



Centre for International Borders Research



Institute for British-Irish Studies

Papers produced as part of the project

**Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways:
routes to North-South cooperation
in a divided island**



**DIASPORAS AND AMBIGUOUS HOMELANDS:
A PERSPECTIVE ON THE IRISH BORDER**

Kevin Howard

Project supported by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and administered by the Higher Education Authority, 2004-06

WORKING PAPER 12

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MFPP Working Papers
No. 12, 2006

(also printed as
IBIS working paper no. 62)

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ABSTRACT

DIASPORAS AND AMBIGUOUS HOMELANDS: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE IRISH BORDER

This paper proposes a diaspora framework as a useful way of conceptualizing the relationship between the kin-state and northern Irish nationalists. The formation of diasporas is generally understood as being a consequence of migration. People migrate across borders and construct communities in their host states while maintaining a strong sense of linkage with the nation's homeland. The homeland is central to diaspora. However, homelands are political constructs the parameters of which fluctuate. I argue that members of the northern nationalist community are outside the political homeland of their Irish co-ethnics as a result of boundary drawing rather than emigration. The paper highlights the rapidity with which the southern political elite consolidated southern statehood reflecting and further reinforcing a clear sense of north-south differentiation. Decades of divergent state building has further reinforced the relevance of the boundary in terms of southern ethnic identity, further emphasizing the rhetorical nature of calls of re-unification.

Publication information

Revised version of a paper presented at the workshop on "The Irish border in perspective", Queen's University, Belfast, 1 October 2004, as part of the programme *Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways: routes to North-South cooperation in a divided island*.

The programme is funded by the Special EU Programmes Body through the Higher Education Authority over the period 2004-06.

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INTRODUCTION

A central objective of the *Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways* research project is to evaluate the impact of partition on those minorities who find themselves in states which they had no hand or part in creating and to which they owe no allegiance or obligations. Drawing on the work of Rabinowitz, five features characterise these populations which he describes as “trapped minorities”:

- **Oppositional histories:** the events that the majority celebrate as the key moments in the empowering of their group are regarded by the minority as signifying defeat and loss.
- **Double marginality:** the majority of the host-state regards the minority as a fifth column of an external state. At the same time, the minority is outside the nation-building project of the external kin-state and marginal to its concerns.
- **Distinctive memorialising:** the events that the trapped minority memorialises as marking its historical experience of marginality are not commemorated in the kin-state.
- **Non-assimilating:** rates of exogamy between minority and majority remain low despite convergence between minority and majority in terms of life-styles and values.
- **Internal fragmentation:** within the minority tensions exist as to the optimum political strategy. Working with and within the host-state legitimises it. Abstention reinforces the suspicion of the majority towards the minority (adapted from Rabinowitz, 2001: 72-78).

Rabinowitz's focus is the Israeli-Palestinian population but, clearly, this set of criteria has some relevance to northern Irish nationalists. However, the notion of a trapped minority is unnecessarily restrictive when applied to this group. This paper proposes that northern Irish nationalists are more usefully understood as a component of the wider Irish diaspora. The primary reason for this is that conceptualising northern Irish nationalists as a trapped minority implies a focus on the internal relationship between the minority and its host-state. Moreover, the notion of a trapped minority suggests a degree of coercively imposed territorial concentration that does not fit the conditions pertaining in Great Britain and Ireland. The common travel area formalised the long-standing reality of no official restrictions on movement within these islands; the Irish citizenship regime is open to northerners, both nationalist and unionist; Northern Ireland is not a state in the classic Weberian sense, since ultimate power resides in London which acts in its own interests in ways that can con-

flict with those of the local unionist majority; and northern Irish nationalists have a sovereign, independent kin-state, quite unlike the Israeli-Palestinians, as well as a bloc of influential co-ethnics in the wider Irish diaspora. The identities of the Irish outside independent Ireland—including the Irish in Northern Ireland—have been mediated through the often-conflicting experience of socialisation in “homeland” orientated and host-state orientated institutions. While not wanting to homogenise the people of independent Ireland, there is a shared experience of socialisation in an overtly Irish public space and set of institutions that has not been the experience of people outside independent Ireland. At the same time, the kin-state fully accepts the border separating independent Ireland from Northern Ireland and *de facto* always has. For a multitude of reasons therefore, from this perspective northern Irish nationalists can be conceptualised as part of the wider Irish diaspora—co-ethnics, but outside the political homeland and independent Ireland's imagined community and with an ambivalent relationship to both.

Smith (1999) sets out a schematic representation of the multifaceted context within which the politics of diaspora needs to be understood (see figure 1). It is within a conceptual framework such as this that the relationship between independent Ireland and northern Irish nationalists is best understood in that it compels attention to the complex interactions of a multiplicity of political actors. The remainder of the paper therefore will briefly examine each of these analytical categories before focusing more specifically on independent Ireland's relationship to the border and to northern Irish nationalists.

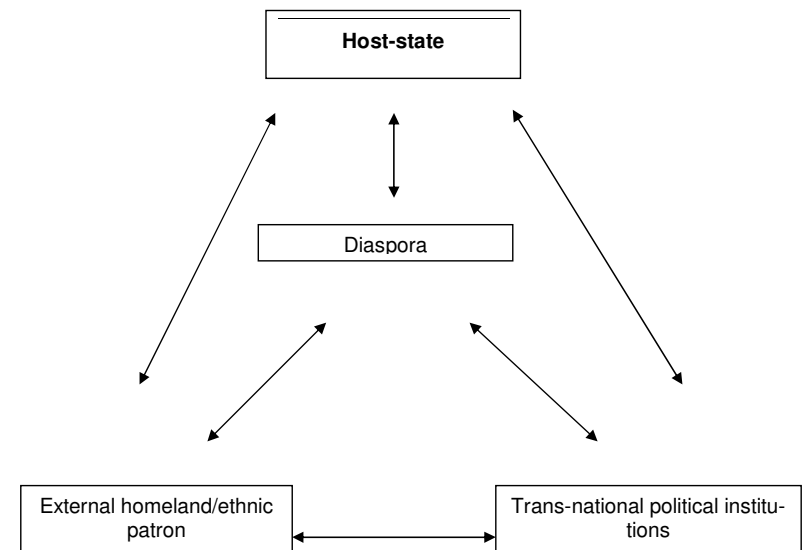


Figure 1. A schematic representation of diaspora politics

Source: adapted from Smith 1999: 505

THE RATIONALE

The impetus for this discussion emerged from a re-reading of the Dáil debates in relation to the December 1925 agreement between the Dublin, Belfast and London governments. As far as the political elites governing the Free State, Northern Ireland and the UK as whole were concerned, this agreement effectively closed off any prospect of revision of the boundary between northern and southern Ireland. The boundary defined in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, was not envisaged as a permanent division, at least not by the Dublin or London governments, and article 12 of the Anglo-Irish treaty committed the relevant parties to undertake its revision. The northern government was not party to this treaty and it is clear that from the beginning it had no intention of revising Northern Ireland's territorial parameters in any way that it perceived as inimical to its interests. Conflicts over and transfers of political sovereignty engender profound changes in the political, economic, cultural and administrative functions of existing boundaries. Since the second world war, at least in Europe, examples of boundary lines being drawn *ex-nihilo* are very rare, the Green Line dividing Cyprus, and that demarcating the Republic of Srpska are prominent exceptions.¹ More commonly, what has happened is that the salience of existing boundaries has changed. The line demarcating Northern Ireland is an example of how existing county boundaries were transformed into the boundary separating two sovereign states. What is striking about the 1925 Dáil debate is the seeming alacrity with which the southern government accepted the "facts on the ground" of the island's partition along the boundary line of the 1920 act. While striking, this is not perhaps surprising; the balance of power was such that the southern government could do little to change the status quo—even if the political will had been there to do so. However, the Dáil debates show clearly that the political will was not there.

What is perhaps more surprising is the sanguine indifference to the fate of the Irish nationalist population in Northern Ireland. This attitude of *laissez-faire* is all the more surprising given that Irish nationalism has long been regarded as a paradigmatic example of irredentism. Irredentism, as Conversi argues, is:

Often considered one of the most dangerous forms of nationalism precisely because it unremittingly identifies nation and state. Minorities which are supposed to be stranded abroad or to have drifted apart from their homeland are expected to be re-deemed ... [Irredentism] conceives the nation as an organic, homogenous whole, all members of which are supposed to dwell under a common political roof and to bow to a single authority (Conversi, 2003: 266).

¹ The website of the government of Srpska adopts a tone of indignation in describing the entity's borders thus, "The frontiers of the Republic of Srpska have been defined by the internationally recognized border with Yugoslavia and the Republic of Croatia and the inter-entity boundary with the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Both these lines were established with no regard to basic principles of delineation between peoples (ethnic, historical, natural-geographic, functional-economic, military-strategic)"; see www.vladars.net/en/srpska/index.html [2006-04-05].

This paper suggests that in relation to independent Ireland northern nationalists, far from being in *irredenta*, are more usefully conceptualised as a "component" of the global Irish diaspora. In general, usage of the term diaspora conjures up images of migration, forced or otherwise. However, the northern nationalists correspond to what Brubaker describes as an accidental diaspora. These are created as a consequence of boundaries moving over people rather than people moving over boundaries (Brubaker, 2000). Northern nationalists offer a particularly interesting example of a group that is outside its kin-state without having migrated. Correspondingly, independent Ireland can be understood as a kin-state whose irredentism has operated at the rhetorical rather than practical level. Since partition, independent Ireland can be seen as having moved from a position of *laissez-faire* to pro-active engagement on behalf of the northern Irish nationalists. *Laissez-faire* corresponds to the greater part of the state's history, that is, when rhetorical irredentism was at its most vociferous. The transition to pro-active engagement has corresponded with the decline in formal irredentism, both processes reaching a highpoint in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the point at which the independent Ireland dropped its formal claim on the territory of the north while institutionalising the all-Ireland dimension.

HOST-STATES, MINORITIES AND MIGRANTS

Although partition marked out an overwhelmingly Catholic Irish Free State, and a Protestant majority Northern Ireland statelet, neither was ethnically homogeneous. Social scientists engaged in the analysis of ethnic diversity have often presented the 26-county Irish state as approximating to the "ideal-type" nation-state. North Korea, Iceland, and Ireland are the usual suspects when the straw-man of an ethnically homogenous state is being set-up. In the case of the Republic of Ireland this is an increasingly inaccurate characterisation given the contemporary crystallization of minority ethnic groups amongst economic migrants and people fleeing persecution. Nor is it an entirely accurate characterisation for the period between independence and the upsurge of immigration in the 1990s. A small Jewish community, the indigenous Travellers and the Protestant descendants of British colonisers constituted distinct minorities in "mono-ethnic" Ireland (Fanning, 2002). Nonetheless, the characterisation is not without some merit. In the 75 years between independence and the mid-1990s, non-SWIC (Settled, White, Irish and Catholic) minorities declined significantly in size in a state in which a SWIC ethos has dominated. In other words, before the Celtic tiger, independent Ireland was approximating ever more closely to the ideal-type nation-state. The non-Catholic component of the population of 26-county Ireland had declined steadily from the 1920s, reaching a low point in 1996. Since then, it has grown slightly both in terms of absolute numbers and diversity as a consequence of immigration from the UK, as well as from European, Asian, African and American source countries (CS0, 2002).

Whatever accommodations have been reached with newly arrived minorities, it could be argued that immigrants stand in a different moral relationship to the state than do indigenous groups. All states operate as mechanisms of exclusion, differentiating between an included minority and the rest of the world's population, and it is migrants that experience first hand the state as a mechanism of exclusion (Panayi,

2000). This can range from encounters with officialdom at the state's access points to its territory (including airports, ferry ports, customs posts, border crossings) to experiencing the differential entitlements available to citizens and non-citizens. In addition, citizenship regimes are continually adjusted in response to immigration (Joppke, 1999). States, by definition, operate hierarchies of entitlement and systems of closure that seem difficult, if not impossible, to justify morally. Nonetheless, there remains an aspect of voluntarism in immigration that is absent in those instances where minority groups are formed as a consequence of boundary changes over which they had no hand or part.²

The example of Ireland shows how rapidly the ethnic make-up of a state can change both as a consequence of the movement of boundaries and or the movement of people. Partition rescaled the potential for inter-ethnic communal conflict from the island to the six-counties of Northern Ireland. In so doing it created a *relatively* ethnically homogenous independent Ireland that was becoming more homogenous in the 70-plus years between independence and the advent of the Celtic tiger. Following years of ethnic consolidation the Irish state now has to integrate a growing population that is unlikely to assimilate into the dominant ethnic group. Ireland is once again facing the challenge of accommodating ethnic diversity, though this time the territorial solution is not really open. It remains an open question as to how successfully independent Ireland will accommodate ethnic diversity. In Northern Ireland of course the problem of ethnic diversity was of a different order. Northern Catholics were not migrants. The northern state did not seek to pro-actively reconcile their indigenous minority to the new state and its institutions. Ghanem identifies two models of regimes that cope with ethnic problems:

The Democratic Model structurally and essentially prefers democracy and equality over ethnic considerations in the treatment of its citizens; and *The Ethnic Model* structurally and essentially prefers ethnic affiliation as the criterion for the treatment of citizens and determination of their rights, with one group and its members being preferred over others within the state (Ghanem, 1998: 429).

For Ghanem, Israel and its treatment of the Palestinian minority "trapped" in metropolitan Israel is a clear example of the "ethnic model".³ The state is a self-consciously Jewish state, yet the Israeli-Palestinians are indigenous to the territory; more so than the three million migrants who have arrived in Israel since the state was founded in 1948.⁴ Israeli-Palestinians are formally Israeli citizens but the content of this citizenship is significantly different to that of non-Arab Israelis (Lustick, 1993). The public space is inscribed with expressions of Jewish identity, "Jews can look on its [Israel's] symbols, values and institutions as their own, derived from their

² This can be overstated in that there are numerous situations in which people have migrated to escape extreme hardship or even death. To argue that this is an individual's free choice is true at one level (at least for adults) but it could reduce the notion of choice to vacuity.

³ This population has increased eight-fold since 1948, from 156,000 to 1.2 million, and now comprises 19% of Israel's population.

⁴ The actual number as of 1 July 2005 was 2,958,066; see The Jewish Agency for Israel, available www.jafi.org.il/alyah1/ [2006-04-05].

own heritage" (Ghanem, 1998: 432). Yet, despite this, the Israeli-Palestinians are embedded in Israel. It is the structures of the Israeli state that frames their possibilities. Ruane makes the distinction between *foundational* and *practical* legitimacy (Ruane, 2004: 119). As the term suggests, foundational legitimacy refers to the manner in which the state came into being in the first place. Practical legitimacy refers to the acceptance of the state's institutions, and the context within which struggles to improve the minority's lot have to take place. The Israeli-Palestinians have not chosen exit, their practical acceptance of the legitimacy of Israel is obvious; their demand for voice is *in Israel as Israelis*. As Rosenfeld puts it:

There isn't the shadow of a doubt that Israeli governments have laboured overtime to earn the antipathy of the Palestinian Arab citizens ... a highly nationalistic, "statist", state in action ... Still, the Palestinian citizens factually, legally, remain "territorialized" (land, homes, house plots, garden plots, etc.), live with kin within communities that are linked through intermarriage, friendships, work relations, religion, nationality, geographical concentrations, political parties, national roof organisations ... there was never a suggestion by Arabs of solving their dual (or multiple) "identity" ... outside the state's boundaries (Rosenfeld, 2002: 1090).

Moreover, the demand for and crystallisation of Palestinian nation-ness outside metropolitan Israel introduces an intra-Palestinian cleavage. In practical terms there is little action undertaken to transcend this cleavage. For obvious reasons migration on the part of the Palestinians in Israel to the West Bank-Gaza is virtually non-existent. The parallels with the northern nationalists can be overdrawn, but for present purposes the primary similarity is the lack of any input on the part of the indigenous minority into demarcating the boundary that came to delineate the political space they inhabit. Put differently, Israeli-Palestinians and northern nationalists are the primary losers in the coercively imposed borders that frame their possibilities. The manner in which the state relates to these groups is a litmus test of its democratic credentials. The refrain that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East is continually heard. The northern statelet's claims of democratic legitimacy are foundational to unionist mythology. In situations where the drawing of political boundaries results in the creation of an indigenous minority there is an obligation on the state to pro-actively protect the interests of the minority group; not to do so compromises the regime's claim to be democratic. Brubaker deploys the term "nationalising nationalism" to describe the style of politics in newly independent or newly re-configured states. These states implement compensatory policies designed to reinforce the identification of nation and state: "the core nation is understood as the legitimate 'owner' of the state and it is conceived as the state *of* and *for* the core nation". Brubaker applies this description to the contemporary successor states of the Soviet Union (in particular the Baltic states) and to an earlier cluster of nation-building states that emerged in the inter-war period, Poland in particular. The kin-minorities are the ethnic Russians and ethnic Germans respectively. Brubaker does not mention Ireland, but as James Anderson has suggested the further east one goes the closer the fit to Ireland. Brubaker's nationalising nationalism, similarly to Ghanem's ethnic model of democracy, describes very well the regime that emerged in Northern Ireland as a consequence of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920.

DIASPORAS

There has been a remarkable increase in recent decades in the social science usage of the ancient concept of diaspora. For instance, there is no diaspora entry in the 1983 edition of Raymond Williams's well known *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (Williams, 1983). A simple keyword search of the US Library of Congress's database using the term diaspora in the title of works also proves revealing. There are 101 entries for all the years prior to 1960; the overwhelming majority of these works deal with the Jewish diaspora. The number of entries increases throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and really takes off in the 1990s with 550 entries for that decade alone, and 480 for the four years 2000-4. The historical and contemporary experience of the Jewish diaspora, particularly its relationship to the state of Israel, continues to feature prominently in the social science literature (Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2003). Many of the contemporary discussions of diaspora start off with the observation that there are millions of people in the world today outside their countries of origin. This is obviously the case: the often-quoted figure is 200 million.⁵ Much of this migration is forced—people fleeing war, famine and natural disasters. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are globally over 17 million people of concern to the organisation. This includes both internally displaced and trans-state refugees.⁶ At one level these are extraordinarily large numbers of people, each with a personal, poignant and often tragic history of displacement. Yet the US Bureau of the Census calculates the world's population at 6.5 billion persons.⁷ This means therefore that over 97% of the world's people are not trans-state migrants or internally displaced refugees.

The overwhelming majority of the world's population are resident within the borders of the states in which they were born. Closer to home, statistics from the CSO show a remarkably sedentary population. In 2002 the majority of people in Ireland (70%) lived in the counties in which they were born. The Irish picture is skewed somewhat in that while Irish rural to urban migration followed the general post-war European pattern, the cities and towns to which Irish country people migrated are in Great Britain and the USA. There are hundreds of thousands of Irish-born migrants permanently outside the state who hence would not show up in the CSO's figures. Nonetheless, the general point is that trans-state migration is not the norm for the overwhelming majority of the world's people. The entire land surface of the globe is demarcated into different political territories or, as in the case of Antarctica, is jointly managed by states. Despite so-called globalisation, and the academic commentary that goes with it, state boundaries frame the context of the lives of all of the world's people in one way or another. Indeed, to be stateless is in many practical ways to be a non-person.⁸ Moreover, while modern technology has speeded up travel and

⁵ The e-journal *Catholic Online* (www.catholic.org [2005-06-21]) gives a figure of around 175 million people residing outside their countries of origin, in an article titled *As the World Migrates*.

⁶ www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home [2006-04-05].

⁷ www.census.gov [2005-07-09].

⁸ The other key point is that trans-state migration is not new. Between 1880 and 1924, 30 million people from all parts of Europe migrated to the Americas. In terms of Europe's population at the time this was a

revolutionised communication, the modern state's capacity for surveillance and for exclusion has also been greatly enhanced.

Inter-state migration (setting aside the special case of the EU) is logistically easier but far more constrained by state imposed restrictions than during the years up to the start of the first world war. So, while trans-state migration has attracted a lot of attention from social scientists, for which the term diaspora has become a useful though misleading shorthand, it is in global terms a minority activity.

William Safran stresses that it is important to maintain a distinction between merely dispersed populations that may for temporary and instrumental reasons play up transnational connections and "real" diasporas. For Safran, the "celebration of hybridity" literature that has appropriated the term diaspora misrepresents the nature of the diasporic experience:

[S]uggesting that there are individuals who *would like to be* members of a diaspora, with all the insecurities, ambiguities, and neuroses associated with that condition, is much like suggesting that "Life is Beautiful" in a concentration camp ... If one wishes to create some sort of order in the discussion of diaspora, one must begin by raising questions about what sort of ethnic, national, or religious groups it should refer to that distinguishes them from mere immigrants (Safran, 2003).

For Safran the diaspora experience is, ultimately, one of contingent belonging. The members of the diaspora in their locales are not and probably never will be fully accepted by the host population amongst whom they are settled. This is based on and reinforces a sense of mutual difference between the diaspora and the host-populations. Politically, the remedy to this ever-present danger is best achieved through the establishment of a homeland state to which the diaspora can migrate if need be and which the diaspora ought to support, and which in turn can engage pro-actively on behalf of members of the diaspora. Robin Cohen (1997) builds on Safran's insights in developing a list of criteria to draw up a typology of diasporas. For both Cohen and Safran the paradigmatic example of a diaspora remains the Jewish people both in terms of its history and its contemporary relationship with the kin-state, the post-1948 state of Israel. Israel is pre-eminent amongst contemporary kin-states (we leave aside the examples of Sierra Leone and Liberia) in that it was formed for the diaspora, and in large part by the diaspora.

Beyond this agreed starting point there are differences between Cohen and Safran. Cohen's aim is to move beyond what he describes as the victim tradition, primarily associated with the Jewish, Armenian, Palestinian, African and Irish examples of forced movement, dispossession and exile. Diaspora is derived from the Greek and its literal meaning is "to sow widely". In its original usage it referred to the Greek communities scattered across Asia Minor, and in this sense there are no necessary negative connotations; diaspora merely means dispersal, and diasporas are just

massive migration. Indeed, Terry Coleman (1992) argues the possibility of migration, and an awareness of the openness of new-world borders dominated European consciousness in the late 19th century. Migration was the ever-present possibility and practical option for millions of Europeans

geographically dispersed groups maintaining some form of co-ethnic solidarity and mutual identification.⁹ So, while for Cohen, being at home abroad can be a positive, life-enriching experience, he regards migration as essential to diaspora. Safran on the other hand does not regard migration as necessary. He equates “the Russian role as protector of the safety of its stranded brethren in the Baltic” with the Israeli fight against global anti-Semitism. He also refers to the Hungarian government’s recently introduced status law that grants “special benefits to the extraterritorial Magyars living in Romania, a policy that could be interpreted either as an example of ethnic solidarity or as a form of political pressure falling short of irredentism” (Safran, 2003: 6).

Both the ethnic Magyars and ethnic Russians are outside their kin-states as a result of imperial implosions rather than migrations. For Safran what is important is not so much how people get to be within a particular political space but rather the nature of the relationships within and between those political spaces. Although the formation of external kin-minorities through migration (forced or otherwise) is usually a drawn-out process, diasporas established through the movement of boundaries is rapid. As in the case of the imploding Soviet Union, virtually instantaneously, the status of ethnic Russians was transformed from that of membership of the dominant nationality who had little need to accommodate the local titular nationality to membership of a minority in states now dominated by the titular national group. For both Safran and Cohen diasporic relationships are not simply between the “trapped minority” and the host-state but are multifaceted, involving additionally the ethnic homeland and co-ethnics in other sites of settlements.

THE AMBIGUOUS HOMELAND

Central to the concept and the sociological reality of diaspora is a shared “homeland”. It is the homeland above all else that provides the shared point of reference between what by definition is a diverse, scattered and often tenuously linked population. Yet these homelands can be of quite recent vintage. So much is this the case that there are even websites devoted to the “Australian diaspora”. Australia is generally regarded as one of the classic countries of immigration: the site of settlement of millions claimed by *inter alia* the Irish, Greek, Italian and Chinese diasporas. However, the “homeland” in the websites dedicated to the Australian diaspora is unambiguously Australia. The European and Asian origins of the majority of the

⁹ Ethnic difference has become a positive right and even the descendants of migrants generally regarded as having assimilated into their host-state’s societies are deploying the concept of diaspora in asserting claims to an ethnic heritage. At the same time states have either unilaterally or under the pressure of expatriate lobbying increasingly deployed the notion of diaspora in developing kin-state/external co-ethnic connections. Across the globe there is a growing realisation amongst states that expatriate communities can be positively utilised. Both processes are facilitated by modern means of communication and the politics of diaspora is shorthand to describe the development of these transnational linkages. There has been a proliferation of official government websites dedicated to diaspora affairs; for instance, the Chinese, Indian and Armenian governments host diaspora websites. These examples represent long-established classic diasporas but there is even a range of Australian diaspora websites. Non-governmental sites, organised by Sikhs, Irish, African-Americans, Palestinians, Russians, Italians and others have proliferated on the web.

Australian population are ignored. Australia, a classic country of immigration, is now presented as a diasporic homeland.¹⁰ Put simply, while the familial metaphors of homeland, fatherland, motherland, and so on evoke roots and longevity, “homelands” are, above all, political projects of flexible provenance. Territory has no meaning other than that ascribed by human action. The distinction between bona fide boundaries and boundaries by fiat is more apparent than real. In each of the five classic victim diasporas that Cohen identifies, “the homeland” cannot be unambiguously identified. Israel’s expansionism is justified with claims that the “true” Jewish homeland stretches between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean.

As Lustick has shown, this ideology ascribes a spiritual importance to what was generally regarded, by many if not most Israelis up to the 1970s, as occupied territory. A similar flexibility characterises the Armenian homeland. Does the homeland of the Armenians comprise the territory of the pre-Christian Armenian empire; is it the area occupied by the 12th-century Kingdom of Cilicia; is it the heartland of Anatolia ethnically cleansed of Armenians in 1915; or is it the contemporary Armenian state demarcated by the Soviet authorities in the early 1920s? For Armenians outside the Armenian state, particularly the Armenian diaspora in the USA, the return of the “lost lands” of Anatolia, especially Mount Ararat, is a long-standing aspiration (Anderson-Paul, 2001). The Armenian political elite in the former Soviet Republic of Armenia on the other hand is keen to play down territorial claims against Turkey. Where is the homeland of the African diaspora? Does it necessarily have to be in Africa or could it, as the black separatist group the Nation of Islam demands, be carved out from the territory of the USA? For the Nation of Islam the homeland of African-Americans would be a space they controlled and would be, by definition, free of whites. What about the migrants from the Caribbean, dispersed throughout Europe and the Americas and interchangeably described as people of the African and Caribbean diasporas—where is their homeland (Goldbourne and Solomos, 2004)? If segments of the occupied territories become the site of a sovereign Palestinian state it is likely that over time this will become the Palestinian homeland. The Israeli-Palestinian population is regarded as historically and culturally part of the Palestinian people who live in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Palestinian diaspora. For the Israeli-Palestinians the kin-state has yet to materialise. However, if and when it does, the Israeli-Palestinians could then become part of the wider Palestinian diaspora without having moved at all. Where, more problematically perhaps, is the homeland of the Irish diaspora? Is it “Ireland”, the internationally recognized, sovereign state with its clearly defined boundaries, or is it “Ireland”, the island, the second largest island in the Irish-British archipelago? While the homeland is the central motif for contemporary diasporas, its precise location is often contested and contingent. What these ambiguous homelands highlight is the importance of borders as the containers of states in which national identities become most fully institutionalised.

¹⁰ <http://www.southern-cross-group.org/austdiaspora/overview.html> (2 August, 2005). At a very basic level, all human beings could be ascribed membership of the “African diaspora”; however, as the Australian example indicates the parameters of any diaspora are notoriously flexible. The Irish diaspora for instance ranges in size from 40 to 100 million depending on the commentator.

TRANS-NATIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

In situations of powerlessness it is not surprising if minorities look towards outside agencies to help articulate their grievances and promote their interests. A kin-state is the obvious example, but there are other agents to which minorities can turn. The diaspora itself can be seen in these terms, that is, an external agent to which a minority can appeal in its struggles against its host state. Shain and Barth for instance refer to a World Bank study published in 2000 on the role of diasporas in ethnic conflicts. The study concluded that “the risk of renewed conflict is around six times higher in societies with the largest diasporas in America than in those without American diasporas” (Shain and Barth, 2003: 449).¹¹ In addition to the diaspora there is a plethora of more formally institutionalised agencies to which minorities can turn. These include, historically, the League of Nations, and in the contemporary world the United Nations (UN); the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN); the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); the African Union (AF); the League of Arab States (AL); and the Organisation of American States (OAS).¹² The UN is probably the most widely used and best-known agency to which minorities can appeal. We recall the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) ruling on the barrier that the Israelis are constructing, ostensibly to protect metropolitan Israel against attacks launched from Palestinian territory. For the Palestinian Authority the ICJ’s ruling provided the basis for an appeal to the UN aimed at securing a Security Council or General Assembly censure of Israel. A General Assembly censure duly came and the Israeli government dismissed it. The effectiveness of these multi-state organisations at protecting the interests of minorities has been extremely variable. Nonetheless, supra-national entities are regarded as having some competence and at least a normative authority in adjudicating majority-minority relationships.

The supra-national entities identified above as having some meditative or even interventionist role in advancing the interests of an ethnic minority have had little or no input in Ireland. The Irish Free State from its inception lobbied to secure membership of the League of Nations as a way of expressing, and securing recognition of, *de facto* independence. Kennedy has argued that:

The admission of the Irish Free State into the League was a rite of passage into the international community. Admission was a vindication of Irish claims for national self-

¹¹This has particular relevance for the British-Irish conflict. Irish nationalism from the Fenians onwards has drawn significant support from Irish-Americans (O’Halpin, 2004). The influence of Irish-America can be overstated, varying radically over time. However, the Irish-American example highlights two things: firstly, the importance of the particular host-state; secondly, the importance of maintaining a distinction between migrants and diasporas. The Irish diaspora in the USA has generally been of far more value politically to Irish nationalists on both sides of the Irish border, and to the Irish state, than the Irish diaspora in Australia or Great Britain. This aspect of diaspora politics is not new. The international importance of the USA and the tradition of ethnic lobbying in the USA enhance the importance of USA-based diasporas (Shain and Bristman, 2002).

¹² All these organisations have websites which stress their role in conflict mediation and resolution: www.un.org, www.osce.org, www.aseansec.org/home.htm, www.nato.int, www.arableagueonline.org, www.oas.org [2006-04-05].

determination ... the process of Ireland’s admission to the League is a microcosm of the early days of the state itself (Kennedy, 1996: 42).

This is a telling and poignant observation; the pursuit of League membership was a vindication of the Free State’s sovereignty. The League’s role as a champion of the interests of minority groups was not exploited by the Irish Free State, whose role as a kin-state was limited and always subordinated to consolidation of the 26-county state.

IRELAND AS A KIN-STATE: THE 1925 DEBATE

The southern state’s abrogation of its kin-state role is not fully explained by the asymmetrical power-relationships that forced the leaders of the Irish revolution to accept the partition treaty of 1921. By December 1921 Northern Ireland, and the boundary that delineated it from the rest of Ireland, were facts on the ground; the territorial division was fixed before the Free State came into being. The Dáil debate over the acceptance of the 1921 treaty revolved around the oath; Article 12’s creative ambiguity was barely commented on (Foster, 1988; Laffan, 2004). Northern nationalists on the other hand were alarmed and confused by the Dáil’s endorsement of the 1921 Anglo-Irish treaty with its formally contingent acceptance of the boundary contained in the 1920 Act (Phoenix, 1994; 2003). Their disquiet was confirmed four years later. In December 1925 the Dáil voted to accept an amendment to the 1921 treaty, thereby endorsing the boundary of 1920. This was primarily in exchange for a resolution of Article 5 of the 1921 treaty that obliged the Free State to compensate people for property losses arising from the Irish war of independence. In effect, from the perspective of northern nationalists and their supporters they had been “sold”.

In introducing this amendment William Cosgrave stated that,

[T]he [Boundary] Commission from our point of view failed utterly to achieve the results for which it was constituted ... We may as well be honest with ourselves. For two generations ever since the national consciousness first manifested itself in the demand for self-government, the problem of the northeast was a constant menace ... This was the genesis of Article 12. It was a formula designed ... to prevent the coercion of a minority within that minority (*Dáil debates* 13: 1301-03).

According to Cosgrave, once the boundary commission’s findings had been leaked the southern government could either accept them and put them into effect “by withdrawing our administrative machinery from those areas transferred to Northern Ireland and moving into those areas ceded to us”, or

Resort to the arbitration of force. The second was clearly unthinkable and would rive the country asunder. There would be an outcry from *our people*, hostile feelings would be aroused, the Treaty position would be challenged and the security, aye, the very existence of *our nation*, would be shaken ... This was not a party question: it was a question of the nation ... political separation is an accomplished fact ... our decision to put this barren question of the Boundary behind us *once and for all*, and turn our faces towards new methods and new developments ... is surely a course more in

harmony with the intentions of the Treaty than the perpetuation of a fruitless wrangle as to where a boundary between Irishmen is to be drawn (emphasis added) (*Dáil debates* 13: 1303-05).

Cosgrave is making a clear distinction between the southern population, the nation, and those beyond the Free State's borders. Parenthetically, this is a very civic conception of the nation. The state's boundaries are the parameters of the nation. In relation to northern nationalists, the December agreement contained nothing that would protect their interests as an external minority in a hostile state. The protection of the nationalist minority had been a key feature for Irish nationalist negotiators engaged in framing the 1921 treaty and was continually broadcast right up until the December agreement. Cosgrave argued that the position of the northern nationalists was the first consideration in negotiations. The fact that the December 1925 agreement contained no provision for protecting the interests of northern nationalists was explained thus:

I believe that there is only one real security for minorities, and that is the good will and neighbourly feeling of the people among whom they live. Next to this, written guarantees are scraps of paper, and sometimes irritating scraps of paper which kill in spirit what they profess to secure in words. There are no such written guarantees in the Agreement, because those present at the negotiations were resolved that the minority should have the only real security, which is, as I have said, to be sought only in neighbourly feeling (*Dáil debates* 13: 1306-07).

At one level this is obviously true in that there are plenty of examples of the formal guarantees of minorities being overridden. At the same time, the Executive Council implied a vantage point superior to that of the northern nationalists, who were not well placed to see the bigger picture and how their own real interests would be better protected without any formal minority policies agreed between north and south:

I believe a new understanding is growing up, and that such an understanding is, as I have said, more valuable than written guarantees ... We have arranged that for the purposes of dealing with certain matters of common concern the two Cabinets should meet together. These meetings must inevitably tend to remove prejudices and allay anxieties and to promote better understanding ... the nationalists of the Six Counties can assist in this development by becoming a link instead of a wall of partition between Dublin and Belfast (*Dáil debates* 13: 1307).

Deputy Professor Magennis best exemplifies the scorn with which some politicians regarded the "partition as the path to unity" idea:

The President asks us to believe that conferences from time to time will bring about [re-]unification. I have not the power of imagination which would enable me to picture triumphant Ulster, confirmed in its victory, yielding any of its acquired powers to the Free State, because, from time to time, some of our Executive Council dined with some of Ulster's Executive Council and, over the dinner table, assumed for the nonce a spirit of friendliness (*Dáil debates* 13: 1336).

In relation to the northern nationalists, Magennis was equally withering of the December agreement and the Executive's rationalisation:

You have left to the wolves our fellow Nationalists in the North ... [The Free State negotiators] either under duress ... sacrificed the nationalist population of the North, or they forgot about them. It would be more difficult to say which was more criminal ... We shall never be able to convince the Northern nationalists that their rights were not sold for price ... I am quite sure, when the Irish people have got time to consider it [the December agreement] in detail and to realise what has been done to them, when the day of general election comes the day of retribution will have arrived (*Dáil debates* 13: 1338, 1340, 1351).

The responses of the Executive Council were rather contradictory. For Kevin O'Higgins, the Boundary Commission was never a particularly good idea; moreover had it pushed the boundary line further north this would:

Leave the nationalists north of that line in a smaller minority than is at present the case, leaving the pull towards union, the pull towards the south, smaller and weaker than is at present the case. Is that *summum bonum*? (*Dáil debates* 13: 1359)

The logic of this line of argument is that the southern government ought to have looked to have the boundary drawn in such a way as to take in more of the Free State thereby increasing the pull southwards. On the other hand, O'Higgins argued, any tinkering with the 1920 boundary was certain to lead to violence. In this case, he asked rhetorically, when the interests of all Ireland conflicted with the "interests of the inhabitants of a particular set of square miles within the country, which should go to the wall?" (*Dáil debates* 13: 1359). It could be argued that partition itself was the consequence of putting the interests of the inhabitants of a particular set of square miles above those of the country as a whole. Nonetheless, O'Higgins robustly defended the "partition as the path to unity" claim. The southern government's acceptance of the boundary and its disinclination to act as a pro-active guardian of the northern nationalists brought:

Nearer the unity of Ireland ... there is no other course that will lead so surely or so swiftly to the unity of the country which we all desire [any other course] ... could but evenom and embitter the relations between the people of the North and the people of this State, and could not but postpone indefinitely the ideal of political unity (*Dáil debates* 13: 1368-9).

The northern nationalists are absent from this conception of "the people of the North". The Labour Party deputy, T J O'Connell dismissed with colourful disdain the Executive Council's unity through partition assertions.

The Deputy who votes for this is, for the first time, voting for the permanent partition of this country, and it is all moonshine to say that this is going to lead to permanent unity. How will it lead to permanent unity? Along what road will it lead to permanent unity? The position is that the nationalists in the North are in the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water ... these people, to put it bluntly, have been sold (*Dáil Éireann*, Vol. 13 col. 1421).

Captain William Redmond (nephew of John Redmond, leader of the old Nationalist Party) argued that the Nationalist Party had been accused in 1914 of having sold the north of Ireland; whether that was true or not then there was "no doubt about

this time. It is not only sold, but it is literally sold. We actually have the figures in black and white" (*Dáil debates* 13: 1458). For Esmonde, endorsing the treaty amendment bill, in addition to making partition permanent, was "to sell into slavery so many hundreds of thousands of his [the President's] co-religionists" (*Dáil debates* 13: 1705). Despite the emotional hyperbole, the Dáil voted by more than three to one to accept the terms of the December 1925 agreement amending the original 1921 treaty; the proposed Council of Ireland was abandoned, Article 5 settled and the boundary of 1920, contingently accepted in the 1921 treaty, was finalised. Kennedy argues that "by signing the December agreement, Cosgrave may also have given *de facto* recognition to Northern Ireland and, though he disagreed with it, he had certainly reluctantly accepted partition" (Kennedy, 2001: 20).

Magennis's confident prediction was that the Irish electorate would punish the government at the ballot box. This did not happen. The southern elite's abandonment of the northern nationalists formed part of what John Regan has described as the "Irish counter-revolution" (Regan, 1999). He argues that the Irish government's representatives:

[N]egotiated the [December 1925] London agreement confident in the knowledge that their parliamentary party would accept the *status quo* with regard to the border, embrace a favourable financial settlement of Article 5, and not worry unduly about the fate of the minority population in the North (Regan, 1999: 255)

Claire O'Halloran is forthright in characterising the southern state's attitude to the northern nationalists as one of undisguised irritation.

Northern nationalists were regarded as outsiders, and often troublesome outsiders, who made excessive demands on the southern government. From the outset, the need to break what was seen as the northern minority's dependence was an increasingly important motivating force behind government policy (O'Halloran, 1987: 133).

Notwithstanding the fact that northern nationalists were strongly pro-Treaty, they were the clear losers in the revision of the Treaty—a perceived betrayal that according to Phoenix "marked their irrevocable alienation from the Cumann na nGaedheal administration" (Phoenix, 1994: 334).

CONTEMPORARY AMBIVALENCE

In sharp contrast to its role in the five decades following partition, successive Irish governments since the late 1960s have become more pro-active on behalf of the Irish nationalist minority in practical terms, while moving towards the explicit, formal acceptance of Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the UK. This pro-active engagement on behalf of the nationalist minority can be seen as reflecting less the decline in the salience of international boundaries than their actual sanctity. The overwhelming support of Irish nationalists in the south, or at least of those who voted, for the Good Friday Agreement and the constitutional amendments it entailed can be interpreted as an acceptance of partition coupled with a set of provisions and safeguards for the northern nationalist minority's political aspirations and ethnic

identity. Such safeguards were absent from Northern Ireland's initial political and administrative framework. The first leaders of the Free State considered such safeguards as of little value; in the contemporary period, it is precisely these ethnic safeguards that are held up to the British/Ulster nationalists in Northern Ireland as guarantees of how the Good Friday Agreement would protect their interests in an united Ireland. Irish nationalists present the Good Friday Agreement as the template upon which moves to unity can be modelled. For the present, however, the constitutional issue—which state has formal sovereignty over the territory—has now been fully accepted by all parties concerned. As Desmond O'Malley has put it, for contemporary nationalists in the Republic, a "lot of what we were told were core values is gone" (O'Malley, 2001: 2). Irish formal irredentism, exemplified in pre-1998 Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution has been abandoned, and the principle of consent accepted. The acceptance by all parties of formal British sovereignty, and the further acceptance that Northern Ireland (uniquely in the UK) can determine its own political future (albeit, ironically, by crude majoritarianism), allows for the negotiation of other second-order concerns. These second-order concerns can include the aspirations of national minorities to maintain and or develop connections with their kin-homelands.

Northern nationalists as a community do not stand in any special relationship to the Irish state. Citizenship is equally available to both Irish nationalists and British nationalists in Northern Ireland and of course to the descendants of Irish immigrants scattered across the world—automatically to the first generation and on application to the second generation. The proposal for the political representation of northern nationalists, as such, in the Oireachtas has been a perennial but has always been denied. There is a discretionary possibility open to the Taoiseach of allocating Seanad seats to people from Northern Ireland. In addition, the report of the seventh All-Party Committee on the Oireachtas proposed that Northern Ireland Westminster MPs might have a limited right of audience within the Dáil with the stipulation that any such participation should take place on a cross-community basis with parity of esteem for the different communities in Northern Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2002). These provisions do not constitute a northern nationalist voice in parliament. Moreover, although a northern nationalist is the current President of Ireland her fellow northern nationalists had no input into her election. The all-party Oireachtas Committee observed that:

The presidency has, particularly over the past decade, acquired a distinctive role in reinforcing the connection between the state and the wider Irish family beyond its boundaries ... [and] for those living in Northern Ireland who wished to do so, playing a part in electing a President would be a concrete expression of their Irish identity ... [However], while holders of the office may have, very properly and very effectively, used it to reach out to the wider Irish family, the President nonetheless remains, in formal terms, the head of the state as it now is. To extend the franchise beyond the state might, if perhaps in a less controversial way than would be the case in Dáil elections, again be held to blur the distinctions accepted in the Good Friday Agreement, and to call into question the sincerity of our commitment to it (Government of Ireland, 2002: 54).

The same report considered the case for emigrant representation in the Oireachtas. Indeed, the consideration of emigrants and northern nationalists were dealt with together; the committee considered it desirable that “the treatment of citizens overseas be in broad step with the treatment of citizens in Northern Ireland” (Government of Ireland, 2002: 58). What the report makes clear is that northern nationalists, similarly to emigrants, are *ex-patria*.

In terms of southern popular opinion as it relates to the north, the British Council’s 2003 survey of Irish attitudes to the UK prove revealing (British Council, 2003). This survey was conducted amongst university educated Irish adults under 40—the so-called “successor generation”. On the one hand, the survey’s presenters suggest that southern respondents did not consider Northern Ireland as part of the UK: “When asked to name regions of the UK only 35% mentioned Northern Ireland spontaneously, which may indicate that many respondents don’t include Northern Ireland in their mental map of the UK” (British Council, 2003: 37). On the other hand this may indicate nothing of the sort; rather, it may suggest an inchoate map-image of the UK. For instance, 20% of the survey’s respondents had visited the South East yet only 15% mentioned it spontaneously as a region of the UK. Only 15% spontaneously mentioned the South West, 14% mentioned the Midlands and Yorkshire and only 10% mentioned the North East. Indeed, of the 10 regions of the UK only four (London, Scotland, Wales and the North West) scored higher than Northern Ireland. In other words, “successor generation” respondents were more likely to identify Northern Ireland as a region of the UK than four other regions located in Great Britain.¹³ When it came to first hand familiarity with Northern Ireland, none of the respondents had ever lived there, although 14% had family and friends that did, and 50% had visited. This contrasted strikingly with London, where 16% of the respondents had lived, 58% had friends or family and 84% had visited.¹⁴

The survey’s recording of opinions regarding the likelihood of Irish reunification and the implications of such a development also proved revealing. A majority of respondents, 68%, repeated the ritualistic assertion of being in favour of a united Ireland. On the other hand, only a minority, 36%, believed there would ever be a united Ireland; an almost equal number, 35%, believed there would never be a united Ireland; while the rest, 29%, indicated that they did not know one way or the other. Moreover, the consequences of such an eventuality were regarded with, at best, ambivalence:

¹³ When attitudes to the UK were explored further, the responses amongst the successor generation to the other regions of the UK repeat well-worn clichés prevalent in the UK itself: “Surrey ... all the hunting and horsey set”; “Where Cheltenham is very horsey”; “A lot of unemployment in Newcastle and places like that in the North”; ... “most people in Liverpool are hated by the English”; “You would have to look at Wales as major scenery, valleys and mountains”; ... “in Scotland ... they have a huge working class population” (British Council, 2003: 44-45). The comment of one respondent “I think the Irish always think the Scottish and the Welsh are against the English” would not be unusual in the home counties. While all of these observations may be accurate the stereotypes the Irish have of the UK regions are very much stereotypes found in the UK regions.

¹⁴ London, Scotland and the Northwest have historically been the main destinations of Irish migrants.

A United Ireland would break *this* country in two—think about it—even basic things like the roads, *their* roads are way better than ours

Northern Ireland is just different. Everything about it—the people, the infrastructure, even *their* clothes, *their* way of life, *they are different people*

I don’t think a United Ireland will work. *It would destroy us if they came to Ireland ... I can’t see it working* (emphasis added; British Council, 2003: 37-40)

The impact of the border on this reading has been to accentuate a southern, 26-county, sense of national identity. Ascertaining how representative of southern opinion these selectively culled quotes are requires further research. At the same time, Catholics in Northern Ireland also display marked ambivalence in relation both to reunification and their Irish identity. The 2003 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey indicated that nearly one-fifth of Catholics (19%) favoured Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK. On the other hand 60% stated that if a referendum on reunification were to be held immediately they would vote in favour. This ambivalence is likely to derive from multiple sources, one of which is the perceived inequity of the Republic’s social welfare infrastructure. As one northern Catholic put it, “we would like reunification if we could keep the National Health Service”. The survey also asked people to speculate if they thought Irish re-unification was likely to happen within 20 years. Although a majority of Catholics were in favour of immediate reunification, the majority, 60%, also thought it unlikely even within 20 years. Somewhat ironically, and perhaps reflecting the pessimism of Protestant attitudes to the Good Friday Agreement, more Protestants than Catholics (37% and 31% respectively) thought a united Ireland was likely over the same time scale. Protestant opposition to reunification remains resolute. A mere 3% indicated it as a preferred option. These contrasting figures indicate that most but not all Catholics would favour reunification but consider it unlikely over the medium term; Protestants remain radically opposed to reunification but a greater proportion of Protestants than Catholics fear that it might actually come about.

What does appear to have cross-community support is the concept and practice of power-sharing. When asked “How much do you agree with this statement: Any Northern Ireland Government should have to ensure that Protestants and Catholics share power”, 8% of Protestants disagreed though only 1% strongly, 9% wouldn’t say and 80% agreed. Amongst Catholics only 1% disagreed, 2% wouldn’t say and 97% agreed. For the no-religion group the figures were 2%, 6% and 90% respectively (Kennedy and Farrington, 2003: 115). Too much weight can be placed on sketchy interpretations of small scale survey results, but the above figures do support the more generalised though nebulous perceptions that on the one hand Northern Ireland can no longer work as an exclusively Protestant state for a Protestant people, and on the other, that it can no longer be regarded as the fourth green field temporarily and illegitimately detached from the Gaelic Catholic motherland. British nationalists have been forced to accept the so-called Irish dimension, and Irish nationalists have been forced to accept the so-called British dimension, and both have been forced to accept the multidimensional character of Northern Irish society. The compromise that has emerged from this means that Northern Ireland is

a unique region in the UK; its people have the explicit guarantee that they can determine their region's constitutional future. The way is open for Northern Ireland to exit the UK and join the Republic. Yet, the Republic has dropped its explicit territorial claim on the north and the so-called successor generation, the perceived source of the Republic's future political elite, articulates a radical sense of "otherness" about the north and northerners in general. There is a distinct sense that the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland do not constitute the same country. Northern Irish nationalists represent a branch of the Irish diaspora, close in terms of territorial contiguity and institutional linkages but, as a consequence of partition, outside the homeland.

CONCLUSION: THE "RED-HERRING" OF UNITY?

Voices from across the political spectrum north and south continue to claim that the re-unification of the island is inevitable. Re-unification, however, can have a multitude of meanings. A re-unification of the island's transport network, for instance, has no necessary constitutional implications. For traditional republicans on the other hand, the border has disrupted the functional unity of Ireland and the rectification of this is the prelude to constitutional reintegration. As with other teleological accounts of socio-political development, the "inevitability of Irish unity" relies more on faith than on evidence. The Good Friday Agreement is regarded by the Republic's government as the template to bring about unity in this functional sense, but the question as to whether or not this will lead to political reunification is left open.

In the run-up to the 2005 Westminster parliamentary elections in Northern Ireland both the SDLP and Sinn Féin published discussion documents on unity. Both parties called on the Irish government to produce a green paper setting out what it saw as the means to bring unity about. The SDLP's publication of its discussion document has to be seen in the general context of the election campaign and as a specific response to Sinn Féin's publication in February 2005 of a green paper on Irish unity. Sinn Féin's stated primary political purpose is to create a united Ireland. From Sinn Féin's perspective, one stage along a route to possible reunification would be "participation by people resident in the North, in the democratic life of the nation" (Sinn Féin, 2005). This would include "Northern representation in the Houses of the Oireachtas and voting rights in presidential elections".

As we saw above, the All-Party Committee on the Constitution rejected these aspirations in 2002. However, in the wake of the IRA's declaration in July 2005 that its "war" was over, Sinn Féin's demand that northern MPs being given the right to partake in Dáil debates and sit on Oireachtas committees was not dismissed out of hand by the government. Instead, the Fianna Fáil government used the line-holding tactic of proposing another committee to look at the issue. The response amongst opposition TDs was lukewarm at best. One Fine Gael TD wryly noted that Sinn Féin wanted participation in an assembly to which it was not elected, the Dáil, but would not participate in an assembly to which it was elected, the House of Commons. Sinn Féin also called on the Fianna Fail government to publish a green paper on how it

saw re-unification being achieved. The government dismissed this as a red-herring; as far as it is concerned the template for unity is the GFA.

The content of the IRA's statement announcing the end to its armed struggle laid heavy emphasis on unity:

Our decisions have been taken to advance our republican and democratic objectives, including our goal of a united Ireland ... The IRA is fully committed to the goal of Irish unity and independence and to building the republic outlined in the 1916 Proclamation ... to bring about independence and the unity of Ireland (IRA, 2005).

The response of independent Ireland's Taoiseach to the question as to whether or not reunification was realistic in the medium term is a paradigmatic example of ambivalence that has been characteristic of southern political elites' attitudes to the border since December 1925:

I hope ... we can move to a situation where the cooperation ... on this island, on things that make sense to cooperate on, like we're doing at the moment on tourism, on matters of trade, on things like electricity, and, on health issues, we should continue to try to build up our confidence over that period of time. And then ... *in another time, people might, on the basis of consent, see that a united Ireland is the right thing to do. It's not going to happen in the short term and I don't think it'll happen in my political lifetime* (emphasis added; Bertie Ahern, BBC, *Today*, 29 July 2005).

Murray and Tonge argue that on any reading the prospects of political unity through the GFA are remote (Murray and Tonge, 2005). Cross-border cooperation and all-Ireland functional integration will by definition lead to all-Ireland unity across many dimensions. Moreover, all-Ireland unity has substantially remained across a range of civil society domains. The rectification and improvement of all-Ireland infrastructural projects to which both the British and Irish governments are committed will be largely funded by the Irish (Ahern, 2005). This may or may not lead to political reunification, though any claim about inevitability is problematic. Nonetheless, the future is open. As late as 1996 analysts were suggesting that the election of a Sinn Féin TD to the *Dáil* was an unlikely event. A decade later, Sinn Féin is tipped to double its present total of five TDs. Its primary vision has not changed. Whether it can bring both the southern electorate and northern electorates around to its view that the people of this island constitute one organic, homogenous whole that ought to dwell under a common political roof and bow to a single authority remains an open question, though the suggestion in this paper is that this is unlikely. At the very least, it will require unionist consent; it is inconceivable that, even if census politics delivered a majority in Northern Ireland in favour of leaving the UK and if a majority of the people in the south voted for all-Ireland political re-unification, unionists would be "forced" into a united Ireland. To paraphrase William Cosgrave 80 years ago, "we may as well be honest with ourselves ... [without partition] the problem of the Northeast was [and is likely to remain] a constant menace [to our nation's political stability]".

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