
Visualizing Irishness: The St. Patrick's Festival 2018

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Abstract

The traditional construct of Irish identity in post-Famine Ireland was based on a dichotomization of Irishness against Britishness. This version of Irishness, based on rurality, agrarianism, the Irish language, Catholicism and Gaelic sports, became the official national identity of the Irish state after independence in 1922. However, there has been a marked decline in the substantive basis of these components of Irishness, except for GAA sports, as Ireland developed from the 1960s into an urban, post-industrial, everyday English-speaking, secular liberal country, integrated into the EU and the global economy. Irish society has also been changed by immigration, with the percentage of non-nationals increasing since the mid-1990s reaching 11.6 per cent of the population in 2016 originating from 200 nations. These social changes – some gradual, other rapid – raise questions about the everyday meaning, and representation, of Irishness in contemporary Ireland, given the significant undermining of almost all the traditional official components of Irish identity. Following Fox and Miller-Idriss's claim that "national holiday commemorations are key sites for the affirmation and reaffirmation of national bonds" (2008, p. 546), this paper will draw on author-generated photos taken during the St. Patrick's Festival in Dublin, Ireland from 15-19 March 2018, including the main parade and other events, to explore visual representations of contemporary Irishness, and to interpret the meaning of these representations in the context of current debates about Irish and national identity.

Keywords: Visualizing Irishness, Irish Identity, National Identity, St. Patrick's Day

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