



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**



**NATIONALIST MYTHS: REVISITING HESLINGA'S
"THE IRISH BORDER AS A CULTURAL DIVIDE"**

Kevin Howard

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

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MFPP Working Papers
No. 16, 2006

(also printed as
IBIS working paper no. 66)

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ABSTRACT

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This paper offers a critique of MV Heslinga's argument that the geographical structure of these islands has for millennia served to funnel interchange in an east-west direction, resulting in a deeply embedded cultural cleavage between the northern and southern regions of both Ireland and Great Britain. This form of geographical determinism lends itself to contemporary British/Ulster nationalism's case for the naturalness of partition. In this way, it mirrors the geographical determinism of Irish nationalism. Both deploy geography in the service of political projects that are fundamentally grounded in recent political events the outcome of which was neither predictable nor inevitable.

Publication information

Paper produced 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

Nationalist narratives by their nature tend to explain social and political change as inevitabilities. Contingent events and unforeseen consequences are re-interpreted as the outworking of national destiny. The political partition of the island of Ireland is the most visible consequence of the failure of both British nation building in Ireland and the UK as a multi-national political entity, as originally conceived (Lustick, 1993; O'Leary and McGarry, 1993). Yet, from the perspective of Irish nationalists, the dismemberment of the UK in 1921 is the inevitable consequence of a centuries-long and continuous struggle for Irish freedom. The separation of 26 counties of Ireland from the UK to form the Irish Free State was seen as inevitable. So too was the reunification of the island under one independent political authority. The fact of nearly a century of separate development north and south was regarded as a temporary hiccup. A fascinating aspect of assertions of inevitability is the way in which they can shape the universe of possibilities—predictive claims can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Heslinga's interpretation of the partition of Ireland falls into this category. His interpretation is the mirror image of Irish nationalists, in that it lends itself very well to British nationalists who regard partition as necessary: as based on the incommensurability between Irish and British cultures. Heslinga asserts the historical inevitability of partition. He argues for a deeply embedded cultural boundary between the northern and southern regions of both Ireland and Great Britain. He argues that the primary component of these divergent cultures is religion, a division no older than the reformation. Heslinga therefore lends support to the political partition of Ireland in two ways. On the one hand, he argues, there is the ancient cultural distinctiveness of the "north"; on the other hand, there is Protestantism. The implication is that these two social forces—regionalism with its roots in pre-history and religion with its roots in the sixteenth century—overlay and reinforce each other; hence the "rightness" of the Irish-UK land border. As Heslinga puts it:

In my opinion the main problem is not why the majority of the "Six Counties" refused to cut their constitutional links with Great Britain and throw their lot in with the people of the "26 Counties", but rather why the majority of the people of the "Thirty-Two Counties" desired to withdraw from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. However that may be, the two questions come to virtually the same thing: both Separation and its immediate aftermath Partition ultimately derive from religious cleavages (Heslinga, 1971: 203).

Yet, the most entrenched ethnic boundaries in these islands (at least amongst the "white" population) are *intra*-northern boundaries. In neither England nor Wales, nor

the Republic of Ireland, has division remained as endemic as in Northern Ireland, and to some extent in Scotland. Heslinga's account, even in its 1979 edition, reissued 10 years into "the Troubles", has virtually nothing to say about why religious background has such little resonance in the other regions of these islands. Being a "white" Catholic in England and Wales does not carry any significant cultural and or political baggage. This mirrors the position of the Republic's "white" Protestant community, who have assimilated, becoming as ethnically Irish as the rest of the Republic's people (Coakley, 2002). In Scotland, as we shall see below, the relevance of religious background is the subject of intense debate between those who argue that religious background is no longer important and those who argue that anti-Catholic discrimination remains endemic. However, the salience of the various aspects that make up group identities in these islands has less to do with regionalism and religion per se and much more to do with the interaction between evolving political institutions and the populations over which they rule.

REGIONALISM AND CULTURE

Heslinga lays particular emphasis upon the physical structure of these islands as one of the causal factors in engendering regional cultures. In an era when land was heavily forested and communications difficult the sea acted as a highway rather than a barrier. The close proximity of coastal areas, as in the case of southwest Scotland and northeast Ireland, coupled with the physical barrier of hill ranges as between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, functioned to facilitate kin connections between the coastal regions which, Heslinga argues, scholars often miss:

It would seem that there is among scholars in the Republic some reluctance—unconscious rather than conscious—to lay stress on the north-south contrasts which are as inherent in early Irish history, secular and ecclesiastical, as they are in modern history...*even if the ancient north-south divisions arise from different causes than the modern political conflict* (emphasis added, Heslinga, 1971: 18-19).

It is a huge leap from the asserted north-south contrasts to the "modern political conflict". The British presence in Northern Ireland represents the living, breathing consequences of sporadic attempts to bring Ireland under Anglo-Norman, then English and later British political control. The absorption of waves of Norman, Elizabethan, and even Cromwellian and Williamite, soldiery and settlers into the Irish population is well known. Despite its brutality, verging on genocide, the Elizabethan attempt to pacify Ireland through the plantation of English colonists across Munster was ultimately a failure (Berleth, 1978). Elizabethan colonists particularly in that southern province were encouraged with extravagant promises of expropriated plenty. However, ethnic structures change slowly (Ruane, 2003), and in a sense these were reluctant colonists. While the colonists benefited from the institutionalisation of differential entitlements that served to reinforce group distinctiveness, the critical mass needed to alter the ethnic structure of the southern Irish provinces did not develop. With the exception of those members of the numerically small but politically powerful Ascendancy, the waves of colonisers that did settle in southern Ire-

land where largely absorbed and have become part of the “indigenous” Catholic population.

The strongest resistance to Elizabethan attempts at colonisation came from the northern clans and a new round of plantation followed the breaking of this resistance. As Heslinga argues, the style and pattern of settlement in the north was different to that of southern Ireland. The same underlying security concerns provided the rationale for the colonisation of northeast Ireland but in this instance there was a ready and willing population of Scottish settlers:

That the Plantation of Ulster succeeded where other ambitious undertakings failed, is primarily due to the fact that it was mainly—and spontaneously—carried out by Scots. It was, by contrast to the previous—and later—undertakings of that kind, essentially a Scottish undertaking instead of an English one (Heslinga, 1971: 155).

The descriptor “the sea-divided Gael” captures the sense of a pre-reformation cultural closeness that linked the peoples of the north Ireland and western Scotland. While the “Irishness” particularly of the Highlands was played down by eighteenth-century Scottish nation-builders (Trevor-Roper, 1983), recent years have seen a revival in the notion of northern, cross-channel Celtic consanguinity. The contemporary, and often overtly commercial, branding of inter-isles “Celticism” has intertwined with two mutually antagonistic political projects: on the one hand, the London-led project of re-reconciling the Celtic periphery of the UK to the union state, and, on the other hand, the project of Scottish nationalism; both projects assert their Celtic credentials (Nairn, 2000; McCrone, 2005; Osmond, 2005).¹ Scottish nationalism in particular, which at its foundation was predicated on anti-Irishness (Gallagher, 1987), now presents independent *Ireland* as a model of what a small independent country can achieve, particularly in the context of the EU, and *the Irish* as co-Celts protecting and asserting their cultural identity in the face of remorseless Anglo encroachment.² London’s espousal of “Celticism” fits into the post-1997 project of re-branding the UK as a multi-ethnic state accommodating of and at ease with its diversity (Parekh, 2002).³ The fluctuations of assertions of Celtic consanguinity highlight the way in which macro-level changes in one domain “spill over” into other domains.

Notwithstanding the modernity of the Irish-UK separation, Heslinga argues that the political boundary and adjacent border zone correspond more or less with a historical and deeply embedded cultural frontier zone that separates the north of Ireland from the south of Ireland. Moreover, this cultural frontier runs east to west. According to Heslinga there is a cultural unity between the northern regions of the islands

¹ For example, the Celtic League in rugby football, the slogan of which is “three nations, eleven teams, one passion”; see the Celtic League’s website for history and organisation www.celticleague.com [2006-04-14].

² Nationalistic fiction such as the film *Braveheart* explicitly plays up the bonds of kin loyalty and hence humanity between the “ordinary” Scottish and Irish, contrasting this to the barbarism of English imperialists and the perfidiousness of home-grown elites.

³ A project that was somewhat mothballed after September 11 and that is being intensely debated at the time of writing.

of Ireland and Great Britain. This historically important east west linkage differentiates the northern regions of the archipelago from the southern regions:

The land boundary is also more of a spiritual divide than is the sea boundary in the sense that the people of the Republic on the whole feel less attached to the people of the rest of Ireland—or rather to the majority of Northerners—and their way of life, than to the people on the other side of the Irish Sea—or rather the English and their way of life. The land boundary, to some extent, may be interpreted as a cross-Channel extension of the Scottish border as it marks off, in a rather arbitrary way, the “scoticized” part of Ireland against the anglicised part (Heslinga, 1971: 101).

Conversely, according to this interpretation it could be argued that the Scottish and English land border marks off the “Irishized” part of Great Britain from the Anglo-Welsh rump.

PROTESTANTISM AND THE UNION STATE

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of a set of boundaries delineating the people of the Irish-British islands based on Heslinga’s analysis. While acknowledging the crudeness of this schema at the outset, and the way in which discussing it reinforces a rigid “groupness”, it nonetheless provides a way conceptualising at an abstract level the implications of Heslinga’s analysis for inter-group relationships in these islands.

The groups are constructed according to four criteria: religion (Catholic or Protestant); state (UK or Republic); region (England-Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland); and ethnicity (English, Irish, Scottish “Ulster”). On Heslinga’s reading the most intractable cleavage should be between Scottish and Ulster Protestants and Republic of Ireland Catholics. This is because a multiple range of dimensions of difference (legal nationality, region of residence, ethnicity and religion)

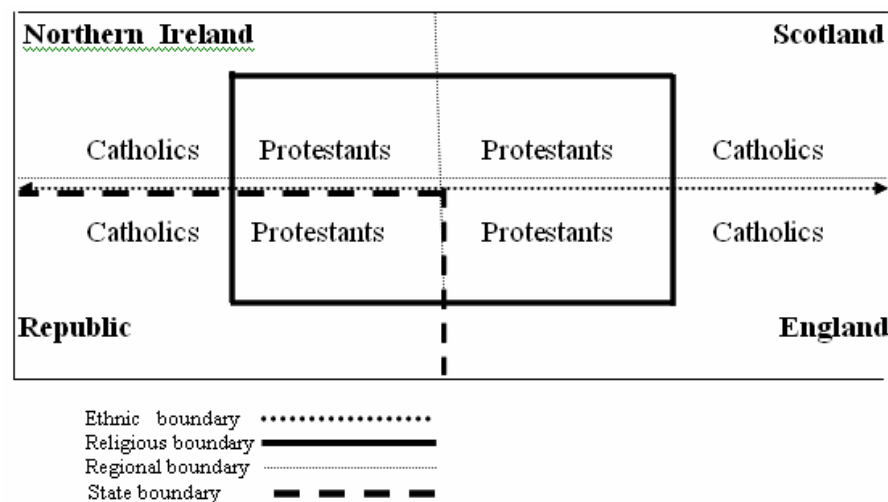


Figure 1: Schematic representation of overlapping group boundaries

overlay and reinforce each other. Conversely, Scotland's Protestants should be closest to Northern Ireland's Protestants, the only dimension separating these two groups being region.

Yet, regionalism per se is not the basis of the most intractable cleavage between northern Catholic 32-county nationalists and northern Protestant British/Ulster nationalists. The long-standing consanguinity of Ulster and Scotland could not withstand the impact of the Reformation. The religious cleavage between Protestant and Catholic "trumped" the historical intra-regional affinity of "the sea-divided Gaels". The cross-channel connections between northeast Ireland and southwest Scotland and the population pressures in the latter area meant that migration to Ireland did not hold the same daunting prospects that it did for southern English colonizers of southern Ireland. Economic and business linkages that developed between the north of Ireland and north-west Great Britain were important in reinforcing northern self-definition. But crucially important was the scale and concentration of the migration of people with a different religion into northeast Ireland; this was facilitated by geographical proximity but was not necessarily dependant on it.

If the defeat of Gaelic Irish resistance in 1601 had been followed by a plantation of a Protestant population in Munster, similar in scale and concentration to that planted in northeast Ireland, it could well have been the boundary of Munster along which the subsequent border between the Free State and the UK developed. If we regard the plantation of Ireland as part of the wider pattern of colonisation in the first British Empire, geographical proximity was not a necessary feature of successful colonisation. What was required was a critical mass of sufficiently committed colonisers bearing a sufficiently robust marker of difference to ensure the maintenance of a strong barrier to inter-group assimilation.

A central element in the constitutional foundation of the contemporary British state is the Act of Settlement of 1701, which explicitly bars a "papist" or anyone married to one from ascending to the throne. This prohibition remains in place. However, its persistence nowadays owes more to the pragmatic calculation that to change it would be immensely complicated for those members of the Commonwealth for which the queen is head of state, and has little to do with any effort to protect Britain against the threat of "papism". One of the most influential accounts of the centrality of Protestantism to the emergence of the British union-state is Linda Colley's *Britons Forging the Nation* (Colley, 1996). The basic premise of her book is that national identities are constructed in opposition to "others". She presents Great Britain's struggles against the continental "others", France and Spain, as of seminal importance in "forging" a British national consciousness. Moreover, Spain and France were Catholic, whereas the otherwise disparate peoples of Great Britain were Protestant. Too much emphasis can be placed on the role of Protestantism in the forging of contemporary British identity. If there is an antagonistic "other" against whom the British define themselves, it is now the Germans. Religion was and is irrelevant in this case.

SCOTLAND'S INTERNAL BOUNDARIES

Protestantism in Scotland has never faced the same level of political threat as in Ireland, at least from Catholicism; historically it formed part of the dominant state culture and its contemporary adherents are not descended from a settler group of overseers of the majority Catholic population. In Scotland, Roman Catholicism is a proxy for Irish Catholic ancestry, and Catholics, some would argue, continue to be stigmatised in a society historically suffused with the norms and values of militant Protestantism (Bradley, 1996, 2005; Macmillan, 1999; Reilly, 2000; Sewell, 2001; Walls, 2001; Williams, 1996). Antipathy to Catholicism was so embedded "that in the 1790s when Glasgow had no more than thirty-nine Catholics there were forty-three anti-Catholic societies" (Gallagher, 1987: 9). This hostility to an abstracted Catholicism structured the reception of migrants from Ireland; both the living, breathing carriers of Catholic "heresy" and their Protestant co-nationals. However, as Audrey argues, anti-Catholic fervour was such in Scotland that:

Protestant Irish migrants were rendered almost invisible in anti-Irish discourse ... Overall the relative compatibility between the religious identity of many Irish Protestant immigrants and that of the existing majority population in Scotland did ease the process of migration and settlement. The "Irishness" of their descendants is hardly visible today ... [except] through those activities of the Orange Order ... 19th and early 20th century concern about "the Irish" was predominantly a concern about Catholics (Audrey, 2000: 18-20).

The Catholic Irish, largely migrants from Ulster, and their Scotland-born descendants were considered unassimilable.⁴

The degree to which religious background continues to be the basis of ethnic division is an issue of intense debate. On the one hand there are those who argue that anti-Catholic (de facto anti-Irish Catholic) sectarianism is endemic in Scottish society, while others argue that to claim so is to indulge in a "politics of victimhood" that is not based on any substantive social reality in contemporary Scotland. Throughout the 1990s, examples of Protestant-Catholic tension had surfaced intermittently, for instance during the campaigning for the Monklands East by-election in 1994 that followed the death of the Labour Party leader John Smith. The SNP, in making reference to Labour candidate Helen Liddel's Catholic background, was accused of playing the "Orange card".

⁴ The reaction to this amongst some Irish was the assertion of overtly Irish symbolism, a trend that continues to be present particularly around the cultural and sports business that is Glasgow Celtic Football Club. In 2001 when the club won the Scottish Premier League an Irish tricolour claimed as the largest Irish flag ever made was draped across the front of the Garngad shopping mall in Glasgow (*Irish Post*, 28 April, 2001). Moreover, this was not a manifestation of "Irishness" in the manner of the pseudo-Irish theme bars and the general *Riverdance* hype of the mid- to late 1990s. Glasgow Celtic Football Club has never hidden its Irish antecedents. Founded by a Marist brother in 1888, it has provided a focal point of communal identity that is self-consciously both Catholic and of Irish origin. Nowhere else in Great Britain has an overtly Irish symbolism been displayed so consistently for so long a period.

At the same time, these tensions were dramatically highlighted when Jason Campbell, a Protestant supporter of Glasgow Rangers Football Club murdered Mark Scott a Catholic supporter of Glasgow Celtic Football Club and was jailed for life. He re-entered the public domain in 1998 as a consequence of Northern Ireland's politics: the Progressive Unionist Party, the political wing of the loyalist paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force, pushed to have Campbell benefit from the early release scheme for paramilitary prisoners which formed part of the Belfast Agreement. Even though the Northern Ireland secretary at the time supported the move, the Scottish courts refused to accept that Northern Ireland's ethnic conflict was a mitigating factor, and refused to allow Campbell's release (Nairn, 2000: 314). Campbell's defence lawyer at this trial was Donald Findlay, one of Scotland's leading advocates and vice-chairman of Glasgow Rangers Football Club. Findlay was forced to resign his position in June 1999 after being filmed singing sectarian songs during a celebration following a Celtic-Rangers match; his actions were condemned, not as wrong in themselves but as possibly fuelling the violent, sometimes lethal, tensions between the followers of the two teams. However, "liberal" Scotland presented Findlay's case as relatively harmless "bad taste", the Monklands East by-election as unrepresentative, and Celtic-Rangers violence as either localised working class disaffection or else as primeval atavism (in particular Irish Catholic ethno-cultural intransigence)—none of which related to or reflected modern Scotland. Indeed, a section of the mainstream media interpreted the resignation of Donald Findlay as a sacrifice designed to appease an outdated sense of Catholic "victimhood". The Scottish *Sunday Herald* in its defence of Donald Findlay, "a nice but tipsy man" stated that:

There was a time in living memory when Irish Catholics were discriminated against, and with reason ... by undercutting Scots workers they were taking the bread out of the mouths of Scots children ... there is still a strong victim mentality among many of the descendants of those early immigrants, a terrible debilitating melancholy they like to indulge ... if you are not discriminated against, then you are not truly Irish, not a faithful Catholic (*Sunday Herald* 13th June 1999).

Consider what the above passage would read like if we replace Catholic/Irish with black:

There was a time in living memory when blacks were discriminated against, and with reason ... by undercutting white English workers they were taking the bread out of the mouths of white English children ... there is still a strong victim mentality among many of the descendants of those early immigrants, a terrible debilitating melancholy they like to indulge ... if you are not discriminated against, then you are not truly black, not a faithful black.

It is difficult to imagine a British newspaper in 1999 explaining away discrimination against blacks on the grounds that they took the bread out of the mouths of white children. Moreover, if an influential member of the dominant ethnic group was filmed taking part in a sing-song about being up his knees in the blood of blacks, even if it was only meant in fun, this would be condemned from across the political spectrum. It is furthermore inconceivable that objections from black groups to the expression of these sentiments would be dismissed as merely self-indulging in a terrible, debilitating melancholy.

When looked at this way, it is the British state's institutionalisation of the political, legal, economic and cultural superiority of a minority group over the island's majority that has reinforced the saliency of the differences that the reformation introduced. Regionalism has very little to do with Ireland's partition. The emphasis on regionalism as the cultural sub-stratum to the Irish border reads like a post-hoc rationalisation. It homogenises the peoples on either side of the north-south divide that runs across these islands, paying little attention to the profoundly arbitrary construction of Northern Ireland with its large and alienated minority. Moreover, in the context of contemporary "Hiberno-Alba" rapprochement it looks increasingly anachronistic.

TERRITORY AND DEMOCRACY

The partition of Ireland provides a graphic example of the difficulties in the practical application of the abstract principle of self-determination (Beran, 1993; Koskeniemi, 1994; Freeman, 1999). In terms of political justification, the secession of 26 counties from the UK and the imposition of the Irish land border were underpinned by the doctrine of "the people's right to self-determination".⁵ In the ideology of modern politics, thwarting the will of the people is paradigmatically anti-democratic. What constitutes "the people" is never defined *a priori*, yet it is a notion bandied about with a similar form of non-reflexive certainty as that of the national territory. President Wilson, the world figure most associated with the dissemination of the concept of the people's right to self-determination, was not sympathetic to Irish claims (Brindley, 1988). For Irish nationalists, especially following the December 1918 British general election, the applicability of the principle to Ireland was as self-evident as the fact that the island of Ireland constituted a natural unity. British nationalists on the other hand regarded the "unit" to which the right of self-determination applied as greater Britain—not any of its component parts. The Irish nationalists' justification of the dismemberment of the UK (*not* regarded as a natural unit) was the democratic right of the Irish people to self-determination. At the same time, British nationalists used the same principle to justify the establishment of Northern Ireland. Heslinga cites, approvingly, Lord Craigavon's biographer St John Ervine:

Ulster's opposition to Home Rule was not manufactured, as was often alleged, by men at the top, but sprang spontaneously from *the people* ... No one could have originated Ulster's resistance to Home Rule if it had not been broad-based upon *the*

⁵ Democracies by definition are territorially circumscribed. In this way they are mechanisms of exclusion, as well as inclusion. The overwhelming majority of the world's population is excluded; there is an explicit hierarchy; citizens of even the most liberal democracy are privileged relative to non-citizens. Citizenship regimes differ from state to state, structured around the two principles of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*. The former is considered more "civic" and therefore by definition more progressive than the descent-based "ethnic" law of blood. Between 1981 and (probably) 2004 the citizenship regime of the Republic of Ireland was significantly more "civic" than that of the UK, despite the constant claim of British nationalists that Ireland was a more "ethnic" nation-state than the UK. Anyone born in the Ireland of Ireland was entitled to citizenship of the Republic. In June 2004, the people of the Republic voted overwhelmingly to remove this progressive *jus soli* dimension of the Republic's citizenship regime. Even this regression was more "civic" than the corresponding act of regression in the UK in that the Republic's abandonment of its *jus soli* dimension required a referendum of the citizenry whereas in the UK it followed the diktat of the majority Conservative Party.

people's will. Whatever critics may say against it, they cannot deny that it was a democratic movement (cited in Heslinga, 1971: 200; emphasis added).

The demarcation of political space is not dependent on, though it can make use of, geographical features. Moreover, the political, legal, economic, social and cultural relevance of that which is physically "given" can change. Physical features can facilitate but can also hinder the political projects of developing and maintaining the sense of spatial awareness, the sense of territoriality, regarded as central to national consciousness (Billig, 1995). The islands of Great Britain and Ireland are cases in point. For Irish nationalists the sea defines the divinely ordained unity of Ireland, and the divinely ordained separation from Britain. In the words of Dominic Behan's Irish nationalist ditty:

The sea, oh the sea, is the *gradh geal mo chroi*,
 Long may it roll between England and me,
 It's a sure guarantee that some hour we'll be free
 Thank God we're surrounded by water
 (Behan, *The Sea Around Us*)

On this view, the sea dictates on the one hand the natural unity of the island of Ireland and on the other hand the right to, and the inevitability of, political self-determination. The territory is held to define "the people" and it is the island territory as a whole to which the right of self-determination applies. The fact that within this island there are people who did not, and do not, regard 32-county Irish independence as either natural or desirable and are willing to resist this with force is glossed over in numerous ways—or simply ignored. When Irish 32-county nationalists refer to ending partition they do not mean reversing the dismemberment of the pre-1921 UK. As Heslinga puts it, "although both sides use the same words they think in different terms. One side thinks in terms of Ireland alone, the other in terms of the British Isles" (Heslinga, 1971: 28).

Irish nationalists are not alone in treating the sea as a border that circumscribes a natural unity of land and people, distinct from other land and peoples. The aphorism attributed to a nineteenth-century *Times* headline, "Fog in the Channel, Continent Obscured", captures the sense of Great Britain as an island nation. Christopher Lee's history of Britain serialised by the BBC is aptly titled *This sceptred isle* (Lee, 1997). If Irish 32-county nationalist scholars in the Republic are, as Heslinga argues, averse to recognising an *intra*-Ireland cultural boundary, scholars in Great Britain are averse to recognising an *inter*-island cultural and political unity, that is, that the UK is more than the island of Great Britain. In both the British and Irish cases, for many, islands constitute natural unities; sea channels constitute natural divisions. Colley's work, referred to above, uses Great Britain as its framework of analysis. Some authors have criticised Colley's treatment of Ireland in the British nation-building project as inadequate (Hickman, 1995; O'Dowd, 1999). However, what Colley represents is an island, rather than an isles consciousness. Great Britain was forged in the eighteenth century and as Norman Davies points out:

The eighteenth century designation was set in stone, and has proved remarkably persistent ever since. In the early twentieth century, when British motor vehicles were

first required to carry an international identification plate, out-of-date and inappropriate abbreviation of "GB" was chosen in place of "UK". Vehicles from Northern Ireland, which has never been part of Great Britain, run around on GB plates to this day (Davies, 1999: xxxviii).

The sea therefore underpins Irish nationalist claims to unity and works against the claims of British nationalists in Northern Ireland. This reflects the deeply embedded idea that there is a distinction between natural boundaries and artificial boundaries. Contemporary political geographers would rarely subscribe to this distinction (Paasi, 1999). Indeed, what constitutes natural is itself an artifice.

The idea implicit in Heslinga that Irish partition was both democratically inspired and based on historically salient north-south differences glosses over the threats of violence on the part of British nationalists. The alleged elective affinity between Protestantism and democracy is a long-running theme in social science and it forms part of the foundational mythology of British nationalism, particularly its variant in Northern Ireland.⁶ Yet the model of democracy that Heslinga implicitly endorses is rather restricted, corresponding to a crude majoritarianism within constructed borders, borders imposed as a direct consequence of Unionist's threats of violence to resist the British parliament's "democratic" endorsement of home rule. Northern Ireland while formally democratic was founded on the coercive capacity of a group to force the demarcation of a space and to describe this as the expression of "the people's will". The one-third of the population included in this space against *their* will does not form part of Ervine's or indeed Heslinga's "imagined community". In principle there is no end to the fissiparous dynamic set in motion when the notion of self-determination is invoked. The drawing of boundaries is rarely based on principle and what Heslinga glosses over, especially with regard to Ervine, is the self-serving nature of a spokesperson for a revolutionary minority applying a democratic gloss to threats of violence by re-defining these threats as the will of "the people". As always, this prompts the question: who exactly are the people? Heslinga seems to be implying that the historical regional affinities of northern Catholics to their Protestant co-regionalists ought to be the basis of Catholic identification with the northern statelet. The northern region has been given political expression in the establishment of Northern Ireland, and northerners share a deep cultural unity. However, if we follow the logic of this reasoning and draw political boundaries along allegedly primordial cultural boundaries that are overlain with religious affinities then the appropriate boundary would look entirely different, extending across the north of Ireland and Great Britain to demarcate this cultural nation from the rest of the islands.

CONCLUSION

Heslinga's argument is that the northern regions remain culturally closer to each other and distinct from the southern regions of Ireland and Great Britain. However,

⁶ The foundational myths of unionism, in particular the cult of 1912-14, celebrate the violent rejection of the right of Ireland as a whole to self-determination. The southern deification of the men of violence of 1916 is mirrored in the northern unionist's mythologizing of illegal gun-running and UVF paramilitary posturing.

while he defends the existence of a deep and historically relevant north-south cultural divide and hence the “appropriateness” of the Irish partition he glosses over the loyalty of the northern nationalists to the Home Rule Party and the pro-action of the northern nationalists in pushing the southern government to insist on the boundary commission allowed for in Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. Of all the relevant groups in Ireland, it was northern nationalists who have been most disadvantaged by its imposition. Staunton argues that northern nationalists in the wake of the boundary commission’s collapse and the southern government’s endorsement of the 1920 boundary were aware of the opportunities missed through a misplaced reliance on the southern government (Staunton, 2001: 99). The role of the kin-state for the first 50 years of its existence was largely ineffectual in advancing the interests of Catholics in Northern Ireland. Northern Irish nationalists may have regarded the southern government as their principal external ally, but the value of this alliance was limited. The official ideology of southern irredentism went parallel with an early and rapid distancing from the north on the part of southern politicians.

The reconfiguration of the UK’s territory meant that a majority of Irish Catholic nationalists and the territory they inhabited were removed from the United Kingdom. At first sight it seems surprising that this occasioned little debate in Great Britain. Norman Davies, for instance, points out that the British Empire had been victorious in the war, and yet within three years of the war’s end “the United Kingdom had lost a larger percentage of its territory than Germany had” (Davies, 1999: 906). However, Davies overstates the comparison. Germany lost significant territories populated by ethnic Germans. The UK on the other hand was and remains a multinational entity in a way that Germany was not and never has been. Prussian-led state building, the political unification of ethnic Germans, was a very different project to the British failure at incorporating Ireland. Ethnic consanguinity, later perverted by the Nazis into biological, cultural and moral superiority, was the basis of German state building. Ireland, essentially, was a security problem, and what was seen as the ultimately successful incorporation of Scotland 100 years previously served as a model of successful nation building.

Ireland never became an integral part of the British homeland; it was not treated thus, particularly in relation to how the state maintained law and order. Moreover, “race hierarchy”, was integral to social and political thinking in the nineteenth century. According to this paradigm, the “Irish”, in particular the rural Catholic Irish were the least “advanced” of the peoples of the British Isles. This ascribed inferiority was used to justify opposition to home rule and then as an explanation for Irish secession (Curtis, 1997; Douglas, 2002). Either way, Ireland and Irish nationalists were not an integral component of the British “homeland” and its peoples:

For the British government, the territorial reconstruction evoked imperial rather than nationalist sentiments. The secession of southern Ireland was seen not as the sundering of the British national territory but as the departure of a particularly troublesome part of the empire (Ruane and Todd, 2003: 48).

The decision therefore to reconfigure the UK certainly “right-sized” or at least did not “wrong-size” the state in the sense that the loss of territory did not engender much concern in the Anglo-heartland. It also “right-peopled” the union state to the extent that it removed the majority of Irish Catholic nationalists from a state towards which they no longer expressed allegiance. Separation and partition also retained the majority of Ireland’s Protestant population in the UK. However, the British government’s decision to do so was not based on ethno-national solidarity but on expediency:

Northern Ireland was retained not because a majority of its population affirmed a British identity and allegiance, but because they threatened armed rebellion if any attempt was to be made to force them into a home rule Ireland ... As a strategy of territorial management, it was a considerable success, but it proved temporary (Ruane and Todd, 2003: 49).

Heslinga takes as his starting point the shared cultural unity of northern Great Britain and Northern Ireland and derives a somewhat deterministic rationale for the Irish-UK land border. In this sense, the *intra*-regional cultural sameness and *inter*-regional cultural difference underpins the border. At the same time, and in some tension to this, he uses the religious cleavage introduced by the Reformation to explain partition. Despite the breadth and depth of its research perhaps the most glaring deficiency in Heslinga’s analysis: his uncritical acceptance of the democratic credentials of Northern Ireland’s “founding fathers”. In this way, Heslinga provides a justification for the coercively imposed boundary that was against the wishes of the majority of the people of Ireland. Alvin Jackson (2000) has argued that Unionist opposition to Home Rule was neither as emphatic nor as deeply-rooted as later post-hoc rationalisations would suggest. Partition was not inevitable; however, neither is it inevitable that partition will be reversed. Heslinga’s teleology mirrors the teleology of Irish 32-county nationalism.

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