

The Role of the Intelligentsia as Dissidents in the Modern Nation State

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“Intellectuals and the Nation State.”

Aristotle defined as second nature those habits and customs which together make an identity, as distinct from the permanent attributes that go to make up human nature. Since the end of the cold war, globalization has taken off as a second human nature, even according to some theorists, the market mentality being intrinsic to the composition of the human being and capitalism being an essential feature of life on earth. This would no doubt upset Aristotle, but we do know, from our studies of other peoples and cultures, that some characteristics are more constant than others, and we have much to learn from each other.

It may be a good thing at this stage, after the Fall of the Wall, to have a look at the role of the intelligentsia, particularly as dissidents, from the positions of right and left, and to see how they have fared in the past, and how we will go forward, in a project of peace which yet acknowledges the diversity of the modern nation states, and to see particularly how Ireland fits into this remit.

The intelligentsia, traditionally, have transcended the boundaries and limitations of class, gender, and race, and in a stance of detachment, comment on and effect the power play and cultural policies of a nation – and so negotiate and reach the area of the desirable qualities and permanent aspects of human nature in a broader context.

Because the idea of nationality is first and foremost an emotional identification with a group who share language, social customs, but not always territory, it is by its

very nature prone to warfare, as we have seen in the 20th century great wars were fought on the basis of nationality, fascism being the most emotive form of nationality it is with its mystification of blood and brotherhood links with symbols and the paraphernalia of modern communications. The progress is from the tribe, with its gods, to the nation state, with its heroes. Therefore one of the roles of the dissident in the nation state is to be vigilant against emotional excess and over identification with the nation, whilst promoting the welfare of the people not to go to extremes where hostilities are engendered. However because the nation state by definition shares an ideology with its members the dissident or intellectual must watch out for the dangers of ideology, which are carried together like a capsule in the minds of the people. There are many well-recognized ways in which ideology works against the truth, where the group mind takes over to the detriment of honest self examination.

On the other hand, in the Western model of rationality and equality, there are specific problems, in that the rhetoric of equality cannot always find a match in an atmosphere of competition and self-aggrandizement that the nation state embraces and the market upholds at this point in history. Some political systems have tried to solve this problem – equality and power: the left socialist countries in their beginnings notoriously entered a duplicity of mind to keep these two balls in the air. What Noam Chomsky calls the bounds of the expressible had its historic moment in 1917 when the fabrication of necessary illusions for social management entered the 20th century. The Bolshevik revolution gave concrete expression to the Leninist conception of the radical intelligentsia as the vanguard of social progress exploiting popular struggles to gain state power and to impose the Red bureaucracy of Bakunin's forebodings. This they

proceeded to do, dismantling factory councils, Soviets, and other forms of popular organization so that the population could be effectively mobilized into a “labour army” under the control of supposedly far sighted leaders who would drive the whole society forward. We have seen in each of the great communist countries that this forceful rule of the intelligentsia resulted in totalitarianism and the banishment of consent. I am old enough to remember the dunce caps of China and how professors and academics had to walk the streets draped as fools to convince the masses of the omnipotent reign of Mao who reached further into places even emperors couldn’t reach with the subjugation of the masses. So the failure of these communist revolutions has shown us there is the least tolerance for dissent in those countries which have espoused socialism and the so called dictatorship of the people when in fact the new emperors and dictators killed unprecedented numbers and threw even vaster numbers into prison.

So we can see under the conditions of pure Marxism, the proletariat were considered to be led by the intelligentsia, however the intelligentsia became the conservative power at the heart of social control, banishing real dissidents to Siberia or the slave camps. Therefore it seems there has been a hiatus between the individual liberties enshrined by the state and the more fundamental values of a global view which have been held by the intelligentsia.

Has the rule of the people from the right fared any better? What is a state now when the people ARE the state, where the individual is held to be equal yet is vulnerable to enormous economic powers held by those who are richer and more adept and able – some are unable to access the media and leadership structures, others seem relatively powerless. Reagan and Thatcher tended to give new meanings to equality and liberty by

superimposing additional rights, the right not only to own property absolutely and to make boundless wealth whatever the cost to the environment, in fact, during the Cold War the environment was regarded as a non-issue as both sides of the globe heaped up armaments; and laid waste the resources of the earth like an enormous party that the world was going to end and they were going to get as rich as possible on the proceeds before pulling the plug on it. Where were the intelligentsia during this crucial cold war period? Those at odds with the government but deprived, through the power of the mass media, of having any foothold on public opinion since the media backed the consumer culture, save with the exception of small literary, academic, and specialist journals.

So the western model, with the emphasis on individual liberty, took no time at all before this became translated by private company despots into the right to rule the earth more than any war lord of the medieval times. And the media backed them, there was hardly a colour supplement without its full complement of energy burning devices, cars being featured even as I speak (in 2005) without mention of the downsides of air pollution, carbon dioxide poisoning of the earth and global warming. During this time of economic expansion the mass media ruled and decided who was in and who was out. Since the enhancement of civil liberties and the incentives of endless wealth was the engine that drove the economic war between East and West, it would be rational to suppose, once the argument had been won by the West, that they could revert to better husbandry of resources in the light of the coming generations that had been saved by the avoidance of full scale confrontation and nuclear warfare. The intelligentsia could come back on stage, that generation of the 60s who had been demonized through draconian drug laws could take their place in the body politic and dissent from the programme of

endless profiteering and economic expansion. But that didn't happen. Reaganism and Thatcherism, while they won the argument against communism, held little hope for the advancement of the human project and civilization because the primary focus was on a sort of preternatural greed, and that greed became normative in a media that was too lazy to react to the challenges at the end of the Cold War. The question of global warming was mooted, in fact, by Thatcher but not addressed by society at large, and not taken up as environmentalists continued to be lampooned as tree huggers and ancient hippies.

So in fact instead of enabling dissent, the media colluded with the giant economic multinationals as they took the planet a day at a time, and in that day, to waste and consume as much as possible. The intelligentsia or those that thought ahead, used to being side-lined, were largely silenced, with the result of the notorious dumbing down culture that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the concomitant rise of gangsters and drug warlords.

The role of the intelligentsia had been to call attention to these democratic deficits in the *real politik*, but they remained marginal figures at the time. There have been movements of the intelligentsia, such as the counter culture in the United States which have been largely absorbed as a sub culture, and which have been deprived of political nous by association, usually through the press of amorality, or corrupted individuals who don't even have the romantic allure they had in the 60s. Instead they are recycled as a superior form of garbage. Notable dissenters such as Timothy Leary are not celebrated for their heroic stance on individual liberty, instead they are demonized as drug users with no credibility who go to make up the social amalgam that is American culture today.

However, this is not to deny that drug use poses serious problems for individuals and for society, a problem which has yet to be addressed comprehensively.

On the broader front, the silencing of dissent from the intelligentsia has through the media emphasis on consumerism continued right until very recently. The result is that dissent and dissidence have become extremist, in the face of a seductive and powerful advertising presence and for these dissenters, a wholesale rejection of the Western model of the nation state has developed. The extremists among the intelligentsia are thriving, particularly those who oppose the images of the commercial West, as they have embraced not just consent to dissent, but a hard edged political programme against those they have cast as the enemy. The Al Qaeda are a case in point.

We could ask if there anything about nation states where the intelligentsia still have a role to play as dissidents in a way that moves forward the democratic processes of society instead of creating a climate of fear and terror with the usual outcome of hyper security, or should I say hyper insecurity. The threat to democracy is very large, as with the enabling of communications such as the internet, a whole culture also has grown up which aims to steal from this demographic group, stealing from common larceny with credit card numbers , to high powered stealing of identity and the infiltration of society where bomb makers can go undetected until the latest suicide bomber makes the ultimate bid for what he or she calls freedom. They have seen freedom defined as licence, and have opted for a genuine freedom of the will, a freedom he or she will not live to enjoy.

They are helped by ideologues who posit an idealized state as distinct from the real nation states of our time.

So all creation issuing as it does from one absolute, universal, and active Will, forms an all-embracing unity in which each individual part is in harmonious order with the remainder.

It would be another day's work to see how this idea of unity, a single will, can be squared with the separatist and isolated acts of terrorism, such as the suicide bomber. The ethics of nationalist Islam, with its education for extremists who do not want the delicate balance between a fundamentalist state and modern states, and who embark on a programme of destruction which is aimed at the western democratic states, need to be examined and dialogued with even more than the need for security.

The huge modern nation states are thus at a threshold where everyday events like writing on the internet can yield clues to a hostile intelligentsia many miles away allowing them access to the culture in order to destroy it. How can a dialogue be made between these fundamentalists and the core values of the nation state which have been with us since the Enlightenment, the appeal to reason and to individual liberties which are enshrined in the modern nation state? That is the challenge facing the modern nation state today, and for which we hope to find some answers today.

The newer nation states, such as in Ireland, have not always proceeded along these rationalistic and cooperative means and measures of pan-Europeanism, the conflict in the North being paradigmatic in this case. However, the space and platform, with the possibilities of cooperation at national level, and the opportunity of Europe gave us was crucial to the solution of this conflict

The revulsion to killing, especially for political ends, is rooted deep in human nature, and while it has inspired the modern miracle of the European Union with its

programme for peace, on the national stage in Ireland, for many years, it was still mired in the politics and extreme actions of the past.

The earlier modern nation states were not without conflict, indeed it was because of their warfare and the possibility of over-coming it that the idea of the European community had its genesis just after the Second World War, when that cataclysm propelled the participants to search urgently for peace..

The role of the intelligentsia is more clear-cut in nation states at the time of their emergence than at any time thereafter. They are to the forefront of the founding of nation states, especially the modern nation states and republics that have sprung up worldwide after the Enlightenment. Ever since that time there has been a class apart from government whom the government cannot fool, and the outcome, whether cultural or political, depends on the noise they make.

Ireland remained neutral during the war, which meant that the nation state had a slower genesis. The very word nation is etymologically rooted in the Latin word for birth, and since death is the mother of beauty, in those early days of the state, the intelligentsia are almost always bound up with death. Indeed three of the leading 1916 leaders were poets. What cannot escape us is their emotional identification with territory, the nation state.

However, the first level of nationhood is the celebration of death and sacrifice and equating it with birth and fertility. The intelligentsia who first brought about the modern nation state were also romantics, some with an imperative to act out their ideas. They are responsible for the birth of what Yeats called a terrible beauty, nationalism.

What distinguishes Ireland from the states which acceded to Europe in 1973, in that the revolution against despots took place there over a century later than those of the nation states in Europe, is not only the experience of colonialism, but the fact that a civil war took place after the revolution. Therefore it took Ireland longer as a state to recover from the revolutionary ferment. A long extended wake is perhaps the first legacy of any revolution, particularly in Ireland where the tradition of the wake was already established with its funeral games and fertility rites all bound into ceremonial both tragic and comedic.

Our propensity for funeral-going has marked our first hundred years as a nation. By respecting the dead in a very ostentatious manner and never speaking ill of them we are creating conditions in which the bloody birth of the nation can be subsumed into a celebration of mourning.

Revolutionaries have looked on their projected nation state as a mother, and in some cases, as in Ireland, writings such as in Patrick Pearse's "The Mother" have posited a state of sacrificial death as being more akin to or even superseding birth itself.

Perhaps the long extended wake was needed to mourn not only the physical deaths but the spiritual betrayals of the Civil War. The intelligentsia who brought about the revolution were soon silenced by a culture of complicity, mired in the betrayals of that war. Frozen in that historic moment, politicians are seemingly unable to transcend the divisions of gender, caste and class, but rely on covert and secret associations based on past loyalties and survival tactics as in a time of civil war, to do the business of everyday. In the fractured psyche of the new state, a consensus, largely anti-intellectual, arose – this being largely marked in the early period of the state, particularly in the 1930s

and 1940s. It may be that all bloody revolutions, for reasons of blood sacrifice and guilt, are unable to progress towards a reconciliation with the past, but this is much more the case with a new state that has endured a civil war.

In Ireland, the heirs to this revolution are natural heirs of families involved in the Civil War, so behind the familial pedigree is the shame that their ancestors who engaged in warfare may have had blood on their hands. In the day to day life of the new state, a quietism set in, and this recourse to silence in Ireland has resulted in a clandestine style of decision-making, which means that the loyalty is to a person and family rather than a more abstract idea of justice, and such loyalties exist even today having their origins in the early conflict of the state.

On the international front, there were many ideological battlegrounds during the Cold War period and Ireland became in some way the focus of a special attention because she was unique in the West – not only had she a colonialist past but also the best aspects of a pre-industrial society, so the negative effects of the industrial revolution in producing a mass culture had not yet taken hold, resulting in a high individualism along with, however a social conservatism. Ireland was ripe for the importation of new ideologies, such as Marxism and feminism.

Because we are a modern nation, we have been inundated with ideas and ceremonies from other cultures, and have found ourselves celebrated nationally as the first state to break away from the habits of colonial powers. Scholars and historians have written of us as a post-colonial state, noting sadly that no sooner have we dismantled the power apparatus of colonialism than we mimic it in our customs and observances. What we have seen in our short history of less than a hundred years is the dismantling of the

past of imperialism, while the more revolutionary of us, those who stayed revolutionary after the foundation of the state, have made it their life's work to find imperialism at work in the heart of the new nation, the target being the Catholic Church, which continued in its role of stifling opinion long after the birth of the nation. The meaning of the territory has shifted from the polemical aggrandizement of the state to the control, and thought control over different bodies, such as women's bodies.

The Irish Constitution, which places the family above the state, therefore plays on the loyalties of our fractured past, with a detrimental effect on the real process and cooperation needed in nation-building. In the quietus that followed, in the 1930s, when the Constitution was written (1937), with its concomitant anti-intellectualism, the role of the intelligentsia is subdued – the conflict with the authority of a colonial power marked them as dissident, but they found themselves silenced by those who succeeded in that clandestine style of power became dynastic rulers with popular appeal to the people, based on past association and loyalties.

The territorial war waged in the North has only recently allowed us to bring to national closure the fact that our birth as a nation was one in which death was the preferred *modus vivendi*, which is a paradox because the succeeding people of the nation have both to deal with the waste of sacrificial death whilst ennobling it. This is an impossible aspiration, as the deaths in H-blocks in the eighties showed, while in the south of the state, the constitution itself was based on ideals which are at the same time life enhancing and death embracing- and a claim to the territory in the North which was only abolished by the Belfast Agreement.

In the years of quietus, the Constitution laid out the forms of government while both the Church and the Press and the government presented a monolithic face of Catholicism. This was broken in the 1950s by the Noel Browne affair, who sought to bring the family into the social sphere, so that it would no longer be a private institution, but a function of the state. The bishops, particularly Jeremiah Newman of Limerick, and John Charles McQuaid of Dublin fought to have the supremacy of the Church in the family, to the point of impoverishing families. Therefore the role of the first intellectuals of the nation state, its writers, was to dissect and criticize the role of the Church, and since Church and State were bound to each other as Siamese twins, often their criticism had to come from afar, as in the early days of the state when all intellectuals were per se banished from the land – O’Connor, O Faolain, Beckett, not to speak of the earlier émigrés Joyce and Yeats, who despite his nationalism, spent most of his years outside Ireland.

It seems the exile’s eye is sharpened by the experience of being alien in another country, all the better to feast those eyes on the homeland and because it is tinged with the fresh air of being an outsider, their criticisms are all the more pungent and powerful. Indeed this “advance and return” of emigrants, who are raised in an alien culture - but with emotional identification with an Irish mother ,who then comes to symbolize the nation - is a pattern in Irish culture, and goes back to the revolution of 1916 in that those intellectuals who brought about the birth of the nation state follow this pattern. Not only is the identification with the mother and her passive state upheld by the Irish intelligentsia, and embodied in the constitution, it is a pattern of modern nation states founded on religion, and is the core of the present profound disagreement with Islam that

all the western liberal democracies experience as they move away from the identification of nation and the mother, with its life/death antimonies in the past.

However, with our accession to Europe it was possible for the first time since our beginning as a nation to move away from the stifling authority of Church and an inherited class who took power – and to move in a wider brief towards a liberal agenda away from patristic concerns of death and history. As we approach the centenary of the founding of our nation state, Ireland, we have a richly documented past both from the early days of the nation state, since our emergence as a nation coincided with a huge increase in communication possibilities both nationally and internationally. This can have positive as well as negative effects.

In the countries of the EU, the role of the intelligentsia is central to good government, and the accord of nations which has brought about the birth of the European Union has always had the possibilities a free and questioning press, where intellectuals of different nations debate and discuss their priorities. This mutual exchange is beneficial to the modern nation, because with the modern emphasis on purely commercial aspects, or globalization, there is always the danger of an in-built elite who will take and maintain power without interrogation or specific direction, other than self-aggrandizement. The possibilities of integration with Europe goes on hand-in-hand with the building of national consciousness, and therefore Europe holds, in its structures of legislative process, and the framework of dialogue, the possibilities reconciliation and ultimately peace at all levels.

The intelligentsia, from the time of their emergence to their existence as a fully equipped nation state, articulate the deeper longings for a new identity and a future based

on justice, as against recidivist emotions such as clinging to the past. They in fact make the past dynamic, and the grounding of their search for justice.

This is all the more so for the intellectuals of modern Ireland, who must engage abroad, or with former powers, and move away from the dynastic style of nation we have inherited.

The basis of the EU political entity is not ideological, and what was imperative in the nation state of the past, has progressed through rational and legislative structures, to a community founded on common accord, which takes precedence over the ideology of the past. The challenge now is how to balance the demands of commerce with the need to protect the environment.

On the European stage, the maintenance of national identity and cultural difference such as language means that globalization will not subsume these important distinctions, which give to the whole a rich and sustainable model and fabric, based as it is on intelligent cooperation and rational ordering of legislation.

In the meantime, we can see how these questions are addressed at national level.

This has already taken place in Europe during the post World War II years, and it is now time this process was started in Ireland.

The common destiny of nations is to be bound together in those deep concerns affecting them which transcend national identities and national boundaries.

We are rich in perspectives. Indeed, the role of the intelligentsia was never more needed now that the market has become so dominant, the need for an objective critical voice which will guide us through the next stage, as we contemplate the need to address the damage such free for all policies have cost the environment.

We are a long way from the time Louis XIV declared “L’etat C’est Moi.” and found his descendants headless under the new regime of the Enlightenment. What the new modern states need is the detachment of its intelligentsia in finding away out of the artificial consensus which arose out of Cold War politics, and is now having its nadir through globalization. The engagement of these intellectuals, dissident though working towards a higher form of unified humanism will affect all the modern nations, including Ireland, in its on going and successful project of peace on earth.

Fin for web essay outtakes below:

Although not ideological, and with the concomitant tribute it pays towards individual liberties, and a free press, the workings of the free market necessarily invites criticism and dissidence in the overall view, lest what happens there becomes like some of the United States free market culture, where, as Noam Chomsky has discovered in America, the title of freedom and the press is indistinguishable from the powers that own the press, and which support economic policies which are based on an oligarchy, like the oil emperors who are bigger than any nation state. With the new emphasis on globalization, the EU must now face, in the teeth of the environmental crisis, this challenge and come up with some answers.

federation being used in the loose sense of working together, and not being the ultimate defining mode of governance – such modes will be defined in the future. . In the modern state, with the adoption as equality and democracy the way these events and patterns unfold can be quite complex

The whole cycle seems to be a build up of territorial fronts, the establishment of a ruling elite, declarations of independence away from the central powers which are largely cohesive of identities such as language and social customs, but with disputed territories, and later re absorption into a wider federalistic agenda aiming at peace

Therefore nation states, and the habits and customs of thought have become secondary, in the eyes of some. Nation states that came into being with statutory declarations of individual rights and social justice now seem obsolete. In the modern nation state, where all are declared to be equal there is a distinct lack of accommodation for the intellectual, who finds that the concepts of equality and identity are not synonymous.

Being an intellectual therefore begs the question of equality. If we take the states of the 20th century,

There are problems inherent in the situation of the equal citizen. Positing at the same time the liberty and equality of all persons while needing leaders is a core problem Aristotle would not have been surprised to have a leader's head cut off, but the quarrel remains between the other parts of the body politic. With the espousal of equality has come the critique, that in a media or modern age, some are more equal than others, being wealthier, and able to buy time and space in our media as well as actually owning them. We still have the form of the state, and even if the wealth of these individuals crosses

boundaries, what holds them together in the modern nation state is government by consent.

In the modern state, with the adoption as equality and democracy the way these events and patterns unfold can be quite complex. revolution – and this intelligentsia transcended the traditional barriers of class, race, and gender, detaching themselves from these immediate concerns into an objective evaluation of the progress, with public critiques, of the state.

Ireland bears the marks of its emergence as a modern nation state brought into being through a revolution based on the ideas first mooted in Europe in the Enlightenment, but much later on How can a state like Ireland, one of the first European states to gain nationhood after the experience of colonialism, give any sort of light to the newer democracies? Has Ireland been able to claim a credit for advancement which its titular freedom has endowed it?

What has marked the lack of intellectual and social progress in Ireland within this modern nation state is that the conditions which brought it into being, the Revolution of 1916, were followed by a Civil War.

In Ireland, as in other modern nation state, this birth had come about successfully because the leaders of the Rising were dissident against the colonial powers, indeed three of the revolutionaries of 1916 were poets, and other intellectuals who propelled it ideologically through the emergent pangs of nationhood.