

Irish Diplomacy in Argentina

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Abstract

There is a relationship between the internal politics of states and their diplomacy. This relationship is a kind of feedback where the two 'spheres' mutually interact. Internal interests influence the decisions that are made in international affairs, just as what occurs abroad can, in various ways and depending on the openness of a country, affect what occurs on an internal level within states. The role of the diaspora as an agent of para-diplomacy has become an important variable for small countries like Ireland. I will endeavour to study this phenomenon from the perspective of historical and political science. This work is the product of research carried out in order to complete my master's thesis in International Relations. Hence it has a double focus; from the historical point of view, which is my main background, and from the point of view of political science. I hope to be able to bring this topic to a conclusion with my doctoral thesis.

Introduction

Nationalism, as a formative theory in these countries, gives us an approach to these internal relationships. Models of nation formation have their own characteristics, which are repeated in international roles. Nationalism as we understand the word in this article is the social and political doctrine through which groups of humans form themselves into and are called nations. This implies that state and nation do not necessarily correspond, though in the majority of cases the formation of a nation will demand the creation of a state. When that formation arises from below, or when what unifies is consciousness or myth of belonging, based on race, language, religion etc., we then call it romantic nationalism. When Irish romantic nationalism managed to achieve an independent country (although with limited autonomy in the beginning), we saw a new state, small and relatively weak, which had to improvise a foreign service from the good will and personal capacity of the personnel available to it. It saw itself forced to resort to informal strategies such as the use of its diaspora and its para-diplomacy, or participation in large numbers of forums in order to further its cause.

Development

Irish foreign policy shows a number of basic elements that derive from the national

characteristics of the country. A very important one of these is the defence of international law and the conduct of policy within these rules. This is seen as a means for controlling the powerful in favour of the weak. Moreover, the framework allows smaller countries greater room for manoeuvre. This also applies to the work of diplomats. That is why these tend to be enthusiastic participants in every type of forum where collective decisions are made - hence the practice of multilateral international relations where small countries gain most through seeking allies. (3)

The first Irish diplomats were not career diplomats, but rather people who were chosen because they knew a foreign language or had some useful skill. From 1919 until 1922, this area was known as the Department of Foreign Affairs, but then changed its name to the Department of External Affairs and maintained this name until 1971. Its primary and almost exclusive objective was to achieve recognition of Ireland's independence. In order to achieve this recognition, representatives were sent all over the world. One of its greatest successes in this respect occurred on 6 December 1922, when Ireland became a member of the League of Nations. This permitted the state to have diplomatic representation in other states, and gave it the power to negotiate and sign treaties and passports for its citizens.

Ireland was one of the first small countries (in population and territory) to achieve independence after the First World War. As Gerard Keown points out, one result of this was that the country participated in numerous international conferences, even when the country had in fact no material interest in the topics that were being debated, and it signed agreements that essentially it did not have the capacity to break. For example; its support for the International Court of Justice in 1929 and the Kellogg-Briand Pact. (4)

Diplomacy and Diasporas

Today's diplomatic affairs have allowed for the emergence of new actors. As borders between states dissolve, new possibilities are created. It is not a case of nation-states losing primacy but rather of them allowing for the emergence of other actors. However, what is in our day facilitated by telecommunications and the global economy and culture had in fact important precedents in an earlier period. This is particularly the case with diasporas and their mother states, along with the role they played in strengthening national objectives.

There are authors who speak of conflict resolution in a country in terms of a 'game of three levels' and then there are other authors who even include a fourth level, where the diaspora is converted into a 'variable' (Hocking 1993). Ivo D. Duchacek has termed these activities 'para-diplomacy', which may be thought of as the relationship of these groups with foreign states in commercial fields such as industry and culture. Quite often, these 'new' players have interests and interpretations of events different to those of the central government (this can occur very frequently) and even different to those of their 'nations of origin', although this is less frequent. (5)

Immigrants and their descendents try to maintain their customs, language, and religion in the country in which they settle. For these purposes networks are developed whose main function is to maintain links with the original place of origin. They do this more efficiently than could one single individual. At the same time they achieve a relationship of mutual

benefit between the leaders of these groups and the non-immigrant sector. The former achieve recognition within their community for their proximity to existing national groups, while the latter gain support that they could not previously gain in their country of origin. These non-national diasporas and their agents can act as a third party in conflicts between their nationalities and their central governments, and they become more effective to the degree that they can involve the states where they live. The more numerous, the richer, the more powerful or more influential these groups are, the greater their possibility of achieving this.

The concept of diaspora is profoundly linked to romantic nationalism, and the model of foreign policy which arises from it. All the rhetorical discourse of the government begins to centre itself on concepts such as *Madre patria* (Motherland), where race is what is most important and goes beyond the state. For a long time the term diaspora had negative connotations because of its association with the Jewish loss of the Promised Land and their subsequent dispersion for not being loyal to their covenant with God. It is for this reason that the term was associated with the notion of punishment. However the word is of Greek origin and means, 'to scatter plentifully'. This was the idea of bringing Greek culture to the colonies and for this reason, it had a positive connotation. Nowadays, however it no longer retains this double meaning and it is used by the social sciences as term for a field of study. This is how it will be used in this article.

Foreign support for Ireland's independence process

We have already mentioned that Ireland was a nation characterised by emigration, be it forced or voluntary. The exodus of large numbers of the population was motivated by economics, politics and religion. This process was significantly accelerated by the 1840s potato famine. With regard to forced emigration we refer specifically to criminals. Often only convicted of minor offences, they were sent to the penal colonies in Australia or to work as slaves on the plantations in the Caribbean. This

spawned the birth of a diaspora nation, one that was deeply connected to its homeland and which, for the most part, never lost these connections. Let us take two of these cases as examples: the Hiberno-Argentines and the Irish diaspora in the US - which has been comprehensively studied and for geographical and cultural reasons merits being kept in mind as we try to understand what happened in Argentina. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century Argentina was one of the most important countries in the world for receiving migrant populations. The country presents us with a rich diversity that is fruitful ground for study.

The Hiberno-Argentines (6)

Irish immigration to Argentina went through a number of phases. There were already families that had settled around the River Plate during the colonial period. After the English invasion prisoners were left behind who integrated themselves gradually and formed their own families. After Argentina gained independence this immigration continued. The majority of Irish immigrants were connected by links with family, friends or neighbours who had already migrated. These links (in the case of Westmeath, Longford and Offaly) were started mainly by ex-prisoners and those who deserted after the English invasions of 1806 and 1807, whereas (in the case of Wexford and Offaly) it was merchant settlements in Buenos Aires that started the migration chain.

Korol and Sabato believe that the decision to emigrate to Argentina was not an easy one. In addition to the difficulties of uprooting and moving that are faced by people deciding to emigrate, the language, unknown traditions and completely alien culture also caused problems. On the other hand the distance between Ireland and Argentina was an insurmountable obstacle for the poorest sectors of society. They generally could not reach further than England or with a lot of luck they could get as far as North America. The structures that were built up to facilitate emigration from Ireland to Anglo-Saxon countries cannot be compared

with the poor organisation involved in the relocating of the Irish to the River Plate.

One of the determining factors in their decision to relocate to the River Plate was the casual relationship of future migrants with the nucleus of Irish immigrants who lived in Buenos Aires. This relationship is known as a 'migratory chain', and according to John McDonald, it can be defined as, 'a connection through which future migrants can become aware of existing labour opportunities, obtain the necessary means to relocate, find accommodation and a job by using the social links they have with previous immigrants' (McDonald 1997).

The total number of immigrants who travelled to Argentina is estimated at between 40,000 and 45,000. (7) Of these immigrants, almost half returned to Ireland or went to the USA. We owe most of this information to the research carried out by Eduardo A. Coghlan, who created an entire genealogical catalogue tracing the surviving descendents of these immigrants.

From 1919 to 1923 Ireland maintained a diplomatic presence in Latin America, particularly in Argentina and Chile. The people sent by Sinn Féin did not have official accreditation for these countries but did have such accreditation for the Irish communities in these countries. The first diplomat was Eamon Bulfin and the second was Frank Eagan. This shows the initial interest in maintaining contact with the diasporas in these countries. The first International Congress of the Irish Race was arranged following talks between Eamon De Valera and the British Prime Minister Lloyd George and was a way of showing the world what was going on in the country. It was held in Paris in 1922 and its main organiser and chief ideologue was Thomas Hughes Kelly from New York (Barry 2004: 3).

In order to prepare the Congress, they first needed to organise all of the Irish communities in the different countries, in order to unify strategies. For this reason, during 1921, the government sent special missions to South America, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the US. Within this context

Laurence Ginnell arrived in Buenos Aires as the representative of the Republic of Ireland to work with Eamon Bulfin who was already there working on the issue. (8)

Finally, the first Irish Congress took place in Buenos Aires on 29 November 1921. More than 50 organisations sent their representatives and they founded a new Federation. The number is an important piece of information because it shows the large amount of immigrants, their dispersion and to an extent their fragmented organisation. They elected five delegates to go to the conference in France.

Eamon Bulfin was an interesting man, whose involvement in the Easter Rising of 1916 led to him becoming admired among the diaspora both of in his own day and indeed today. Bulfin was born in Buenos Aires in 1892. He was the son of William Bulfin, who emigrated to Argentina when he was just twenty years old. In his adopted homeland he went on to become a writer, journalist, editor and owner of *The Southern Cross* newspaper. He used his newspaper to help the republican cause financially and with propaganda. In 1909 he returned to Ireland with his family and died there the following year.

Eamon actively participated in the 1916 Easter Rising and it was he who hung the flag from the roof of the General Post Office. When the rebellion was repressed he was sentenced to death by an English court-martial. However due to the fact that he was an Argentinean citizen his life was spared and he was deported back to Argentina. A few years later, in 1919 Eamon De Valera appointed him consul. It was his task to gather support among the Irish community in Argentina. He also sought to win

over public opinion in order to raise funds and assemble arms to aid their cause. In 1922 he was finally able to return to Ireland where he settled until he died in 1968.

Conclusion

While recognising the similarities between small nation states that are formed on the basis of national identity, we should also begin to take cognisance of their differences. We should do so by looking to the farthest reaches of these states - to their diasporas. This in itself offers a different and indeed a new emphasis than that provided by notions of 'motherland' (Cruset 2007). The ideals of 'nationalism' and group belonging, and what they imply; the role of the church; the role of women; the question of 'race'; the armed struggle as means of winning political goals - these concepts not only distinguished the Irish diasporas in Argentina and other countries but they marked a difference between the Irish diaspora and the diasporas of other countries. It would be interesting to study how emigrant groups of other nationalities sought out and studied the 'Irish mirror', not just out of intellectual curiosity but as a means of learning from the history of another ethnic nationalism which managed to attain political independence. Of interest also would be to study the foreign policy strategies which helped to achieve national goals. At some time in the future we would like to know in greater detail what was reflected in that mirror and what was done with the image it showed.

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Notes

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3 In 1969, during the political situation known as 'The Troubles' - a period of confrontation between Catholics and Protestants which began in 1969 and ended with the Good Friday agreement of 1998 -

faced with rising violence, the Irish government appealed to the Security Council of the United Nations for a ceasefire and a peaceful solution to the conflict. However this did not achieve the desired results.

4 The Kellogg-Briand Pact, 27 August 1928 in Paris, was signed by fifteen countries. It outlaws and prohibits war as an instrument of national policy.

5 On this situation, Gloria Totoricaguena's case study on the Basques is worth consulting (Totoricaguena, Gloria, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 2005).

6 This is the name frequently given to Argentines of Irish origin and it is derived from the word Hibernia, which comes from the Roman name for Ireland.

7 According to McKenna, Patrick. *Nineteenth Century Irish Emigration to, and Settlement in, Argentina*, cited by Murray, Edmundo. *Devenir irlandés* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 2004).

8 Another one of his important missions was to launch the 'Irish Fund'. Ginnell and others in Ireland had high hopes for the Irish in Argentina because they were rich landowners with a lot of available capital and were also sympathetic to the different Irish causes. This reputation was completely unfounded (most of them were labourers, foremen and administrators and only a very small minority were landowners).

