

Contemporary Reflexions on the Irish Celtic Revival of the 19th century

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Abstract :

Currently there is a great deal of questioning of Ireland's alleged Celtic identity, especially with the great numbers of immigrants arriving in the country. As geneticists and archaeologists deny the myths of a true Celtic origin, the idea of identity as social construction comes out strengthened from this discussion. This article aims to deal with the nationalist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ireland and its influence on the establishment of the Free State in 1921 and subsequently of the Republic of Ireland in 1922. In order to illustrate the construction of the Celtic narrative in the invention of the Irish nation, some brief passages are presented from the book *Mother Ireland* (1976), written by the contemporary Irish writer Edna O'Brien. In it, the author makes use of parody to highlight the construct character of the nationalist discourses that created a Celtic identity for Ireland.

Keywords : Celtic Revival, nationalism, national identity

In the last twenty years, genetic and archeological research is questioning the supposed Celtic identity of the Irish. This preoccupation in defining and redefining identities presents itself at a time when Ireland receives a great number of immigrants from several parts of the world. Traditionally a country of emigration, Ireland experienced great economic growth and technological advances in the period known as *Celtic Tiger* (1995-2008); since then, and even after the 2008 crisis in Europe, the country has received a great flow of immigrants. This had great influence on the secularization of the country and the integration of a growing globalized culture. Change brings with it the desire for a better understanding of the feeling of belonging of the Irish, and we will demonstrate in this article that this feeling is a social construct. To do this, we will travel back to the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. That was the moment of definition of what means to be Irish, and the moment of the choice of an origin (in this case, the Celtic origin) that justified their differences in relation to the English people, in their fight of separation from them

Geneticists, nowadays, defend that the origin of Irish civilization is not associated to the arrival on that region of Central European Celts, the *Hallstatt* civilization, but to the ancestral population that inhabited the edge of the Atlantic in Europe, at the end of the last ice age (Oppenheimer, 2006). Archeologists like Simon James (1999) and Collis (2003) claim that prehistoric Celts did not exist in Ireland, because there is no continuity in the archeological evidence found in the country that would permit us to say that those who lived there were Celts. The existing signs that could link this original population with those who immigrated to Ireland centuries later, coming from Central Europe (who had lost any historical aspects that defined them as Celtic), are simply not enough. James affirms that the Irish never claimed a Celtic identity until the last decades of the 19th century, and only did that when the desire of freedom from British colonialism raised a political need for it. In that historical moment, the Irish nationalist movement tried to find, beyond literature and the arts, a “scientific base” in archeology to prove a Gaelic or Celtic past, and the country’s government has invested resources, since then, in projects that preserve and even reinvent Irish heritage and identity. These projects are part of the process that created the past of the nation, remembered and revered.

According to Nicholas Healey (2016), archeology – made popular through schoolbooks, documentaries, museums, and the media – has political implications in the understanding of the Irish Celtic nationalist project in the end of the 19th and beginning

of the 20th centuries. Through textual analysis of books well studied in modern times, the author concludes that archeologists maintain or refute the justification of an ancestral Celtic past distinct from England, the argument that was the basis of the nationalist movement.

Two British archeologists analyzed by Healey were Simon James (1999) and Barry Cunliffe (2003). James, a specialist on European Iron Age, dismantles the idea of a strong movement of immigration or invasion of Ireland in Antiquity, since there are no material traces to support this hypothesis. The presence of pieces of art, for instance, would be the result of commercial interchange between the British Isles and the continent. To James, the belief in a Celtic past for Ireland is mostly due to the linguistic studies developed in the 18th century by the Welsh philologist and antiquarian Edward Lhuyd (1660-1709), who made the connection between Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Britton, and extinct languages like Gaulish, and considered them Celtic languages. The archeologist defends the idea that the notion of insular Celts and Irish Celticity are myths and do not possess historical base, being originated in the 18th century. James' writings oppose the justification of an ancestral Irish past distinct from a British past.

Barry Cunliffe, however, uses the term "Celt" as a general term to designate tribes in Central and Western Europe, allowing the use of the category from the Iberian Peninsula to Asia Minor, including Italy, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. This archeologist reinforces the idea of an European Pan-Celticism when he says the reach of Celtic migrants was continental. This representation defends the idea that there is a common cultural heritage to all Europeans, symbolically united in a "Primitive Europe", even though Cunliffe recognizes the heterogeneous aspects among the different people classified as "Celts". This common heritage supports the distinction claimed by the Irish in relation to British domain.

We can observe that the basis for the Celtic identity of Ireland is not fixed, but is subject to continuous debate and is much more a matter of social construction of identities than to aspects of ancestry. More important than the origin of the Irish is the effort of those who live in the outskirts of a central power to maintain an identity that is unique and distinct from that of the oppressor. In the Irish case, a nation was established from the difference from those who never conquered them, the Romans, and those who fought to subjugate them, the British. Following this line of thinking, we can mention the theoretician Benedict Anderson (1991) and his seminal work for the development of

a constructivist approach for the study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. His theory is that the feeling of belonging comes from the belief people have that they are part of a certain group and no other; national identity is invented or imagined by those who seek a common identity. We can therefore say that the identity invented for Ireland was Celtic, constructed in an idealized way, with streaks of nobility from an ancestral warring society, admired and feared by its contemporaries. They dreamt of the mythical and idyllic nation that preceded the one where the Irish, not being English, lived as second-class citizens inside the British State.

The Irish needed to prove to the English who ruled them, and to themselves, they were a people and a nation with distinct history, identity, and aspirations. The myths of a Celtic past played a very important role in the success of the nationalist movement, and in the embodiment of a Celtic nature in the Irish sense of identity. After independence, the main characteristic of Irish politics was the demonstration of the virtues of an idealized Celt. Since then, the socioeconomic changes of Ireland have redefined and adapted this Celtic identity.

Here we will examine the Celtic Revival, or Celtic literary rebirth, that gave consistency to the nationalist movement of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, and its influence in the establishment of both the Free State in 1921, and the Republic of Ireland in 1922. To illustrate the construction of the Celtic narrative in the invention of the Irish Nation, we will give as examples passages of the book *Mother Ireland* (1976), of the contemporary Irish writer Edna O'Brien, where she uses parody to make evident this construct characteristic of the nationalist discourses that created a Celtic Irish identity. Literature, to us, brings important contributions to the considerations about the construction and legitimization of identities. In the case of the Irish national identity, this process had its start in the last decades of the 19th century, as we will shortly see.

In the middle of the 1880s, the so-called Celtic Revival, or Celtic renaissance, appeared as part of a cultural, artistic and political awakening that contributed decisively for the creation of the Irish nation in the 1920s. The authors of this literary rebirth, like William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), George Russell (1867-1935), Lady Gregory (1852-1932), and John Synge (1871- 1909), among others, engaged in this project of retrieving and creating a national literature for the country. This movement

was necessary to establish the differences between Ireland and England, and to justify the independence of one in relation to the other, in a moment when Irish ways were forgotten and the Irish language almost extinct.

At the time of the episode that became known as the Great Famine, in the middle of the 19th century, “Ireland was a kind of nowhere land, waiting for appropriate images and symbols to be inscribed” (KIBERD, 1995: 115). The scholar Declan Kiberd refers to the historical trauma Ireland went through during this period of 1845-1848, when the country, dependent in the growing of potatoes, suffered with successive losses of harvests attacked by a fungus, and had its population decimated by hunger, misery and disease. There was also mass emigration of Irish to England, to the United States, Canada, and Australia.

After the catastrophe, the country went through a substantial process of Anglicization. Actually, since the ascension of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy in the beginning of the 19th century, England had already implemented a colonizing strategy with a cultural perspective: the English language. In 1801, with the creation of the Act of Union that established the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the official language for business and commerce became English, and Irish customs and way of life slowly became outmoded. However, being an agrarian country – what caused most of the population to live in the countryside – Irish language and customs were preserved until the middle of the 19th century. The Great Famine changed drastically the panorama, since it was responsible for the devastation of Gaelic Ireland. It is estimated that, at the time, one and a half million people died and another million emigrated, starting the Irish diaspora. Since the Anglo-Irish had better economic situation and did not depend exclusively of the potato harvest for their livelihood, great part of the decimated population was of Gaelic ancestry. Losing two million of six million inhabitants generated a deficit of the Irish-speaking community.

The situation of the Irish language after the Great Famine became great motivation for political struggle. After the recovery of Gaelic-Celtic cultural elements, the nationalists took up the propaganda for the preservation of what was left of the Irish language, and for the reaffirmation of national identity, to guarantee the unity of the country. President of Ireland from 1938 to 1945, Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), in his declaration of 1892 on the importance of the de-Anglicization of Ireland, said:

“But you ask, why should we wish to make Ireland more Celtic than it is – why should we de-Anglicize it at all?”

I answer: because the Irish race is at present in a most anomalous position, imitating England and yet apparently hating it. How can it produce anything good in literature, art, or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory? Besides, I believe it is our Gaelic past which, though the Irish race does not recognize it just at present, is really at the bottom of the Irish heart, and prevents us becoming citizens of the Empire, as, I think, can be easily proved.

To say that Ireland has not prospered under English rule is simply a truism; all the world admits it, England does not deny it. But the English retort is ready. You have not prospered, they say, because you would not settle down contentedly, like the Scotch, and form part of the Empire. 'Twenty years of good, resolute, grandfatherly government', said a well-known Englishman, will solve the Irish question. He possibly made the period too short, but let us suppose this. Let us suppose for a moment – which is impossible – that there were to arise a series of Cromwells in England for the space of one hundred years, able administrators of the Empire, careful rulers of Ireland, developing to the utmost our national resources, whilst they unremittently stamped out every spark of national feeling, making Ireland a land of wealth and factories, whilst they extinguished every thought and every idea that was Irish, and left us, at last, after a hundred years of good government, fat, wealthy, and populous, but with all our characteristics gone, with every external that at present differentiates us from the English lost or dropped; all our Irish names of places and people turned into English names; the Irish language completely extinct; the O's and the Macs dropped; our Irish intonation changed, as far as possible by English schoolmasters into something English; our history no longer remembered or taught; the names of our rebels and martyrs blotted out; our battlefields and traditions forgotten; the fact that we were not of Saxon origin dropped out of sight and memory, and let me now put the question – How many Irishmen are there who would purchase material prosperity at such a price? It is exactly such a question as this and the answer to it that shows the difference between the English and Irish race. Nine Englishmen out of ten would jump to make the exchange, and I as firmly believe that nine Irishmen out of ten would indignantly refuse it.” (MURPHY & MACKILLOP, 1987: 138)

On the text above, Hyde reinforces the image of Irish resistance to being part of the British state, and points out the intense process of erasure of Irish values since the union of the country with England. To Hyde, the Gaelic [Celtic] language could give back to the Irish the identity they had lost in the past. The Gaelic League, founded by Hyde in 1893, dedicated itself to the rebirth of the Irish language, which they believed would be the great power able to reach the political sphere. This branch of political nationalism sustained that the true cultural identity was Gaelic and Celtic. The participation of descendants of Anglo-Irish landowners in this movement for the recovery of national identity tried to soften the harsh contours of politics through the splendor of culture.

The writers of the Celtic Revival wrote about an old, heroic, idyllic, pagan and mystic Ireland. They valued Gaelic culture, even if they wrote in English. Regarding this, aiming to examine better that historical moment, we deem appropriate to use Stuart Hall's affirmation in *The Question of Cultural Identity*:

National cultures are made not only of cultural institutions, but also of symbols and representations. A national culture is a discourse – a way of building signification that influences and organizes both our actions and the conception we have of ourselves. National cultures, when producing meaning we can identify with, build identities. These meanings are contained in the stories that are told about the nation, memories that connect its present with its past, and images of it that are constructed (HALL, 2003, pp. 50)

Starting from this affirmation, we can understand that the Celtic Revival tried to recover for the Irish people the valorization of its past, of old Gaelic literature, and of the remains of a Celtic way of life, as marks that distinguished them from the British Empire and that justified the political struggle for emancipation. These nationalist ideals inspired the leadership of people like James Connolly, Patrick Pearse, and Michael Collins, among others, in the episode known as the Easter Rising of 1916. Although it was unsuccessful, it brought the necessary political strength – with its new heroes and the execution of its leaders – and the necessary support for Ireland to become independent in 1922. It is the invention of a nation, as Declan Kiberd puts it in his book *Inventing Ireland: the literature of the modern nation* (1995). The author says that

The majority of the nation states existed before they were defined and were, therefore, defined from their existence, but states that emerged from occupations, expropriations or denial processes have a different type of growth [...] there was (and there still is) a lot of tension serving this artificial process through which an abstraction is converted into reality. (KIBERD, 1995: 117).

The abstraction Kiberd refers to was the search, by the Irish authors, of a national style that expressed itself in literature by Celticism. It serves as differentiation of the Irish people from the English, and inspired in the imagination of the Irish a certain glamour for this warring society, feared and admired by other societies of Classic Antiquity. Examining this, we can say that, even if an effort was made to

retrieve the traits of a Celtic past, the term “Celtic Renaissance” is not precise. It is not a rebirth, but a construction.

Making reference to the Celtic Revival texts, Kiberd says that “in Celtic writing, usually expression precedes concept” (KIBERD, 1995:116) to justify that a national style for literature needed to be found, since the long colonization period erased the possibility of development of a distinctive national literature. English literature, which propagated the colonial discourse, was read by the Irish and worked as one of the mechanisms of cultural colonialism.

The reading of English Victorian novels, for instance, was a practice in Ireland during the 19th and 20th centuries, as the modern Irish writer, Edna O’Brien, exemplifies in her book *Mother Ireland* (1976), when she mentions the reading habits of the Irish and cites William Makepeace Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, and Ellen Wood. The English novels focused, in fiction, on a determined way of life that people imitated in real life, and in Kiberd’s view served as “instrument for the civilization of the [colonial] subject” (KIBERD, 1995: 115). The behavior of the characters was considered desirable for well-mannered people.

For Kiberd, W.B. Yeats, for instance, representing the ideal of a national poet, “hoped that, from his style, a whole [Irish] man could be inferred and, in due time, a whole nation would be.” (KIBERD, 1995: 117). The question of style preceding the conceptualization of a national literature can be illustrated here by the definition of ‘minor literature’ according to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It is literature written in a hegemonic language [major] by a minority [in the sense of a non-hegemonic group] that rebels against their oppressors:

An important or established literature (i.e. imperial) follows a vector that goes from content to expression. Once the content is presented in an already established form, one can find or discover the manner of expression that follows. Those who conceptualize [the form] express themselves well. However, a minor or revolutionary [literature] starts by expressing itself, and does not conceptualize [the content] until it [expresses it]. (DELEUZE E GUATTARI, 1986: 28)

This consideration helps us understand why Irish cultural renaissance gave ideological support – and even preceded by quite a few years – the political declaration of independence of the country. In this view, we can consider the authors of the Celtic

Revival as the first national authors of post-colonial Ireland, and these authors used Celticism as a literary style that shaped Celtic national identity.

Also making use of the Celtic cultural tradition of Ireland in her fictional narrative, Edna O'Brien takes the opposite route to the one taken by the authors of the Celtic Revival. She deconstructs the nation discourse when she lets us see in her work the construction of a Celtic identity discourse as a projection of the nationalist values that the Irish admire, and that materialize textually a homogeneous idea of nation. Here we highlight what we understand as O'Brien's literary project, when she questions official historical narratives: she articulates past and present to understand the relation between them. Or rather, as she herself says, "writing about the dilemma and the conflict that goes through the obvious." (O'BRIEN, 1995 *apud* COLLETTA & O'CONNOR, 2006:148).

In her work, O'Brien interacts in many ways with Celtic legacy – exposing, recreating, giving new meanings –, starting from the references to myths and legends she uses extensively. We realize this legacy survives in the author's imagination and reveals itself in her work. In *Mother Ireland* (1976), the valorization of a mythical origin of the Irish people, against official history, is already evident in the first chapter, entitled "The land itself". In this chapter, the author reproduces the cosmogony contained in the Book of Invasions (*Lebor Gabála Éirenn*), which belongs to the Irish mythological cycle, as it traces the landscape of Irish origin – starting with Cessaic, Noah's granddaughter, before the Flood. According to O'Brien, "those of her people were the first buried here, the first of a long line of Irish ghosts." (O'BRIEN, 1976:12). Ghosts that, according to O'Brien, justify the myth of the Irish 'atavistic violence', pointing to a supposed Celtic identity:

"If you are Irish you speak softly, and are considered savage, degenerate, drunk, superstitious, untrustworthy, backward, servile, prone to evil temper, while you know that, in truth, a veritable entourage of ghosts lives inside you". (O'BRIEN, 1976: 23).

O'Brien refers to the barbarian (savage) stereotype, and justifies it through the ghosts of the past, that we can understand here as the Celts themselves, and those silenced in the encounter between foreign and native, colonizers and colonized. The

ghosts were silenced, but the traumatic past, that should remain forgotten, returns with the memory of the trauma.

Still in Mother Ireland, the author describes the Irish from their supposed Celtic origin, using references common to that society, like chess, the portion of the hero (the best cuts of meat), and the banquets where the warriors sat on the floor with the heads of their enemies hanging from their belts. O'Brien is clearly making a parody of classic authors (both Greek and Roman), who describe the Celts as a barbarian people. O'Brien continues:

The conventions were occasions for festivities. The high kings, the minor kings, their bodyguards, the poets, the lawyers, the women and the slaves, all seated in their places and wearing the colors appropriate for each rank. [...] Their chess pieces were capable of piercing the brain of a man, and frequently they did. The warriors sat with the heads of their dead enemies hanging from their belts, while common soldiers put moss on their wounds to stop their bleeding [...] when the roast was cut, to the historian was given a twisted bone, to the hunter the shoulder of the pig, to the bard and the king the best steaks, and to the smith the head of the animal! (O'BRIEN, 1976: 14)

We can observe the irony, and O'Brien's strategy of temporal weaving to show the similarities of past and present, anachronically including professions that did not exist at the time of tribal organization of the High Kings, like lawyers and historians. On the historians, in the imaginary description of the ritual distribution of food (the portion of the hero), Edna gives them only a twisted bone. To the bard and the king were offered the best steaks, according to Edna, and not the leg, as described in classical texts, because the steak is recognized, by the contemporary reader, as a noble cut of meat.

The Celtic warrior, with his belt of heads of the enemies he killed, presented here with strong colors by the author, suggests to us that – through the exaggeration in their representation – she wishes to demonstrate the stereotyped character in the classical construction of such warriors. We can still consider her text as parody of classic accounts of the historical Celts, such as, for instance, in *Athenaeus' Deipnosophistae* (compiled in the 2nd century):

In the twenty-third book of his *Histories*, Posidonius says that the Celts, sometimes, during a banquet, engaged in a singular kind of combat. Armed, they simulate a fight where they end up wounding each other, and if not stopped, could end up dead. He also mentions that, in ancestral times, the best warriors received the portion of the leg in the banquets. If another man questioned his right to the best portion, a duel to the death was fought. (ATHENAEUS, IV).

Or in Diodorus of Sicily (60-30 A.C.):

In battles, the Celts used two-wheeled carts pulled by two horses. These carts conducted the charioteer and the warrior. At the time of combat, the warrior left the cart and defied his opponent. [...] when their enemies were killed, they cut their heads and hung them on their horses' necks; they would then turn to their followers and give them the weapons of the enemies, drenched in blood, singing an exaltation over them, and a song of victory. (DIODORUS SICULUS, V)

Both when she gives just a twisted bone to historians and when she exaggerates the cruelty of warriors, O'Brien questions the historical treatises, calling attention to the fact that the Celts were seen as barbarians by classic civilizations. The reader is made to notice that the text makes parodies of accounts of Roman and Greek authors who were contemporary to the Celts. For those civilizations, the Celts represented the Other and – when they judged them according to their own standards of society – they concluded they were barbarian and inferior people.

The narrative strategy used by O'Brien meets the (modern) concept of parody defended by the Canadian theorist Linda Hutcheon, when she talks about the text of parody: “in the background one finds another text against which the new creation is implicitly measured and understood” (HUTCHEON, 2000: 31). She emphasizes that modern parody dramatizes the difference between texts, especially through irony, which “seems to be the main mechanism to activate the perception of the reader in relation to this dramatization.” (HUTCHEON, 2000: 31) That is what O'Brien does when she inserts modern professions, and this difference is dramatized through irony and the exaggeration of the descriptions. In truth, due to these narrative resources, the reader realizes the emphasis that the author intends to give to the Celtic past and to the fact that foreigners, believing themselves members of a higher culture, judge a different culture inferior for the simple fact they are not able to understand it.

In this moment, O'Brien signals to the reader that official narratives are an articulated construction that interprets alterity from a standpoint of hegemonic value judgements. She highlights not only the construct characteristic of history, but also the repetition of the past in the present, when the Irish, like the Celts who preceded them, are taken and interpreted as the Other. This Other that must adapt to manners considered as "proper" by the English since the 12th century or by other countries like, for instance, North America of today.

In relation to Celticism, revised by O'Brien, we have a discourse that persists in the globalized Ireland of today, but it has changed. It is no longer a distinctive mark that justifies a national identity diverse from the British. It is, now, a powerful mechanism that feeds the tourism industry, already adapted to the global market, where "culture" is exported as a commodity. It is enough to think of the term "Celtic Tiger" to visualize the intense economic growth and technological development of the country in the period from 1995 to 2008, a growth that mixes tradition and economy in a way that is disturbing, to say the least.

Innumerable publications deal with Celtic themes; expositions and whole sections of museums are dedicated to the theme; the authors of the Celtic Revival are read and commented, their works adapted to movies and theater. In Dublin and in smaller Irish cities there are souvenir shops that explore Celtic themes, specialized restaurants, Celtic dance and music. Everywhere in the Republic of Ireland, the street signs are bilingual (English and Gaelic). There are many institutes where you can learn Gaelic, which is part of the school curriculum. There are bilingual publications or even those written only in Gaelic. Facing this picture of Celticism for Export, the Celtic experience might not have any more weight for the contemporary Irish experience. However, for many Irish writers, like the recently deceased poet Seamus Heaney, for instance, the idea of a Celtic unity – even when questioned or treated ironically – remains as an interpretative possibility. Heaney made extensive use of Celtic images and symbols from the Gaelic oral tradition to revisit history and bring new possibilities to the surface – like, for example, the analogy he makes between old Celtic sacrifices in the Iron Age and the violence in Northern Ireland:

You have a society in the Iron Age where there was ritual blood spilling. You have a society where girls' heads are shaved because of adultery; you have a religion based on territory, on a goddess of ground and

Earth, associated to sacrifice. Today, in many ways, the fury of Irish republicanism is associated to a religion like this, to a goddess of many shapes. She appears as Caithleen Houlihan in Yeats' plays, she appears as Mother-Ireland. I think the republican ethos is a feminine religion, in a way. It seems to me that there are no satisfactory imaginative parallelisms between this religion and that time, and our own time. (HEANEY *apud* BROWN, 1976).

Irish identity is formed by the legacy of prior generations, and the way this legacy is interpreted by the Irish of today. The interpretative possibility emphasized by Heaney remains, and we also understand that, in moments of great socioeconomic change, like today, when thousands of foreigners live and work in Ireland, it is fitting to reflect on what means to be Irish today. According to Nash (2006), "the search for ancestral origins must be understood in the context of the development of cultural nationalism, and of the political challenges of colonialism". (NASH, 2006, pp.13) and "those who insist [in saying] that the Irish are not Celtic are engaged in an internal post-colonial process of rethinking History, belonging, and identity" (*idem*, pp. 27). As we have seen, an essential element to understanding the way Irish identity is formed is the search for the difference in relation to other peoples, particularly those who threaten the Irish collective sense of belonging. In modernity, therefore, with the new configurations of the country, it is not strange to see that the search for the distinctive traces of the Irish in relation to foreigners has become such an important issue for that society.

The question of belonging, of what it means to be Irish, changes radically with the experience lived by the country in the period it was considered a "Celtic tiger" (1995-2010). The economic growth and the technological development was comparable to the economies of the "Asian Tigers" in the 1970s. Irish society became globalized and the consumer market attractive to the United States. Ireland, a country with a tradition of emigration because of its economic and political difficulties, changed standards rapidly and started to attract immigrants both from in and from outside of Europe. Diasporic individuals returned, after decades living outside Ireland. Immigration and globalization, added to the growing secularization of society, brought significant changes to the closed, provincial nationalism, shaped in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, that based itself on a mystical Celtic past.

The challenges that impose themselves on Irish identity today are not, actually, a matter for geneticists searching for the origins of an "Irish race". They are much more the search for a way of incorporating thousands of foreigners that live, work, study, and

start their families in the country. Multiculturalism and globalization are part of Irish reality today. In the same manner that the colonial condition demanded the invention of a Celtic Ireland, the post-colonial movement demands the Irish imagination to choose which elements of the past must be preserved and which must be incorporated from the present and future generations that form the Irish community.

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