

Introduction

It is June 1918, and Ireland is once again close to rebellion. The British government's efforts to extend conscription to Ireland has caused outrage, and all nationalist groups, as well as the Catholic hierarchy, have combined to resist the measure. Beginning in April 1918, there was large-scale public agitation against conscription, which led some British officials to fear that just two years after the Easter Rising, there would be another outbreak of violence. The 9th of June was designated 'Women's Day', and tens of thousands of women converged on Dublin to sign an anti-conscription pledge. Nelly O'Brien, a nationalist activist, organised a separate Protestant women's protest. On the morning of the 9th, the women sought to meet at Christ Church Cathedral for prayer prior to attending the main rally. Receiving no reply from the Dean as to their request for the cathedral to be opened early, they assembled at the appointed time, but found the doors shut. They were forced to hold their prayer service outside, kneeling down in the rain. Before the group departed, the doors were opened and the women were met by an official. He snatched a copy of the women's pledge from them, tore it into pieces, and stated that he would not allow 'rubbish' like that in the cathedral.1

This incident is illuminating for several reasons. First, the women felt the need to form their own, explicitly Protestant, organisation. Second, the women, who came from respectable families, were treated discourteously by a Church of Ireland official. Third, when the group made their way to the main rally, they were warmly received by their fellow (Catholic) nationalists and their presence was highlighted in several accounts. And finally, for D. P. Moran, a Catholic-chauvinist newspaper editor, the incident substantiated his long-held view that the vast majority of Irish Protestants were entirely opposed to Irish nationalism, and that Protestant nationalists were a tiny, unrepresentative minority. This book will explore these themes.

² The Leader, 15 June 1918.

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¹ Irish Independent (II), 10 June 1918. See also Nenagh Guardian, 15 June 1918.



2 Introduction

This is the story of a counterculture. From about 1900, and continuing until the end of the Irish Civil War in 1923, a substantial group of Irish Protestants eschewed the unionist views typically held by their co-religionists, and instead played an active role in the advanced nationalist movement. There are three overarching themes of this book. The first is motivation. Although Protestant nationalism was a widespread phenomenon, its support within the broader community was always low. This book assesses the formative influences that caused a minority to reject unionism for a nationalist perspective that would cause them to be isolated from their own communities. It will chart the striking tendency for Protestant nationalists to form self-perpetuating networks of activists, where individuals, bound by ties of family and intense friendship, forged alliances that allowed them to repudiate the views of Protestant unionists. It will also discuss the tendency for some to have a tradition of nationalism in their family, and for others to explicitly reject a unionist inheritance.

Second, this book will detail the extent of Protestant involvement in, and influence on, Irish nationalism. Although the nationalist movement during the period 1900–1923 included many Protestants in leadership positions, the extent of 'grassroots' Protestant nationalist activism has been under-researched. Where nominal data can be traced, a prosopographical methodology will be adopted to assess the denominational and socioeconomic composition of nationalist organisations. Furthermore, Protestant nationalist influence on wider nationalism (for example, in reviving the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) or planning the Howth gun-running) will be discussed.

Third, it will examine the fraught relationship between religious identity and Irish nationalism. How did Protestant nationalists fit into the nationalist movement? How did Catholics view them? One key theme is the changing nature of nationalism. After 1916, the nationalist movement grew steadily more Catholic in nature. How did Protestant nationalists react to this? This book will discuss evidence that Protestants suffered discrimination from Catholic nationalists, and will highlight the hostility that Protestants faced from their unionist co-religionists, especially in Ulster. Some Protestant nationalists converted to Catholicism. How common was this? And for those who remained Protestant, how did they view Catholics, and Catholicism? Did traditionally hostile attitudes endure?

Irish nationalism in the early 1900s was divided into two wings: moderate nationalists, whose objective was home rule, and advanced nationalists, who sought a significantly larger degree of independence, usually a republic, and who incorporated a substantial physical-force



Introduction 3

element. Although some scholars have drawn attention to the commonalities between moderate and advanced nationalists,³ a study of Protestant nationalists must choose which tradition to focus on. Protestant advanced nationalists and Protestant home rulers had little in common: the former sought an independent state, whereas the latter could be notably tepid in their convictions, tending to view home rule primarily as another liberal reform, which would ultimately strengthen the Empire. Protestants within the advanced nationalist movement are the focus of this book.⁴ Advanced nationalists were a disparate group, bringing together political, literary, theatrical, journalistic, cultural, sporting, trade union, and militant elements, largely uncoordinated until 1917, and by and large represented by Sinn Féin after that. The contrast with the home rulers' Irish Parliamentary Party and grassroots United Irish League is stark, but individual advanced nationalists understood that even though their movement was comprised of small, heterogeneous groups, they saw themselves as working towards a common goal. A classic expression of this perspective comes from Sydney Czira, née Gifford (1889-1974), a Rathmines Anglican and a prolific nationalist journalist under the pen name 'John Brennan'. She stated that:

a new political force was coming into existence, and which, with a touch of prophetic vision, we called 'The Movement' ... It was not organised into one body, and it had no recognised leaders. But the Movement did move, slowly at first, and then with tremendous momentum from 1910 to 1916. Many of the men and women of the Movement were very obscure individuals ... They had little or no political influence. They belonged to a number of small societies and groups. Some were in Sinn Féin; others in the Irish Republican Brotherhood; others in the Inghinidhe na hÉireann. Still more were in the ranks of the Gaelic League or GAA. Within a few years these scattered groups had coalesced, and an Irish revolutionary force came into being. The obscure men and women of 1908 became the acknowledged leaders of Ireland in 1916 and the years that followed.⁵

³ For example, Patrick Maume, *The long gestation: Irish nationalist life 1891–1918* (Dublin, 1999); D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London, 1995).

Sidney Gifford Czira, *The years flew by* (John Hayes, ed.) (Galway, 2000 [1974]), 39. Both 'Sydney' and 'Sidney' spellings appear of Czira's first name.

⁴ We lack a full study of Protestant home rulers, but see four useful recent biographies: Colin Reid, *The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn: Irish constitutional nationalism and cultural politics, 1864–1950* (Manchester, 2011); Jennifer Regan-Lefebvre, *Cosmopolitan nationalism in the Victorian Empire: Ireland, India and the politics of Alfred Webb* (Basingstoke, 2009); Otto Rauchbauer, *Shane Leslie: sublime failure* (Dublin, 2009); Jasper Ungoed-Thomas, *Jasper Wolfe of Skibbereen* (Cork, 2008).



4 Introduction

It is the Protestants of Czira's 'Movement', the advanced nationalist movement, which this book will trace.

Why is religion relevant to the study of nationalism? Although often taken for granted in Ireland, the extent to which nationalism has a religious origination has been the subject of dispute. First published in 1960, Elie Kedourie's work Nationalism advanced the theory that nationalism was a concept that was invented in Europe in the early nineteenth century.6 This text has proved influential, and has given rise to the modernist perspective, whose adherents claim a comparatively recent history for nationalism. Most modernists hold that nations and nationalism are recent constructions that have been created by social elites to achieve political and economic ends, and were little influenced by religion or pre-industrial experience. The most influential modernist thinkers include Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm.⁷ The modernist approach is disputed by advocates of the perennialist perspective. Perennialists contend that nations and nationalism are continuous or recurrent throughout history, with their roots in vernacular culture and religion. Adrian Hastings's The construction of nationhood has become the seminal work. 8 Hastings adopted an empirical approach to demonstrate that nations frequently have origins deep in medieval history and argues that religion is central to the creation of nations and nationalism. Anthony D. Smith's Nationalism and modernism criticises the modernists for what he contends is a lack of historical depth to their analyses, and argues that religion plays a strong role in forging nationalism. 10 Steven Grosby's recent critique offers a perennialist interpretation, which uses examples from ancient Israel, Buddhist Japan, and Catholic Poland to demonstrate both the antiquity of nationalism and its primarily religious origination. 11 But can these theories be applied to Ireland? Or to the Protestant nationalist tradition?

The Tudor conquest of Ireland, generally seen as lasting from 1534 to 1603, saw English sovereignty extended beyond the Pale, to encompass the entire island. The trauma of conquest was exacerbated by attempts

⁶ Elie Kedourie, Nationalism (London, 1960).

⁷ See, for example, Ernest Gellner, Thought and change (London, 1964); Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Oxford, 1983); Benedict Anderson, Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism (London, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality (Cambridge, 1990).

Adrian Hastings, The construction of nationhood: ethnicity, religion and nationalism (Cambridge, 1997).

⁹ Hastings, *The construction of nationhood*, 2.

Anthony D. Smith, Nationalism and modernism: a critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism (London, 1998), 112–116, 219, 227.

¹¹ Steven Grosby, Nationalism: a very short introduction (New York, 2005).



Introduction 5

by the English authorities to enforce the Reformation. However, weak state power meant that the Gaels and Old English generally resisted conforming, which gave Irish Protestantism the appearance of an English imposition, an image it has never quite lost. D. George Boyce has argued that the Gaels (the native, Irish-speaking inhabitants) developed some sense of national identity during the Tudor plantations. 12 The Ulster plantation, an attempt to subdue this most recalcitrant province, saw the native Irish removed from their lands and replaced by Protestant Scottish and English planters. The natives, who never accepted their expropriation, sought in 1641 to overturn the plantation. The 1641 rebellion was enormously significant, acting as an 'occult force' on Irish Protestants, and providing later generations with evidence of the natives' capacity for murderous retribution for past dispossession.¹³ Equally significant was the decision of the Old English gentry of the Pale to cast aside ethnic difference and support their co-religionists in rebellion, culminating in the Confederate war. This religious front had been prefigured by the writings of the Gaelicised Old English priest Geoffrey Keating (c. 1580-1644), who in 'Foras feasa ar Éirinn' (c. 1634) defined the 'Éireannaigh', or Irish people, as the Gaels and the Catholic Old English, excluding the New English settlers and Protestants from his definition. Perennialist scholars sometimes trace the origin of Irish nationalism to Keating's work. 14 The dual disasters of the Cromwellian land settlement and the expropriation that followed the defeat of the Catholic King James II offered a final crystallising moment. 'Old English and native Irish were once more involved in a common ruin; and the long period of oppression that followed all but eradicated the memory of any division between them.'15 Marianne Elliott adopts a perennialist approach in tracing the origin of Irish nationalism to this fusion of the Gaels and Old English in the seventeenth century. 16

The eighteenth-century penal laws, although imperfectly implemented, discriminated against Catholics in favour of members of the established church, the Church of Ireland, resulting in a Protestant parliament, constitution, and land ownership, which actively excluded

Boyce, Nationalism in Ireland.

¹⁵ J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish tradition* (London, 1976), 42.

¹³ A. T. Q. Stewart, The narrow ground: aspects of Ulster 1609-1969 (Belfast, 1997 [1977]), 49.

¹⁴ See, for example, Tom Garvin, 'National identity in Ireland', Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review, Vol. 95, No. 379 (Autumn, 2006), 243.

Marianne Elliott, When God took sides: religion and identity in Ireland – unfinished identity (Oxford, 2009).



6 Introduction

the Catholic majority from influence. ¹⁷ Although grievously wounded by the loss of its gentry to emigration and religious conversion, Catholic identity was in fact strengthened during the penal era. Gaelic poets, in declaiming the ruin of their people, provided later generations of Catholic patriots with a rich literature of past injustice to mine. One paradox of the penal era is that Protestants themselves became assertively Irish. Although remaining culturally English, they discarded the terms 'New English' or 'English in Ireland' and began to refer to themselves as the 'Irish nation'. 18 Partially born of grievance with the British government's treatment of the subordinate legislature in Dublin, the Protestant 'Patriot' movement developed. This movement, which sought legislative independence from Britain, originally excluded Catholics from their conception of the Irish nation.¹⁹ Although the late eighteenth-century genesis of the 'Protestant nation' suggests it corresponds to the modernist model, it must be noted that Protestant nationalism was propelled by religious identity. Eventually, prominent Patriots, inspired by Enlightenment principles, came to support Catholic relief. Protestant patriotism spawned the Volunteer movement, whose Convention at Dungannon in 1782 prompted the eventual concession of legislative independence from Britain.²⁰ One of the themes of this study will be the extent to which nostalgia for the Patriots, Volunteers, and Dungannon informed later Protestant and Catholic nationalism.

The Society of United Irishmen was founded in 1791. Its ideology was a synthesis of influences: Protestant patriotism, Presbyterian democracy, Catholic unrest, and the spirit of the American and French revolutions. Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763–1798), an Anglican barrister, was the group's most powerful personality and is generally regarded as the father of Irish nationalism.²¹ Its commitment to the union of 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter' was historically significant, and has provided both an aspiration and a source of rhetorical ammunition for generations of Irish nationalists. The 1798 rebellion, in which the United Irishmen sought to create a republic on French lines, ended in failure, and was

¹⁷ S. J. Connolly, Religion, law and power: the making of Protestant Ireland, 1660–1760 (Oxford, 1992); T. P. Power and Kevin Whelan (eds.), Endurance and emergence: Catholics in Ireland in the eighteenth century (Dublin, 1990).

Elliott, When God took sides, 34; David Hayton, 'Anglo-Irish attitudes: changing perceptions of national identity among the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland, ca. 1690–1740', Studies in Eighteenth-century culture, Vol. 17 (1987), 151–152.

¹⁹ See Jacqueline Hill, From Patriots to unionists: Dublin civic politics and Irish Protestant Patriotism, 1660–1840 (Oxford, 1997).

Thomas Bartlett, The fall and rise of the Irish nation: the Catholic question, 1690–1830 (Dublin, 1992), 34–38.

²¹ Marianne Elliott, Wolfe Tone: prophet of Irish independence (New Haven, 1989).



Introduction 7

followed by the Act of Union in 1800, which dissolved the Irish parliament and created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Marianne Elliott has argued that Protestant – in particular, Presbyterian – support for the United Irishmen should be understood in the context of a widespread belief that Catholicism had lost its menace.²² When it became clear throughout the nineteenth century that Catholicism was in fact resurgent, Presbyterians began to identify with wider British culture and support the Union.²³ This did not prevent later generations of Catholic nationalists from citing the example of 1798 in exhorting Presbyterians to rediscover their radicalism, nor for a small but active tradition of Presbyterian radicalism to remain active, especially in Ulster. Protestant nationalists frequently looked back to the late eighteenth century. One such figure was the novelist and Church of Ireland clergyman George A. Birmingham. Speaking of his co-religionists, he wrote:

They have quite forgotten that their grandfathers stood for Irish nationality. They have chosen to call themselves English \dots They conceived of themselves as an English garrison, and held loyalty to England as their prime duty. 24

The few scholars of Irish nationalism to endorse the modernist view trace the formation of Irish nationalism to the eighteenth century. John Hutchinson traces the origin of cultural nationalism to the mideighteenth century. Richard English, in his wide-ranging empirical and theoretical survey, offers a useful compromise between the perennialists and modernists: he dates the origins of Irish nationalism to the United Irishmen, although he stresses its more ancient roots. ²⁶

This study argues that the United Irishmen, alongside the Patriots and Volunteers, formed an alternative moment of crystallisation, when a Protestant nationalist tradition was created in Ireland. This tradition, while always having the adherence of only a minority of Protestants, co-existed alongside the Catholic nationalist tradition. The existence of a separate Protestant nationalist tradition helps explain, for example, the prejudice against the institution of the Church of Rome held not only by United Irishmen such as Tone and William Drennan, but also by later generations of Protestant nationalists, a fact that occasionally perplexes

²² Elliott, When God took sides, 128.

²³ Peter Brooke, Ulster Presbyterianism: the historical perspective 1610–1970 (Dublin, 1987), 194, 208.

George A. Birmingham, The seething pot (London, 1905), 134–135, originally quoted in Elliott, When God took sides, 98. For Birmingham, see below, Chapter 1.

²⁵ John Hutchinson, The dynamics of cultural nationalism: the Gaelic Revival and the creation of the Irish nation state (London, 1987). See also R. V. Comerford's guarded endorsement: Ireland (London, 2003).

²⁶ Richard English, Irish freedom: the history of nationalism in Ireland (London, 2006), 492ff.



8 Introduction

modern scholars.²⁷ It is possible that there are two Irish nationalisms: one, a Catholic strain, with its perennialist roots in the seventeenth century or earlier, and the other, a more modern, Protestant strain. Protestant nationalism, like Catholic nationalism, had its origin in religious identity, and, in its evolved, United Irishman form, gave ideological sustenance to later generations of Irish nationalists, from all religious backgrounds.

What European parallels with Protestant nationalists can we discern? Central European history is replete with borderland peoples who, forced to declare a national allegiance, chose an identification seemingly at odds with language or religion. One parallel is that of the Protestant Masurian Poles of East Prussia, who, following a plebiscite in 1920, essentially became German by rejecting the politics of their Catholic co-nationals and voting almost unanimously to remain in Germany.²⁸ There is a burgeoning historiography on 'side-switching' in Central Europe. James Bjork has examined, again in the post-Great War period, the Upper Silesians, some of whom adhered to Germany, some to Poland, and others wavering in between.²⁹ Chad Bryant has charted the fair degree of opportunism that led some Czechs, living under Nazi occupation, to declare themselves German. 30 Tara Zahra, in an important article, has claimed that national 'indifference' constituted a distinct form of political agency in Central Europe. ³¹ It is difficult, however, to meaningfully place Protestant nationalists within these frameworks. The wartime Czech experience aside, most Central European side-switching involved substantial population groups, who may have appeared one thing, but became another. Only the relatively small number of Protestant nationalist converts to Catholicism really fit into this category.³² Likewise, national indifference can scarcely be detected among the subjects of this book, although Protestant National Army servicemen may come close.³³

²⁷ See, for example, discussion of Independent Orange Order, below, Chapter 2.

Richard Blanke, "Polish-speaking Germans?": language and national identity among the Masurians', Nationalities Papers, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1999), 429–453.

Chad Bryant, *Prague in black: Nazi rule and Czech nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 51–55, 71–76ff.

³² See Chapter 3. ³³ See Chapter 8.

²⁹ James E. Bjork, Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and national indifference in a Central European borderland (Michigan, 2008). See also an important comparative study, T. K. Wilson, Frontiers of violence: conflict and identity in Ulster and Upper Silesia 1918–1922 (Oxford, 2010).

Tara Zahra, 'Imagined noncommunities: national indifference as a category of analysis', in Slavic Review, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Spring, 2010), 93–119. Cf. Jakub S. Beneš, Workers and nationalism: Czech and German social democracy in Habsburg Austria, 1890–1918 (Oxford, 2016), 11–12.



Introduction 9

More promising may be the pan-European phenomenon of aristocratic rebellion, where upper-class figures transgress class lines and support socialist, communist, or anarchist causes. Examples are legion: Katharine Stewart-Murray, the 'Red Duchess' of Atholl, who supported the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War; Mihály Károlyi, the 'Red Count', who served as president of the short-lived First Hungarian People's Republic; Gavin Henderson, 2nd Baron Faringdon, a socialist, pacifist, and Fabian; and Leo Tolstoy. Indeed, the 'repentant gentry' is a recurring theme in Russian literature.³⁴ Certain Protestant nationalists bear this comparison well: Roger Casement, Albinia Brodrick, and, above all, Constance Markievicz. But we should be careful. As we will see throughout this book, Irish aristocratic revolutionaries usually allied and formed networks with decidedly bourgeois co-religionists. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Protestant nationalism is better understood as a minority response to the history of Irish Protestantism and the growth of Catholic democracy, rather than an Irish expression of a pan-European phenomenon.

Any study of Protestant nationalists is indebted to, and builds upon, the work of earlier scholars. Protestant nationalists have fascinated historians of Ireland, who have frequently sought to decode and analyse the ambiguities and ambivalences that underlay their experiences. The existence of a substantial political dissident tradition within Irish Protestantism, whose members frequently exhibited liberal or cosmopolitan views that diverged from the ethos that would dominate Northern Ireland, the Irish Free State, or the Republic of Ireland, has excited the curiosity of generations of scholars. Historians, as well as literary critics and political scientists, have employed a diverse range of methods to reconstruct the political trajectories, ideology, and social milieu of these figures.

The importance of religious and social background in determining political development has proved controversial. F. S. L. Lyons's study *Charles Stewart Parnell* portrayed the Irish Party leader as a skilled practitioner of political power, though one whose views did not follow any fixed programme. ³⁵ A younger scholar, Paul Bew (b. 1950), in his short, sharp *C. S. Parnell*, disagreed, arguing that Parnell followed an essentially conservative programme, aimed at securing the leadership of the Protestant gentry in a home rule parliament. Bew claimed that Parnell's views were informed by ancestral memory of the eighteenth-century Patriot tradition, the nationalist leanings of members of his immediate family, as

³⁵ F. S. L. Lyons, Charles Stewart Parnell (London, 1977).

³⁴ See, for example, Caryl Emerson, The Cambridge introduction to Russian literature (Cambridge, 2008), 12.



10 Introduction

well as class consciousness.³⁶ This book will demonstrate that these themes projected into the twentieth century: we will see how the importance of residual memories of the eighteenth century, the influence of relations who exhibited nationalist sympathies, and even the desire for the perpetuation of Protestant influence informed the actions of those who lived a generation and more after Parnell.

Among individuals active during 1900–1923, the field of biography is particularly well served. The romantic, often tragic experiences of prominent Protestant rebels have been subjected to repeated analysis: there have been at least twelve full biographies of Roger Casement, seven of Erskine Childers, and nine of Constance Markievicz. 37 Since 2000, biographies have been produced of Bulmer Hobson, Rosamond Jacob, Captain Jack White, Alice Milligan, Albinia Brodrick, Kathleen Lynn (twice), Ella Young, Maud Gonne, Grace Gifford, Louie Bennett, Eva Gore-Booth, Anna Parnell, Francis Stuart, and Sam Maguire, as well as a collective biography of the Gifford sisters. Marnie Hay's Bulmer Hobson is a fine biography of an occasionally neglected figure, and has proved an invaluable source for this study. Margaret O hOgartaigh's Kathleen Lynn reconstructs Lynn's career as a pioneering female physician and socialist republican, while probing her troubled relationship with her unionist family. Colin Reid's The lost Ireland of Stephen Gwynn offers, inter alia, a fine discussion of the 'O'Brien inheritance': the amalgam of maternal-line influences that inspired his subject's (moderate) nationalism. Catherine Morris's evocative Alice Milligan and the Irish cultural revival highlights Milligan's influence on the development of cultural nationalism.³⁸

³⁶ Paul Bew, C. S. Parnell (Dublin, 1980). See also a later, expanded life by the same author: Enigma: a new life of Charles Stewart Parnell (Dublin, 2011).

Marnie Hay, Bulmer Hobson and the nationalist movement in twentieth-century Ireland (Manchester, 2009); Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, Kathleen Lynn: Irishwoman, patriot, doctor (Dublin, 2006); Catherine Morris, Alice Milligan and the Irish cultural revival (Dublin, 2012).

³⁷ The fullest account of Casement's life is Séamas Ó Síocháin, Roger Casement: imperialist, rebel, revolutionary (Dublin, 2008). For a fine portrait that stresses the extent to which his self-image as an Irish Protestant informed his nationalist activism, see Brian Inglis, Roger Casement (London, 1973). For Childers, the fullest treatment is Andrew Boyle, The riddle of Erskine Childers (London, 1977). Important studies of Markievicz include Diana Norman, Terrible beauty: a life of Constance Markievicz (Dublin, 1988), and Lauren Arrington, Revolutionary lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz (Princeton, 2016). An earlier work by Seán O'Faoláin, Constance Markievicz: or, the average revolutionary; a biography (London, 1934), is implicitly hostile.