

Irish and Polish migration: some preliminary comparative analysis

Among “moving Europeans”, Irish and Polish migrants occupy a pioneer (if unenviable) status in the historiography of migration and ethnicity. Thomas and Znaniecki’s multi-volume study of “The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-20)” was the foundation text of positivist sociology, an exposition of disorganization and dysfunctionality as migrants moved from traditional mechanisms of social regulation to the modern world of individualization. Primitive peasants in provenance, Polish migrants were studied simply as objects of social processes: atomized, cultureless and normless, they exemplified general laws of social change and individual social behaviour. This Chicago school methodology (with its roots in German sociology) was soon extended backwards by Handlin’s study of the “uprooted” Irish transplanted in America. Early arrivals, the Irish were the first to undergo the alienation and individualization subsequently experienced by Poles and other “new” immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. As the respective archetypes of the two main waves or “generations” of migrants – an historiographical perspective which still applies – the Irish and the Poles figured prominently in subsequent studies of assimilation, a uniform (upward) process perceived (and celebrated) in individualized terms of personal attributes and achievements.¹

Positivism and assimilation have long since fallen from fashion. In the pluralism and post-modernism of recent scholarship, ethnic fade is no longer the inevitable fate of Irish, Polish and other migrants. As is now appreciated, ethnicity was to persist – at times to flourish – within hyphenated and multiple migrant identities. Like other forms of identity, ethnicity is a cultural construction, defined through opposition to a reviled and ‘alien’ other, and by the invocation of deep-rooted, self-referential myth. The project of intellectuals and cultural nationalists, this “invention” of ethnicity is outside the scope of this paper. Migrant workers, however, were often the first to embrace the “collective fiction” ahead of the vernacular mobilization of the people – the crucial transition from Miroslav Hroch’s phase B to phase C – back in the homeland.² A relational identity, ethnicity seems to have acquired added salience at a distance, strengthened in dialogue between host-ascription – generally in the form of crude labelling and stereotyping – and migrant response. In the ‘real life context and social experience’ of migrant workers, ethnicity served to incorporate, adapt and amplify pre-existing communal solidarities, cultural attributes, and historical memories. Ethnic affiliation was

1 D.A. Gerber, The immigrant letter between positivism and populism: the uses of immigrant personal correspondence in twentieth-century American scholarship, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16 (1997), pp. 3-34; A. Kazal, Revisiting Assimilation: the rise, fall and reappraisal of a concept in American ethnic history, in: *American Historical Review* 100 (1995), pp. 437-71; Ewa Morawska, The Sociology and Historiography of Immigration, in: V. Yans-McLaughlin (ed), *Immigration Reconsidered* New York 1960, pp. 187-238.

2 Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge 1990 provides a useful introduction to the theoretical frameworks of Hroch, Gellner and others.

a creative means of coping with migrant adjustment, a process aided by “peer review” of other migrant “others”. Often close neighbours, the various migrant groups looked at each other as role models to be emulated or spurned. As Conzen, Gerber, Morawska, Pozzetta and Vecoli have shown, migrant “ethnicization” was a dynamic and contingent historical process, “driven by multiple relationships, among various sidestream ethnicities as well as between them and the mainstream ethnicity”. It required “constant invention, innovation, negotiation and renegotiation on the part of those seeking to organize identities, patterns of daily life, or the competitive struggle for social resources around ethnic symbols.”³

Unlike the Chicago school or the assimilation model, the notion of adjustment – the current historiographical orthodoxy – is multi-form and various, devoid of any prediction (or hierarchy) of outcome. It allows recognition of the economic rationality of migrants (located within a continuum of differing strategies and objectives from seasonal and temporary to permanent migration) and of the ethno-cultural resources (and other coping capacities) at their disposal.⁴ Once characterized as pre-modern peasants, nineteenth-century migrants are now acknowledged as pioneers in the modernization of consciousness, among the first to adapt to multi-national or “distanctiated” (to use Antony Giddens’s terminology) space and time in the global economic system.⁵ No less than today’s brain-drain “Eirepreneurs”, early Irish migrants sought to make the most of their portable ‘human capital’:⁶ in their case, readiness to speak English and to undertake tasks which native-born workers preferred not to do. Their information networks and mobility channels were remarkable, acutely sensitive to “niche” market opportunity – in a manner not always discernible, however, to the panel-regression indices and cliometrics which now supplement the old “push-pull” analysis of mass migration.⁷ Irish migrants, David Fitzpatrick has observed, “might be restricted to the worst jobs, but they clustered in regions of expanding employment. In effect, they occupied the worst seats in the best theatres.”⁸ Similarly, migration for the Poles represented a conscious decision at betterment within available economic opportunities. Having only peasant “strength” at their disposal, they were perforce selective in choice of destination. Cities where light industry demanded skilled labour or where large African-American populations already took the unskilled jobs (as in Baltimore, Cincinnati and St Louis) were avoided, but they poured into cities of heavy industry like

3 K.N. Conzen, D.A. Gerber, E. Morawska, G.E. Pozzetta and R.J. Vecoli, *The Invention of Ethnicity. A Perspective from the USA*, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (1992), pp. 3-41.

4 For a useful introduction to the latest approach, applied to the comparative study of transnational Italian migration, see S. L. Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise. Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City 1870-1914*, Ithaca 1999

5 Gerber, p. 26.

6 Mary P. Corcoran, *Emigrants, Eirepreneurs and Opportunists. A social profile of recent Irish immigration in New York City*, in: R.H. Bayor and T.J. Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish*, Baltimore 1996, pp. 461-80.

7 For the latest cliometrics, see T.J. Hatton and J.G. Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migrations. Causes and economic impact*, New York 1998

8 David Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration 1801-1921*, Dublin 1984, p. 34.

Buffalo, Chicago and the mine and mill towns of Pennsylvania.⁹ Sensitivity to the international labour market, however, was generally accompanied by commitment to traditional values back in the homeland. Remittances sent home by migrant workers facilitated the survival of large families on otherwise uneconomic holdings. Emigration wages in America and elsewhere were a crucial factor in the final solvency of the Polish countryside: one assessment for Galicia set the amount at 24 to 30 million US dollars annually.¹⁰ Fertility remained high in nineteenth-century Ireland as married couples reared children to migrate, a form of insurance policy offering a pension or lump sum from the grateful offspring once they gained employment in the diaspora. Bred to migrate, they readily withstood the “shocks” of displacement, relying on ethnic and other coping capacities.

For some present-day migrant groups (the Cubans and the Chinese in the United States are the best-studied examples), “ethnic solidarity” can empower self-sufficient “enclave economies.” In seeming defiance of ecological models of assimilation (and labour market segmentation theory), newly-arrived workers can gain parity with the primary labour market outside, without linguistic or other extra-ethnic interaction: in the enclave economy, earning-returns are commensurate with human capital skills and investments.¹¹ By contrast, ethnic affiliation among nineteenth-century Irish and Polish migrants was protective and defensive, a means of coping with the disadvantages, disabilities and discrimination of the secondary labour market in which most were confined. As Weber suggested, ethnicity exists in direct relationship to its usefulness as a mechanism of group formation and mobilization. Whereas classes in the Marxian sense must develop their sense of identity, forms of organization and culture *ab initio*, ethnic groups can call upon their sense of ethnicity and their forms of ethnic bonding as a resource. From the outset, as John Rex notes, they are “ethnics-for-themselves.” There can be rapid progress from ethnic identity (factors which distinguish one communal group from another) to ethnic identification (consciousness of the significance of these factors). Awareness of ethnic category leads readily through participation in ethnic network and ethnic association to ethnic community. Given this facility, ethnic forms of collective association and mutuality can reach into parts untouched by the class-based movements privileged in conventional labour history.¹² However, there were limits to such inclusion. There was to be no place for Protestants in the Irishness of the diaspora: ethnic and religious identity were increasingly interwoven, a symbiotic relationship which “made Irish, Catholic, and Catholic, Irish.” Despite their common provenance, Jewish migrants from Poland were excluded from Polonia, the preserve of Catholic migrants.

9 E.R. Kantowicz, Polish Chicago. Survival through Solidarity, in: M.C. Holli and P. A. Jones, Ethnic Chicago. A multicultural portrait, Grand Rapids 1995, pp. 174-76.

10 D.A. Pacyga, Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago. Workers on the South Side 1880-1922, Columbus 1991, p. 123.

11 For a critical introduction to the “enclave-economy hypothesis” of Alejandro Portes and colleagues, see J.M. Sanders and V. Nee, “Limits of Ethnic Solidarity in the Enclave Economy”, in: American Sociological Review 52 (1987), pp. 745-67.

12 John Rex, Ethnic mobilisation in multi-cultural societies, in: J. Rex and B. Drury (eds), Ethnic Mobilisation in Multi-cultural Europe, Aldershot 1994, pp. 3-12.

As I have argued elsewhere, there are problems in applying such functional resource mobilization theory to nineteenth-century migrants.¹³ The necessary components of ethnic affiliation were not all in place, ready for instant activation. Migration may have helped to construct an “imagined” national identity, to superimpose a wider “invented” affiliation upon traditional and instinctive sub-national loyalties, but it was a delayed and interactive process within which host labelling was an important factor. As both the Irish and Polish outflows evince, chain – or “network” – migration replaced local and circular forms to become the dominant migration system in nineteenth-century Europe, facilitating long-distance movement from densely populated peripheral areas – particularly Ireland, Italy and the Polish provinces – to core industrial and commercial regions.¹⁴ Working through family networks, social connections, village and regional solidarities, chain migration involved social arrangements with people already at destination, who characteristically helped newcomers to find jobs and housing, thereby protecting them from disorientation, dislocation and anomic behaviour. The initial mechanics of chain-migration preserved old sub-ethnic allegiances, functioning along lines of clan, county and regional filiation. Polish peasants limited their identification to the *okolica* or area within which their reputation resided.¹⁵ Irish migrants were no less particularistic. In the paddy camps of Lowell, Massachusetts, work-place loyalties to specific foremen were based upon clan/family/regional ties simply transferred across the briny ocean. Faction fighting, indeed, was transplanted with undiminished vigour: “Far-ups” and “Far-downs” adapted the intimidatory tactics of the agrarian secret societies to defend territory and jobs in urban-industrial America. In the shanty camps of canal construction, rivalry between Corkonians and Connaughtmen was the axis around which existence was ordered, subsets which created social solidarity but more profoundly led to dissonance in the canaller community.¹⁶ Such fierce rivalries notwithstanding, combatants were perceived by resident Americans as one and the same: Irish. To Americans, provincial and village identities were meaningless: migrants were lumped together into ethnonational categories, Irish, Italian, Polish (or more likely, Micks, Wops and Pollaks). Continually labelled in this way, migrants began to take an inverted pride in their ‘ethnic’ identity. Life in America, Patrick Ford later observed, elevated the Irish out of “the littleness of countyism into the broad feeling of nationalism.”¹⁷ The development of networks and associations above the region, clan and faction, however, depended on a number of factors. For the purposes of our comparative analysis, I want briefly to highlight two: the presence of a middle class, and the role of the Catholic Church.

13 John Belchem, *Ethnicity and labour history: with special reference to Irish migration*. Paper presented to the foundation conference of Labnet, the European Network of Labour Historians, Amsterdam, 18 Feb. 1997.

14 Leslie Page Moch, *Moving Europeans. Migration in Western Europe since 1650*, Bloomington 1992.

15 Helena Znaniecka Lopata, *Polish Americans*, New Brunswick 1994, p. 3.

16 Brian Mitchell, *The Paddy Camps. The Irish of Lowell 1821-61*, Urbana 1988; Peter Way, *Common Labor. Workers and the Digging of North American Canals 1780-1860*, Cambridge 1993, 192-99. See also, David Montgomery, *The Irish and the American Labor Movement*, in: D. N. Doyle, O. D. Edwards (eds), *America and Ireland 1776-1976*, Westport 1980, pp. 206-09, and R.S. Wilentz, *Industrializing America and the Irish Towards the new departure*, in: *Labor History*, 20 (1979), p. 582.

17 Quoted in T.N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, Philadelphia, New York 1966, p. 21.

Let us start with American Polonia, an ethnic community embodying what has been called “institutional completeness.” Built upon inter-locking networks of churches, building and loan associations, parochial schools and fraternal associations, Polonia came to offer nearly all the services – religious, educational, political, recreational and economic – which Polish-Americans required without recourse to the host society. Polonia, indeed, proudly regarded itself as the “fourth province of Poland.”¹⁸ At the foundation of this super-territorial ethnic community was the local neighbourhood organized around the parish church, construction of which was the first obligation on migrant earnings. Here was an important element of continuity, preserving essential aspects of the distinctive (and intense) religiosity of the Polish village: solemn services of worship; the high esteem given to sacred objects; and an intensive cult of the Blessed Virgin.¹⁹ An anchor for communal life in the new urban setting – the base upon which new forms of associational culture and collective mutuality were constructed – the parish represented “the single most important link with the Old Country and the focal point of the New World ethnic community.”²⁰ A pervasive spiritual and social influence in the migrant community, the church served to transcend regional divisions and to promote a national consciousness. In the “occupied” Polish territories, the church was the one national institution spanning the partitions, providing haven and sanctuary for Polish language and culture against “de-nationalizing” Kulturkampf attack. Implanted in Polonia, the church was the very symbol of Polish nationality and identity.

The essential aim of the church in Polonia was to construct and maintain this ethnic Catholicism, to prevent contamination by other forms. This single-minded internalizing of energies denied the Poles wider influence within American Catholicism – by 1900 there were nearly 900 Polish parishes in the United States, but not one Polish bishop.²¹ The Irish experience was very different. Having left Ireland before the “devotional revolution”, many migrants arrived with a nominal Catholicism which, lacking the ritual and ornament of continental European Catholicism, caused less grievous offence in Protestant America. While ensuring against leakage and Protestant proselytization, Irish clergy assiduously promoted American patriotism, bourgeois values and upward mobility among their congregation (and themselves). Some clerics even demanded that emigrants Anglicize “unpronounceable” Gaelic names. This readiness to adapt – anathema to Polish Catholics – placed the Irish at the head of the catholic hierarchy, clerical and lay. Some Irish-Americans, indeed, were to seek a more integrated form of hyphenated identity, placing themselves at the head of other ethnic groups as the leaders of Catholic-America. The Knights of Columbus, which emphasized Catholic and American loyalties over narrowly Irish ones, proved very popular with successful second-generation ‘lace-curtain’ Irish-Americans.²²

18 Lopata, chs. 1 and 3.

19 Anna Zarnowska, Religion and politics. Polish workers c.1900, in: *Social History*, 16 (1991), pp. 299-316.

20 W. Kruska, *A History of the Poles in America to 1908*. Part One, Washington DC 1993, xii.

21 *Ibid.*, xiii.

22 Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America*, Syracuse 1992, pp. 47-88; Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles. Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, New York 1985, pp. 331-335 and

Ethnicity, then, kept the Poles apart, but enabled the Irish to secure a leading role for themselves in larger formations – not only in the Catholic church but also in the Democratic Party and the American labour movement. The contrast here is not between ethnic persistence and ethnic fade. Irishness, indeed, was to become more pronounced as the ‘ethnic’ Irish networked their way into American structures. The difference is perhaps best understood by comparative study of middle-class migrants, the culture-brokers of ethnicity.

Created and preserved as their own “property” by the native upper class, gentry and urban intelligentsia, Polish nationhood reached a much wider constituency in the diaspora, aided by the presence in Polonia of petty *déclassé* gentry and *émigré* lesser intellectuals. In similar manner to other East European *émigrés* (representing no less than fourteen proudly distinct groups), they articulated a passionate nationalism to symbolize their link with the homeland elite – and to underpin their status within the migrant community where literary and cultured forms were placed above “folk”.²³ With its exclusive focus on the homeland (and disregard of American political context), their nationalism served to complement rather than to contest that upheld by the Polish church. However, rival super-territorial structures – the Polish National Alliance and the Polish Roman Catholic Union – were in place by the 1880s, both with headquarters in Chicago. As Kantowicz notes, the religionist-nationalist rivalry among Poles was comparatively mild. Factionalism abounded, but unlike the Bohemians, there was no split into two completely separate cultural communities: “Nationalists and religionists formed two tendencies within one community of Polish Americans. (...) Divisions remained for the most part within the Polish family, which prayed together and stayed together.”²⁴ Above all, the national cause was extended throughout the migrant community by proud preservation of ethnic culture, a form of cultural-economic autarky – similar to their separate Catholicism – facilitated by members of the professions (who found a sufficient client base and adequate status reward within Polonia) and by ethnic entrepreneurs. Specialist business were opened to meet migrant needs, combining language retention (as in the many printshops) with other homeland traditions and delights (remembered and/or invented): the national diet and drink available in Polish saloons; the retail of religious and patriotic goods; and funeral parlours offering the full Polish ceremony.²⁵ As Poles were enjoined to “Patronize Your Own”, anti-semitism came into force, directed against stores run by Jewish migrants.²⁶

As Roy Foster has shown, there were “Micks on the make” in the Irish diaspora, but their ethnicity – at least in the days before the gaelic revival and Sinn Fein (“Ourselves alone”) – was less essentialist and autarkic, indeed more acceptable and marketable to a wider audi-

526-531. See also the local studies in: T. J. Meagher (ed), *From Paddy to Studs. Irish-American communities in the turn of the century era*, New York 1986.

23 See the section on ‘Changing Images of the Old Country and the Development of Ethnic Identity among East European Immigrants’ in: Conzen et al, pp. 21-26, drawing upon the work of Ewa Morawska.

24 Kantowicz, p. 182.

25 Lopata, pp. 71-72.

26 Pacyga, p. 224.

ence.²⁷ Like the émigrés in Polonia, political refugees enjoyed considerable prestige. As recollected in American exile, 1798 became a legacy of pride, providing the martyrs, myth and mission to inspire immigrant support for the nationalist cause with fervour absent in Ireland itself. In the absence of a language of its own, however, this nationalism was expressed through the public political rhetoric of the new land of residence. Aligned with the American master narrative of republican liberty, and, through its Canadian connections, with the manifest destiny of republican expansionism, Ireland was projected as the privileged site for American aid and intervention. Assertion of Irish nationalism was thus a means of challenging ‘Know-Nothing’ nativist prejudice, of affirming Irish-American republican credentials within the American body politic.²⁸

Similarly, entrepreneurs who identified their best interests (or market niche) in servicing the Irish migrant community did not restrict their customer base on exclusive ethnic lines. This was most famously the case with the Irish saloon-keeper – and with Paddy, the vaudeville artist whose bibulous and genial ethnicity was much enjoyed by otherwise strait-laced Yankee audiences in need of vicarious saturnalian release.²⁹ Like its Polish counterpart, the Irish saloon provided an alternative and/or complementary base to the parish for ethnic associational culture and collective mutuality. However, where the Polish tavern was ethnocentric and enclosed in victuals and location, Irish pubs were ‘universal’, catering for a mixed clientele in prime thoroughfare sites.³⁰ They were the ideal location for wider political networking, for the construction of Democrat machines under the control of Irish ward captains. From such bases, the Irish gained control of a number of cities, henceforth under the grip of ‘boss’ politicians.

Rehabilitated in filiopietistic Irish-American studies as ‘modern urban Robin Hoods’, these notorious figures ruled ‘miniature welfare states’ based on corruption, graft and personal loyalty (not least from the disproportionate number of Irish-Americans who gained upward mobility into the secure ranks of the uniformed and pensioned working-class in city employment). Social justice was dispensed through the ward captains who functioned like members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, participating in the daily life of the Irish-American community – attending funerals, club meetings and parties, and helping their constituents with jobs, rents, food, fuel and personal problems. These benefits, apologists like Lawrence McCaffrey argue, were later extended to multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in return for political support.³¹ Recent research, however, has questioned the scale and benefits of ‘rainbow’ poli-

27 Roy Foster, *Marginal Men and Micks on the Make. The Uses of Irish Exile, c.1840-1922*, in: R. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch* London, 1995, 281-305.

28 John Belchem, *Nationalism, republicanism and exile. Irish emigrants and the revolutions of 1848*, in: *Past and Present*, 146 (1995), pp. 103-135.

29 W.H.A. Williams, *Twass Only an Irishman’s Dream. The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyric, 1800-1920*, Urbana 1996, ch.6.

30 P.R. Duis, *The Ethnic Saloon. A public melting pot*, in: Holli and Jones (eds), pp. 503-28.

31 L. J. McCaffrey, *Irish-American politics. Power with or without purpose*, in: P.J. Drudy (ed), *The Irish in America. Emigration, assimilation and impact*, Cambridge 1985, pp. 169-90; T.N. Clark, *The Irish ethic and the spirit of patronage*, in: *Ethnicity 2* (1975), pp. 305-59. See also: T.H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish. A political history*, Boston 1995.

tics. Other ethnic groups were paid off at minimal cost to continued Irish control over such (limited) power and patronage at the disposal of the machine.³² Here, indeed, was one of the main points of contention between Polish and Irish migrants. When middle-class Poles in Chicago sought (somewhat belatedly) to encourage their working-class compatriots to engage in domestic politics, progress was disappointingly slow. Internal factionalism, low levels of naturalized citizenship, the lack of political experience were principal factors, but it was the Irish who were blamed in the Polish-American press:

Whoever is familiar with our city politics knows only too well how the Irishmen, the most notorious political tricksters in the entire country since the earliest times, manipulate continually and invariably the divergent ambitions of private groups within the non-Irish nationalities against one another in order to promote thereby their own selfish interest.³³

By the late nineteenth century, the Irish exercised a similar dominance within the American labour movement. Here again, account must be taken of the role of the Irish-American middle class. An important influence in the community, they encouraged less fortunate fellow-countrymen to abandon transience, faction fighting and other behaviour that conformed to host labelling, and to adopt instead a trans-regional national or ethnic 'Irish' pride in themselves. Once implanted, ethnic associational culture provided a means by which successful Irish-Americans could guard against social and labour radicalism while keeping a check on violent inflexions of nationalism.³⁴ In alliance with the Catholic church, these middle-class culture brokers took prompt action to eradicate the 'wild' Irishness displayed in 'primitive' forms of trade unionism, most notably the 'terrorism' of the Molly Maguires in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania. Through sponsorship of formal and respectable forms of collective mutuality (including the re-branded Ancient Order of Hibernians, shorn of its former secrecy), the Irish-American middle class imposed its version of Irish ethnic affiliation, promoted in a manner which conformed to the norms and values of the host society.³⁵ In the process, blue-collar Irish-American workers – the target audience of the proliferation of Irish clubs and societies in the last third of the nineteenth century – acquired useful transferable skills, the organizational and associational know-how that was soon to carry them to leadership positions within the formal trade unionism of the American Federation of Labour. By the end of the century, as David Doyle notes, "numerically, Irish Americans *dominated* few trades (except plumbers and steam fitters); politically they dominated a majority of the unions of organised trades."³⁶ Irish women in garment-making, textiles, steam laundries, shoemaking, meatpacking, restau-

32 S. Erie, *Rainbow's End. Irish Americans and the Dilemma of Urban Political Machines, 1840 to 1985*, Berkeley 1988, ch.1.

33 *Dziennik Chicagoski* 4 Feb.1922, quoted in Pacyga, p. 198.

34 D.B. Light, Jr, *The role of Irish-American organizations in assimilation and community formation*, in: Drudy (ed), pp. 113-42; Kerby A. Miller, *Class, culture and immigrant group identity in the United States. The case of Irish American ethnicity*, in: Yans-McLaughlin (ed), pp. 96-129.

35 Kevin Kenny, *The Molly Maguires and the Catholic Church*, in: *Labor History*, 36 (1995), pp. 345-76.

36 David Doyle, *The Irish and American Labour 1880-1920*, in: *Soathar*, 1 (1975), pp. 42-53.

rants, printing and telephone exchanges were also ardent trade unionists, often to the fore in leadership positions. Like the men, however, only a handful of Irish-American women moved on from trade unionism to a more radical economic analysis.³⁷

Extending beyond the labour movement, Irish-American women developed an associational culture of their own, assisted by sisters in the female religious orders. An esteemed alternative to marriage and motherhood, sisterhood offered considerable fulfilment. The entrepreneurial nun, it has recently been argued, was one of nineteenth-century Ireland's most successful exports,³⁸ developing the infrastructure which enabled large numbers of single women to prosper in the migrant outflow – with the possible exception of Sweden, Ireland was unique in the gender balance of its emigration. Against the odds, nuns developed a national network of social services in the new lands of residence, providing training schools and employment services, houses of refuge and shelter, medical facilities and day nurseries. While trusting to heighten the spirituality of Irish-American women and their daughters, the Sisters of Mercy helped them to acquire economic self-sufficiency – or at least a sufficient dowry to attract a co-ethnic marriage partner.³⁹

By 1900, the Irish were securely located in the mainstream of the working class enjoying the American standard of living, the “wages of whiteness.”⁴⁰ The Irish, originally located alongside African-Americans, had finally become white – a longer, more complex and contested process than Ignatiev suggests⁴¹ – boosted by the “uplifting effect” of subsequent waves of “foreign” immigration. Old stereotypes were abandoned along with pseudo-scientific taxonomies. No longer portrayed as physically different, Paddy and Bridget were recast as Maggie and Jiggs in a comedy of suburban middle-class manners where Irish-Americans were applauded as role models, as suitable intermediaries to acculturate the new wave of European immigrants.⁴² As union leaders (and urban political bosses), Irish-Americans may have constructed some inter-ethnic solidarity among the Poles and other “not-yet-white ethnics”. As work-place culture brokers (and boundary markers) for the white American mainstream, however, they implanted dominant attitudes, thereby ensuring the spread of racist stereotyping and prejudice (delayed amongst the Poles, however, until the inter-war years). Originally an ethnic minority, the Irish were to contribute much to “Americanization from the bottom up.”⁴³

37 Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America. Irish immigrant women in the nineteenth century*, Baltimore 1983, ch.4.

38 See the editors' introduction in: R. Swift and S. Gilley, *The Irish in Victorian Britain. The local dimension*, Dublin 1999, p. 9.

39 Diner, ch.6.

40 David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness. Race and the remaking of the American working class* London 1991, ch.7.

41 Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became white*, New York 1995.

42 K. Donovan, *Good old Pat. An Irish-American stereotype in decline*, *Éire-Ireland* 15 (1980), pp. 6-14; J.J. Appel, *From Shanties to Lace Curtains. The Irish image in Puck, 1876-1910*, in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1971), pp. 365-75. See also, Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic*, Middletown 1986.

43 J.R. Barrett, *Americanization from the Bottom Up. Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930*, *Journal of American History* 79 (1992), 996-1020.

The contrast sketched here between Polish ethnic isolationism and Irish ethnic networking into the mainstream is crude, but I hope it provides a useful starting point for comparative analysis. Some qualifications must be entered straight away. For women, there was little difference in ethnic inflexion. Whether in Irish or Polish form, ethnic associational culture (and the preference for intra-marriage) tended to reinforce patriarchy and traditional gender roles, but it allowed women considerable space. Catholic sodalities and the like served to complement the two key components of the ethnic community: kinship ties (which in the migrant context more nearly resembled peer groups than lineages); and neighbourliness. Constructed in this way, ethnic communities should not be studied in terms of the conventional distinction between private and public. Ethnic associational culture operated within an enlarged private space shared by men and women: the public sphere was further off, beyond a boundary that some married women were perhaps never to cross. Newspapers published by Polish women's organizations emphasized the domestic origins of communal responsibility through the socialization of children into ethnic consciousness, the maintenance of ethnic institutions and the proscription of materialist Protestant-American alternatives. Admittedly, the Polish Women's Alliance took an interest in the struggle for women's rights but it kept apart from American feminist associations and activists on the grounds that Polish women were members of both an oppressed sex and an oppressed people so that their problems were exclusively Polish.⁴⁴ Middle-class women in the ethnic community acted as "social housekeepers": class status, female activism and mutual aid were interwoven, Donna Gabaccia notes, as they "used their 'brooms' simultaneously to sweep away native-born competitors, to guarantee their own status, and to promote ethnic group survival." Significantly, once the public associational framework began to decline (along with patterns of neighbourhood residence), the maintenance of "symbolic" ethnicity came to depend more on women. An optional life-style, ethnicity became domesticated, a residual matter of family festivals, stories, tales and the socialization of children.⁴⁵

This brief portrayal of Irish and Polish ethnicity in America has taken insufficient account of internal contestation, contradiction and confusion. "Irishness" was not always articulated in conformity with the norms and mores of the middle-class culture-brokers. Lower down the socio-economic scale, the "gaelic-Catholic-disability variable", to use Don Akenson's terminology, came into play.⁴⁶ In a dependency culture of inverted pride, poverty was valorized by the conflation of religious adherence and ethnic affiliation. Sanctified by Catholicism, the holy virtue of poverty became the hallmark of being genuinely Irish, exiled from the "martyr nation" which had suffered seven centuries of British oppression for its faith.⁴⁷ This "culture

44 Pien Versteegh, *Survival Strategies? The role of family and ethnic networks in migration and settlement of Polish migrants in Pennsylvania 1890-1940*. Paper presented to the European social Science History Conference, Noordwijkerhout, May 1996, pp. 12-14.

45 Donna Gabaccia, *From the Other Side. Women, gender and immigrant life in the U.S. 1820-1990*, Bloomington 1994, pp. 92 and 121-23. For the public aspect, see Colleen McDannell, *Going to the Ladies' Fair. Irish Catholics in New York City, 1870-1900*, in: Bayor and Meagher (eds), pp. 234-51.

46 D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora*, Belfast 1996, pp. 237-42.

47 Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, p. 333 and *passim*.

of poverty” – and the dependency it engendered – was replicated throughout the Irish diaspora, even where Irish migrants were quick to acquire socio-economic parity. Some Irish-Australians chose to eschew the Australian ethic of individual material advancement in favour of the communality and solidarity – and welfare benefits – available only at the bottom of the social, but not the spiritual, scale.⁴⁸

At the political level, middle-class hegemony was by no means assured. Irish working-class voters turned to local labour parties, unions and nationalist formations when urban party bosses, conscious of the maintenance needs of the machine and its limited tax base, abandoned radical ventures (and ethnic largesse) in favour of fiscal conservatism.⁴⁹ At the time of the Land League, as Eric Foner has shown, Irish nationalism carried workers forward into a class-based social radicalism deeply critical of Gilded Age America. Patrick Ford’s aptly titled “Irish World and Industrial Liberator” promoted Irish nationalism, Georgeite land reform and the labour movement in unison. The same conjuncture was personified in the career of Terence Powderly, prominent member of the Clan-na-Gael, the Land League and the Knights of Labor.⁵⁰ Under Powderly’s leadership, the Knights acted in defiance of the racism associated with the Irish: in the South, some 60,000 African-American men and women were recruited into its ranks. Out in the western states, however, the Irish-led Knights spearheaded the “abatment” campaign to drive Chinese workers out of lumber and mining camps.⁵¹ The social thought of New York Irish nationalists, David Brundage has shown, was characterised by ideological incoherence and inconsistency. Although hostile to labour radicalism and militant working-class activity, middle-class advocates of home rule continued to uphold the radical stance of the Land League towards religious, class and gender equality while revolutionary separatists, a male-dominated approach, became increasingly conservative and exclusively Catholic in their republican Irish nationalism.⁵² Generational tensions added to the confusion and complexity. In Butte, Montana, indeed, they pulled the Irish apart, weakening their control of this high-wage hard-rock mining town. Through manipulation of Irish organizations (most notably the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Clan-na-Gael, and the Irish-dominated Miners Union), the key underground workers, an “ethno-occupational aristocracy”, safeguarded their privileges and security, rigorously excluding transient fellow-countrymen who showed no interest in steady employment and home ownership. The next generation, however, aspired higher: sons preferred to cross the collar gap, abandoning the mines and exclusively Irish forms of associational culture. Wages and security were later put at risk when Butte’s disposable labour force was swollen by the arrival of a new generation of Irish immigrants. Imbued with Larkinite social radicalism, they joined together in class alli-

48 Patrick O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, Kensington, NSW 1986, p. 299.

49 Erie, chs. 2 and 3.

50 Eric Foner, *Class, ethnicity and radicalism in the Gilded Age. Land League and Irish America*, in: *Marxist Perspectives* 1 (1978), pp. 6-55.

51 David Brundage, „Green over Black“ Revisited. Ireland and Irish-Americans in the new histories of American working-class „whiteness.“ Paper presented to: *Racializing Class, Classifying Race* conference, St. Antony’s College, Oxford, 11-13 July 1997.

52 David Brundage, „In Time of Peace, Prepare for War.“ Key themes in the social thought of New York’s Irish nationalists, 1890-1916, in: Bayor and Meagher (eds), pp. 321-34.

ance with disadvantaged ethnic groups to mount a fundamental challenge to the cosy ethnic/corporate/union world of the settled Irish workers.⁵³

Such tensions were less evident in Polonia. Its internalized “status competition” took no heed of the status-gaining resources of the dominant society, but according to Lopata it proved sufficiently robust to “motivate even second, third, fourth and fifth generations of Polish Americans to concentrate their energies and concerns in its direction.”⁵⁴ There were increasing differences of emphasis, however. Members of the Polish National Alliance sought to refine ethnic purity prior to return to an independent Poland – a dream largely dispelled in the years after the First World War – while the Polish Roman Catholic Union wished to maintain an ethnic identity in the new (and permanent) land of residence. The Polish Falcons, established as a private army to fight for Polish freedom, developed into a welfare and education association, offering education in English along with other increasingly bilingual means to help Polish workers to overcome work-place discrimination.⁵⁵ Although the project of middle-class culture-brokers, ethnicization did not preclude proletarianization. In industrial South Side Chicago, ethnic communality facilitated wider mobilization through pan-ethnic federation of unions and locals in the stockyards and steelworks, a strategy promoted by John Kikulski. In the tense aftermath of the First World War, however, labour advance was reversed by race riots and inter-union civil war – Kikulski was murdered, allegedly by the Irish – as employers imported increasing numbers of African-American labour. The Poles continued to advocate the widest working-class unity – they took particular exception to criticism of the anti-semitism practised in their newly independent homeland from hypocritical racist Americans. As nativist sentiment and economic pressures intensified, the entire Polish community – including priests, professionals and business owners – rallied to support their striking compatriots in the packing-house strike of 1921-22. Ethnicity and class proved mutually reinforcing, but the strike ended in disastrous failure, much to the detriment of organized labour and race relations in Chicago. Through this painful process, Polish-American workers were finally acculturated into the white American working class.⁵⁶

Turning briefly to Europe, it would seem that the contrast between isolationism and networking might need to be inverted. It was the Poles, not the Irish, who were more adept at mobilizing ethnic resources to gain recognition and inclusion. Murphy’s study of the Poles in Bottrop, an “ideal type” exercise in Milton Gordon’s assimilation model, recounts a pluralist “success story of American dimensions.” The Poles did not confuse the preservation of a distinct ethnic community with the creation of an autonomous “Little Poland”. From their ethnic associational base, they were able to negotiate a secure place for themselves within the new urban culture of the Ruhrgebiet.⁵⁷ This process is perhaps best understood in dialectical terms, as a creative reac-

53 D.M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish. Class and ethnicity in an American mining town, 1875-1925*, Urbana 1989, chs 3-7, and: *Faction fights. The Irish worlds of Butte, Montana, 1875-1917*, in: P. O’Sullivan (ed), *The Irish World Wide Volume 2: The Irish in the New Communities*, Leicester 1992, pp. 82-98.

54 Lopata, pp. 11-13.

55 Versteegh, pp. 10-12.

56 Pacyga, ch.6.

57 R.C. Murphy, *Guestworkers in the German Reich. A Polish community in Wilhelmian Germany*, New York 1983.

tion against enforced Germanization (the path followed by the Protestant Masurians). Through their associational culture, the Catholic Poles established the boundaries of their ethnic community, while acquiring the means and resources to effect adjustment and socialization. Furthermore, as John Kulczycki's masterly study of the *Zjednoczenie Zawodowe Polskie* (ZZP) has shown, linguistic, cultural and ethnic divisions did not preclude class solidarity and industrial militancy. Uprooted from a rural homeland, Polish migrants sought mutual protection by borrowing and adapting the associational culture of the Catholic German miners. Once established, these mutual aid societies – different in origin and form from those implanted in American Polonia – acquired a class dynamic which was to distance and emancipate Polish workers from conservative ethnic interests: Church leadership and the influence of the middle-class intelligentsia at the head of Polish nationalist organizations. Thenceforth, it was but a short step to institute a formal trade union specifically for Polish-speaking migrants. Avowedly Christian itself, the militant ZZP rejected the industrial conciliation of the *Gewerkverein*, while distinguishing itself from the international socialist image promoted by the *Alter Verband*. Union officials remained lowly-paid and close to their roots, aiding the ZZP in its dual mission to express and support the class grievances of the miners while identifying with the cultural characteristics that differentiated Polish-speaking miners from native workers. Before the First World War, the ZZP had integrated itself into the German labour movement and succeeded in equating the interests of the Polish nation with those of the Polish working class. In the pre-war Ruhr, Polish ethnicity was a pro-active force, an essential preliminary to the construction of wider class-based attitudes and structures.⁵⁸

By contrast, the Irish in Britain – at least as portrayed in current historiographical orthodoxy – were not an ethnic community. Coming from a range of backgrounds, they took up a number of occupational and residential opportunities without the need for distinctive “Irish” cultural and associational forms. Migrants readily identified, affiliated and integrated with host members of their particular class.⁵⁹ However, despite this purported “ethnic fade”, anti-Irishness was to persist in British culture. Although technically internal migrants within the United Kingdom, the Irish continued to be labelled in popular stereotype as alien and outsiders – ethnicity was imposed upon them, as it were, to keep them in their place in the labour market. According to functional analysis, migrant labour needs to be not only a quantitative addition (to allow expansion of production when lack of domestic labour might impose constraint) but also a qualitatively different source of supply (low-level labour prepared to accept conditions below normal standards). In the case of the Irish in Britain, there were no legal, linguistic, pigmentary or other phenotypic means of distinguishing and defining them as alien and hence more exploitable: in this respect, their position would seem more favourable than that of “German” Poles on the Ruhr, let alone that of later guestworkers, illegal immi-

58 John J. Kulczycki, *The Polish Coal Miners' Union and the German Labor Movement in the Ruhr, 1902-1934*, Oxford 1997, chs.1-4.

59 For critical perspectives (other than my own) on the current socio-economic orthodoxy, see Mary J. Hickman, *Alternative historiographies of the Irish in Britain. A critique of the segregation/assimilation model*, in: Swift and Gilley (eds), pp. 236-53; D.M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750-1922*, Basingstoke 1999, pp. 2-8.

grants or colonial migrants from a distant “dark” continent.⁶⁰ But they remained apart, occupying “a curious middle place” without the “ethnic” (and other) resources to effect either full assimilation or complete separation. There was not even the possibility of a hyphenated identity as Irish-British.

There was one exception: Liverpool. Disparaged by historians as a sectarian redoubt, “marginal to the cultural and political life of the nation,”⁶¹ Liverpool contained an Irish “colony” of sufficient dimensions to merit comparison with ethnic enclaves across the Atlantic. In pluralist fashion, middle-class Irish Catholics – Micks on the make on the Mersey – stood forward as ethnic culture-brokers. Under their patronage and sponsorship, Irish nationalism was projected in constitutional terms, hence its blessing by the Catholic church, quick to adjust to the hibernicization of its congregation. Violence was excluded, socialist radicalism was marginalized – hence Liverpool’s backwardness in the forward march of Labour – while the Irish poor were instructed in respectability and citizenship. However, in taking such active charge of migrant adjustment, the ethnic leaders constructed a self-enclosed, self-sufficient network which, viewed from outside, emphasized Irish-Catholic apartness. Ironically, the bid for inclusion served to confirm Irish “difference”: they remained the internal “other” against whom the otherwise “non-ethnic” English defined themselves. The Liverpool-Irish continued to suffer the prejudice and negative reputation which, in the late twentieth century, have come to blight the city itself.⁶²

The Liverpool-Irish were the last to transfer political allegiance to Labour. Considerable tensions remained. Working-class Irish Catholics throughout Britain believed that Labour had no place taking political positions outside the industrial domain, certainly not to interfere with their ‘way of life’ in such family matters as birth control and education. Equally, they believed the Catholic church should respect its boundaries of competence and refrain from ideological and political intervention. This is a timely reminder that identities seldom conform to the neat programmatic prescriptions of ethnic or class-based associations. As post-modernist deconstruction has confirmed, people are eclectic in selection and fusion of ideologies, languages and narratives. As comparative study of Irish and Polish migrants will surely confirm, ethnicity and class are neither discreet nor mutually exclusive, but form a complex, often bewildering, continuum. However, it may be significant to note by way of conclusion that among the elderly Poles in Britain today – exiles who remained as post-war political settlements made return to Poland unacceptable – good mental health depends on two factors: involvement in ethnic associational culture; and the opportunity to relate a national narrative of the past.⁶³

60 Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Foreign Labor in Germany 1880-1980*, Ann Arbor 1990.

61 Steven Fielding, *Class and Ethnicity. Irish Catholics in England 1880-1939*, Buckingham 1993, p. 5.

62 John Belchem, *Class, creed and country. The Irish middle class in Victorian Liverpool*, in: Swift and Gilley (eds), pp. 190-211; and: *The Liverpool-Irish enclave*, in: *Immigrants and Minorities* (forthcoming).

63 M. Winslow, *Polish Migration to Britain. War, exile and mental health*, in: *Oral History* 27 (1999), pp. 57-64; For an earlier study of their ‘accommodation’, see J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain. A study of adjustment*, The Hague 1956.