Origins of Nationalism

Through a comparative study of nationalism in Iceland and Ireland a general picture of the development of political and cultural nationalism in the periphery of Europe during the 19th and the early 20th century is enlightened

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The study of the nation seems to be a lasting actor on the academic arena. The fact that this is so is a testimony of the continued interest in the nature and origin of nationalism. As the political aspect of the nation state is generally said to be undergoing a major transformation towards a more extra-national structure, nationalism as a cultural decoder and identity marker is as strong as ever. This development is one of the reasons why the study of nationalism continues to be both interesting and fruitful. At the present, cultural nationalism is likely to both predate and outdate the political aspects of nationalism.

This article focuses on the origins of nationalism. By adapting a comparative approach to two unlikely cases, namely Ireland and Iceland, it is the aim to bring forward new ideas and understandings of why nationalism was embraced by the public in the 19th C. Primarily I make a comparative study of the development of nationalism in Iceland and Ireland. At first sight not the most obvious comparison. However, the situations of the two countries were in reality not so different. Both were islands on the periphery of Europe, both had been colonized and ruled from another country for centuries, both were mainly agrarian societies and finally in both cases cultural nationalism became connected to the struggle for independence.

The main question in the article concerns the factors which brought about nationalism in Ireland and Iceland. On the basis of the article "The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland" by Gunnar Karlsson the aim is to challenge and discuss the claims of the modernist theories. These theories propose an intimate link between the emergence of nationalism and the industrialization of the 19th C along with the change in economic and social structure that followed the early industrial period.

On the other hand, opponents of the modernist theory argue that pre-modern equivalents of the nation did exist and that the modern phenomenon of the nation came about as a dialectic between the past and the present. What this article establishes is that despite lacking almost all of the features claimed as crucial by the modernist, such as social mobility and cultural homogeneity, Ireland did manage to adopt the national dogma.

On the other hand, as argued by Gunnar Karlsson, the quite unmodern 19th C Icelandic society had features strongly resembling the ideal modern society. Gunnar Karlsson aims to sustain the modernist argument by tracing the factors identified by the theorist Ernest Gellner in 19th C rural Iceland. However, by doing this he indirectly challenges the claim that these were factors exclusive to the modern era and as a result unintentionally he undermines the modernist argument itself.

Consequently this article both sustains and criticizes Gunnar Karlsson's thesis. By comparing the development of nationalism in Iceland to the development in Ireland it becomes clear that these societies, still very much embedded in the pre-modern era, were just as likely to embrace the national idea as the newly modernized societies.

Historical cultural heritage

One of the few things scholars of nationalism seem to agree upon is the importance of a people's awareness of its historical, cultural heritage, and the way in which myths and traditions can be created or redirected in order to sustain nationalist ideologies. This element of nationalist theory can be sustained in both the case of Iceland and of Ireland, however with some difference in its character.

To Miroslav Hroch, one of the main foundations for the development of a nation is: "a memory of some common past, treated as a 'destiny' of the group or at least of its core constituents." (Hroch, p.79) A common past can then be used to summon a group of people that might not otherwise have much else in common. However, the destiny of the group can vary according to the interpretation of it.

My claim is that in Iceland only one interpretation was put forward, whereas in Ireland several readings of the past challenged one another. Whether these readings were based on fact or fiction was less important.

The creation and importance of myths

Gunnar Karlsson sees the persistent awareness of history (both in the political and in the cultural sense) in the minds of the Icelandic people throughout centuries as one of the basic foundations for the establishment of a national identity. (Karlsson, p.48)

Such an awareness is to be found in both Iceland and Ireland. Both countries have a large amount of historical and partly fictitious literature from the early Middle Ages. Thomasson claims that the first thing a new soci-

ety will do is to create its point of origin, i.e. a myth that can sustain the claim of a unified people. (Thomasson, p.6) This seems to be true for both of the countries since in Iceland one can find *The Book of Settlement* and in Ireland *The Book of Celts*.

Moreover, in both countries there has continuously existed a tradition for myth-making and oral storytelling, the latter keeping the former alive. The tradition for storytelling was kept well alive for centuries, partly due to geographical isolation and partly due to a large degree of cultural isolation. According to which scholar that defines it, the Icelandic sagas were written between 1100 and 1500. The heroic tales of chieftains and frontiersmen blurred the distinctions between facts and fiction, reality and glorification, but this was of minor importance as long as the aim of the myth was achieved.

A similar development can be found in Ireland. The Irish sagas likewise display tales of the brave, Celtic chieftains and although they were written around 1200, they embodied ideas and stories from the early Celtic settlements around 400 BC. In both countries then we find pre-colonial historians creating a history of legends, unity and antiquity.[1]

It could be suggested that the emerging romantic nationalism was more easily embraced (esp. in the case of Iceland) because for centuries people had already had a sense of belonging to a single, well-defined ethnic group whose authenticity was documented by sagas and settlement literature. Knowledge of this literature was crucial for the proponents of nationalism.

Historical cultural knowledge leading to political claims

The historical literature proved to be of great importance to 19th C nationalists. Interestingly it seems that many politicians were initially poets, suggesting that knowledge of and interest in traditional literature were likely to raise political aspirations or an interest in ideologies.[2]

In both countries knowledge of pre-colonial laws and forms of government was used in the battle for independence as means to sustain the claim to the existence of a distinct, authentic political structure or culture. Moreover, in myths and sagas nationalists found the proof of a distinct, ethnic identity with certain essential features that could be seen as uniting the population into one whole.

However, history and myths were interpreted very subjectively and selectively. In Iceland nationalists seemed to agree upon the interpretation. This might be due to the fact that Icelandic literature and culture had remained virtually unchanged for several centuries and that the interpretation offered by the nationalists was the interpretation that was held to be true by the population in general. There existed no major divisions in Icelandic society that would have fought for different interpretations or versions of the past. When nationalists proposed their theory, people generally agreed upon the aim: an independent, autonomous Iceland. Such agreement was not to be found in Ireland.

Ironically, it was the Anglo-Irish who upheld the claim to a national parliament.[3] To them, nationalism meant the establishment of a Protestant Anglo-Irish parliament such as the one that had existed in the 18th C. On the other hand, the Catholic national leader James O. Connolly emphasized the ethnicity of the Irish people, claiming that they were the descendants of the Celts and thus the original ethnic people.

Finally, the Anglo-Irish cultural revivalists focused on uniting people based on a common interest in the Gaelic and a sense of common heritage. These were among others the Young Irelanders of the 1850's, the Gaelic revival of the 1880's and Yeats' Cultural Revival in the beginning of the 20th C.

As the focus on the Gaelic language was dangerous for the Anglo-Irish themselves they focused on unification above creed, race and religion. In this manner they attempted to overcome the religious and economic differences between groups in society.[4] This cultural nationalism with its emphasis on literary romantic myth-making and unification can be said to represent one branch of Irish nationalism opposed to the more pragmatic and revolutionary nationalism practised by for example O'Connell and Parnell.

In the cases of Ireland and Iceland myths, sagas and other pre-colonial literature became very important tools in the battle for nationalism and independence. The importance of an already existing folk culture and literature for the development cannot be exaggerated. Romanticism generated the notion that the true essence of things is hidden in the past and this has proven to be indispensable for nationalism until today. One could say that the past is constructed and traditions reinvented to suit the aims of nationalist ideology.

For example, mythology is used to sustain the claim of a homogeneous population and thus sameness in the past overrides differences in the present. The pre-existence of a folk culture that people already practised and held in high esteem undoubtedly made the implementation of the idea of a national homogeneous culture much easier.

However, as the example concerning the different strands of Irish nationalism shows this past can be interpreted very differently and create a nationalism that is heterogeneous rather than homogeneous in its character. Nonetheless, the uses of a historical cultural heritage were important for the rise of nationalism in both countries.

Cultural homogeneity

The historical cultural heritage also provides part of the foundation for cultural homogeneity. As pointed out in the last chapter, the sharing of a common past provides a sense of belonging and a sense of a common destiny among people. Cultural homogeneity can be defined in many ways. This chapter focuses on unifying aspects such as history of settlement, religion, occupation, language, and geography.

Gunnar Karlsson departs among other things from the theory of Miroslav Hroch. Hroch sees a high level of cultural homogeneity as a must for the establishment of

a national sentiment. He defines an integrated social group as: "...the combination of several kinds of objective relationships (linguistic, religious, etc.) and their subjective reflection in the collective consciousness." (Hroch, p.79)

The existence of these two levels makes it difficult to sustain when a group can actually be termed culturally homogeneous, since cultural agreement may not always be based on objective relationships and such relationships may not always generate cultural agreement. However, an agreement between the two was to be found in Iceland.

Iceland as continuously homogeneous

If we look at the ethnic origin of the Icelandic people they can be claimed to be very homogeneous with some certainty. Apart from a few Irish monks that had immigrated to the island the first settlers were farmers from the Norwegian west coast. Probably because of the geographic isolation few people immigrated to Iceland after the first settlement, and the Norse remained the only ethnic group.

One of the most recognized and unique features of Icelandic society in the 19th C was the lack of social hierarchies. Despite the fact that there were often substantial differences in wealth within the farming society, the degree of social mobility was astoundingly high.

Terry G. Lacy suggests that this lack of a second settlement combined with a large degree of internal social contact (for example a political centre and a set of laws were quickly established), gave rise to a vigorous and homogeneous language. (Lacy, p.26) The almost total lack of dialects also points to the high level of social interaction.

When compulsory school attendance was introduced in 1907, the level of literacy among the population was already very high. This can probably be explained by the existence of a vital folk-culture that had a large focus on the reading and reciting of sagas and *rímur*.[5] Home education and small rural schools were common and especially during the long, dark winter people took to reading and writing.[6]

When we look at features such as occupation and the social structure of Icelandic society, homogeneity seems likewise to be the rule. Until the 20th C the primary occupation on Iceland was agriculture. Almost the entire population consisted of farmers. Moreover, despite the fact that their income differed considerably their status did not. Class divisions as one traditionally envisages them did not exist and because of a high level of social mobility farming culture was rather homogeneous.

This was also strengthened by the fact that Iceland was almost solely a rural society. Towns of a certain size did not develop until the end of the 19th C and hence one does not find a clash between a rural and an urban culture. Another aspect that can be said to have functioned as a unifying factor was religion. After the Reformation few other religious communities were incorporated into the society, and Icelandic society functioned almost as a mono-religious entity.[7]

Finally, the geographic isolation of the island meant that very few continental influences, both in terms of ideology and production forms, reached the country until Icelandic students began travelling to Copenhagen in the 19th C.

The internally divided Ireland

If homogeneity was what defined Icelandic society for many centuries, the opposite seems to be the case for Ireland. Ireland was settled by several different ethnic groups. The Celts arrived in 500 BC, and although initially they failed to establish any central political institution, they nevertheless felt a strong bond of otherness founded on their common cultural past. (Boyce, p.23-30)

Around 900 AC the Vikings/Norse settled, and in 1171 the Normans arrived. Henry the Second was accepted by the smaller Celtic kingships as Lord of Ireland. The Normans came under English feudal law and the Celts remained under their own law, and this sense of a divided society between colonizer and colonized was to last for many centuries.

The structure of the settlement of Ireland provided the foundation for many of the divisions of the 19th C. For example, opposed to Iceland Ireland had several major religions existing side by side. The battle for power and wealth between the different Catholic and Protestant communities divided the society into several fractions, and ironically the religious dispute seems to have been one of the most stable and continuous factors of Irish society throughout the centuries. But religion was by far the only aspect dividing Irish society.

Although Ireland was mainly an agricultural country, towns had existed in the countryside for a long time as centres of trade. This made for a merchant middle class with quite different values and interests than the farming class. Moreover, no social continuum existed as in Iceland, as Irish farmers were not only divided by wealth but also by status.[8]

Furthermore, class divisions were characterised by a similar, ethnic division. The Anglo-Irish constituted the upper and the wealthy middle classes, whereas the Irish mainly belonged to the lower classes. This division was further enhanced by the former being Protestant and the latter Catholic.

Finally, I will touch upon the question of language as a unifying force. During the 19th C Gaelic was heavi-

ly declining and even with the efforts of the cultural nationalists it failed to be reinstituted as the vernacular. One could then argue that the English language shared by all could be seen as a unifying factor. Probably, however, it rather created a divided identity to most Irish people and it was certainly a problem for the Irish nationalists.

How should one claim cultural distinction founded in a Gaelic past, but expressed in the vernacular of the colonizers? Especially since language adoption is one of the strongest markers of the internalization of the 'other'.

If we return to Hroch's definition outlined in the beginning, Iceland can be said to be a case in which the objective relationship (a large amount of cultural homogeneity) was largely reflected in the collective conscience. This high degree of cultural homogeneity on both levels made the implementation of the nationalist thought seem both obvious and natural.

In Ireland, on the other hand, it can be argued that all the different kinds of divisions and interests at play in society prevented the emergence of a homogeneous Irish national culture in the 19th C. Localism rather than nationalism marked everyday life and it was only very localized organisations such as O'Connell's Repeal Movement that managed to bring out the national sentiment in a large number of people.[9]

Cultural homogeneity no doubt existed at some level, but it was mainly based on identification with other equals in terms of economy, occupation, religion etc. One could say that Ernest Gellner's idea of cultural homogeneity as a crucial basis for the development of nationalism is sustained by the Icelandic case, in that a culturally homogeneous group (such as found on Iceland) will adopt a culturally homogenous nationality.[10]

However, reflecting on the case of Ireland one may suggest that a heterogeneous group will adopt similarly varied versions of nationalism that are just as strong in each of their fractions. Hence, in the end of the 19th C Irish people did become very much aware of their nationality, albeit without being any less aware of the other divisions in society. People combined national sentiments with localism or class distinctions. It seems that we can thus simultaneously prove and argue against Gellner's theory of cultural homogeneity. The following chapter will evaluate if this is also the case with a second main feature in Gellner's theory, that of social mobility?

Social mobility

Another important aspect in relation to the rise of nationalism is social mobility. (Karlsson, p.46) Social mobility is strongly connected to the emergence of the modern or industrial era and to the change in social structure that follows from it. The loss of earlier fixed barriers in society such as the division between a labourer and a feudal lord, or between the common man and the nobleman not only leads to a more uncertain identity of the individual, it also enables a degree of social mobility hitherto unknown. Both the new uncertainties and the new opportunities provide better conditions for the spread of nationalism.

Iceland and the traditional social mobility

Gunnar Karlsson imposes Gellner's model on the Icelandic rural society of the 19th C. He claims that social mobility existed, not because of the breakdown of earlier fixed boundaries, but rather because these boundaries had never existed. As described in the second chapter the Icelandic population consisted roughly of one class only, based on their common occupation. This existence of a social continuum made it easy for people to move up and down the social scale, since no formal barriers existed in society.

A second aspect that needs to be stressed in relation to social mobility is an ideology of egalitarianism peculiar to Iceland and perhaps existing as a result of the classless society. This concept is introduced by Richard. F. Thomasson:

> Among the values that took shape during the early period of the Icelandic settlement and that have been passed down through the centuries in the folk culture are egalitarianism, freedom...a configuration of values close to those developed in America. (Thomasson, p.51)

The parallel to America is continued with a reference to the pioneer mentality of the Icelandic people, with the focus on hard work as a status symbol. This supports Gunnar Karlsson's thesis because it suggests that hard-working people were likely to achieve a high status independent of their economic or social point of departure. However, both Karlsson and Thomasson point to the fact that a low degree of class conscience does not necessarily mean that distinctions in society did not exist. People did differentiate, but the contrasts were rather hidden, informal and mobile. (Karlsson, p.57) As pointed out previously, this was not the case in Ireland.

Unegalitarian Ireland

If we turn to Ireland, Gellner's idea of social mobility seems to fit less convincingly. Apart from Belfast and Dublin, industrial Ireland was actually situated in Manchester and Liverpool, where thousands of Irish immigrants worked. It is hard to point to a certain date when Ireland became an industrial society, but the nationalist cause had gone far before industrialization affected the majority of the population.

Therefore, the modern capitalist class system that lies at the bottom of Gellner's theory cannot really be said to have existed. Rather, it seems that old distinctions between labourer, farmer and lord continued to exist and that nationalism in its different shades likewise spread horizontally within each class rather than embracing the entire population.

Moreover, opposed to Iceland Irish society was notorious for being extremely unegalitarian, since ...every class in this country oppresses the class below it, until you come to the most wretched class...there is no exaction practised by their superiors that they do not practise upon those below them. (Hoppen, pp.40-41) The

modern idea of equal opportunities for all who worked hard seems to be far away.

When juxtaposed with the Irish situation there are obvious problems with Gellner's idea of social mobility, equality of opportunity and nationalism as a new common ground of identification. Nationalism was no doubt a new entity to identify with, but it was canalized and adapted into older, already existing divisions. The lack of social mobility might even be one of the main reasons why Irish nationalism became so diverse in its nature.

For centuries the medieval assembly the Althing was situated at Thingvellir and functioned mainly as an appellate court.

If one looks at Iceland from Gunnar Karlsson's point of view, Gellner's idea of social mobility seems to fit very well. Karlsson writes:

> There is a strong relationship between cultural homogeneity and social mobility on the one hand and national identification on the other, in other words, it was easier for an Icelander to identify with his or her people than it was for most Europeans...because the Icelanders had so little else to identify with. (Karlsson, p.59)

However, there is a complex of problems inherent in the approach.

Gellner's thesis is very much related to a neo-industrial society, in which people try to come to terms with an increasingly fragmented social world that follows a previously stable period consisting of more fixed entities and identities. The urge for a new stable marker of identification seems more obvious and believable in an industrial society that had *recently* been considerably changed than in a rural society, which looked much the same as it had done for centuries. As Gunnar Karlsson implicitly writes, the national ideal may not have differed very much from the Icelanders' traditional self-perception. Moreover, the lack of controversies in terms of religion, culture and ethnicity probably did make the implementation of the national idea much easier. But one could then question whether nationalism actually represented a new phenomenon at all as Gellner takes it to be. Moreover, it seems slightly simplistic to draw the conclusion that because of a lack of the social controversies mentioned above, all that people were left to identify with was each other.

As he suggests himself differences and hierarchies did exist informally and it is likely that they played a greater role in people's everyday lives than did the notion of the homogeneous Icelandic people. But it was undoubtedly due to the fact that Icelanders already had a strong cultural self-perception that nationalism (new phenomenon or not) was embraced with such speed.

Visibility of the Colonial Country

In the beginning of his article Gunnar Karlsson asks why the Icelanders chose not to adopt the language of their colonizer and why they chose separatism rather than integration into Denmark. (Karlsson, p.36) If one follows his line of thought another question immediately springs to mind: How come the Irish adopted the English language and yet still chose separatism? An investigation into the visibility of the colonial country or the degree of settlement will provide us with some answers in both cases.

The separate Iceland

Most importantly the physical presences of the colonizers in the two countries were very different. For the most part of its history Iceland had been ruled from a distance by the mother country (both under Norway and under Denmark), which meant that most officials were Icelandic. Moreover, because of the geographical isolation few Danes or Norwegians had ever travelled to or settled in the island. As a result, both the Danish people and the spoken Danish language must have seemed far away from people's everyday lives, although it could be argued that written Danish was actually taught in many iterant schools.

With the rise of romanticism Iceland gained a high status, as it was believed to be the home of the 'authentic' language of Scandinavia. This resulted in a great effort from both Danish and Icelandic intellectuals to keep the language and the Icelandic literature alive. Finally, due to the origin of the original settlers Icelanders had always perceived Norway to be their rightful mother country. Therefore, when Iceland came under Danish rule no tradition of looking to Denmark existed.

The relatively small connection to Denmark and the increased emphasis from both countries on the uniqueness of the Icelandic language helped the vernacular to survive and it also helped the Icelanders to form a sense of a distinct self, independent of the Danes. This notion of distinct sense of self-hood was also to be found in Ireland, albeit produced under very different circumstances.

The Celtic vernacular and questions of pragmatics

The various Irish language revivalist movements failed to re-introduce Celtic as the vernacular. First of all, the colonizers had been integrated into Irish society since the early settlements, and although always a minority the presence of the Anglo-Irish and the English language strongly affected the use of the vernacular.[11] Moreover, the Celtic language was undermined with the introduction of universal primary education in 1831

and the introduction of State schools in which English was the only language tolerated.

The importance of this national school program in relation to the disappearance of Celtic must not be disregarded, since farmer's children who had hitherto had little contact with the English-speaking population were now brought up bilingually.[12] The Celtic Revival of the late 19th C thus faced a mainly bilingual society in which all public matters were addressed in English.[13]

Moreover, the various revivalist movements were rather concerned with more romantic notions about a real or imagined Celtic past, and although they all perceived the national identity to be based on a Celtic foundation, few of the people involved made any effort to reintroduce the language into the general public. Finally, the importance of the geographic placement of Ireland in relation to her colonizer must not be overlooked.

England and more importantly the English were never far away, and a substantial amount of immigration from one country to the other had always been taking place.

Gunnar Karlsson writes in his article that the non-English speaking population around England adopted English as their vernacular. (Karlsson p.34) It can be questioned, however, whether it was a matter of deliberate adoption. People probably did not have a choice. The strong presence of the English in the Irish society is an important factor to keep in mind when one asks the question of language adoption.

Moreover, it probably became a pragmatical question, as daily trade and local politics necessarily involved some skills in the English language. Had Iceland been situated closer to Denmark and had the Danish intellectuals and the Danish school law been against and not for the Icelandic vernacular, the Danish language might very well have been adopted as well. However, what this analysis does prove is that the question of language adoption was not necessarily connected to a claim for independence.

The development of nationalist politics[14]

Nationalism is not necessarily connected to politics if it is taken to mean a community with a feeling of kinship and an awareness of its common history. Such a community feeling existed in both countries prior to the emergence of a line of distinctive national politics, albeit in a more heterogeneous manner in Ireland. However, in both Iceland and Ireland the intellectual ideology of nationalism became connected to the political quest for independence.

Nationalism equated with politics

Terry G. Lacy argues that the Icelandic people suffered from something close to complete political apathy up until the middle of the 19th C, because they lacked experience in regulating their own affairs beyond farm level. (Lacy, p.207) The initial political centre, the Althing made around 920, merely functioned as a high court under foreign rule.[15] As a result, party politics as we know it today did not exist in Iceland until the middle of the 19th C.

Jón Sigurdsson is accredited as the father of the Icelandic nationalist movement.

When in 1849 the Danish state changed from being an absolutist monarchy to being a parliamentary monarchy, a few Icelandic intellectuals based in Copenhagen glimpsed the chance for Iceland to claim its right to independence. For the next 80 years the battle for independence was fought peacefully merely by the means of historical and jurisdictional evidence. (It should briefly be noticed for the sake of comparison with Ireland that the Icelandic battle for independence did not cost a single human life.)

The national leader Jón Siggurdsson and the nationalist movement based their claim for autonomy on the fact that Iceland had a governing institution and a legal system prior to their subjection to the Norwegian King in 1262. Moreover, with the Danish people now ruling the country democratically Iceland could no longer be said to be subjected to the Danish monarch alone as they had once agreed to. The achievements of the Icelandic national politics were thus to a large extent based on the changing political structures in Denmark.

In addition, the fact that the Icelandic jurisdictional claim was fairly far fetched indicates that the steady move towards independence was probably more de-

pendent on Danish goodwill than on the Icelandic arguments. This can also be sustained by the fact that Iceland continued to be supported by the Danish Treasury until they gained Home Rule in 1918.

To most Icelanders, politics in the 19th C came to be equivalent with nationalism and the claim for independence. Few politicians concerned themselves with social problems or problems concerning occupation, transport developments or trade. This can be seen as another answer to Gunnar Karlsson's conclusion mentioned in the previous chapter, and to the question why people went from a state of more or less political apathy to a strong awareness of their nationality and the political future of their country. Perhaps the national cause won support so quickly because it was the only line of political concern people were offered. Such a one-track political line was not found in Ireland.

A fragmented Ireland

As was the case in Iceland, Irish politics in the 19th C to a large extent became synonymous with the national battle for independence. However, nationalist politics was not a new phenomenon in the 19th C. The continuous presence of the Anglo-Irish meant that for a long time people had had a distinct sense of their identity based in opposition to some 'other'. As stated earlier it was the Anglo-Irish that initially advocated for Irish independence and the establishment of an Irish republic led by the old aristocracy.

In 1791 The Society of United Irishmen was established by Wolfe Tone. The society became the centre for different radical independence aspirations, but the Anglo-Irish ascendancy quickly realised that they needed the support of the Catholic masses in order to carry through their revolution. However, the supposedly great revolt in 1798 failed. The different reasons for the failure can be taken as an example of the problems that continued to mark and obstruct later attempts of uniting the people of Ireland into one nation.

First of all, the interests of the Protestant Anglo-Irish minority and those of the Catholic majority continued to be very different. The Catholic masses were mostly preoccupied with local problems and blamed the Anglo-Irish for their economic and social misery. The attempted unification of the Irish people in The Society of United Irishmen mainly failed because people were fighting and hoping for different outcomes. This gap only widened during the following century.

Irish independence politics of the 19th C was flavoured rather by local interests than by a general wish to unite the people. One branch of nationalism was advocated by intellectuals such as the Young Irelanders and the Gaelic Revival. This cultural nationalism focused on romanticism and mythmaking, looking to the past in order to make the future. The second branch of nationalism was the more pragmatic and political one practised by people such as O'Connell and Parnell.

The local farmer or merchant was generally more interested in issues concerning his immediate everyday life and his greatest national concern was mainly expressed in blaming the English for his miseries. The easiest way to gain mass-support for a political programme therefore became to blend local concerns with national rhetoric.[16]

However, several other factors obstructed the quest for independence. One of the main problems was the economic situation. After the Act of Union in 1798 Irish economy had gradually been incorporated into the English. A large percentage of Irish agricultural products were sold in England and as mentioned earlier most of the Irish industry was situated in England, apart from some amount of industry around Dublin and Belfast.

Finally, contrary to the situation in Iceland religion came to play a major part in the national struggle. As religion was greatly incorporated into politics the Irish society was largely divided into denominatory fractions. This sectarian and divisionist nature of Irish society remained the biggest hurdle in the national quest for independence.

All the fractions of Irish society had very different interpretations of nationalism and independence. In general Irish politics was based on a mosaic of ideals and aims originating from classes, religions and ethnic backgrounds. Far from the ideal of a modern society that will be examined in the next chapter.

Nationalism and modernization

As explained earlier one of the most prevailing theories for the rise of the nation is modernization. The main spokesman for this view was Ernest Gellner. To him, modernity and nations represent a radical break with the past. In his theory nations do not arise after the French Revolution by mere accident, they are seen as the product of a growing modern world.

Their development was a long process, but nevertheless they were created by nationalists *ex nihilo*. Moreover, capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, improved technology, and secularization are all aspects that were crucial to the creation of the nation. As the structure of society changed and social mobility became increasingly common people lost their earlier stable positions in society.

A new identity marker was needed and quickly offered by the new nationalists: A widespread, common high culture; high because it was based on literacy and ideology. State schools were needed in order to spread a homogenized national image to future generations.

Nationalism is therefore dependent on a culture of mass literacy, mass schooling, a national curriculum, national icons etc. All parts of this thesis can be sustained, as all these elements were and are part of any country's national discourse.

Nations and nationalism are wholly modern phenomena. But are they merely so? Several authors have attacked Gellner for his very creationist view.[17] Anthony Smith writes: For Ernest (Gellner), the genealogy of the nation is located in the requirements of modernity, not the heritage of pre-modern pasts. Ernest is claiming that nations have no parents, no pedigree, except the needs of modern society. (Smith, p.4)

Smith proposes that there had to be other factors at play in the creation of the nation than merely the requi-

rements of modern society. To modernists the past, cultural or historical, was mainly a tool that was used for manipulation by the nationalists. However, if we attribute a less passive role to history and traditional cultures we may end up with a much more dynamic model for the creation of the nation. A model that proposes a dialectic between the requirements of modern society and the heritage of a pre-modern past.

Icelandic nationalism as a dialectic between past and present

Gunnar Karlsson states that Iceland can be seen as an exception to Gellner's theory, however an exception that actually proves the rule. (Karlsson, p.46) He finds the claim for validity in Gellner's foundation for nationalism or rather the elements which constitute this foundation (outlined above). He rightly claims that all these elements were to be found in pre-modern, agricultural Iceland. The similarities are indeed striking. But does this throw new light on the validity of Gellner's theory? In some respects, yes.

It also reveals a striking ambivalence in the theory. If Icelandic nationalism proves to be based on the same foundation as the nationalism in more modern and industrial societies, Gellner must have pointed to some of the most central elements. Yet, by proving that these elements need not necessarily be specifically modern or spring from infant industrial societies, Gunnar Karlsson at the same time undermines Gellner's stringent relationship between modernism and nationalism.

This ties in very well with the attack on Gellner made by Anthony Smith. As he is not a perennialist Smith does not believe that nations have always existed. What he claims is rather that a widespread communal feeling and a common culture similar to that of nationalism may have existed among a large number of people (lifting it from the local level) prior to the French Revolution and the spread of the idea of the nation.

In some ways his theory seems to fit the case of Iceland better than Gellner's. Let us return to Gunnar Karlsson's conclusion: ...that it was easier, and more natural for an Icelander to identify with his or her people than it was for most Europeans in the first half of the 19th century, because the Icelanders had so little else to identify with - no estate or class, no district or region.

It seems that Gellner's central elements had been present in Icelandic rural society for centuries. Then why should people all of a sudden identify more strongly with each other just because this identification was now termed nationalism? Firstly, Karlsson states that social mobility had been mirrored by a similar geographical mobility suggesting that the possibility for identifying with fellow men all over the island had been an option long before the 19th C.

Another argument that favours the long existence of a common identity and communal feeling is the literary heritage. According to Gellner, a homogeneous popular high culture is essential to nationalism. Often, a previously high culture is extended to the masses or a traditional low culture is elevated. Neither was the case in Iceland.

The widespread literacy and the general popularity of the sagas suggest that a unifying culture had existed for a long time. One could claim that this common culture was merely imposed with the national sentiments of the 19th C. It is true that the national sentiment was a new element on the political and cultural arena and it is also true that the discourse of romantic nationalism placed an increased focus on the literary and cultural heritage.

I would claim that Icelandic nationalism emerged as a dialectic between a growing modern society combined with a modern philosophy of thinking and an already existing communal feeling and traditional identity. Icelandic nationalism does not present a radical break from a former form of society. Rather, it exemplifies the processual transformation of an older traditional culture that was affected by the impact of a new and modern perspective of the world. Icelandic nationalism represents continuity rather than any radical break from the past.

Irish nationalism - plurality and diversity

What about the Irish case? One of the main problems with the modernization theory in relation to Ireland is that the old class structure of Irish society continued up until the beginning of the 20th C. Class differences continued to be huge and sharply demarcated. Moreover, many people reacted strongly against the modern world. Intellectuals such as the Young Irelanders and W.B Yeats retreated into a picture of rural idyl and traditional values and for them nationalism was rather a reaction against modernism than an acceptance of it.

One could argue here that this counterreaction was actually a result of modernization. Or one could suggest that for the lower classes it was a reaction to the uneven spread of capitalism. However, it did not embrace the modern values or adapt to modern society as Gellner envisages nationalism should. The lower classes generally blamed industrial England for taking their crop and polluting their culture. People were still more concerned with everyday or local matters than with nationalism.

One reason why Irish nationalism failed to unite the country was probably that people already identified themselves strongly with other aspects or rather probably identified against other aspects. Religion, class and occupation played a central role in people's everyday lives. The romantic project of uniting Ireland failed because old prejudices and grudges kept resurfacing.

T. Hoppen suggests that to the part of the population that was well-off nationalism became a tool used to serve their own interests rather than any general interests of the country. (Hoppen, p.109) Localism and egotism rather than any national communal feeling prevailed.

A major problem with the modernization theory is that it fails to account for the variety of nationalist traditions in Ireland. The nature of Irish nationalism was far from homogeneous and unifying. Rather it was multi-

faceted, coloured by different religious and political convictions and by ethnicity and class.

Ireland did not become a secularized country as is entailed in the modernist theory. People continued to identify strongly with their religion, and thus nationalism cannot be said to have filled any general religious void. However, the diversity of Irish society did not mean that nationalism became weak. Boyce suggests that nationalism gained popular support because it was based on a sense of historical wrongness.[18] (Boyce, p.382)

The myth of the wronged and suppressed Irish people has endured from O'Connell to Sinn Fein, and it was this myth that managed to keep the different groups together in the final battles for independence. Since the biggest problem for Parnell and other politicians was that the aims and the aspirations of the groups were so varied, the myth of wrongness provided a good opportunity for uniting people.

The collective memory of joy and sacrifice constituted a bond between the conflicting self-interests, and once a golden past had been reconstructed it could begin to assert its own power over the present. The only thing that all the fractions seemed to agree upon was that somewhere down the line a terrible wrong had been done to them.

Gellner's theory of modernization may have pointed to some of the right elements (social mobility, cultural historical heritage), but the fact that these elements may very well have existed prior to modernity undermines his claim. The modernist theory has obvious flaws in both the case of Iceland and of Ireland, because both countries defy the definition of being modern at the time nationalism emerged.

There is no doubt that nationalism was more easily implemented in Iceland because many of the factors mentioned by Gellner were present. But it can be questioned whether one can only adopt part of a theory, as Gunnar Karlsson has done in this case, without undermining its structure and validity to some extent. As suggested by this analysis, nationalism and the causes for its emergence are not easily outlined or adequately described.

Nationalism differed then and differs now according to which person or group that defines it. And with the recent deconstruction of the nation states, exemplified by EU-integration and multiculturalism, culture and nation can no longer be said to coincide. In the future it will probably be more difficult than ever to come up with a theory that can adequately describe the nature and origin of nationalism.

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1. Interestingly, Terry G. Lacy claims that Celtic influences can be found in the Icelandic saga in aspects such as motifs and structure. (Lacy, p.37) This is perhaps due to the fact that Icelandic tradesmen traveled to Ireland and also held Irish 'slaves' or because Iceland was inhabited by Irish monks prior to the arrival of the Norse.

2. In Ireland we find men such as James Parnell, Patrick Pearse and to some extent W.B Yeats, and in Iceland the national hero Jon Siggurdsson is a good example.

3. The term Anglo-Irish can be said to constitute both the earliest English settler from the 11th C and the later great wave of settlers from the 16th-17th C. However, must authors refer to the latter group which was Protestant, since the first settlers were and remained Catholic. These are often termed the "old English".

4. Another interesting example of the subjective interpretation of history and reality can be found in the events evolving around the Irish dramatist J.M. Synge and his play *Translations.* Contrary to W.B. Yeats' romantic staging of the Irish people in their authentic rural setting, Synge, who had been conducting field studies on the west coast of Ireland, presented a far more realistic picture of the otherwise idealized western peasant. The language and the plot outraged the Dublin audience to a level never seen before, which suggests the clash between a staging of empirical reality and of a myth that had grown to constitute the reality of many Irishmen. (J.M. Synge: *The Playboy of the Western World.* First staged at The Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1907)

5. *Rimur* is a long epic poem made of material from older sagas and other tales.

6. A similar interest in literature and learning can actually be found among the farmers living on the rough Irish west coast as well.

7. 97.2% of the population was Lutheran, 1.6% non-Lutheran (Catholic, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist) and 1.2% non-religious. (Thomasson, p.176)

8. The gaps between landlords (those who owned the soil), farmers (those who rented the soil), and labourers (those who merely worked the land) were immense. As K. Theodore Hoppen writes:
" Almost innumerable shades of distinction were maintained by contemporaries, mostly economic, but sometimes relating as much to perceived status as to objective prosperity." (Hoppen, p.39)

9. Thus it could be argued that O'Connell only succeeded in gaining so much public support because he focused merely on matters concerning the farmers who voted for him. (Boyce, pp.137-149)

10. "Two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture." (Gellner, pp.6-7)

11.The influence of the English language was particularly strong since the Irish Parliament (until its dissolvement in 1798) had been dominated by an Anglo-Irish nobility.

12. The English took the Irish farmers to be largely uneducated and ill-breed. However, as we saw in the case of the Icelandic farmers, the Irish rural societies actually had a long tradition for local iterant schools in which the level of education was often quite advanced. A fictitious example of this can be found in play "Translations" by the Irish playwright Brian Friel. In this play the

new English magistrate arrives at a local school in Donegal, and failing to understand a word of what the people say writes them off as un-civilized brutes. The point is, however, that the farmers were actually speaking Latin to their new teacher.

13. The different Celtic Revivals involved Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League 1893, The Gaelic Athletic Association 1884 and W.B. Yeats' Literary Revival 1899.

14. This chapter follows the general line of the paper and focus only on a few interesting historical developments that are relevant for the discussion concerning the emergence of nationalism. Therefore it will far from be giving an adequate view of the entire nationalist political development.

15. Originally the Althing was made by the local Icelandic chieftains as they realised the need for a centralized body that could deal with legal matters. The Althing and early Icelandic law were based on a study of the Norwegian state structure.

16. Two examples of this are O'Connell's Repeal Movement and Parnell's Land League program. Both managed to canalize different kinds of rural content into a system of formal national agitation.

17. For example authors such as Anthony Smith and D. George Boyce. It must briefly be mentioned that Smith was a pupil of Gellner.

18. Irish national culture has often been said to be a grievance culture in which martyrs and sacrifices are repeatedly commemorated. As K. Theodore Hoppen writes:
"Modern Ireland has long been troubled by the undead."