

Cultural practices and local identities in early modern Britain and Ireland

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Summary

This paper is concerned with the emergence of British identity and with reconfiguration of territorial and local identities in early modern Britain and Ireland. The authors readdress the debate concerning the relationships between the projects of British identity and regional identities. They argue that British identity was complementary to regional identities. The projects of British identity did not totally supplant regional and local identities, allowing for a certain degree of historical-cultural autonomy. However, the political potential of regional identities within these projects was confined to the cultural domain, thus their political potential was suppressed. Newly emerging territorial identities forged in the margins in an attempt to integrate into the British monarchy were also complementary to local identities. The authors define such identities as consensual.

The British problem and the notion of consensual identity

John Pocock's plea for a new British history¹ remains a challenge. In spite of the fact that scholarship has adopted transnational "Britannic", archipelagic, and Atlantic approaches to Tudor and Stuart state-formation and empire-building,² main analytical categories and interpretive paradigms with regard to identities have not been reconsidered.

Researchers tend to interpret the transformation of people's sense of themselves in the process of building Tudor and Stuart composite monarchy in primordialist terms³ using so-called

¹ Pocock, *British History: A Plea for a New Subject*, 1975, pp. 601-621.

² See also Canny, *Making Ireland British, 1580–1650*, 2001; Schwyzer, *British History and 'The British History': the Same Old Story?*, 2002, pp. 11-23; Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 2004; Macinnes, *The British Revolution, 1629-1660*, 2005; Chedgzoy, *Women's Writing in the British Atlantic World: Memory, Place and History, 1550–1700*, 2007; Ellis, Maginn, *The Making of the British Isles: the State of Britain and Ireland, 1450-1660*, 2007; Maley, *The English Renaissance, the British Problem, and the Early Modern Archipelago*, 2010, pp. 23–36; Coolahan, *Whither the Archipelago? Stops, Starts, and Hurdles on the Four Nations Front*, 2018; Ohlmeyer, *Making Empire: Ireland, Imperialism, and the Early Modern World*, 2023.

³ Fyodorov, *The New British History*, 2014, p. 4.

“strong” conceptions of identity, in Rogers Brubaker’s words.⁴ These conceptions imply a high level of group boundedness and homogeneity, “a clear boundary between inside and outside”,⁵ and consider identity “as something already ‘there’ ”.⁶

In this context, early modern “British problem” is described as a conflict between two divergent types of identities – a supranational British identity on the one hand, and particularist ethnocultural and ethnopolitical identities, on the other. The majority of scholars attribute the failure of the Tudor and early Stuart British project⁷ to its Anglocentricism and exclusive nature, concluding that a vague concept of Britishness was confronted by “national” particularism.⁸ Thus, a new British identity is thought to have failed to displace local identities that were deeply entrenched in societies. Such an interpretation of British state-formation is not only retrospective but is also affected by practices and realities of nation building in the 19th-20th centuries.

The paradigm adopted by some scholars who confirm the provisional success of the British project seems more productive. However, they also experience problems describing the product of such an interaction in terms of cultural hybridity⁹ or duality.¹⁰ They are inclined to address the co-existence of “supranational” and “local” substrata from perspectives of fusion or situational choice, which is reflected in the vagueness of their terminological apparatus.¹¹

⁴ See Williamson, *National Consciousness in the Age of James VI*, 1979; Levack, *The Formation of the British State: England, Scotland, and the Union*, 1987, pp. 169-213; Caball, *Faith, Culture and Sovereignty: Irish Nationality and Its Development, 1558-1625*, 1998, pp. 112-139; Brown, *Scottish Identity in the Seventeenth Century*, 1998, pp. 236-258; Jenkins, *Seventeenth-Century Wales*, 1998, pp. 213-235; Bradshaw, *Nationality, National Consciousness and Nationalism in Pre-Modern Ireland*, 2015, pp. 45-116.

⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 2004, p. 37.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 55.

⁷ The “British project” is used in this article as an analytical term. It implies a number of institutional and discursive practices.

⁸ Williamson, *National Consciousness in the Age of James VI*, 1979, pp. 1-47; Wormald, *The Creation of Britain*, 1992, pp. 175-193; Brown, *The Scottish Aristocracy*, 1993, pp. 543-576; Mason, *Scottish Political Thought and The Problem of Britain 1560-1650*, 1994, pp. 3-13; Kidd, *Protestantism, Constitutionalism and British identity under the Later Stuarts*, 1998, 321-342; Macinnes, *The British Revolution*, 2005, pp. 4,7, 8; Ellis/Maginn, *The Making of the British Isles*, 2007, pp. 372-378.

⁹ Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland*, 2013, pp. 158-179; Ohlmeyer, *Aristocratic Formation in Seventeenth-Century Ireland*, 2015, pp. 25-42; Ohlmeyer, *Making Empire*, 2023.

¹⁰ Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England*, 2004, pp. 337-419.

¹¹ Smith, *Some Eighteenth-century Ideas of Scotland*, 1970, pp. 107-111; Levack, *The Formation of the British State*, 1987, pp. 204-209.

The prevalent emphasis on the “conflictual” nature of early modern Irish and Scottish identities in historiography (the Welsh case is treated more as an exception), which are regarded as a product of resistance to Anglicization and incorporation into the British monarchy¹² shifts the attention from a variety of scenarios of identity processes in early modern Britain. Instead, we would like to deepen the potential of a holistic approach to the history of early modern Britain and Ireland¹³ and to focus on convergence, rather than divergence, regarding crystallization of local identities as a form of integration into the British composite monarchy.

It is necessary to overcome the problem succinctly summarized by Mark Greengrass, according to whom, political identity is usually interpreted in an exclusive fashion “as though adoption of one meant automatic exclusion of another”.¹⁴ As regards the identities in early modern Britain and Ireland, it is impossible to understand them without reconsideration of the relationship between epochalist discourses aimed at consolidation of collective identities, which are socially deprovincialized but psychologically enforced, and essentialist discourses, which are focused on the cultivation of local culture and distinctions, being socially isolating.¹⁵

In this article, we argue that British identity was complementary to regional identities and that British identity and regional identities were structurally not as different as it has been previously imagined. We will illustrate this by addressing the case of early modern Ireland.

All identities in Britain and Ireland underwent a certain discursive reconfiguration.¹⁶ The *terminus post quem* of this process is the first half of the sixteenth century, whereas *terminus ante quem* is the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ During the course of this process, the concept of a unified British political ethnicity was consistently contrasted to relatively conventional ethnopolitical categories of self-identification, which defined the relations between territorially distinct ethnic groups. At the regional level, there was a similar discursive process, during which more unified concepts of cultural identity replaced older forms of articulation of

¹² Canny, *Irish, Scottish and Welsh Responses to Centralisation*, 1995, pp. 147-169; Morrill, *The Fashioning of Britain*, 1996, pp. 11-13; Bradshaw, *The Tudor Reformation and Revolution in Wales and Ireland*, 1996, pp. 39-65.

¹³ Morrill advocated this approach: Morrill, *The British Problem, c. 1534-1707*, 1996, p. 17.

¹⁴ Greengrass, *Conquest and Coalescence*, 1993, p. 20.

¹⁵ We are borrowing the terminology of Clifford Geertz here. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 1973, p. 243.

¹⁶ In our study we employ the concept of identity in a ‘weak’ sense as a constructed negotiated discursive project and tend to focus on strategies of identification and classification rather than on identity per se. See Brubaker, *Ethnicity without groups*, 2004, pp. 137-138, 141-144.

¹⁷ Fyodorov, *Britanskaya Identichnost’/Identichnosti v Rannee Novoye Vremya*, 2013, p. 75.

ethnocultural diversity. These new concepts were based on the notions of shared subjecthood, fate, faith, background, language, and history, and sometimes could be politicized.

At least two substantial processes accompanied these changes. On the one hand, there was a gradual institutionalization of various intellectual groups (antiquarians, lawyers and theologians; and in the Jacobean period – heralds, poets, playwrights etc.). These groups were actively engaged in the ongoing elaboration and dissemination of new concepts of political (British) and cultural (territorially bounded) identities and their adaptation and popularization among the diverse population of the British Isles. In doing so, they created British epochalist discourses and nativist essentialist discourses, which reflected the objectives of the British composite monarchy. British epochalist discourses were aimed at neutralizing and accommodating particularist identities, whereas essentialist discourses were directly associated with the British regions (with Wales and Ireland during the Tudor rule and with Scotland during the Stuart rule) and enhanced the cultural-historical autonomy of British composites.¹⁸

Although epochalist and essentialist discourses could remain self-sufficient in the 16th-18th centuries, they could correlate with one another. The discourses of British identity could borrow resources and instruments from the essentialist practices in order to maintain a cultural balance between the regions, whereas discourses on the margins could rely on some epochalist concepts to overcome ethnic differences.¹⁹

The role of epochalism and essentialism in identity formation in Britain and Ireland requires reconsideration. Firstly, the emergence of essentialist identities in Ireland, Scotland and Wales should be regarded as a form of integration into Tudor and Stuart composite monarchy rather than a form of resistance. In spite of all the complexities inherent in the British project, the projects of British identity did not totally supplant regional and local identities allowing for a certain degree of historical-cultural autonomy of the composites. However, within these projects, the political potential of regional identities was suppressed, and they were confined to the cultural domain. In other words, British identity was complementary to constituent regional identities.

Secondly, in multi-ethnic early modern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, newly emerging territorial identities were also complementary to local identities and in this context reproduced the epochalist script of the formation of British identity. Therefore, duality was hardly an unintended consequence of the British state-formation both in the centre and on the periphery.

¹⁸ Fyodorov, *Britanskaya Identichnost'/Identichnosti v Rannee Novoye Vremya*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

We would like to define such identities as *consensual*, i.e., identities which originate in the context of ethnic interplay, entail intercultural switching, and have supragentile character serving as a superstructure over constituent local or regional identities.²⁰ British identity, therefore, was imagined as a consensual identity, and its crystallization was connected to the promotion of acculturation strategies. During the 16th-18th centuries, it involved loyalty to Protestantism and to the actions of the Crown and its administration; the acquisition of the English language; and a commitment to the English standards of civility and nature.

The term *consensual identity* emerged because of the reflection on historiography of medieval identities²¹ and the literature concerned with the issues of assimilation and acculturation in the 20th century.²² This term helps to problematize the co-existence of different identities and the connection between power and acculturation.²³

Karl F. Werner has identified two forms of nation building in the Middle Ages: “primary”, which was based on one’s *gens* and its political consciousness, and “secondary”, which involved a lengthy process of the fusion of two or more *gentes*.²⁴ According to him, the secondary form was characterized by its supragentile character²⁵ in which both sides of intercultural interplay reconsidered their background.²⁶ It is with the secondary form that consensual identity should be associated. The aforementioned secondary form was triggered by the processes of territorialization²⁷ by which different *gentes* were connected to the same ruler

²⁰ Fyodorov/Levin, *Medieval and Early Modern Insular Identities*, 2020, p. 1344.

²¹ Particularly: Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, 1961; Kienast, *Studien über die Französischen Volksstämme des Frühmittelalters*, 1968; Ewig, *Volkstum und Volksbewusstsein*, 2nd edition, 1969; Geary, *Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct*, 1983, pp. 15-26; Pohl, *Conceptions of Ethnicity*, 1991, pp. 39-49; Gschnitzer/Koselleck/Schönemann/Werner, *Volk, Nation, Nationalismus*, Masse, 1992, pp. 141-431; Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, 1997, pp. 250-331.

²² Berry, *Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society*, 1992, pp. 69-85; Berry, *Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation*, 1997, pp. 5-34; Gordon, *Assimilation in American life*, 1964, pp. 60-159; Barth, *Introduction*, 1969, pp. 9-38; Barkan, *Race, Religion, and Nationality in American Society*, 1995, pp. 38-101.

²³ Fyodorov/Levin, *Medieval and Early Modern Insular Identities*, 2020, pp. 1345-1349.

²⁴ Gschnitzer/Koselleck/Schönemann/Werner, *Volk, Nation, Nationalismus*, Masse, 1992, pp. 243-244.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁶ It is important that unlike Karl F. Werner who was inclined to treat these processes from the perspective of cultural primordialism, we are focussing here on the discursive side of the genesis of the categories of identification.

²⁷ The early contours of territorialization can be already found in the 7th c. See: Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, 1961, pp. 540-541.

and greater *patria* dominated over lesser *patria*, the place of one's origin.²⁸ At this stage, attempts were made to find common ground for creating horizontal ties between the subjects, which opened up prospects for acculturation. This process was accompanied by a crystallization of the discourse on *patria communis* (shared fatherland) equated with the territory of the realm,²⁹ which could also actualize the idea of a shared historical path and language as a guarantee of this new unity.³⁰ The peculiarity of this discourse lay in its indifference to common descent.³¹

Consensual identities involved two types of consents. The first type of consent implied cultural ambivalence and absence of emphasis on a common descent. The communities, which acquired consensual identity, possessed the capacity for frequent intercultural switching. Consensual identity allowed for cultural duality, which enabled an individual to belong to both cultural worlds.³²

The second type of consent was manifested in the agreement between a vassal and a seigneur. An acquisition of consensual identity was tantamount to professing loyalty to the sovereign. In this context, medieval and early modern consensual identities were always oriented at the level of power relations and articulated by direct or indirect coercion.³³

Consensual identities in early modern Ireland

Tudor and early Stuart state-formation contributed to the formulation of both British consensual identity and local consensual identities. In this part of the article, we will demonstrate how both epochalist and essentialist strategies revealed themselves in early modern Ireland. Early modern Ireland was a multi-ethnic country populated by the Gaelic-speaking Irish, by the descendants of the English-speaking Anglo-Norman invaders, who began to identify themselves as Old

²⁸ Gschnitzer/Koselleck/Schönemann/Werner, *Volk, Nation, Nationalismus*, Masse, 1992, p. 217; Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300*, 1997 pp. 256-302.

²⁹ Post, *Two Notes on Nationalism in the Middle Ages*, 1953, pp. 281-282; Gueneé, *État et Nation en France au Moyen-Age*, 1967, pp. 24-30; Ehlers, *Kontinuität und Tradition*, 1983; Beaune, *Naissance de la Nation Française*, 1985, p. 324; Gschnitzer/Koselleck/Schönemann/Werner, *Volk, Nation, Nationalismus*, Masse, 1992, pp. 224-231, 38-47.

³⁰ Gschnitzer/Koselleck/Schönemann/Werner, *Volk, Nation, Nationalismus*, Masse, 1992, p. 219.

³¹ Fyodorov/Levin, *Reflections on the Medieval and Early Modern Insular Identities*, 2020, p. 1345

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 1345-1346.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1347.

English during this period, and by new colonists, including the New English, the Scots, and the Welsh.

The process of territorial consolidation of different ethnocultural groups was triggered by the acquisition of the title of the king of Ireland by Henry VIII in 1541 as the whole population of Ireland was declared subjects of the king. This event facilitated the emergence of different discourses of consensual identities aimed at overcoming local particularisms emanating from the authority or from the subjects themselves.

Before turning to the policy, it is necessary to outline that otherness of native population was treated as a problem from the beginning. Irishness was regarded as a cultural phenomenon applied to both Gaels and Gaelicized Anglo-Norman settlers whose Englishness was questioned on the basis of their deviation from prescribed cultural patterns.³⁴ The negative image of the Irish was mainly derived from Giraldus Cambrensis's *Topographia Hibernica* (12th c.), in which they were described as savage in all spheres of life. Giraldus described them as "truly barbarous" possessing all barbarous habits and behaving like beasts.³⁵

Furthermore, Irish identity was deprived of political subjectivity. This understanding partly stemmed from Giraldus who represented the Irish as primitive pastoralists who did not engage themselves with agricultural production and urban life, and depicted them as barbarians averse to any civil institutions.³⁶ In early modern time, Giraldian discourse about Ireland was supplemented with the discussion of the extent of Irish barbarity and their political organization, which was inspired by the reception of classics.³⁷ The Irish were described as backward population existing at a pre-political level. English authors portrayed Gaelic lordships as "faulty" (not self-sufficient) polities ruled by tyrants.³⁸

Fynes Moryson's portrayal of Gaelic polity exemplifies this attitude best of all:

³⁴ Campion, *Two Bokes of the Histories of Ireland*, 1979, f. 8v; Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland*. Written Dialogue-wise between Eudoxus and Irenaeus, 1809, p. 80; Kew, *Shakespeare's Europe revisited*, 1995, pp. 660, 663, 684, 696-701; Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland Was Never Entirely Subdued nor Brought under Obedience of the Crown of England* (1612), 1890, p. 227, 229.

³⁵ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topografia Hibernica*, 1867, pp. 151-153.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

³⁷ Campbell, *Renaissance Humanism and Ethnicity Before Race*, 2013, pp. 53-82.

³⁸ See Morgan, *Great Deeds in Ireland: Richard Stanihurst's De rebus in Hibernia Gestis*, 2013, p. 110f; Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland Was Never Entirely Subdued nor Brought under Obedience of the Crown of England* (1612), 1890, pp. 284, 285, 332-333, 337.

“These foresaid meere Irish Lords of Countryes governe the people under them with such tyranny, as they know no king in respect of them, who challenge all their goods and Cattell to be theirs saying, that their Progenitors did not only give them lands to till, but also [lawes] [coves] and other goods to possesse [...] at the lords will and disposall”.³⁹

This discourse justified cultural superiority of everything English (civility) over everything Irish (barbarism) in order to validate English rule and marked the necessity to impose English civility to subdue backward Gaelic society. Moreover, since the deputyship of Sir Henry Sidney,⁴⁰ Tudor intellectuals asserted that Ireland had always been a British possession.⁴¹ They mentioned that the British king Gurguntius gave aid to the progeny of Gathelus travelling from Spain in exchange for suzerainty over Ireland,⁴² and that King Arthur exercised lordship over Ireland.⁴³ By means of dispossessing the Irish of historic statehood, Tudor intellectuals reduced Irish otherness to the cultural domain. The key epochalist strategy of Edmund Campion’s, Raphael Holinshed’s, Richard Stanihurst’s, and William Camden’s narratives was the representation of Ireland as a Western province of *Britannia*.

The Tudor and early Stuart governments regarded “barbarous” customs in subordinate regions as an obstacle to their consolidation of power and saw their acculturation strategies as a means of overcoming distinctions and achieving harmony.⁴⁴ Due to the Renaissance awareness of the possibility of transforming one’s identity or self-fashioning, it was believed that education and interaction could assist in ascending to civility.⁴⁵ Therefore, Tudor and early Stuart reformers promoted the programme of “anglicization”, i.e., adaptation to the norms and values of ruling

³⁹ Kew, Shakespeare’s Europe Revisited, 1995, p. 686.

⁴⁰ Brady, From Policy to Power: The Evolution of Tudor Reform Strategies in Sixteenth-Century Ireland, 2011, pp. 33-34.

⁴¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, Topografia Hibernica, 1867, pp. 319-320.

⁴² Campion, Two Bokes of the Histories of Ireland, 1979, 27v-28r; Stanihurst, Description of Irelande, 1577, pp. 4-5; Hanmer, The Chronicle of Ireland, 1809, pp. 27-28.

⁴³ Hooker, The Conquest of Ireland, 1587, p. 35; Hanmer, The Chronicle of Ireland, 1809, pp. 101-105; Spenser, A View of the State of Ireland. Written Dialogue-wise betweene Eudoxus and Irenaeus, 1809, p. 75.

⁴⁴ MacGregor, The Statutes of Iona, 2006, pp. 111-170; Ellis, Tudor Frontiers and Noble Power, 2011, pp. 47-78; Ohlmeyer, Colonization within Britain and Ireland, 2011, pp. 124-147; Maccoinnich, Plantation and Civility, 2015, pp. 11-29.

⁴⁵ Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, 1980, p. 2; Thomas, In Pursuit of Civility, 2018, pp. 180-182, 222-224.

elites in terms of religion, governance, law, manners, language, and social practices as a necessary condition for turning “unruly” barbarous subjects into “worthy subjects”.

As far as Ireland is concerned, the Act of Supremacy (1537), the Act for the English Order (1537),⁴⁶ and the policy of surrender and regrant, according to which Irish lords surrendered their lands to the king and had them regranted as a freehold by English law, bespoke concern with uniformity in Ireland and insisted on Reformation and acculturation as the main condition for integration of Gaelic population (elite, in the first instance) into the composite monarchy. Acculturation involved conversion to Protestantism, renunciation of native surnames, use of the English language, and the adoption of English dress, manners, and social practices⁴⁷ labelled as standards of “civility”, which were expected to bind the heterogeneous Irish population to the sovereign and to overcome their particularism.

The policy of surrender and regrant revealed the consensual potential of English identity in Ireland.⁴⁸ It was an agreement between the subject and the sovereign, according to which, the subject promised to reconsider their identity in exchange for peerage. Some indentures stated that after acquiring the same status as English subjects, Gaelic peers turned into “Englishmen”.⁴⁹ In the Elizabethan period, the government finally recognized that Irish subjects did not have to reject their Irish ancestry but had to conduct themselves as Englishmen.⁵⁰ It was definitely a manifestation of an epochalist strategy.

The attitude of Tudor and early Stuart administration towards cultural diversity in Ireland was complex and contingent on the level of cooperation between local elites. Reflecting on the resistance to state-formation and Reformation in Ireland, Tudor and early Stuart officials and intellectuals came to think of assimilation as a desired outcome of the policy of Anglicization in the long run due to firm associations of Irishness with disobedience. This hope was succinctly summarized by Sir John Davies who wrote that “We may conceive and hope that the next generation will in tongue and heart and every way else become English, so as there will be no difference or distinction but the Irish Sea betwixt us”.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Butler/Vesey, *The Statutes at Large, Passed in the Parliaments Held in Ireland*, pp. 90-91, 120-123.

⁴⁷ See for example: Curtis/Mcdowell, *Irish Historical Documents*, 1968, p. 106f.

⁴⁸ It seems that English identity in Ireland may have functioned similarly to British identity in Britain.

⁴⁹ Brewer/Bullen, *Calendar of the Carew manuscripts, Preserved in the Archiepiscopal library at Lambeth. 1515-1574, 1867*, pp. 186-187,193.

⁵⁰ Maginn, *The Gaelic Peers*, 2011, p. 581.

⁵¹ Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland Was Never Entirely Subdued nor Brought under Obedience of the Crown of England (1612)*, 1890, p. 335f.

However, the rhetoric of uniformity of the Tudor and early Stuart government and intellectual groups coincided with essentialist policies. The government in the 16th-17th centuries may have allowed for cultural switching, distinguishing between public (outward) and private (inward) manifestations of identity. In this context, “civility” was understood as accommodation to the needs of others, including cultural norms, and had to be externalized as a form of deference to the needs of the sovereign, agents of power, and social superiors.⁵² It is necessary to point out that this combination of public and private forms of identity was deemed to be permanent rather than situational since it was an organic part of the relationship between subjects and their sovereign.

Tudor and early Stuart government could tolerate cultural autonomy. For example, Edward VI and Elizabeth I came to accept that reformed religion had to be promoted in the native language.⁵³ The Irish translation of the catechism was published in 1571 by Seaáan ‘O Cearnaigh.⁵⁴

During the early Stuart period, cultural ambivalence was particularly tolerated if an individual converted to Protestantism. The biography of Donough O’Brien, 4th earl of Thomond, demonstrates how the model of consensual identity entailed cultural duality and enabled the person to belong to both cultural worlds without giving up their descent. During the Tudor age, his family demonstrated loyalty to the crown and substituted the ancestral title of O’Brien for the title of the earls of Thomond. Donough O’Brien converted to Protestantism and was perceived by his contemporaries “as truly English as if he had been born in the Middlesex”.⁵⁵ He was believed to be eager “to bring in English customs and to beat down all Irish barbarous usages”.⁵⁶ At the same time, O’Brien did not have to renounce his Irish blood, which legitimized his presence in the Irish peerage. He openly demonstrated this by commissioning two pedigrees published in English, in 1614 and in 1617, which traced genealogy of Gaelic noble families including O’Briens to the ancient times in accordance with native historical tradition.⁵⁷ Therefore, the case of Donough O’Brien testifies that in certain circumstances Englishness could entail cultural duality.

⁵² Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility*, 2018, pp. 66, 111-113, 224.

⁵³ Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath and Queen Elizabeth’s Irish Primer*, 2016, pp. 28-30.

⁵⁴ About it see: Caball, *Print, Protestantism, and Cultural Authority*, 2014, pp. 292-308.

⁵⁵ Treadwell, *Buckingham and Ireland*, 1998, p. 107.

⁵⁶ Mccavitt, *Sir Arthur Chichester*, 1998, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Kane, *The Politics and Culture of Honour in Britain and Ireland*, 2013, pp. 61-79.

Apart from that, English intellectuals employed essentialising strategies in order to assign a particular historical and cultural profile to Ireland within British composite monarchy. Its distinctiveness defined its separate and subordinate status. That is how Ireland was represented in Holinshed's chronicles, William Camden's *Britannia*, and contemporary drama (for example, William Shakespeare's *Henry V*; *Henry VI. Part I* and Ben Jonson's *The Irish Masque*). The plays raised concern that the erosion of differences could possibly lead to the undermining of English hegemony in the British monarchy. That is why the maintenance of distinctions was crucial to the British imperial project.

Even though a certain logic can be inferred from Tudor and early Stuart policy in Ireland, it was far from being consistent. It hardly completed its epochalist strategy of consolidation of heterogeneous subjects in the kingdom of Ireland, possibly for fear of potential politicization of such consolidation and negative associations with Irishness. That was the reason why O'Brien's experience remained an exception, whereas the majority of his contemporaries continued to maintain their own particularist identities. Among them, Old English and Gaelic identities were reconfigured, having become more territorialized.

The Catholic Old English continued maintaining their "Englishness", defined by descent.⁵⁸ In the course of state-formation, they began to articulate their separate identity, in contrast to the officials coming from England and new English colonists, in order to demonstrate their original capacity for ruling Ireland.⁵⁹ In doing so, they began to focus more on Ireland as their *patria* and on an autonomous constitutional status of Ireland within Britain.⁶⁰ The difference between the Old English and their counterparts in England was manifested in the separate history of their residence on the island, their Catholic faith, their privileges, and their pride in a separate parliament. In early modern time, Irish Parliament became an element of tradition, a symbolic tribute to the distinct status of Ireland as a composite rather than an active institution because its political agency in spite of the opposition had been seriously reduced since the end of the 15th century.⁶¹ The reconfiguration of Old English identity was, therefore, an attempt to

⁵⁸ Clarke, *Old English in Ireland*, 1966, pp. 15-27.

⁵⁹ Canning, *The Old English in Early Modern Ireland the Palesmen*, 2019, pp. 167-192.

⁶⁰ Canny, *Formation of the Old English Elite in Ireland*, 1975, pp. 10-16, 24-26; Lennon, *Old English Identity*, 1978, pp. 130-141; Bradshaw, *The Irish Constitutional Revolution*, 1979, pp. 271-288; Macraith, *Creideamh agus Athartha*, 1996, pp. 7-19.

⁶¹ Edwards/Moody, *The History of Poyning's Law*, 1941, pp. 418-424; Clarke, *The History of Poyning's Law*, 1615-41, 1972, pp. 207-222.

negotiate the conditions of integration into the British monarchy. In the course of this process, Old English essentialist identity was politicized.

As for Gaelic identity, it had been redefined several times during the examined period. Although it still had gentile connotations, its cultural aspects were politicized in the Elizabethan period, which included the adoption of the Irish language, apparel, and Gaelic socio-political practices, not to mention Catholicism. In 1563, Shane O'Neill appeared in London dressed in a kind of Irish apparel and surrounded by the entourage of galloglasses to announce submission to Elizabeth and addressed the queen in the Irish language. Thus, he explicitly asserted himself as an independent lord⁶² who derived his authority from being an O'Neill.

Gaelic particularism was to a certain extent overcome with the accession of James I to the English throne. During his rule, the conquest of Ireland was almost completed. Gaelic pedigrees of Stuart dynasty facilitated recognition of their sovereignty over Ireland by Gaelic population. Coming to terms with the realities of a new state, Irish Catholic intellectuals who resided on the Continent or received education there, having been influenced by the Renaissance discourses of *patria*, began to refer to the Gaels as “*Éireannach*” (Irishmen).⁶³ In this context, the transition from gentile-based self-identified “Gaels” to the territorial “*Éireannach*” was a sign of dynastic loyalty.

It is noteworthy that one of the accomplishments of state-building in early modern Ireland was territorial isolation of the Irish Gaels. The shift to territorial identification of the Irish Gaels strengthened the division between Irish and Scottish Gaels as subjects of separate kingdoms and ruined all prospects for formation of a unified Gaelic polity extending across the Irish Sea, which, according to Steven G. Ellis, was still possible in the 15th-16th centuries.⁶⁴

Blocking the formation of pan-Gaelic identity, state-building in Ireland created new discursive opportunity for the formation of insular Irish identity. Although Tudor and Stuart composite monarchy was able to buttress territorial consciousness,⁶⁵ it refrained from creating unified Irish subjects because of the firm associations between Irishness and subversiveness. However, the Catholic elite of both Old English and Gaelic background, gradually supplanted by new English officials in the process of reflection on common subjecthood, faith, alienation from government and internal development of Ireland, came up with a new initiative for territorial legitimacy in the form of consensual identity. In a broader sense, this discourse insisted on shared loyalty to

⁶² Casey, *The Nugents of Westmeath and Queen Elizabeth's Irish Primer*, 2016, p. 27.

⁶³ Ó Buachalla, *Cúlra is Tábhacht an Dáin*, 1990, pp. 410-413.

⁶⁴ Ellis, *Nationalist Historiography*, 1986, pp. 7-9.

⁶⁵ Bradshaw/Roberts, *Introduction*, 1998, p. 3.

the Crown, faith, residence, and territory but did not insist on a common descent. For example, in the Proclamation of 1599 Hugh O'Neill argued that ecclesiastical and administrative posts, except for the Lord-Deputy, had to be given to the "Irishmen".⁶⁶ The term "Irishmen" was applied to both Catholic Old English and Gaelic elite.

In a narrower sense, Irish identity acquired its historical-cultural legitimacy in the historical narrative of early Stuart period "Foras Feasa ar Éirinn" (Foundation of knowledge on Ireland) created in 1634-1635 by an Old English Catholic priest – Geoffrey Keating. It was dedicated to the ancient history of Ireland from its beginnings to the Anglo-Norman invasion. In the text, the term "Éireannach" implied the members of Catholic community of Gaelic and Old English origins born or residing in Ireland, who were loyal subjects of the king of England, Ireland and Scotland, who had a long ancestral tradition of living on the island. These members were related to one another through marriage and friendship, and who knew the Irish language and recognized the Gaelic past of Ireland as their own.

Irish identity in *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn* was consensual since it did not deny different ethnic background of the Gaels and the Old English. In his narrative, Keating continued using traditional descent-based designations such as a Gael (*Gaedheal*), an Old Englishman (*Seanghall*), and a New Englishman (*nuaGhall*), even admitting his Old English background:

"Whoever thinks it much I say for them, it is not to be considered that I should deliver judgment through favour, giving them much praise beyond what they have deserved, being myself of the old Galls as regards my origin".⁶⁷

Therefore, Irish identity in Keating's rendering was complementary to constituent particularist identities. Keating advised his audience to prioritize shared territory, faith, language, and experience over descent. Yet Keating's project of Irish identity was exclusive of new Protestant population of Ireland.

In *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, Irish identity was depicted not only as a cultural (the Irish language was particularly important for defining this identity),⁶⁸ but also as a political phenomenon. Keating perceived the Irish crown as separate, and Ireland as a kingdom preceding the Anglo-

⁶⁶ Atkinson, *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland*, 1974, pp. 279-280.

⁶⁷ "Cibé lé n-ab mór a n-abraim riu, nach inmheasta go mbéarainn breath le báidh ag tabhairt iomad molta tar mar do thuilleadar orra, agus mé féin do Shean-Ghallaibh do réir bunadhasa." Comyn, *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, 1902, p. 76f.

⁶⁸ Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating*, 2000, p. 127, 133.

Norman conquest.⁶⁹ In doing so, he suggested native, insular foundations for the legitimacy of ancient “Irish” constitution. He envisaged composite monarchy not as an imperial polity with hierarchical relationships between its constituent parts but as a form of union known as *aeque principaliter*, under which the constituent kingdoms had to be treated as distinct entities.⁷⁰ In this context, Keating’s text exemplified the politicization of regional identities.

The project of Irish identity articulated by Keating was an alternative to the Anglocentric project of English and British consensual identity which placed everything English over local cultural identities. Unlike the latter, Keating’s version of identity was Hibernocentric, giving priority to the local, placing English values on the periphery. In spite of its essentialist nature, the project of Irish identity suggested by Keating and his contemporaries borrowed some epochalist concepts in order to consolidate two distinct groups divided by descent and cultural affinities.

Conclusion

In Tudor and early Stuart Britain and Ireland, the identitarian language underwent certain transformations. British and regional identities were forged with the help of both epochalist and essentialist strategies aimed at a consolidation of the elite. Early modern identities had a consensual potential since they were complementary to local loyalties, did not insist on common descent, and entailed cultural switching. The difference between British or English consensual identities and regional consensual identities lay in the scope allocated to selfhood. Regional identities were reduced to the cultural domain in British discourses, whereas newly reconfigured regional identities could be politicized to deepen political autonomy of the composite.

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⁶⁹ Bradshaw, Geoffrey Keating, 1993, pp. 174-178; Cunningham, *The World of Geoffrey Keating*, 2000, pp. 141-142.

⁷⁰ About such kind of unions see: Elliott, *A Europe of Composite Monarchies*, 1992, pp. 52-53.

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