership, political rhetoric, commitment by dedicated minority groups, the impact of changing circumstances, and the role of violence. In the case of nationalism the key issues of what constitutes nationhood, language, religion, or race (sc., ethnicity or the implied membership of a descent group) all play their role.

In this introduction and in the pages which follow I have obviously made considerable use of the distinction between "ethnic" and "civic" nationalism, discussed so brilliantly by Rogers Brubaker in *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Harvard University Press, 1992).[36] This raises the key issue of who is included within the nation and who is excluded and at what cost. Nationalism also raises the issue of what is termed "the tyranny of the majority." Finally there is the key question as to why nationalist rhetoric should often be more successful in the polls than political argument based upon economic or class consideration.

On all these issues, Irish nationalism may be seen as a significant case study. The problems faced after independence by successive Irish

governments were unique to Ireland. From a more general point of view, however, the experience of Ireland in relation to the membership of the nation, the role of history in nation building, the balance between "civic" and "ethnic" considerations, the roles of religion, language, and ethnicity, runs parallel to that of other nations and other nationalist movements. Even England, which long considered itself to be above such considerations, is now being forced to concern itself with issues of ethnicity, Englishness, and Britishness.

NOTES

1. Tony Judt, "Israel: The Undivided Solution," in *The Sunday Times*, 26 October 2003.

2. Graham Walker, "Irish Nationalism and the Uses of History," in *Past and Present*, no. 126, pp. 208–14.

3. Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton University Press: 1998).

4. Norman Davies, *The Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford University Press: 1984); Irena Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania* (Cornell University Press: 1995).

5. See N. Canny, *Making Ireland British* (Oxford University Press: 2001).

6. See Bernadette Cunningham's brilliant book, *The World of Geoffrey Keating: History, Myth, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), especially chapter 6.

7. See Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, *Catholic Reformation in Ireland: The Mission of Rinuccini 1645–1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

8. Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, "Political Ideology and Catholicism in Ireland," in Jane Ohlmeyer, ed., *Political Thought in Seventeenth-Century Ireland: Kingdom or Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 159.

9. Ibid., p. 168.

10. O'Connell held one of his monster outdoor meetings of Mullaghmast, Co. Leix, the site of a massacre in 1577. Clontarf, Dublin, was the scene of Brian Boru's victory over the Vikings in 1014.

11. Provided by Mr. William Corbett, ref. PRO London Home Office Papers HO-100-223. See also Clonmel Museum.

12. *The Irish Catholic*, 26 Sept. 1908, quoted in David W. Miller, *Church, State and Nation in Ireland 1898–1921* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973), pp. 227–28.

13. Willard Potts, *Joyce and the Two Irelands* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), p. 11.

14. Potts, Joyce and the *Two Irelands*, p. 33. See also Patrick Maume, *D. P. Moran* (Dublin: Dundalgan Press, 1995).

15. Barry M. Coldry, *Faith and Fatherland: The Christian Brothers and the Development of Irish Nationalism 1838–1921* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), p. 243.

16. See Senia Paseta, *Before the Revolution: Nationalism, Social Change and Ireland's Catholic Elite 1879–1922* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999).

17. P. Hart, *The IRA and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork 1916–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

18. The term "Eire" is often misused. For De Valera it referred to a unified Ireland, a future prospect in 1937. But often it was employed as equivalent to "The Irish Free State." The term "Ireland" itself is also misleading if used to mean "the Republic of Ireland" (of twenty-six counties).

19. Liam ua Cathain, *Cnoc Muire (Knock Shrine) in Picture and Story* (Galway: 1945). Fifth impression 1949, pp. 318–19.

20. Ibid, p. 327.

21. Ibid, p. 338.

22. T. P. Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 274.

23. The impending British defeat raised hopes in some Irish circles that Germany might unify Ireland.

24. Quoted in Gabriel Doherty, "National Identity and the Study of Irish History," *English Historical Review* (April: 1996), p. 340.

25. Progress slowed, however, after the election of a new Pope, Paul VI, in 1963. See John Cooney, *John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland* (Dublin: O'Brien Press 1999), chapter 24.

26. There was a marked contrast with the situation in Britain where doctors' waiting rooms carried advertisements with such slogans as "There was an old woman who lived in a shoe, She had so many children because she did not know what to do."

27. Coogan, p. 623.

28. The Free State had a population of 2.9 million, Northern Ireland one of 1.5 million. See Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Nation and State* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994), p. 88.

29. Peter Hart, "The Protestant Experience of Revolution in Southern Ireland," in Richard English and Graham Walker, eds., *Unionism in Modern Ireland: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture* (London: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), p. 81.

30. In his influential and brilliant book, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 661, Professor Lee declares of religion, language, and race that "It is the defining characteristic of normal European states and normal European peoples."

31. Coogan, p. 591.

32. In 1998, when political leaders from Northern Ireland visited Pittsburgh, David Trimble and Seamus Mallon spoke at the nonsectarian University of

Pittsburgh whereas Gerry Adams chose to speak at the Catholic University of Duquesne.

33. *The Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1999.

34. *The Irish Times*, 30 Oct. 1999.

35. Isaiah Berlin, "Nationalism, Past Neglect and Present Power," in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (New York: Viking, 1980) pp. 333–55.

36. See also his *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996).