
Dan Lainer-Vos focuses on two important nationalist movements, the Irish and the Zionist, tracing their attempts to mobilize diasporic communities in the United States and establish large-scale fundraising apparatuses. He argues that the newly established fundraising organizations played a central role in the construction/constitution of the categories Irish and Jewish American. For Lainer-Vos, “[I]t is through participation in IVF [Irish Victory Fund] and UJA [United Jewish Appeal] activities that Ireland and Palestine became ‘homelands’ for millions of Irish and Jewish Americans” (p. 3).

The crises that the two organizations faced in the 1910s and the 1940s respectively—which were related to the *nature* of the fundraising mechanisms used to extract diaspora resources and the “deep-seated disagreements regarding the rights and obligations associated with membership in a nation” (p. 4)—ultimately led to the introduction of a new mechanism for fundraising: national bonds. But, while the Israel Bond project has been an unequivocal
success that offered a way for Jews in the United States to participate in the Zionist project, the Irish bond collapsed and ultimately severed the ties between Irish in the homeland and America (p. 5). One of the central contributions of the book is tracing the fundraising mechanisms of the Irish and the Jews and making sense of the relative failure of the former compared to the latter.

The question that the author focuses on is whether a national movement manages to portray a bond more as a gift than as an investment—recognizing that both bonds were a fusion of both elements. Building on Bourdieu’s insight—that the critical difference between gift giving and market exchange is the temporal gap between the gift and the countergift, Lainer-Vos draws an analogy to the time lag between subscription and redemption in the case of bonds. Within the latter period the bond organization has the ability to frame bonds as gifts, investments, or a fusion of the two (p. 143). The Israeli bond managed to create a zone of indeterminacy—with respect to technical as well as organizational issues—that was crucial for the cooperation between Israelis and American Jews and did not require agreement. On the contrary, in the Irish case “technical glitches and organizational mistakes” (p. 7) led to insurmountable disagreements over “the rights and obligations associated with contribution to the national cause” (p. 7). Thus, the unsettled ambiguities in the Israeli bond facilitated the development of national attachments, while the failure of “orchestrating the differences” to reach agreement in the Irish case led to the estrangement of the Irish-American diaspora. The conclusion that the author draws from this is that “absence of consensus and internal differences” are not necessarily impediments to nation-building. Instead, it is the strategy that each movement follows to reconcile such differences that accounts for success or failure in each case.

Lainer-Vos recognizes that both the Irish and Israeli movements combined elements of gift giving and market exchange in their construction of fundraising instruments. The divergence, which also accounts for the variation in success across the two movements, lies in the details. In particular, he suggests that we should focus on the variation in procedures for the sale and delivery of bonds as well as the interorganizational structure of the two efforts. “In comparison with the Israeli bond, the Irish bond was a simple, almost primitive financial instrument” (p. 131). But, although the author convincingly demonstrates important variation in the sophistication of the two bonds, the question is whether this is endogenous to the fact the Israeli effort took place following WWII, while the Irish effort took place in the 1920s—when the Republic of Ireland was not yet recognized by the United States. According to the author, the triadic configuration of the Israel bond brought about competition between the UJA and the American Financial and Development Corporation for Israel (AFDCI), thus allowing the state of Israel to appear “above” them and to disassociate from the tensions within the Jewish-American community. The dyadic configuration in the
Irish case—produced by the American Commission on Irish Independence (ACII) pushing out the Friends of Irish Freedom (FOIF)—precluded such an approach. In fact, this fallout with the FOIF forced the Irish movement to clarify the rights and obligations flowing from the bond and left no room for the productive ambiguity—the zone of indeterminacy that was characteristic of the Israeli bond. “This forced clarification rendered the differences between Irish and Irish-Americans visible and further fueled the dispute” (p. 141).

The author recognizes that the varying initial conditions these two cases faced and the fact that these efforts occurred three decades apart undermine his case selection (for a list of confounding variables and a case selection discussion see pp. 144–48). But Lainer-Vos asks the reader to focus on the processes, the agents, and the contingency that may have been equally—if not more—important in accounting for the observed variation in these two cases. For Lainer-Vos to be correct, he would have to convince the reader that the very interesting material he has unearthed is evidence that the existing explanations cannot account for the failure of the Irish attempt without taking into account the mechanisms that he has proposed. More difficult, however, is to disentangle the impact of these structural differences on the way that the mechanisms he is proposing played out. The reader is left wondering to what extent some of the interesting mechanisms delineated in the book actually serve as intervening variables or microfoundations of some of the structural conditions that explain the observed variation in the outcomes he is interested in explaining.

To be sure, the author emphasizes that he is not focusing in explaining why the Irish national movement failed while the Jewish succeeded but rather “to understand how national movements weave different groups into the national struggle” (p. 6). But this approach opens up a different issue: How typical are these cases compared to other diasporic communities within the United States, or across the different host states? For instance, both of these particular diasporas were—at one point in time—stronger than their respective nationalist movements operating overseas. In other words, it is unclear what the universe of cases is to which this argument applies.

The book ultimately provides a more convincing argument about why the Israel bond succeeded than why the Irish bond failed, as the latter seems overdetermined by structural conditions. At the same time, however, Sineus of the Nation constitutes a contribution to the historiography of the Irish movement and our understanding of the severance of the ties between Irish Americans and their homeland as partly endogenous to the tensions related to the Irish bond.

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