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Olivier Coquelin

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Nationalisme « autochtone » et unionisme : vers l'émergence de deux nationalismes antithétiques en Irlande à la fin du XIXe siècle

Dr. Olivier Coquelin
(Brest, France)

Abstract

Cet article repose sur le postulat selon lequel les principales idéologies politiques propres à l'Irlande que sont le nationalisme et l'unionisme, constituent deux formes antinomiques de nationalisme : le premier se caractérisant par sa nature « autochtone », le second par sa dimension supranationale, sur le modèle britannique du nationalisme impérial. Si leurs origines profondes remontent indubitablement aux années 1790, leur rivalité n'apparut sur le devant de la scène politique irlandaise que vers la fin du XIXe siècle. Dès lors, le nationalisme « autochtone » et l'unionisme devaient façonner l'histoire de l'Irlande, au moins jusqu'au milieu des années 2000, en fonction d'un antagonisme politique et idéologique, unique en Europe occidentale.

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"Native" Nationalism and Unionism: Towards the Emergence of Two Antithetical Nationalisms in Late 19th Century Ireland

Dr. Olivier Coquelin
(Brest, France)

Holder of a doctorate in English and Irish studies from the University of Rennes 2 (France), Olivier Coquelin is currently teaching English as a foreign language and lecturing on the history and civilization of the British Isles at the University of Western Brittany (Brest / Quimper, France) where he is also an associate member of the Centre for Breton and Celtic Research. His research work focuses on the history and ideological analysis of Irish political and social movements in the contemporary era. One of his articles, entitled "Politics in the Irish Free State: The Legacy of a Conservative Revolution", was published in the February 2005 special issue of the journal of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas, *The European Legacy – Toward New Paradigms*.

October 1791 saw the creation of the Society of United Irishmen by Belfast and Dublin radicals from the Protestant middle classes, under the influence of the American and French Revolutions, with the object of uniting Catholic and Protestant so as to reform legally and radically the Dublin Parliament. However, just a few months after they had dissociated themselves from the parliamentary patriots in 1794, the United Irishmen became converted to republicanism and formed an alliance with the Catholic masses represented notably by the secret society known as the Defenders, in order to "break the connection with England"—to quote Theobald Wolfe Tone—and establish an independent and secular Irish republic. In doing so, they actually paved the way for what will be called in the present article "native" nationalism, as opposed to "colonial" nationalism, for it was to be given either a different confessional (henceforth Catholic), ethnical and cultural (henceforth Gaelic), and social (henceforth popular) dimension as in the Repeal movement led by Daniel O'Connell, or an ecumenical and irenic dimension as in the Young Ireland association. It should not therefore be confused with Catholic nationalism which constituted merely a trend within a "native" nationalism essentially endorsed by the Catholics, to be sure, but also by some Protestants of every denomination among whom

were prominent leaders such as Charles Stewart Parnell.[1] For its part, in the particular case of Ireland, "colonial" nationalism could be defined as the political expression of Anglican settlers claiming self-government within an imperial framework while reviling both natives of the Catholic faith and dissenting settlers, such as the Presbyterians, subjected in accordance with the Penal Laws[2]— thus involving merely the Protestant colonists of the Anglican persuasion[3] "colonial" nationalism should not therefore be confused with Protestant nationalism.[4]

On the other hand, as the virtues of the confessional unity extolled by the United Irishmen were far from meeting with general approval within the various Protestant communities, many of whom joined the ranks of reactionary organisations,[5] such as the Orange Order founded in 1795, through which they aimed at preventing the advent in Ireland of

[1] The inverted commas enclosing the words colonial and native are used here as some historians deny the fact that there were once colonists and natives in Ireland. Brian Walker asserts for instance that Ireland did not share the same characteristics as the various British colonies, due to her integration with the United Kingdom through the 1800 Act of Union. Thereafter, unlike all the genuine British colonies endowed with their own assemblies, Ireland was allowed to send elected representatives to the London Parliament. To this argument one may nevertheless reply that Ireland was always subjected to the interests of the British central authorities notably through a Protestant oligarchy settled on the most fertile Irish lands since the inception of the 17th century. Moreover, by developing a superiority complex *vis-à-vis* the natives of Catholic faith, the Protestants of all persuasions were regarded as eternal "colonists"—except maybe during the first half of the 1790s. We are therefore entitled to believe, notwithstanding Walker's assertion, that Ireland was treated in many respects like a colony at least until 1921. Hence the use of "Colonial" and "Native" in the present article. See Brian Walker, "Changing Political Languages—II. Ireland's Historical Position. 'Colonial' or 'Continental'", *The Irish Review*, vol. 9, 1990, 36-40.

[2] It is important to recall here that although the 1695-1727 Penal Laws essentially aimed at oppressing the Catholics some of them did not spare the Dissenters either. For example, the Sacramental Test Act imposed in Ireland in 1704 excluded all non-Anglicans from public office. See André Guillaume, *Irlande. Une ou deux nations ?*, Paris : PUF, 1987, 24; A. Norman Jeffares, "Swift and the Ireland of his Day", *Irish University Review*, vol. 2, n° 2, autumn 1972, 120.

[3] In the present article "Protestant" is used as a generic term referring to the non-Catholic Christians in Ireland. Although, arguably, the members of the established Church of Ireland were not Protestants strictly speaking—unlike the Dissenters such as the Presbyterians and the Methodists—it was common for them to be called "Protestants" rather than Anglicans, so as to distinguish them from both the Catholics of Ireland and the Anglicans of England.

[4] On the different hues of Nationalism, see D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland*, London: Routledge, 1995, 18-19, 104-107; J. G. Simms, *Colonial Nationalism, 1698-1776*, Cork: The Mercier Press, 1976, 9; Raoul Girardet, *Nationalismes et nation*, Bruxelles : Éditions Complexe, 1996, 60-61.

[5] Reactionary is a political term used to refer to any form of opposition to the idea of change or innovation, likely to subvert the institutions which have come down from the past and on behalf of which it is necessary to fight so as to either maintain or restore them. Thus the Orange Order was founded with a view to retaining a system favourable to Protestant hegemony. For a brief introduction to the tenets of reaction, see Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideas and Concepts*, London: Macmillan, 1998, 286-293.

Catholic power.[6] Thus were laid the foundations of an ideological and political edifice which was to answer to the name of Unionism from 1886 onwards.

The purpose of the present article is to explore how both unionism and "native" nationalism came into existence and to explain why they can be seen as two antagonistic Irish nationalisms, the followers of which were to play a large part in the partition of Ireland and, subsequently, in the Northern Irish conflict.

From Counter-Revolution to Unionism: A New Form of Irish Nationalism?

In their plan for a nationwide insurrection against British rule the United Irishmen could ill afford to do without the most numerous social group in Ireland, the Catholic peasantry, especially as they had apparently alienated many members of both Catholic and Protestant middle classes as early as 1795, after having openly adopted a separatist and revolutionary declaration of faith. The alliance envisaged in this way needed to proselytise, in the first place, the secret organisation founded with a view to protecting the interests of the Catholic farmers and labourers, namely the Defenders. But, as the name Defenders was very often synonymous with sectarian crime, this unitary strategy had the opposite effect of the one which was actually intended. Fears of the "popish" were not calmed but exacerbated within the various Protestant communities, thereby strengthening the counter-revolutionary forces—especially in the north-east of the country—the spearhead of which was undoubtedly the Orange Order.[7]

In fact religious intolerance had re-emerged when the first Catholic Relief Acts were promulgated in 1778 and 1782, so as to reward Catholics for their long-continued "loyalty"—allowing them to sign 999-year leases, inherit and purchase land, teach and set up schools.[8] In accordance with the new legislation, the Catholics started to encroach on the modest privileges of the Protestant lower classes as regards both employment and land occupation. This context of interdenominational rivalry saw the formation in 1784 of the Peep o' Day Boys of the Protestant persuasion whose tactics consisted in the use of violence and terror. The response to these sectarian-inspired practices was Catholic counter-terrorism mainly led by the secret society known as the

[6] See J. J. Lee, "Grattan's Parliament", *in* Brian Farrell (ed.), *The Irish Parliamentary Tradition*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973, 159.

[7] See Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen. Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-98*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, 63, 148, 151; J. L. McCracken, "The United Irishmen", *in* T. D. Williams (ed.), *Secret Societies in Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1973, 62; D. George Boyce, *op. cit.*, 128.

[8] Wesley Hutchinson, *La Question irlandaise*, Paris: Ellipses, 2001, 86-87.

Defenders. However it was not long before the latter surpassed their rivals in credibility as in prestige, as they propagated their cause throughout the four Irish provinces. In addition, from 1793 onwards, the Defenders started infiltrating an essentially Catholic militia founded after the outbreak of war with revolutionary France.[9] It was also in 1793 that the enfranchisement of the forty-shilling freeholders compelled parliamentary landlords to treat their tenants equally irrespective of religion. Reversing this situation implied matching the Defenders. This eventually occurred immediately after some Protestants—most of whom came from the lower classes—had won a victory over a band of Defenders in a violent clash which took place in County Armagh on 21 September 1795. Organized on the Masonic model the first lodge of the Orange Order thus came into being.[10]

Shortly thereafter other lodges were established more or less all over the north-east of the country. They asserted themselves above all by violent means used to drive the Catholic peasants out of a very fertile land of Ulster.[11] Although mainly made up of skilled workers, small farmers and labourers, the Order Orange was soon to find favour with some members of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy won over by the Orangemen's doctrinaire commitment to both the British crown and the omnipotence of Protestant institutions in Ireland. As a result, eighteen months after its creation, the secret society was placed under aristocratic control. Moreover, like the Defenders before them, the Orangemen gained many followers throughout the country, to such an extent that they may have boasted a nation-wide membership of 80,000 by 1798. Such a phenomenon resulted notably in the founding in Dublin of the Grand Lodge of Ireland in March 1798 and in the co-opting of members among the militia, the regular troops and the yeomanry, formed in 1796 on the government's initiative so as to restore law and order in rural Ireland.[12] Thus, within three years, the Orange sectarian and counter-revolutionary spirit was instilled in all the social classes of the various Protestant communities in Ireland. The Orangemen even drew some

[9] According to some sources around two thirds of the militiamen had sworn allegiance to the Defenders by February 1795. A militia which was to comprise about 25,000 members three years later. See Nancy J. Curtin, *op. cit.*, 165-166, 167.

[10] On the origins of the Orange Order, see Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism. The Formation of Popular Protestant Politics and Ideology in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975, 23-40; Hereward Senior, "The Early Orange Order, 1795-1870", *in* T. D. Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, 36-37; Jim Smyth, "The Men of No Popery. The Origins of the Orange Order", *History Ireland*, 1995, 49-52; Nancy J. Curtin, *op.cit.*, 155-157.

[11] In County Armagh alone nearly 7,000 Catholics were driven out just a few months after the creation of the Orange Order. See Curtin, *ibid.*, 156.

[12] On the relationship between the Orange Order and the Irish Yeomanry, see Allan F. Blackstock, "'A Dangerous Species of Ally'. Orangeism and the Irish Yeomanry", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 30, 1997, 393-405.

support from those former radical campaigners and sympathizers who had opposed the Defenders-United Irishmen alliance. Under these conditions that the rebellion orchestrated by the United Irishmen from May to October 1798 should take the form of a real war of religion in several places is hardly surprising.[13]

However, shortly after the failure of a particularly bloody separatist insurrection,[14] the question relating to the Anglo-Irish Union was to divide the Protestants of every persuasion. Many Orangemen and landowners feared above all that the British government would indeed emancipate the Catholics as initially agreed in return for their support. Within the representative assemblies, on the other hand, the opponents of the Union were inspired by two divergent motives. One regarded the disappearance of the Dublin Parliament as the end of the prerogatives hitherto enjoyed by the Protestant oligarchy, while the other one saw the Dublin Parliament as the only guarantee of political and economic equality between Ireland and Britain.[15]

As for the proponents of the Union, they were mainly proselytised in such high places as the senior civil service, the established Church and the Irish government. But among the supporters of the Union were also some United Irishmen who relished the prospect of witnessing the end of much abhorred institutions. Finally the Act of Union was adopted by the Dublin Parliament on 7 June 1800—but not without having recourse to bribery following the setback suffered by the first bill in January 1799—and formally took effect on 1 January 1801, thereby giving birth to the "United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland",[16] the defence of which was to be used, much later, as a federative purpose involving each Protestant community.

Indeed, some eight decades later, a united front was presented against the imminent enactment of Home Rule which imperilled the

[13] See *Ibid.*, 403; Peter Gibbon, *op. cit.*, 40-42; Hereward Senior, *op. cit.*, 38-40; Jim Smyth, *op. cit.*, 52-53; Nancy J. Curtin, *op. cit.*, 156; D. George Boyce, *op. cit.*, 129.

[14] The 1798 Rebellion caused more than 30,000 casualties—or even more than 50,000 according to some sources—the vast majority of whom were non-combatant civilians—that is civilians who did not take up arms. See Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981, 31.

[15] See *Ibid.*, 32; Hereward Senior, *op. cit.*, 40; G. C. Bolton, *The Passing of the Irish Act of Union*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, 218.

[16] See Jean Guiffan, *La Question d'Irlande*, Bruxelles: Éditions Complexe, 1997, 35; Nancy J. Curtin, *op. cit.*, 284; Brendan Clifford, *The Economics of Partition. A Historical Survey of Ireland in Terms of Political Economy*, Belfast: Athol Books, 1992, 52; Bolton, *op.cit.*, 219-220; Donal McCartney, "The Quest for Irish Political Identity. The Image and the Illusion", *Irish University Review*, vol. 9, n° 1, 1979, 14-16; Wesley Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, 91-92. It is also worth noting that, by virtue of the Act of Union, Ireland lost its Parliament and was henceforth represented in London by 100 MPs (as against 300 in Dublin) out of a total number of 658 MPs in the House of Commons and by 32 peers (instead of 250 in Dublin) in the House of Lords. See Guiffan, 36; Hutchinson, 92.

Union. The predictable dominance of the Catholics—admitted to parliament since 1829—within a future autonomous Irish parliament largely contributed to this phenomenon. But behind the political and religious façade there basically lay economic issues. For, at that time, industrialized and predominantly Protestant Ulster[17] owed its prosperity to its inclusion in the United Kingdom, unlike the other mainly agricultural Irish provinces. The Home Rule Bill therefore ran counter to the interests of the Protestant upper classes. Hence the calls for rallying the working classes under the banner of Protestantism so as to curb the "popish" threat. As for the members of the radical middle class—who could quite rightly be counted among the heirs to the United Irishmen—, as London had met most of their liberal demands throughout the 19th century, they had eventually accepted the Union as a *fait accompli*.[18]

But the best way to mobilize all the Irish Protestant communities against Home Rule—beyond the traditional socio-political and socio-economic cleavages—was undoubtedly through the foundation of a new organisation. This was the work of the Orange Order, the socially eclectic membership of which enabled it to get considerable support for the party project. A Manifesto was even passed to that end in December 1885. Published in the *Irish Times* it reads in part:

> Yesterday, at a meeting of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland in Dublin, several peers and Members of Parliament being present, the following address was adopted: […]
> 'Never in the history of Protestantism of this realm has the aspect of affairs been more threatening than it is now'.
> 'Three out of our four Provinces are apparently at the mercy of those whose avowed object is the overthrow of the Imperial rule in Ireland'.
> 'Ulster alone and the University of Dublin have been able to return supporters of the Union to the Imperial Parliament, and we are proud to claim ten of these members of our most loyal Institution'.
> 'Under these circumstances the duty of all three Orangemen is plain'.
> 'While maintaining with unwavering determination the principles of our Order, we must prove by our demeanour towards those with whom we have hitherto had minor differences, that the charge of bigotry which is so commonly made against us is wholly unfounded—that while we bate not one jot of our conscientious opinion we welcome with cordiality all those who will assist us in keeping intact the bond which unites us to that great Empire of which we are proud to form a not unimportant part […]'.[19]

[17] The 1881 census revealed that the Protestants of all persuasions accounted for 49,7 % of Ulster's population, that is 865,856 out of their total number of 1,159,147 nationwide. As for the Catholics, 833,566 out of a total of 3,960,891 nationwide lived in the north-eastern province of Ireland in the same year. See W. E. Vaughan and A. J. Fitzpatrick (eds.), *Irish Historical Statistics. Population, 1821-1971*, Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978, 49, 59.

[18] See Peter Gibbon, *op. cit.*, 120-127; Brendan Clifford, *op. cit.*, 84-87; Jean Guiffan, *op. cit.*, 60-63; André Guillaume, *op. cit.*, 40-41; Nancy J. Curtin, *op. cit.*, 284.

[19] *The Irish Times*, 22 December 1885, 5. On the Orangemen's rallying calls against the repeal of the Union, see also *The Irish Times*, 23 December 1885, 5.

Thus, from January 1886, was to be labelled as Unionist, in any election, every candidate opposed to Home Rule and then, from 1922 onwards, to the reunification of Ireland.[20] The doctrine known as Unionism was born and through it a form of nationalism[21] peculiar to Ulster—and subsequently to Northern Ireland—and based on the notion of "social imperialism" as Peter Gibbon puts it:

> In so far as their emergence created a new set of political structures, and in so far as they laid claim to an identity which was territorially based, the Unionists were creating a form of nationalism. Like all other nationalisms, however, the ideology justifying their claim to self-determination was necessarily based on a set of principles going beyond those of self-determination alone. In the case of Ulster Protestants the ideology which 'filled out' their nationalism was in large measure an anticipation of *social imperialism* […]. The social imperialism of the Ulster Unionists was concerned with the integration of two classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat.[22]

Thomas Hennessey, for his part, points out that the national consciousness of Ulster Protestants, however Irish it was, "because of the existence of a specific Irish nationalism seeking self-government, identified itself with a British imperial nationalism which was specific to both the British Isles and the British Empire".[23] We are therefore entitled to believe from these two comments that, since the late 19th century, two diametrically opposite nationalisms have coexisted in Ireland —one being supranational and synonymous with Unionism;[24] and the other one being of a "native" and autonomist or separatist nature.

The Political and Ideological Path to "Native" Nationalism and its Aftermath

What we have called in the present article "native" nationalism was, to a certain extent, the result of the alliance between the United Irishmen and the Defenders sealed sometime in 1795-96.[25] As mentioned

[20] See D. C. Savage, "The Origins of the Ulster Unionist Party, 1885-86", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 12, 1961, 185-208; Aiken McClelland, "The Later Orange Order", *in* T. D. Williams (ed.), *op. cit.*, 130-132.

[21] This form of nationalism, also endorsed by a tiny minority of upper-middle class Catholics, should not be confused with Protestant nationalism which constituted the most radical hue within the Unionist ideology.

[22] Peter Gibbon, *op. cit.*, 136-137.

[23] Thomas Hennessey, "Ulster Unionist Territorial and National Identities, 1886-93. Province, Island, Kingdom and Empire", *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 8, 1993, 35.

[24] On the different features of Unionism, see Colin Coulter, "The Character of Unionism", *Irish Political Studies*, vol. 9, 1994, 1-24.

[25] The exact date of the formal alliance between both secret societies remains a matter of speculation. See Nancy J. Curtin, *op. cit.*, 165.

above the emergence of the Defenders coincided with the 1784 interdenominational clashes which particularly ravaged a County of Armagh which provided a fertile breeding ground for such sectarian rivalries owing to its population being almost equally divided between Catholics and Protestants.[26] In the early 1790s, however, the Defenders also acquired fame in the other Irish provinces where many proselytes swelled their ranks. Outside Ulster, they went somewhat beyond the field of religious sectarianism. Their actions were thus motivated, in some places, by the desire to serve the peasantry's economic interests. On the other hand, influenced by the French Revolution and the campaign for Catholic Emancipation, they took on a more political aspect through their contact with those Dublin small shopkeepers, artisans and workers deeply imbued with radical ideas. Among the latter were even some Protestants who joined the ranks of the Defenders notwithstanding the sectarian nature of the secret organisation. In fact, as Nancy J. Curtin points out, what mattered to them above all was to achieve a revolution. The Defenders, therefore, were probably seen as the only society in Ireland that could fulfil their aspiration—at least before 1795.[27]

This meant, moreover, that the Defenders gained a following not only within the working classes but also among some sections of the lower middle classes. The revolutionary and military potential they had by 1795 was henceforth to be reckoned with by the United Irishmen, especially after the defection of many members of the bourgeoisie. As for the Defenders, confronted with both repressive governmental measures and sectarian crimes perpetuated by the Orange Order, they could hardly refuse to unite their destiny with that of the republican organization.[28]

Yet this was a peculiar coalition to say the least. For both secret societies had apparently nothing in common other than a keen interest in the French Revolution as well as a deep loathing for the Anglo-Irish oligarchy. But even these shared affects were underlain by divergent motives. For Catholic activists, the landowners purely and simply represented the descendants of the 16th and 17th century Protestant and Anglo-Saxon conquerors. The invasion of Ireland by Enlightened France, which they hoped and prayed for, was thus synonymous, in their eyes, with fair redistribution of estates arbitrarily confiscated from the

[26] See *Ibid.*, 49 and Wesley Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, 87.

[27] See Nancy J. Curtin, "The Transformation of the Society of United Irishmen into a Mass-Based Revolutionary Organisation, 1794-96", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 14, 1984-85, 481-482.

[28] See Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property. Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992, 45-67, 100-120; Nancy J. Curtin, *Transformation, op.cit.*, 476-479; Nancy J. Curtin, *United Irishmen*, *op. cit.*, 63, 148-154, 157; Thomas Bartlett, "Select Documents XXXVIII. Defenders and Defenderism in 1795", *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 24, 1985, 373-380; Tom Garvin, *op. cit.*, 27-29 and "Defenders, Ribbonmen and Others. Underground Political Networks in Pre-Famine Ireland", *Past and Present*, vol. 96, 1982, 142-144.

culturally and ethnically Gaelic natives of Catholic persuasion. The United Irishmen, in contrast, were mainly inspired by the contractual and secular dimension of French republicanism when fighting against what they regarded as a corrupt and illegal power held by a vast majority of Anglican landlords. This last point is well illustrated notably by the following extracts taken from *The Northern Star*, the organ of the United Irishmen in Belfast:

> We gladly look forward to brighter prospects—to a people united in the fellowship of freedom—to a Parliament the express image of that People—to a prosperity established on civil, political, and religious Liberty […]. If the rights of men be duties to God, we are in this respect of one religion. Our creed of civil faith is the same […]. And we think that whoever desires an amended Constitution, without including the great body of the people must on his own principles be convicted of political persecution, and political monopoly […]. Without, therefore, an imperial and adequate Representation of the community, we agree in declaring, we can have no Constitution—no country—no Ireland.[29]

In short, the Defenders strove to overthrow an order defined in both socio-economic and ethno-cultural/ethno-confessional terms with, on the one hand, genuine farming and Celto-Catholic Irish people and, on the other hand, landowning and Protestant Anglo-Saxon settlers. For their part, the republicans had a more political, irenic and economic conception of national liberation based on the conquest of the Irish government for the middle classes of every religious persuasion, with the support of the lower classes, in order to liberate the Irish economy from the restrictions imposed by Britain.[30]

Nevertheless the United Irishmen exploited the religious, racial and populist[31] character of the Defenders' nationalism for strategic ends. What they actually aimed at was winning the Catholic masses over to the revolutionary cause through a campaign of propaganda both egalitarian (notably in terms of land property) and sectarian (by intensifying the Orange menace and hatred of the established Church). In this course of action, however, the republicans only exacerbated the traditional interdenominational tension and rivalry instead of transcending them as originally planned.[32] This eventually contributed to the failure of the 1798

[29] *The Northern Star*, 7 January 1792, 4.

[30] See Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen*, *op. cit.*, 10-11, 32-35, 159-162; Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property*, *op. cit.*, 67, 112-113.

[31] Understood here as a set of radical doctrines and movements supposed to represent the socio-economic interests of a peasantry victimized by urban elites and economic modernity. See *Dictionnaire de la pensée politique*, Paris : Hatier, 1989, 610-613.

[32] Nancy J. Curtin, *United Irishmen*, *op. cit.*, 36-37, 119-121; Curtin, "The Transformation of the Society of United Irishmen", *op. cit.*, 490-492.

rebellion, notwithstanding French military support,[33] as the French historian, Jean Guiffan, puts it:

> More than a national revolution, the 1798 uprising was a great *jacquerie* which often took the form of a war of religion, of a large-scale 'chouannerie'. Inflamed by their priests, the Catholic peasants often committed the worst excessive acts of violence against the Protestants, the riposte to which was the yeomen's atrocities. The Irish clergy's wariness of revolutionary France explained to a large extent the weak support of the rebel Catholic peasants for the 'liberators' dispatched by Wolfe Tone. The alliance between a section of the liberal protestant middle class and the traditionalist Catholic peasantry came to a sudden end. The great idea of interdenominational reconciliation and fraternization put forward by the 'United Irishmen' was extinguished.[34]

The aborted attempt of the radical "colonial" nationalists to create a republican and secular Irish State[35] subsequently left the way clear for the emergence of "native" nationalism based on the notion of political and economic re-conquest of Ireland, on behalf of either a predominantly Catholic and Gaelic dispossessed people or of a dispossessed people of all faiths and cultures. Whereas "native" nationalism, together with Unionism, has constituted the dominant ideology in the north-east of the country since the late 19th century, it also greatly inspired the various organizations which took an active part in the establishment of Southern Ireland in 1922.

In fact, the advent of "native" nationalism on the Irish political scene, in the early 19th century, was to represent a long-lasting menace to the cohesion of the British Empire, especially as the main political doctrine in Ireland turned out to be less and less monolithic as time went by. Thus emerged two major diametrically opposite tendencies as regards the means to be used so as to reach equally divergent goals. In substance while one tendency aimed at promoting Ireland to the same rank as England in the imperial hierarchy by legal and non-violent means, the other planned to separate the Empire from its Irish element by

[33] On the French military expedition led by General Humbert from August to September 1798. See John Cooney, "Two French Revolutionary Soldiers in Rebel Ireland, 1798", *Études Irlandaises*, vol. 13, n° 2, 1988, 101-107; John Cooney, « En Campagne avec l'armée d'Humbert », *Études Irlandaises*, vol. 23 n° 2, 1998, 137-149.

[34] Jean Guiffan, *op. cit.*, 34. « Plus qu'une révolution nationale, le soulèvement de 1798 fut une grande jacquerie qui prit souvent des allures de guerre de religion, de vaste "chouannerie". Fanatisés par leurs prêtres, les paysans catholiques se livrèrent souvent aux pires excès contre les protestants auxquels répondirent les atrocités des *yeomen*. C'est la méfiance du clergé irlandais envers la France révolutionnaire qui explique en grande partie le faible soutien des paysans catholiques révoltés aux "libérateurs" envoyés par Wolfe Tone : l'alliance d'une partie de la bourgeoisie protestante libérale et de la paysannerie catholique traditionaliste tourna court. La grande idée de réconciliation et de fraternisation interconfessionnelles lancée par les "Irlandais Unis" était morte », (my translation).

[35] It is worth remembering here that, in July 1803, a group of former United Irishmen led by Robert Emmet launched another rebellion which also ended in failure.

insurrectional and revolutionary means with a view to establishing an independent republic. Both designs therefore took the form either of a radical reform on an imperial scale—for the constitutional wing—or of a radical break with the Empire—for the revolutionary wing, two major tendencies which were to contribute equally to the complexity of the ideological and political situation in early 21st-century Ireland.

Indeed, born in 1829 with the Repeal movement of Daniel O'Connell, the constitutional wing of "native" nationalism became assimilated, as early as the 1870s, to the movement for a Home Rule the prospect of which brought about the formal creation of Unionism as a political force, in the mid-1880s, which was to greatly influence Irish partition—for the Unionists were fiercely opposed to the setting up of an autonomous all-Ireland parliament, which led the British authorities to grant them self-government within a new, predominantly Protestant entity called Northern Ireland—and thereafter Northern Irish politics during the period known as the "Troubles" triggered in the late 1960s. As for the revolutionary wing initiated by the Young Ireland movement in the late 1840s, it ignited, through Sinn Féin and the IRA, the armed and political revolution that eventually resulted in the partition of Ireland in 1922 which in turn led to the aforesaid "Troubles", owing to the coexistence of two large and antagonistic political, ideological, denominational and cultural communities within the Northern Irish geopolitical entity.

To sum up "colonial" nationalism laid the founding stone of two antithetical forms of Irish nationalism, "native" nationalism and Unionism; the followers of both being the main architects of the 1922 partition of Ireland and, and consequently, of a Northern Irish conflict still unresolved at the time of writing.

Conclusion

Nationalism, whether "native" or unionist, undoubtedly imbued politics in both of the Irish geopolitical entities—at least until the mid-2000s. This explains, to a large extent, why the traditional left-right divide mainly founded on socio-economic differences never really took root in the whole of Ireland unlike the other western European nation-states—at least until the 1990s. The Irish political divide actually rested on constitutional and socio-political antagonisms. In the case of Southern Ireland the two major parties—Fianna Fail and Cumann na Gaedheal/Fine Gael—that emerged from 1927 onwards owed their existence not to any significant divergent economic views but mainly to the split within Sinn Féin regarding the merits of the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed in December 1921. As for Northern Ireland the political fracture was, in addition to the strictly constitutional sphere, of a denominational and cultural nature whereby each of the two largest communities

supported a movement in accordance with its socio-political aspirations—the "native" nationalists (whether constitutionalists or revolutionaries) for the vast majority of Catholics and the unionists for the vast majority of Protestants. Only on rare occasions throughout the 20th century was the socio-economic field to transcend the religious and cultural barriers as happened notably in the 1907 and 1932 Belfast strikes.[36]

And the root cause of what can be referred to as the contemporary Irish uniqueness within a European political and ideological context therefore lies in the path which gradually led to the advent of two antithetical nationalisms in late 19th century Ireland.

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[36] On this topic, see Ronnie Munck, *Ireland. Nation, State and Class Struggle*, London: Westview Press, 1985, 79-80; Stephen Bowler, "Sean Murray (1868-1961) and the Pursuit of Stalinism in one Country", *Saothar*, vol. 18, 1993, 44-45.

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