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Máiréad Nic Craith

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ABSTRACT

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The Good Friday agreement gave an impetus to interest in the issue of cultural diversity in contemporary Northern Ireland, extending to the issue of smaller language groups, such as Irish and Ulster Scots. While these two languages have deep roots, their importance today is not just linguistic but also political: tongues and dialects may operate as emblems of identity and as endorsements of specific political perspectives. The history of the Irish language in Northern Ireland is well documented, as is its importance as a symbol for Irish nationalists. More recently, its cultural significance for those outside this tradition has been recognised, and its position has been acknowledged also by the state. The position of Ulster-Scots is more problematic: not only is its identity as a language less clearly defined, but so too is its social and political significance. Nevertheless, both languages are likely to profit from the inter-communal compromise that was encapsulated in the Good Friday agreement.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Máiréad Nic Craith is Director of Research and Postgraduate Studies at the Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool. She has published widely on the theme of culture contact and conflict. Her recent books include *Watching one's tongue* (editor, two volumes, Liverpool University Press, 1996). Her monograph on the "two traditions" paradigm in Northern Ireland *Plural Identities—Singular Narratives* is due to be published by Berghahn in December 2001. She is currently working on the politics of identity in divided societies for Palgrave (2002) and on the European dimension to Irish cultural studies (Ashgate 2003). She spent Trinity Term 2000 as visiting research fellow at the Institute for British-Irish Studies, UCD.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Máiréad Nic Craith

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I examine cultural diversity in contemporary Northern Ireland with particular reference to the smaller language groups in that community. Here I pay particular attention to the concept of language as a political rather than a linguistic issue and explore the manner in which tongues and dialects operate as emblems of identity and as endorsements of specific political perspectives. In order to set the political context in which the languages operate, I begin with a brief review of the establishment of the state of Northern Ireland and the cultural and political stances of the major political parties.

Some of the languages that I review here have been spoken in Northern Ireland for a considerable length of time. Irish has been a medium of communication in the region for millennia. Cant or Gammon has been spoken for at least 350 years. While the antiquity of Ulster-Scots has not been fully determined it is clear that this speech form has been developing for at least a number of centuries. As yet none of these are categorised as official languages of the state of Northern Ireland. Perhaps this is not surprising, as the state itself is relatively modern and only emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century.

THE STATE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

The Act of Union enacted in 1800 affirmed the island of Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom. For more than a century the British crown and parliament at Westminster governed the entire Island. In 1920 the Government of Ireland Act divided the 32 counties of Ireland into two areas, each with its own parliament. According to this act the new state of Northern Ireland consisted of the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. Although Ulster unionists were not entirely content with the proposal they accepted it because it ensured they remained within the framework of the United Kingdom. Nationalists were deeply unhappy as the act partitioned the country and separated them from their counterparts in the southern 26 counties.

While the newly established Northern Irish parliament debated policy on local affairs, Westminster maintained control over matters concerning the crown, foreign policy and military affairs. Northern Irish politicians were entitled to representation at the Stormont parliament in Belfast and at the British parliament in Westminster. In the first election in May 1921 unionists led by Sir James Craig won 40 of 52 seats. Nationalists of various hues secured the remaining twelve seats but refused to attend sessions of parliament. They intended to ensure that the new state would

become unworkable which might ultimately lead to its unification with the other 26 counties. King George V formally opened the parliament in Belfast on 22 June 1921 and unionists effectively governed Northern Ireland for many decades (Darby, 1983; Alcock, 1994; Ruane and Todd, 1996).

Inspired by the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King in America, and irritated by the inequality in the allocation of housing to Catholics, Northern Irish nationalists organised a variety of protest marches in the late 1960s. There was a great deal of violence as marchers regularly clashed with the Royal Ulster Constabulary and in 1972 the British government suspended the Stormont parliament. Following extensive consultations with Northern Ireland's elected representatives, the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 provided for the transfer of certain powers to a new 78-member assembly in which representatives from unionist and nationalist communities would participate. But a general workers' strike organised by extreme unionist political and parliamentary organisations in 1974 led to chaos in the province and the new assembly collapsed shortly afterwards. As a consequence arrangements were made to govern Northern Ireland through a British secretary of state.

But power has again been devolved to Northern Ireland. On 10 April 1998 the majority of political parties in the region arrived at a form of compromise and issued a document that has become known as the "Good Friday Agreement". Voters throughout the 32 counties endorsed this document and representatives from all parties were elected to a new assembly.

ALLEGIANCES AND IDENTITIES

The new executive is composed of members from the two larger self-defined ethnic groups of nationalists and unionists. Constitutional and republican nationalists in Northern Ireland, as represented by the Social and Democratic Labour Party and Sinn Féin respectively, are committed to the belief that there is one nation in Ireland. Gerry Adams summarised the position in his *Politics of Irish freedom* when he wrote that "Ireland is historically, culturally and geographically one unit" (1986: 88). All nationalists regard unionism as a tradition within the Irish nation. Self-determination and territorial integrity are of primary importance to these people who believe that the national territory and the jurisdiction of the state should coincide. Ethnic boundaries should not cut across political borders. Their understanding of group identity is similar to that espoused by the German nation in that it gives prominence to common cultural and racial characteristics. An alternative emphasis is shared by French and British nationalists.

Constitutional and republican nationalists differ in their interpretation of the partition of Ireland in the early 1920s. Constitutional nationalists believe that the British government created the Northern Irish state in an attempted compromise between Irish nationalists who sought independence from the United Kingdom and unionists who desired to remain within its constitutional framework. From this perspective the British government was primarily motivated by peaceful intentions and aimed merely to

satisfy the greatest numbers possible. Republicans perceive the process of partition differently and explain it as a consequence of British imperial policy. According to this rendition, Britain had a colonial interest in Ireland and despite nationalist demands for independence, it was determined to govern the country for as long as possible. As it could no longer maintain control over the entire island, the British government sought to retain at least a portion of it within the United Kingdom and created the state of Northern Ireland. While these two perspectives are radically different, they both imply that the British government is primarily responsible for the "artificial" division of the Irish nation (Bean, 1994; Roche, 1994). Traditionally republicans resorted to violence as a means of forcing a British withdrawal from the country, but at the end of the last millennium they installed and maintained a cease-fire and have affirmed a commitment to the political process.

As is the case with nationalists, unionists do not constitute a homogeneous community and many analysts make a distinction between Ulster loyalists and British unionists (for example, Todd, 1987). Members of the loyalist community are primarily committed to the monarchy rather than to parliament. They are unwavering in their allegiance to the crown but are conditionally loyal to the United Kingdom. Their covenantal culture is regarded as having strong roots in Scottish Presbyterianism (Akenson, 1992). The primary imagined community of loyalists lies in Northern Ireland and they place strong emphasis on emblems of a Northern Irish culture. "Cultural unionism" is the term given by Porter (1996) to this ideology, which is rooted in a purely Protestant-British ways of life, but its concept of Britishness is not necessarily recognised in Great Britain. Porter states that

> a familiar belief of those bearing an Ulster unionist identity is that its distinctive features are by and large peculiar to Northern Ireland. Its combination of Protestantism and Britishness has long since ceased to characterise political life in the rest of the United Kingdom, even if it lives on the margins of Scotland (Porter, 1996: 62).

Ulster British ideology is quite different. Unlike the loyalist community, its primary imagined community lies in the United Kingdom. These unionists consider themselves international rather than parochial and are patriotic in respect of emblems of Britain rather than of Northern Ireland. Official British rituals such as the British national anthem, poppy days and British honours such as the Order of the British Empire (OBEs) are important, but overall this community places less emphasis than loyalists on cultural symbols. These unionists portray themselves as proponents of a civic rather than an ethnic philosophy and strongly disapprove of any nationalist obsession with heritage and culture.

Yet these unionists are proud of the diversity of British traditions within the United Kingdom and regard it as the epitome of civilisation. Porter (1996: 66) uses the term "liberal unionists" to describe this political group, which may be composed of both Protestants and Catholics: "They may consider themselves Irish, Northern Irish, English or whatever. The point is that unionism as a political identity is *culture-blind"*. These British unionists regard their Britishness as a reflection of their citizenship rather than their nationality. "There are only British citizens who happen to be English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and some who would be none of these" (Aughey, 1995: 12).

Cochrane (1997: 70) suggests that their relationship is to a mythical British community which owes more to "Kipling's Britishness than to the multicultural Britain of the late twentieth century".

Political changes at the end of the last millennium have had a serious impact on unionist identity in Northern Ireland and devolution has exaggerated their perception of distance from mainland Britain. Many adherents of Orange traditions experience a great sense of separation from Britain—of being trapped between, rather than within, Irish and British cultures. They are isolated from Britain by the Irish Sea and from the Republic of Ireland by a border that is disputed by nationalists. Their sense of betrayal has heightened and they have become increasingly fragmented. Many of the political changes have threatened a reduction in status for unionist traditions. Some hitherto unrestricted expressions of unionist culture, such as Orange parades, are currently restrained and sometimes banned.

Of course there are other identities in Northern Ireland (Hainsworth, 1998). These will not be the primary focus of this paper but their existence ought to be recognised. There are four main ethnic minorities in the state incorporating indigenous and non-indigenous groups. There are approximately 1,100 Travellers in the region. Chinese, Indian and Pakistani groups have also established their presence. Estimates regarding the size of the Chinese community, the largest of these minorities, vary. A review by Irwin (1996) assessed their numbers as between 3,000 and 5,000, but further studies increased the figure to 7,000 (Irwin and Dunn, 1997). But the Chinese Welfare Association believes it to be closer to 8,000 (Watson and McKnight, 1998). Overall these minorities make up less that 1% of the population of Northern Ireland.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

English is the only language with official status in Northern Ireland and is spoken by almost everybody, but the Good Friday Agreement acknowledged the cultural diversity of the region. All participants to the document (Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Government of Ireland, 1998: 22) affirmed that they

> recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

Irish-speakers constitute the largest group of speakers of a non-official language and its position as demonstrated in the 1991 census was quite substantial (Nic Craith and Shuttleworth, 1996; Mac Giolla Chríost and Aitchison, 1998). This census investigated the extent to which individuals over the age of three had knowledge of the language, and according to the published reports 142,003 people claimed to be familiar with it.

Some critics suggest that this figure is somewhat exaggerated as the 1991 census was the first occasion since the emergence of the new Northern Irish state that respondents had an opportunity to indicate knowledge of that language. The census of 1901, taken before partition, had indicated that Irish survived among five per cent or more of the total population in eight districts. In at least three of these areas, Irish speakers constituted over a third of the community (Nic Craith, 1999b). After partition the question regarding knowledge of Irish was removed from the census form and a vigorous campaign in the 1980s led to its re-introduction in 1991. For that reason it is possible that a great welcome for the census question may have exaggerated the figures of Irish-speakers as those with a very limited knowledge of the language may have returned themselves as familiar with it. But it is also likely that these figures were counterbalanced by those who declined to indicate their knowledge of Irish on the census form for political or personal reasons (Nic Craith, 1999a).

Although the census form of 1991 included a query regarding knowledge of Irish, it failed to question the community regarding knowledge of Ulster-Scots. As a consequence there are no official government estimates of the extent of this linguistic community. Native speakers of Ulster-Scots usually refer to this speech form as "Scotch" but it has also been termed "Ullans" by some modern writers, which could possibly be interpreted as the speech of the people of Uliad (Ulster). Alternatively the term "Ullans" may be perceived as the Ulster rendition of Lowland Scots, occasionally called Lallans, which is simply a Scots form of "Lowlands". Indeed the UK Committee of the European Bureau for Lesser-used Languages has recognised Ulster-Scots in precisely this context.

According to the Society for Ulster-Scots, 100,000 speak the tongue on a regular basis in Northern Ireland. This figure represents less than 7% of the total population and is smaller that the Irish language community, which constitutes more than 9%. But speakers of Ulster-Scots are keen to establish that their largely rural language community is dominated by native speakers of what may be "a purer form of Lallans than that spoken in Scotland itself" (Adamson, 1982: 76). This, they suggest, contrasts sharply with speakers of Irish, many of whom have acquired the language as a second, rather than a first, language.

Cant or Gammon is spoken by the 25,000 indigenous Travellers in Ireland and by their counterparts in Britain and North America. It is only spoken by Travellers and is unknown outside this community (Meyer, 1909; Helleiner, 1995). Shelta is the accepted academic term for this language, but as Travellers themselves refer to it as Cant or Gammon I shall refer to it accordingly. In its present form the vocabulary is largely constructed of a variety of Irish language words that have been disguised, using a series of routine changes. This modified vocabulary is set in a simplified English structure (Binchy, 1994). Travellers speak the language among their own community and in the presence of settled people in a variety of situations.

Other languages spoken in Northern Ireland include the Chinese language. Chinese migrants in the province have primarily arrived from the New Territories where people speak the Hakka and Cantonese dialects of southern China. After their arri-

val Chinese migrants generally continue to use their first language on a regular basis and many of their children are unfamiliar with English when they first come to school. Language difficulties often prevent this community from enjoying full access to social and health provisions, as they are often unaware of the extent of services available. One fulltime interpreter has been employed in an official capacity to liaise with this community but, as yet, many of the needs of this linguistic group have not been officially satisfied.

LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND POLITICS

Of all of the languages of Northern Ireland, Ulster-Scots has received the sharpest increase in media attention and the question of whether it constitutes a language or a dialect of English or Scots is much debated and highly controversial (Nic Craith, 2000; 2001). Disputes regarding the status of this language occur for a variety of reasons. In some instances the language is perceived as a unionist attempt to generate a language that is associated exclusively with British identities and traditions. I have no doubt that some nationalist objections to the linguistic status of Ulster-Scots are motivated by financial considerations. If Ulster-Scots constitutes a genuine language (and it is now recognised as such by the British government) then it is entitled to government funding, which inevitably means the diversion of finance from Irish.

Controversies regarding the status of Ulster-Scots occur as speakers of English believe they can easily comprehend Ulster-Scots. Debates often transpire when two languages are mutually intelligible and the question of whether a particular form of communication is a language or a dialect is not unique to Ulster-Scots. Danes, Norwegians and Swedes find aspects of their languages mutually intelligible. For that reason I could argue that their tongues are merely dialects of a single continental language, but they are internationally respected as uniquely distinct. For the same reason I could propose that Manx (Gaelic) and Irish (Gaelic) are the same, but these are classified as separate languages.

The reverse situation also prevails. Languages that are not mutually intelligible are identified as the same speech form for political or historical reasons. For example, the Sámi language has three main dialects, all of which are mutually incomprehensible. Several hundred dialects of spoken Chinese are usually classified into eight main subgroups. Although the spoken languages are mutually incomprehensible they are regarded as dialects rather than languages as their written traditions are similar and it is possible for those who have acquired the Chinese system of characters to communicate easily in writing with one other. This example should be set in a political context as the consolidation of many speech forms into a small number of languages may also reflect the state promotion of a unified culture.

When the status of Ulster-Scots is questioned, its speakers are merely experiencing a problem that is common to some of the major languages in the world. But in the case of Cant or Gammon, the question of whether it is a language or dialect has rarely been addressed (Ó Baoill, 1994). The lack of attention to this question

may partly be due to sheer ignorance of its existence, leading some to query whether it constitutes a secret language. Travellers themselves acknowledge that Cant is heavily imbued with English—a fact that can disguise its use. Strangers may not realise that another language is being spoken in their presence. Academics familiar with Cant propose that as it has no independent grammatical structure of its own it should not be recognised as a language. But I would counter that such arguments do not apply to languages such as Hindi and Urdu in India, which are treated as separate languages though their grammatical structure is identical. Ó Baoill (1994: 157) postulates that it would not be entirely inappropriate to define Cant or Gammon as a "register".

It is possible that the lack of controversy regarding the status of Shelta is due to the lack of recognition for Travellers as a distinct ethnic group. Here I am proposing that the concept of language is a political rather than linguistic issue. Billig (1995: 30) believes that languages may be "an invented permanency, developed during the age of nation-state". The idea of a dialect was of no great relevance before nation-states started establishing official ways of communicating, speaking and writing. Print technology gave certain languages such as English or Russian great status and power, establishing a hierarchy of languages. From this perspective language may be an ideological construction of nationalism. Romantic nationalism, as expounded by Fichte in the nineteenth century, stressed the purity of original languages "as guarantors of the essence of nationality" (Crowley, 1996: 115). A separate language identifies a distinct nation that is perfectly justified in seeking self-government.

A link between language and nationalism is often emphasised in minority situations. In Brittany the Breton language often defines the identity of the self-conscious intellectual nationalist (McDonald, 1989). French is the distinctive characteristic of ethnic identity and the primary mechanism of Quebec nationalism (Williams, 1993). Language has also proved vital for nationalist movements in Belgium, Luxembourg, Wales and Norway. Different concepts of language result in a variety of nationalisms although in some cases non-linguistic factors have been prominent on nationalist agendas.

Language has proved extremely significant for nationalists in Northern Ireland. Adams (1986: 143) argued that "the restoration of our culture must be a crucial part of our political struggle and that the restoration of the Irish language must be a central part of the cultural struggle". In the pre-Assembly days, the use of Irish was often perceived as a powerful political act: "The Irish language is the reconquest of Ireland and the reconquest of Ireland is the Irish language. The language of the people shall revive the people" (Adams, 1986: 147).

For many republicans in the 1980s, speaking Irish generated sentiments of protest. Republicans are familiar with examples of alleged discrimination against speakers of Irish. For example, McCann (1992: 342-3) recounted the case of the Irish language teacher, Frankie Meenan, who was stopped by the police in 1957 and asked his name:

> He could have said, "Frankie Meenan" but, being what he was, he said "Proinsias Ó Mianáin, tá mé ag dul abhaile" (I am going home) for which piece of bilingual imperti-

nence he was taken to Crumlin Road jail in Belfast and held without trial for seven months. No one came out to riot about it—there was no point.

Other stories of alleged harassment abound. One commentator wrote that

> if people were not harassed over using Irish names, speaking Irish or whatever, Irish probably would not have been as important according to some. Thus when youths shouted "tiocfaidh ár lá" (our day will come) at members of the security forces, the fact that it was in Irish was as much an act of defiance as the actual words (Ó hAdhmaill, 1990: 328).

Republicans regarded the use of Irish as "the rightful language of the nation" (Sands, 1982: 150). Its use by republican prisoners in the 1980s in the H-Block prison considerably enhanced the appeal of the language to the republican community at large. The subsequently deaths of some of these Irish-speaking republican prisoners elevated them and their language to a heroic level. Learning and speaking Irish was perceived as an affirmation of the republican protest. The significance of any language is always greater among those whose sacred texts are written in their own tongue, and the Irish memoirs and poems of prisoners, such as Bobby Sands, gave the language a political significance outside of the prison.

From the perspective of nationalists, Irish is the national language of the country especially as it has been spoken for thousands of years in the region. It constitutes the indigenous language of Northern Ireland and was the primary language spoken throughout the Ireland until the nineteenth century (De Fréine, 1978; Fitzgerald, 1984; Nic Craith, 1994a). Cant or Gammon is also a language that is indigenous to the country although its period of origin has not yet received much attention. Some academics suggest that it was created in the last 350 years or so when the population of Ireland was becoming increasingly familiar with both Irish and English. In this context bilingual speakers applied an Irish vocabulary to an English syntax.

Speakers of Ulster-Scots also regard their Germanic language as indigenous to the province. There are some suggestions among the Ulster-Scots community that the original language of the pre-Celtic inhabitants of Ulster may have had Teutonic elements. Speakers of Ulster-Scots, who are keen to emphasise the early presence of a Germanic language in Ireland, point to the distinctive nature of the "linguistic and ethnic confederacy" in east Ulster in pre-historical times (Ulster-Scots Language Society and the Ulster-Scots Academy, 1996). I believe that the primary intention of these speculations is to attribute a very early presence to the Ulster-Scots language in Northern Ireland. This would confer upon it the quality of an indigenous language and place it on a par with Irish.

Speakers of all these languages interpret the concept of their mother tongue in a political rather than a literal fashion. Balibar (1991) has suggested that one's "mother" tongue is not inevitably the language that has been acquired as an infant. It has not necessarily been the medium of communication between an infant and his or her mother. In fact it is the language currently spoken which generates the feeling that it has existed for centuries, whether or not this is actually the case. Such a language can produce primordial attachments, though it may not necessar-

ily be the first language acquired by an individual. It is obvious that attachments to languages are highly variable. Brass (1991) has pointed out that uneducated rural people are very often unaware of the proper name for "mother" tongue. In many instances they do not have any concerns regarding this language or have no particular emotional attachment to it. Language in this context operates in an instrumental or functional way rather than as a political symbol.

In the case of Northern Ireland many nationalists regard Irish as their mother tongue. This applies even when they do not speak the language fluently. Irish may not be the language of their childhood, yet it is perceived as their own language, as describing and interpreting the Irish worldview. Tolkien regarded Welsh in a similar fashion. He distinguished it as his native rather than his cradle tongue. Many loyalists also believe that Irish represents their own native tongue. Smith describes the sensation as follows:

> Now it was strange for loyalists at that time to hear the Gaelic language actually being spoken, but after a while it became just a feature of camp life. It had an even stranger effect on me, because I was listening to a language that I couldn't understand, that I had never heard before, but it was not a foreign language. It was my own native tongue (Smith, 1994: 17).

LANGUAGES ACROSS CULTURES

All communities in Northern Ireland invest a heavy significance in language, and nationalists and unionists alike are convinced that certain tongues have a tremendous significance for identity (Nic Craith, 1995). A former republican prisoner at the Maze suggested that

> Where a people have spoken a common language for hundreds or thousands of years, that language reflects their history, sentiments, outlook and philosophy. It carries the values of that people and influences the way they see the world. The culture of a people is the whole way of life of that people. The language is more than one more factor in that culture. The whole of the culture is filtered through it and the language is the repository for all the present and past of that cultural group (Ó Maolchraoibhe, 1986: 1).

Some unionists are anxious to ensure that the Irish language does not become exclusively associated with a Catholic/nationalist identity. Historically many Protestants were interested in the language and loyalists are keen to establish the link between Irish and a Protestant identity:

> The majority of Ulster Protestants equate Gaelic and Irish culture with Roman Catholicism and are of the opinion that no "good Prod" would have anything to do with such Popish traditions. The truth of the matter is, Ulster Protestants have as much claim, if not more in some cases, to the Gaelic culture as the Roman Catholic population. Someone once said that the Irish language was stolen from the Protestant people by the Papists; it would be more correct to say that the Protestant people gave their culture away to the Roman Catholics (quoted in Ó Glaisne, 1982: 870)

In recent years loyalists have begun a reclamation of this linguistic heritage and have started to learn the language. It is sometimes the case that these learners are culturally rather than politically motivated. They wish to have access to a cultural tradition of the island of Ireland. Knowledge of the language enhances their sense of Irishness without diminishing their British identity. Fluency in the language does not necessarily imply any republican tendencies nor can it be ascribed to any desire for unity with the south. In this context Irish is regarded as a shared experience that cannot belong exclusively to the nationalist tradition. One learner describes the experience in the following manner:

> At first it was a bit scary because I didn't want to admit I was Irish. I didn't want anything to do with being Irish, I was British. But then I learned that I am Irish and I can reclaim all my Irishness, the Irish dancing, the Irish language, everything. That's as much part of me as it is to anybody in the nationalist community. I'm very proud to be a Protestant and very proud to be British, but I'm also very proud to be able to sit here and say, "I'm Irish too" and have as much right to be as anyone (quoted in Cochrane, 1997: 58).

Occasionally these learners are forced to remain in a linguistic closet. While nationalists respond to them with delight, they are sometimes suspicious of their motivations. Unionists can sometimes react in an extremely hostile fashion, as if such learners are betraying their British identities. Unionist learners of Irish often feel compelled to defend their commitment to the United Kingdom in unionist circles. At the same time when moving in Irish language environments they are required to conceal their loyalties (McCoy, 1997).

Some loyalists emphasise the significance of Irish in the context of a Northern Irish culture. They describe the language as Ulster (Gaelic) rather than Irish (Gaelic). This terminology associates it with both Scottish Gaelic and Ulster Scots. It acknowledges the Irish Sea as a facilitator of, rather than a prohibition on, movement between Northern Ireland and Scotland (Kockel, 1999). It roots the language in a provincial tradition and emphasises the difference between Northern Irish and that of the Republic of Ireland. It may also indicate a desire to develop a "new" Irish that will reflect an Ulster heritage and develop in an exclusive fashion.

Loyalists also point out that many Scottish migrants and settlers in Ulster spoke the Scottish Gaelic language for centuries. A proportion of the Scottish communities who arrived during the Plantation period in the early seventeenth century spoke Scottish-Gaelic. Heslinga suggests that it is

> fairly certain that many colonists of the first three decades of the seventeenth century who came from Galloway were Gaelic speakers. The same holds good for (later) immigrants from the Highlands whose descendants, in some cases, remained Gaelic-speaking until the first half of the nineteenth century (Heslinga, 1962: 159).

There was no great difference between Scottish-Gaelic and Ulster Irish in the early seventeenth century and communications between Scottish and Irish Celts would have been very easy. There was possibly a blend of cultures between the two groups contributing to a common Celtic heritage across the province. According to Hill (1993)

the great majority of English and Lowland Scottish settlers probably found the province barbaric and perhaps, according to their standards, uncivilizable. On the other hand, Scottish highlanders intermixed easily with the indigenous Irish. The resulting cultural fusion was not particularly Irish or British, Catholic or Protestant.

Scottish Gaelic continued to be spoken in Ulster for many centuries and Dubourdieu (1802: 492-3) recorded its survival to the nineteenth century in County Antrim: "descendants of the first Scotch settlers speak also a dialect of the Celtic, said to be a mixture of the Highland language and that, which the ancient Irish inhabitants spoke; but it is not easily understood by those, who speak Erse or Irish well".

In recent years there has been a renewed appreciation in Scotland of the significance of Scottish-Gaelic (Macdonald, 1997). Contemporary loyalist journals urge their readers to reclaim this language of their ancestors in Ulster. But they are also keen to promote the significance of the Germanic Ulster-Scots, which serves as an important expression of identity within the context of Northern Ireland. Like the "Red Hand", the language represents a symbol that is peculiar to Northern Ireland and has evolved over the last four centuries solely in this context. Symbolically Ulster-Scots emphasises the connection with Scotland and reinforces the early presence of the Scots in the territory:

> Several factors have in the past prevented the Ulster-Scots from taking a justifiable pride in their language and culture. Considering it was settlers from Ulster that gave Scotland her very name, attempts to portray the Scots element in the north-east corner of the island of Ireland as some kind of "Johnny-come-lately" offshoot of English imperialism at the time of the Plantation betray a total ignorance of history. There was actually a period during the history of these islands when the whole island of Ireland was viewed as one of the western isles of Scotland. Those academics and others who underplay the importance of the Scots input in Ulster quite simply fly in the face of the facts (Smyth, 1996: 61)

Perhaps the use of the Ulster-Scots language can also be regarded as a symbol of protest. It communicates the message that its speakers cherish the relationship with Scotland rather that with England. Their first loyalty is to Ulster—their second to Scotland. At a conference organised by the Ulster Heritage Council in 1986, one commentator suggested "the Scots had a strong sense of nationality. They had no desire to be English or Irish and to this day their descendants are best described as Ulstermen" (Braidwood, 1986: 31).

In addition to these smaller language groups, the use of English serves to identify different communities in Northern Ireland. It is often suggested that different denominations speak a different form of the language. According to an account written by a medical doctor in the mid-1970s, most Catholics and Protestants recognise one another by their accent difference (Fraser, 1974: 115-6). This view is confirmed by individuals, such as Polly Devlin, who grew up in the province and describes her early experience of being recognised as Catholic (papist) in the following manner:

> We went further along the lough shore and went on playing and paddling and one girl followed us, pursued us. She said: "C'mere you two, are you two papishes?" I knew

that there was something amiss, and so did you, but I tried to answer the question, I said, "What are papishes? Papishes?" "You're papishes," she said, "Come on over here."

We were scared, but her companions were with her, watching us, waiting, and we went over to her. She said "Say the Lord's Prayer. Go on say it, at once."

"Our Father Who are in Heaven," I said. But you wouldn't say it. You wouldn't. You stood your ground. But I did, and when she heard "Who are in Heaven" instead of "which art" which is how they said it, she said, "You dirty wee papishes, you wee bitches, get on home." And we ran home crying, and said to Daddy, "What are papishes Daddy? They called us papishes" (Devlin, 1992: 383).

Although this piece obviously refers to set prayers rather than colloquial speech it demonstrates that Protestants and Catholics are aware of clues in one another's speech which alert them to the denomination of the speakers. Devlin (1983: 384) suggests that the vocabulary of Catholics is antique and is more full of meaning than the "pale nimble English" spoken by Protestants. She explains the constant use of violent imagery and exaggeration in terms of the "damage done to Ireland" in the past. Of course while Irish has had a significant influence on the English among Catholics I would argue that Scots-Gaelic may also have affected the English spoken by Protestants.

LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Irish and Ulster-Scots have evolved as symbols of community among the variety of traditions. Catholic ideology is essentially communal and a sense of community has traditionally been an important element of the social organisation of Northern Irish Catholics. This is partly a consequence of history. Irish Catholics, with the help of extended families and neighbours, had survived the evictions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Secret societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had enhanced a sense of kinship. Moreover society in Northern Ireland had disapproved of exogamy, and Catholics tended to marry only those of the same denomination. Consequently one's entire social circle was of a similar denomination. All of these factors ensured that the concept of nation and community was central to the nationalist experience of and reaction to the Northern state (Todd, 1990).

In the early 1980s the Irish language strengthened the sense of this community in a variety of sectors. For the republican tradition it easily identified members of their own community within the Maze prison and one of its principal advantages was that of separating "insiders" from "outsiders", of placing a linguistic barrier between republican prisoners and wardens. McKeown (1996: 46), a former prisoner, recounts the anxiety of prisoners when it appeared on one occasion that a new warden was familiar with Irish. In such circumstances the language would lose its efficiency as a boundary marker. According to McKeown's account the prison wardens

constantly "threatened" that they were learning it, that they would soon know what we were saying. With much glee they opened Seanna's door one day and one of them, a new face in the block, recited the prayer "Hail Mary" in Irish. As the prayer finished

they slammed the cell door shut before Seanna could make any response, going off up the wing hooting and cheering (McKeown, 1996: 46).

Initially the prisoners were very concerned but quickly established that the officer's knowledge of Irish was superficial. Following a few brief meetings with the new warden, they "addressed him in Irish in what appeared to be a serious manner but which was in reality heaping abuse upon him, it became obvious that his grasp of the language did not extend beyond the solitary prayer".

A revival of interest in Irish in the community at large linked the Irish-speaking republicans in the Maze prisons with their supporters in the wider community. In the wider Northern Irish community the use of Irish in street signs and in murals also served to identify nationalist areas. In the past Sinn Féin and other republicans were accused of using the language as a tool of exclusion. The director of the Ultach Trust, an agency that promotes the language across the community, has suggested many of those who spoke the language in the past were politically motivated and it was obvious that their cultural and political commitments were inseparable. As a consequence it was automatically assumed that *all* speakers of the language were republican. Unionism and Irish were perceived as incompatible.

An Ultach Trust report noted that "this unconscious ethnocentricity, rooted in an unresolved conflict between principles which claim to be non-political, and assumptions which are essentially political in their implications, is deeply ingrained in the Irish language movement" (Ultach Trust, 1991: 9-10). The report suggested that the exclusion of the Protestant community by ordinary Irish-speakers was often deliberate in the past. In a reference to a statement in the 1980s by a member of Sinn Féin it was noted that the language was frequently perceived as a "weapon in the nationalist armoury". But the efficiency of this weaponry would decrease if the language became acceptable across the community. Unionists themselves often imbued the Irish language with political overtones. In a "strange mirror image of this cast of mind, many unionists, following a programme to build Britishness by rejecting everything Irish, are extremely hostile to the language, for motives which are themselves essentially political (Ultach Trust, 1991: 10).

As with the Basque language Irish has operated in the past as a means of excluding "foreigners" (Conversi, 1997). It created a frontier that generated solidarity among those that spoke it and had divided the Irish community from the Protestant unionist world. The director of the Ultach Trust conceives of Irish as a tool of integration rather than segregation and explains that this inclusion/exclusion dichotomy will not be alleviated by the de-politisation of Irish. Instead it is more appropriate to multi-politicise the language and render it acceptable to all political traditions (Ultach Trust, 1994: 15).

Irish speakers in Northern Ireland are consciously rejecting the economic advantages offered by English in favour of the spirit of community generated by the speaking of Irish. Irish-speaking networks act as linguistic fortresses and protect members from cultural pressures at large (Ó Donnaile, 1997). A resurgence of Irish language networks has also linked Irish speakers in Northern Ireland with their imagined com-

munity in the South from whom they were separated at the time of partition (Nic Craith, 1994b).

Ulster-Scots links the loyalist community in Northern Ireland with their imagined community in Scotland, where in recent years there has been a revival of the Scots language (McClure, 1997). As a consequence there has been increasing co-operation between speakers of these languages in Ulster and Scotland. Most of the demands for the Ulster-Scots language are expressed in communal terms and the Ulster-Scots Language Society established in 1992 frequently refers to the "community" when seeking equality with Irish for their language. Almost all of its stated aims are expressed as demands for the linguistic community. In overall terms they wish to bolster the confidence of this community particularly by enhancing the appreciation and status of their language. They wish to ensure that the community takes pride in the validity of their history and traditions.

I believe that Ulster-Scots is not quite as effective as Irish as a boundary marker, because its linguistic closeness to English lessens its effectiveness as a vehicle of exclusion. Speakers of English may understand aspects of Ulster-Scots and will not necessarily feel excluded by the use of that language in their company. As is the case with Irish, Ulster-Scots operates as a territorial marker in some regions. In June 1996 the Ards Borough Council decided to erect bilingual street-signs in the village of Greyabbey, an act that symbolically defines the local district. Signs in both Ulster-Scots and English have been designed to acknowledge the Ulster-Scots placenames that were employed before the erection of monolingual street signs in English. Ards Borough Council has also resolved to use bilingual stationary and to establish a sub-committee to assess and establish other measures to promote the Ulster-Scots language.

Unlike Ulster-Scots, Cant or Gammon operates very effectively as a boundary for members within the travelling community. It often serves as a secret language in the sense that few people, other than its speakers, know of its existence. Travellers can use the language freely in the presence of the settled community. They believe that such communication is aided by the fact that Cant or Gammon is interspersed with English words so that the casual observer does not realise that another language is being used. This is the reversal of the Ulster-Scottish situation where the proximity with English is often regarded as a problem. In the case of Cant or Gammon it is viewed as an asset.

CONCLUSION

"Meon an phobail a thógáil tríd an gcúltúr" (the people's spirit is raised through culture) is the text of a contemporary mural in Northern Ireland. It emphasises the increasing relevance of emblems of culture in everyday life. Some commentators are keen to establish the variety of cultural traditions in Northern Ireland. Others propose that this divided community participates in a common heritage. Many expressions of culture in Northern Ireland are perceived as political acts but as the process of recognition for all traditions evolves some of these expressions may become less politically motivated.

Perhaps difference will no longer be perceived as intimidatory and cultural traditions may come to be celebrated as a shared cultural experience. A new Northern Irish identity will possibly emerge alongside the traditional ones. As the entire community gains self-confidence, it may abandon the desire to achieve harmony in homogeneity and resolve to become unified in diversity. A desire for affirmation from either the British or Irish government may abate. As the entire community gains self-confidence it may increasingly seek to control its own destiny. Kennedy (1995: 34) argues that

> There is a strong argument for making it as easy as possible for nationalism to feel at home in the United Kingdom, for avoiding obsessive or obtrusive use of symbols of the UK state, and above all for offering maximum opportunity to all to play a full role in administering Northern Ireland, and in sharing political authority. The decision of Queen's University to stop playing the national anthem at graduation ceremonies is a surrender to Boorishness, but it is probably the sort of skirmish a wise general is prepared to lose within the overall context of a successful engagement.

While I could not agree with Kennedy that the discontinuation of *God save the Queen* was a "surrender to boorishness", it does raise the crucial point that of whether the presence of cultural emblems, such as Irish or Ulster-Scots, are provocative to a community that is becoming accustomed to peace.

In December 1999 a new cross-border implementation body for language was established under the jurisdiction of the North South Ministerial Council. Known in Irish as *An Foras Teanga*, or in Ulster-Scots as Tha Boord o Leid, the board aims to enhance public appreciation and awareness of the cultural traditions of Ireland. It is possible the operation of this new body will genuinely promote intercultural communication and a greater appreciation of some aspects of the linguistic diversity of Northern Ireland.

But it is also possible that there will be increasing pressure to displace Irish or Ulster-Scots by a silence that promotes peace. Markers of culture may disappear from Northern Irish society and it may become a homogenised, sterilised but ultimately peaceful province. Some would regard the prize of peace as being worth a sacrifice of emblems of distinction. Others may suggest that until such markers are widely accepted, real peace will never be achieved.

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