

## **Searching Ireland's Soul: Consumption, Catholicism and the Birth of the Free State (1922-1937)**

**By John Hugh Porter**

In 1924 the newly formed Irish Free State government adopted the “traditional” Irish harp as the great seal for the nation. The harp had been symbolic of Eire for centuries, and was, therefore, an obvious emblem for the Free State.<sup>1</sup> However, the harp already served as the emblem for another great Irish institution, perhaps greater than the government itself; the Guinness company. The iconic Irish drink had adopted the Irish harp as its logo in 1862.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in 1924 there began considerable correspondence between the government and the Guinness Company as to the right of use of the harp symbol.<sup>3</sup> Arthur Guinness, Son and Company, was unwilling to let the Free State appropriate the use of the harp. Eventually the matter was resolved when it appeared that the harp on the great seal would be presented with the back facing to the right, whereas, when it appeared on the Guinness Trade Mark the back of the harp faced towards the left.<sup>4</sup> This resolution only came after a considerable amount of legal wrangling, demonstrating the contested territory of symbolic consumption.

The harp had, by 1924, already become a symbol of consumerism, with its connection to the most recognisable of Irish brands. Yet, the nexus between consumerism and nation building has been somewhat neglected in Irish historiography.<sup>5</sup> We see a lack of analysis into concepts such as the “consumer”, the ways in which such concepts have been constructed, and what impact they may have had upon Irish social and political discourse.<sup>6</sup> This is especially true for the Irish Free State, as historiography on the period has tended to focus on political and economic concerns to the detriment of significant concepts, such as, the

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<sup>1</sup> In folklore the harp was said to belong to Brian Boru and later to the O'Neill family. It is now preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> Unknown Author, *The Irish Harp, adopted as their Trade Mark, by Messrs. Arthur Guinness, Son and Company in the year 1862* (Dublin: Unknown Publisher, 1928), 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> There have been few historical works written on Irish consumption in the twentieth century, and those that have been written have only taken the story as far as the 1910s, for example, Stephanie Rains, *Commodity Culture and Social Class in Dublin 1850-1916* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 3-14. These histories fail to analyse the tremendously important moment in Irish nation building that the Irish Free State marked, as after all, it was the first, modern and independent, Irish nation-state.

<sup>6</sup> This article will not attempt to place a rigid definition on the idea of the consumer as it does not want to ask what is the consumer, but instead ask how Irish society attempted to define the consumer in the 1920s and 1930s. For an introduction to the “consumer” in sociological thought see Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997).

consumer. Paddy Dolan has published an article entitled “Developing Consumer Subjectivity in Ireland: 1900-1980”, which is of tremendous value for anyone studying the idea of the consumer in the Ireland during the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> However, the article is limited to a certain extent, as Dolan takes a sociological rather than an historical approach.<sup>8</sup> Thus, there is considerable scope for the historian to consider consumption patterns and consumer identities during the early twentieth century.

This article will consider how discourses on Irish national identity shaped ideals of the consumer in the Irish Free State, and how significant the idea of the consumer was in shaping concepts of Irish national identity. This was a period of formation and crystallisation of ideas on Irish national identity.<sup>9</sup> In the early years of independence the need to define the rights and duties of the ideal Irishman and Irishwoman became crucial for the new state. This essay will argue that the role of the consumer was one of the critical concepts to be defined in this discourse on national identity.<sup>10</sup> It will ask how the ideal Irish consumer was constructed, how they were supposed to behave, and what they were supposed to purchase.

The article will analyse consumption history using a cultural framework by asking what significance Irish society and Irish citizens attached to particular items, modes of behaviour and ideologies. The conceptual basis of the argument relies on Anderson’s anthropological definition of the nation as an “imagined community”, and the work of MacLaughlin, in assessing nation-building discourses and national identity through both socio-economic and symbolic frameworks.<sup>11</sup> This article will analyse how the rhetoric surrounding the Irish consumer functioned as part of the power dynamics existing in the Free State. For this reason, sources have been selected to highlight the complexity of debate on the

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<sup>7</sup> Paddy Dolan, “Developing Consumer Subjectivity in Ireland 1900-1980” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9, (2009): 117-141.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 137. The conclusions drawn by Dolan are more relevant to the latter half of the twentieth century. His thesis focuses on the development of consumer subjectivity beginning sometime in the early 1960s and increasing thereon. This focus on consumer subjectivity as a recent development glosses over the complexity of consumer experience in Ireland prior to 1960.

<sup>9</sup> This article will occasionally reference statements that were made after the period of the Irish Free State, but only where the comments can be seen as indicative of the discourse evident during that period.

<sup>10</sup> Here evident parallels are apparent with other national examples. For example, T.H. Breen’s work on the American Revolutionary period has highlighted the importance of consumption and consumerism to emerging notions of American identity. In this case national identity was forged around consumer boycotts, symbolic of self and communal sacrifice. See T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 25-32.

<sup>11</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 3-12; Jim MacLaughlin, *Reimagining the Nation State: The Contested Terrains of Nation-Building* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 91-112.

Irish consumer in the Free State. The documents range from those chosen to highlight the elite discourse on the ideal consumer - such as Dáil (Irish Parliament) debates and political speeches, to those chosen to give an insight into the wider societal interaction with consumption and consumption ideologies - Such as advertisements, newspaper and magazine articles, as well as letters to the editor.

Three aspects of the relationship between ideas of national identity and discourses on the consumer will be considered. Firstly, the idea of duty and service to the nation, demonstrated through consumption, will be discussed. Often, in discourse during the Irish Free State, the idea the consumer owed a certain duty to Ireland is repeated. This article will consider the idea of the patriotic consumer, and the responsibilities that were imposed upon them. It will also ask why in much discourse the Irish consumer was perceived to be failing in those responsibilities.

Secondly, the article will consider the idealised relationship between the producer and the consumer. The idea of the producer, especially the small producer, became central to ideas of Irish national identity, having its roots in the socio-economic developments in the post-famine environment, as national identity became intimately connected with land and the tenant farmer.<sup>12</sup> Arguably, this connection became even more important in the Irish Free State, especially during the 1930s with the coming to power of Fianna Fáil, who espoused ideas of self-sufficiency, and cultivated the image of themselves as the party of the small farmer. Sean Lemass's 1928 comment, 'we can make Ireland a self-contained unit', is indicative of this ideology.<sup>13</sup> The article will ask how the significance attached to the idea of the producer may have affected the concept of the consumer, and what sort of idealised relationship was envisaged between producer and consumer.

The final aspect the article wants to consider is the spiritual character of Irish nationalism and how it was linked to consumerism. The idea of Ireland as a Catholic country perhaps reached its zenith in the years of the Irish Free State. Eamon Duffy described Catholicism at this time as 'something bred in the bone . . . like breathing and breathing out . . . a part of the landscape'.<sup>14</sup> As Smith suggests, the idea of "Catholic Ireland" was one of the

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<sup>12</sup> Philip Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism: a study of the Irish Land Question* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Sean Lemass, Speech to the Dáil February 1928, quoted in James Meenan's "From Free Trade to Self-Sufficiency" ed. Francis McManus, *The Years of the Great Test 1926-1939* (Cork: Mercier P 1967), 74.

<sup>14</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Faith of Our Fathers* (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.

few concepts that united two political parties still feeling the after effects of a Civil War.<sup>15</sup> This article will ask to what extent the concept of Ireland as a land of the spirit, opposed to the material obsessions of other nations, impacted on discourses of the consumer. It will also consider to what extent rigid Catholic moral doctrine impacted on pleasure seeking activities in the Free State.

### **An Irish Christmas Carol: The “Buy Irish” Campaign before Independence**

It is first necessary to provide some context to discourse on the consumer in pre-independence Ireland, before discussing the Irish Free State. Prior to independence there had been real concern with the Irish consumer, demonstrated by a number of “Buy Irish” drives in the early twentieth century. An advertisement for “An Irish Christmas Market” held in Dublin in 1908, claimed to sell goods of ‘exclusively Irish Manufacture’.<sup>16</sup> Another promotional poster from 1912 promotes the same Christmas market, but is even more forceful in its rejection of non-Irish goods, stating, ‘Foreign Wares – NO! ...IRISH GOODS ONLY!’.<sup>17</sup> Thus, we see the concern to connect Irish consumption patterns to Irish politics and Irish nationalism. Stephanie Rains has highlighted the 1880s as the decade in which we can first note marked attempts to politicize Irish consumption patterns and to connect Irish shopping habits to Irish nationalism.<sup>18</sup> From this period on we can note various waves of support for “Buy Irish” drives and efforts to enlist the Irish consumer as a servant to Irish nationalism.

Immediately prior to the founding of the Free State, during the War of Independence 1919-1921, the nexus between nationalism, national identity and consumption became even more prominent. One example is provided by an advertisement for Irel coffee, in May 1921 (during the most violent period of the War of Independence December 1920 – July 1921), holds the title ‘Employment’.<sup>19</sup> The advert claims ‘every bottle gives employment not only in

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<sup>15</sup> James Smith, “The Politics of Sexual Knowledge: The Origins of Ireland’s Culture of Containment and the Carrigan Report (1931)” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 13, no. 2 (April 2004) 211.

<sup>16</sup> Advertisement, “An Irish Christmas Market” (Dublin, 1908) taken from *Consumer Culture, Advertising and Literature in Ireland 1848-1921*, [http://www.ccalireland.com/Graphics/imageschronological201002/slides/1908\\_Irish\\_Christmas\\_Market.html](http://www.ccalireland.com/Graphics/imageschronological201002/slides/1908_Irish_Christmas_Market.html)

<sup>17</sup> Advertisement, “Sale Exhibition of Irish Goods Only” (Dublin, 1912) taken from *National Library of Ireland* <http://www.nli.ie/1916/pdf/3.3.1.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Stephanie Rains, *Commodity Culture and Social Class in Dublin 1850-1916* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 125.

<sup>19</sup> Advertisement, Irel Coffee Company, “Employment”, (Dublin, 1921) taken from *Consumer Culture, Advertising and Literature in Ireland 1848-1921*, [http://www.ccalireland.com/Graphics/images-chronological-201002/slides/1921\\_Irel\\_Coffee.html](http://www.ccalireland.com/Graphics/images-chronological-201002/slides/1921_Irel_Coffee.html).

the Irel Factory, but to Irish bottle workers, Irish box makers, Irish printers e.t.c.’.<sup>20</sup> An Irish company is here endeavouring to sell a product solely on the basis that it provides employment for Irish citizens. The coffee is not even mentioned, as the consumer is asked to purchase it as a service to the nation. A Bill for the Protection of Irish Industries brought before the Dáil (the Irish Parliament) in 1920 proposed it be the ‘duty’ of Irish citizens to purchase Irish goods ‘to the exclusion of similar articles of foreign origin’.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately the bill was not enacted, but not because of fears that it placed excessive demands on the consumer. The arguments raised by the deputies all revolved around the pressure it would place upon Irish retailers, or the feasibility of the measure.<sup>22</sup> Joseph MacBride, TD for Mayo, asserted during the debate on the Bill, that ‘traders should not be coerced’, but there was little concern that the consumer would be coerced by the measure.<sup>23</sup> During the debate no-one questioned the idea that it was the duty of the Irish consumer to buy Irish goods.<sup>24</sup> Countess Markievicz did point out that consumers would merely acquire the products they desired from London and other markets, but she described this as ‘the worst form of trading’, and suggests that it is the responsibility of the Irish consumer to buy Irish products.<sup>25</sup>

A focus on the duties and the responsibilities of the Irish consumer is ever-present in the Irish Free State. Repeatedly in discourse, the role of the consumer is framed in terms of their duty to the nation. President Cosgrave is quoted, in *The Irish Independent* in 1926, as saying ‘every citizen can do something for his country, and ultimately, of course, for himself, by going a little out of his way to get Irish goods, even at a higher price when he can afford it’.<sup>26</sup> A heavy moral burden is placed upon the Irish consumer to perform his patriotic duty for the nation; it is not merely a duty that will be of benefit for his fellow countrymen but also ‘for himself’. Irish consumers are often lambasted for the failure to perform their patriotic mission to “Buy Irish”, as the article will demonstrate below. A letter to the Editor of *The Irish Independent* in August 1925 claimed that:

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dáil debate, Vol 1. 17 September 1920, Ministerial Motions – Bill for the Protection of Irish Industries, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph MacBride, Dáil debate, Vol 1. 17 September 1920, Ministerial Motions – Bill for the Protection of Irish Industries, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Countess Markievicz, Dáil debate, Vol 1. 17 September 1920, Ministerial Motions – Bill for the Protection of Irish Industries, 3.

<sup>26</sup> William T. Cosgrave, quoted in “Buy Irish” article in *The Irish Independent*, 15 November 1926, 7.

‘Grocers’ shop windows in every town are filled with foreign oatmeal . . . how can they be so thoughtless and so blind to their own duty and the country’s interests . . . and the public who ask for these foreign goods are as unpatriotic and as indifferent to their duty.’<sup>27</sup>

Again, consumption is framed in terms of moral obligation. Moreover, the Irish citizen is at least perceived, to be failing in this obligation.

There was a great deal of lamenting over the failures of the Irish consumer in the 1920s and 1930s. Deputy Walsh, in the debate on the Bill for the Protection of Irish Industries referenced above, asserted that the ‘Irish public had been asleep as regards their duty to support Irish manufacture’.<sup>28</sup> The National Agricultural and Industrial Development Association Assistant (N.A.I.D.A) Managing Director, Mr G.D. Findlater, claimed, in 1936, that the Irish consumer had ‘an inferiority complex’ by which ‘they always preferred imported goods’.<sup>29</sup> This is a very revealing comment; Irish consumers chose foreign products because of a psychological deficiency whereby they viewed their nation as inherently inferior. Mr Findlater went on to say that ‘in the great majority of cases’ the Irish products ‘were satisfactory in quality and variety’.<sup>30</sup> The problem is the Irish consumer, not the Irish product, at least in the view of the N.A.I.D.A. In these fears over the quality of Irish products we perhaps can detect the fears of a formerly colonised nation, still existing in something of a colonial status. After all, Irish TDs were required to take an oath of allegiance to the British crown until 1933, and a Governor General of Ireland continued to act as the official representative of the sovereign until December 1936. Perhaps, the fear and paranoia surrounding Ireland’s still semi-colonial status was expressed in doubts over the quality of Irish products, and the development of the Irish economy. It was in this environment that the Irish citizen in their role as a consumer was called to perform the patriotic task of “Buying Irish”.

### **Moulding the consumer; sculpting the patriot**

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<sup>27</sup> Unknown Author, Letter to the Editor “Foreign vs. Home Oats” *The Irish Independent*, 14 August 1925, 6.

<sup>28</sup> J.J. Walsh, Dáil debate, Vol 1. 17 September 1920, Ministerial Motions – Bill for the Protection of Irish Industries, 3.

<sup>29</sup> Mr G.D. Findlater, quoted in *The Irish Independent*, 04 December 1936, 13.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

A considerable emphasis is put on education as a path of potential remedy for the failings of the Irish consumer. A number of organisations were established to educate the Irish consumer as to their patriotic duties. The N.A.I.D.A, mentioned above, is one very significant organisation that had been in existence long before the Irish Free State, but there are a number of others that were set up in the 1920s and 1930s. For example, The Women's Industrial Development Association (W.I.D.A), founded in 1932, which had the express aim not only of investigating why Irish-made goods were not stocked in shops, but also educating the consumer as to where Irish products could be purchased.<sup>31</sup> It seems to be a fundamental belief of the W.I.D.A. that the Irish consumer could be made to "Buy Irish" if only they were educated; in the practicalities of where to locate Irish products and more importantly in the moral and ideological responsibilities that they had to shoulder. In W.I.D.A's founding statement they say the Irish public 'should be ashamed of being mere shopkeepers for another country' and make it their duty and the duty of all 'Irish women' to be 'apostles' for the "Buy Irish Foods" campaign.<sup>32</sup> The idea that through education and promotion, Irish consumers could be made to purchase Irish produce appears to be very prominent in this discourse.

We can, therefore, witness the responsibilities imposed on the ideal Irish consumer and the attempts to shape Irish consumption patterns through patriotic discourse. The perfect consumer in the Irish Free State was compelled to make individual sacrifices for the nation. The reasons for this were both ideological and practical. In gaining independence, Ireland had to define its national identity, the consumer was called upon to demonstrate that Irish produce was just as good as British produce; that Ireland could stand alone. However, we should also note the practicalities of a newly-created state that necessitated an increase in home production and employment levels. This became even more important during the 1930s and the period of economic war with Britain, when the survival of the nation was dependent on the Irish consumer buying Irish, especially as foreign markets for sale were not actively sought.<sup>33</sup>

In this environment the importance of a cyclical arrangement between Irish producer and consumer became increasingly evident. Newspaper articles, during the 1920s and 1930s, continually lament the gap between the producer and the consumer. Mr J. Sullivan, President

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<sup>31</sup> "Irish Women and Industry", *The Irish Times*, 29 October 1932, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Mrs A Stack, Speech made at Mansion House Dublin, reported in *The Irish Press* 24 May 1933, 7.

<sup>33</sup> James Meenan, "From Free Trade to Self-Sufficiency" *The Years of the Great Test 1926-1939*, ed. Francis MacManus, (Cork: Mercier P, 1967), 77.

for the Munster Egg and Poultry Exporter's Association, claimed in February 1926 that 'all farm produce was suffering from the high charges between the producer and the consumer'.<sup>34</sup> A Labour TD (Irish Member of Parliament) for Wexford, in a Report for the Executive Council in 1931, asserted that there was 'a margin between farmer and consumer that called for investigation'.<sup>35</sup> It seems that many influential figures were unprepared to accept the idea that wholesalers and retailers would make a profit to the cost of both the producer and the consumer. Dr James Ryan, Minister for Agriculture, asked 'why Irish farmers should have always been looking for prosperity from the towns of Britain. If they got people working in our own towns they would consume Irish produce'.<sup>36</sup> Here we see the idea of a cyclical arrangement benefiting both the Irish producer and consumer; only in uniting together could either be successful.

There were a number of quite fantastical ideas postulated to encourage some form of regressive link between the producer and the consumer. Sean Lemass, when opening a flour-mill in Carlow, claimed the scheme could:

'Represent a complete change in the trend of industrialisation as it is known in many countries. The smaller unit is becoming again the principal unit . . . the community who will be the consumers of the flour will also be the workers who help to produce it.'<sup>37</sup>

It appears as though there was a real fear that if the consumer was too far removed from the realities of production this would be damaging to the nation. Indeed, as far as possible, it seems as if it would have been preferable ideologically for the consumer to generate their own produce. Perhaps this thinking is best represented by a statement made by Patrick Giles, after the period of the Irish Free State in 1947, but very reflective of the discourse already highlighted in the Free State. Giles lamented in a Dáil debate that 'the nation had become a spoiled child running to the shop and buying everything they needed, instead of producing it'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Mr J. Sullivan, President Munster Egg and Poultry Exporter's Association, *The Irish Independent* 09 January 1926, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Mr R. Corish, Report for the Executive Council, *The Irish Press*, 15 September 1931, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Dr Ryan, Minister for Agriculture, Speech made at Blackwater, Wexford 18 January 1933, quoted in *The Irish Press*, 19 January 1933, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Sean Lemass, Speech made at opening of Flour Mill in Carlow, reported in *The Irish Press*, 22 January 1935, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Patrick Giles, Dáil Debate, vol. 105, 28 March 1947.



Perhaps, it is valid to view such calls for a closer link between producer and consumer as part of a broader desire for a “traditional” and rural way of life. Such a desire, for a traditional “Irish” Ireland was quite widely expressed, which the article will later discuss, and this is an ideological lifestyle that can be contrasted explicitly with Britain, the most industrialised nation in the world. Yet, we can note similar desires expressed across Europe during the inter-war period.<sup>39</sup> For example, a central aspect of Nazi ideology was the concept of “blood and soil”; a mystical link between the Germanic people and the Germanic lands.<sup>40</sup> Whilst the idea of a return to rural life within Germany was impracticable due to the Nazi desire for rearmament, it remained an important focus of ideology during the 1930s. It would be wrong to overstress the similarity to Irish ideals of an agrarian and simplified way of life, but it is important to note the common trends affecting European thought in the inter-war period and not consider Ireland in isolation.

The article has thus far pointed to the numerous duties placed upon the Irish consumer within discourse during the Irish Free State. The extent to which the consumer was expected to be servant to the nation, and servant, or at least partner, to the Irish producer, has been highlighted. However, we can also point to numerous examples where the rights of the Irish consumer are declared. A letter to the editor of the *Irish Independent* in 1936 lodged a ‘protest against the poor quality and high price of fruit, especially oranges, now being sold in the Free State . . . the consumers were clamouring for oranges of the good quality previously imported’.<sup>41</sup> Whilst the writer here, Mr Thomas Ebbs from Galway, is not complaining about the quality of Irish goods, he is clearly asserting that the Irish consumers should be able to expect a certain standard of produce; that the consumer does have rights as well as the producer and the nation.

This belief, that the consumer could expect a certain quality of product, seems to have been widely accepted, even by government ministers. Sean Lemass, in a 1936 speech, stated that ‘it was not merely sufficient that Irish consumers should accept Irish products as

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<sup>39</sup> Hartmut Berghoff, “Consumption Politics and Politicized Consumption: Monarchy, Republic, and Dictatorship in Germany, 1900-1939,” *Decoding Modern Consumer Societies*, eds. Hartmut Berghoff and Uwe Spiekermann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 129-132.

<sup>40</sup> The importance and embedded nature of this ideology can be seen in a story published by *Der Giftpilz* about a German peasant forced from his land by a Jewish capitalist. Unknown Author, “How a German Peasant Was Driven from his House and Farm”, published in *Der Giftpilz*, taken from German Propaganda Archive, accessed 28/02/2013, <http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/>.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Ebbs, Letter to the Editor, *The Irish Independent*, 4 April 1936, 7.

“good enough” or because government policy had deprived them of an alternative, but that they should demand them because of their superior worth’.<sup>42</sup> Even the President of the Executive Council, Eamon de Valera, when referring to a turf production scheme, asserted that ‘consumers should not be expected to support the scheme unless they received honest value’, stating that poor quality turf would not be sold to the consumer.<sup>43</sup> These comments, made by the most important figures in the Fianna Fáil government, demonstrate how much significance was given to the idea that the consumer could expect a certain standard of product. They must make us question any simple acceptance that the producer was given sole importance in discourse on Irish national identity and demonstrate that, whilst the consumer had certain responsibilities to the nation, he could also demand certain rights that the nation was bound to fulfil.

### **A Catholic Consumer? Chocolate as a Heavenly Pleasure**

Finally, this article will consider the spiritual aspect of discourses on Irish national identity, which is perhaps best exemplified by a number of speeches made by Eamon de Valera. His 1943 St Patrick’s Day address is an exemplar of the “traditional”, rural ideal that his Fianna Fáil government encouraged during their period in office. In the speech de Valera delivered the famous line ‘that Ireland, which we dreamed of, would be the home of a people, who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people with frugal comfort devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit’.<sup>44</sup> The consumer, in this view, should not expect or even desire material products, but be content to be a good Catholic and a good Irish citizen. Whilst Walsh is right to highlight the failure of this view to affect the reality of Irish consumption patterns or desires for material goods, we cannot easily dismiss the affect such ideals may have had on discourse relating to the Irish consumer.<sup>45</sup>

De Valera, in a speech made in 1932; the year Fianna Fáil came to power, called on the average Irishman to

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<sup>42</sup> Sean Lemass, *The Irish Independent*, 02 December 1936, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Eamon de Valera, “A Warning to Producers”, *The Irish Press*, 06 May 1935, 7.

<sup>44</sup> Eamon de Valera, “St Patrick’s Day Broadcast 1943”, taken from *Irish Political Documents 1916-1949*, eds. Arthur Mitchell and Pádraig Ó Snodaigh (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1985), 231.

<sup>45</sup> Annie-Marie Walsh, “Root them in the Land: cottage schemes for agricultural labourers,” ed. Joost Augusteijn *Ireland in the 1930s*, (Dublin: Four Courts, 1999), 66.

‘...give up the idea of having around him the cushions and all the rest that a servant in the mansion might have . . . If a man makes up his mind to go out to a cottage he had to make up his mind to put up with the frugal fare of the cottage.’<sup>46</sup>

This is quite a powerful metaphor for the new Irish nation. The Irish people have given up the ‘cushions’ provided by the British Empire, with striking their own course they must be content with a simple, frugal life. De Valera was certainly not the only person to express such views about the Irish nation and consumer. The concept of Ireland as a land where the spirit would dominate over the material was widely expressed.<sup>47</sup> Mrs Brigid Redmond, daughter-in-law of John Redmond (former leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party), and Fine Gael TD for Waterford, in article published in *The Irish Monthly*, stated that ‘the true Nationalist aimed at the reconstruction of the Kingdom of God in Ireland’.<sup>48</sup> She lamented ‘the tradition of a capitalist economic system founded on usury and mass production’ that had been imposed on Ireland by her ‘Imperial master’.<sup>49</sup> This view of materialism and consumerism can be taken as fairly typical of the Gaelic Catholic ideology, as well as, the paranoia, and ‘finger-pointing,’ at any potential British influence on the Irish economy or national spirit.

Yet, we can also find many examples that suggest pleasure-seeking was perfectly accepted and encouraged; examples suggesting that the matters of the soul were not always placed above consumer desires. In 1937 the *Catholic Bulletin* published an article which stated that, ‘the modern idea is to get as much pleasure with as little trouble as possible’.<sup>50</sup> It might be initially expected that such an article would express some moral panic over the virtue of the nation, but instead it simply extols the joys of picnics and encourages all mothers and daughters to engage in them when possible. Likewise, an *Irish Press* article carried the title ‘Buy Irish Chocolates and Candy for Halloween’.<sup>51</sup> The article claims that the holiday had been ‘stripped of its ancient terrors, blood curling stories, and superstitious practices’ and had instead become ‘a chocolate festival’.<sup>52</sup> Again some criticism could be expected here, either criticising the fact that a pagan festival is celebrated at all, or that it is now simply an excuse for materialism. However, the article is not condemnatory in tone, and

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<sup>46</sup> Eamon de Valera, “Speech made on 29 April 1932”, taken from ed. Maurice Moynihan, *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 154-155.

<sup>47</sup> Reverend Doctor Harty, “Unity Against Godless Materialism”, *The Irish Press*, 06 March 1933, 2; Out with Paganism”, *Leitrim Observer*, 20 January 1934, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Brigid Redmond, “Reshaping a Rural Society”, *The Irish Monthly*, Vol. 64, No. 754 (Apr., 1936), 263.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>50</sup> “For Mothers and Daughters”, *Catholic Bulletin* Vol. 27, January-June 1937, 558.

<sup>51</sup> “Buy Irish Chocolates and Candy for Halloween”, *The Irish Press*, 29 October 1932, 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

instead simply uses the opportunity Halloween provides to promote the sale of Irish confectionery.

Catriona Clear's work has demonstrated that, far from discouraging pleasure seeking activities or consumerist desires, most popular publications aimed at women actively encouraged consumerism.<sup>53</sup> Her work highlights the lack of any idealisation of housework by popular journals or books aimed at housewives.<sup>54</sup> There is an absence in discourse of any image of the self-effacing, self-sacrificing wife and mother in such publications, and quite to the contrary, we see many women extolling the virtues of conveniences and encouraging all women to make time for their own enjoyment. Clear provides the example of Mary Laverty, who, in 1935, wrote: 'there is something both pitiful and revolting about anybody who makes a god out of work'.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, at the annual conference for the Women's Guild of Transport and General Workers Union in 1933, Mrs John Cliff speaking of housewives said:

'burdens imposed by the care of children, washing, cooking, and other home duties prevented them from having a full and enjoyable life . . . every home worker should have a proper annual holiday free from all her usual responsibilities.'<sup>56</sup>

Care of the family is not presented here as the delightful natural duty of women, but an imposed responsibility that should be met sympathetically by society. The solution to the problem is a consumerist one; housewives should be given time to holiday, they should be allowed to indulge in the pleasures of the modern world.

The force of consumer desires, even as early as the 1920s and 1930s, should not be underestimated. A 1933 edition of *The Irish Press* carried on page two the headline for an article written by the Archbishop of Cashel, Rev. Dr. Harty, "Unity against Godless Materialism".<sup>57</sup> The article lamented the modern materialistic condition of Ireland and the world and hoped for a return to "traditional" Catholic values. However, it was sandwiched

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<sup>53</sup> Catriona Clear, *Women of the House – Women's Household Work in Ireland 1922-1961* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>54</sup> Catriona Clear, "No Feminine Mystique: Popular Advice to Women of the House in Ireland 1922-54", *Women in Irish History*, eds. Maryann Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd, (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997) 202.

<sup>55</sup> Mary Laverty, *The Irish Press*, 7 September 1935, quoted in Catriona Clear "No Feminine Mystique" Popular Advice to Women of the House in Ireland 1922-54", 202.

<sup>56</sup> Mrs John Cliff, Speech Annual Conference for the Women's Guild of Transport and General Workers Union, quoted in *The Irish Independent*, 12 July 1933, 10.

<sup>57</sup> Reverend Doctor Harty, "Unity Against Godless Materialism", *The Irish Press*, 06 March 1933, 2.

between two advertisements; one held the title “3 Lace Curtain Bargains” and the other “Just Look at these Frocks”.<sup>58</sup> Thus, even if we can locate examples of rigid moral doctrine, we must also note the ways they can be subverted, either purposefully or accidentally, by popular publications. The lay-out and design of a newspaper can serve to undermine what is imagined to be the dominant societal discourse, and there are as many examples of advertisements contradicting the rigid Catholic doctrine as there are supporting it. We must also ask in what ways such popular publications were read by the consumers who purchased them. Were the ideals of the Irish consumer and the Irish national spirit viewed with humour and derision by many who encountered them in newspapers and magazines? If we merely consider the discursive constructions of ideals we perhaps ignore the ways in which people related to such ideas, which provides the fuller picture of the functioning of ideology in society.

Evidently, however, there was a movable but definable line between what kind of consumer recreation was acceptable and what was unacceptable. This is most obviously seen in the furore over dance halls and jazz in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>59</sup> The crusade against such perverse pleasures, led by Catholic officials and nationalist organisations, such as the Gaelic League, centred on the moral decay that such pernicious foreign imports were having on the Irish national character.<sup>60</sup> Dance halls and jazz music were almost uniformly characterised as foreign, and unnatural to Irish people.<sup>61</sup> The Irish Catholic Directory, for example, described jazz music in 1924 as an importation ‘from the vilest dens of London, Paris and New York’.<sup>62</sup> It was this type of consumer recreation, perverse, morally bankrupt, and imported from the materialist British and Americans, that was the most troubling for the makers of Irish morality in the 1920s and 1930s. Certain forms of pleasure and consumerism were accepted, even if the general materialist acquisition of goods was considered un-Irish, but there was a clear line separating those pleasures from things unacceptable.

### **Some concluding remarks**

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<sup>58</sup> Advertisement “3 Lace Curtain Bargains”, *The Irish Press*, 06 March 1933, 2; Advertisement “Just Look at this Frock”, *The Irish Press*, 06 March 1933, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Dancing on the Hobs of Hell: Rural Communities in Clare and the Dance Halls Act of 1935” *New Hibernia Review* Vol. 9, No. 4, (Winter, 2005), 10-12.

<sup>60</sup> Jim Smyth, “Depravity and All that Jazz: The Public Dance Halls Act of 1935” *History Ireland* Vol. 1, No. 2 (Summer, 1993), 53.

<sup>61</sup> R.S. Devane, “The Dance Hall”, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, vol. 37 (Dublin, 1931), 23 ; Flann O’Brien “The Dance Halls”, *The Bell*, vol.1, no.5 (Dublin: publication, 1941), 4-5.

<sup>62</sup> *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1924, cited in the *Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, ed by Fintan Vallely, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 103.

This article has suggested that the concepts of the Irish consumer were shaped by discourses on Irish national identity and vice versa. The consumer was expected to “Buy Irish”, to fulfil certain obligations to the nation, and to be an aid in the development of the new Irish nation by serving the producer. Yet, it is also evident that discourses on the consumer were heterogeneous. Whilst certain responsibilities seem to have been demanded at the level of the ideal, certain rights, such as the right to a certain standard of product were also asserted. The consumer, it seems, was neither expected to reject material desires in favour of matters of the soul in the Irish Free State, and indeed, certain types of consumer pleasure were encouraged even by Catholic publications.<sup>63</sup> The rights of the consumer could be defended as vigorously as those of the producer by politicians. The varied and complex discourse on the Irish consumer suggests the extent to which the concept could function as political rhetoric. Politicians, business interests and newspaper editors had recourse to the rights and duties of the consumer as tools of political leverage. The heterogeneous nature of discourse on the Irish consumer can perhaps also suggest the varying and competing ideals of the Irish nation and its citizens.

Many of the article’s findings are comparable to other European societies in the 1920s and 1930s. Adam Arvidsson’s work on Fascist Italy has demonstrated the importance of consumption and the idea of the patriotic consumer in nation building processes.<sup>64</sup> The Italian Fascist government called upon their Italian citizens to demonstrate their patriotism through consumption; by the substitution of rice for pasta and beer for wine.<sup>65</sup> Fundamental concerns over the modern consumer society, including paranoia about excessive consumption, foreign imports, and forms of consumption, as well as the decline of traditional morality, were also seen across Europe. Berghoff has highlighted Weimar Germany as one such example, where the seeming advance of modern consumerism aroused deep suspicion about the future of the nation, and led to demands for restrained consumerism and a return to “traditional values”.<sup>66</sup> It is important not to overstress this connection, but it is also vital that the Irish example is

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<sup>63</sup> “For Mothers and Daughters”, *Catholic Bulletin* Vol. 27, January-June 1937, 558.

<sup>64</sup> Adam Arvidsson, *Marketing Modernity: Italian Advertising, from Fascism to Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 53.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Hartmut Berghoff, “Consumption Politics and Politicized Consumption: Monarchy, Republic, and Dictatorship in Germany, 1900-1939,” *Decoding Modern Consumer Societies*, eds) Hartmut Berghoff and Uwe Spiekermann (Basingstoke: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2012), 131.

placed within an international context, so that Irish history is not seen as a unique development.

There is great opportunity for further analysis into consumption patterns in the Free State. This essay has only provided the briefest of sketches on consumption during 1920s and 1930s Ireland. There is considerable scope for further research into concepts of the Irish consumer. In particular, a consideration of ideals of the female Irish consumer would greatly add, not only to the history of consumption, but also to the ways in which the strictures of Irish womanhood were created. Moreover, a greater nuancing of the class issues involved in the history of Irish consumption is necessary to problematize the varying roles and duties of the Irish consumer.

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