Partitioned identities. Everyday national distinction in Northern Ireland and the Irish state

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I. Introduction

How does political structure affect national identity? The question has been at the heart of theories of nationalism (Breuilly 1982; Gellner 1983; Hutchinson 2005: 1-5, 9-37). Here it is treated empirically in a case study of a partitioned island where we can assess the effects of changed political structures on a common symbolic inheritance. This article shows how nominally identical national identities with common historical roots are differentially understood in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (the Irish state), the polities that emerged after the constitutional partition of Ireland in the 1920 Government of Ireland Act.[1] I argue that significant continuity in national identity has accompanied the radical institutional divisions which followed partition. This goes against the grain of existing scholarship (see variously Kennedy, 1988, Cleary, 2003). The differences in judgement about the effects of partition are rooted in the different sources of evidence: this study works from the everyday discourses of 'ordinary people' rather than the ideological and nation-building discourses of political leaders, activists, intellectuals and artists.

[1] The official name of the Irish state is Ireland. Since this appears to conflate state, island and nation, I follow common usage in speaking of the Republic of Ireland', alternating this with the politically neutral term 'Irish state', to describe the 26-county society and the state that governs it. I use the official name, Northern Ireland, for the North-eastern six counties of the island. For stylistic variation, and as is common in Northern Ireland, I also distinguish 'the South' (the Republic) from 'the North'.

Using a data base of interviews with over 220 respondents, conducted between 2003-6, I argue that the Protestant-Catholic and Irish-British/English distinctions remain central in each jurisdiction.[2] Moreover there is substantive continuity in the elements of these identities - national and religious categories, cultural practices and norms embedded in associational life, historical narratives - even while the 'grammar', or way of interrelating the elements, has diverged. That the grammar of nationality is more sensitive to state belonging than its elements is a significant claim that promises to advance comparative research conceptually, methodologically, theoretically and empirically.

Conceptually, the article takes nationality as a composite construct rather than a simple category. It is composed of elements (a name, a sense of place, a set of related categories, a set of assumptions and values embedded in cultural practices and associational life, historical narratives, and a set of political reference points) which may be differentially prioritised and interrelated by different subgroups and in different jurisdictions. To clarify, the distinction of elements and grammar is not the same as the distinction of ethnicity and nationality: on the contrary throughout the article I treat ethnicity also as composite. Nor is it the same as the distinction between category and community or group (Brubaker, 2002). Rather nationality qua category is conceived here as composite, contested and indeterminate.[3] It is intersectional, not in the sense that simple 'national' boundaries intersect with already constituted religious, state, class and gender boundaries, but in the sense of composite and complex divisions made out of simpler and more abstract conceptual distinctions (Ferree 2009; see also Ruane and Todd 2004).

Methodologically, this means that we need to investigate not just the highlighting of national distinction, nor the social embedding of it, but the making and re-making of it out of simpler elements. Indeed one cannot research the making of boundaries by presupposing them (cf Wimmer

[2] Throughout the article I use national 'identity' as the subjective side of national 'distinction', or boundary-making. Both identity and distinction are therefore relational concepts (see Lamont and Mizrachi 2013, Todd 2005)

[3] On the composite nature of ethnicity, see Smith (2003); on its contested character, see Hutchinson (2005: 77-113).

2013: 38-43) but where nationality is a composite phenomenon it can only be researched by investigating the simpler categories which are combined to make up totalising potentially exclusivist distinctions.[4] Just as studies of the Scottish/English distinction have shown unspoken, indeterminate and situationally variable boundaries (for example, Condor 2010) so the seemingly clear national boundaries in each part of Ireland are complex, permeable and negotiable, with closure (of Protestant against Catholic, British against Irish or North against South) highly contingent on political action and events.

Theoretically, the article shows much more variation within the same nationality than is often supposed, not simply in political direction and historical interpretation (Hutchinson, 2005) but also in the mode of being national. Social psychologists have emphasised individual and social variation within at least fourteen measurable dimensions of identity (Ashmore et al, 2004). In this article I focus only on two dimensions, and their sensitivity to state and political variation: nationality as belonging and at-homeness in a wider community (Calhoun 2003; Inglis 2008; Jenkins 2008: 102-117; Skey 2005) and nationality as identification, orientation and framework of understanding (Abdelal et al 2009: 18-25; Breakwell 1996; Castells 1977: 66-7; Todd 2005). The 'belonging' dimension can be measured in terms of the sense of commonality with others in the group, and the sense of solidarity with them (Ashmore et al., 2004): it is a warm feeling that may be embraced, rejected or simply not felt. Orientation is cooler, cognitive and normative, measured by the categories used and interrelated and the stories told of how the individual positions him/herself with respect to the given distinctions, and thereby in part remakes them . Variation exists independently on each dimension. Emphasising and operationalising this distinction allows us to show a very clear contrast in *mode* between otherwise similar Irish national identification North and South. This difference, I argue, is highly sensitive to political context and contest.

[4] In the Irish case, the same terms (Protestant-Catholic, Irish-British) are used for the simple religious, territorial and political distinctions, and for the totalising ethnic and ethno-national distinctions. This makes for interpretative trickiness but does not affect the analytic point.

Finally, the article makes a comparative empirical contribution to the literature on partition and national identity (see see O'Leary 2007; Fraser 1984). Partitions set in motion diverse, sometimes opposed, processes of state and nation-building, institutional change and identity formation. Just as nation state building requires an estrangement from those outside its boundaries, so partitioned societies build national identities by 'a more violent and clamourous estrangement' (Cleary, 2003 57). The divisions produced are sometimes seen as irreversible. But how deep do they go? This research which works from everyday understandings suggests that they go much less deep than the new nation-builders and ideologists might like. Comparable to analyses of the symbolic effects of partition on nationality in the two Germanies (Bornemann 1992; Fulbrook 1999; Glaeser 2000), partition in the Irish case made for a different symbolic articulation of very similar elements. Nationality in each Irish jurisdiction is at once the same (in terms of its elements) *and* different (in terms of the symbolic grammar by which the elements are articulated). This makes for misunderstandings but it is eminently negotiable. Partition in Ireland has created political and institutional division, but no irreversible cultural gulf.

Each of these issues is approached empirically. After a section outlining the methodology, I outline (i) the categories used in national identification and the ways respondents qualify them; (ii) the elements that are associated with these categories and the grammar of their interrelation (iii) the mode (belonging or orientation) in which nationality is asserted. In each case, I compare between jurisdictions, while noting variations (where they exist) on class, gender, religious and generational grounds. Finally, I look at the implications for North-South understandings and interrelations.

II. Comparison and method

Through the greater part of the nineteenth century, the same Irish and British, Protestant and Catholic repertoires of distinction and identity were island-wide, linked at once to the wider British world and overlaying the regional differences within Ireland.[5] Until the final decade of the century competing unionist and nationalist political projects focussed on the island as a whole. World war, rebellion and Anglo-Irish war created the context for partition, imposed in 1920. It created Northern Ireland as a devolved region of the United Kingdom, and, two years later, the Irish Free State (the remaining 26 counties) as a dominion within the British Commonwealth, that gradually increased its independence and declared itself a Republic in 1948.

Partition left a majority Catholic state in the South and a deeply divided society in Northern Ireland. In each part of the island, ethno-religious distinction was reproduced in education and social networks. The Irish state was formally pluralist and informally dominated by the Catholic majority: the small Protestant minority came to accept an Irish national identity and state loyalty but informally kept to its own private sphere, and for long retained a socially and economically advantaged position (Bowen 1983). In Northern Ireland, in contrast, the much larger Catholic minority was excluded economically, culturally and politically, leading to a protracted violent conflict beginning in 1969 (Ruane and Todd 1996: 116-203). Political agreement was reached and sustained only with the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 199 . The research reported here began in 2003, five years after the GFA and as a long process of political and economic equalisation of the communities there was coming to completion (Ruane and Todd 2014). It was a period of economic boom in the South, and peace and slowly improving community relations in the North (Morrow, 2013). At this time, Protestants made up 4% of the population in the South and 53% in the North; Catholics were

[5] While acknowledging regional variants and emphases, F.S.L. Lyons (1979: 26) speaks of the island-wide long-term 'complex of Irish and Anglo-Irish cultures operating within and powerfully affected by, the dominant English culture'. See also Boyce and O'Day, 2001 for the matrix of unionist identities on the island.

89% in the South and 44% in the North (2001 Census, Northern Ireland; 2002 Census, Republic of Ireland).

There are sharply conflicting scholarly views on how this divergent history has affected national identity (O Dochartaigh, 2012). I investigate this through analysis of episodic interviews (taped, transcribed and anonymised) with over 220 respondents, of whom 75 in Northern Ireland, conducted between 2003 and 2006. [6] The interviews focussed on identity, its reproduction and change. Before the interview, respondents were provided with information about the project - in particular that it was concerned with how people understood themselves in a changing Ireland/Northern Ireland. In the interview they were asked to introduce themselves. When religious or national categories were discussed (whether volunteered or - if not - later introduced by the interviewer) respondents were asked what they meant to them and if this had changed.[7] This allowed respondents to present themselves in a non-threatening environment, showing their

[6] The author was co-PI and PI on two projects (see acknowledgements). Four interviewers were involved, including the author, and the results for this article did not show variance between interviewers. In what follows, and for the sake of consistency between different publications, respondents are identified by a code (eg LF1TXP02) which identifies the interviewer (L), the gender of the respondent (female), their generation (first or eldest generation), their class or job (teacher), their locality (X-town), their religion (Protestant) and a number (02 - the second respondent with these characteristics). Of the 75 respondents from the North, a third were Protestant; there were almost 150 Southern respondents, including 20 Southern Protestants, 9 English-in-Ireland, and 9 Irish travellers. 8 interviews were with married couples, 4 with siblings or with a parent and child, and in 3 cases friends were, on their request, interviewed together.

[7] The exact phrasing of questions varied as the different interviewers developed styles that at once met the imperatives of the project and with which they and their respondents were comfortable: the author interviewed, monitored others' interviews, listening to them and discussing techniques, interpretation and research methods and aims with the research fellows. Further details are available on request.

repertoires of distinction-making and their understandings of the resonances and interrelations of different distinctions.

The research sites (3 areas in each jurisdiction) were chosen to maximise comparability between North and South in terms of size of town, proximity to the border, and a significant presence of both Protestants and Catholics. Sampling was purposive and focussed on three generations of 'ordinary people' (distinguished from political and community activists or leaders).[8] Access was achieved through gatekeepers, snowballing and sometimes extended residence in the local area. While there is no claim to representativeness, within each local area an attempt was made to maintain a class, gender, religion and generational balance with minorities overrepresented: the sample thus allows meaningful comparison.

The interviews show how meaning is constructed by ordinary people whose priorities are job, family and leisure, rather than political activism or community mobilisation. Respondents gave highly personalised accounts of nationality (Cohen 1996) that differed from current political ideologies. All interviews were read in their entirety and coded by the author. Coding was manual and involved noting when religious and national categories were used, what was said about them, and how they were associated with other categories; when Northerners referred to the South and to Southerners, and Southerners to the North and Northerners, and what similarities and differences were noted; how respondents referred to national identity, in particular when they used the national 'we'.

Measurement is necessarily imprecise, and particularly so for complex and ambiguous meanings. It is given in numerical format only for the simpler measures. Patterns of distinction-making are discussed in terms of familial background ('Catholic', 'Protestant' and 'mixed/neither'), class (defined

[8] A handful of our Northern respondents turned out to be political or community activists: their responses contrasted to those of others, as discussed below.

in terms of job and background) and state of long-term residence (North or South).[9] Quotations are chosen to illustrate typical modes of response.

Analysis proceeds by four stages: how respondents name and talk about the categories of national identity; how they interrelate national categories with other categories and values; their mode of identification (belonging or orientation); and how they talk about the North-South distinction.

III. Categorising the self: repertoires of national distinction-making

Despite over eighty years of partition, there were significant similarities in the ways respondents talked about nationality in each Irish jurisdiction

- Almost all respondents, North and South, Catholic and Protestant, Irish, British and English, took the inherited Protestant/Catholic and Irish/British(English) distinctions as a part of their social life in terms of which they positioned themselves. Almost all offered highly personalised variants of them (Breakwell 2004:28-9; Cohen 1996). Only a tiny minority of respondents were unwilling to use the ascribed categories.
- Respondents placed these distinctions in a wider web of concepts, situating them as one part of a much wider understanding of the social world. Just as religious self-categorisations were situated within a complex, multi-dimensional religious spectrum (Todd 2014: 48), similarly national identities were qualified and personalised: '*Irish, Irish Catholic but open not boxed'; 'An Irish countryman*'; '*born Irish, will die Irish, not a big part of my life'; 'Irish but not nationalist'; 'British - just something to tick in a box*'; '*Northern Irish, definitely not from the South, not Irish, not English*'.

[9] Respondents gave background information freely. Only a small minority were from mixed backgrounds and their responses are not given special attention in this article.

- Respondents qualified the categories sometimes by moving up to more universal (moral) or down to more particular (local) concepts, sometimes by contextualising them (within a European or historical field) or by repositioning themselves within them (blurring or combining categories (Wimmer 2013: 49-63) They described themselves as '*a human being first and foremost',* or as '*border-people'* or as '*from Dundalk'*, or explained that '*I wouldn't see myself as English or as sort of British as people perhaps on the mainland but … I wouldn't identify myself as exactly Irish either although I live on the island of Ireland so I'm sort of somewhere maybe in between'.*[10] They used these moves not to introduce a new terminology but rather to draw a complex web of meaning, thus redefining the ascribed categories. The outcome, in each jurisdiction, was a mosaic of distinctions in which respondents were able to reach out in one dimension to persons defined as different on another, and in which religious and national distinctions were typically presented as permeable rather than exclusivist.

Self-positioning varied North and South. As has been shown in successive surveys, Protestants and Catholics in the South share an Irish identity while in the North they tend to diverge in their self-identifications as, respectively, British and Irish (Fahey et al 2005: 60-67; for recent trends in Northern Ireland see Morrow et al 2013). The interviews show other equally important differences.

- Southern Catholic respondents spoke of Irish nationality as a simple category, to which political, religious and moral qualifications and sometimes supra-national identifications might be added: *'Irish born and bred, Irish and European'; 'Irish yes, European definitely, angry at the state of Ireland'; 'Irish and proud to be Irish'; 'Irish and anti-English'; 'Irish but not nationalist';*

  Southern Protestant respondents, particularly in the border area, were much more likely to qualify their sense of Irish nationality. Ten of the twenty respondents added *national*

[10] TM2TPA16

qualifications: *'I would consider meself, em, maybe not just fully Irish to a point, I would probably consider meself Scotch Irish'; ' I suppose we're probably not traditionally Irish at all, you know'*; *'Irish with English blood'*; *'Irish?... yes.. [*with hesitation*],.. Northern Irish*'.[11]

In Northern Ireland, where nationality was overtly contested, complex pluri-national identifications were common among both Protestants and Catholics: *'Irish and British', 'more Irish than British but the jury is still out'; 'British and Northern Ireland and close to England'; 'British as much as Irish'; 'Catholic, Irish from Northern Ireland, .. it is not particularly salient to me*'; '*British and Northern Irish*'; ' *'British-Irish'; ' 'I'd love there to be a nationality of Northern Irish*'; '*Irish but British, Northern Irish but British'*.

While Northerners of Protestant and Catholic background predictably differed in their choice and prioritisation of Irish or British or Northern Irish nationality, less than half of the respondents had a simple singular national identity and more than half a complex plural one where the national categories were understood as non-exclusivist and the boundaries they defined as permeable.[12]

- Southern Catholics, as a large majority, might be expected to take their national identity for granted. Indeed one cluster - just less than a third of Southern Catholics (disproportionately working class and women) -were unreflective about categories that formed the background frame of their lives: they were *'born into it, never knew anything else'; ' 'never thought about it; it was always there': 'being Catholic and being Irish were always kind of there*'.

[11] LF2WPC4; LM2FPC2; TF1HPD52; TF1xPD56;

[12] This finding coheres with the survey material (Northern Ireland Life and Times, Community Relations Module, Identity question, 1998,1999; Identity Module 2007; and, although attitudes have hardened somewhat, the identity section of the Politics module, 2012) www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results, accessed January 30 2014. The 2011 census shows a majority of Northerners plumping for one singular identity. Whether or not this is a construct of the census itself, which encourages an 'official' self-categorisation, is beyond the scope of this article.

None of the Northern respondents and very few Southern minority respondents made such statements. However a majority of Southern Catholics were, like the other respondents, highly reflective about their nationality. They spoke of the way the moral ethos of the country had changed with the Celtic Tiger economy, they defined and redefined 'the nation', its changing boundaries, and the role of 'the church', often without feeling the need to say which nation or which church.

- Southern Catholics differed from all other categories in their slowness explicitly to volunteer their nationality in response to open-ended questions.[13] Seven in ten Southern Protestants, four in ten Northerners, and all of the English respondents in the South volunteered their nationality before they were probed for it, but only one in ten Southern Catholics did.[14] While the contrast is striking it bears no relation either to the stated importance of nationality to the respondent or to their interest in it. The main concern of most respondents North and South was not to affirm or deny the bare categories of identity but rather to redefine their meaning. Southerners differed from Northerners primarily in their social expectations: anticipating that their identity would be recognised they did not bother to name it.

IV. The elements of nationality and the grammar of their interrelation

[13] Three quarters of the interviews started with open-ended questions, asking the respondents to introduce themselves. The rest of the interviews began with a slightly more guiding (but still open) question of the form: '*If I were to ask you to define yourself in terms of nationality, religion, that sort of thing, how would you define yourself?*' See footnote 6 above. In fact, ethnic and national self-definitions and episodic narratives about them did not differ between the two sets of interviews.

[14] The likelihood for Northerners to volunteer these categories was unaffected by religious background or commitment, locality, generation, gender or class. A similar contrast exists between those who volunteered their religion at the start of the interview:. See Todd 2014 for discussion.

Ethnic and national identities are complex constructs, constituted in webs of meaning rather than defined by single categories. Ethnicity is generally understood to involve not just a category (a name) but also a sense of place, history, culture (lived and/or normative), solidarity (among some sections of the population at least) with nationality adding an organised political expression (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6; 1994: 4). The respondents in this study referred to precisely these elements. Thus they drew together a cluster of associations and related meanings into a loose map of identity and distinction that constituted 'ethno-nationality' in the rich lived sense. We have already seen how the categories (British, Irish, Northern Irish) were defined by respondents. Consider now the other elements in turn:

- *Place*. If ethnicity and nationality are always associated with a homeland (Ireland, Britain and/or Northern Ireland), the sense of place is multi-levelled. In the Republic, respondents often identified with their county of origin or - in Dublin - their local neighbourhood as their way of being Irish. In the North, the sub-national identification was most often Northern Ireland itself, with little identification either with locality or county, even when probed; the exceptions tended to be respondents from close-knit communities in Belfast or South Armagh, where local area defines class, religion, and experience of violence (on the latter, see Fay et al, 1999, 141-155).
- *History, myth and narrative*. If ethnies and nations involve a myth of collective origin, hardly any of our respondents recounted such myths. Almost all recounted historical narratives, intertwining the familial and the national to show their particular place in a shared history. Respondents in the South often positioned themselves in the nation by recounting a family tradition stretching to the foundations of the state and sometimes beyond. In the North, respondents - both religions and all social classes and localities - frequently discussed identity in terms of a complex familial history entwined with ethnic, religious and national division and mixing: as one loyalist woman put it '*nearly everybody's history and family life ...*

*someway along the line [*there*] was a Protestant or a Catholic'.*[15] References to blood lineage or myths of common ancestry were made only by a few.

- *Culture as organised social practice*. Respondents spoke of their at-homeness in everyday institutions and cultural practices that they saw as emblematic of the nation: often mentioned were examples like language, sport, distinctive names, idioms and accents, landscape, local customs and practices, media, sometimes religious practices and rituals or (in Northern Ireland) religio-political rituals like Orange marches.[16] In Northern Ireland, predictably, different practices were mentioned by Irish and British identifiers, with considerable overlap in the practices mentioned by Irish identifiers North and South. These practices created a sense of habituation and solidarity that was easily generalised from immediate interaction to wider national networks and commonalities.
- *Culture as interactional norms* that define the tone of social relations and of national life. In the Irish state respondents emphasised values of quietness, civility and friendliness, which they contrasted with the bitterness and roughness of the North and the coldness and anonymity of England. This was particularly often mentioned by border dwellers, both Catholic and Protestant (Todd et al, 2006). In Northern Ireland respondents often emphasised similar norms - moderation, civility - but as cross-cutting and qualifying ethnic and national distinction, or even as providing the means to negotiate it. Only a very small minority (almost exclusively Protestant and in each jurisdiction) spoke of values specific to their (ethno-)religious tradition that might improve national politics. Northern respondents intermittently voiced moral outrage - at those who intimidated, killed, discriminated or were simply 'sectarian' - thereby partially constituting and legitimating opposing political positions and (for many) feeding into opposed ethno-national political perspectives (Abulof, 2014).

[15] TF1WPA2

[16] Coakley (2012 48-135) sees these as constituent elements of the nation. Billig (1995, 6-7, 42-6) counts them as part of the 'daily habits' that reproduce nationalism.

But this was specific to discussions of violence and exclusion and it typically cross-cut other discourses of nationality.[17]

- *Politics*. Nationality involves political reference points. Almost all respondents in the South identified with the Irish state and were interested in current political issues of state and society. Catholics and nationalists in the North had no strong identification with any state in the archipelago, and only a minority of the Northern Protestant respondents identified strongly with either the British or Northern Irish state. Four out of five Northern respondents were engaged with political issues, although as often to distance themselves from the state and its policies as to identify with it. Few in either jurisdiction equated state and national belonging. In the North, a few young working class women reported (and sometimes accepted) ascription by nurses and teachers who 'corrected' their proffered national categories - '*Irish is if you're from down South'*[18]
- *Ascribed and externally projected images*. Identity is relational, and how one is seen may affect one's self- perceptions (Jenkins 2008: 47-8) . Young adult working class Dubliners repeated tourist advertisements in saying what they associated with being Irish: the '*craic*', the Guinness, the '*gift of the gab'*, holidays and how '*everyone loves the Irish*'. For other Southern respondents nationality was *'not that sort of thing at all*'. In the North, external images (this time of violence and hatred) were rejected in self-descriptions, although sometimes said to be accurate of others.

Very similar elements - cultural legacy, political loyalty, local tradition, familial history, religious background, national categories - made up nationality for the respondents. Crucially, they interrelated them differently North and South.

[17] This is the topic of my work in progress.

[18] TF2SPA07; TF2HCA5

In the North, religious and national categories are mentioned together (associated in self-descriptions and episodic narratives, sometimes with slippage in discussion) by well over half of the respondents, with one in three Protestants explicitly equating being 'British' and being 'Protestant'. Religion is embedded in and discursively interwoven with everyday institutions, locality and familial history, significantly more so than is nationality.[19] Respondents, even those who associate the elements at one point in the interview, are also highly likely to disaggregate them at another. This permits them to seek common ground with others whose politics, nationality, or religion differs from their own.

In the South, the articulation of elements is different. Religion is not explicitly equated with nationality except by the oldest of respondents, and most see the Irish nation as encompassing a plurality of religions.[20] Nationality is at the centre here, with substantive social and discursive overlap with associational life, democratic participation and interactional norms, with state-belonging as a subpart - a sufficient but not necessary condition - of nationality, and religion integrated into the nation through its part in everyday practices rather than explicitly.

These interrelations constitute a loosely knit symbolic structure, different in each jurisdiction, defining the appropriate ways to draw national boundaries: it is a grammar of nationality defining who is - and who can be - included, who is definitively 'other'. In the Irish state, the fields feed into a multi-faceted national identity, each providing repertoires of national distinction with class and religious variants of emphasis. People are defined as '*very Irish'* if they identify on all counts, engage very fully in all the practices, and exclude from full national membership those who do not so meet all the criteria. But most people in the state - and indeed on the island - meet enough of the criteria

[19] Linkages are complexly interwoven: so, for example, nationality is explicit in 'Catholic' sports (Gaelic Athletic Association) more than 'Protestant' and in Protestant churches more than Catholic (a non-Irish reader will not know what you mean).

[20] In the 1999-2000 EVS survey, 28% of Catholics in the Irish state said it was important to be Catholic to be Irish, see Fahey et al (2005: 69). Significantly fewer mentioned it in the interviews.

to be included. Nationality thus provides an implicit frame for most debates, whether it is about the impact of the Celtic Tiger economy, social morality, the Northern conflict or the appropriate demeanour in interaction. It is used to define position and steer social debate and action, to engender interest and win support, to give status and weight to one's argument. The implicit national 'we' is undefined, but it remains the frame of discussion even among those who declare themselves non-nationalist. Because it is so flexible, permeable and used to invite engagement on multiple dimensions, when it is used to exclude it does so in a totalising way.

In Northern Ireland, religion is at the centre of a set of overlapping distinctions that are routinely discursively disaggregated, although they remain institutionally interlinked. There is intense contest as to which of the distinctions is to be hegemonic, and when they coincide, which is to be defining. Positioning oneself to define the parameters of interaction and debate is a daily task and attempts at re-positioning are regularly contested: one cannot simply claim to be neither Protestant nor Catholic, neither British nor Irish, one has to give credible evidence for the claim. There is indeed an 'ethnic' division in Northern Ireland, embedded in largely separate associational spheres, saturated with cultural, religious, historical meanings, still permeating politics, and until very recently defining life-chances (Whyte 1991: 26-93; Ruane and Todd 1996: 49-83). But it is far from a clear and defined boundary. It is differentially experienced and asserted from different social positions. There is no single boundary of which there are numerous markers, but only contest over which 'marker' is to be asserted as the real boundary, and how it is to be understood. [21]

These symbolic interrelations facilitate the discursive shifts, slides and generalisations between one meaning and another, one field and another. The logics differ in each jurisdiction. A Catholic woman on the Northern side of the border intuitively disaggregates distinctions in describing her parents: '*So… I'm trying to bring it back to what you asked me about… national identity so, yes, I would say*

[21] The case studies show the difficulties of separating 'boundaries' from 'cultural content', a recommendation made by Frederick Barth (1969) who himself also qualified this view.

that my father had an Irish identity but my mother's identity was family and parish more than nationality, even though her background was republican…….. , she would have identified with New York quicker than with Kerry because she didn't know anyone from Kerry… she had four sisters and a brother in New York… She identified… she was from South Armagh and she identified… with her parish, I think that that was the extent of her real identity.'[22] Some respondents on the Southern side of the border identify primarily with their parish and seldom leave their local area, but they merge the distinctions:for them this is simply their way of being Irish.

V. Modes of being national: Identity and belonging

In the Republic, respondents speak as if there is an achieved and assumed nation that is all-encompassing. In Northern Ireland, they speak as if the nation is unachieved, a project whose trajectory remains unknown. Slippage from local and familial identifications to a consensual national identification is easily possible in the South. In contrast, nationality in the North is always contested, not simply in itself (British vs Irish vs Northern Irish) but also in its relation to other fields. This affects the mode of national identification. Stevenson and Muldoon (2010) show how adolescents in the North assert their nationality 'hotly' while those in the South interact within a shared, cooler, taken-for-granted sense of nationality. A different contrast is evident in the discourse of the adult respondents in this study. Identity-as-belonging (a sense of at-homeness in the national community) is common in the South, while identity-as-orientation (a personalised project encompassing a value-perspective, assumptions and expectations) is common in the North.

This contrast is revealed in the ways the respondents use the term 'we'. The 'we' indicates membership in an unproblematised collective: it is used all the time, in each jurisdiction, for family

[22] NF2NWC14

and friends, colleagues and those with whom one shares citizenship, religion and/or political commitment. Tracing the shifts, expansions and contractions of the 'we' shows boundaries shifting and fluctuating in conversation.

In analysis of the interviews, all uses of 'we' were colour coded. Common usages included:

Familial (family of origin and of marriage); Cohort (school friends, circle of friends); Locality (neighbourhood, town); Work (the firm or enterprise or sector); Religion (sometimes broadened from church to wider community who share religious socialisation); Class (in particular working class); State-society (the situationally defined population who share the same laws, institutions, governing parties); Nation (the people - Irish, British or Northern Irish - said to share common cultural characteristics and/or stretching back historically).

National 'we's were counted.[23] The results were stark. In the South, over 90% of respondents used the national 'we', irrespective of class or gender or location, and they used it often.[24] In the North, only a third of respondents used the national 'we', and then only sparingly.[25] This is striking because Northerners and Southerners were asked the same questions by the same interviewers, and Northerners, both Protestant and Catholic, nationalist and unionist, spoke about nationality at least

[23] The following counts as a national 'we': 'We' (ie the British, Irish or Northern Irish) are/do/think/speak about xyz. The following does not: 'We' (indeterminately family, cohort, religious group, fellow citizens) are British (or Irish or Northern Irish).

[24] The English in Ireland and Irish travellers were excluded from the sample. Border Protestants were less likely to use the national 'we' than other respondents - only half did. Respondents who used it did so on average 11 times per interview.

[25] Of the Northerners who used the national 'we', the average was four times per interview. Northern Ireland 'we's were judged national if the 'we' referred to a cultural/historical community, and/or if the respondent explicitly said that Northern Ireland was their 'nation' or 'country' or 'nationality'. They were judged non-national if the 'we' referred to a common situation and/or when the respondent made clear that their national identity was British or Irish rather than Northern Irish. Both North and South there were inevitably some ambiguous cases, but whether these are judged as national or not, does not affect the broad and clear contrast between the two jurisdictions.

as much and at least as strongly as did Southerners. It is not that they did not identify nationally; they identified in a different mode.

Respondents spoke of 'we' frequently but not equally in relation to each field.[26] They spoke of 'we' as soon as they began to discuss family, childhood and schooling. All seamlessly moved between one 'we' and another as discussion moved from family of origin to schooling and locality, to present family/friends and workplace: '*When **we** were growing up....', or '**We** would have come from a family that was very open' or '**we** lived in a part of Belfast that escaped from the troubles'*. Sometimes the familial and cohort 'we' was used to explain the understanding of national and religious categories: *'**we** were brought up Irish and brought up Roman Catholic'*. Sometimes the boundary of the group was redefined in the course of a narrative of exclusion: one first-generation Southern woman described the expulsion of Protestants from her class and simultaneously - and against her personal principles - from her cohort 'we': '*I remember when **we** were at school now, say there were maybe about four or six Protestants and **they** used to have to leave the class when **we** were doing prayers and **I** used to think this is awful you know what I mean because **they** had as much right as **we** had like to do their prayers, they were put out.'* [27]

In the South, this immediate 'we' is also used for the nation. Respondents noted that *'**we** are not as tolerant as **we** were'* or *'**we** live in the past a lot you know.... **we** are quite racist...*' . Sometimes this is generalised to the historical past:

***'We** never dominated any particular area of the world at any one time you know **we** are not an imperialistic nation and from that point of view **we** are coming from behind and at the same time*

[26] Less than ten percent of respondents used 'we' less than twenty times with about the same percentage using it over one hundred times, with no distinction between North and South,

[27] NF1DWC17

because of mass emigration coming from the famine years which is the middle 1840s ***we*** *exported an awful lot of Irish and they made an impact abroad…* '.[28]

Northern respondents were much more guarded with the national 'we', even when they were very strong national identifiers. Jack, with a strong sense of Irish and British national identity, spoke with feeling about the island and about '*my* [not our] *army*' and used the 'we' only for Northern Ireland.[29] Others used the Irish national 'we' while simultaneously distancing themselves from it: '***we*** *do have set dancing,* ***we*** *have ceili dancing,* ***we*** *have Irish dancing…* ***we*** *do have a culture but it was never part and parcel of* ***my*** *life or* ***my*** *upbringing…'* [30] There were exceptions. Those who identified with Northern Ireland or Ulster as their 'country' or nation used the national 'we' freely: Irish and British identifiers were much more guarded. None of the British identifiers in the sample used the national 'we' although they frequently used a Northern Ireland situational 'we' or a Northern Protestant ethno-religious 'we'. A few Irish identifiers used an Irish 'we' but most did not, with no evident relation to the strength of their all-Ireland networks or linkages - for example, a rugby player used it, a Gaelic games enthusiast did not. Only one or two respondents - including a border republican activist -used the Irish 'we' without inhibition as in the South.[31]

Northern respondents were much more likely to speak of what 'I' value, or what 'I' think important about being Irish or British. Imelda - a politically engaged nationalist through the period of violence - used the familial 'we' freely, the communal 'we' and 'our' sparingly and quickly moved back to a national 'me' and 'I': ' ***we*** [ie. her family] *would have certainly have stood up for* ***our*** *side,* ***our own***

[28] NM2 DXC03

[29] LM2FPH1

[30] NF2NWC05

[31] A study of political activists is likely to give different results. It might be argued that a sample including more professionals trained in Great Britain, more trades unionists in British based unions, and perhaps more sportspeople with all-Ireland linkages, would have produced more British and Irish 'wes'. But our sample was varied, including representatives of these categories. Thus the findings are significant of a trend although they do not delineate its exact parameters.

side [ie those of Catholic and nationalist background]*… I mean I remember "Bloody Sunday" happened everybody in* ***our house*** *[*ie her family] *was very, very angry about, you know* ***any Catholic people in the country*** *were… The hunger strike was major significance, had a huge impact on* ***me*** *... …'* When asked if this affected her sense of nationality, she replied '*Absolutely****, I*** *see* ***myself*** *as Irish'*.[32]

The 'we' is often used in a relational sense to discuss institutionalised relations (Northern Ireland in its relation to British state policy, the Irish state in its relation to the EU) or to situate 'us' in respect to common laws and institutions 'here'. In the South, this flows seamlessly into a national 'we'. In the North, even this 'we' is sometimes used with irony: Niall used an ironic Northern Irish 'we' in the context of declaring his personal Irish identification despite British state sovereignty: ***I*** *would certainly sign* ***myself*** *as Irish…* ***I*** *would see* ***myself*** *as Irish… although…no great problems with being a British subject… though* ***we*** [ie. those from Northern Ireland, in particular Catholics and nationalists] *may carry the burden of shame occasionally …* [Laughs]*… but* ***I'****ve a preference yes and see* ***myself*** *as Irish.'* More frequently he undermined any Northern Irish identification by using the depersonalised 'you' (the idiomatic equivalent of 'one') rather than 'we'*: '****you*** *grow up in Northern Ireland* ***you're*** *very accustomed to sussing out how people live, what their name is and very quickly* ***you*** *can box them off*' or by using 'we' only in an overtly self-critical sense : '***you*** [people in Northern Ireland] *don't notice the separate uniforms that* ***we*** [parents in Northern Ireland] *dress* ***them*** [school-children*] up in.'*[33]

In short, the national 'we' is a common repertoire in the Irish state. For many respondents, national identity involves belonging, fellow-feeling and a sense of ownership of national history which allows the respondent to speak on behalf of past and present co-nationals. It allows quite radical

[32] NF2NMC07

[33] NM2NYC09

indeterminacy on where the boundaries of the national community lie: however, since it starts from the (Catholic) family and locality it tends to assume their characteristics generalised over the nation.

This repertoire exists in Northern Ireland but it is used much less frequently, and not for lack of national feeling or nationalist commitment. It is rather because for many Northerners, national identity is much more a project or orientation than a matter of fellow-feeling: it is manifested in personal choices, values and expectations, and often also in intuitive preferences for one or other style of life, interaction and government; it involves clear distinction-making honed in conflict and relies more on cool commitment than on a warm sense of belonging with co-nationals. Ethnic and situational belonging ('our own side'; 'we' in Northern Ireland) may sometimes be more immediate, but it is not thereby more important to these respondents than the nationality by which they define their place in the world. This makes for a disconnect between Northerners' explicit individualised assertion of nationality and Southerners' association of nationality with an intuitive we-feeling. Slow to identify with this national 'we', even Northern nationalists can easily be seen as - and feel themselves as - 'they'.

VI. Symbolic structure and the making of North-South distinction

The different ways boundaries are made within Northern Ireland and within the Irish state helps constitute the perceived boundary between them.

From the Northern side, the state boundary looms large for both unionists and nationalists, but there is much contest over its symbolic significance: whether it also constitutes a national boundary, a boundary of peoples, a moral or cultural boundary or all of these. The plural concept of nationality used by so many in the North is not one that can easily be used to assert clear and unambiguous national boundaries. As in other fields, many Northern respondents disaggregate distinctions such that political- territorial distinction coexists with a sense of cultural permeability across the state border. Lisa, a Northern-Irish-identifying Protestant of unionist background, says: '*I don't really*

know if I have ever made my mind up that Ireland is all one, north and south or if it is two different countries, ... I don't see it as a border that I'm going into foreign territory or anything ...'.[34]

About a quarter of Northern Protestant respondents were clear that the state border was also a national one.[35] They included those few who identified state and nation, the handful of loyalist political activists, and those who emphasised the cultural differences on each side of the border. For the most part, however, among both Protestants and Catholics in this sample, *national* distinction is not highlighted in relation to the South, except when respondents sense themselves excluded by Southerners.[36]

From a Southern perspective, the nation is insisted upon as the inclusive frame of discourse. This makes the Irish border a challenging and sensitive issue. Partition was a source of historic unease and guilt (about the abandonment of Northern nationalists) and it exemplifies a current predicament for Southern respondents who wish neither to exclude Northerners from their historic community nor to include them against their will.[37] They respond by emphasising ambiguity and negotiability: that the North is the same *and* it is different, indeed its sameness is seen only through its differences which alert them to the unacknowledged differences within the South. Sameness is evidenced in interactive norms and associations cross-cutting the border (Coakley et al 2007). Difference, for each generation, has to do with violence, security and conflict. Difference also alerts respondents to features of their own society. After noting the public role of Protestantism in the North, for example, some respondents immediately spoke of the role of Protestants in the South. Cultural commonalities and familial linkages across the border decrease over generations, but the structure of discourse remains the same. Table 1 below shows this drawing on episodic interviews with three

[34] JF2PAP02. For similar views that the border is '*not a barrier*', *'not foreign to us'* see LF3OCY1; LM1TPF1; NF1NBC15; NMINBC16; TF1MCA15; JF2PBP03; JF1SBP01; JF2PBP01

[35] Some respondents did not make their views clear. Just over half saw the South as 'not foreign'.

[36] For example, NM3NTC10, LF3OCY1.

[37] A parallel predicament faces English people in considering Scotland, see Condor (2010).

generations of a large extended Southern family.[38] Similar generational change is evidenced in other interviews.

Table 1: Changing generational perceptions (Irish state)

Generation	Indicative episodic narratives	N/S same	N/S different	N/S Same and different, same through difference
Generation one	Most of '*our family'* lived in the North: constant *'to-ing and fro-ing*' across the border. Shock at the police, their dark uniform and their guns. Teenage holidays on the North coast with invitations out on Saturday night .. to prayer meetings.	Familial linkages Interactional norms	Institutions - policing, the overt presence of guns held by police, the sense of threat. Interactional norms - prayer meetings on Saturday night.	Encounters with Protestants highlighted in the North. Then discussed as equally significant in the South.
Generation two	On holiday in the North during the violence, a couple are surprised to be told to park their '*Southern car'* hidden from the road. Regular work related trips North and extremism and exclusion recounted. Northerners' consciousness of religious difference noted.	Interactional norms - ordinary moderate people of good will vs extremists. Extended familial links and (mild) tensions between nationalist, republican and unionist views within the extended family.	Cultural differentiation - not just the violence and contention, but the respondents' obliviousness to the fact that their car might be a target. Extremism, exclusion and hyper-sensitivity to difference in the North.	Common good will affirmed by highlighting differences (the '*Southern car*'). The 1998 Agreement in Northern Ireland seen as coming '*full circle'* and allowing an understanding of '*both sides'*, in the South as well as the North.
Generation three	Teenagers go North to buy fireworks. Some of their school-friends have Northern parents.	School-friends '*just like us'* because now living in the South	Moral difference - the '*stupidity*' of conflict. Institutional difference - legal sale of fireworks	Strategic links through institutional differences (buying fireworks). Moral difference explained by institutional differences (partition) rather than cultural differences.

[38] JM1CD01 and extended family

Table 1 indicates that the symbolic repertoires of North-South distinction change little, even while experience of Northern Ireland and linkages with it thin out over the three generations.

Nationality in the South is at once crucially important and indeterminate in its boundaries. Surveys in the Irish state since the outbreak of violence in 1969 have shown fluctuating attitudes to the North and to Irish unity and some evidence of the emergence of a'26 county' state-centred nationalism excluding the North, although the evidence is uneven (Coakley 2009; O Dochartaigh 2012). We asked a subset of 60 Southern respondents - 20 from a working class area of Dublin and 40 from an east coast town to the North - if they thought of Ireland as 32 or 26 counties and why, with a follow-up on whether or not they include Northerners as Irish.[39] In proportions similar to recent surveys, about half said 32 counties, a third 26 counties, and the rest either pointed out the complexity of the question or did not wish to address it.[40] There was a preponderance of 32 county answers in the East coast town, and of 26 county answers among the Dublin working class.

It is indicative of the composite nature of nationality that almost all of the respondents - whether they initially opted to consider Ireland as 32 or 26 counties - spoke both of national similarities and of national differences between North and South. Northern Ireland at once was Ireland in terms of place (the island), people ('*the same people'*), associational life (the same religious practices and distinctions, the same sports and leisure), historical linkages (past familial linkages were particularly strong in the border area), and it was different in terms of perceived interactive norms ('*bitter*' rather than civil, violent rather than peaceful) and pluri-national identity ('*Englishised*', '*half-British half-Irish'*) . Only a very few were definitive that the Irish nation excluded the North and

[39] These respondents were interviewed by Dr Theresa O'Keefe.

[40] The most recent November 2012 Irish Times/IPSOS poll on the topic gives a similar result: 56% opted for 32 counties, 28% for 26 counties http://www.irishcentral.com/news/boost-for-a-united-ireland-support-in-new-poll-figures-from-irish-times-180974381-237756961.html accessed 18 January 2014.

Northerners. One young working class Dubliner voiced '*shame'* that she *'wouldn't consider there to be Ireland. I know that's terrible'.*[41]

The degree to which the North was excluded or included in the 'nation' was highly specific to the resources the respondent used to construct their own sense of nationality. When respondents used the full tool-kit of Irish nationality, it was easy for them to find similarities North and South. When they hollowed out nationality to little more than the national category and their immediate social practices they had few resources to include Northerners without thereby excluding themselves. In general, however, the interviews highlight the ambiguity that characterises Southern attitudes. For most Southern respondents, a North-South distinction was salient but not overriding and was eminently negotiable.

Conclusion:

I have argued that ethnicity and nationality are composite phenomena, interrelating a limited number of elements in a grammar that determines where national boundaries are drawn and with what degree of closure. The article has looked not just at categories but at qualifications of those categories, not just at national distinctions but at the ways spatial, historical and cultural distinctions are associated with them, and not just at meanings but at modes of national identification - belonging or orientation. It has shown that the grammar of nationality is highly sensitive to state belonging, much more than are the elements. Of course the elements change too: Southern Protestants changed their category of identity in a previous generation, and in the present more Northerners are moving to a Northern Irish identity (Morrow, 2013). However even here continuity is very evident: a significant section of Southern Protestants retain a distinctive understanding of being Irish; a Northern Irish identity is often combined with a British or Irish one, qualifying not rejecting the nationality. Some sub-groups change more than others: why and when is an important question beyond the scope of this article.

[41] TF3FCT10.

The article shows that partition in Ireland created much less national division than political leaders in the North desired, and than intellectuals in the South supposed. At the everyday level, the article has shown the construction of composite and permeable symbolic distinctions on both sides of the Irish border, open to contest and negotiation. Respondents create discursive arenas where it is possible to remain Irish, or British, while being '*open not boxed*'. This creativity and contest exists within loosely-knit symbolic structures which differ in Northern Ireland and in the Irish state. In consequence, the Irish border is symbolically complex, much less than a national border even after close to a century of partition. States make a difference to nationality but much more - at least in this case - to its grammar than to its elements, and to its mode than to its content. It is not so much that one side imposes national categories on the other, but that they have different ways of constructing national distinctions from very similar elements. The resulting North-South distinction is ambiguous and fluctuating, its permeability or closure dependent at once on events and on individual cultural resources, highly dependent on class and location. Perhaps most striking of all are the continuities in Irish identification, North and South. The differences between Northern and Southern concepts of the Irish nation are matters of emphasis (orientation or belonging) and logic (disaggregation rather than merging of shared distinctions) and thus eminently negotiable. Substantive commonalities and linkages in the elements of nationality remain in each part of Ireland, providing a basis for island-wide empathy. Partition has indeed has major and perhaps irreversible consequences, but these are political and institutional more than national.

Of course many questions remain. In the Irish cases we need a more precise delineation of sub-group variations and a closer analysis of when and why the national 'we' appears and its linkage with ethnic, religious and state-situational 'we's. Comparatively the claim that the grammar of nationality is more responsive to state change than are its elements needs to be tested: the approach used here could be applied to a range of dispersed ethnies and partitioned nations, from Germany to Albania to the Basque Country. The aim of this article has been to provide a broad picture of national distinction, rather than a precise delineation of its different dimensions for particular sub-groups.

This stems from a conviction that the elements of nationality matter most in their interrelations. Each element may be investigated in more depth and with greater precision. But only by revealing the distinctive logics of interrelation can we understand why some differences do and others do not come to matter nationally and politically.

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