
CONSTRUCTING THE "SELF" OF
SELF-DETERMINATION:
LIBERAL AND ANTI-LIBERAL TENSIONS
IN MODERN IRISH NATIONALISM¹

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship of modern nationalism to the philosophical dictates of eighteenth century liberalism. It argues that although the ethos of modern nationalism developed out of the liberal ideal of popular sovereignty, the process of constructing a national "self" as the legitimate benefactor of that sovereignty often embraces very anti-liberal ideas. This paper explores this tension through a case study modern Irish nationalism. Although born out of the dictates of British liberalism, Irish nationalism also drew upon the anti-liberal objectives of European Romanticism and Socialism in order to create a unique national "self." By combining these liberal and anti-liberal ideals, Irish nationalist leaders articulated a political culture which claimed the right of self-determination for a community symbolically separated from the British Empire.

Nationalism is one of the ways in which marginalized or excluded groups have historically responded to the political ideals of liberalism. To the politically marginalized, the philosophy of liberalism exposes situations of political disenfranchisement and provides a powerful legitimation for political sovereignty and the right to autonomous development.² At the same time, however, the cultural boundaries of "imagined communities" produced within nationalist ideology promote an anti-liberal, communitarian agenda that extends liberal individual rights to a

community which is symbolically distinguished from a colonial power. In this sense, nationalism is a peculiar hybrid of liberalism that straddles the liberal contradictions between individual rights and civil society; nationalism's demands for the extension of political rights to a group claiming the status of a nation simultaneously affirm and critique the liberal political agenda.

The Irish case is ideal for exploring nationalism as the reaction of marginalized groups to the political ideals of liberalism, since Irish nationalism was born from the belly of British liberalism. Founded upon the liberal ideals of John Locke and the British Whig tradition, Irish nationalism is arguably one of the first cases of modern nationalism in history. Its founders, themselves Protestant Whigs, articulated the liberal objectives of civic humanism, and a limited, representative, and conditional government as the foundation of their nationalist ideology. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, nationalist leaders merged these liberal ideals with the objectives of a variety of broad anti-liberalism movements, including Romanticism and Socialism. From these movements Irish nationalist leaders coopted various anti-liberal ideals, including an emphasis on shared traditions and culture, social solidarity, community values and collective economic control, in order to create the cultural boundaries and economic rationale that would extend liberal individual rights to a unique and often imagined community. It is in this sense that the merging of liberal and anti-liberal ideas produces the "self" of political self-determination.

This paper is an exploration into the liberal and anti-liberal tensions within modern Irish nationalism.³ Specifically, I focus on the ways in which Irish nationalist leaders combined liberal and anti-liberal ideals in order to extend liberal political rights to a political "self" that was distinct from the British Empire. My core argument is that the character of modern nationalism allowed Irish nationalist leaders to draw from and support liberal and anti-liberal thinkers and movements throughout the late-

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These often contradictory recipes for civil society were merged into a nationalist political culture that was ideologically critical of traditional British liberalism and politically counter hegemonic against British rule over Ireland.

In order to effectively explore these issues, this paper is divided into three sections. First, I explore the general character of modern nationalism, documenting the key components of nationalist ideology and their foundation in eighteenth century liberalism. I then turn to a case study of modern Irish nationalism which examines the liberal and anti-liberal components of Irish nationalist ideology and their influence on Irish national identity.⁴ In order to allow for adequate depth, I have limited this case study to the liberal influences of John Locke and the anti-liberal ideals of Johann Herder's romanticism and European socialism. While many other examples of liberal and anti-liberal influences exist,⁵ those focused on in this paper tend to be considered the most significant, and as such will suffice for the scope of this paper.

THE CHARACTER OF MODERN NATIONALISM

Modern nationalism can be understood as an ideology that promotes the freedom of a particular group of people with a consciousness of a common identity to their own autonomous development (Leach 1991, p. 171). In doing so, it makes manifest the assertion that "the nation state is the ideal and the only legitimate form of political organization and that nationality is the source of all cultural creative energy and of economic well being" (Kohn 1965, p. 10). These definitions demonstrate the two interrelated components of modern nationalism: 1) the demand for popular sovereignty and, 2) the construction of identity boundaries between dominant and excluded groups.

The demand for popular sovereignty within modern nationalist movements was born out of classical liberalism. Indeed, scholars note that pre-enlightenment (i.e. premodern) forms of nationalism were primarily "state-led" (Tilly 1992), where monarchical states created national identities to coalesce the diverse population within their territory (Anderson 1988). This pre-modern form of nationalism was "civic-territorial" (Smith 1986), molded by dominant bureaucratic states to create territorial units of law and citizenship and conceptualizing the nation as an elite or sovereign people who transcended distinctions based on territory or genealogy (Greenfield 1994). Throughout the eighteenth century, however, liberal critiques of hereditary rule and the development of liberal constitutionalism paved the way for a fundamental transformation in the character of nationalism. Newly emerging definitions of popular sovereignty exposed situations of political disenfranchisement and challenged arbitrary rule. The resulting "ethnic-genealogical" (Smith 1986) form of nationalism was oppositional, separatist, and legitimated the right of colonized groups to popular sovereignty and political self-determination.

In contrast to the individualistic conception of political liberty embodied in liberal political philosophy, however, the ideal of popular sovereignty epitomized in modern nationalism also necessitates a definition of the "people" which is organic rather than abstract; a political "self" which is fundamentally anti-liberal in character. As Sugar (1981) notes, the dictates of the Enlightenment

placed great stress on the rights of the individual, including his freedom to associate freely with people of his own choice. This factor reinforced, in contradiction to the demands of the modern state, the freedom of individuals to seek the company and to protect the interests of those to whom they felt "naturally" drawn (Sugar 1981, p. 76).

In the process of constructing the "self" of self-determination, nationalist leaders articulate claims that define a community as genealogically, geographically, and/or culturally distinct. Thus,

although modern nationalism articulates the liberal ideal of popular sovereignty, the process of constructing the "nation" as a cohesive and legitimate unit of political sovereignty makes nationalist ideologies partially critical of the individualistic tenets of the liberal agenda. Consequently the process of extending liberal individual rights to a unique and often "imagined community" (Anderson 1988) makes modern nationalism simultaneously complementary and critical to the political ideals of liberalism.

THE LIBERAL FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN NATIONALISM IN IRELAND

Premodern Irish nationalism was primarily an "ascendancy nationalism" (O'Hegarty 1969) emanating from the Protestant aristocracy, landed gentry, and professional classes in Ireland. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, British colonialism in Ireland had led to the political disenfranchisement of the Irish Catholic majority and placed national identification and political control of Ireland directly into the hands of a minority of upper class Irish Protestants. As the sovereign people of Ireland, the Protestant Ascendancy, although a minority, asserted itself as the true nation of Ireland over the dispossessed Catholic majority. Rooted in premodern conceptions of the nation as a sovereign people, the Ascendancy's feelings of national identity were so strong that William Molyneux, a leader of the Protestant Ascendancy, stated publicly that

...the greatest body of the present people of Ireland are the progeny of the English and Britons, that from time to time have come over into this Kingdom; and there remaining but a mere handful of the Ancient Irish at this day; I may say, not one in a thousand (1698, pp. 20-1).

It was not until 1790 that the dictates of the Enlightenment began to challenge the premodern nationalism of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland. In 1782, the Ascendancy successfully

negotiated the legislative independence of the Irish Parliament, which had been denied by the British government since 1720. The majority of "patriot" MPs saw legislative independence as an end in itself, even though the new Irish Parliament was even less receptive of Catholic emancipation than the Parliament at London (Newman 1991, p. 153). However, a small group of radical Irish Whigs, committed to British liberalism's distaste for aristocratic absolutism, pushed for further reforms within the Irish Parliament. In their distrust of arbitrary rule, how could they settle for a political situation that continued to disenfranchise Irish Catholics when Catholics comprised both the numerical and ethnic majority of the Irish population? Clearly the Irish Catholics, as Theobald Wolfe Tone and other radical Irish Whigs were beginning to argue, represented "the Irish, properly so called" (Boyce 1991, p. 127).

Modern Irish nationalism was born out of this context, and the political dictates of classical liberalism, especially those of John Locke, were the fundamental building blocks of the nationalist reaction against the Protestant Ascendancy in late-eighteenth century Ireland. Locke's *Treatises on Civil Government* had played a critical role in the development of the political philosophy of the Whig tradition (Clifford 1991, Leach 1991), and had provided the platform from which British Whig radicals framed their reform strategies in the British Parliament as well as the foundations of political republicanism at the inception of the American Revolution. Locke's liberal philosophy was also the impetus of modern nationalism in Ireland, and provided powerful symbolic resources from which Irish patriots could frame their nationalist reform policy (Curtin 1994).

The center-piece of modern nationalism in Ireland was Locke's idea of "civic humanism," which argued that individuals had natural rights to life, liberty and property, and thus government should rest on the consent of the governed. It promoted constitutional limits on government that would protect these

natural rights, and justified the right of popular rebellion if these rights were infringed. In short, the objective of civic humanism was the liberal ideal of a united, representative people submitted only to the laws of their own making. Irish political leaders found the themes idealized within liberal civic humanism valuable in mounting their critique of the Ascendancy's control over Irish politics and exposing previous reform efforts as fundamentally biased and unrepresentative. This is evident in three interrelated themes found in their nationalist rhetoric: the need for religious tolerance and unity, constitutional reform in the name of fair and equal representation, and the construction of a secular state that would place religious differences secondary to political interests and act as a trustee of the people.

The need for religious tolerance and unity was one of the most potent criticisms of the Protestant Ascendancy made by early Irish nationalists. They argued that reforms in the Irish Parliament had done little to increase the extremely limited participation of Irish Catholics.⁶ Since the majority had been denied representation, nationalist leaders argued that reforms in the Irish Parliament had not created a true national government. Locke's emphasis on the unified, representative polity provided Irish nationalists with the rhetorical resources to effectively frame this criticism. For instance, Sammuel Neilson, founder and editor of the *Northern Star*, a daily newspaper that served as the voice of nationalists in Belfast who would later title themselves the "United Irishmen," proclaimed that "efforts for [parliamentary] reform hitherto have been ineffectual, and they deserve to be so, for they have been selfish and unjust, as not including the rights of Catholics in the claims we put forward for [Irish Protestants.] (Madden [1842] 1916, p. 79). Theobald Wolfe Tone, attributed as one of the founders of the United Irish movement, espoused similar criticism in his famous *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*:

That Ireland, as deriving her government from another country, requires strength in the people, which enable them,

if necessary to counteract the influence of that government, should it ever be, as it indisputably as been, exerted to thwart her prosperity: That this strength may be most constitutionally acquired, and safely and peaceably exerted through the medium of Parliamentary Reform: And finally, that no Reform is honourable, practicable, efficacious or just, which does not include as a fundamental principle, the extension of elective franchise to the Roman Catholics. (Tone 1791, p. 12)

Taken as a whole, the nationalist rhetoric of the United Irish movement criticized the Irish Parliament as less than a true national government, since it was rooted in religious intolerance and bigotry. The liberal ideal of religious tolerance and unity thus became one of the key planks in early modern Irish nationalism.

The second liberal theme woven into the rhetoric of early Irish nationalism centered on the necessity of constitutional reform toward representative government. Locke's phrase "fair and equal representation" was itself repeatedly used in United Irish oaths, declarations and literary productions in order to criticize the abusive reforms of the past and highlight a liberal political ideal. In upholding the right of fair and equal representation, leaders in the United Irish movement also advanced the liberal ideal of conditional government within their nationalist claims. True liberty was defined as "having an actual share in the appointing of those who from the laws and who are to be the guardians of every man's life, property, and peace" (*Northern Star* 28 Jan. 1792). The ideal state was espoused as one serving as a trustee of the people, where legislation would reflect the will of civil society as a whole rather than the interests of a limited group, and where rebellion was justified if these rights were violated. In line with this liberal ideal, Irish nationalists proclaimed in the *Northern Star*:

... the king of a free people is only the first magistrate, holding a great public trust, and subject to the majesty of the people ... The Compact between the people and their

first magistrate is mutual, and a departure on either side dissolves the obligation. . . Loyalty. . . is conditional. (*Northern Star* 4 Apr. 1792)

Finally, Curtin (1994) notes that the concept of "Republicanism," which would become an organizing principle of Irish nationalism during the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arose in Irish politics as a reference to a governing structure that would uphold the Lockian ideal of fair and equal representation (1994, p. 15).

The third liberal ideal articulated within the nationalist rhetoric of the United Irish movement centered on the need for a secular state that would separate national concerns from religious affiliation and negate the political inequality that had evolved out of the religious sectarianism of the past. Locke's political philosophy attacked the negative political influence of denominational conflict while at the same time supported a general acceptance of Christian beliefs; "Locke subverted the political force of denominational Christianity, while retaining "*common Christianity*" as a general spiritual medium of life" (Clifford 1989, p 19). This made Locke's philosophy both resonant to the Irish situation as well as particularly appealing to the program of the United Irishmen. As a result, the rhetoric of United Irish leaders stressed the need for a religious unity which would place religious differences secondary to political interests. For instance, Martin Dúnnovan called Irishmen of both religious sects to lay aside their differences for the good of the Nation.

Oh! degraded, injured, and insulted Ireland! . . . Awake to a just sense of your injuries — Arouse from you Torpor — Join the Bands of your Countrymen — Lay aside your Party Distinctions of Lenister Men and Munster Men — Lay aside your religious Differences of Catholic and Protestant, and embrace every Irishman as your Friend and Brother. Consult together . . . and never forget the Duty you owe to the Country that gave you Birth, and nourished your infant Years. (*Report from the Committee of Secrecy*, 15 March 1799, p. 86)

The liberal ideal of elevating national concerns over religious affiliation yielded a specific nationalist goal for Irish politics: the construction of a secular state. Tone, as well as other leaders in the United Irish movement, maintained the Catholics, Protestants, and Presbyterians must join forces in order for Irish political reform to be effective. However, this unity was liberal in nature. The national self proposed by Tone was a result of the individualistic and mechanistic principles of civic participation rather than an anti-liberal sense of organic connectedness. United Irish leaders argued that the religious beliefs of every individual were between that individual and the leading of God; civil unity, on the other hand, was to be derived from the abstract and impersonal spirit of civil society (Clifford, p. 68-69). This civil spirit, they argued, was a national rather than theological necessity; religious unification was necessary for political reform rather than the creation of an organic national self: "The proximate cause of our disgrace is our evil government, the remote one is our own [religious] division, which, if once removed, the former will be instantaneously reformed" (Tone 1791, p. 8).

Thus, we see that early modern Irish nationalism embodied a conception of civil society borrowed from the British liberal tradition. By espousing the liberal ideals of Locke's civic humanism, Irish nationalist leaders during the 1790's exposed the anti-democratic nature of past reforms in the Irish Parliament and framed a liberal critique of existing patterns of political disenfranchisement in Ireland. The liberal context was thus critical to the formation of an anti-hegemonic, nationalist political culture in Ireland focused on shifting power relations out of the hands of the privileged Protestant Ascendancy into the hands of a representative Irish state. In addition, however, this liberal theme proposed an atomistic and mechanistic national self rooted in individual liberty and freedom rather than a self given life through an organic sense of interpersonal connectedness. This organic national self would arise in the early decades of the nineteenth

century through the anti-liberal influences of Romanticism and European Socialism.

ANTI-LIBERAL REACTIONS IN IRISH NATIONALISM

As we have just seen, the liberal ideals of civic-humanism provided important symbolic resources from which Irish political leaders mounted their critique of the Protestant political Ascendancy in Ireland. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, Irish nationalist leaders bolstered the liberal foundations of Irish nationalist ideology with ideals drawn from a variety of anti-liberal movements throughout Europe. The result was a transformation in the Irish national self, away from liberal principles of abstract individual rights toward an emphasis on organic national identity and collective economic control as the basis for political sovereignty. The following section explores this transformation of Irish nationalism in the wake of the anti-liberal principles embodied within the European Romantic and Socialist movements. These movements provided Irish nationalist leaders with the symbolic resources to frame a political program that more fully represents the characteristics of modern nationalism.

Romantic Reactions in Irish Nationalism

The anti-Enlightenment nature of the European Romantic movement had a significant influence on the development of anti-liberal principles within the political culture of Irish nationalism during the 1840s. European Romanticism during the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries replaced the Enlightenment basis of civil society in atomistic and mechanistic natural rights with a conception of the social organism, organic community, and national spirit. Irish nationalist leaders found the Romantic conception of civil society a powerful symbolic

resource for bolstering their nationalistic critique of British control over Ireland. For this reason, they augmented their liberal political agenda with a romanticized notion of the national self rooted in historicity and cultural uniqueness rather than abstract political rights. The result was a nationalist agenda that centered on rediscovering the Irish past and the infusion of Irish cultural strengths into a conception of national community as the basis of political sovereignty.

Perhaps the most influential figure in the development of Irish Romantic nationalism was the German romantic scholar Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder's notion of "historicism" was an important symbol in Irish romantic nationalism. According to Herder's historicism, every culture has its own logic and life and can thus only be understood internally and in terms of its unique categories and definitions (Saiedi 1993). For this reason, Herder argued that the common denominator between the individual and the state should be the history through which they have both emerged, and thus the foundation of civil society should rest in the logic, world view, and shared history of a unique culture (Beiser 1992) rather than some abstract and universalistic collection of natural laws.

Herder's influence on Irish romantic nationalism can be seen in the shifting claims to Irish nationhood from a rational basis in civil rights to a more nostalgic emphasis on cultural discovery and revival throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Irish nationalist culture during the romantic era is replete with references which connect claims of the unique heritage, characteristics and superiority of Irish culture to the right for political self-determination. For instance, Thomas Davis claimed that Irish nationality:

is the summary name for many things. It seeks a literature made by Irishmen and coloured by our scenery, manners, and characters. It desires to see art applied to express Irish thoughts and belief. It would make our music sound in every

Paris at twilight, our pictures sprinkle the walls of every house, and our poetry and history sit at every hearth. It would thus create a race of men full of more intensely Irish character and knowledge, and to that race it would give Ireland. (Rafroidi 1980, pp. xxvi-xxvii)

Similar to the Enlightenment goal of the United Irishmen, the ideological goal of Irish romantic nationalism was to fuse the Irish people, in all their diversity, into one nation. However, the means to this goal was not to ignore diversity or tolerate difference in the name of civil society (as the United Irishmen had proposed), but rather to mobilize around the discovery of a common cultural denominator that would unite the people into an organic whole. Irish romantic nationalists were critical of the highly politicized liberal notion of national self, which they saw in terms of "the Ireland of English burlesque" involving "whining complaints or framing petitions for some scanty crumb of relief" (Duffy 1881, p. 190). Instead, they romanticized the Irish national self as the

... old historic island, the mother of soldiers and scholars, whose name was heard in the roar of onset on a thousand battle fields, for whose dear love of the poor home-sick exile in the garret or cloister of some foreign city toiled and plotted, and at length hid his weary head and dies - the one mother country which a man loves as he loves the mother who held him to her breast. [Where men] dreamed not of becoming Repeal Wardens,⁷ but of becoming martyrs and confessors ... (Duffy 1881, p. 193)

In this way, Irish nationalists during the romantic period promoted the rediscovery of a distinctive Irish past rather than the identification of universal human rights. They romanticized the Irish past by resurrecting national ballads, the Celtic race, and Gaelic songs and poetry, all of which were consolidated into a program of national education.⁸ One of the best examples of this goal is the intellectual newspaper, titled *The Nation*, founded in 1842 by nationalist leaders with the goal of promoting Patriotism, Knowledge, and Truth. It would do so by promoting the nostalgia of the Irish past and thus making public opinion

“racy of the soil” (O’Hegarty 1952, p. 108). *The Nation* published elegies to the rebel lords of the Renaissance, Jacobite hymns, and a seemingly endless number of poems glorifying the Irish past and praising the merits and love of Irish history (Rafroidi 1980). Gavan Duffy, editor of *The Nation*, highlighted the romantic nationalist purposes of the paper in his editorial statement, in which he claimed *The Nation* would create “self-reliance and self-respect which misgovernment had nearly extinguished in the mass of the people” (Duffy 1869, p. 31). As implied here, the romantic goal was to promote the self-sufficiency of Gaelic culture as the basis of Ireland’s right to political sovereignty and repeal of the British Union over Ireland. This goal was furthered through an expanded process of cultural education, organized around the construction of Repeal Reading Rooms, designed to “educate the masses to be free” by increasing both the circulation and the accessibility of *The Nation* and other materials celebrating Gaelic culture.⁹

Another key foundation to Irish romantic nationalism was its focus on reviving the Gaelic language as the national language of Ireland. The romantic emphasis on Gaelic can be seen as the epitome of the organic form of national self. Irish romantic nationalists saw the Gaelic language as the key expression of cultural heritage, and politicized its loss throughout the past century as an indication of national and cultural inferiority. For instance, Thomas Davis, a leading figure in Irish romantic nationalism, saw the resurrection of the Gaelic language as a potential antidote to Irish national inferiority. He ridiculed the English language as “the Mongrel of a hundred breeds,” and argued that the loss of one’s native tongue “is the worst badge of conquest, it is the chain on the soul. A people without a language of its own is only half a nation . . . A people should guard its language more than its territories” (*The Nation*, 1 April 1843). Once again, this emphasis on linguistic revival provides evidence of a romanticized notion of self that proposed building cultural unity and self-sufficiency as the antidote to Anglicization.

In sum, conditioned by the anti-liberal conceptions of civil society embodied within the European Romantic movement, Irish nationalists expanded the notion of civic society and national selfhood beyond its liberal foundation in abstract natural laws. As Richard Kearney notes, the ideology of Irish romantic nationalism “looked less to a future Enlightenment dream of world citizenry than to a memory of an ancient ‘Celtic Race’ which preexisted colonial divisions and differences” (1997, p. 35). The resulting romantic nationalism promoted the construction of a unique, homogeneous, and self-sufficient cultural identity as the basis of the national self and thus the primary legitimation for Irish political sovereignty. The anti-liberal tenor of the romantic conception of civil society thus increased the counter-hegemonic nature of Irish nationalism, creating an imagined community (Anderson 1983) that was fundamentally set in opposition to the British political control over Ireland.¹⁰

European Socialism and Irish Economic Nationalism

Perhaps no other event of the nineteenth century had the scope of impact on Irish political culture than the potato famine of 1845-47. Agricultural decline in Ireland between 1815 and 1845, the transformation of land use from agriculture to pasture, increasing rents fluctuating prices, and the collapse of domestic industry, had made the Irish peasantry dependent on the potato as their staple food source (Green 1956, p. 122), so much so that three years of blighted potato crops left the Irish rural populations devastated. Ironically, bumper crops of wheat and oats were grown during 1845-47 in Ireland. However, those crops, along with barley, turnips and carrots, were grown to pay rent on the land or were exported for English consumption (O’Hegarty 1952). Thus, in the wake of three years of failure of the potato crop, between 1 and 1½ million people in Ireland died of starvation, cholera, and typhus (O’Hegarty 1952; Newman 1981), and an

additional one million Irish people emigrated to the United States and 300,000 emigrated to England (O'Hegarty 1952).

For the most part, the British response to the famine crisis in Ireland was couched within the liberal dictates of laissez-faire economics.¹¹ British Prime Minister John Russell's speeches during this time make it clearly evident that he was most interested in maintaining conventional economic relations with Ireland during the famine and fearful of the effects that disrupting normal trades flows or creating public works programs would have on British private industry. Russell believed that the sovereignty of supply and demand would feed the Irish people, and thus regarded any form of food distribution or relief work a matter for private enterprise, not the state (Nowlan 1994, p. 149). For these reasons, Britain held to a strict laissez-faire economic policy in dealing with the Irish famine, protecting trade and imports and placing the responsibility for paying for workhouse districts solely in the hands of the Irish district itself, rather than contributing half of the cost from its own Treasury as in the years before. Even the relief programs that were created upheld the economic orthodoxy of the day, restricting work to public utilities that would not interfere with private industry, and as a result prohibiting any work that would improve land, property, or holdings (O'Hegarty 1952).

The influence of the famine, and the British reaction to it, on Irish politics is perhaps best captured by the fact that most nationalist ideologues of the day referred to the famine as the "Great Starvation," "highlighting their belief that the British were using the famine to solve the Irish Question through a policy of extermination" (McCaffrey 1976, p. 112). Conditioned by the growth and potency of European Socialism, Irish nationalism became increasingly centered on a critique of the British liberal economic principles. The socialist economic agenda provided Irish nationalists with a powerful critique of the British laissez-faire response to the devastation of the Irish potato famine.¹² This

anti-liberal critique not only "nationalized" economic issues in a way that legitimated the Irish claim to political sovereignty, but also further expanded the anti-liberal conceptualization of the Irish national self.

Post-famine Irish nationalism evidences an economic focus in two broad ways. First, Irish nationalist leaders argued that the Britain's laissez-faire response to the famine had unique economic consequences for Ireland due to its colonial status. Other countries, including Holland, Scotland, Germany and Belgium experienced the same blight on the potato crop, but had been able to close their exports and open imports in order to protect their populations from famine. Irish nationalist leaders problematized their colonial status by arguing that state intervention in the economy was the necessary right of any nation to protect its inhabitants.

Some Continental States, especially Belgium, have prohibited the carrying of grain, meal, or flour, out of the country, a course which, however objectionable under ordinary circumstances, yet may become sometimes absolutely necessary, when a calamity like the present occurs. Of this, however, we must not think. We have no domestic Government or legislature to provide such a remedy, and as for the English Government, is not Ireland their store-farm? To prohibit themselves from importing food from hence would be like a man making a covenant with himself, in a season of scarcity, not to have recourse to his own barn. So long as this island is a "foreigners' farm" that remedy is out of the question. (*The Nation*, 25 October 1845)

The critique of laissez-faire commercial economics embodied in post-famine Irish nationalism legitimated the transformation of the Irish political system by espousing the ideal of increased collective economic control. This goal was highly nationalistic, since it would take repealing the British Union to allow Ireland a level of economic control over its destiny.

Every country in the globe, possessing a government, and not tributary to a foreign people, whenever there is a deficient harvest, and the slightest apprehension of famine arises, immediately shuts its ports to export and opens them to import (that is, if it wants import). In other words, every Nation except a nation of slaves, takes care that the food raised on its own soil shall feed its own people first. (*The Nation*, 10 October 1946)

Thus, the criticism of England's laissez-faire response to the famine crisis in Ireland was politicized by nationalist leaders into an anti-liberal economic agenda that legitimated the Irish right to political and thus economic control. The national "self" was also conceptualized with the equally anti-liberal and communitarian notion that national self-hood rather than abstract economic laws should be the basis of economic control.

The second way in which the anti-liberal ideals of European socialism nationalized Irish economic issues and promoted the Irish claim to political sovereignty was through the development of an anti-liberal land ethic. This radical "economic nationalism," organized primarily by James Fintan Lalor and John Mitchel, promoted the anti-liberal notion that the sole proprietor of land was the citizenry, and thus the private landholder could only justify his ownership so long as he acted in harmony with the community. In addition, it constructed a national self rooted in the communitarian notion of collective economic control. From this perspective, the power to confer new titles to the land rested in "the people of Ireland," and were legitimate only to the extent that they met the demands of the rural population, who had been hardest hit by the famine (Nowlan 1994, p. 172). Lalor's economic nationalist agenda articulated the following anti-capitalistic objectives:

1. That in order to save their own lives, the occupying tenants of the soil of Ireland ought, next autumn, to refuse all rent and arrears of rent and arrears of rent then due, beyond and except the value of the overplus

of harvest produce remaining in their hands after having deducted and reserved a due and full provision for their own subsistence during the next ensuing twelve months.

2. That they ought to refuse and resist being made beggars, landless and homeless under the English law of ejection.
3. That they ought further, on principle, to refuse *all rent* to the present usurping proprietors, until the people, the *true proprietors* (or lords paramount, in legal parlance) have, in national congress or convention, decided what rents they are to pay, and to whom they are to pay them.
4. And that the people, on grounds of policy and economy, ought to decide (as a general rule admitting of reservations) that these rents shall be paid to *themselves*, the people, for public purposes, and for behoof and benefit of them, the entire general people (Connolly 1914, p. 187)

Lalor further politicized this economic critique by arguing that the famine had exposed British landlordism as the foundation of the British Union over Ireland. This foundation, he proposed, needed to be destroyed if Irish land was going to be distributed among its "true proprietors," the people (McCaffrey 1995). To carry out this nationalist class struggle in Irish land policy, Lalor, Mitchel, and their revolutionary cohort proposed an agrarian policy of direct agitation against the existing land system of Ireland. However, they argued that this would not merely constitute an economic revolution, but also a national and democratic revolution, since it would place economic control directly into the hands of the people of Ireland (Nowlan 1994).

In sum, we can see that the anti-liberal principles embodied within the general European socialist perspective were an influential component in the construction of modern Irish national identity. Not only did socialist ideals support the nationalist critique of liberal economics in the post-famine period, it also constructed the need for collective economic control, and in doing so, further defined the national self that would be encompassed by Irish political sovereignty. In this way, the agenda enveloped by Irish socialism did not contradict the anti-liberal dictates of Irish romantic nationalism. Rather, it augmented the national self by adding a class consciousness to cultural discovery.¹³ The result was an increasingly potent nationalist agenda that promoted Irish political sovereignty extended to an economic as well as culturally unified community.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the liberal and anti-liberal tensions embodied within the character of modern nationalism. I have argued that while liberal political ideals are critical to the nationalist agenda of exposing situations of political disenfranchisement and promoting the ideal of national sovereignty, the character of modern nationalism simultaneously promotes anti-liberal conceptions of civil society, including an emphasis on shared traditions and culture, social solidarity, community values and collective economic control, as it constructs the cultural boundaries of imagined communities. Operationalizing these ideas within a case study of Irish nationalism, I have shown how the character of modern nationalism allowed Irish nationalist leaders to draw from broad and often contradictory social movements in constructing a political agenda as well as delineating the national self to which that agenda applied. The result was a political culture that was politically counter-hegemonic to British rule in Ireland and

extended liberal individual rights to a culturally distinct although often "imagined" community.

Although this paper has relied on a case study of nationalism in Ireland, other scholars point out that the general theoretical argument made here is applicable to separatist nationalisms around the world. For instance, Hutchinson (1987) distinguishes "cultural" from "political" nationalism by indicating that while political nationalists look to reason, natural law, and the civic *polity* as the basis of nations, cultural nationalist view the nation as

not just political units but *organic* beings, living personalities, whose individuality must be cherished by their members in all their manifestations. Unlike the political nationalist, the cultural nationalist founds the nation not on 'mere' consent or law but on the passions implanted by nature and history (Hutchinson 1987, p. 122).

Here we see evidence of both liberal and anti-liberal foundations of modern nationalism in general. However, while Hutchinson discusses these two forms of nationalism as separate movements, I have argued here that the liberal forces of political nationalism typically combine with the anti-liberal ethos of cultural nationalism in order to promote the ideals of political sovereignty in the name of a unique cultural and/or geographic identity.

Other scholars make similar arguments. For instance, Hutchinson and Smith (1994) note that:

Nationalism was, first of all, a doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty. The people must be liberated – that is, free from any external constraint; they must determine their own destiny and be masters of their own house; they must control their own resources; they must obey only their own "inner" voice. But that entailed fraternity. The people must be united; they must dissolve all internal divisions; they must be gathered together in a single historic territory, a homeland; and they must have legal equality and share a single public culture (Hutchinson and Smith 1994, p. 4).

Thus, liberal and anti-liberal tensions are not simply characteristic of modern Irish nationalism, but are rather evident in anti-colonial struggles around the world. For example, in her study of Finnish nationalism, Karner (1991) notes that the romantic cultural expressions embodied in the *Kalevala*, a book of Finnish folk poems, was critical to the creation of Finnish identity as separate from Swedish and Russian identity. The *Kalevala* provided a sense of Finnish cultural history that "served as symbolic exemplars of a nation yearning for self-expression and hence, independence" (Karner 1991, p. 160). Similarly, Cobban (1969) argues that this same liberal/anti-liberal tension was responsible for the Norwegian idea of independence, the development of national ideas in the Austrian Netherlands, and the appearance of the American conception of nationhood. In this sense, it is clear that the "self of self-determination" embodied in modern nationalism evolved out of the clash between the liberal notion of individual political autonomy and an anti-liberal sense of communitarian identity.

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Notes

¹ A previous version of this paper was presented at the 1996 Graduate workshop: Liberalism and Civil Society in Modern Britain and Germany: Ideas, Traditions, Practices. *Minda de Gunzburg* Center for European Studies, Harvard University. I am grateful to Robert Antonio, Joane Nagel, Dan Krier, and Carl Strikwerda for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Direct correspondence to: William J. Swart, Department of Sociology, Augustana College, 2001 S. Summit Avenue, Sioux Falls, SD 57197, E-mail: swart@inst.augie.edu

² In the Irish situation, it was not merely the politically disenfranchised who came to understand their exclusion through the ideational frame work provided by British liberalism. In fact, in the two decades following the formation of the Irish Parliament in 1782, it was a faction of Protestant Whigs who became increasingly frustrated with the lack of democratic reform in Irish politics. It was their liberal background and Whig affiliation provided the ideational foundation for the mounting critique of Irish Ascendancy rule and the beginning of a nationalist ethos in Irish politics.

³ I refer to "modern" Irish nationalism as that which occurred after 1790. Prior to 1790, Irish nationalism was "premodern" in the sense that it centered around the goals of a Protestant Aristocracy. It was not a popular movement, nor did it rely on a liberal definition of civil society.

⁴ This paper builds off a larger case study of Irish nationalism and utilizes a content analysis of the Irish nationalist documents archived in the O'Hegarty Collection of the University of Kansas' Spencer Research Library. For this paper, I have traced the articulation of liberal and anti-liberal ideals within the evolution of Irish nationalism by identifying the arguments, critiques, and rationales through which Irish nationalist leaders gave shape and substance to their national agenda.

⁵ For instance, the liberal ideals of Thomas Paine, as well as those articulated by leaders of the French Revolution, were critical to the development of modern Irish nationalism. In addition, anti-liberal influences of Thomas Carlyle or Guiseppe Mazzini were important to the romanticized notion of national self espoused by nineteenth century Irish nationalists.

⁶ Although Catholics were not allowed to serve as MP's in the Irish Parliament until after 1829, the "forty-shilling freeholders," an overwhelmingly Catholic group of landowners whose holdings were estimated at forty shillings, and free of rent, were allowed to vote in Parliamentary election. Newman notes that their political influence was limited to the election of Protestant MPs, and was often at the mercy of landlords who had a history of evicting tenants who did not vote according to their landlords' interests. The ballot was not made secret until after 1828 (Newman 1991, pp. 69-70).

⁷ "Repeal Wardens" refers to public officials organized by Daniel O'Connell to promote the need for repealing the Union with Britain among the general

public. The criticism against these overtly political nationalists is another example of the emotional and cultural emphases of Irish romantic nationalism.

⁸ The emphasis on national education can also be traced to Herder's influence. Herder believed that public enlightenment through cultural education would allow people to govern themselves through the world view unique to their own culture and tradition. Eventually this populism would become the foundation of political activity and render the state as a centralized form of power unnecessary (Beiser 1992, p. 190; 212).

⁹ It is interesting to note that the construction of the public sphere was critical to the historical development and promulgation of Irish nationalism. Reading rooms, cultural societies, newspapers and pamphlets all provided a public space with which national identity and nationalist ideology could be constructed and disseminated. British reactions against Irish nationalism also typically centered on limiting or controlling this public sphere. Destroying publishing houses, outlawing the publication of "seditious" newspapers or pamphlets, and limiting the public interaction of the Irish population were but a number of ways in which the British government attempted to control Irish nationalist activity.

¹⁰ The anti-liberal agenda of Irish romantic nationalism indeed mirrors Anderson's discussion of the construction of an "imagined" community (Anderson 1983). The "invention" of the Gaelic tradition espoused within Irish nationalism during the romantic period was highly selective (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). In looking to a common Irish past as a source of Irish unity, Irish nationalist emphasized that part of the past that predated the religious battles of the sixteenth century onward (Boyce 1990). In addition, the emphasis on linguistic revival was primarily a Protestant interest, since many Catholics felt threatened that the likelihood that the translation of the Bible into Gaelic would be used by Protestant proselytizers to convert the Catholic masses (Davis 1988). Finally, Gavan Duffy indicates that Thomas Davis met strong resistance from his friends when he tried to start Irish classes (Duffy 1881), and even though he never mastered it, Thomas Davis spoke of Gaelic as his "national" tongue (Cronin 1981, p. 70).

¹¹ While England responded to the first year of famine by repealing the Corn Laws and allowing Indian rice and corn to be imported into Ireland as well as establishing public works systems to employ farmers who could no longer provide for their families off the land (O'Hegarty 1952), these policies were revised the following year, with the succession of Lord John Russell over Sir Robert Peel as British prime minister, to reflect the economic orthodoxy of the day.

¹² It is important to note that Russell's policies, as doctrinaire as they were, actually received a favorable reaction by most nationalists and non-nationalists opinion. It was only after their costly yet unproductive nature was revealed several months later that they came under fire from nationalists as well as the landed classes (Nowlan 1994, p. 151).

¹³ Similar to the romanticized notion of cultural uniqueness, this class consciousness can also be considered an "imagined" component of the Irish national self (Anderson 1983). Indeed, while many nationalists of the time touted the need for collective economic control to aid the lower classes, they were simultaneously wary of alienating themselves from Irish landowners, whose support they saw as a necessary component to repealing the British Union (Nowlan 1994). Thus, while socialism contributed an anti-liberal and class unifying sense of self to Irish nationalist rhetoric, landlord privilege was implicitly understood as necessary to practical politics of the day.

BORDER STATES AND CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM PRIOR TO 1955

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Abstract

Early civil rights activism prior to 1954 Brown case is marked by the absence of an intervening agency or organization associated with the type of mass mobilization found in the Montgomery Bus Boycott and other events in the later civil rights movement. The community action in Topeka, Kansas before Brown illustrates that civil rights actions have always been around, but only recent scholarship of the civil rights movement has brought these seemingly less significant campaigns to the foreground. The activism in Topeka, Kansas, characterized as indirect action tactics, was organized around primarily local level issues. These local level issues were also historically situated prior to the national push to desegregation which occurred after the 1954 Brown decision.

Introduction

The 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision was a significant national step in the fight against segregation (Bloom 1987; Blumberg 1984; Branch 1988; Brenner 1994; Chafe 1980; Dalifume 1968; Greenberg 1994; Klarman 1994; Kluger 1976; Lawson 1991). It was also followed by and grew out of a significant local victory against segregation in the city of Topeka, Kansas. This paper discusses indirect action tactics un-

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