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### **Surnames in Northern Ireland: A Key to History and Identity**

"Nothing is more personal and closely related to one's identity than one's name—be it surname or name" (Penfield 1987: 118). In the United States, a 'melting pot' of global cultures and backgrounds, origins and ancestries can be determined from examining surnames. Daniella Martinez Jiminez believes that surnames say "a lot about your family background... there's a significance in that... I think it is also tied with the principle of independence and identity."

A dramatic loss of personal, national, and ethnic identity has ignited a violent conflict in Northern Ireland for more than 30 years. Surnames in Northern Ireland can denote origin, religion, and even political outlook, and because the conflict often scrutinizes one ethnic group or the other (in this case Protestant or Catholic), surnames publicize an otherwise private identity (Maxwell, Ian 2008). The Irish have immense pride toward their heritage, and are generally seen as having backbone and fight, having strong roots and strong names. themselves in their heritage and their person, which can be seen by examining the roots of their surnames. History is synonymous with identity in Northern Ireland, and therefore, to effectively understand why the Northern Irish have such a profound attachment to their surnames, it is important to understand their history. This paper will explore how history and identity play a role in surnames in Northern Ireland. Lack of literature on the subject has made the focus of the paper the overall Northern Ireland population, without focus on one gender or another.

Catherine Nash states:

'It is often said that people in Ireland are obsessed with their history. This supposedly unhealthy habit is often portrayed as the root of our problems. In fact, history is not the problem. History is essential, for without it we would be marooned from our heritage and our culture. What would your identity be without knowledge of your community or your past? History itself is not the danger, rather the way we use it and abuse it' (Nash, Catherine 2005).

According to Kanchan Chandra, ethnic identity is determined by descent based attributes, attributes that are acquired genetically or attributes that are acquired through cultural or historical inheritance, i.e. surnames" (Chandra). This pride in their genetic and historical background has forced the Irish into many conflicts, from ancient, small scale clan feuds to more recent, island wide internal wars, all of which contribute to their national history, and therefore their identity. In the 11th century, Protestants from Britain 'invaded' Ireland, which until that point had been ruled by a variety of Catholic clans. The British hastily condemned the barbaric nature of the Irish. The Irish were proud of their land and their heritage, both hard fought and maintained, so the British belittling their way of life caused conflict almost immediately. Eventually, Britain gained control of Ireland and forbade the practice of Catholicism also, denying Catholics the right to own land and livestock, to vote, and to be educated about their religion. The Irish were, in all legal terms, without a voice in their native country.

When the Irish Famine struck and people were starving to death countrywide, Protestant missionaries created soup kitchens to help those in need. However, the price of food was not free: to receive food, one had to convert to Protestantism and repudiate any connections to Catholicism. Catholics were faced with the decision to feed their family or to convert. Some risked starvation to retain their identities, while some converted to Protestantism. Often,

Catholics who converted were bullied, so in an effort to avoid embarrassment and ousting, many dropped the characteristics of their surnames that were identifiably Irish. Joyce Penfield states that "nothing is more symbolically attached to one's social image than one's name" (Penfield 1987: 118). For example, the O'Brien's would become the Bryan's, or the McCarthy's would become the Carty's. This effort to fit the mold of Protestant society diminished the heritage and independence that Irish Catholics associated with their surnames, and also caused immense frustrations. Orla Muldoon maintains:

To an extent, the struggle over identity can take on a similar meaning as the struggle over power or resources themselves, and as such it can be argued that collective identification plays a pivotal role in political conflict (Muldoon, Orla 2007).

The Catholic Irish frequently challenged what they deemed unjust circumstances over the years, but independence from Britain was not feasible until the Easter Rising in 1916. The Irish Free State was established in 1921, but only included the southernmost 26 counties. In the northern six counties, the population was made up primarily of Protestants who still supported retaining ties with Britain. Thus, Northern Ireland was created with a population divided by personal, religious, and national identity.

Catholics were upset that, with the creation of Northern Ireland, having a United Ireland was improbable and they were living in a society officially under British rule which meant they had lost their independence that the Republic still encompassed. Presumably, separation from the Republic caused crises surrounding personal identity- "Who am I? Who are we? Who are they?" (Conway 2003). Catholics and Protestants had to determine with which facets of this new Northern Ireland mix of culture and society they would/could relate to.

Women who change their name in marriage seem to be in a similar predicament as those in Northern Ireland who modify their names. "Marriage... a means by which a woman took on a male identity and consequently submerged her own identity" (Penfield 1987: 118). Carrie Ruiz discusses her view on changing her natal name in marriage. "I think that it's both cultural and also because I would have a huge problem switching... That's a form of possession... why would I change my identity?" She makes a valid point. Since a surname is such an important part of who a person is, being forced to change that, in turn, makes your individual identity shift and change too.

In the 1960's a civil rights movement aiming to better the Catholic situation gave rise to unrest and small-scale violence. The British Army was deployed to Northern Ireland, originally for peacekeeping purposes. Unrest between the Catholic community and the British Army soon escalated into a violent internal war. In response, The Irish Republican Army (IRA) was assembled, an armed force generally determined to dismantle Northern Ireland as a British entity and create a completely independent Ireland. Other paramilitary and activist groups formed with Nationalist/Republican/Loyalist/Unionist aims and began a campaign of violence that lasted for over thirty years, killing more than 3,600 people and injuring 30,000 more.

Identity, independence, and historical pride were huge factors during the conflict. Neither Catholics or Protestants were willing to stand down and let their history and identity be invalidated or discontinued. "People of Irish descent continue to remember their different family pasts" (Walter, Bronwen).

Ireland was one of the first countries to develop hereditary naming, where surnames are passed on generationally. Historically, a surname in Ireland began with adding Mac (son of), or O (grandson of) to the father or grandfathers existing surname, respectively. Although an

important part of the last name is drawn from paternal history, surnames with the prefixes Mac or O are given to females too. Following that, last naming practices evolved to include the occupation of the father, for example, Mac an Bhaird, or son of the Bard. Names were and still are very reflective of the people they belong to, illustrating both the lineage of the individual and their role in society. Now, the sources from which names are derived are almost endless: nicknames, physical attributes, countries, trades, heraldic changes, almost every object known to humanity (Blake 2011). The most popular Irish surnames, listed below, clearly represent these ancient Irish naming practices.

Irish	British
Murphy	Smith
Kelly	Jones
O'Sullivan	Williams
Walsh	Brown
O'Brien	Taylor
Byrne	Davies
Ryan	Wilson
O'Connor	Evans
O'Neill	Thomas
O'Reilly	Johns

The most common British surnames sound significantly different from the Irish ones. One reason for that is that Ireland and Britain have different first languages, Britain's is English and Ireland's is Gaelic. This situation is comparable Hispanic surnames to Scottish surname; the fundamental language is different so the names will be spelled differently and sound different. In Northern Ireland, if a surname sounds Gaelic, such as Ó Conghailaigh (O'Connolly) or Mag Aonghusa (MacGuinness), that person is likely to identify as both Catholic and Irish, where a person with a British surname in Northern Ireland would likely identify as Protestant and possibly British. There are, of course, exceptions, but the above generalizations are based on Northern Ireland stereotypes.

Belfast and Derry/Londonderry are the two largest cities in Northern Ireland. Belfast is primarily Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist while Derry/Londonderry is primarily Catholic/Nationalist/Republican. This is not to say all Protestants are loyalist or unionist and consider themselves British, or that every Catholic identifies as nationalist, republican or Irish. Five of the most common British surnames are also the most popular surnames in Belfast. This demonstrates that people who migrated to Britain often retained their original surnames. (see Figure 1). The most common surnames in Derry/Londonderry are less reflective of the primarily Catholic population (see Figure 1). That being said, McIntyre, Mccollum, and Ayton all have Irish roots and do reflect the current population of Derry/Londonderry, after name modifications and aliases were put in place to conceal identities.

Surnames in Belfast	Surnames in Derry/Londonderry
Wilson	Mcintyre
Jones	Ali
Beattie	Barry
Smyth	Browne
Johnston	Barnett
Smith	Clarke
Lowry	Mccollum
Mclaughlin	Ayton
Rice	Young
Moore	Watson

Figure 1-  
<http://surname.sofeminine.co.uk/w/surnames/391-belfast/most-common-surnames.html>  
<http://surname.sofeminine.co.uk/w/surnames/416-county-londonderry/most-commonsurnames.html>

Both members of the IRA and the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force), have surnames that directly reflect their heritage, and in this case both their political and religious views (See figure 2).

Most members of the IRA (Irish Republican Army) have names that are clearly Gaelic and Irish Catholic, which fits the stereotype of the paramilitary group during the Troubles (see Figure 3). The names clearly display the characteristics of old Irish naming practice, many containing 'Mc,' 'O,' or written in Gaelic. There is no specific list of members of loyalist and unionist paramilitary groups, but some of the well known UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) have surnames that are undeniably British in origin. Their names are phonetically different than the Gaelic names, and sound much more Western and British (see Figure 3).

Patrick McAdurey	Ruairí Ó Brádaigh
Proinsias MacAirt	Dáithí Ó Connail
Daniel McAnallen	Phil O'Donnell
Daniel McAreavey	Gearóid Ó Heára
Pearse McAuley	Éamonn O'Doherty
Jack McCabe	Sean O'Callaghan
Charles McCann	Thomas O'Donnell
James McCann	James O'Hagan
Tom McCann	Siobhán O'Hanlon
Martin McCaughey	Dessie O'Hare
Charles McChrystal	Danny O'Neill
Joseph McComisky	James O'Neill
Anthony McCooley	Edward O'Rawe
Tommy McCool	Anne Parker
Raymond McCreesh	Patrick Pendleton

Figure 2- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_members\\_of\\_the\\_Irish\\_Republican\\_Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_members_of_the_Irish_Republican_Army)

Gusty Spence
Jim Hanna
Ken Gibson
Tommy West
John Graham
Billy Wright

Figure 3- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster\\_Volunteer\\_Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulster_Volunteer_Force)

The study of surname frequencies across geographical areas can provide interesting insights into the structure of populations, helping to disentangle ancestral human movements, historic settlements, distant and local migrations (McElduff 2008). People from Wales, Scotland, and Britain migrated to Ireland hundreds of years ago, so surnames help in determining where ancestries lie. In Northern Ireland, there is a particularly low level of surname diversity because of the generally rural setting and small population size and density. Northern Ireland also has many physical and societal barriers that limit interaction and migration.

Recently, Karen Trew examined the various ways adults and children identify people in Northern Ireland. She found that adults generally determine a person's 'side' (Catholic or Protestant) based on one or more of four observations: their surname, their forename, the school that they attended, and their area of residence, skills taught generationally and by basic observations of daily life in a contested society (Trew 2004). "Houston Crozier, and Walker (1990) confirmed that most children do not acquire the skill of making ethnic discriminations based on names until they were at least 11 years old" (Trew 2004). The segregated school system

in Ireland seems to be enhancing the judgments children make about their peers. What American eleven year olds are more concerned with a person's ethnicity and validity than whether or not they have cooties?

Englishman John Loveday said during a visit to Ireland in 1732, 'So great is ye pride of these common people that if a woman be ye same name as some noble family she'll retain it in marriage unless her husband has as distinguished a name (Maxwell 2008).' Pride in their origins and their personal histories caused the Irish to engage in a war that ravaged their homeland and, arguably, modified their personal and familial identities. Surnames are an important part of any ethnic group, and Northern Ireland is no different. Surnames tell a story: who a person is, who their ancestors were, where they are from, what they think, how the world perceives them.

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