

Ethnic Minorities: Concept and Meaning

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'Inconvenient Peripheries:
Ethnic Identity and the "United Kingdom Estate"
– The cases of "Protestant Ulster" and Cornwall'

Abstract

Since the 1980s 'territorial politics' has become a legitimate, indeed commonplace, component of British political science, the myth of homogeneity that had characterised the early post-war era being replaced by a new orthodoxy which emphasises the inherent diversity of the British polity. This, in the main, has focussed on the differing strategies employed by the 'centre' in managing the constitutionally-disparate elements of the 'United Kingdom estate'. The Welsh Office, the Scottish Office, the changing governance of Northern Ireland, the ambiguous status of the Channel Islands, the prospects for devolution or regional government, and the heterogeneous condition of post-reform Local Government, have all invited comment.¹

Introduction

From an historical perspective, this orthodoxy has required viewing the United Kingdom '... as a relatively heterogeneous collection of territories, and the state itself as the product of a series of amalgamations, conquests and Unions, rather than some sort of "natural" political entity'.² As well as emphasising the importance of centre-periphery relations in perpetuating territorial differences in the United Kingdom, this approach has also implied that this 'union without uniformity' represents a relative lack of political integration which continues to find expression in political behaviour.³

However, although Rose and others have sought to re-define the United Kingdom as a 'multinational state',⁴ and while considerable attention has been afforded both Scottish and Welsh nationalism and the Northern Ireland problem, there is as yet surprisingly little attempt to link the problems of managing the 'United Kingdom estate' with an appreciation of ethnic diversity within the United Kingdom. Indeed, notwithstanding a now general allowance that Scotland and Wales constitute separate 'nations' within the state, there is a marked reluctance by many

¹For example, see R.Rhodes, *Beyond Westminster and Whitehall: The Sub-central Governments of Britain*, Unwin Hyman, 1988; J.Kellas, 'The Scottish and Welsh Offices as Territorial Managers', *Regional Politics and Policy*, 1/1, 1991; J.Sharpe, 'The United Kingdom: The Disjointed Meso', in J.Sharpe (ed), *The Rise of Meso Government in Europe*, Sage/ECPP, 1993.

²A.Lee, 'Political Parties and Elections', in P.Payton (ed), *Cornwall Since the War: The Contemporary History of a European Region*, Dyllansow Truran/Institute of Cornish Studies, Redruth, 1993, p.253.

³Y.Meny & V.Wright (eds), *Centre-Periphery Relations in Western Europe*, George Allen & Unwin, 1985.

⁴R.Rose, *The United Kingdom as a Multi-National State*, University of Strathclyde, 1970.

observers to apply the 'ethnic' label to the constituent peoples of the United Kingdom. Its use in the Northern Ireland context is still controversial,⁵ while elsewhere in the United Kingdom there is general recognition of 'ethnic minorities' only – usually, those of Asian or Afro-Caribbean origin. The idea that 'the English', for example, might comprise 'an ethnic group' would still strike many people as odd – or even dangerous and subversive.

This paper, then, contends that the difficulties of managing the territorial diversity of the United Kingdom are not merely structural problems reflecting the imperfect political integration of the state but are a function of an ethnic complexity that is imperfectly understood by the practitioners of central government. This imperfection of understanding helps explain the continuing difficulties experienced by those practitioners but also raises deeper questions about how those who are being 'imperfectly understood' perceive the territorial strategies of central government. Additionally, it suggests that political scientists should do more to accommodate consideration of ethnicity within their analyses of British territorial politics – Hechter's intervention in the mid-1970s should be seen as a false start rather than a cul-de-sac.⁶

This paper focusses on two disparate but almost equally far-flung components of the United Kingdom, 'Protestant Ulster' and Cornwall. The identification of a 'Protestant Ulster' is not designed to be divisive but is to make two points. First, it is contended here that it is 'Protestant Ulster' (as opposed to other manifestations or images of the north of Ireland) that is most especially 'imperfectly understood'. Second, the term intimates a particular relationship between territory and ethnic identity which is pertinent to this discussion. The identification of Cornwall as the second territory worthy of treatment is based, notwithstanding Lee's belief that 'In a general political sense, the status of Cornwall as a social and economic periphery of the United Kingdom is now well established and widely accepted',⁷ on the assumption that the notion of a relationship between territory and ethnic identity in modern Cornwall would be not only imperfectly understood but seen as bizarre by many otherwise well-informed observers.

The justification for comparing the ostensibly quite different experiences of 'Protestant Ulster' and of Cornwall is that, in both cases, imperfect understanding has led central government practitioners to view both territories (and peoples) as 'inconvenient peripheries' – a conclusion that has in turn led to strategic policies which, as seen by many in those territories, are potentially disastrous for the survival of separate identity.

⁵For example, S. Bruce, *The Edge of the Union: The Ulster Loyalist Political Vision*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

⁶M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development*, Routledge, 1975.

⁷Lee, 'Political Parties and Elections', p.253.

Protestant Ulster and Northern Ireland

At first glance 'Protestant Ulster' may seem vague as a definitional term but it refers intentionally to both territory and ethnicity, and thus the relationship between the two. 'Protestant Ulster' is the body of people (ethnic group) which subscribes to that identity but it is also the territory that these people inhabit and with which they identify. As individuals they are 'Ulster Protestants', a phrase which – in Cox's estimation – '... combines a sense of emotional attachment to a territory and a people with a descriptive precision which no other term possesses'.⁸

However, not only is attachment to that territory contested so that, as Ryan and O'Dowd have noted, '... Northern Ireland is less a coherent region than a patchwork of interlocked Catholic and Protestant localities'⁹ but also the constitutional entity that is Northern Ireland (and thus the only geo-political expression of 'Protestant Ulster') is itself of recent and arbitrary construction. Indeed, as Boyle and Hadden remind us, 'Northern Ireland was created by the essentially pragmatic British decision to partition Ireland in 1920'.¹⁰ Thus for those who insist that 'A myth of territory is basic to the construction and legitimation of identity ... politicization of territory is achieved through its treatment as a distinct and historic land ...',¹¹ 'Protestant Ulster' today is inherently vulnerable and incomplete.

Graham concludes that 'Patently, Ulster is not a geographical fact ...', a flaw '... which underpins the complex uncertainty of Ulster Protestant identity'¹² and has not allowed the development of a coherent 'representative landscape'. From this perspective, Northern Ireland is an inadequate, externally-invented construction of recent date – small wonder, then, that it is ill-equipped to adequately reflect the ethnic identity of 'Protestant Ulster' and that that identity should have been so consistently misunderstood by a succession of British administrations since 1922. As Cox observed, Northern Ireland '... is an official term; but it has very little emotional resonance'.¹³

Obscured if not invisible within the inadequate construct of Northern Ireland, 'Protestant Ulster' was conveniently pushed to the back of the collective political consciousness of the British governing élite for almost fifty years. For Enoch Powell this was not a case of benign (or irresponsible) amnesia but a reflection of '... the duplicity, the selfishness and the cynicism of the English State...' which since partition had attempted to distance Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. In Powell's words, '... since 1919 the English State has with dogged tenacity been determined to rid the United Kingdom of the province'.¹⁴ Be that as it may, it is certainly true, as Powell points out, that in addition to its Home Rule parliament at Stormont, Northern Ireland was provided with its very own Governor and all that that entailed. Governors and Governors-General are Imperial

⁸H.Cox, 'On Being an Ulster Protestant', in N.Evans (ed), *National Identity in the British Isles*, Coleg Harlech Occasional Papers in Welsh Studies, 3, 1989, p.35.

⁹C.Ryan & L.O'Dowd, 'Restructuring the Periphery: State, Region and Locality in Northern Ireland', in G.Day & G.Rees (eds), *Regions, Nations and European Integration: Remaking the Celtic Peripheries*, University of Wales Press, 1991, pp.199-200.

¹⁰K.Boyle & T.Hadden, *Ireland: A Positive Proposal*, Penguin, 1985, p.53.

¹¹B.Graham, 'No Place of Mind: Contested Protestant Representations of Ulster', *Ecumene*, 1/3, 1994, pp.257 & 259.

¹²Graham, 'No Place of Mind', pp.259 & 274.

¹³Cox, 'On Being an Ulster Protestant', p.35.

¹⁴E.Powell, 'Aligned with the IRA', *The Times*, 10 August 1994.

devices, designed to represent the Sovereign in territories beyond the seas, and to that extent at least Northern Ireland was encouraged to behave as if it were a self-governing Dominion of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Paradoxically, the Protestant élite which ran Northern Ireland colluded in this process, using this relative isolation and independence to construct a new Protestant hegemony designed to exclude as far as possible the 'subversive' influence of the Catholic minority in the new and possibly fragile statelet.

In the years after 1945, Northern Ireland was encouraged by the British government to reach an accommodation with the Republic of Ireland, leading amongst other things to the famous meeting of Sean Lemas and Terrence O'Neil. However, this process was rudely interrupted by the emergence of the Troubles in the late 1960s. This forced Northern Ireland at last into the forefront of the British political consciousness, leading in 1972 to the abolition of Stormont and the implementation of Direct Rule. But despite the integrationist logic of this move, there was little attempt by the British government to understand the imperatives of 'Protestant Ulster' – which remained, both as a territory (arbitrarily defined by Northern Ireland) and as an ethnic group, an imperfectly understood and inconvenient periphery. Indeed, notwithstanding the implementation of Direct Rule, a consistent British policy objective was the creation of a new system of devolutionary government. In practice, the first decade or so of Direct Rule was marked by a complete failure to come to grips with the political problem of Northern Ireland, the British government instead lurching from one security crisis to another.¹⁵ Military containment became the day-to-day practical method of managing the problem.¹⁶

The Anglo-Irish Agreement and Downing Street Declaration

In contrast, the 'Anglo-Irish Agreement' of 1985 and the subsequent 'Downing Street Declaration' almost ten years later appear bold, perhaps visionary, attempts to 'grasp the nettle' and to seek innovatory avenues of progress in a situation that had come to appear increasing intractable. Yet, from the point of view of 'Protestant Ulster', both events were seen as evidence of the British government's at best indifference, and at worst hostility, to the position of Northern Ireland within the Union. As Cox put it, '... the fact that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was negotiated over their heads without consultation has been so powerfully seen in Ulster as adding insult to injury'.¹⁷ Of course, that these negotiations were with the Republic of Ireland lent a particular quality to this feeling of insult, but this sense of powerlessness was symptomatic of a growing concern in 'Protestant Ulster' that in a number of areas an impatient and uncomprehending British government was without proper consultation 'representing' the interests of Northern Ireland.¹⁸

¹⁵ Boyle & Hadden, *Ireland*, p.66.

¹⁶ M.Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland*, Arms & Armour Press, 1985.

¹⁷ Cox, 'On Being an Ulster Protestant', 1989, p.41.

¹⁸ For example, in relations with the European Union; see P.Bew & E.Meehan, 'Regions and Borders: Controversies in Northern Ireland about the European Union', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 1/1, 1994.

Relics from Empire ... A Cantankerous Inconvenience

Although an informed reading of 'Protestant Ulster' might have predicted and even understood the 'Ulster Says No!' campaign that emerged in the aftermath of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the hostility to an apparently imaginative, courageous and sincere attempt at breaking the impasse was seen in Britain (in government, in popular opinion, and amongst some academics) as merely evidence of the backwoodsman attitude of the Ulster Protestant as '... a boorish, bitter Orange Neanderthal'.¹⁹ As Cochrane has noted, the London-Dublin rapprochement since the signing of the Anglo-Irish agreement has led to declining support within Britain for 'Protestant Ulster'.²⁰ And nowhere has this been more apparent than in the government itself where, despite John Major's increasing reliance upon Ulster Unionist MPs at Westminster, the distancing of policy from the influence of the Protestants has been obvious.

Although Cochrane's view that there is now a corresponding and symmetrical indifference on the part of the Dublin government towards the Catholic minority has been contested,²¹ his surer analysis of the current relationship between 'Protestant Ulster' and the British government is supported by the evidence of the Downing Street Declaration's statement that Britain has 'no selfish, strategic or economic' interest in Northern Ireland. This view is in marked contrast to John Major's unswerving commitment to the Union with Scotland, while the idea that a British government might announce 'no selfish, strategic or economic' interest in Kent or Hertfordshire is simply absurd. In Dixon's opinion, '... it is hardly surprising that unionists are insecure about their constitutional position in the United Kingdom and have regarded the "Peace Process" with such suspicion'.²²

If in its treatment of Northern Ireland the British government was reflecting its increasing indifference to (even irritation with) this 'inconvenient periphery', then British public opinion was also expressing doubts about the future position of Northern Ireland within the Union – a fact routinely demonstrated in opinion polls.²³ The fact that the British taxpayer was required to support Northern Ireland to the tune of a net £4.4 billion per annum was, claimed Appleyard in August 1994, a cause of disquiet but more important was that in Britain 'The Protestants are just so unattractive to the romantic-liberal imagination'.²⁴ Ironically, (but reflecting the new-found accord between London and Dublin) this was at a time when British opinion generally had become more sympathetic to the southern Irish – exemplified in the soccer World Cup when '... tricolours flapped throughout London'.²⁵

Although it would be an unacceptable generalisation to suggest that most academic analyses have been hostile to or misunderstanding of 'Protestant Ulster', it is certainly true that a many have displayed such attributes and have often sought

¹⁹ B.Kay, 'The Scots Ower the Sheuch', in I.Wood (ed), *Scotland and Ulster*, Mercat Press, 1994, p.89.

²⁰ F.Cochrane, 'Any Takers? The Isolation of Northern Ireland', *Political Studies*, 42/3, September 1994, pp.378-395.

²¹ P.Dixon, 'Internationalization and Unionist Isolation: A Response to Feargal Cochrane', *Political Studies*, 43/3, September 1995, pp.497-505

²² Dixon, 'Internationalization and Unionist Isolation', p.505.

²³ Cochrane, 'Any Takers?', September 1994, pp.386-389.

²⁴ B. Appleyard, 'Mad Ireland Should Get Real', *Independent*, 10 August 1994.

²⁵ Appleyard, 'Mad Ireland Should Get Real', 10 August 1994

to influence British government policy. Thus in 1988, for example, Rowthorn and Wayne could declare that:

‘Northern Ireland is one of the last remaining relics from Britain’s once mighty empire. Its Protestant community, descendents of the original settlers sent to colonize Ireland more than three hundred years ago, still behaves as a settler community surrounded by hostile natives.’²⁶

Significant for this discussion is the attempt to deny the rights and *raison d’être* of the Protestant community – it is not just the statelet of Northern Ireland that is illegitimate but the whole territorial-ethnic nexus of ‘Protestant Ulster’.

As Appleyard has written, in response to such attitudes ‘... Protestant anger rises dangerously. They see themselves written out of history as a cantakerous inconvenience ...’.²⁷ For academics more sympathetic than Rowthorn and Wayne, such as Cochrane, ‘This ebbing support for the Union amongst both the policy-making élite and general electorate is linked directly to an increasing inability within mainland Britain to understand the unionist community in Northern Ireland’.²⁸ For Bruce, ‘Protestant Ulster’ is

‘... fundamentally threatened by British actions and British attitudes. Ulster Protestants are well aware that the British public is largely indifferent to their efforts to preserve themselves and entirely uncomprehending of their history, attitudes and culture.’²⁹

By 1994 Bruce’s analysis had not changed. Borrowing, perhaps, from the celebrated assertion of Peter Robinson, the Democratic Unionist MP, that Northern Ireland was by now ‘on the window-ledge of the Union’, Bruce produced his book *The Edge of the Union* in which he investigated the attitudes of key sections of the ‘Protestant Ulster’ community to the situation in which they now found themselves.³⁰ His conclusion was that the Troubles were a deeply-entrenched ethnic conflict in which the failure (by Britain) to appreciate the strength and characteristics of the ‘Protestant Ulster’ ethnic identity had prevented a proper understanding of the situation. Moreover, this lack of appreciation and understanding had led to strategic policies that would not only fail but would further alienate ‘Protestant Ulster’.

Re-inventing Protestant Ulster

The increasing fragility of the Northern Ireland statelet in the estimation of ‘Protestant Ulster’ has led not only to the alienation noted above but also to a desire to move beyond the perceived fragility of that recent, externally-invented construction to create a more secure myth of the relationship between territory and ethnic identity. There has been a return to the familiar image of the ‘Ulster Scot’ as progenitor of ‘Protestant Ulster’ but with a new emphasis which now focusses less on

²⁶B.Rowthorne & N.Wayne, *Northern Ireland: The Political Economy of Conflict*, Polity, 1988, p.166.

²⁷Appleyard, ‘Mad Ireland Should Get Real’, 10 August 1994.

²⁸Cochrane, ‘Any Takers?’, September 1994, p.381.

²⁹S.Bruce, *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism*, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.258-259.

³⁰Bruce, *The Edge of the Union*, 1994.

the seventeenth-century 'plantation' (which confirms the Protestants as Johnny-come-lately colonists) but stresses instead both the antiquity of the relationship between the north of Ireland and Scotland and the ancient distinction between Ulster and the rest of Ireland. Here, for example, 'There is a strong case for defining the land that stretches from the west of Northern Ireland to Scotland as one cultural area'.³¹

Heslinga argues that the modern Irish border is more or less the contemporary manifestation of a much older divide.³² 'Ulster' was always cut off from the south by mountain and bog, forests and lakes and water courses, while the current Irish border is a kind of latterday version of an older proxy border between Scotland (with its cultural hegemony in the North) and England (with its influence radiating from the Pale). The adoption of Cú Chulainn by the Ulster Defence Association as a symbol of 'Protestant Ulster', or a growing interest amongst Protestant activists in learning Gaelic, may to external observers seem to be uniquely perverse. They are, however, part of a wider attempt at 're-inventing' 'Protestant Ulster'.³³

'Protestant Ulster', then, represents a particular relationship between territory and ethnic identity, one that is only imperfectly reflected in the constitutional entity of Northern Ireland and one that has been so consistently ill-understood by the British that it has become an 'inconvenient periphery'. This has led to policies which either ignore or under-estimate 'Protestant Ulster' opinion, or are even seen as posing a threat to the survival of that identity. This, in turn, has prompted a deep suspicion of British policy while also encouraging a 're-invention' of the myth of 'Protestant Ulster', the results of which are as yet difficult to predict but are likely to prove further antagonistic to the aims of British policy.

Cornwall – Territory and Ethnic Identity

In marked contrast to Northern Ireland, the geo-political territory of Cornwall is of ancient provenance – its extent clearly defined by the River Tamar and the sea – while the Cornish are clearly the people who inhabit that territory. Charles Thomas has suggested that Cornwall was probably a 'pagus' or administrative sub-division of the Roman canton of Dumnonia.³⁴ Its status after the departure of the legions is less clear, although by the tenth century the territorial extent of modern Cornwall had been established in the Athelstan settlement which set the Tamar as the divide between Celt and Saxon.³⁵ The Athelstan settlement was one element of a process of accommodation within the English State which developed in the medieval period, other features including the Stannary or Tinnars' Parliament (which had powers equal to those of Westminster³⁶) and the institution of

³¹ Kay, 'The Scots Ower the Sheuch', 1994, p.89.

³² M.Heslinga, *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide*, Assen, 1971, pp.100-101, cited in F.Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939*, Oxford University Press, 1979, p.116.

³³ For example, see P.O'Snodaigh, *Protestants and the Irish Language*, Lagan Press, 1995; P.Misteil, *The Irish Language and the Unionist Tradition*, Ulster People's College/Utach Trust, 1994.

³⁴ Charles Thomas, *The Importance of Being Cornish in Cornwall*, Institute of Cornish Studies, 1973, p.5.

³⁵ P.Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall: Historical Experience and the Persistence of 'Difference'*, Dyllansow Truran, Redruth, 1992, pp.45-47.

³⁶ G.Lewis, *The Stannaries: A Study of the Medieval Tin Miners of Cornwall and Devon*, Bradford Barton, Truro, 1965; R.Pennington, *Stannary Law: A History of the Mining Law of Cornwall and Devon*, Newton Abbot, 1973

the Duchy of Cornwall.

Although today the Duchy is seen generally as a landed estate connected only incidentally with the territory of Cornwall, telling constitutional devices remain (for example, the High Sheriff is appointed by the Duke of Cornwall and not the Crown, in contrast to every English and Welsh county) while even as late as 1855 the Duchy of Cornwall itself could insist that ‘... from earliest times Cornwall was distinct from the Kingdom of England, and under separate government ...’³⁷ and that ‘... the three Duchy Charters are sufficient in themselves to vest in the Dukes of Cornwall, not only the government of Cornwall, but the entire territorial dominion in and over the county ...’.³⁸ At the very least, we may conclude that the constitutional history of Cornwall is singular and that the territory is, in that sense, one of the distinctive components that came to comprise the United Kingdom.

The people of Cornwall spoke their own Celtic language until modern times (Cornish as a spoken vernacular died out by about 1800), and the distinctive experience of industrialisation in Cornwall enhanced and redefined an already developed sense of separate identity. However, the rapid de-industrialisation of the late nineteenth century precipitated a cultural as well as socio-economic crisis. One response was the ‘Cornish Revival’ which attempted to look back over the debris of the industrial period to a time when Cornwall was more ‘purely Celtic’. This ‘re-invention’ of Celtic Cornwall led, amongst other things, to a small but persistent Cornish language revivalist movement and, after 1945, a modest but nonetheless relatively influential political nationalism.³⁹

In recent years the relationship between territory and ethnic identity in Cornwall has received considerable attention.⁴⁰ It has been suggested that in the post-war era the Cornish identity has both redefined and strengthened in response to rapid socio-economic change (not least substantial in-migration from across the Tamar), with Cornish ‘difference’ exhibited in a range of areas of human activity (such as voting behaviour and the politics of ‘anti-metropolitanism’). McArthur considered that ‘There is a sharpening of conscious ethnic identity among Cornish people ...’⁴¹ and argued that ‘The Cornish are a named group or community, with a self-awareness (albeit of differing degrees) of separate identity, being long established in a well-defined territory, and according to this definition do qualify for the label “ethnic group” or “ethnic community”’.⁴²

Significantly, McArthur added that it was ‘... the land of Cornwall itself which has proved to be a powerful focus of ethnic identification’.⁴³ This view was echoed in the work of Deacon who, taking his cue from Conversi,⁴⁴ decided that in Corn-

³⁷The Duchy of Cornwall, *Preliminary Statement Showing the Grounds on which is founded the Right of The Duchy of Cornwall to the Tidal Estuaries, Foreshore, and Under-Sea Minerals within and around The Coast of The County of Cornwall*, Duchy of Cornwall, 1855, p.3.

³⁸The Duchy of Cornwall, *Preliminary Statement ...*, 1855, p.9.

³⁹B.Deacon & P.Payton, ‘Re-inventing Cornwall: Culture Change on the European Periphery’, in P.Payton (ed), *Cornish Studies: One*, University of Exeter Press, 1993.

⁴⁰For example, see P.Payton, ‘Territory and Identity’, in Payton (ed), *Cornwall Since the War*, 1993; Alys Thomas, ‘Cornwall’s Territorial Dilemma: European Region or “Westcountry” Sub-region?’, in P.Payton (ed), *Cornish Studies: Two*, University of Exeter Press, 1994.

⁴¹Mary McArthur, *The Cornish: A Case-study of Ethnicity*, unpublished MSc thesis, University of Bristol, 1988, Summary; see also p.100.

⁴²McArthur, *The Cornish*, 1988, p.81.

⁴³McArthur, *The Cornish*, 1988, pp. 66-67.

⁴⁴D.Conversi, ‘Language or Race? The Choice of Core Values in the Development of Catalan and Basque Nationalisms’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 13/1, 1990; B.Deacon, ‘And Shall Trelawny Die?’

wall the 'core value' of ethnic identity around which the Cornish were most likely to mobilise was that of territory. This, in turn, informed Payton's assessment that 'Although sporadic and generally reactive or defensive, and not leading to sustained ethnic mobilisation, a general concern for the territorial integrity of Cornwall has become increasingly significant since the War.'⁴⁵

They are no different from the Devonians

By the early 1990s there was some evidence that the scholarly attention afforded Cornish identity was having an impact elsewhere. The Commission for Racial Equality, for example, examined the case of Cornwall, prompting *The Times* to ask, 'Are the Cornish an ethnic minority?'⁴⁶ and found a '... substantial number of indigenous Cornish people who feel disadvantaged compared with "incomers" in relation to class, income, housing, employment ...', one respondent (an LEA advisory teacher) arguing that '... the Cornish are an oppressed minority, and recognition of this fact in her work had proved to be a useful introduction to multi-cultural and anti-racist education'.⁴⁷

However, despite the growing corpus of academic material on Cornish identity, the concept of Cornish ethnicity was by no means uncontested. In 1991, for example, Denis et al insisted that 'Arguments based on the existence of an ethnic identity have a plausibility ... which is totally lacking in the far south west'.⁴⁸ Although genetic research into Cornish 'difference' proved inconclusive,⁴⁹ and although it was pointed out that biological make-up was only incidental to ethnic identity, the 'regional' media (based outside of Cornwall in Plymouth) took the findings to mean that 'there are no Celts left in Cornwall' and that 'the Cornish are no different from your average Brummie', an attitude and conclusion that was reflected as recently as 3 January 1996 in a BBC 'Spotlight' magazine item on 'are the Cornish an ethnic minority?'. The inference was that Cornish claims to separate identity were not only tiresome and eccentric but spurious and unfounded, perhaps even dangerous.

Significantly, however, a further conclusion in the estimation of the (Plymouth) *Western Morning News* was that 'The Cornish might not like it, but ... they are no different from the Devonians on the other side of the Tamar'.⁵⁰ In other words, as the newspaper's editor made plain at a conference in May 1992, there was a fundamental conflict between Cornish claims to separate identity and the demands of a wider agenda intent on devising a homogeneous regional construct of which Cornwall was but one component.⁵¹ To deny the legitimacy of Cornish ethnicity

The Cornish Identity', in Payton (ed), *Cornwall Since the War*, 1993.

⁴⁵ Payton, 'Territory and Identity', 1993, p.224.

⁴⁶ cited in P.Payton, 'Ethnic Consciousness', in M.Foley (ed), *Ideas That Shape Politics*, Manchester University Press, 1994, p.172.

⁴⁷ E.Jay, *Keep Them in Birmingham: Challenging Racism in the South West of England*, Commission for Racial Equality, 1992, p.16.

⁴⁸ M.Denis et al, 'The Peripheries Today', in M.Havinden et al (eds), *Centre and Periphery: Brittany and Devon & Cornwall Compared*, University of Exeter Press, 1991, p.38; see also A.Ivey & P.Payton, 'Towards a Cornish Identity Theory', in Payton (ed), *Cornish Studies: Two*, 1994.

⁴⁹ R.Harvey et al, 'How Celtic are the Cornish? A Study of Biological Affinities', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 21/2, 1986; M.Smith, 'Cornish Genes and Celtic Culture', unpublished paper presented at Polytechnic South West, 1991.

⁵⁰ *Western Morning News*, 29 August 1992.

⁵¹ Payton (ed), *Cornwall Since the War*, 1993, p.309.

was thus a device to negate the suggestion that there was in Cornwall a particular relationship between territory and identity which imbued 'the land of Cornwall' with especial significance.

Paradoxically, this negation has been one of the principal precipitators of that sporadic ethnic mobilisation noted by commentators such as Deacon, Payton and Alys Thomas. A significant element of the 'politics of anti-metropolitanism' that has emerged since 1945 has been Cornish resistance to strategic policies which, from a Cornish perspective, have threatened the territorial integrity of Cornwall. In an echo of the predicament of 'Protestant Ulster', this Cornish perspective has on the whole been imperfectly understood (especially by central government), and Cornwall has been seen at best as an 'inconvenient periphery' muddying the waters of regional management. As Alys Thomas observed, 'It is ironic that at a time when such strong arguments are being made for the strength and persistence of a distinctive Cornish identity Cornwall's territorial status is under attack from several directions'.⁵²

Since the war, regional strategies affecting the territory of Cornwall have been driven by the twin imperatives of Plymouth as a focus of regional activity and the 'South West' (variously defined) as an appropriate unit of regional management. In 1946, as part of a scheme for post-war reconstruction, an expansion of Plymouth into South East Cornwall was planned. This threat was beaten off by Cornwall County Council, although the plan re-emerged some twenty years later under the guise of local government reform. The Redcliffe-Maud Commission was sympathetic, as was a Labour government anxious to vest more power in urban hands, and a blueprint emerged for the creation of a Plymouth 'unitary authority' including territory drawn from Cornwall. Cornwall County Council mounted a vigorous campaign in defence of the Tamar border but the scheme was only defeated by a change of government and a new central regime less keen on powerful cities.

Interestingly, the events of local government reform had influenced the perspectives of the Crowther-Kilbrandon Commission on the Constitution which, as well as noting the special status lent Cornwall by the Duchy, reported in 1973 that 'What they (the Cornish) do want is recognition of the fact that Cornwall has a separate identity and that its traditional boundaries shall be respected'.⁵³ However, this did not inform the ensuing process of boundary construction in the creation of a Cornwall and Plymouth European Parliamentary Constituency (EPC). There was widespread dismay that Cornwall was not to have its own seat, David Penhaligon MP insisting in the House of Commons that 'It is the first time in any election that the boundary of Cornwall, which is sacrosanct and important, has been ignored ... the Celts of Cornwall regard this as a sad day in their history, for it was the day when their boundary was ignored and denied'.⁵⁴ In the ensuing Euro-election the Mebyon Kernow (Cornish nationalist) candidate secured almost 10% of the Cornish vote, in part a measure of the hostility to the new EPC and an expression of anger at the government's inability to take Cornish claims seriously.⁵⁵

In 1983 there was again a general mobilisation of Cornish opinion to demand

⁵²Thomas, 'Cornwall's Territorial Dilemma', 1994, p.149.

⁵³*The Report of the Royal Commission on the Constitution*, Cmnd.5460, HMSO, 1973, paragraph 329.

⁵⁴*Hansard*, 1161-1162, 4 December 1978.

⁵⁵D.Butler & D.Marquand, *European Elections and British Politics*, Longman, 1981, p.133.

a Cornish EPC consistent with the territorial extent of Cornwall. In 1988 a Campaign for A Cornish Constituency emerged to argue that (as in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, or indeed Northern Ireland) there were within the terms of the enabling legislation an array of 'special geographic considerations' which would allow the creation of a Cornish EPC even though it would be significantly smaller than the 'quota' guide-line employed by the Boundary Commission. The Assistant Commissioner who presided at the subsequent public inquiry in Cornwall agreed that there were such considerations, although he did not feel it 'appropriate' to act upon them.⁵⁶ Later still, in 1993, when as part of the Maastricht deal the United Kingdom obtained an additional six European seats, Cornwall County Council led a strong bid for a Cornwall-only seat. The outcome, however, was a modified Cornwall and West Plymouth EPC, a result which did not satisfy Cornish aspirations and yet was seen as a snub to Plymouth's regional aspirations.

Devonwall

The 'New Localism' of the mid 1990s, however, served to re-focus Plymouth's role as regional centre. In November 1993 the government announced its 'New Localism' initiative, aimed at creating a modest administrative 'regionalism'. A South West regional office was created in Bristol but a Plymouth sub-office was set-up to manage the relevant affairs of Devon and Cornwall. Here was a reflection in the 'devolved' institutions of central government a regional agenda that had grown apace in the 1970s and 1980s, the creation of a Devon-and-Cornwall ('Devonwall', to its detractors) sub-region within the wider framework of the six-county South West Planning Region.

A Joint Devon and Cornwall Committee had been set up by the two county councils as early as 1974 but, as Alys Thomas noted, in more recent years '... pressures from Central Government and from sectors such as the newly privatised monopolies have led to an increasing level of co-operation'.⁵⁷ Indeed, such co-operation became increasingly strategic so that, for example, in 1988 Devon-and-Cornwall was (on the advice of the British government) designated a NUTS II region by the European Community. Other strategic creations were the Devon and Cornwall Development Bureau, the Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) (formed despite the declared preference by Cornwall County Council for a Cornwall-only TEC), and – in September 1993 – the Westcountry Development Corporation which (with government blessing) saw its mission to construct a 'unified voice' and 'overall vision' for Devon-and-Cornwall.⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, ideological battle was joined as detractors of the 'Devonwall' process reacted to these developments. Noting the resistance of Cornish opinion, the *Western Morning News* warned that '... although politicians and local agencies believe that Devon and Cornwall must work together to develop the regional economy, animosity between the two counties has held the region back':⁵⁹ the

⁵⁶ *Boundary Commission for England: European Parliamentary Act 1978 (as amended): The Report of the Assistant Commissioner G.D.Flather, QC, upon the Local Inquiry held by him on 12 & 13 July 1988 in Bodmin, Cornwall, into proposed changes in the European Parliamentary Constituencies of Cornwall and Plymouth and Devon*, Boundary Commission for England, 1988.

⁵⁷ Thomas, 'Cornwall's Territorial Dilemma', 1994, p.140.

⁵⁸ *Western Morning News*, 30 September 1993.

⁵⁹ *Western Morning News*, 4 September 1992.

not-so-coded message was clear – concern for the territorial integrity and identity of Cornwall was getting in the way of the wider regional agenda. Cornwall was indeed an ‘inconvenient periphery’: Christmas reflected in her perceptive portrayal of Britain under the Tories that ‘Cornwall does not wish to be ignored and does not wish to be hyphenated to Devon ... Cornwall is fed up with border blurring, with having more and more decisions that affect daily life decided on the other side of the Tamar’.⁶⁰

In Cornwall itself, arguments that the ‘Devonwall’ project was a threat to territorial identity were augmented by socio-economic objections, the most significant of which was that which insisted that within a Devon-and-Cornwall region the particular problems of Cornwall were disguised by the link with relatively affluent Devon.⁶¹ This ‘statistical invisibility’ was demonstrated graphically in 1993 when the government decided to bid to the European Community for ‘Objective 1’ status (a category reserved for the very poorest regions of Europe and attracting a high level of grant aid) for Merseyside, the Highlands and Islands, and Devon-and-Cornwall. The Merseyside and Highlands bids were successful but that for Devon-and-Cornwall failed. The criteria for Objective 1 status was notionally 75% of average EC GDP. Merseyside and Highlands were slightly high at 79% each but Devon-and-Cornwall produced an unfortunately high 83%. Cornwall on its own would have been 76%.⁶²

For Cornwall County Council the seemingly inexorable move towards ‘Devonwall’ posed particular problems, a grass roots inclination to defend Cornish integrity and identity tempered with a ‘pragmatism’ which recognised the difficulty of ‘bucking’ the ‘Devonwall’ trend and opted instead for an ‘if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em’ strategy in which Cornwall attempted to take the initiative in a number of joint projects. However, this produced a Janus-like stance which was often difficult to sustain. For example, when the Westcountry Development Corporation was first mooted the *Western Morning News* noted that ‘Many in Cornwall want a separate Development Agency ...’⁶³ and ‘Cornish business and political leaders say it is necessary to have their own voice for Cornish concerns in the corridors of power in Whitehall and Brussels’.⁶⁴ The County Council, however, decided that it would be ‘pragmatic’ to lend the Westcountry Development Corporation its support – but at the same time set-up a Cornwall Economic Forum as a counter-balance.

A more direct threat to the territorial integrity and identity of Cornwall in this period was the Local Government Review of 1994-95. In response to early intimations that the government might seek to ‘partition’ Cornwall, in the process abolishing it as an administrative-constitutional entity, a vigorous campaign emerged to fight for Cornwall’s survival. Although opinion was divided as to whether the status quo (two tier) system should endure or a single unitary authority be created in its stead, there was almost unanimous agreement that a single strategic voice

⁶⁰L.Christmas, *Chopping Down the Cherry Trees: A Portrait of Britain in the Eighties*, Penguin, 1991, p.262.

⁶¹The most recent analysis of Cornwall’s ‘statistical invisibility’ is that in J.Payne (ed), *Interpreting the Index of Local Conditions: Relative Deprivation in Devon and Cornwall*, Universities of Exeter & Plymouth, 1995.

⁶²Payton (ed), *Cornwall Since the War, 1993*, p.17.

⁶³*Western Morning News*, 8 July 1992.

⁶⁴*Western Morning News*, 3 December 1992.

was required for Cornwall and that the Tamar border was inviolate. The County Council in its own submission to the Local Government Commission emphasised Cornwall's '... geographic, economic, historic, cultural and ethnic integrity ...'.⁶⁵

The Commission, for its part, identified a high level of popular identification with the territory of Cornwall and noted that 'Cornwall's Celtic roots create a strong sense of identity ... Some suggest that it has never been legally incorporated into shire England ... it has its own flag and patron saint ...'.⁶⁶ The Commission's final recommendation was that the existing two-tier structure should survive. Although this was greeted as a famous victory for Cornish popular opinion against a central government determined to fragment local government, Alys Thomas noted wryly that '... populism is less easily mobilised against the pragmatic trend towards linkage with Devon at diverse levels, and it could be that this presents a longer term challenge to Cornwall's territorial identity'.⁶⁷

Conclusion

In Cornwall, as in Northern Ireland, perceived threats to the relationship between territory and ethnic identity led to myths of territory being 're-invented' or re-inforced. Indirectly, this was expressed in the phenomenal levels of support that the Cornwall rugby team achieved in the late 1980s and early 90s (10% of the population constituted 'Trelawny's Army' at Twickenham in 1992), and overtly it was manifested in attempts to restore or at least popularise the ancient territorial rights of the Stannary Parliament and Duchy.⁶⁸

Again, it is not easy to predict what this might mean for the future. It is difficult to imagine a degree of ethnic mobilisation in Cornwall significant or sustained enough to cause a central government to pause to reconsider its strategies for the management of the 'United Kingdom estate'. Yet, taken alongside the altogether more 'critical' case of 'Protestant Ulster', there is evidence of serious disfunction within the state – an inability on the part of central government practitioners to understand the relationship between territory and ethnic identity in the United Kingdom. As long as there are 'inconvenient peripheries', central government will experience difficulty in managing its estate, while those peripheries will themselves experience varying levels of alienation and disaffection.

⁶⁵ Cornwall County Council, *Cornwall: One and All – Submission to the Local Government Commission*, Cornwall County Council, 1994, p.5.

⁶⁶ Local Government Commission for England, *Final Recommendations on the Future Local Government of Cornwall*, HMSO, January 1995, p.5.

⁶⁷ Thomas, 'Cornwall's Territorial Dilemma', 1994, p.149.

⁶⁸ For example, see Jim Pengelly, *The Detectable Duchy*, Cowethas Flamank, Redruth, 1986; *The Stannary Parliament of the Cornish People, The Constitution of Cornwall or Kernow: The Country of the West Britons*, Stannary Parliament, Truro, 1993.