

The Moral Boundaries of the Nation: The Constitution of National Identity in the South Eastern Border Counties of Ireland.

By Jennifer Todd, Orla Muldoon, Karen Trew, Lorenzo Cañas Bottos, Nathalie Rougier, Katrina McLaughlin

Abstract

This article argues that nationalism is more varied in the way that it constructs its boundaries than contemporary scholarship suggests. In an interdisciplinary, multi-stranded qualitative study of ethno-national identity on the Southern side of the Irish border, it shows the moral repertoires that qualify, conflict with, and on occasion replace, territorial-ethnic and state-centred aspects of national identity. It refocuses attention on the cultural and normative content of imagined national communities, and the different ways in which general norms function in particular communal contexts. It casts a new light on Southern attitudes to Irish unity. More generally, it suggests that a form of moral nationalism is possible, distinct from the forms more typically discussed in the literature: ethnic, civic, trans nationalism or even banal nationalism. .

Keywords.

Nation, state, border, Ireland, Europe, moral repertoires, national identity.

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Introduction

This paper argues that nationalism is more varied in the way that it constructs its boundaries than contemporary scholarship suggests. Conventional typologies distinguish ethnic nationalism, where identification is with a people and its historic territory, from civic nationalism, where identification is with the state and its institutions. , are increasingly challenged in the comparative literature, in studies of minority regional nationalisms and in studies of pluri-national identification which transgresses state boundaries (Keating 2001; Peters, 2002; Yeoh et al, 2003). Our study extends this critique by showing the moral repertoires which qualify, conflict with, and on occasion replace, territorial, ethnic and state-centred aspects of national identity. An emphasis on the moral content of national identity is not new: however moral repertoires are often seen simply as legitimating prior ethnic or ‘imperial’ forms of national identification and dominance (Garvin, 1987; Osterhammel, 1997). We show that they can play an independent role in constituting the boundaries of the nation.

Our analysis is based on a qualitative study of ethno-national identity in the Irish border area; in this article we focus only on our findings in the Southern border counties. This reveals an unexpected side of Irish nationalism and casts a new light on Southern

attitudes to Irish unity. More generally, it refocuses attention on the cultural and normative content of imagined national communities, and the different ways in which general norms function in particular communal contexts. It identifies a form of moral nationalism, distinct from ethnic, civic, trans nationalism or even banal nationalism. It suggests that where such normative content is highlighted, imagined national boundaries become more contingent, more fluid and more negotiable than is the case either with state-centred, or ethnic, nationalism.

The existing scholarly literature on contemporary Irish nationalism defines three main types of Irish nationalism: ethnic nationalism, with a 32-county island-wide locus, based on a sense of the historic territory of the ethno-national community and typically strongly Catholic (Kissane, 2003); civic nationalism, based on the institutions of the state, with a 26 county locus (Coakley, 2001); transgressive (post-) nationalism, based on a hybrid multiplicity of loci (state, ethnic diaspora and Europe) (Kearney, 1997). Much of the debate in the literature and more generally in the media is on how far, when and why Irish nationalism moved from one form to another and whether or not this is a good thing (O'Halloran, 1987; Mair, 1987; Garvin, 2002; Kissane, 2003; Garvin 2004). Our research reveals a form of Irish nationalism that does not fit into any of these categories, one in which moral repertoires are highlighted over ethnic or state ones. This contrasts with the way the majority community on the Northern side of the border constructs its identity: there, different moral repertoires give existential depth to a state-bounded identity (Donnan, 2005). We do not claim that our results are representative, but they

allow us to reframe the question of the direction of development of contemporary nationalisms in Ireland, and beyond, in a potentially fruitful way.

We begin from a methodological perspective which takes national identity as a varying construct with substantive cognitive and evaluative content and looks qualitatively at the ‘elements’ or ‘repertoires’ which go to make up different forms of national identity (Lamont, 2000; Ruane and Todd, 2004; Ashmore et al, 2004). Such a qualitative approach is necessary in the Irish case for four reasons. First, existing quantitative studies focus on the category of national identity (almost exclusively Irish) with only limited attention to the content of that identity or the values associated with it: they may question the perceived conditions of being Irish (birth, language), but do not, perhaps cannot, probe the more subtle ways in which the constitutive elements of national identity are combined. These studies show significant trends of change in policy dispositions (for example, changing attitudes towards a united Ireland, uneven between localities and generations with stronger forms of nationalism in the border counties (Davis and Sinnott, 1979; Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott, 2005). These policy preferences, however, are consistent with several different ways of constructing identity and community. Second, qualitative analysis is almost exclusively based on speeches and media commentaries (Ruane, 1994; Ivory, 1999; Hayward 2004b). How these are received, how far they echo either policy makers or public’s views is not clear. Third, broader interpretative analyses of the move from ethnic to state-centred to transgressive identities are radically underdetermined by the data. They are typically explicit attempts to show the relevance to the Irish case of wider philosophical theories of post-nationalism or the post-modern

condition or of political scientific categories of ethnic vs civic nationalism, or of European regionalist tendencies (Kearney, 1997; Coakley, 2001; Laffan and Payne, 2001). Some commentaries are explicitly politically motivated (New Ireland Forum Report, 1984). Fourth, the radical socio-political and economic changes in recent decades in the Irish state have produced major changes in Irish society (O'Hearn, 1998). In this changing, contentious, theory-driven and politically-charged field, the need for qualitative research is clear.

We focus in this article on one aspect of national identity, its imagined boundaries. Our case study is in the Irish border area. Taking seriously the 'revisionist' hypothesis that the state border has slowly become institutionalised to become part of the imaginative boundaries of the nation, one might expect the ambivalences and conflicts that surround this transition to be particularly evident at the Irish border. Scholars have shown that identity formation in 'frontier' areas, where state-ness is routinely problematised or challenged, throws light on national identity formation more generally (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, 45-6, 50; Rokkan and Urwin, 1983; Agnew, 2003). In the past, the Irish border area was more strongly nationalist than the rest of the state, with continuing national divisions between Protestant and Catholic, and it still records a high vote for Sinn Féin (Davis and Sinnott, 1979; Bowen, 1983). However its economic problems and demographic decline, and the importance of EU funding in the area, suggest that it may also be an area where transgressive, hybrid, cross-border and European identities are emerging faster than in other parts of the state (Laffan and Payne, 2001; Hayward, 2004a; Tannam, 2004). The border area is thus a particularly appropriate area for the case study,

potentially revealing all three types of identity highlighted in the literature: ethnic, civic and transgressive.

Border regions are atypical of their wider societies. Throughout Europe, they manifest an ambivalent practical institutionalization/subversion of state borders in informal economic activities such as smuggling, a self-reclassification process when the border is crossed, and a sense of borders not as lines but as borderlands, varying and fluctuating frontier regions (Donnan and Wilson, 1999). All of these features, as we show below, are also typical of the Irish case. Elsewhere in European border regions, it appears that state borders are institutionalized in identity formation, although state-centred identities often coexist with overlapping national and local (cross-border) identities (Bray, 2002). We expected the same to be the case in our study: a gradual and perhaps ambivalent move to a 26-county national identity, slower than in the rest of the Irish state, with the possibility of new hybrid identities opened up by European integration. This was not what we found. Neither ethnic, nor civic nor hybrid European identities were highlighted in the narratives and discussions of our respondents.

Our argument rests on data generated within an inter-disciplinary research project on inter-generational transmission and ethno-national identity in the Irish border area. Here we report only on our research on the Southern side of the border, in the counties of Louth and Monaghan. This research was undertaken in 2004 and includes a school essay project undertaken by 40 pupils in three schools, three months participant observation in one border location and over 60 in-depth, open-ended interviews. A number of schools in the border area were invited to participate in the essay study and, in the Southern

counties, three schools, each located in large towns, agreed: one a Roman Catholic secondary, another a Protestant secondary and the third a Roman Catholic vocational school. The pupils averaged 14 years of age and were asked if they thought the border had an impact on the people who live close to it, and why or why not. Responses were read and re-read by three coders. Themes, often more than one per response, and similarities in young people's responses were identified.

The interviews were conducted by three researchers in different locations: a small border town where three months participant observation was carried out, a large border town, with an additional set of interviews with mixed marriage families in Belfast and Dublin. The interviews followed a common 'topic guide' which ranged over all aspects of identity, Protestant-Catholic and North-South interrelations, including individuals' experience of 'the border', its impact on their lives and identity, their perceptions of 'the other side' of the border. The research design involved interviewing members of three-generational families; the overriding criterion used to choose interviewees was their membership in such a family and willingness to participate in the research. There was a representative age-, generation- and gender-spread (with the exception of the youngest generation who were underrepresented in interviews but at the centre of the school essay study). Protestants were slightly over-represented in our sample. The interviewees were predominantly but not exclusively middle class. The school study and participant observation study were cross-class.

The interviewees ranged over the (local) political spectrum; if we did not interview declared IRA members, we did interview individuals from strongly republican areas and families, whose close relatives, friends or schoolmates were, or had been, in the IRA. The researchers had varying degrees of insider and outsider status (see Ganiel and Mitchell, 2004). The interviews were taped, transcribed and coded in terms of the topic guide. Analysis began by each interviewer presenting their results on the impact of the state border on identity formation; it continued with interpretations discussed and refined, with each interviewer going back to their data to test out ideas. We report on general views and note exceptions; quotations are chosen as representative of the interviews while identifying details are removed. The interview data is used to reveal categories of thought and repertoires of argument.² Participant observation suggests, however, that the interviewees' views are by no means atypical of the area.

After a brief historical contextualisation, data from the interviews and the essay study are presented, prior to analysis of their significance for the wider questions about the boundaries of national identity raised in this introduction

The Irish border

The Irish border was created by the Government of Ireland Act of 1920 which granted devolved powers within the United Kingdom to the North-eastern six counties of Ireland which would become Northern Ireland. The other 26 counties were, with the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, granted a limited form of independence within the Commonwealth; this

was later developed into full independence. That a border was drawn at all was a product of the military resistance of the Protestant (unionist) population concentrated in the north-east of Ireland to a home rule parliament for all of Ireland where they would be a minority in a predominantly Catholic and nationalist polity. That the border was drawn where it was (rather than including only the four majority Protestant counties of the North-east, or the historic nine counties of Ulster, or attempting to follow more precisely religio-political demography) was a direct product of unionist mobilization and will. Unionists successfully campaigned for control of a region defined not on the basis of population or history or geography, but as the largest territory which they could safely hope to control (Whyte, 1983a; Mansergh, 1991). The British government legislated for and enforced this boundary. Large pockets of majority Catholic areas were included in Northern Ireland, with smaller enclaves of Protestants in what became the Irish state. This complex land border - 499 kilometers in length - effectively cut off many areas from unrestricted economic access to their hinterlands (Boundary Commission, 1925). Yet it could not effectively be policed, informal bypassing of the border was widespread, and smuggling became an important component of some local economies (O Gráda, 1994).

The border was opposed by nationalists and Catholics throughout Ireland and was particularly resented by those within the new Northern state (Harris, 1993; Phoenix, 1994). Our interest in this paper, however, is with the population on the Southern side of the border which is predominantly but not exclusively Catholic (Bowen, 1983). From 1921, the Irish state developed its own institutions and political culture – distinctive

political parties and a party system, educational institutions and a state system were set up and politics and much of civic life took place within these limits. Some key civil society institutions – churches, sporting associations – continued to be organized on an all-Ireland basis, and some new cross-border and all-Ireland voluntary organizations were set up, but much civic activity followed state boundaries (Whyte, 1983b; Tannam, 1999). Cross-border linkages and institutionalization increased with EU integration and support for peace in Northern Ireland (Laffan and Payne, 2001; Tannam, 2004; Coakley, 2005). One might hypothesise that the institutionalization and growing legitimization of the Irish state would have led the Southern population to accept the border as a normal and stable boundary of social, cultural and national life. As we shall see below, however, the reality was more complex.

Discourses around the border: the interviews and participant observation

Interviews and participant observation in the counties of Louth and Monaghan revealed a complex discourse around the border: in what follows, we distinguish practical, symbolic and moral themes within the discourse. In respect to its practical everyday significance, our respondents' narratives show that the Irish border has been institutionalized in ways typical of European border regions, not least by subversion of it through smuggling and other informal economic and paramilitary practices. Atypically, no process of symbolic institutionalization was found: our respondents were explicit that the border did not impact on their sense of themselves or on their sense of their community. A closer

reading of the discourse, however, reveals recognition of *a* border, a moral boundary which divided North and South but cross-cut the institutionalized state boundary.

The practical significance of the border

'County Monaghan has no natural resources, well, the border is its natural resource, and its inhabitants have always mined it.' (Male second generation Catholic).

Almost all our respondents emphasized the practical significance of the border as something that changed over time, presenting new challenges, limits and opportunities to the inhabitants of the region, and being transformed in turn by their practice. In these respects, the Irish border is portrayed in a fashion very typical of border-lands. It is the whole area of the border that is relevant to perception and interaction. For our respondents, the border was not primarily a line on a map or a division between states but a continuum in everyday life experience that might constantly be negotiated or avoided for a variety of ordinary motives – shopping, profit from smuggling, work, family. The border-area fluctuated in extent, depending at once on the activity and the period. It incorporated large towns in narratives of IRA camaraderie in the 1940s and 1950s. It might be condensed to a few roads in areas of military contestation in the 1970s and 1980s. During the troubles, it was described in terms of penumbra of danger radiating from core areas through to normally safe havens. More recently, it has become a liminal zone, where state boundaries are not seen until it is clear that one has passed some miles beyond them. In these respects, the Irish border is typical of border-lands or 'frontiers',

zones where state authority comes into question, where state and nation are still negotiated (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, 15-17, 63-4). This aspect of the Irish border, unlike many other European borders, has persisted to the present

The discussions of the practical significance of the border fall into four broad categories, depending on the period recounted. We spoke to few people old enough to remember the formation of the border in the 1920s, but several spoke of their parents' generation and their experience of violence, forced population movement and the stepping down of IRA activity that formed the context of their childhood. Some individuals emphasised how the life-paths of their own parents and family were critically affected by political events in the 1920s. For others, partition represented a significant traumatic event which was still present to them: *'it was the best we could get out of Britain'* (female second generation Catholic), *'Partition divided the land, divided families'* (male second generation Catholic).

Personal memories begin in the context of the 'economic war' between Ireland and Britain that prevented the legal traffic of products across the border and continue through the Second World War which prevented Ireland from acquiring wheat from the international market. Members of the oldest generation often had relatives on both sides of the border and described much *'to-ing and fro-ing'*. In many of these narratives, the border is represented as an opportunity for the acquisition of otherwise unavailable or cheap goods for domestic consumption. A strong sense of local community was partially constituted by hardship and the shared experience of subversion of border control.

A third distinctive period was that of the ‘troubles’, beginning with the 1950s border campaign and continuing – after ten years of peace - with the outbreak of the Northern troubles. Whereas memories of border crossing in the previous period focus on the return into the Irish state, with Irish custom officers questioning individuals on the products they were carrying, in this period memories emphasise the opposite movement: the crossing into Northern Ireland and the control exerted by the British security forces. The border is transformed into an area of differential gradients of danger, whose extent fluctuates, sometimes reaching as far as Dublin with memories of the Dublin bombs, and contracting into an area of intense danger patrolled by armed agents of the state or by paramilitaries. Danger is concentrated in the North. One couple told of their own experience of state violence in the border area in the 1950s, epitomized by the Northern security forces: *‘you were amazed, probably even shocked by .. the colour of the uniforms.. the dark black uniform ... the first thing you noticed was the guns and you found that quite overpowering really’* (male, first generation, Catholic). In the 1980s, even in tourist areas of Northern Ireland, safety remained an issue as a couple on honeymoon discovered: *‘we did the Giant’s Causeway and ...all the rest ... we’d used the Discover Ireland brochure and we had all the things and everything else but unfortunately it didn’t tell you whether a Southern reg [registered] car at the time would be safely parked.’* (male, second generation, Protestant).

For those in the small border town where participant observation was undertaken, the level of danger rose as one moved from the town, where safety was assured by the

dependency of the IRA on the support of the local population, to a core border-area that was plagued with danger, where the IRA might control ‘unauthorised’ and ‘concession’ roads and where one might encounter republican paramilitary checkpoints, British security forces, or, a little farther, Protestant paramilitaries. Some motorists would modify their Irish registration plates to avoid being singled out in Protestant majority areas. During this period the border became a practical barrier imposed by violence, on the one hand an area of danger, on the other, a distancing device from the troubles. *‘That was in the North’* or *‘the troubles were not here, but over there’* are common references to that period. Although petty smuggling continued through the ‘troubles’, it was now controlled and transformed into a source of funding for the IRA.

The period beginning with the ceasefires of 1994 and continuing through the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 coincided with increasing EU economic support for the border area (Laffan and Payne, 2001). The dangers associated with war were reduced, and progressively checkpoints, barriers and British army installations were removed. The profitability of smuggling has been reduced and ‘double claiming’ of agricultural subsidies has become one of the most important informal economic resources of the border area. An important formal resource is constituted by the EU funded grants offered to cross-border bodies. Shopping trips are easier and safer, but the globalisation of brands has made ‘shopping for novelty’ obsolete. Travelling, shopping and socialising North of the border are presented as normal unproblematic activities, and some interviewees voiced surprise that they were even asked about them – this was *‘not an issue’*. Yet the same interviewees said that they did not cross the border very often; they preferred to

stay in their area, or go to Dublin rather than Belfast or Newry for shopping trips or travel to the west coast for short trips and holidays. The most frequent border-crossers are now those who cross for formal economic reasons, because of the new organization of their (middle class) work, the economic linkages and mergers between firms North and South.

The symbolic insignificance of the border

'Border, there is no border here.' (Common comment in the small border town)

North and South – 'It's all the same, we're all the same.' (Female second generation Catholic)

The most striking aspect of our findings, common to all three sets of interviews, was our respondents' explicit statements that the border did not affect the way they thought about themselves, their identity, or their sense of community or nationality. If, from our academic perspective, they were 'border-landers', this was not how they saw themselves. Respondents who lived less than ten miles from the border did not think of themselves as living on the border. Despite the fact that all respondents were clear that our project was investigating identity 'in the border area', no-one spontaneously mentioned the proximity of the border or its impact on their self-perception and self-definition. When inhabitants of the large border town were specifically questioned on the subject, all but one emphasised the lack of impact the border had on their self-perception and identity definition. Perhaps we should not have been so surprised, for in drama by authors from this area very similar ideas are expressed (Bort, 1999).

Those interviewed did not describe the border as a real separation between two different countries, two different states. One woman expressed a typical attitude: *'because it's one island, just because there's a treaty... written... all those years ago...'* (female second generation Catholic). These individuals, Protestant and Catholic, tended to define and locate themselves (and others) in terms of counties rather than in terms of town or state: *'we are from Co. Cavan', 'my father married a Fermanagh woman', 'I grew up in Co. Monaghan', 'we've lived in Dublin then moved to Louth', 'our family would have been from Roscommon and Cork'*. They spoke of Ireland in terms of counties (*'the 6 counties', the '32 counties', the '26 counties'*), sometimes in terms of provinces (*'we're in the province of Leinster but we would go and play football in Ulster because it was easier to travel'*). This practice (institutionalised in the national sporting organisation, the GAA) had the function of bypassing the significance of the border, avoiding the need to give legitimacy to it as a dividing line. Catholics and Protestants shared a clear sense of Irishness although they tended to express it differently. Some Catholics manifested a quasi-primordial sensibility: *'I know no other way of living, you know...'*, *'We know nothing else [than being Irish]'*, *'We have the Irish way in us... that's just the way it is'*, *'We take it for granted... the kids take it for granted'..* The Protestants were at once Irish and had an equally clear sense of being a *'minority'* in Ireland. Sometimes they combined their Irish identity with another category: *'Irish Presbyterian'*, or, on one occasion, *'Scots-Irish'*. A second generation Protestant emphasized both his particular genealogy and his Irish identity: *'even though its, originally our generations back they would have came from Scotland to Ireland so, we would have a strong link I suppose with them, em,*

so, I'm happy to be Irish, I like the country and like living here, eh, that's all, there's nothing else I can say really'.

Many of the respondents, both Protestant and Catholic, emphasized the relative 'peacefulness' of their area in comparison to other border locations (many references and comparisons were made with South Armagh and to the Monaghan bombing of 1974). A religious boundary was clearly acknowledged, although it was also explicitly seen to cross-cut the border. Respondents (both Protestant and Catholic) highlighted the good relations between the ethno-religious communities in their area and the lack of 'spill-over' of the Troubles in Northern Ireland in their locality. Ethno-religious distinctions and tensions were emphasised by the older Catholic and by almost all Protestant respondents but they were put in the past: *'when I was younger, there was a very definitive... difference between Protestant and Catholic families in this country'* (male, first generation Protestant).

European identity did not feature in people's narratives, even when prompted. No-one of any age, even those with extensive European linkages, volunteered a sense of 'European-ness'. A well-travelled teenager said *'.. I just see myself as young Irish people. I don't see, like I know we are in the European Union and there are a lot of people in it but I don't see myself as European, which is weird. I see myself as Irish.'* (male, third generation, Catholic) Some had benefited from and were very well informed about EU membership: a farmer described how the EU had a huge impact on the Irish state but when asked if he felt European at all said it was *'purely economical'* (male, second

generation, Protestant). Despite their physical proximity to a state border, few actually associated the opening of Europe's borders with a sense of increased closeness with Northern Ireland. One man summarised the general feeling: *'we're Irish and pro-Europe [rather than] European'* (second generation Catholic). There was substantial agreement on the positive aspect of increased exchange and cooperation across the border and all interviewees seemed to think that these would be hugely beneficial to the area in terms both of community relations and economic rewards, but there was no sense of increasing European 'unification', 'integration' or even increased connection with Northern Ireland or, for that matter, with any other European state

The imaginative boundaries of moral life

'I came back and I remember saying to John, never, ever, ever let the children go to the North of Ireland because if that hasn't changed before (sic) what's happened in the last few years, its never going to change'. (Female second generation Catholic mixed marriage)

If North-South territorial borders were denied any national or cultural significance or significance for identity, cultural differences between North and South were clearly recognised. Living near the state border, it was said, made people more aware of the situation in Northern Ireland than people who lived further away in the south, *'more*

aware of the bigotry that can exist' (male second generation Catholic). One individual, whose sense of a shared, indigenous Irish identity went back millennia and encompassed all parts of the island, said *'when the border was built it was like the Berlin wall, there was a wall built.. and the closer you got to that wall the darker the shadow was... [it] always appeared to me not to be the darkness of the land, it was the darkness that was created by that difference between the North and the South and it was strengthened when the border was erected... '* (male first generation Catholic). A young woman from the Southern border counties described her childhood perception of Northern Ireland: *'it was a place that you went to and did a bit of shopping and came home. It wasn't a place you chose to spend time, leisure time or socializing time, it was a place to go into and come out of, depending on the rate of sterling... it was always this strange place and not a very welcoming place'* (female second generation Catholic mixed marriage). In another case, the very frequency of contact with people in the North and of visits to Northern Ireland led one woman to the view that Northerners were *'boxed'* in their categories, that they were not *'open'* in the way it was possible to be in the South (female second generation Catholic mixed marriage). Sometimes, however, Protestants saw more similarities than did Catholics:

The civility of the South was implicitly and explicitly contrasted to the North. In the South, relations between Catholic and Protestant are presented by both groups as civil and neighbourly. In the North, one might face physical attack, prejudice, the need to reclassify, to think of oneself as Catholic and Irish. *'So definitely, I know I am Irish, I know I am Catholic Irish, but it is almost like that has been imposed on me. I have never*

thought about that myself... [after moving to Belfast] I suppose it was more practical reasons that you had to become aware of what you are. Whereas in the South really while everybody else is the same as you and is in the same category as you sure it didn't matter where you go or who you talk to.' (Female second generation Catholic mixed marriage)

Two Catholic teenagers emphasised the 'stupidity' of the division in the North: one elaborated: *'.. I think it was a bit of a stupid thing to do to hang onto religion, to hang onto everything.'* (male, third generation, Catholic.). Southern Protestants, while sometimes expressing cultural and religious similarity with Northern Protestants, make a clear moral distinction from them: *'I think em just the hard line, the, the, the southern protestants look at the north and see the very very hard line that Ulster says no to everything, you know.* (female, first generation Protestant). *'I'm a Protestant, I'm proud to be, you know, but I don't agree with what the loyalists, you know, the whole thing in the North, fighting over... '* (female, second generation Protestant)

These perceived moral and cultural divisions, however, cross-cut the institutionalized border, excluding some in the South, including some in the North. Visits to family or friends in the North showed a common culture cross-cutting the border (although different aspects of that culture were emphasized by Protestants and by Catholics). Within the South, refugees from the Northern violence disrupted Southern civility. *'The troubles changed everything, everything completely. It's never been the same since. When we grew up there was a lot more freedom of everything and then when the trouble started and so many people came from the North to live here, people were afraid, afraid to say what they thought, what they felt, afraid to say anything and that has never gone away,*

that whole thing' (female second generation Catholic); *'They'd even take over the whole conversation. We were placid, quiet, but they were all gun blazing'* (male, second generation, Catholic). *'You could get beaten up in the pub for saying something, if you said the wrong thing they'd look at you and you might get beaten up for saying something'* (male, second generation, Catholic). Even where numbers were less and sympathy more, distance remained *'.... there was a smaller mobile home there and those people were called the refugees, they came from the north like but they were called refugees, they came to get away from the troubles up the north and I remember thinking this was like, you know I was feeling so sorry for them sort of leaving their home and that'* (female second generation Catholic).

Our respondents reported episodes where they transcended these differences, in individual interrelations, acts of kindness, sometimes in marriage across religious, national and state lines. This however, was an existential transcendence, a recognition of the Other as also a moral centre. Its difficulty was made clear in the narratives. As we see below, the way the differentiation with the North is morally constructed says much about the self-understanding of Southern Irish society and the constitutive values of the Southern state.

The younger generation: the essay study

Young people's views of the border were accessed and explored in an essay writing study. 40 young people, aged on average 14 years, were asked whether they thought the

border had an impact on the people who live close to it. Forty six per cent, including roughly equal proportions of males and females, and of those who identified as Protestant and as Catholic, agreed with the statement. Fifty four percent of young people sampled believed that the border had no impact on those who lived close to it. When asked to explain their answer, most young people, like the adults discussed above, emphasized the practical rather than symbolic impact of the border.

Living close to the border is dangerous.

By far the predominant theme in the responses of those who believed that the border had an impact was danger. Three different vulnerabilities were readily identifiable. First, some young people perceived a present threat for those residing South of the border. They believed this either because they had experienced or had heard of violence occurring in the border area in which they lived. For instance one young person wrote *'I have heard a lot of stories about what has happened to people living close to the border. E.g. bricks being thrown at windows of houses, cars being vandalised and people getting beaten up or seriously injured'* (female, Catholic). Another stated *'...there has been a load of men shoot (sic) around the area because I live beside the border'* (male, Protestant).

Others believed that those residing in border areas were particularly vulnerable in the event of 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland escalating. For instance one respondent stated *'I think yes because if there was ever anything which went wrong the people who live*

next to the border would be the first to know about it' (female Catholic). Similarly another respondent stated *'...when you live near the border if anything happens you will be near it so therefore it is having an impact on you. It is in my opinion dangerous as so many things happen on the border. As the border is near the north were (sic) a lot of things take place'* (female Catholic).

Implicit in many explanations of the danger associated with the border was the view that 'the North' represented that danger. In some cases young people interpreted the term 'border' as meaning 'the North', as exemplified in the following passage: *'Yes I do think the border has an influence on us because every time you turn on the tv or listen to the news you see all the riots and fights not to mention all the innocent people who's being brutally kilt (sic) all over the years. Like for example look at the Omagh bombing'* (female Catholic).

A final point evident in some young people's responses was the lasting impact of their own earlier 'border experiences'. British security force checkpoints at the border were identified as threatening by a number of young people and were recalled as a particular source of anxiety during childhood. For instance one young person wrote *'I live near the border of Monaghan and Tyrone. I was going into Tyrone and we had to go through a check point I use to always think something was going to happen to me. I used to be so scared'* (male Catholic)

The border is a source of division.

A second theme that emerged from young people's responses was related to division.

Young people referred to the impact of isolation on the minorities both North and South, but particularly on Protestants in the South.³ The political division and difference that has resulted between North and South was also highlighted.

Young people often spontaneously referred to the issue of religious and national division when writing of the impact of the border on those residing close to it. For instance one young person stated that the main reason that the border *'affects people is because of their religion'*. This view was often underpinned by a belief that those from the minority group in the North or South were those most adversely affected due to isolation or intimidation. For instance the Catholic respondent quoted above went on to state *'Catholics in the North are the people who get the abuse and the same for Protestants living in the South. The level of abuse nowadays isn't as bad as five years ago but people still get the torture'* (female, Catholic). In these discussions, the border is seen as accentuating the practical importance of the religious divisions which transcend it.

Others saw the border as itself creating division between North and South. In some cases young people referred to the border as resulting in an *'us versus them'* mentality between Northerners and Southerners. In other instances division and difference between Northerners and Southerners was implicit in what young people said. One male Protestant recalled his experience: *'When I was playing rugby people was (sic) calling us*

names because we were from a different place'. Some stated that they could see no justification for the border and a small proportion (3 respondents) perceived it as illegitimate, thus implicitly opposing themselves to unionists (although not to all Northerners). Some admitted that they did not understand all the issues but saw the border as preventing the divisions between Catholic and Protestants and the associated violence in the North from encroaching on the South. These young people saw relations between Catholics and Protestants in the South as good: 'We go to school were (sic) there is both religions. We work with each other and are friends with each other why can't people except (sic) each other in the North' (female Catholic).

The border has no impact

Over half of young people sampled (54%) believed that the border had no impact on the people who live close to it. Some asserted that living near the border was no different to living elsewhere in Ireland, whilst others saw issues relating to the border such as proximity to sterling shopping areas as so minor that they had little impact on everyday life. On occasion, the perceived lack of influence of the border currently was evidenced by comparison to how relevant the border had been in the past, when security and customs increased both the visibility and the salience of the border. For instance one young person stated *'The only good impact living on the border at Monaghan is you can go shopping and get lots of things. Where as you couldn't a few years back. You were*

stopped and the car would be searched for any things you couldn't bring back home'
(female, Catholic).

In some cases young people viewed the border as having no impact in part because they believed those who lived North and South had much in common. In direct contrast to the themes of division and difference evident in some responses, these young people saw their counterparts in the North as similar to themselves. In some cases, this belief was underpinned by an assertion that everyone living in Ireland, both in the North and in the South, was of Irish nationality. In other cases this belief was bolstered because of relatives who lived North of the border or because the respondent had significant contact with those living North of the border.

The moral constitution of the boundaries of the nation: interpreting the data

Our respondents communicated to us their everyday reality, nothing that to them was startlingly new: many of the same attitudes were exemplified in their narratives of the border area in the 1940s and 1950s; similar attitudes are to be found in autobiography and creative literature (Anderson and Bort, 1999). Yet these most ordinary and everyday of attitudes throw light on the character of Irish nationalism today. The border was – for the same people – a source of trauma in the past and symbolically irrelevant today. North and South were the same and different. Our respondents were open to others, non-exclusive in their national identity, yet they constituted strict divisions from many in the North.

They volunteered countless examples of the practical importance of the border in jobs, party system, narratives of state formation, everyday activity, and freely recounted experiences of danger in the border area and in their own neighbourhoods, yet they explicitly and systematically denied that it had any impact on their sense of identity and nationality; this was consistent across all three sets of interviews; the vast majority of young people also emphasized the practical rather than the symbolic influence of the border. What was their construction of identity and place-in-the-world that makes sense of these seeming contradictions?

The absence of any symbolic significance given to the border might be thought to be an expression of classic ethno-territorial consciousness. Yet these were not classic ethnic nationalists: some but not all of our Catholic respondents held a strong sense of ethnic identity, most of our respondents, both Protestant and Catholic, had a territorial sense of the island, some did and some didn't think Northern Protestants were nationally different from themselves. They were not particularly concerned to bring about a united Ireland. Nor was it primarily a Catholic or a cultural sense of national community, although some pointed out to us that nationality had been so constituted in the past for their own parents. Today, however, all were explicitly inclusive of religious and cultural difference and indeed themselves in so being. Nor was it a movement towards a transgressive, hybrid identity for which borders are now practically and symbolically irrelevant. As we have seen, the practical significance of the border remained, our respondents did not accord any symbolic significance to supra-state, European linkages, and the attitudes expressed were not presented as new.

Rather, the very discourse that explicitly denied the significance of the border, did so through constructing national community as a moral phenomenon, and substituting a moral for an institutional border. The denial of the significance of the border was associated above all with an assertion of civility and openness. These people were – in their self-perceptions and in their interactions with us – open and peaceful, not closed and oppositional. As the young person quoted above wrote *'we work with each other and are friends with each other'*. This was a civility that did not need flags and emblems or state marking of the border, that could be Irish without being willing to shed blood for it. Their denial of the significance of the border allowed our respondents to engage in everyday civil interaction, across the border as well as within their own state. It meant that intense conflict was defined and distanced as morally alien, nothing to do with their nation or their attitudes to the border. It also meant that they would distance any 'intrusions' of conflict, as they did the Northern 'refugees'.

The border was, in their perceptions, imposed upon them by force, by armed men (police or paramilitaries, unionists or republicans) at a distance from them. It was not a product of their will or a reflection of their interrelations or antipathies. It was in this sense alien to themselves, and they held it apart from their self-definitions. Their sense of identity was not self-defined as divided by states or borders. They were willing to include all in their own civility, in their own Irishness: their very state was open at its borders. Notably this is close to the official narrative of the Irish state, not so much the territorial claim of the 1937 Irish constitution but the aspirational claim of the European period, open to

unity but unwilling to force it, recognizing people in Northern Ireland as Irish where they so choose. Our respondents, however, defined people in Ireland, North and South, as Irish, the same as themselves, to the extent that those people accepted civil values: This is a cultural nationalism with a moral rather than an ethnic core.

Our respondents affirmed binary oppositions between civility and violence, openness and boxedness, tolerance and bigotry. A moral border divided them from those who denied their civility, who resisted their openness, who set boundaries, who shouted them down. What Irishness meant to many of our interviewees, what they took from the values of their state, was challenged by conflict in the North. There was moral exclusion of those (North and South) who supported violence or perpetuated the troubles. Our respondents' conceptual frame of understanding thus constituted a different border, more fluid, more contested, and moral rather than institutional. It reproduced resistance against those Northern Protestants who were threatened by their moral and civilisational expansiveness; it provoked anger against those Northern Catholics who could not so civilly affirm their Irishness. The narratives and conceptual oppositions which denied the significance of the border constituted a border which partially overlapped with the institutional one. Those who saw no difference between North and South no longer went North.

This suggests a different view of contemporary Southern attitudes to Irish unity. It is sometimes suggested that the Irish electorate is now accustomed to a 26 county state, society and even nation, and might reject Irish unity if it were put to referendum

(Coakley, 2001). Our results confirm a Southern distance from the North, but suggest that this as a moral rather than a cultural or ethnic or national sense of distance. Should their judgement of the civility of the North and Northerners change, so too would their attitudes. If the key issue is a moral one, then the merits or demerits of unification are open to a discussion and to dialogue, and the result is not a fore-gone conclusion.

Some – perhaps many – of our respondents recognized the ambiguities and potential contradictions of their attitudes. They did so intermittently, in insights which interrupted and cross-cut other ways of talking. The border did not divide nationally but it was a ‘darkness’ which accentuated and intensified previous divisions, casting darkness even on the ‘civil’ side of the border. Civil and peaceful individuals kept contact with close relatives and friends in the IRA, or voted for Sinn Féin, or in the past sympathised with the hunger strikers. These respondents might reach out and recognize existential difference, sometimes at huge personal cost. But this was always experiential, personal, a recognition not just that others were different (and less civil) but that others also saw the respondents as different (less civil). This recognition interrupted the narrative of civility which was part of what allowed ‘normal’ and ‘civil’ interactions in these border counties. It was also a precondition of serious engagement with the North.

Conclusion

Our study shows some of the complex web of meanings that surround the North/South division in Ireland. The official ‘map images’ of the states and of the border between them were not present in our research findings, nor was the ‘26-county’ state-centred perspective so prevalent in the Irish media and ‘revisionist’ scholarship over the last two decades. Yet neither did we find old-fashioned nationalist irredentism: the relevance and significance of the border was denied, not its legitimacy. We found little evidence of evolution from contested borders to institutionalization of borders to ‘normalisation’ of them, either within the life-span of individuals, or across classes, local areas or generations. The practical and institutional importance of borders is held separate from self-definition. The Irish state, despite close to a century of institutionalization and legitimation, has not embedded its territorial borders in the identity of its population.

Yet our respondents’ denial of the national significance of the state border reconstituted a different sort of national boundary, one that is founded not merely in institutions but in values and sense of self. What has been communicated and transmitted is not ethnicity or nationalism as such, but a sense of moral values and civility which is felt to pervade Irish society and in general to be upheld, but not constituted, by the Irish state and its institutions. This moral constitution of the nation has replaced, for our respondents, a strong ethnic nationalism. It is more mundane than the ideologies of Gaelic, Catholic Ireland which many of our respondents treated with some irony. Yet it is as powerful, connecting the collective category of nationality with the personal sense of moral self. It has a generalizable form, but a culturally particularist content which may also vary on

ethno-religious lines.. It continues to constitute division, although more fluid, fluctuating and contested than that defined by state boundaries.

Our findings show a moral repertoire which is of wider significance. Our own interviews in Dublin, and preliminary and as yet uncoded results from a related research project suggest that the repertoires that we have identified are not confined to the border area, although farther from the border one is also more likely to find explicit statement of a 26 county national identity.⁴ Whatever the answer, our findings point to a new research agenda. To understand how Irish nationalism functions today in the Irish state requires a refocus of attention from explicit ideology to the normative content of national identity. The values and principles which are central to self-esteem may also reproduce a banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and ensure that it retains its personal relevance. For the most part these values are mundane, a context of life which replaces a proclaimed national identity. Yet challenge can provoke a more forthright nationalist response. These moral-national boundaries are fluid: where they are placed depends on who is challenging them. They fluctuate over time and with events. This raises a new agenda for analysis of nationalism in Ireland, requiring analysis not simply of the South but of North-South contrasts, challenges and interrelations.

The 'moral nationalism' which we have identified in Ireland is of general significance. Nationalist discourses in many societies take on a democratizing, liberal form just as articulations of liberalism and justice may have national boundaries (Castells, 1997; Keating, 2001; Miller, 1995; Walzer, 1983). Nor is this simply a recent phenomenon:

post-second world war British identity incorporated welfarist values and social citizenship (Marshall, 1992); the dominant strands of French and American nationalisms are defined in terms of the values associated with the respective republics, while Canadian nationalism self-defines as egalitarian and pluralist. That the political policies associated with these values may not be justifiable in their terms should not blind us to the fact that individuals may define themselves and guide their own actions in their terms (see Lamont, 2000). It would go far beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether such a 'moral nationalism' is becoming increasingly prevalent in the contemporary world; it certainly existed in the past, although it is neglected when research confines itself to elite writings and speeches where morality merges into *raison d'état* and justifies particularist agendas. Our analysis raises important new research questions: how and when these moral repertoires re-shape, displace, or come to justify ethnic and state agendas; how moral discourse interrelates with other aspects of national identity, when and for whom it is superimposed on a deeper ethno-national sense of identity, when and for whom it is a transposition of state-centred identity. It requires a closer interpretative analysis of the moral discourse used by everyday nationals to see when universalistic norms and values function as critique of ethno-national particularity and when they support it.

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² For this reason, second generation interviewees are somewhat over-represented in our quotations, as they were often the most articulate on these issues.

³ The references were to Protestants as a religious not a national minority. Like the adults, the young Protestants in our study described themselves unequivocally as Irish.

⁴ These interviews were conducted by Dr Theresa O'Keefe as part of the Identity Diversity and Citizenship research programme at the Geary Institute, UCD, between 2003-2005.

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