

Partition, consociation, border-crossing: some lessons from the national conflict in Ireland/Northern Ireland

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ABSTRACT. Outlining Ireland's long history of ethno-national conflict, and the recent protracted 'peace process' in Northern Ireland, contextualises a critique of the problems underlying such conflicts, and the difficulties in transforming externally imposed conflict management into self-sustaining conflict resolution. It is argued that the problems and difficulties are deeply rooted in a thoroughly modern complex of nationalism, ethnicity, sovereignty and representative democracy. These are knotted together in a common denominator of territoriality, and the nub of the problem is the 'double paradox' of democracy's *undemocratic* origins in the present. Territoriality, the use of bordered geographical space, is a powerful and ubiquitous mode of social organisation which simplifies social control. But it can grossly *oversimplify* and distort social realities, particularly at borders and especially where territory is contested, thereby reinforcing other distorting simplifications typically found in ethno-national conflicts. In consequence, radical remedies are needed if the problems are to be overcome. Making ethno-national peace paradoxically calls for more creative border-crossing conflicts around other issues.

KEYWORDS: borders, conflict management, ethnicity, integration, resolution, territoriality

The re-establishment of Northern Ireland's consociational power-sharing executive in May 2007 gave renewed currency to the notion that Ireland/Northern Ireland, long a byword for the intractability of ethno-national conflicts, now exemplifies how such conflicts can be resolved. Two centuries of national struggles involving Irish nationalists and unionists and the British state, and some nine decades of partition, certainly point to the inherent difficulties of conflict management and resolution. The lessons for other conflicts are negative as well as positive, though they may apply only at the rather general or abstract level of underlying structural problems, for every national conflict has its own detailed particularities.

Northern Ireland has been transformed since the paramilitary ceasefires of the mid-1990s, but the political conflict between nationalists and unionists – largely Catholics and Protestants respectively, and now mainly represented by

their more 'extreme' parties, Sinn Fein and Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionists (DUP) – is still far from a resolution. Indeed some think the political divide has been further institutionalised and reinforced by the consociational arrangements at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998, though for much of the nine years following the GFA the power-sharing executive was actually in suspension. That hampered the workings of the GFA's innovative cross-border political institutions, jointly operated with the Republic of Ireland but dependent on Northern power-sharing. Northern Ireland was under 'direct rule' of the British government in London with the Irish government in Dublin as its 'junior partner', and power-sharing was only re-imposed after substantial investment of political time and resources by both governments. They threatened that otherwise 'direct rule' from London would be consolidated and extended (anathema to nationalists), and that the two governments would fully operate the cross-border institutions while their inter-governmental partnership would amount to *de facto* 'joint sovereignty' over Northern Ireland (anathema to unionists). These threats seem to have worked, though even now it is unclear how a problematic 'peace process' will develop, or perhaps fail to develop.

Yet, while there are difficulties and dangers in generalising from the particularities of the Irish case, it has many if not all of the main elements of ethno-national conflicts, and most strategies of conflict management have been tried, including territorial solutions which have failed in Ireland as elsewhere. On a more hopeful note, it holds the promise of conflict *resolution*, as distinct from the mere containment, regulation or *management* of conflict. Encouragingly, it now has all the ingredients necessary for resolution, both in state institutions and in civil society, even if some exist only in embryo, or are not quite in place or in the right proportions.

The article¹ first draws some general lessons from an historical sketch of the main features of the Irish conflict and peace process (first section), and this provides the basis for a more radical critique of fundamental ethno-national structures (second section). It is argued that the problems of national conflict and conflict management stem from shortcomings inherent to nationalism, ethnicity, sovereignty and representative democracy, and particularly from their common dependence on territoriality or the use of bordered geographical space to organise, symbolise and control. The shortcomings are compounded by the fact that flawed assumptions about them are typically shared by external conflict managers from other national governments, as well as by the immediate nationalistic protagonists they are trying to manage. Territoriality simplifies control, and its strengths in delimiting nations and states, sovereignty and democracy, underpin the tenacity of national conflicts. But it oversimplifies and distorts social realities, especially at contested borders, and its inherent weaknesses help explain the high failure rate of management solutions.

These deep-rooted problems demand radical remedies (third section). We cannot simply counterpose conflict resolution to externally imposed manage-

ment, or transnational border-crossing to national territoriality – management is a pre-requisite for resolution, and territoriality cannot be wished away. But the key post-ceasefire challenge is to move from dependence on the usually limited and sometimes fickle ambitions of external conflict management towards self-sustaining resolution. And this requires moving from ethno-national conflict to more creative transnational struggles which cross ethnic and/or territorial divides.

Ireland – state territory, religion, nationalism

Ireland's history of national conflict, now largely confined to Northern Ireland, is one of armed struggles, some attempts at so-called 'ethnic cleansing', territorial partition, majoritarian domination, limited efforts to integrate or assimilate minorities into majorities, consociational power-sharing within existing state borders, and border-crossings in state institutions and civil society with some elements of *non*-territorial participatory democracy (see Anderson and Goodman 1998a, b). Other important international dimensions range from the historical legacy of Britain's wars with Catholic Spain and France down to recent conflict management by the London and Dublin governments, the USA and the EU. Sketching the main historical contours of the conflict and its (mis)management provides some immediate lessons about nationalism, and a context for then critiquing national territoriality and solutions overly dependent on it.

State- and nation-building failures

Nationalism's ideal is that the territories of the nation and of the state should coincide geographically in 'nation-states'. But geographical realities generally fail to meet this happy coincidence, and attempts to make reality fit the ideal can produce deep-rooted conflict. Ireland is a spectacular case of state- and nation-building failures, from the perspectives both of British nationalism and Irish nationalism. Their contest has been unequal but both have failed to win the whole of Ireland or all of the Irish; and Northern Ireland remains at the apex of their failures (see McGarry and O'Leary 1995).

British state-building in Ireland gained momentum with the Tudor, Stuart and Cromwellian land confiscations and plantations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Its sectarian nature established 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' as the main markers of ethnicity in Ireland, and eventually of Irish and British nationalisms respectively, despite considerable mixing and overlaps. The new landlords – the 'Protestant Ascendancy' – were mostly of British origin and episcopalian Protestants, the official state religion. But the Protestant Reformation had been largely unsuccessful in Ireland partly because it was sponsored by an aggressive and explicitly Protestant British state. The majority of the population remained Catholic, and as such a

potential ally for Britain's continental Catholic rivals, to whom Irish opponents of British rule periodically looked for help. The Ascendancy, together with their followers, mostly tenants and many of them also of British ancestry, were constituted as a garrison to protect Britain from attack by Catholic Spain and France, and by revolutionary France following the French Revolution. For geopolitical reasons and local economic advantage, the Ascendancy's 'Penal Laws' in the eighteenth century systematically discriminated against Catholics, and also against non-episcopalian Protestant 'Dis-senters', mainly Presbyterians.

Thus British nationalism was self-defeating in largely Catholic Ireland, an early instance of nationalism being its own worst enemy. '[H]eavily dependent . . . on a broadly Protestant culture', as Linda Colley points out, Ireland 'was never able or willing to play a satisfactory part in this Britishness . . . cut off . . . by the prejudices of the English, Welsh and Scots, and by the self-image of the bulk of the Irish themselves, both Protestants and Catholics' (Colley 1992: 6, 8, 322–3).

The pre-nationalist opposition to British rule by the dispossessed Irish mainly focused not on 'national independence' but on restoring a Catholic monarchy in London (e.g. James II of England and later Stuarts), in order to reclaim their lost lands and privileges, further reinforcing the sectarianised nature of British and Irish politics. It was only when influenced by the American and then French Revolutions that Irish discontents came to be expressed in nationalism and republicanism; only in the pivotal 1790s that opposition to British rule became explicitly nationalist and *anti*-sectarian. And contrary to later essentialist and sectarian oversimplifications about Irish/Northern Irish politics comprising just 'two Traditions' (capital 'T'), Protestant and Catholic, Irish republican nationalism was in fact initiated by northern Presbyterian Dissenters (who were second-class citizens – or rather subjects – while Catholics were third class). Ireland's first nationalist, republican movement, 'The Society of United Irishmen', was established in Belfast in 1791, just two years after the beginning of the French Revolution, and it explicitly sought to unite and replace 'Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter' with the common designation 'Irish'. However, military help from revolutionary France arrived too late and in the wrong place. In 1798 Irish nationalism was defeated militarily and politically by the British state and the Episcopalian Ascendancy, partly by their mobilisation of the very sectarianism which the Irish nationalists had sought to transcend. The explicitly sectarian Orange Order, sponsored by Ascendancy landlords, was instituted in 1795 in response to the United Irishmen; and a further pattern was set for later decades when some Irish nationalists responded in sectarian kind, contrary to their own principles and to Irish nationalism's detriment.

After their defeat, and largely because of British fears of another French invasion (though against local Ascendancy wishes), Ireland lost its own subsidiary parliament and was brought into full political union with Britain in 1801. The scene was set for Irish unionism's continuing reliance on a

popular culture of anti-Catholicism, initially in a largely successful effort to unite Presbyterianism with Episcopalianism in a loyalist bloc against Roman Catholics, who if they were allowed to vote would have a clear democratic majority in Ireland. Reliance on anti-Catholicism intensified after 1885 when the extension of democratic voting rights led to mass mobilisations of nationalists and unionists, for and against the restoration of an Irish Home Rule parliament in Dublin.

Some four decades later, following a complex interplay of imperialism and nationalism (see Anderson and O'Dowd 2005), the result was Ireland's partition, though it was not an outcome which any of the factions in Ireland had wanted, being essentially a British imperial idea which British conflict managers imposed by force. A large democratic majority in the 1885 General Election in favour of Irish Home Rule brought sectarianised opposition ('Home Rule is Rome rule') from Ireland's unionist minority, strongest in the northern province of Ulster where Protestants were most numerous. Despite Home Rule offering very limited autonomy within a continuing UK and Empire framework, the Irish unionists were seditiously encouraged by an obdurate faction of Britain's imperialists who saw any devolution or concession to Irish nationalism as a threatening precedent and an affront at the heart of the British Empire. Winston Churchill's Tory father, Sir Randolph, declared that 'Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right'. That is, Ulster would fight not for partition but to block Home Rule for the whole country, and that continued to be the position of most unionists up to and beyond the 'Third Home Rule crisis' in 1912. But by then it was clear that Home Rule could no longer be blocked by the unelected part of the British Parliament (the House of Lords). Only then did partition begin to emerge as a serious option, and then only as a supposedly temporary measure. Unionists in Ulster were organising militarily, to be followed by nationalists on an island-wide basis. And although World War I intervened, there was an abortive nationalist uprising at Easter 1916. In 1918 Sinn Fein won a resounding electoral victory on a platform of political independence, their support fuelled by Irish resentment of military conscription and Britain's political error of summarily executing the leaders of '1916'. Sinn Fein declared independence but Britain rejected it, and the 'Troubles' started when on the basis of Sinn Fein's 1918 electoral mandate, the Irish Republican Army started its 'War of Independence' against British forces.

With Irish Home Rule inevitable, the question was what unionist areas could be excluded from it by partition. The geographical distributions of Catholics and Protestants across the island meant it was impossible to draw a partition border which clearly separated them; only in Ulster were there sizeable unionist majority areas, though even here they were intermingled with nationalist ones; and indeed since partition in 1920 close territorial intermingling within Northern Ireland has continued to be a defining condition of the conflict. The specifically Ulster mobilisation against Home Rule had been based on the historic province of nine counties, but in five of them unionists

were actually in a minority, and in three of these – Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan – the Catholic and nationalist majorities were very substantial. Therefore British politicians who saw partition as a temporary expedient favoured a ‘nine-county Northern Ireland’ because with its Protestant:Catholic ratio of only 56% to 44% it was less likely to become permanent. For the very same reason, Belfast unionists opposed it, preferring a ‘six county Northern Ireland’ with its ‘safe’ 66% to 33% Protestant majority, despite sacrificing their fellow-unionists in Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, and despite including two counties, Fermanagh and Tyrone, where nationalists were in a small but clear majority. However, with the typical lack of democracy or ‘even-handedness’ which was to stoke up future problems, this was the partition border imposed by British force in 1920 and confirmed in 1925. Neither the two included counties nor the three excluded ones had any say in the matter, and an Irish delegation was turned away from the Versailles Conference which was then organising democratic border plebiscites, but only in Europe’s *defeated* empires.

Thus Northern Ireland was the outcome of a failed unionist attempt to prevent Irish nationalists achieving Home Rule, though it did produce a built-in unionist majority. By the same token, and although it got most of the country, Ireland’s separatist nationalism failed to secure the allegiance of a majority of the predominantly Protestant north-east (ironically the area of nationalism’s main founders). Here the ‘failure theme’ was to continue, indeed is still continuing, much of it self-inflicted by unionists.

Partition and further ‘Troubles’

In 1920 two separate Home Rule parliaments were established in Dublin and Belfast. An innovative Council of Ireland to run common, border-crossing interests and facilitate reunification was still-born partly because of Northern unionist antipathy. For over forty years up to the mid-1960s there was relatively little contact between two government administrations little more than 100 miles apart, though in civil society the border remained very porous by European standards – the continuing depth of cross-border social relations a positive factor for the future. Britain left Northern Ireland to its own, unionist, devices, and partition was accompanied by simple domination of the sizeable one in three Catholic minority, by one-party unionist rule in a ‘Protestant state for a Protestant people’ in the words of its first Prime Minister. To further reduce Catholic power, local government was re-organised and there were some very contentious cases of gerrymandering to artificially create local unionist majorities (see, e.g. McGarry and O’Leary 1995, 107; Whyte 1990). But for nationalists the whole of Northern Ireland was a gerrymander designed to make them a permanent minority; and the unionists, despite their dominance, never made any concerted effort to integrate even a section (e.g. middle class) of the minority (whether through lack of political intelligence, capacity or self-confidence). Instead, they simply

defined the minority as a disloyal threat to the state, and that turned out to be a self-fulfilling proposition.

Northern Ireland's established structure of power was suddenly unsettled in the mid-1960s. As an anti-sectarian precondition for newly important economic co-operation with the Dublin government, the Unionist government talked of mild reforms; but these were seen as 'too little too late' by those campaigning for British standards of civil rights, largely but not exclusively for disadvantaged Catholics; and as 'too much, too soon' by many unionists (with a populist Paisley playing a leading sectarian role). Unionists argued, in the zero-sum terms typical of nationalisms, that any improvement for Catholics must mean less for Protestants (despite obvious benefits for many Protestants who were also disadvantaged). This led to a violent sectarian backlash from unionism in the late 1960s; and to defensive and then offensive armed actions when a defunct IRA was resurrected. It 'justified' its actions by arguing that Northern Ireland was an unreformable, gerrymandered framework in which Catholics were predetermined losers, locked into minority status by unionism's 'democratic' Protestant majority, and permanently excluded from power. A low intensity 'thirty years war' ensued, again called 'the Troubles'.

Embarking on serious reforms, the British replaced the Unionist government with Direct Rule from London in 1972; and in the Northern Ireland Constitutional Acts and Sunningdale Agreement of 1973–4 they established a power-sharing government of unionists and nationalists in Belfast. They revived the cross-border Council of Ireland of 1920, and began to see Dublin as a potential partner in managing the conflict, rather than merely another 'foreign government' (which continued to be the Ulster unionist view). But then 'Sunningdale' was wrecked in 1974 when Britain capitulated and retreated in the face of the so-called 'Ulster Workers' Strike' (organised by unionist paramilitaries, with Paisley again active), after counter-productive bluster about the Northern Irish being 'scroungers'. From that point British conflict management, or rather *mismanagement*, was characterised by retreat and drift, by attempted internal and military solutions and moralistic pronouncements about 'never talking to terrorists' (though sometimes they secretly were doing just that). Agreement was impeded by British nationalism in Britain (see O'Dowd 1998) and by a fruitless search for the chimera of an 'internal solution' within Northern Ireland (see Anderson and Shuttleworth 1998). Failure to find one was inevitable when the border was *the* issue, but it was supposedly justified by the not-so-clever quip that 'The Northern Ireland problem is that there is no solution'. This, if true, would have exonerated the conflict managers' failure. However, as we shall see, in a sense it actually was true within the terms of absolute territorial sovereignty which the British then shared with the Irish nationalists and unionists who were making two incompatible claims to national sovereignty over the same territory. Furthermore, these Troubles were in some respects a re-run of the first, 1918–25 Troubles. But the understandable desire of both the London and Dublin

governments to contain the conflict within Northern Ireland and insulate Britain and the Irish Republic from it has had two unfortunate side effects: first, a hot house effect with the conflict confined and *intensified* in a smaller space but *extended* over time (over three decades of armed conflict mainly in the 'six counties' compared to less than one decade across thirty-two counties); and second, channelling efforts towards a purely internal solution made an actual solution well nigh impossible.

The constitutional nationalist politician, Séamus Mallon's clever quip in 1998 that the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was 'Sunningdale for slow learners' encapsulated the failures and wasted time (and lives) on all sides in the intervening quarter century. The GFA was ratified in June 1998 by 94% of Southern Irish and 71% of Northern Irish voters (including a narrow majority of the Northern unionists). It established consociational power-sharing between Irish nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland (Strand 1); path-breaking North-South cross-border institutions drawn from the Northern and Southern parliaments and government departments, with its own secretariat (Strand 2); East-West inter-governmental/parliamentary bodies linking Ireland and Britain (Strand 3), and additional institutions dealing with such 'internal' issues as equality and human rights (*Agreement* 1998; and see Wilford 2001). It was the basis for making the paramilitary ceasefires permanent (with relatively minor exceptions). Like Sunningdale (but in more detail and now vitally incorporating the extremes most involved in conflict, particularly the IRA and Sinn Féin), the GFA's partition *plus* power-sharing *plus* cross-border institutions was a crucial improvement on partition with some internal integration and a huge improvement over partition with majoritarian domination, both conspicuous failures.

However, the GFA has not yet resolved the conflict. Sinn Féin and the DUP share power but have some diametrically opposed objectives; and an element of Paisleyite unionism still hankers after majoritarian domination which would merely confirm Northern Ireland as indeed a failed political entity.² Others argue that the GFA's elaborate consociational checks and balances invite gridlock and cement sectarian division. But to move forward, we need a more radical critique of conflict management and territoriality's strengths and weaknesses.

Problems of territoriality and conflict management

Territoriality is the use of bordered geographical spaces or territories to 'control, classify and communicate' (Sack 1986). It is a powerful mode of social organisation, ubiquitous and deeply rooted in social and political life. It simplifies issues of control, management or administration and makes power relationships more tangible materially and symbolically – whether in the home, the workplace, or the state. Territorial borders delimit states and sovereignty, provide the framework for representative democracy, and reinforce ethnicity and nationality.

But while territoriality's simplification of control helps explain its attractions for conflict managers, its advantages can become serious *disadvantages*, not merely simplifying but *oversimplifying*, reifying and distorting social realities, and especially in contested border regions. It depersonalises social relationships, obscures relations of power, and often erroneously equates *physical* space with *social* space, arbitrarily truncating social processes at borders. Its oversimplification reinforces the distorting simplifications which also feature more widely in other aspects of ethno-national conflict. Territoriality's very nature – symbol-laden and generating rival territorialities in a competitive space-filling process – actively encourages ethno-national conflict and its typically zero-sum thinking. Unlike most goods (e.g. economic wealth, cultural capital, political democracy), territory is a *finite* resource with a fixed total (e.g. the island of Ireland) where the zero-sum equation really does fit reality, and more for one side (e.g. nationalists) does indeed mean less for the other (e.g. unionists), and vice versa. But such thinking is then inappropriately applied across the board to goods which do not necessarily have a fixed total, and this blocks or curtails positive-sum games where both sides would gain. In reality, the outcome is usually *not* the familiar zero-sum of nationalistic discourse, but actually a *negative*-sum equation where both sides lose (though often unequally).

Ethno-nationalism, sovereignty and democracy as territoriality

Territoriality is the common denominator of ethno-nationalism, sovereignty and democracy, knotting together their separate problems and compounding their intractability. Management failures based on territoriality should not surprise us.

The intractability stems partly from nationalisms essentialising ethnicity as natural, timeless and by implication unchangeable. Conflict managers often reinforce rather than challenge this misconception or gross oversimplification, as with their 'two Traditions' in Ireland.³ Ethnic groups cannot be wished away, as is attempted when liberal individualists concentrate only on *individual* rights and marginalise *group* rights (e.g. to language, religion). Nor is the largely spurious dichotomising of *ethnic* nationalism (bad) and *civic* nationalism (good) very helpful: 'good' civic nations are typically defined by already agreed state borders, whereas in ethno-national conflicts there is no agreed state border, or 'nation' pre-dates 'state' and can only be defined in ethnic (e.g. religion or language) terms. It should be recognised that ethnic identities are always *socially* produced and therefore changeable even if it takes time and effort.

However, contrary to postmodernist exaggerations of people's freedom to choose between multiple identities, there may be very little such freedom in conflict situations. Identities can be particularly slow to change as people are dragooned into line with considerable effort expended on actively *re-producing* identity difference, and it often needs to be expended where the

conflicting groups are actually quite similar and geographically intermingled (as with Northern Ireland's 'narcissism of small differences'). Here generating ethnic and territorial conflict becomes one means of maintaining difference. Conflicts sometimes explained by pseudo- (and often nationalist) history as due to ancient ethnic hatreds are more likely contemporary struggles to produce/reproduce differences, their causes rooted in the distinctly modern nexus of nationalism, sovereignty and democracy.

Nationalism's happy ideal of a nation and state coinciding in the particular territory of a 'nation-state' has powerful appeal, linking homeland, democracy, sovereignty, self-determination, political freedom. But nationalism promises to deceive (Anderson 1986): geographic realities conspire against the ideal, and the ideal itself is two-faced – unifying/divisive, including/excluding, forward-looking and backward-looking (often to an invented past), and only variably progressive. In societies divided into conflicting classes and interest groups, the national interest is inevitably an ideological and illusionary unity, sometimes serving the reactionary interests of dominant groups and classes and used for internal control.

Likewise, national sovereignty is at best elusive in the contemporary world. The partial separation of politics/economics unique to capitalism means that sovereignty applies, and then only as a claim, mainly in the *political* sphere while most of the *economic* sphere, including multinational branch plants and other foreign investment, is conveniently excluded from the claim (see Anderson 2001). Thus while recognising nationalism's democratic associations, and differentiating between oppressed and oppressor nations (for nationalism, unlike say liberalism, is a particularist ideology tied to particular territory), the resolution of national conflict requires a critical stance to nationalism in general. But this is just what conflict managers (and some academics) tend to lack. As representatives of great(er) (national) powers, they typically share some of the same flawed assumptions (or presumptions) as the nationalist protagonists they manage – indeed provide them with models of national success to aspire to – and hence are in no position to teach or preach. They tend to pander to the protagonists perhaps because they themselves share the assumption that national identity has overriding importance over other types of identity. But in most if not all ethno-national conflicts, the nation-state ideal sought by the protagonists is either unattainable or not worth the cost in human lives, misery and the foreclosing of more fruitful options.

Perhaps the most basic problem underlying these conflicts, epitomising the modernity of their intractability, involves not some easy archaic or atavistic target, but the decidedly modern and highly valued phenomenon of representative democracy. Ethno-national conflicts are not amenable to 'normal' resolution by representative democracy because what is basically in dispute is precisely the territorial framework or shell within which this democracy is to take place. The problem is 'which place, and who decides?' As William Connolly (1991) has pointed out, democracy depends on democratic

institutions and hence is absent until they are established, but there is the paradox that they cannot be established democratically because initially there are no democratic institutions. And in 'normal' societies for democracy to have legitimacy there is a politics of forgetting their *undemocratic* origins (in, e.g. warfare, conquest, genocide of indigenous inhabitants). But in situations of ethno-national conflict there is no possibility of such forgetting: first, historical origins are a live issue (as William Faulkner said, 'The past is not dead. It's not even past'); and second, the paradox is not simply a matter of historical origins but is in the here and now because any re-drawing of borders would reproduce the paradox in the present. Normally the electorate decides, but the prior question here is who decides the electorate – who should have a vote, what is the appropriate territorial framework? As we saw with Irish partition, how the borders of the institutional shell are drawn will determine the outcome of a democratic majority vote, but the contested borders cannot themselves be decided by this democratic means. Instead we get an infinite democratic regression of who decides who decides who decides . . . which can only be terminated *undemocratically*. Either one of the protagonists decides (e.g. by unilateral action, in the extreme creating a 'democratic' majority by ethnic cleansing, which Michael Mann (2005) shows to be 'the dark side of democracy'); and/or external managers pragmatically enforce a solution (e.g. partition or power-sharing) – though perhaps with marginal plebiscites, or subsequent legitimation by democratic ratification.

Such subsequent legitimation did not happen with Irish partition, but it did for the Good Friday Agreement and with referenda in both parts of Ireland. However, in the quarter century wasted in chasing the chimera of an internal solution, the decision on who decides Northern Ireland's future – the voters of Northern Ireland on their own, rather than the electorates of all the UK, or of all Ireland, or all Ireland plus Britain – ensured that there was no real political movement. As those beyond Northern Ireland were affected by the conflict, they too should arguably have had a direct say as well, but the two governments opted for the first option, partly in their attempt to bottle up the conflict within Northern Ireland. This seems democratic as that is the electorate most directly affected, but in fact it excluded other directly affected people, and further intensified the conflict within Northern Ireland by putting the whole weight of the formal decision onto its relatively evenly-sized groups (the Protestants' majority in Northern Ireland's six counties has now fallen below 56%, their majority in a *nine*-county Ulster which we saw was deemed 'unsafe' before partition).

The limitations of representative democracy are central to ethno-national conflict. This form of democracy imbues territory with added political significance but cannot resolve territorial conflict. In normal circumstances it has great strengths: the paradox of undemocratic origins is avoided by having a prior framework of standard all-purpose territorial constituencies for decision-making independent of particular issues, which contributes legitimacy to decisions, rather than having to delimit the relevant political

community issue by issue in terms of who is actually affected. But where state borders are crossed or contested, conventional democracy has crucial weaknesses. If issues straddle the pre-given border (e.g. cross-border environmental pollution), deciding the relevant political community in terms of who is affected might well be more reasonable and democratic than excluding affected groups because they happen to live beyond the border of sovereignty. Where borders and sovereignty are disputed, *non-territorial* deliberative democracy may be essential. Conventional democracy has to be supplemented by more flexible participatory forms which can cross ethnic and territorial borders (see Anderson 2002; Held 1993).

Conflict management shortcomings

The interrelated problems of territoriality and territorial management suggest that conflict resolution requires *radical* measures. But what would it take to persuade the managers? Their solutions often create or reinforce territorial and/or ethnic divisions and borders, whether external partition with new borders, or the internal alternatives of consociation or integration based on existing but disputed borders. They rest on the management virtues of control by segregation or separation, whereas conflict *resolution* requires cross-border contact and co-operation between the managed.

Partition, as Brendan O'Leary (2006) shows, imposes a new border cutting through at least one community's national territory, creating at least two separate entities, but it has limited application and a poor record of solving conflicts. It has mostly featured in defeated/collapsing multi-national empires (e.g. Hungary after WWI), or to empires in retreat (e.g. the British from Ireland, Palestine, India). Since the 1940s, partition has been out of favour internationally because of its dismal record and continuing difficulties (see, e.g. Fraser 1984; *Index* 1997). New borders tend to exacerbate the problems they were supposed to solve. It is often impossible to (re)draw national borders where ethnicities are geographically intermingled, or to do so invites ethnic cleansing. Partition as a temporary expedient (extending divide and rule to divide and run) can become permanent, further exacerbating conflict (e.g. Indian partition led to over 200,000 deaths, over 5 million migrating, several Indian – Pakistani wars, and now nuclear threat). But partition and similarly new borders through secession are also out of favour because they threaten the territorial integrity principle for national states in general (as distinct from collapsing multi-national empires). Since the 1940s the international community's preference has therefore been for the self-determination of *peoples* rather than of *nations* (Cassese 1995), whether involving federalisation, consociation, or both, all achievable internally within existing 'national', i.e. state, borders, but leaving disputed borders in place.

Consociationalism contains and regulates conflict by institutionalising power-sharing between contending groups, but, its critics argue, at the cost of helping to perpetuate, even deepen, the divisions between them. Its main

internal alternative is social integrationism to create a single unified society within existing borders. But the terms of the debate around these two alternatives are over-polarised and overly static.

There are typically four main non-majoritarian power-sharing elements in consociations: a coalition government by representatives of all the ethnic groups; representation proportional to their relative sizes; autonomy in their group organisation; and mutual vetoes to protect particular ethnic group interests. This internal partitioning approach, according to its leading exponents (e.g. Lijphart 1977; McGarry and O'Leary 2004; O'Leary 2005), realistically accepts the harsh facts of groups in conflict: if 'good fences' do not necessarily 'make good neighbours', they can at least stop them fighting. Consociation focuses primarily on stopping or preventing their open/violent conflict, and in this it has had some notable successes, not least in Ireland. It claims to be even-handed; to secure the trust of the conflicting groups by giving guarantees about their future; and to provide stable democratic government. In its more limited ambitions it can claim to be more realistic than wishful thinking integrationist alternatives which peddle dangerous illusions about a unified society. Minority groups tend to see integrationist measures as a direct assimilationist threat to their own cherished identity and interests. If purely voluntary they may be ineffective, and if effective they may generate further conflict.

The case against consociation, according to its more integrationist critics (e.g. Taylor 2001; O'Flynn and Russell 2005; Wilford 1992; Wilson 1998), is that it enshrines a bleak view of humanity which sees distrust and antagonism as endemic. Its power-sharing mechanisms and guarantees produce expensive cumbersome gridlock, and static rather than stable government. Secretive dealing between political elites replaces open political debate; effective opposition and alternative government are said to be rendered unlikely; and ethnic divisions and polarisation are maintained or increased. People are forced into one or other ethnic camp, and more fruitful bases of political mobilisation (e.g. class) which cross-cut ethnic divisions are marginalised or excluded. The so-called middle ground of compromise, or other grounds for alternative politics, are eroded; and the primacy and permanency of ethno-national categories are conservatively accepted rather than questioned or challenged. Whatever the more discerning opinions of its advocates, in practice consociation lends support to essentialist segregation and exaggerates division.⁴

These are serious claims and counter-claims. But in fact both approaches make some valid criticisms and both contain positive elements, a basis for seeing potential complementarity. While apparently diametrically opposed mirror-images, integration and consociation also share some of the same shortcomings. First, both have underplayed reliance on external conflict management. Michael Kerr (2005) details how consociation in Northern Ireland and in Lebanon remain dependent on external enforcement with, in his opinion, little prospect of becoming self-sustaining. Although its external

environment is much more favourable than Lebanon's, Northern Ireland was at the mercy of conflict managers whose priorities were elsewhere.⁵ Conversely, their large investment of time and effort in ending hostilities can give local ethno-national leaderships an inflated sense of their own importance; and continuing external responsibility may actually encourage *irresponsible* brinkmanship by the immediate protagonists. Second, both approaches usually have the generally ignored weakness of being internal solutions which accept and support rather than deal creatively with disputed borders. It is telling that consociation was first formulated for the Netherlands where the religious differences were entirely internal and, unlike Ireland, the state's borders were not at issue (Lijphart 1977). Third, both approaches are typically overstated and seen as mutually exclusive strategies or ideal end-states. Instead, they should be seen dynamically as complementary elements in an historical process.

Border-crossings and conflict resolution

Rather than statically juxtaposing consociation or integration, territoriality or border-crossing, nationalism or transnationalism, in each case conflict resolution requires a dynamic process of qualifying, supplementing or transcending the former by the latter. The key challenge is to move on to resolution, and this depends on developing other transnational struggles which span territorial and ethnic divides.

An over-polarised debate and the Good Friday Agreement

The consociationalists are generally realistic in insisting that to achieve ceasefires, or some initial agreement between warring ethno-national protagonists, elaborate, guaranteed and hence rather static power-sharing arrangements are essential. At this stage the overriding objective is to end hostilities, and the promise of guaranteed power-sharing generally plays a key role. Integrationist critics of consociation (as in the GFA and the 1995 Dayton Accord which ended the Bosnian war) often appear to forget that there was a war, or that appeals for a unified society would have been of little use in achieving ceasefires. Timing and stages are important;⁶ consociation was necessary but is not sufficient.

Integrationists are on firmer ground in arguing that consociational arrangements reinforce divisions and perpetuate – or at the very least fail to supersede – the conditions of the conflict, though here the Northern Ireland evidence is rather inconclusive. The challenge for the integrationists is how to qualify or complement the often dominant consociationalism with more integrative practices which straddle ethno-national divisions; and there is the further challenge of crossing disputed territorial borders which they, like the consociationalists, tend to ignore and hence in practice support. These are

difficult challenges which might be insurmountable if the consociation model, or the integration model, operated in pure form. But that is never the case; there are always other elements, even if obscured by the polarised and somewhat abstract debate about the two models. Too much has been claimed for consociation, and it has been blamed for too much. Other political and social factors are involved, and these can provide some of the dynamism for increasing co-operation across the divides.

Because of the relative dominance of its internal power-sharing 'Strand 1', the GFA is sometimes seen as simply 'consociationalism', and as such gets blamed for alleged ethno-national polarisation, increased sectarianism and the rewarding of the extremes. Since 1998 Sinn Féin and Paisley's DUP have won out over, respectively, the more moderate constitutional nationalists of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). However, while consociationalism on its own would tend to cement ethnic divisions, it is hardly responsible for all these 'post-1998 problems'. For most of the period consociation has been in suspension; sectarianism long pre-dates 1998, has not got any worse overall since then and in some areas has got better; and there are other reasons for political parties winning and losing,⁷ other considerations besides consociation.

'Strand 2' of the GFA crucially set up a qualitatively advanced set of cross-border institutions linking Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (*Agreement* 1998). These included a North-South Ministerial Council, bringing together government ministers and officials from the Belfast and Dublin administrations, with its own Secretariat (arrangements similar to the EU Council of Ministers). It would cover at least twelve policy areas for North-South co-operation and the implementation of mutually agreed policies; and its scope and powers can be expanded by mutual agreement. The GFA also provided for a Northern Ireland 'civic forum' involving employers, trade unions, the voluntary sector and other particular areas of interest and expertise. While a proposal for a similar cross-border, all-Ireland body (Anderson and Goodman 1996, 1998c: 249-50) – an 'Island Social Forum' to facilitate greater transparency and democracy in cross-border developments and stimulate the growth of cross-border interest groups or political communities – was not implemented, it was mentioned in the GFA as an option for the future.

Thus, despite limitations, the North-South bodies are remarkable in breaking the impasse over an imaginary internal solution and symbolically giving Northern nationalists some parity of esteem with unionists. Crucially, in blurring sharply bordered territorial sovereignty with an element of sovereignty-sharing, they redefined and deflated the unsolvable problem of two absolute, overblown and incompatible claims to national sovereignty over the same territory of Northern Ireland – the sort of claims which still plague other ethno-national conflicts.

It can be argued that Strands 2 and 3 are relatively weak. According to Kerr (2005), in the fragmented GFA negotiations the unionists concentrated

on weakening 'Strand 2' while its nationalist defenders had other pre-occupations.⁸ Nevertheless, the North-South institutions are already relatively successful and advanced compared to arrangements in other border conflicts, and they are open to further development. Looking on the bright side, at a formal level the GFA probably contains most of the necessary institutional ingredients for conflict resolution, even if arguably more an internal than a fully cross-border strategy.

Moreover, formal political institutions are only part of the story, existing to enable or facilitate other, ultimately more important, substantive developments in civil society. To appreciate their potential for conflict resolution, the institutions have to be seen in this wider informal or 'non-institutional' context. And its importance can be seen in the fact that cross-border co-operation has its own dynamics, some of which (e.g. the Single European Market) pre-date or are quite independent of the GFA (see Anderson 1994). Economic interests are particularly important, though as Guy Ben-Porat (2005) found in the different contexts of Northern Ireland and Israel, business lobbyists may have only limited influence on peace processes partly because of being politically divided or elitist. However, the key thing which the institutions can facilitate is not so much lobbying for peace (which simply adds yet more actors focusing on the ethno-national conflict), but rather the development of actual political communities which themselves cross the ethnic and territorial divides and thereby (perhaps inadvertently) undermine or displace the very basis of the conflict. But to be politically effective in this sense they need to be popular, broad-based and diverse, rather than narrowly confined to business elites (hence the enabling potential of an all-island 'Social Forum').

Towards more creative transnational conflicts

Cross-border institutions and co-operation, whatever their socio-economic advantages, will only resolve ethno-national conflict to the extent that they foster trans-ethnic and trans-border political communities, and *non*-territorial participatory democracy geared to border-crossing. And this will only happen to the extent that other, more creative, conflicts and issues take centre stage.

Instead of often sterile, zero- or negative-sum conflict over democracy's national territorial shell, there could, for instance, be more productive struggles about (more?) important issues to do with class, gender, or the environment, which cross-cut and under-cut the ethno-national divisions. Creating living, functioning transnational political communities, which define themselves in non-ethnic, non-territorial or cross-border terms, requires practical mobilisation around social, cultural and political as well as economic issues which are not the preserve of any particular ethnicity and are self-evidently worthwhile in their own right. Examples include struggles for goods such as cultural enrichment or economic well-being which (unlike territory) do not have fixed totals but can lead to positive-sum games where all benefit

(though ethno-nationalists will continue to try and drag issues back into their own particularist and zero-sum moulds). The positive-sum games could include struggles directly for democracy itself at different levels, rather than struggles over its territorial shell; and for the participatory, non-territorial and transnational forms which we saw are needed because of the limitations of national territorial representation.

The paradox of making ethno-national peace by making conflict over other matters runs counter to the usual pieties of reconciliation and integration. But the resolution of ethno-national conflict is very unlikely to come from moral appeals for reconciliation or for compromise between opposed identities, or from truth commissions, whatever their moderating impact or therapeutic benefit for individuals who were caught up in violence. In a still-unresolved, and relatively evenly-balanced, conflict, there is a propensity for people to continue the conflict, or re-fight old battles, by using or rather abusing reconciliation measures.⁹ The basic problem is that reconciliation and integration continue to prioritise the same general type of territorial identity as the ethno-nationalists they seek to bring together. They remain locked into the same fixation with this type of identity, and could indeed offer the worst of both worlds: confirming rather than challenging the notion that ethno-national identity is all-important, while simultaneously being seen as threatening particular ethnic identities and being shunned and ineffective for that reason.

Conclusions

To achieve the self-sustaining resolution of ethno-national conflict, it is potentially more productive to transcend it by encouraging *other* struggles and conflicts, rather than accepting or attacking ethno-nationalisms in their own terms; better to try and shift the political terrain by rejecting the notion that ethno-nationalism necessarily has overriding importance over all other types of identity.

The Irish case illustrates the problems of national conflict, and its qualified successes have depended on large investments of external political support which may not be so readily available to other conflicts. The problems are intractable largely because they are deeply rooted and compounded together in territoriality, which reinforces the simplifying distortions more widely a feature in ethno-national conflicts. Consequently, they demand radical remedies. A partly *non*-territorial, border-crossing approach is essential for breaking their vicious circle. While management and especially consociation can be absolutely crucial to ending outright hostilities, we also need to move beyond the prevailing territorialist or statist mind-set of conflict managers. They usually manage rather than resolve conflict, and sometimes they fail even to manage.¹⁰ Unless forced by circumstances or popular mobilisations, they generally prefer to deal with symptoms rather than causes – and for them

consociation has the great advantage of *not* being radical. Its innovations are mostly confined to political institutions and elites, rather than challenging the principle or practice of territorial integrity, the presumptions of ethnicity or nationalism, or the limitations of conventional democracy. Initially to guarantee a ceasefire it is necessary to accept the categories of the conflict, even at the risk of legitimising their assumed primacy. But then the emphasis has to shift towards transcending these categories and diffusing their malign consequences. Conflict resolution is too important to be left to external conflict managers, and ultimately people have to depend on themselves.

Rather than the cross-border component being a secondary add-on, it needs to be built into the peace process from the start and fully integrated with consociationalism, transforming it from border-accepting to border-crossing. Likewise, potential openings for more creative conflict need to be considered when the peace process is first initiated. Resolving national conflict requires the development of transnational political communities and a radical shift of the whole political terrain to marginalise the debilitating negative-sum preoccupations of ethnic and territorial identity. Here, activities and objectives which cross ethnic and territorial borders, but which are valued for themselves without any conflict resolution motivations, may paradoxically prove the most effective. There are no guarantees of success, but transnationalism is a necessary antidote to national conflict, border-crossing essential for its resolution.

Good fences do not make good neighbours. But nor, on reflection, can weak fences. Only the neighbours themselves can.

Notes

1 My thanks for comments from workshop participants in Montecatini Terme, March 2006, especially Eiki Berg and Guy Ben-Porat; from Adrian Guelke; and from three anonymous referees. The ideas in the article were developed as part of ESRC grant RES-228-25-0056 for which thanks are also due; and I draw on earlier publications including collaborations with James Goodman, Liam O'Dowd and Ian Shuttleworth, some of them referenced below.

2 Unionists understandably resent this characterisation of Northern Ireland (by a former, disgraced Dublin Prime Minister), but they themselves bear substantial responsibility for giving it substance.

3 'Two Traditions' fits the essentialist, unionist notion that Irish partition was inevitable because of the Protestant Reformation (Heslinga 1979) – predestined over three centuries earlier but clearly slow-moving! In fact in the 'Home Rule crisis' periods up to 1912 it had not been wanted by nationalist or unionists in Ireland (Anderson 1989).

4 Consociationalists sometimes see a divided society as two separate societies (e.g. O'Leary 2005: 10). Politically, this may reflect the aspirations of nationalist groups, but socially it undervalues their necessary sharing of space and functional interdependencies where groups are intermingled – as in divided cities which are hence fruitful sites for conflict amelioration drawing on urban agonistic traditions of negotiating and channelling conflict – see www.conflictincities.org

5 Except when persuaded into the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement by the Dublin government, Northern Ireland was a low priority for the British government for most of 1974–94. And the Dublin government ruled out Sinn Fein as a future government partner in the South because of its

IRA links, while simultaneously persuading the DUP to share power with it in the North, double standards reflecting Southern electoral priorities.

6 A conference ten years after the Dayton power-sharing settlement underpinning a two-part Bosnian state was generally critical of its consociationalism. But the Israeli geographer, Oren Yiftachel (2005), coming from a more violent, earlier stage of a different peace process, cogently argued for 'Dayton in Palestine', as preferable to partition, violence and an undermined two-state solution.

7 Sinn Fein and the DUP have been models of party political efficiency compared to their shambolic 'moderate' rival parties, the SDLP and the UUP.

8 Apparently the Ulster Unionist Party concentrated on minimising what it least wanted – 'Strand 2'; the SDLP on what it most wanted – 'Strand 1'; and Sinn Fein on de-commissioning and security, issues more immediate to the IRA, and to its electoral base (Kerr 2005). Presumably the conflict managers in the two governments retained a more comprehensive overview.

9 Northern Ireland concentrates considerable resources on reconciliation and 'identity' policies, but often the only identities recognised are ethno-nationalist. In 'single identity work', public funds for reconciliation can in practice strengthen one ethno-nationalism's capacity for continuing the conflict.

10 See Roger MacGinty's (2006) *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave, which firmly establishes similar conclusions by a different route.

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