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NATIONAL TERRITORY IN EUROPEAN SPACE: RECONFIGURING THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

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Abstract

The meaning and significance of borders in nation-statehood and European integration are integrally linked in a process of change. Uncovering such connections in a case study notable for its recent transformation, this article explores the way in which the narratives and models of European integration have been used in the discourse of Irish official nationalism. Its central thesis is that participation in the space of European Union has facilitated the conceptualisation of a common Irish space in which borders (specifically the Irish border) are not conceived as barriers to be overcome but rather as bridges to the fulfilment of interests. Thus, the Irish governmental elite have used the language of European integration to reconfigure traditional ideals of latent anti-partitionism for a context of peaceful settlement.

Key words

Ireland, European Union, discourse analysis, nationalism.

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INTRODUCTION

The impact of European Union membership on state borders has been central to the transformation of governance in contemporary Europe (Herb 1999:9). New relationships across the internal and external territorial borders of the EU have been driven by economic considerations, facilitated by political adjustments and legitimated through conceptual change. As with all developments in European integration, the precise nature of this conceptual reform varies according to context. From a state level of analysis, the reconceptualisation of borders between member-states varies in line with the official nationalism of the states concerned, which provides ideological justification for the way their territory is governed. The state level of analysis is applied here within a discursive constructivist framework in order to assess the effects of Europeanisation on the conceptualisation of borders in the territory of Ireland. In this case study, the Irish governmental elite has interpreted the European context as not removing Ireland's borders but building 'bridges' across them. This article outlines the image of European 'space' that frames this conceptualisation of territory in Irish political discourse before tracing the new symbolic contours of Ireland's borders. Symbolism and conceptual change is quite so crucial because borders, although territorial, are generally determined not by their physical but by their social setting.

CONCEPTUALISING BORDERS: NATIONAL TERRITORY, EUROPEAN SPACE

An important distinction is made by Smith (1995:2-3) between two types of geographical boundaries: 'bona fide' (i.e. those which exist independently of human cognitive acts, such as coastlines) and 'fiat' (i.e. those which do not exist independently of human cognitive acts, such as property lines). The fact that state borders are rarely bona fide frontiers means that they are primarily socially constructed institutions, delineated by political decisions across history. The territory of a state embodies the

extent of its physical scope and political authority. Yet, as Anderson (1991:170-178) notes, maps are not merely the representation of the limits of state authority, they are also the one of the most powerful international signifiers of the state. Territorial borders thus have political and symbolic as well as physical significance. Precisely because borders are instruments, constraints and markers of statehood, the matter of what they are and represent is constantly reworked, even if their actual delineation remains the same (Anderson 1998:5). In light of this, a constructivist perspective aids analysis of the changing significance of state borders.

Official discourse and political change

Constructivism holds that social realities exist only by agreement, by human cognitive action and interaction, and are therefore fragile and changeable (Berger and Luckmann 1967; Searle 1995). The rationale of collective actors changes according to experience, in order to adjust to a new position regarding other social actors or structures (Offe and Wiesensthal 1979). In analysing this process of social change, discursive constructivism points to the importance of discourse (language) in the interpretation of, response to, and definition of context. Change in political context is a discursive issue as much as a structural one because of the dialectical relationship between political practice and official discourse. Hajer (1995:59) defines politics as ‘a struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their definition of reality’. The particular power enjoyed by governing elites in following through on ideals with practice gives their official discourse a unique constitutive role in the legitimation and transformation of social conditions (Wodak *et al.* 1999:8).

Official discourse, as texts produced by the governing elites to explain and legitimate policy action and principles, is central to the definition of the political and symbolic

significance of state borders.¹ As the internal and external constantly changes, so too does state practice, the worldview in which it is framed, and the language used to legitimate it – all three of which are encapsulated in official discourse (after Fairclough 2001:21). Discourse analysis considers what is being presented and how in order to examine the logic of the conceptual/practical link and its reconstitution.² This is not to underplay the importance of institutional arrangements, nor is it to seek a ‘truth’ or cause behind the actions of politicians. Analysis of official discourse is valuable precisely because it examines the carefully crafted ‘public face’ of politics.³ It thereby provides an insight the priorities of those elected to govern, their assumptions about what and whom they govern, and the way in which they meet competing pressures of pragmatism and ideology, stability and change. The fact that those in power use this discourse to legitimate their actions gives it significance in and of itself. Nevertheless, this same discourse is also intended to both respond to and influence public opinion. This article focuses on the way in which the Irish governmental elite gradually changed the official definition of Ireland’s ‘national territory’, leading to a point at which the state’s explicit irredentist claim over Northern Ireland could be removed from the Constitution. Analysis of official discourse shows the use of the EU as a benign model for the reinterpretation of key nationalist principles.⁴ The strength of public support for the Good Friday Agreement in the Republic reflects, amongst numerous other factors, the success of this strategy.⁵

National territory

Geographical space has emotional and material power which is harnessed in nationalism’s delineation of ‘territory’ as the embodiment of (and point of connection between) state and nation (Penrose 2002). The territory of the state thus gives it a tangible material existence and international platform as well as (literally) grounding its

identity in common experience (Periwal 1995:236; Bassin 2001; Murray 1997). For, according to O'Dowd and Wilson (1996:8), bounded territories 'are not simply a matter of control or access to resources, or of networks of interaction within fixed geographical limits, rather they denote participation in a collective consciousness'.⁶ The association of common experience, practice and culture with a particular territorial space is epitomised in the notion of the national 'homeland' (Billig 1995:83). The narrative of the homeland supports the intrinsically spatial identities of 'state' and 'nation' with an historical and physical context: in the national territory, the ancestral and cultural origins of the nation connect with the contemporary and political activity of the state. Thus, nationalism serves to blur the division between the bona fide and the fiat types of boundaries, asserting that the borders of the state are (ideally) its 'natural' boundaries, marking the (pre-)historical space of the nation's homeland.⁷ In this way, the territorial borders of a state become associated with an 'imaginary process' of linking present with past and an 'active process' of drawing lines of inclusion and exclusion.⁸ The territorial borders and the cultural, historical, economic and political boundaries of the state thus become analogous.

European space

The link between territory and the interests and identity of the state is fundamental to the logic of nationalism; whilst the nature of this link may have changed, its underlying rationale remains as strong as ever, even within contemporary Europe (Müller-Graff 1998:15). From a legal or geopolitical perspective, state borders within the European Union have remained for the most part remarkably unchanged since the end of the Second World War. The EU itself draws on material and constitutional powers of space, with sovereignty and governance still associated with bordered territorial jurisdictions (Penrose 2002; Herb 1999:13). Yet, although European integration has not redrawn the

map of Europe, it has been predicated on the notion of a definite European 'space'. Jönsson, Tägil and Törnqvist (2000:3) define 'space' as a 'geographical concept' within which the politically-laden notion of territory is subsumed. Reference to 'European space', therefore, includes historical, cultural, and economic dynamics which may be associated with, but not defined by, territorial boundaries. As will be seen in relation to the Irish context, the concept of European space is one that transgresses the limitations of political state borders, forming a basis for European political cooperation, economic transactions, communication and mobility (Rosamond 2002; Richardson and Jensen 2003). As Christiansen (1996) argues, this European space not only facilitates supranational cooperation but other forms of political activity, such as regional and local governance. Whereas territoriality may be conceived as a 'specific arrangement of space' whose boundaries are politically defined (Albert and Brock 2001:34), the term 'space' is more apt in relation to the EU. For, although reference to 'Europe' has particular geographical associations, the EU itself cannot be said to be a territorial entity given that the most concrete delineation of its boundaries at any time is the external borders of its member-states, the number of which looks set to be in flux for some time to come.

Ambiguity regarding the space of Europe reflects the case that it was not until relatively recently that European integration became expressly concerned with the significance of political borders. It was the Council of Europe that first projected an alternative view of borders as bridges, through its ideal of regional cross-border cooperation. In contrast, the European Economic Community actually strengthened state borders, with the regulation of national markets enhanced by the Treaty of Rome (1957) – a trend continued with the development of the Single Market in the 1980s and the corresponding role of the state within its own borders (O'Dowd 2000:7). This changed

with the focus on political cooperation as a part of economic integration within the European Union, and the 1990s saw the growth of ideals of cross-border cooperation. This was accompanied by a discursive shift away from the use of borders as symbols of exclusive national power, at both a European and a national level (O'Dowd 2000:11). Overcoming internal division and enhancing internal unity is reflected in the ideal model of the EU as one in which internal borders are no barrier to cooperation in the achievement of common interests within the common space of the EU.⁹ This is now elaborated in relation to the case study of the Republic of Ireland, where the governmental elite have used the idea of European space as one part of a reconceptualisation of the link between governance, identity and territory on the island of Ireland.

The case of Ireland

The Irish state was founded by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, in which the British government partitioned the island of Ireland in reaction to the nationalist war of independence, centred in the south, and the threat of insurgence from the unionist majority in the north. Although originally intended as a temporary solution, the Irish border became entrenched as the political, ideological and economic experiences of Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State (becoming the Republic of Ireland in 1948) increasingly diverged. Tensions within the mixed nationalist and unionist population of Northern Ireland erupted in the late 1960s, as paramilitary groups on both sides fought over the legitimacy of British rule. Thirty years of the 'Troubles' drew to a close with the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement of 1998, which introduced three-strands for peace-building: between political parties and communities in Northern Ireland, between north and south on the island, and between the British and Irish governments. This three-stranded model has an institutional form: the devolved Assembly in Northern

Ireland; the North-South Ministerial Council and cross-border Implementation Bodies; and the British-Irish Council and British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. To be established, these institutions required constitutional changes in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. In the case of Ireland, the most significant alteration was the retraction of the explicit claim over the territory of Northern Ireland (Articles 2 and 3) and acknowledgement of the need for majority consent in Northern Ireland and the Republic before any change can be made to the constitutional status of the former. These amendments required a substantial shift in the significance given to the 'shared territory' of the island of Ireland by official Irish nationalism. Until 1998, the icon of the 'island of Ireland' had been clasped by Irish official nationalism, seeking to fortify the notion of Irish nationhood with an immutable, bona fide territory. With the Good Friday Agreement, the Irish government and public had to come to terms with the disparity between this ideal concept of an island nation and the fiat boundaries of the Irish state. This was a process that had begun over thirty years previously, partly in response to the conflict in Northern Ireland, and was aided to a considerable degree by the context of EU membership. This article examines the way in which the territory of Ireland was reinterpreted in Irish official discourse during this period in relation to four themes: partition, unity, common space, and geography.

Partition

Unionist and Nationalists, Protestant and Catholic all share the one island, and are deeply attached to its soil. All belong and have a contribution to make to our common country. (Haughey 30 May 1983)¹⁰

Territory has been important in the traditional conception of Irish nation-statehood not only in its political, symbolic or cultural designation but also in ideological, even emotive, terms. For example, in the above extract Haughey refers to a deep attachment to the 'soil' of the island shared by all resident on it, thus making a direct equation

between the physical reality of territory that forms the literal and metaphorical ground of people's identity and experience. Such a notion is prominent in Irish official discourse, as it was in pre-independence Irish nationalism, and sustains the belief that territory helps define what it means to be Irish and to hold an Irish worldview. For this reason, partition is also conceived as an emotive and personal issue as much as political one. This is embodied in Reynold's¹¹ description of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution reflecting 'hopes and ideals which lie deep in the hearts of many Irish men and women North and South'.¹² Similarly, in a speech that anthropomorphises the territory of the island of Ireland, Lynch¹³ presents the division of Ireland as a personal tragedy for every Irish citizen, equating 'true' Irishness with an anti-partitionist sentiment.¹⁴

Partition is more than just a *Border*, more than just an *artificially-made* and *artificially-maintained* barrier, more than just an *economically-disruptive* division, more than just a *culturally-divisive* influence, more than just an *historical affront*. Partition is a deep, throbbing weal across the *land, heart and soul of Ireland*, an imposed deformity whose indefinite perpetuation eats into the Irish consciousness like a cancer. (Lynch 17 January 1970, emphasis added)

The significance of partition in Irish official discourse is reflected in the capitalisation of 'border' in the transcription of Lynch's speech above. A device particularly common in the early 1970s, the use of capitalisation in government publications indicates the reification of certain concepts in Irish official discourse. In this case, the Irish border and the island of Ireland are being given significance and status that are usually reserved for individual places or countries, thus implying that the 'Border' and the 'Island' have their own identity and (international) importance.¹⁵ Nomenclature itself remains a significant element of official discourse and a good indicator of change in Irish official nationalism. The phrase 'twenty-six counties' is used in official discourse with the

assumption that the audience will associate this geographical term with a political and cultural entity. It is interesting to note that the phrase is often capitalised, which (for reasons noted above) confirms that it is more than a reference to a geographical area. Similarly, ‘the North’ is often used as a self-consciously ‘depoliticised’ term for Northern Ireland in Irish official discourse. References to ‘the South’ are only made in statements that refer also to ‘the North’, affirming the image that Northern Ireland and the Republic are both parts of a ‘whole’, i.e. the island of Ireland. Yet, the North/South description is not purely territorial and it often appears in texts which acknowledge the different cultural constitutions of the jurisdictions. The fact that FitzGerald¹⁶ can make reference to ‘*traditional* North/South tensions’ (27 September 1977:12, emphasis added), highlights the association of the geographical areas with different histories, ideologies and cultures, namely unionism and nationalism. The development of not only divergent economies and politics but also different ‘traditions’, ‘identities’ and ‘views’ in the two parts of Ireland had, it was argued, resulted in ‘psychological barriers between North and South’ (FitzGerald 21 November 1984:4; Lynch 6 August 1971; FitzGerald 11 February 1982:1). Moreover, the conflict in Northern Ireland had the patent effect of ‘accentuating the mental partition’ between north and south (Cosgrave 13 June 1974:3).¹⁷ From the early 1970s, the majority of the Irish governmental elite recognised that the process of overcoming the effects of partition would require a lot more than constitutional change in the United Kingdom – it necessitated political and ideological change in the island of Ireland as a whole. For this reason, drawing people together in support of peace became a more urgent priority than territorial reunification.

...we should be involved in building bridges between North and South, not in the creation of more puerile and more ineffective barriers between the people of this island. (Lynch 20 October 1971)

Unity

Although the priorities of the Irish governmental elite towards Northern Ireland have become more explicitly concerned with peace and stability, the historical association of Irish identity with a desire for Irish unity means that they still find it necessary to stress that reunification remains their ideal objective. Thus, whether it is a question of relations with Britain, economic development or participation in the EU, official Irish discourse will not portray any national state policy as making re-unification less feasible. Even when there are significant changes in government policy, this principle remains – or must be *seen* to remain - absolute. Thus, successive generations of the Irish governmental elite – both main parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, being historically pro-integrationist – have not neglected the significance of a European model in which territorial frontiers are bridges to partnership and cooperation. Prior to the referendum on accession, the Irish governing elite was keen to persuade the Irish electorate that membership of the EEC would not ‘involve [the Irish government’s] acceptance...of the partition of Ireland’ nor would it ‘adversely affect the national policy for the reunification of this country’ (DFA 1972a:1).

...although it would be quite wrong to look to this as a panacea for the Irish problem, which will always remain one to be settled by Irishmen in Ireland, such influence as *membership of the Community* will have is likely to be *uniformly* directed towards *easing that path to a united Ireland*. (FitzGerald 1973:104, emphasis added)

Official Irish discourse has capitalised on the notion that participation in the Common Market meant the removal of ‘barriers...to the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital’ (DFA 1971:1). In a leaflet that specifically addresses the likely impact of EEC membership on north-south relations in Ireland, assertions regarding

decreasing ‘barriers’ between ‘North and South in the EEC’ both explicitly and implicitly refer to *the* barrier between Northern Ireland and the Republic (DFA 1972a). This argument had a flip side too, with the threat that the border would become increasingly significant if the Republic opted not to join the United Kingdom in the EEC:

If we were to stay out of the enlarged Community, then the Border would, in effect, become the land frontier between us and the EEC. This would result in the erection of many more economic and trade barriers than exist now. ...North and South would inevitably grow even further apart. (DFA 1972a:12)

Playing on the resonance of the verb ‘unite’ in Irish nationalism, Fianna Fáil campaign advertisements in the 1972 referendum carried the slogan ‘Unite with Europe’. One of its campaign posters carried the image of Ireland outside of an EEC of which the United Kingdom including Northern Ireland was a part, thereby creating a graphic split within the island of Ireland (Source: Desmond 2001). The implication of this image was that Irish exclusion from the EEC would result in the Irish border being ‘permanently entrenched’ as an ‘international frontier’ between not just the Republic and Britain but the Republic and the EEC (Haughey 7 May 1972; DFA 1972b:12; DFA 1972a:4). At the heart of this discourse was the association of accession to the EEC with reunification of the island. If the Republic and Northern Ireland were both part of the EEC, then the frontier between them would be diminished. In this way, Irish official discourse on European integration built upon the traditional assertion that the island was not only a territorial but also a cultural and political unit, as reflected in Cosgrave’s claim:

...our aspiration towards an eventual political unity of the island of Ireland is founded on a reality – on the reality that *Ireland is and has always been a single society* (2 July 1973:3, emphasis added)

The Irish government has long been in the paradoxical position of wanting to disassociate the Irish state from the conflict in (and confine it to) the province of Northern Ireland whilst taking every opportunity to emphasise its right to involvement in any resolution. The language used by the Irish governmental elite on this subject was directed at countering both the fears of people of Northern Ireland and the indifference of the people of the Republic regarding reunification. As a result, FitzGerald (20 May 1978:18) contested ‘the attempt to suggest that North and South are “foreign” to each other’ and called for ‘bridge-building’ to ‘bring closer together the two parts of this island’. More specifically, he identified at the core of ‘this radical re-statement of the nationalist position’ a new configuration of territory in Irish nationalist ideology:

...the reunion sought by the people of the Republic [is] a reunion of peoples and not a re-conquest of territory. (FitzGerald 22 February 1980:1)

This approach was consistently advocated by John Hume as leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party in Northern Ireland, whose definition of an ‘agreed Ireland’ centred on removing ‘the real border in Ireland, which is not a line on a map but in the hearts and minds of people’ (Hume 1993, 2001). The repetition of Hume’s concepts and phrases in Irish (and British) official discourse reflects his crucial role in the peace process and reveals the two states’ increasing heed of the sensitivities of all parties and communities in Northern Ireland. For example in the 1993 Major-Reynolds ‘Joint Declaration on Peace’ (Article 5), the Taoiseach spoke not of reunification but of his hope ‘that over time a meeting of hearts and minds will develop, which will bring all the people of Ireland together’. Emphasis on reconciliation between traditions went alongside the principle of majority consent as a precondition for unification: ‘Unless and until we can persuade a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to join with us, there will not be a united Ireland’ (Reynolds 1993).¹⁸ This discursive and ideological

modification was sealed with the amendments to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution of Ireland following the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

The 26-county Irish state's irredentist claim over the territory of Northern Ireland was embodied in its constitutional definition of the 32-county Irish nation. Articles 2 and 3 have thus been of historically immense symbolic significance for Irish nationalism. Haughey (11 October 1981) lauded them for enshrining: 'the belief that this island should be one political unit – a belief stretching far back into history and re-asserted time and time again by the vast majority of our people North and South'. Yet the Irish governmental elite became increasingly aware that these articles were not merely a defining point for Irish nationalists but a sticking point for unionists and, therefore, a barrier to north-south cooperation. Unionists objected to Article 2's description of Ireland's 'national territory' as the 'whole island'¹⁹ and viewed as a threat the explicit expectation of reunification and the assertion of the 'right' of the Irish government to jurisdiction over the 'whole' of the territory in Article 3.²⁰ Following the 19th Amendment of the Constitution, as noted by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews (30 April 1998:1), Article 2 has moved 'the centre of gravity from land to people'.²¹ This goes some way towards addressing the problem that Article 3 of the 1937 Constitution originally faced, namely accommodating the difference between the 'national territory' and the actual territorial jurisdiction of the Irish state (Foley and Lalor 1995). The anticipation of reunification ('until then') remains in the amended Article 3, yet the 'threat' is removed through the inclusion of two conditions: a) it would occur through 'peaceful means' and, b) with majority consent in Northern Ireland.²² The second part of Article 3 marks a new departure for the 1937 Constitution (although it was present in the 1922 Constitution) in its facilitation of institutions that function on an all-island basis.²³ Such elements are highlighted in Irish official discourse, as the Irish

governmental elite has sought to present the new Articles as enhancing, rather than compromising, what are deemed to be fundamental nationalist principles. For example, within days of signing the Agreement, Ahern²⁴ reaffirmed the ideal of reunification, assuring his audience that the Irish nation ‘is not territorially disembodied’ and that it ‘is and always will be a 32-county nation’ (Ahern 21 April 1998:2, 26 April 1998:3). Indeed, ‘the bonds that unite the Irish nation, North and South’ are made stronger, in that:

The nation is defined in terms of people, but *people related to a specific territory, the island of Ireland*. ...we no longer say, or appear to say, that the territory is ours, not theirs, but rather that it is shared by all of us. (Ahern 21 April 1998:2,4, emphasis added)

Common space

The territory of the island, therefore, has remained a fundamental tenet of the Irish official nationalism that supported and facilitated the peace process; what has undoubtedly changed, however, is the language used to describe the role of this territory. This is evident from closer examination of the text below – a speech given by the Taoiseach shortly after the Good Friday Agreement in which the term ‘common space’ is substituted in place of the customary references to ‘united Ireland’:

A new beginning to relationships on this island must involve the creation of *a common space* in which our different cultures can be experienced, shared and enjoyed by *all people of the island*, free from the political overtones which in the past have alienated different groups and communities from elements of *our common heritage*. (Ahern 14 May 1998:1, emphasis added).

Ahern implies that political ideologies lie at the heart of the conflict in (Northern) Ireland, and if these were to be taken out of the equation, residence in the ‘common

space' would mean common interests, action and identity in a rediscovery of a 'common heritage'. This idea of conceiving of culture as apolitical is actually a highly political statement to make, particularly given that the implied assumption is that unionism 'free from...political overtones' would be merely another Irish cultural tradition. The suggestion in official discourse that the island of Ireland is a 'common space' is directly related to the concept of a 'European space' in which territory constitutes an area for common interests and cooperation is not delimited by state borders. This point is clearly expressed in a statement made by Lynch (28 May 1971):

Ireland and Britain are now very close to entry into the European Economic Community. North and South will find many of its problems and opportunities common to both. *Ireland itself will be one common market* of 4.5 million people and will, in turn, be part of the much larger common market of ten States.²⁵

The image of the island of Ireland as a 'common market' in the Common Market draws direct parallels between the practice and ideals of European integration and Irish official nationalism in two main ways. First, the notion that the *common interests* of the two parts of Ireland have 're-emerged under the conditions of EEC membership' (FitzGerald 16 June 1978:4). Secondly, the perception that EU membership *lessens differences* and divisions between Northern Ireland and the Republic whilst (in some cases) heightening those between the island of Ireland and Britain.

Participation together in the EEC will certainly encourage the people of this island to concentrate on what they have in common rather than on what divides them.
(DFA 1972c:3)

Underpinning the identification of common interests between north and south is the assumption that economic interests are themselves integrally related to conditions within a particular territorial unit. It was asserted early on that 'the country as a whole'

would benefit from EEC policy on regional development because '[b]oth parts of Ireland share many similar problems in relation to underdeveloped regions' (DFA 1972a:2-3). Indeed, Lynch (July 1972:1) predicted that the 'development policies of the EEC [would] be helpful to each part of what is largely a single region'. In this way, Irish official discourse apparently uses the rationale of the common market to highlight the logic, as opposed to the ideal/ideology, of a 32-county policy outlook. Nevertheless, the political implications of 'the two parts of Ireland sharing common interests' within the European Community are not far below the surface:

...the fact that on some of these major issues [agriculture and regional development] the North and the Republic will have a common interest, divergent from that of highly developed Britain, cannot be without significance in these conditions (FitzGerald 1973:103).

In this vein, FitzGerald (16 June 1978:4) later asserted that the similar interests of the 'shared territory' of the island in Europe would 'prove a significant factor in the evolution of the political situation between North and South'.

One way in which the EU was seen as influencing a new north-south relationship was through helping to create 'the kind of society in the Republic with which the Northern majority would wish to be closely linked with a view to our common benefit' (Cosgrave 26 June 1974:8). This ideal society has traditionally been seen as achievable only through economic development, as Cosgrave claimed: '[p]rosperity can bring us a unity of hearts and of purpose' (26 June 1974:9). Many government speeches on the subject of drawing north and south closer together were premised on the need to first 'increase the material wealth' of the island (Cosgrave 2 July 1973:9). The belief that a (more) united Ireland would arise from greater prosperity was integrally connected to the expected effects of Ireland's integration into Europe.²⁶ In this light, official discourse

anticipated the weakening of the territorial border, given that ‘the real dividing line in Ireland so far as economic prosperity is concerned has always been an East-West and not a North-South one’ (Lynch July 1972:1). The notion of common economic interests and needs lay at the core of the predicted pragmatic treatment of the island of Ireland as a single unit:

Continental entrepreneurs will not be concerned with political borders or outmoded political attitudes in this country. And the Governments of the Common Market countries will not be interested either. (Lynch 28 May 1971)

Much Irish official discourse has served to give the impression that internal territorial borders are *de facto* less significant in the context of European integration. As Cunningham (1997) contests in a critique of the political language of John Hume, the logic of this remains directed towards the principle of reunification.²⁷ This may be identified in earlier statements of the Irish governmental elite predicting that a united Ireland would be facilitated and supported through EU membership:

There would almost certainly be a willingness in the European Community to contribute to ... the economic development of a united Ireland. (Haughey 30 May 1983)

More common and subtle use of the concept of European space to support closer links with Northern Ireland may be seen in Irish official discourse on cross-border cooperation. ‘Politically and economically, the intrinsic value of North/South co-operation is obvious’, according to then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen; moreover, he argued, it ‘can benefit everybody and need not threaten anybody’ (28 April 2000:3).²⁸ Cross-border cooperation has therefore been seized upon by the Irish governmental elite a peaceful and relatively uncontroversial means of ‘working together without reference to the border or to political affiliation’ – a long-held nationalist

aspiration (Cowen 28 April 2000:3). Thus, although the new European context was vital in overcoming 'the taboo that surrounded North-South relations' prior to the 1960s, it did not prohibit the early introduction of arguments for a political dimension (Kennedy 2000:367).

This kind of cross-border co-operation, which has been given a further boost by E.E.C. membership, would be considerably facilitated, however, by a political association between North and South. (FitzGerald and Harte 1979:8)

In more recent times, the EU has been credited with guiding the 'negotiations of arrangements for cooperation and joint action within Ireland, North and South' that gave rise to the multilevel institutions of the Good Friday Agreement (Andrews 29 April 1998).²⁹ The fact that the Agreement institutionalised British-Irish as well as a north-south cooperation reflects a core element of cooperation facilitated by EU membership.

The anticipation that Britain and Ireland would move 'into closer political and economic association' in the EEC represented a move away from previous assumptions that the path to reunification lay in clearer distinction between Britain and Ireland (ITGWU 1972:19). Instead, Irish governmental elite members now began to claim that closer association between Britain and the Republic could help overcome differences between north and south.

...the only solution is an Ireland united by agreement, in independence; an Ireland in a friendly relationship with Britain; an Ireland a member with Britain of the enlarged European Communities. (Lynch July 1972:1)

This assertion was at the heart of negotiations that led to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, the 1995 Framework Documents and the 1998 Good Friday Agreement itself

(Arthur 1999:73-78), and is reflected in comments made by John Bruton (1996), a key player in these negotiations:³⁰

This problem [of conflict] is not a problem that can be solved solely within the perspective of Northern Ireland itself alone...It has an all-Irish dimension. It also has a dimension in terms of relationships between Britain and Ireland.

By placing Northern Ireland 'in between' Britain and Ireland, it becomes the concern not only of these two states but of 'Europe' itself:

Both Northern Ireland and Ireland are part of Europe, and any problem that occurs in Northern Ireland or Ireland – or as we say, Ireland and Britain – is a European problem in that sense. (Bruton 1996)³¹

As the following extract from the Joint Declaration of the British and Irish Governments (December 1993) shows, common membership of the EU brought the two states together and highlighted the options for a cross-border approach to Northern Ireland:

...the development of Europe will, of itself, require new approaches to serve interests common to both parts of the island of Ireland, and to Ireland and the United Kingdom as partners in the European Union. (Article 3)

The Joint Declaration's (Article 8) official recognition of 'the special links that exist between the peoples of Britain and Ireland...while taking account of newly forged links with the rest of Europe' reflects in part the new and positive conceptualisation of Ireland's geographical position.

Geography

Although membership of the European Union could not change the facts of Ireland's territorial circumstances, it was possible for Irish official discourse to 'reimagine' these conditions in the context of the European Union. Ireland's geographical location on the periphery of the European continent has been traditionally interpreted in Irish nationalist

discourse as a clear indicator of its distinctiveness. Whereas this had previously led to a sense of isolationism and marginality, becoming part of the space of the European Union has allowed this dimension of Irish geography to be interpreted as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. Even aside from substantial economic growth, the plain fact of EEC membership meant that FitzGerald was able to claim in 1978 that the Irish Republic was ‘no longer an isolated political unit in a small island off the coast of another island’ (20 May 1978). Thus, as a ‘partner[] in a common enterprise’, Ireland has been able to play its part ‘in assisting and encouraging change across *our shared continent*’ (Ahern 1 March 2001:1; 5 February 2001:1, emphasis added). More recently, members of the Irish governmental elite have presented Ireland as ‘a natural and profitable gateway to Europe’³² and ‘well-placed to meet the needs of US companies seeking a European base (Cowen 6 June 2000:2; Ahern 24 November 1997:3). This model not only implies that Ireland’s geographical position no longer confines it to the economic and political periphery of Europe, it also enables Ireland to be presented in official discourse at the ‘centre’ of Europe.

Ireland’s geographical (and thereby historical) proximity to Britain also gave rise to another traditional tenet of Irish nationalism, namely its vulnerability to larger countries. This tenet was strengthened by the small size of Irish territory. Ireland’s size affected its approach to international affairs in three ways: a sense of vulnerability, an empathy with other ‘small nations’, and a weak economic capacity.³³ Again, this territorial feature is reinterpreted in the context of European integration. The logic of official discourse advocating full cooperation with other states has been that Ireland’s geographical size and position necessitates it.³⁴ Participation in the Common Market was urged on the basis that Ireland was ‘a small country with little capacity, at present, to influence events abroad that affect [its] interests’ (DFA 1972b:13). A sense of Ireland’s physical

vulnerability to larger powers has also been present in arguments against EU membership, many of which have compared the sharing of sovereignty in Europe to Ireland's experience of colonialism.³⁵ Yet such a protectionist attitude was the type of worldview that the pro-European Irish governmental elite were attempting to prove as anachronistic and self-defeating. Instead, they argued that Ireland's approach to European integration should reflect and build upon its territorial properties.³⁶ Ireland's small island status was hence conceived in official discourse as being transformed in the European context, with its isolation overcome and its distinctiveness enhanced through Europeanisation. Recent official assessments of Ireland's experience of EU membership have credited it with enabling:

...a small, insular country, insular literally and up to then, metaphorically as well to interact on a basis of equality and on a wide range of issues with our fellow-members on the continent, as well as our nearest neighbour (Ahern 15 April 1999)

Ireland's interaction with its 'fellow-members' in the EU has reflected the continuation and extension of its identification with other small nations in the international realm.³⁷ This has been demonstrated in recent times as the Irish government led small states in opposition to certain elements of the draft treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and in relation to the enlargement of the EU, in which Ireland's status (including its size and history) has been used as a reason to support EU expansion.³⁸ The presentation of EU membership as an invaluable opportunity for small states on the European periphery to 'catch up' relates to the reversal of Ireland's weak economic capacity in the European context. Integration of the Irish economy into 'one of the great economic groupings of the world' was always presented in Irish official discourse as effectively overcoming the limitations on the Irish economy arising from the status of its territory (i.e. mainly

agricultural, small size, geographically ‘hidden’ behind its neighbour) (DFA 1972b:13). From being ‘a small island off Europe’, Ireland now ‘punch[es] above its weight’ as a player ‘at the heart of decision-making in Brussels’ (Ahern 15 May 1999:1; Cowen 6 June 2000). In the context of the European Union, the geographical configuration of Ireland is no longer viewed as an impediment to an active and influential role in international affairs; instead, it has been reimagined as a positive national attribute.

CONCLUSION

Although the Good Friday Agreement embodied a thirty-year process of ideological and political change in relationships on the island of Ireland, the territory of the island remains a pinnacle element of Irish official nationalism. Major constitutional and institutional adjustments in north-south relations have been largely supported by the Irish public. Underpinning this support has been the Irish governmental elite’s ability to present these changes as fulfilling rather than compromising long-held nationalist principles. This conceptual reconfiguration of Irish territory has in part been facilitated through selective and versatile reference to the context, model and implications of European integration in Irish official discourse. Even prior to accession in 1973, EU membership has been presented in Irish official discourse as ultimately affirming the ideals of essential Irish unity (common interests, cross-border cooperation, etc.). It is clear that this strategy has gone some way towards enabling more productive, positive and peaceful relations between the Republic of Ireland and its neighbours. Nonetheless, European space is not a ‘dead’ space; neither is the discursive construction of state borders divisible from their political and even material delineation. In emphasising the importance of the European context for redefining national territory, the Irish governmental elite have assigned the European Union a key role in changing the very meaning of a ‘united Ireland’ itself.

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Notes

¹ The majority of texts analysed here are articulated by the seven political leaders who have been Taoisigh (Prime Ministers) since 1966. These individuals are significant for their prominent profile as public and media figures as well as political leaders and for their role in the shaping of official policy and practice in relation to Northern Ireland and EU membership. In this research, the contributions of FitzGerald, Haughey and Ahern are particularly notable for their explicit attempts to redefine Irish nationalism in relation to Northern Ireland at crucial periods of change in British-Irish relations (early-mid 1980s), negotiations between nationalist parties north and south (mid-late 1980s), and new constitutional and institutional arrangements (late 1990s).

² Discourse analysis involves examining the particular words selected (lexicalisation), semantic structures of sentences and their sequences, rhetorical operations, and stylistic variations of expression structures (van Dijk 1993:12). Such techniques help uncover nuances in the articulation of key themes, such as the themes examined below: partition, unity, common space, and geography.

³ It is acknowledged that many of the texts selected in this way were not actually written by the member of government who gave the address or speech or in whose name the article, statement or letter was published. Nevertheless, this does not undermine the key purpose of analysing official discourse, which is not to discover the underlying motivations or actual opinions of governmental elite members but rather to analyse the text for the message that it presents to the audience. Hence, in official discourse analysis, it is not the author of the text that is as important as the authority of the person in whose name the text is presented.

⁴ Although this research concentrates on the discourse of members of the Irish governmental elite, it is of central importance to note that the concepts analysed here are not exclusive to the Irish state but may also be propagated by, for example, the European Commission and moderate nationalist politicians in Northern Ireland (most notably John Hume). This highlights the importance of the shared conceptual as well as political space of the EU.

⁵ The Good Friday Agreement was ratified following a referendum held in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland on 22 May 1998 with a positive vote of 94 per cent and 71 per cent respectively (Ruane and Todd 1999:13).

⁶ This 'collective consciousness' is forged over time, as individuals are socialised and experiences shared (particularly in relation to those outside the state) within this common delimited space (Herb 1999:17; van Amersfoort 1995:173).

⁷ Smith (1991:21) identifies a specific homeland as one of the six main identifying features of an ethnic community. However, the complex, diverse and changeable elements involved in the definition of any nation-state makes it necessary to consider the 'homeland' as an evolving concept rather than an historical 'given'. To do otherwise is to risk reifying the concept.

⁸ This is an extension of Schlesinger's (1992:16) description of national identity as involving an 'imaginary process of creating traditions and of activating collective memories' and, secondly, an 'active process' of 'inclusion and exclusion'.

⁹ It is important to note that this conception of the European Union does not 'compete' with that of the nation-state, given that it does not presume that the EU has a 'territory' or 'homeland' at all, let alone one that supersedes that of the nation-state

¹⁰ Charles Haughey: Government Minister 1961-1970, 1977-1979; Leader of Fianna Fáil 1979-1992; Taoiseach 1979-1981, 1982, 1987-1992. As Taoiseach, Haughey negotiated with the British government the conditions for all-party talks in NI (1991), held the Irish Presidency of the European Council (1990), and negotiated the Maastricht Treaty (1992).

¹¹ Albert Reynolds: Government Minister (1979-81; 1982; 1987-92); Leader of Fianna Fáil (1992-94); Taoiseach 1992-1994. As Taoiseach, Reynolds agreed the Joint Declaration (1993), saw the implementation of the IRA and Loyalist ceasefires in 1994, supported the Hume-Adams initiative, the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation (1994) and the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty (1993).

¹² Joint Declaration on Peace, Article 6, December 1993.

¹³ Jack Lynch: Government Minister 1957-66; Leader of Fianna Fáil 1966-79; Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) 1966-73, 1977-79. During his time as Taoiseach, the 'Troubles' began in Northern Ireland, direct rule from Westminster was introduced for the province (1972), Ireland acceded to the EEC (1973), Ireland joined the EMS (1979), and Ireland held the Presidency of the European Council (1979).

¹⁴ This notion was present in early Irish official nationalism, as governmental elites struggled to explain the refusal of unionists to join with the Irish state. Hence, de Valera's (17 April 1926) assertion that 'every Irishman' has a 'native undying desire' for unification.

¹⁵ Although common for the first fifty years of Irish official discourse, this device of capitalisation for emphasis has been used less frequently since the late 1970s, perhaps in line with growing importance of non-written media.

¹⁶ Garret FitzGerald: Government Minister 1973-77; Leader Fine Gael 1977-87; Taoiseach 1981-1982, 1982-87. As Taoiseach, FitzGerald established the New Ireland Forum (1983), signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), held Presidency of the European Council (1984), and negotiated the Single European Act (1986).

¹⁷ Liam Cosgrave: Government Minister 1954-1957; Leader of Fine Gael 1965-1977; Taoiseach 1973-1977. During his time as Taoiseach, the Sunningdale Declaration and Assembly was briefly established in NI (1973-1974), the NI Constitutional Convention was held (1975-1976), and Ireland held its first Presidency of the European Council (1975).

¹⁸ See also comments by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Brian Cowen (27 May 2000:19): ‘As an Irish nationalist, it remains my hope that one day there will be a united Ireland. But what we have learned over the past thirty years, is that this united Ireland must be agreed and consensual, both in its achievement and in its administration.’

¹⁹ Article 2 (original): ‘The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas.’

²⁰ Article 3 (original): ‘Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the Parliament and Government established by this Constitution to exercise jurisdiction over the whole of that territory, the laws enacted by that Parliament shall have the like area and extent of the application as the laws of Saorstát Éireann and the like extra-territorial effect.’

²¹ Article 2 now reads: ‘It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation.’

²² Article 3i (amended, emphasis added): ‘It is the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland, in all the diversity of their identities and traditions, recognising that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means with the consent of a majority of the people, democratically expressed, in both jurisdictions in the island. *Until then*, the laws enacted by the Parliament established by this Constitution shall have the like area and extent of application as the laws

enacted by the Parliament that existed immediately before the coming into operation of this Constitution.’

²³ Article 3ii (amended): ‘Institutions with executive powers and functions that are shared between those jurisdictions may be established by their respective responsible authorities for stated purposes and may exercise powers and functions in respect of all or any part of the island.’ For intricate analysis of these constitutional amendments, see Morgan (2000:150-182).

²⁴ Bertie Ahern: Government. Minister 1987-94; Leader Fianna Fáil ‘94; Taoiseach ‘97. As Taoiseach, Ahern oversaw the final negotiations of the Good Friday Agreement and referendum (1998), the two referendums on the Nice Treaty (2001, 2002) and the introduction of the Euro currency (2002) in the Republic of Ireland.

²⁵ The figure of 4.5 million refers to the total of the combined populations of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland at the time.

²⁶ Hume’s (March 1995, emphasis added) argument reflects this logic: ‘For the first time in our history not to be seeking victory by one side over another, but to build institutions which respect the diversity of our people but following the European example, allow us to work *our common ground together, which is economics.*’

²⁷ The following quotation from John Hume (1996:46-47) is the type of statement that shows the similarity between anti-partitionism and European neofunctionalism in an Irish context: ‘The EU commits all its members to an ‘ever-closer union’ among the peoples of Europe. That includes an ever-closer union between the people of Ireland, North and South, and between Ireland and Britain. Borders are gone all over Europe, including in fact the Irish border.’

²⁸ Brian Cowen: Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2000-2004; Minister for Finance, 2004-present.

²⁹ David Andrews: Minister for Defence, 1993-1994, 1997; Minister for Foreign Affairs, 1992-1993, 1997-2000 (resigned). Andrews was Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time of the final negotiations towards, the signing of and the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement.

³⁰ John Bruton: Government Minister 1981-1987; Leader of Fine Gael 1990-2001; Taoiseach 1994-1997. As Taoiseach, Bruton oversaw the launch of Framework Documents and Twin

Track Initiative (1995), the multi-party talks, and Ireland's Presidency of the European Council (1996).

³¹ This notion is present in Hume's (March 1995) argument that, 'in today's Europe, Britain and Ireland are together with France, with Spain, with Germany. Therefore, that has changed the nature of our problem. The problem is no longer the British presence. The problem today is the divided people.'

³² There are echoes here of a revival of President de Valera's vision of an Ireland 'situated at the very focus of the trade routes between Europe and America - the gateway to the West' (1918:2) and 'the gateway of the Atlantic...the last outpost of Europe towards the West' (1922:11) .

³³ 'Economically participation in the EEC seems desirable because... the smaller the country the more it needs international trade because of its greater dependence on goods and services not obtainable within its own frontiers.' (FitzGerald 5 January 1963)

³⁴ 'In the real world, all countries, *especially small ones*, operate within very considerable constraints. Nobody can pull the curtains and tell the world to go away.' (Ahern 29 March 2001:2, emphasis added)

³⁵ For example, a trade union leaflet issued prior to the referendum on accession asserted: 'A surrender of sovereignty... would mean we would be powerless to prevent the rich folk of Europe from buying as much Irish *land and property* as they wished; it would mean the *surrender of our territorial waters* to highly capitalised fishing concerns in Britain and Europe.' (ITGWU 1972:20-21, emphasis added)

³⁶ 'We opted for membership because we saw clearly that protectionism did not protect and that openness, economically as well as politically, was the way to prosperity for our people...We recognised that we had a part to play in securing a strong and prosperous Europe...' (Ahern 8 January 2001:3)

³⁷ This outlook was reflected, for example, in the positive response of so many in Ireland to the Allied call in the First World War to defend the rights of 'poor little' Belgium. Seventy years later, this underlying principle was maintained: 'As a small nation we must voice our concern

and join with the other small nations of the world in asserting humanitarian principles...'

(Haughey 2 November 1985)

³⁸ 'Ireland is seen [by applicant states] as a small state, with an historical experience not totally different from their own, which, having started from a long way back, has made the best possible use of the support and opportunities given to it to catch up with the European mainstream.' (Ahern 5 February 2001)