



Spaces of Irishness in Nineteenth-Century America *Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl Amerikasında İrlandalılık Alanları*

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, the USA was the major destination of Irish emigrants. Though most of Irish emigrants in the eighteenth century emigrated from Ulster, emigrants in the nineteenth century were from all the Irish counties. Due to the sharp rise of emigration, an international network of Irish communities was established by the end of the nineteenth century. My paper examines the distinctive experience of Irish immigrants in the USA with a special emphasis on the cultural, economic and political forms of exile. Though it deals with the different forms of exile, it outlines the different aspects of Irish integration in the American society. Additionally, it explores the ways in which Irish immigrants negotiated their identities with the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture while constructing spaces of Irishness. In this context, it attempts to show that these negotiations of Irishness in the American society created a hybrid identity.

Keywords: Irish-Americans – Irishness - Irish immigrants – exile - Irish immigrant identity.

Özet

Ondokuzuncu yüzyıl boyunca ABD, İrlandalı göçmenlerin başlıca göç alanı idi. Onsekizinci yüzyılda İrlandalı göçmenlerin çoğu Ulster kökenli iken Ondokuzuncu yüzyılda İrlanda'nın bütün eyaletlerinden göçler olmuştur. Çalışmamız; sürgünün kültürel, ekonomik ve politik biçimlerine özel bir vurgu ile ABD'deki İrlandalı göçmenlerin kendilerine özgü deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Farklı sürgün biçimlerini ele almasına rağmen İrlandalıların Amerikan toplumuna entegre olmalarının farklı boyutlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bununla birlikte, İrlandalı göçmenlerin İrlandalılık alanları oluştururken baskın Beyaz Anglo-Sakson kültürüyle kendi kimliklerini uzlaştırma yollarını araştırmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, İrlandalılık ile Amerikan toplumunu uzlaştırma çabalarının hibrit bir kimlik yarattığını ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır.

Keywords: İrlandalı Amerikalılar, İrlandalılık, İrlandalı göçmenler, sürgün, İrlandalı göçmen kimliği

During the nineteenth century, Ireland witnessed a massive wave of emigration to many countries including Britain, Canada and Australia. However, the USA was the major destination of Irish emigrants¹. Though most of Irish emigrants in the eighteenth century emigrated from Ulster, emigrants in the nineteenth century were from all the Irish counties.

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¹ George Boyce and Alan O'Day, *Modern Irish History Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 192.

The conditions of the emigrants' departure especially the ones of the mid-nineteenth century have left a legacy of suffering in the Irish collective memory today².

The study of Irish immigration in the USA could not be in isolation from the historiographical debate over other aspects of Irish history. In fact, most of the academic articles on nineteenth-century subjects have been coloured by the revisionist-nationalist debate. Though revisionism holds a sympathetic attitude towards the role of the British government in Ireland, nationalist historiography mainly focuses on the shortcomings of the British policies. Nationalist historians also explain the causes of emigration from Ireland by the British reluctance to improve the economic conditions in the country. They view Irish emigration as being a forced exile caused by the dilapidated situation in Ireland³. In his book, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865*, Oscar Handlin explains that the emigration experience of the Irish was one of psychological dislocation. He also stresses the alienation of the Irish in the host society⁴. Undoubtedly, Handlin supports a nationalist narrative of the Irish past. Indeed, his emphasis on the suffering of the emigrants raises questions about the push factors in Ireland.

Kerby Miller argues that the Irish perceived themselves as experiencing an involuntary exile. He also explains that Irish emigrants blamed the situation on the cruelty of the English who made them leave their own country⁵. After examining the emigrant letters in his book *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, he concludes that large numbers of emigrants believed that they were driven into an involuntary exile due the injustice inflicted upon them by the English. However, he questions the very idea of exile as most of the Irish were not forced to leave their own country involuntarily:

Just which and how many Irish emigrants truly left home involuntarily? Political rebels, to be sure. Also fugitives from the law or from personal disgrace. To be generous, include evicted farmers who subsequently emigrated. Add as well those Famine Emigrants of 1845-1850 who fled out of sheer panic and fear of death (as opposed to many for whom the Famine was simply the final determinant in their decision). But altogether these compose only a relatively small proportion of the seven million or so Irish emigrants to North America. Despite the prevalence and persistence of the exile image, comparatively few emigrants were compelled by force or famine to leave Ireland, particularly between 1856 and 1921, when most departures occurred. Rather, the Irish emigrated voluntarily in order to better themselves; and at least in theory they could have remained in Ireland, as many of their spokesmen advocated⁶.

The idea of exile certainly supports the nationalist narrative of history. In fact, the immigrant perception of being exiled in America because of the oppression of the English government of the day resulted in the emergence of Irish nationalism. In the 1860s, Irish immigrants in America had their own newspaper, *The Irish People*, which reinforced nationalist feelings. Not only did the paper publish articles and poems about the heroism of the Irish but it also encouraged rebellion against the English in Ireland. It used the heroic stories of the Irish regiments in the Civil War in order to frighten the English government of the day. It also urged the Irish soldiers who took part in the American Civil War to join the Irish rebels.

² Mohamed Salah Harzallah, "The Construction of Famine Memory in the Irish Oral Tradition", *Nordic Irish Studies* 6 (2007), p. 49.

³ Kerby Miller, "Re-Imagining the Imaginary : A Challenge to Revisionist Mythology", *Irish Studies in Europe* 2(2009), p. 19

⁴ Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941, p. 221.

⁵ Kerby Miller, "Re-Imagining the Imaginary : A Challenge to Revisionist Mythology", op. cit., p.19

⁶ Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles – Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 6.

Though Civil War soldiers of Irish origin crossed the Atlantic to take part in a rebellion in Ireland, the English soldiers defeated the rebels easily⁷.

Patrick O’Sullivan identifies three main trends in the writing of Irish emigration history. In his exhaustive six volume study, *The Irish World Wide*, he states that the writing of Irish emigration history is divided into three categories. According to O’Sullivan, the approach of historians, whether conscious or unconscious, falls under one of these three categories: oppression, compensation and contribution⁸. While the oppression approach deals with the suffering of the Irish people during a particular period of time, it often provides a sanitised version of what happened. Instead of giving voice to the victims, historians sometimes normalise and legitimise past atrocities and wrong doings. Compensation history, however, opposes the soundness of oppression history. Contribution history focuses on the achievements of Irish migrants in different fields in the country of immigration.

Graham Davis, however, believes that the three approaches identified by O’Sullivan provide a fragmented understanding of the Irish experience. He also outlines the fact that these approaches fail to deal with the particular experience of specific migrant groups “All three models are selective in setting out to prove a point, but their focus is invariably too narrow and fragmented. The particular experience of individuals or groups of migrants is rarely compared with the general pattern or process of migration, so that the commonalities are missed”⁹. Davis also states that the idea of exile is part and parcel of the Irish emigrant mindset. He believes that it represented a psychological device that enabled the emigrants to find a rationale to their departure¹⁰.

My paper examines the distinctive experience of Irish immigrants in the USA with a special emphasis on the cultural, economic and political forms of exile. Though it deals with the different forms of exile, it outlines the different aspects of Irish integration in the American society. Additionally, it explores the ways in which Irish immigrants negotiated their identities with the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture while constructing spaces of Irishness. In this context, it attempts to show that these negotiations of Irishness in the American society created a hybrid identity.

The first wave of Irish immigration to the USA started from the time of the Revolutionary War to 1845. During this period, about one million Irish persons immigrated to the USA. Researchers indicate that the number of Irish people in the USA in 1790 reached about 306,000 out of a population of four million inhabitants. Most of the early immigrants were Presbyterians from Ulster who made up about two-thirds of all Irish immigration in 1815¹¹. However, the number of Catholic immigrants from Ireland increased gradually throughout the 1830s. Accordingly, the percentage of Protestant immigrants declined sharply. It, in fact, reached about ten percent of Irish immigration to the USA in 1840¹².

⁷ Mohamed Salah Harzallah, “The English Hegemonic Order and Irish Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century”, *Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies* 6 (2009), pp. 159-174.

⁸ Patrick O’Sullivan, *The Irish World Wide Patterns of Migration*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992, pp. xvii-xx.

⁹ Graham Davis, “Models of Migration: The Historiography of the Irish Pioneers in South Texas”, *The South Western Historical Quarterly* 99 (1996), p. 329.

¹⁰ Graham Davis, “Reconstructed Memory: Irish Emigrant Letters from the Americas”, *Irish Studies in Europe* 2(2009), p. 35.

¹¹ Patrick J. Blessing, “Irish Emigration to the United States, 1800-1920: An Overview”, *Irish Studies* 4 (1985), pp. 12-13.

¹² Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History*, New York: Longman, 2000, pp. 45-46.

During the 1840s, emigration from Ireland witnessed a radical change in terms of its scale and character. While prior to the Famine years most of the emigrants were young, the Famine period (1845-1851) was marked by the involuntary departure of different categories of people including men, women and children. All those who could afford the cost of the voyage desperately left Ireland seeking better conditions in America "It became common for all members of the family, parents, grandparents, and children alike, to risk the uncertainty of the voyage and what might be awaiting them in North America. This was preferable to facing the certainty of starvation at home."¹³ Undoubtedly, the horrors of the Famine along with the spread of contagious diseases and the inadequate relief policies of the British government acted as push factors that made thousands of Irish people leave their country¹⁴.

During the Famine years, emigration was even used as a form of relief that helped the poor seek better conditions elsewhere. The serious shortage of food in Ireland along with the scarcity of employment urged many Irish landlords to pay the cost of their tenants' journey to North America. A scheme of assisted emigration was adopted by some landlords such as Lord Palmerston. The latter assisted 2000 tenants to emigrate from Ireland¹⁵. Lord Lansdowne also assisted his tenants to emigrate from Ireland:

I shall not readily forget the scenes that occurred in Kenmare when I returned and announced that I was prepared at Lord Lansdowne's expense to send to America every one now in the poorhouse who was chargeable to his Lordship's estate, and who desired to go, leaving each to select what port in America he pleased. Whether Boston, New York, New Orleans, or Quebec. The announcement at first was scarcely credited, it was considered by the paupers to be too good news to be true. But when it began to be believed and appreciated, a rush was made to get away at once¹⁶.

Though schemes of assisted emigration helped the Irish paupers escape the Famine, they proved to be cheaper to the humane landlords than defraying the cost of indoor relief in the workhouses. Unlike the absentee landlords who were indifferent to the pauperism of their tenants, the humane landlords attempted to save the lives of their tenants by means of emigration.

Additionally, British politicians believed that the Irish economy could be improved through schemes of emigration. The density of the Irish population was regarded as being the cause of the agricultural backwardness of the country. Therefore, British politicians wanted to modernize the agricultural system. This could be achieved only through the reduction of the weight of population upon the land. However, many contemporaries refused to achieve land reform at the expense of the Irish people:

We can hope for little more from emigration as a means of lessening the competition for land in Ireland. While there is an Ireland there must be Irish people in it in large numbers; and be they of what race they may, they must remain discontented under any system of land culture which refuses to allow them to develop the agricultural resources of the country except under the liability to be robbed by ejection, or fined by increased rents, when they venture upon improvements. We are, therefore, warranted in concluding that no solution of the Irish land difficulty is attainable by the policy of extermination, no matter how long we may sustain

¹³ Margaret M Mulrooney, *Fleeing The Famine*, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003, p. 5.

¹⁴ See for example Mohamed Salah Harzallah, "The Great Irish Famine: Public Works Relief during the Liberal Administration", *Nordic Irish Studies* 8 (2009), pp. 83-96.

¹⁵ Tyler Anbinder, "Lord Palmerston and the Irish Famine Emigration", *The Historical Journal* 44 (June 2001), pp. 441-469

¹⁶ William Steuart Trench, *Realities of Irish Life*, London: Longmans, 1868, p.103.

that policy. Individuals may give way before that policy, but the people as a mass cannot escape, and must remain¹⁷.

Though British politicians believed that emigration would have a positive impact upon the system of landholding in Ireland, the land question remained very controversial throughout the nineteenth-century. Despite the significant decline of the Irish population during the post-Famine period, the perplexing issue of land in Ireland resulted in the Land War in the 1870s¹⁸. In this way, the theoretical and ideological assumptions upon which politicians acted proved to be wrong.

The influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s marked a watershed in the history of Irish immigration in the USA. Earlier Irish immigrants attempted to distinguish their own identity from the massive number of poor and unskilled Famine immigrants. In an effort to differentiate themselves from the Catholics, they identified themselves as "Scotch-Irish"¹⁹. The attempt of the Protestant Irish to differentiate themselves from the rest of the Irish immigrants emphasises their distinctive character. Contrary to the Catholics, they attempted to assimilate quickly by adopting the WASP norms. The researcher Bill Rolston argues that the articulation of the prejudice of the WASP establishment enabled some members of the Scotch-Irish group such as Thomas Mellon to assimilate:

The path to respectability was a much more difficult one for Mellon's poor fellow Scots Irish. However, one element that eventually allowed them to gain a level of assimilation was remarkably similar to a key aspect of Mellon's respectability; namely, racism. The ownership of slaves became, for many immigrants, not only the single most important symbol of their success in the New World, but also a key element in their upward mobility, however limited. There was no group of early immigrants more eager to acquire this symbol than the Scots Irish²⁰.

The Scotch Irish embraced racism as a means of climbing the social ladder. Therefore, slave ownership and a highly prejudiced attitude towards the black population seemed to characterise their assimilation process. They sought to emulate the behaviour of the dominant WASP group in an attempt to reach a better social status. Thomas Mellon even expressed anti-Catholic opinions and suggested that the remedy to the problems of Ireland was the dispersal of the Irish Catholic population all over the world²¹.

Anglo-Americans showed different forms of hostility towards the Irish Catholics. In *That Most Distressful Nation*, Andrew Greeley states that the level of victimisation of the Irish equalled the one of the American blacks. The Irish experienced a high degree of exclusion from mainstream culture as the natives regarded them as inferior beings:

Practically every accusation that has been made against the American blacks was also made against the Irish: their family life was inferior, they had no ambition, they did not keep up their homes, they drank too much, they were not responsible, they had no morals, it was not safe to walk through their neighbourhoods at night...²²

¹⁷ Irish Landowner, *Irish Landlordism: A Plea for the Crown*, London: W. J. Johnson Printer Bristol Selected Pamphlets N. 45110, 1869, p. 33.

¹⁸ Kevin Haddick Flynn, "Davitt-Land Warrior: Kevin Haddick Flynn Looks Back at the Life and Times of Radical Michael Davitt as Ireland Remembers the Centenary of His Death on May 31st", *History Today* 56 (2006), pp. 28-30.

¹⁹ Michael P. Carroll, "How the Irish Became Protestant in America", *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 16 (Winter 2006), p. 6.

²⁰ Bill Rolston, "Bringing it all Back Home: Irish Emigration and Racism", *Race and Class* 45(2003), p. 42.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 42.

²² Andrew M. Greeley, *That Most Distressful Nation*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972, p.120.

Being destitute, Irish immigrants in America in the 1840s showed a willingness to do jobs that were mainly done by the slaves. They were hired to work in dangerous places such as building the canals and working on the docks. The fact these jobs had high mortality rates made many companies hire the Irish instead of using slaves to do these tasks. Indeed, the death of a slave cost more money for companies than the one of an Irish person. Apart from the fact that the Irish had no monetary value, American employers believed that they were more reliable than slaves²³. Despite their poverty in the country of immigration, Irish immigrants in the USA sent money to their relatives in Ireland. They tried to alleviate the destitution of their family members who were left to suffer from starvation. *The New York Tribune* praised the efforts of the Irish immigrants:

It is fitted to exalt our estimate of human nature to record such a proof of the self-sacrifice and severe self-denial through which alone such a sum as is here stated \$808, 000 could in one year be remitted from their savings by the Irish at labour and at service in and around this city. Of what other people in the world under like circumstances can such a fact be truly stated?²⁴

The feeling of solidarity must have been consolidated by the unprecedented level of suffering experienced in Ireland. The immigrants knew well that if they had not helped their relatives, the latter would have died from starvation. In fact, the British government of the day adopted a policy of financial retrenchment²⁵.

Due to the fact that the Irish lived in poor neighbourhoods and mixed with black people, they were highly discriminated against. Many Americans labelled them “niggers turned inside out” while the black people were often referred to as “smoked Irish”. Apart from the discrimination inflicted by the White Anglo-Americans on the Irish, some slaves thought of themselves as enjoying a better social status than the Irish. One of the slaves who complained about the bad treatment of his master stated that the latter dealt with him as if he had been an Irish person “He treats me badly as if I was a common Irishman”²⁶. Moreover, anti-Irish jokes spread among the American black population. The latter amused themselves by many stories in which they constructed the Irish immigrant group as being lazy and incompetent. They also mocked the way in which the Irish spoke English²⁷. The feeling of superiority of the slaves to the Irish immigrants sheds light upon the nature of stereotypes against the Irish and their degraded status in the American society.

The alienation of the Irish resulted in the increase of the level of illiteracy of this immigrant group in America. An examination of the official records of the 1850s shows that the Irish in the city of New York had lower educational status than the German and native New Yorkers. Despite the lower status of the Irish in New York, Irish official records show that the level of illiteracy in Ireland among both men and women was higher than the one in the country of immigration. While 8 per cent of Irish men and 14 per cent of Irish women were

²³ Dennis Clark, *Hibernia America*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 97.

²⁴ *The New York Tribune*, 9 January 1847.

²⁵ Mohamed Salah Harzallah, ‘Food Supply and Economic Ideology: Indian Corn Relief During the Second Year of the Great Irish Famine (1847)’, *The Historian* 2 (2006), pp. 305-22.

²⁶ Florence E. Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1951, p.15.

²⁷ Bill Rolston, “Bringing it all Back Home: Irish Emigration and Racism”, op. cit., 2003, p. 2.

illiterate in New York, the Irish Census of 1861 shows that 28 per cent of men and 31 of women were illiterate in Ireland²⁸.

One of the major reasons for the exclusion of the Irish from mainstream American culture was their religious faith. Anti-Catholicism was strong in America due to the fact that the Americans were mostly Protestants rejecting all forms of religious formalities. The high level of devotion to Catholicism reinforced the feeling of exclusion among the Irish and their victimisation as a group. The historian Andrew Greeley notes that the Irish clung strongly to their religious faith regardless of the circumstances in which they found themselves:

There was one thing the Irishman did have, whether he was scheming rebellion, dying of famine, fighting fever on the ship, or struggling to make it through the slums of New York City. That was his religion. The Irishman clung to his religion as though it were all he had, and frequently it was²⁹.

Greeley's comments hold true since the Famine records show that the efforts of the proselytisers in some charitable organisations failed to convert the Irish into the Protestant faith. Though some Irish paupers accepted to attend the Protestant religious services in return for food, they quickly rejected Protestantism when they became able to support themselves and their families³⁰.

The arrival of the Irish Catholics in large groups to America increased anti-Irish feelings which were translated into violence. In 1806, after the completion of the building of the first Catholic Church in New York, St Peter's Church, a group of American Protestants burned it³¹. The rejection of Catholicism or what was designated as "Romanism" became very strong in the 1840s. It resulted in the burning of Catholic places of worship such the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts³². Protestant Americans also formed anti-Catholic organisations such as the American Patriotic League (APL) and the American Protective Association (APA). These organisations proved to be highly critical of Catholicism and attempted to spread prejudice against the Irish³³. Though anti-Catholicism was very strong, Irish immigrants attempted to forge a hybrid religious identity. They started a process of Americanising the American Catholic Church. Bishop John Hughes encouraged the Irish Catholics to combine their Catholicism with a commitment to the American values and morality³⁴.

Despite the end of the Famine, the influx of emigrants from Ireland continued during the post-Famine period. Between 1855 and 1920, about three million Irish people became immigrants in the USA. Historians ascribed the continuous flow of immigrants to the degraded economic conditions in Ireland. David Emmons notes that poverty in Ireland worked as a push factor that encouraged the Irish to leave their country "In sum, there were no jobs, no

²⁸ Cormac O'Grada, "The New York Irish in the 1850s: Locked in by Poverty?", *Working Papers 05/17*, University College Dublin, November 2005, p. 11.

²⁹ Andrew M. Greeley, *That Most Distressful Nation*, op. cit., p. 63.

³⁰ Cathal Poirteir, *Famine Echoes*, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd, 199, p. 168.

³¹ Stephen A. Brighton, "Degrees of Alienation: The Material Evidence of the Irish and Irish American Experience, 1850–1910", *Historical Archaeology* 42 (2008), p.134.

³² Patrick Blessing, "Irish Emigration to the United States, 1800-1920" in P.J. Drudy, *The Irish in America, Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 29.

³³ Howard Chucadoff and Judith Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 5th edition, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000, p.147.

³⁴ Hasia Diner, "The Most Irish City in the Union": The Era of the Great Migration, 1844–1877, In Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher, *The New York Irish*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p.103.

inheritances, no dowries, no access to the land, no promise—or even faint hope—of a secure future”³⁵. In fact, most of the Irish immigrants in the post-Famine period were young, poor, unskilled and from a farming background. By 1900, about five million people in the USA claimed that they were Irish. The number of Irish-Americans grew quickly during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In 1920, about a quarter of the American population was of Irish descent³⁶.

In the 1850s, the poor living conditions in the country of immigration had a serious impact upon the longevity of the Irish. Researchers have shown that most of the Irish in the city of Boston died young. They explained the short longevity of the Irish by their addiction to alcohol, high level of deprivation and their employment in very dangerous jobs. They have also argued that alcohol-related diseases were higher among the Irish than any other immigrant group. Patrick Blessing argues that Irish women suffered from diseases unique to the Irish such as tuberculosis. The latter often results in the death of the sick. He also notes that the deteriorated conditions resulted in high infant mortality among the Irish³⁷. It is worth noting that large numbers of Irish immigrants were deprived of medical care on the ground of their ethnicity. Anglo Americans thought of the Irish as being racially and religiously inferior to them. Therefore, there was a widespread belief that the Irish should not be helped. This view was reinforced by the public perception of poverty as being the cause of the individual’s weakness of character. Health care and public assistance were limited in the Irish immigrant community since the poor were regarded as being morally corrupt³⁸.

Though large numbers of men left Ireland to the USA during the post-Famine years, women outnumbered Irish men in New York. In 1860, Irish women represented 60.9 per cent out of the total number of Irish immigrants in New York. It is worth noting that the labor force participation of Irish women was higher than the one of their European counterparts such as the Germans. However, Irish women mainly worked as domestic servants and dressmakers³⁹. Due to the fact that female workers in the domestic service were subject to the cruelty of female employers and the sexual harassment of men, most of second generation Irish women avoided doing this job. Moreover, domestic servants had higher wages than the ones of the unskilled and semiskilled women. They also lived in better neighbourhoods than their working class counterparts and had a steady occupation that enabled them to save money. Women working in factories, however, lived in poor areas and earned meagre wages⁴⁰.

One of the major barriers to the inclusion of the Irish in the American society was language. Most of the immigrants especially those who emigrated from Ireland in large groups in the 1840s spoke only Gaelic. The official records of the time show that about a third of all Famine immigrants could not speak English. The fact that the immigrants could not speak

³⁵David M Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990, p. 3.

³⁶Francis M. Carroll, *American Opinion and the Irish Question: 1910-1923*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978, p.3.

³⁷Patrick Blessing, “Irish Emigration to the United States, 1800-1920” in P.J. Drudy. *The Irish in America, Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*, op. cit, p. 25

³⁸Stephen Brighton, “Degrees of Alienation: The Material Evidence of the Irish American Experience”, op. cit., pp.132-137.

³⁹Cormac O’Grada, “The New York Irish in the 1850s: Locked in by Poverty?”, op. cit., University College Dublin, November 2005, p. 6.

⁴⁰Cormac Ó Gráda, “The New York Irish in the 1850s: Locked in by Poverty?”, *Working Papers 05/17*, op.cit., pp. 7-9.

English was perceived by both politicians and missionaries as being a serious obstacle to effective communication⁴¹. Though the first generation of Irish immigrants in the USA suffered from discrimination because of its inability to speak English fluently, the Gaelic language seemed to provide a sense of belonging for the immigrants. It provided them with a space of Irishness in the American society. In Philadelphia, for example, St. Philip's Catholic Church held religious services in Gaelic⁴². The use of the Gaelic language in some churches helped the immigrants maintain the links with their own culture.

Irishness in the USA was forged against anti-Irish and anti-Catholic opinions which culminated in the Know-Nothing party of the 1950s. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century the Irish were stereotyped as ape-like beings with a strange English accent. They were also stereotyped as a group having a tendency towards drunkenness and alcoholism. These stereotypes were mainly promoted in the magazines and newspapers of the time through the publication of cartoons and jokes⁴³.

Though the Irish were discriminated against on the ground of their religion, there were some signs of their integration in the American society. Instead of being isolated because of Catholicism, the loyalty of the Irish people to their religious beliefs and practices enabled them in the long run to be the leaders of the Catholic movement in America. They built their own churches which attracted large numbers of Catholic immigrants. Contrary to the status of the Catholic Church in Europe, Catholicism seemed to flourish where the Irish settled in the USA. It got the financial and social support of the Catholics. The historian Dennis Clark indicates that "While the church was losing the allegiance of workers in Europe, the American Catholics led by the Irish had created a democratic Catholicism with popular support, financial and social, for what would become the country's largest religious establishment⁴⁴." There is no doubt that ethnic clustering might have helped the politicians among the Irish immigrants to mobilise the voters for the support of the Democratic Party. The concentration of the Irish in specific areas might also have helped the Catholic Church to have a better influence over its adherents.

Moreover, the Irish became actively involved in politics especially during the 1840s. They mainly showed support for the Democratic Party. In 1844, they represented a considerable electorate that could influence election results in many areas. The Irish support for the Democratic Party derived from the fact that Democratic politicians defended the rights of immigrants through the introduction of a legislation in 1804 that made the naturalisation of foreigners easier. In the 1820s, the removal of property qualifications for voting helped the franchise of a larger portion of the newly naturalised immigrant population⁴⁵.

The defence of the voting rights of the immigrant population was not the only reason that made the Irish support the Democratic Party. Their political backing to the Democrats during the elections could be explained by the way in which the Democratic vision of society improved the status of the Irish. Contrary to the widespread prejudice and stereotypes against the Irish, the Democrats questioned the xenophobic atmosphere of the Anglo-Saxon culture. Accordingly, the acceptance of the Irish as whites was eased in the American society. Central

⁴¹ Kerby A Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, op. cit, p. 297.

⁴² J. Thomas Scharf and Thomson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609—1884*, Philadelphia 1884, vol. 2, p.1392.

⁴³ Margaret M Mulrooney. *Fleeing The Famine*, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2003, p. 66.

⁴⁴ Dennis Clark, *Hibernia America*, op. cit., p. 58

⁴⁵ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, Great Britain: Routledge, 1995, pp.75-76.

to the Democratic ideology was the vehement opposition to nativism which promoted stereotypes against the immigrants⁴⁶.

The franchise of the Irish immigrants resulted in their political promotion. Some of the active members in the Democratic Party reached good political positions. Mike Walsh was one those successful politicians who emerged from the Irish immigrant group. In 1852, he was elected to Congress as a member of the Democratic Party. Being the editor of a newspaper, Walsh spread his views about the sensitive issues that dominated the public opinion. He, for example, opposed the abolitionist politicians who were against the system of slavery. Walsh believed that the plight of the working class in the northern states was worse than the situation of the slaves in the south of the country. He also believed that the slaves born in slavery suffered less than the workers in the factories who were born free and later on enslaved by the capitalist system:

If the slave has never been a free man, we think, as a general rule, his sufferings are less than those of the free laborer at wages. As to actual freedom one has just about as much as the other. The laborer at wages has all the disadvantages of freedom and none of its blessings, while the slave, if denied the blessings, is freed from the disadvantages⁴⁷.

The views of Walsh could only be understood within the context of the white laborer radicalism. Many white labor radicals spread their views in the paper of the *Working Man's Advocate*. Central to their activism was the idea that the system of slavery was better than the exploitation of labourers in factories. Strangely enough, working class radicals in the Northern states justified the enslavement of the black people in the South⁴⁸.

Though the Irish showed a willingness to be involved in the American culture, they did not show a real interest in the frontier experience. Their Irishness in the USA revolved around the urban experience where they faced both forms of integration and exclusion. A number of historians emphasise the reluctance of the Irish to be involved in the westward expansion. Carl Frederick Wittke notes that the Irish experience is “a phenomenon of the development of urban life in the United States”⁴⁹. Thomas Gallagher also emphasises the urban nature of the Irish immigrants' experience:

The horses and pigs in the streets, the slaughterhouses and tanneries, the stables and blacksmiths' shops and all the rural smells they created, the hotels with their efficient Irish servant girls and slender young Irish waiters, the burly Irishmen laying the city's gas lines and Croton Water Works pipes in the streets—all these made staying in New York City more attractive than heading into the unknown countryside, where building canals, cutting through forests, laying railroad lines, or working the land presented almost the only ways to exist, all of them in lonely places bereft of the kind of “society” most Irishmen craved⁵⁰.

The reluctance of the Irish people to be highly involved in the process of the westward expansion could be explained by the fact that earlier immigrants in the 19th century mainly left the depressed industrial areas in Ireland. Accordingly, they settled next to the industries in America. In the 1820s, the American press also discouraged the immigrants who did not have a farming background from trying to settle in the west. The *Mechanic's Free Press*, for example, warned the immigrants about the dangers and harshness of life in the west.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.76.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid*, p. 79.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.78.

⁴⁹ Carl Frederick Wittke, *The Irish in America*, USA: Louisiana State University Press, 1956, p.62.

⁵⁰ Thomas Gallagher, *Paddy's Lament*, New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1982, p.289.

Simultaneously, it encouraged the immigrants with an experience in “the mechanical business” to settle in towns in order to take jobs in the same field. Similarly, later emigrants from Ireland proved to be reluctant to be involved in the process of westward expansion. Undoubtedly, the harshness of the voyage to America must have worked as a disincentive to further adventures. Large numbers of those who travelled to America died in the “coffin ships” before reaching their final destination. Moreover, Irish immigrants must have felt a need to settle in the urban areas where there were established immigrant communities from Ireland. These Irish dominated areas must have provided the new immigrants with a sense of belonging.

It is worth noting that many affluent Irish-Americans tried to change the highly prejudiced attitude towards their own group. Educated Irish Catholics such as Edward G. Ryan of Wisconsin, John G. Downey, Thomas O’Connor of New York, and Jasper O’Farrell of San Francisco led many organisations and wrote to both the American press and the one of their own country in an attempt to improve the status of Irish immigrants. Though many prominent Irish people were actively engaged in different activities in order to ensure a better acceptance of their countrymen in the host society, few either changed their names or moved to areas where anti-Irish feelings were not strong⁵¹.

Irish Catholics in Philadelphia transcended the confinement of their ethnic boundaries and showed a significant participation in class-based associations and political parties. Apart from their identification with the Jacksonian Democratic Party, they supported other parties such as the General Trades Union and the Workingmen’s Party. In the second half of the nineteenth century, they were actively involved in the local development of the Republican Party. Despite their role in founding Catholic associations, many Irish Catholics in Philadelphia joined many non-Catholic elite associations such as the Art Club, the Law Club and the Union League⁵².

In the city of New York, the Irish played a major role in trade unions. In the 1850’s, most of the leaders of trade unions were Irish. In 1854, for example, the leaders of the New York Tailors’ and Laborers’ Unions, boot and shoe workers, bricklayers, printers, porters, masons and stone cutters were Irish. The Irish union leaders represented 106 out of a number of 229 union leaders in New York. The Irish held a leadership role in most of the unions because they constituted a large portion of the working class⁵³. Furthermore, the Irish involvement in the American labour movement reflects the degree of their integration in the American society. It also shows that the Irish experience was not only an experience of exclusion as they contributed to the defence of the workers’ interests.

During the 1870s, a small group of Irish-Americans belonged to the wealthiest class in America. Among those wealthy people we find a number of millionaires such as William Grace who was a well-known shipping magnate. There was also a significant group of Irish people belonging to the middle class. Though the depressions of the 1870s and 1890s had a serious impact upon the American economy, they did not affect the Irish upper and middle classes. The growth of these classes continued even during the depressions. The occupational status of Irish-Americans also improved significantly. The proportion of Irish-Americans

⁵¹ Patrick Blessing, “Irish Emigration to the United States, 1800-1920” in P.J.Drudy. *The Irish in America, Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*, op. cit., pp. 28-29.

⁵² Dale B. Light, “The Role of Irish-American Organisations in Assimilation and Community Formation”, in P.J.Drudy. *The Irish in America, Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*, op. cit., pp. 124-126.

⁵³ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, op. cit. pp.116-117.

employed in white-collar and skilled occupations equalled the one of the White Anglo-Saxon people⁵⁴.

The paper has identified the different aspects of the exile experience of the Irish immigrants manifested by their alienation from cultural, political and economic opportunities in the host country. Irish immigrants are discriminated against and classified as belonging to a lower status than not only the Anglo-Saxons but also the slaves. Therefore, the American spaces of Irishness were marked by the subordination of the Irish immigrants to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. Though the alienation of the Irish represented an obstacle to their assimilation in the American society, it enabled them to establish a distinct community. The paper has also shown that the efforts of the American Irish people to oppose the stereotyping of Irishness as being tantamount to drunkenness, irresponsibility, laziness and idleness reflect the way in which this group struggled very hard to find its role in the American society. The achievements of the Irish immigrants in the fields of politics, economy, trade unionism and the combination of Catholicism with a respect of American values also acts as an evidence of this group's willingness to integrate while preserving its own identity. This identity, however, was hybrid since it was both Irish and American.

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