

## **“We are an island”: Geographical Imagery in Accounts of Citizenship, Civil Society, and National Identity in Scotland and in England**

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*In this article we question recent psychological approaches that equate the constructs of citizenship and social identity and which overlook the capacity for units of governance to be represented in terms of place rather than in terms of people. Analysis of interviews conducted in England and Scotland explores how respondents invoked images of Britain as “an island” to avoid social identity constructions of nationality, citizenship, or civil society. Respondents in Scotland used island imagery to distinguish their political commitment to British citizenship from questions relating to their subjective identity. Respondents in England used island imagery to distinguish the United Kingdom as a distinctive political entity whilst avoiding allusions to a common or distinctive identity or character on the part of the citizenry. People who had moved from England to Scotland used island imagery to manage the delicate task of negotiating rights to social inclusion in Scottish civil society whilst displaying recognition of the indigenous population’s claims to distinctive national culture and identity.*

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In a paper based on her presidential address to the International Society of Political Psychology, Haste (2004) noted how a lack of sensitivity for cultural difference may lead researchers unwittingly to assume that forms of citizenship apparent in “stable,” “Western” societies represent a normative benchmark against

which other (“transitional” or “emergent”) societies may be judged. As an alternative, Haste argued that political psychology should adopt a “cultural perspective” and should be more open to rhetorical and discursive methods that afford analytic attention to the role of ideology in “providing narratives to make sense of history and the future, to justify political or social practices, to sustain shared identity” (p. 415).

In this article we adopt the kind of stance that Haste advocated, focusing in particular on commonsense understandings of selfhood, nation, civil society, and citizenship in Scotland and in England in the immediate aftermath of changes to the British constitution. In common with the other contributors to this symposium, we focus on the ways in which constructions of space and place articulate with understandings of national identity (Hopkins, Reicher, & Harrison, 2006), cross-border mobility (Reicher, Hopkins, & Harrison, 2006), and civil society (Dixon, Levine, & McAuley, 2006). However, our own focus differs somewhat from that of the other contributors in so far as we consider how geographical constructions of categories of polity or society may on occasions be used strategically as a substitute for allusions to human groups or social identities.

By way of introduction, we will first consider briefly how “adopting a cultural perspective” and paying due attention to the peculiarities of the constitutional arrangement of the United Kingdom may draw attention to three potentially problematic generalisations implicit in Haste’s own argument.

### *In what Respect is the United Kingdom a “Stable Society”?*

Haste’s argument rests in part on a distinction between “stable” and “changing” societies. However, the idea that any modern states are “stable” in the sense of being unchanging over time, or lacking in internal tensions or external challenges, is highly questionable. With respect to our own specific research context, it is notable that Haste, following Billig, included the United Kingdom within the category of “stable” democratic nation states. However, this form of representation reflects the adoption of a particular form of ideological narrative that is, to borrow Aughey’s expression, “selective in its historical assumptions” (2001, p. 21). The British State has existed for less than 300 years,<sup>1</sup> and both its territory and name have changed twice in the past 200 years. Over the past 120 years British governments attempted to introduce devolution of political powers on 11 separate occasions. Universal adult franchise has existed for less than 100 years, and the subject peoples of the British Monarch were first granted the nominal status of “citizens” only in 1948. Over the past 50 years, challenges to the British state have included (in addition to the loss of empire), the “troubles” in Northern Ireland, nationalist movements in Wales and Scotland, and the United Kingdom’s entry in to the

<sup>1</sup> The state of Great Britain was founded in 1707, and the United Kingdom was founded after the Union with Ireland in 1801.

EEC/EU. The 1999 devolution settlement, which established a parliament in Scotland and elected assemblies in Wales, Northern Ireland, and London, has been described as “the most radical change in the government of the United Kingdom since 1922”<sup>2</sup> (Curtice & Seyd, 2001, p. 227), and as “the most radical constitutional change [the] country has seen since the Great Reform Act of 1832” (Bogdanor, 1999, p. 1).<sup>3</sup>

*Are “Nationality” and “Citizenship” Necessarily Synonymous?*

Haste, again following Billig (1995), presumed that the basic unit of global governance is the “nation state.” However, it is widely recognized that the composite category of “nation-state” is highly problematic. For example, Connor (1990) estimated that less than 10% of established states could properly speaking be regarded as nations. It is now common for sociologists and political scientists to distinguish the constructs of State (the object and institution of governance), nation (a “people” possessing a sense of common identity and possibly culture), and civil society (a system of concrete networks of exchange and interaction; e.g., Calhoun, 1999; Connor, 1978; Walby, 2003).

A specific focus on England and Scotland as research contexts in particular draws attention to the need to distinguish conceptually between citizenship and national identity. The United Kingdom is not in fact a nation-state, but a multinational state. Haste’s and Billig’s own descriptions of the United Kingdom as a “nation state,” and British citizenship as a form of “nationality,” reflects a mode of discourse which is common in England, but which tends to be used less by people living elsewhere in the United Kingdom, who are generally inclined to distinguish their British *citizenship* status from their (Welsh, Scottish, etc.) *national* identity (McCrone, 1998). In addition, whereas in Scotland it is common for the nation to be regarded as a singular and distinctive “society,” in England it is more common for civil society to be understood in local or regional terms (Condor & Abell, in press).

*Is Citizenship Equivalent to Social Identity?*

A third presumption apparent in Haste’s article is that constructions of nationhood and citizenship are necessarily instantiated in a form of collective “identity” defined by “what we have in common with others whom we deem ‘like us’” (2004, p. 423). However, Haste’s composite rhetorical category of “stable Western democracies” elides very different ways in which citizenship may currently be understood in Europe and the United States (Brubaker, 1992; Conover, Crewe, &

<sup>2</sup> A reference to the establishment of the Irish Free State.

<sup>3</sup> An Act of Parliament often viewed as transforming the British constitution into a modern democracy. The bill more than doubled the size of the electorate, but still left 85% of the male (and all of the female) population disenfranchised.

Searing, 1991). The presumption that social inclusion, rights, and responsibilities are contingent upon a common identity (understood in the sense of “people like us”) is in fact particularly characteristic of what are sometimes called communitarian or civic republican political cultures. Far from representing a universal form of democratic citizenship, communitarian models are often defined in explicit contrast to liberal individualist political cultures, in which identity is treated as a matter of private rather than public life, and values of civility dictate precisely a “willingness to inhabit the public domain alongside those whose beliefs and values are different, and to treat others with the presumption that they are one’s moral equals” (Kenny, 2004, p. 84). Although it has generally been assumed that common understandings of citizenship will be shared by the population of particular states, it has been suggested that the dominant liberal individualist orientation to citizenship within the United Kingdom may be reflected in the common-sense understandings of people in England, but that the population of Scotland may be more inclined to endorse communitarian values (Condor & Abell, in press).

### *Polity, People, and Place*

Haste’s account of citizenship and of national identity as involving a sense of “people like us” parallels those social psychological approaches which suggest that nationality may be understood as a particular subgenus of the universal psychological processes of social identification (Tajfel, 1978) or self-categorization (Turner, 1987), involving subjective self-identification with a group of compatriots perceived as comparatively similar or functionally equivalent. The general utility of the social identity construct for political psychology has been discussed extensively (Huddy, 2001; Oakes, 2002; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001b). However, social identity approaches may have a limited application to matters relating to nationhood and citizenship in so far as they direct analytic attention solely to the way in which people orient to *social* categories, and overlook the possibility that the boundaries of political community may also be imagined in institutional (Habermas, 1990) or in territorial terms. Beiner has recently suggested that one way in which notions of bounded political community may be squared with liberal values of particularism and universalism is precisely by treating citizenship as a function of “accidental territorial coexistence rather than ethnic homogeneity or ascriptive community” (2003, p. 110).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The geographical aspects of national representation have been widely discussed by historians and social geographers (e.g., Daniels, 1993; Hooson, 1994). In psychology, scales devised to measure national attachment often include items pertaining to place identity (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999) and research in developmental psychology has traditionally considered the geographical aspects of national consciousness (e.g., Piaget & Weil, 1951; Jahoda & Woerdenbagch, 1982).

Although in principle it may be possible for individuals or groups to subscribe either to a social or to a territorial construction of political community, in practice it is unlikely that these represent stable or mutually exclusive frames of reference. Consequently, rather than ask whether nationhood or citizenship is understood in social categorical *or* in territorial terms, it may be more useful to ask when, and for what purposes, particular forms of representation come to be used. Political rhetoric commonly provides examples of speakers slipping between social and territorial constructions of units of governance. In the following extract from a speech entitled “British Identity,” the speaker elides British “society” with territory, using images of “island status” and “island people” to avoid homogenising constructs of national culture or character:

“British society . . . has been deeply marked by its island status of four nations and its history of an overseas rather than a continental empire. It has always been a nation of island people from diverse origins.” (Keith Vaz, 2001—then FCO Minister of State)

In this paper we consider how geographical imagery in general, and the “island” repertoire in particular, may currently be used to manage accounts of nationality, citizenship, and civil society by ordinary social actors in England and in Scotland.

### **Methods**

Data were drawn from a large-scale qualitative interview study of national and state consciousness and identity in Scotland and in England in the immediate aftermath of constitutional change (2001–2002).

#### *Respondents*

Respondents were recruited using a combination of open and theoretical sampling from four key sites: two urban (Glasgow in Scotland, Manchester in England), and two semirural (Perthshire in Scotland, East Sussex in England). For present purposes we shall focus primarily on the 60 respondents in Scotland and 100 respondents in England who had been born in their current country of residence. However, the study also included a sample of 72 people who had moved from England to Scotland, who will be considered in the final section of the analysis. All samples were heterogeneous in terms of age (range: 16–89 years), gender, political affiliation, and socioeconomic status.

#### *Interviews*

A narrative interview technique was employed, whereby the interviewer started out by asking the respondent to “tell me something about yourself,” and

once the respondent appeared at ease would start to shape the conversation to issues germane to the research interests, such as local, national, and European identity, social inclusion and exclusion, and constitutional change. Interviews ranged between 45 minutes and four hours, with most lasting approximately 90 minutes.

### *Analytic Procedure*

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and the thematic content was indexed using ATLAS ti. The first stage of analysis involved identifying all strips of talk in which respondents represented their nation/state in geographical terms. The most common form of geographical representation, present in 75 (47%) of the interviews, involved reference to island status. These references generally took a highly stylised form (e.g., “we are an island”). From this original set, seven cases in which an island reference had been initially introduced by the interviewer were subsequently excluded.

Although spontaneous references to island status appeared in almost half of the interviews, it was rare for a single individual to employ this trope more than once during the course of their interview. As Moon (1994) has demonstrated, conventional, stylised rhetorical formulations are typically used as a vehicle by which to present cultural stereotypes whilst avoiding explicit evaluation. Consequently, it appeared likely that individuals were using clichéd references to island status strategically as an emergency rhetorical measure to deal with some particularly problematic aspect of the ongoing interview conversation.

Subsequent analysis employed inductive techniques to identify those factors that provided the best empirical fit for variations in forms and functions of these representations. Membership Categorization Analysis (Sacks, 1992) was used to assist microanalysis, and techniques based on the method of constant comparison and the consideration of deviant cases were used to analyse patterning of response types across the data set. Emergent hypotheses concerning patterning and typicality of response types were routinely checked using category counts and truth tables (cf. Seale, 1999).

### **Analyses**

Initial analysis indicated, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the island trope could be used to convey a variety of images: of boundedness, integrity, isolation, independence, vulnerability, permanence, physicality, and size (either “large” or “small,” which in turn could be used to convey images of power). Higher order analyses indicated that references to island status tended to be employed by respondents as a strategic device to manage talk concerning British citizenship and identity. Beyond this, however, analysis indicated that the precise nature of dilemma that was being managed by references to island status tended to vary systematically according to the respondents’ countries of birth and residence.

*Scotland*

Twenty-two (37%) of the 60 respondents born and living in Scotland referred spontaneously to island status during the course of their interview.<sup>5</sup> In half of these cases (N = 11), a singular *island* formulation was used: *This island*; *On an island*; *We are an island*. The other 11 cases involved idiomatic use of the term “*the British Isles*”: *Part of the British Isles*; *Within the British Isles*; *We are the British Isles*. Technically, the term “British Isles” refers to an archipelago off the West coast of mainland Europe that encompasses the political territories of two different states: the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and the Crown Dependency of the Isle of Man. However, in the interviews conducted in Scotland, “the British Isles” was generally employed as a colloquial reference to the United Kingdom or, more specifically, to the geographical area of Scotland and England.

Among respondents from Scotland, idiomatic allusions to island status tended to be used in a very restricted range of contexts. Typically, island references were made in the course of talk relating to the relationship between England and Scotland, and in almost all cases (21 of the 22 identified instances) allusions to island status were made in the context of talk about the respondents’ own self-concept. In particular, island allusions tended to be used in situations in which respondents were opposed to challenges to British *citizenship* (e.g., they were concerned to distance themselves from Scottish nationalism as a political force) but were reluctant to claim a British *identity*, especially in so far as this might imply a sense of commonality with people from England.

Prior to the reported exchange in extract 1, Sandy and his wife Janet had expressed a sense of being “*very much Scots*,” a status defined explicitly in contrast to “*English-speaking people*.” However, when the interviewer broaches the subject of British identity their answers become more evasive.

**Extract 1: “You’ve Got to Accept It, The Island of Britain”**

- 1 I: We’ve talked a little bit about your sense of being Scottish, do you  
 2 also think of yourselves as being British?  
 3 Janet: I suppose.  
 4 Sandy: You’ve got to accept it, the island of Britain  
 5 Janet: Yes, we’re British.  
 6 I: It’s not something either of you has a sense of being strongly  
 7 attached to?  
 8 Janet: No, we don’t mind if people call us British. We do mind if they call  
 9 us

<sup>5</sup> Overall, comparable proportions of respondents in both samples used the “island” trope. A total of 29 (47%) of the respondents in Scotland did so, but in five cases the interviewer originally introduced the trope.

10 English. We don't like that.  
 (Sandy, aged 77, Liberal Democrat supporter)

In response to the interviewer's question, Sandy and Janet neither claim, nor disclaim, a "sense" of "being British." Janet concedes only that they do not "mind" if other people call them British. Sandy deals with the question by treating "being British" not so much as a matter of subjective identity as an objective fact of nature. It is interesting to note how this rhetorical move is accompanied by a shift in Sandy's footing from the personal "I" adopted when speaking of his sense of Scottish identity to the generic, impersonal "you": "You've got to accept it, the island of Britain" (line 4).

Prior to the exchange reported in extract 2, Ian had expressed a strong sense of Scottish as opposed to English culture and identity: "I think it [English] is a different culture, a different way of life, I do. I'm very much Scottish. I always will be. I have my own identity." Later, he acknowledged calling himself British, an act which he treated as a marker of opposition to constitutional change: "Oh yes, I still say I'm British. I'm not in favour of independence at all. I would scrap the Scottish Parliament tomorrow if I had my way." However, when the interviewer attempts to gloss Ian's support for a centralised United Kingdom state as a positive attachment to Britishness, Ian backs off. Implicitly identifying "Britain and Britishness" with Englishness (and hence arguing "that doesn't bother me so much, with being Scottish," line 4), Ian treats his argument for a political "connection" (line 11) with the United Kingdom/England as a rational response to a fact of geography, rather than as a reflection of some psychological attachment to a common British culture or identity. Again, we may note how this move is accompanied by a shift from the voice of identity—of subjective experience ("that doesn't bother me," line 4) or collective ontological status ("We are the British Isles" lines 4–5)—to the use of the objective, generic "you" ("Maintain your connection," line 11):

### Extract 2: "Scottish but Part of the British Isles"

- 1 I: Would one of your concerns be that the [Scottish] Parliament, possibly  
 2 independence, might have an effect on the idea of Britain and ,  
 3 Britishness that one of your (.)?  
 4 Ian: I don't know, that doesn't bother me so much, with being Scottish. We  
 5 are the British Isles. There's no real reason to change that. I don't see  
 6 any reason to change it.  
 7 I: So you wouldn't want to be simply Scottish rather than say Scottish  
 8 and British?  
 9 Ian: Scottish but part of the British Isles.  
 10 I: You'd like to maintain that—?  
 11 Ian: Maintain your connection.  
 (Ian, aged 39, Conservative Party supporter)

Ian’s use of the plural “Isles” to denote a sense of United Kingdom political unity notwithstanding diversity of national identities represented a common rhetorical device used within this sample of respondents. In this case, Ian is using the plural referent in the context of an argument against devolution. However, the most common context in which the plural (*British Isles*) formulation was used was specifically in the context of arguments against the prospect of future Scottish political independence. An example is provided in extract 3. In this case the respondent had earlier expressed a positive attitude towards the newly devolved Scottish parliament, but had resisted discourses of “nationalism” (which she associated with national socialism) and “separatism” (on the grounds of an in-principle political commitment to internationalism). Claris had also expressed a strong sense of Scottish identity, understood against an English “other,” and throughout her interview had consistently elided the categories English and British. Consequently, when arguing against the prospect of Scottish political independence, Claris is unable to employ a repertoire of identity politics or appeal to common culture by which to establish the status of the British State as “*one country*” (lines 10–11). Rather, she adopts a realpolitik repertoire, which she warrants with reference to the incorrigible proposition of U.K. territorial integrity, thereby casting the British as the inhabitants of a common place (*we . . . here*, line 14) rather than as a singular people:

**Extract 3: “We are Still One Country”**

- 1 I            We began to talk about the Scottish Parliament and  
 2            issues to do with independence. Do you think that  
 3            independence is a likely development?  
 4 Claris    I don’t know. I don’t know that Scotland’s ready for  
 5            total independence yet. I think there’s a long way to  
 6            go yet. I’m not a great one for politics or anything.  
 7            That’s just how I feel. I don’t think we’re ready to be  
 8            “right this is us and we’re going it alone.” I think there’s  
 9            a lot of issues that it is the whole of the British Isles,  
 10          because we aren’t a separate island. We are still one  
 11          country.  
 12 I            Do you still feel a sense of pride in being British?  
 13 Claris    I’ve never really given it a thought. I’ve never had to  
 14            think that I’m anything other than, we’re here and that’s  
 15            it. It’s not something that’s ever crossed my mind. I don’t  
 16            know whether I feel a sense of pride about that or not  
 17 I            If someone says “Britain” or “Britishness,” would it make  
 18            you think of anything?  
 19 Claris    No.

(Claris, aged 82, Labour Party supporter).

Again, we can see how the strategic use of an island referent effectively enables the respondent to distinguish her attitudes towards British *citizenship* from notions of “the British” as a group of people sharing a common social *identity*.

### *England*

Forty-three of the 100 respondents born and resident in England referred spontaneously to island status during the course of their interview. Although they used some of the formulations employed by the respondents in Scotland (e.g., *We are an Island; We're on an island*), respondents in England used the term “*British Isles*” less frequently and almost always used it to refer to the geographical area including the Republic of Ireland *as opposed* to the political entity of the United Kingdom.

In contrast to respondents from Scotland, people interviewed in England rarely used a reference to island status to manage an account of the “internal frontiers” between England and the other U.K. territories (cf. Cohen, 1994). Rather, island references tended to be invoked in the course of accounts of the “external frontiers” of the British state. In 36 (84%) of instances, island references were used as a strategic device by which a respondent could construct Britain as a distinctive community of political interest in the context of a wider “world of nations” (Billig, 1995), whilst avoiding concrete stereotypes of common British culture, character, or identity, and avoiding articulating depreciatory sentiments towards national “others.” The most common use of an “island” reference in England was as a rhetorical bottom-line to naturalize, justify, or to mitigate a sense of psychological distance from “the continent” of Europe. Almost half of the respondents in England who used an island reference did so in the context of talk about Europe or the EU (N = 20; 46%). In contrast, only three (13%) of the 22 respondents in Scotland who referred spontaneously to island status did so in relation to talk about Europe.

Extract 4 comes from an interview with Tom, a member of the England (football) Supporter’s Club, who at the time of interview was regularly engaged in acts of organized “hooliganism.” Earlier in his interview, Tom had demonstrated a tendency, typical of people with extreme right political beliefs but otherwise unusual in England, to claim an identity as English *as opposed to* British (“*I am English not British I am English. If it were called Britain-land then I would be British.*”). The stretch of talk reported in extract 4 comes from a point in the conversation where the interviewer questions Tom about his sense of European identity. In response, Tom categorically denies considering himself European and backs this up with reference to the absolute difference between “*us, the United Kingdom*” and “*the continent*” (line 16). This strategic deployment of a U.K. “we” (lines 14–16) clearly conflicts with Tom’s earlier claim to self-identify solely as English. Consequently, Tom manages his account by treating the singularity and

distinctiveness of the United Kingdom as a matter of topography rather than as a matter of common British identity, culture, or character:

**Extract 4: “We’re Shoved Out There by Nature”**

- 1 I: Okay, would you ever consider yourself to be European?  
 2 Tom: Never [laughter].  
 3 I: I wish I’d had some money on the answer to that question.  
 4 Tom: Never  
 5 I: Why not?  
 6 Tom: We’re on an island aren’t we?  
 7 I: Yeah  
 8 Tom: Which you’ve probably gathered [laughter]  
 9 I: Yeah.  
 10 Tom: Yeah, and we’re on that island for one reason I think, the English  
 11 Channel that cuts across us off from the rest of Europe. If we wanna  
 12 be part of Europe that would be joined on  
 13 I: Yeah (laugh)  
 14 Tom: Joined on to France or Belgium but it’s not, we’re, we’re shoved out  
 15 there by nature over the years or whatever. The country. And that’s  
 16 our island and that is us, the UK if you like. That’s Europe, the  
 17 continent  
 (*Tom, aged 28, Conservative Party supporter*)

Tom is using the island trope to construct the United Kingdom as a singular *country* (line 15) and the U.K. population as a common ingroup by virtue of common geographical location (“*we’re on an island,*” line 6; “*we’re on that island,*” line 10; “*that is our island,*” line 15). In this respect, Tom’s use of the island trope is functionally similar to Claris’s in extract 3, in so far as he is deploying an image of common territorial occupancy as a substitute for a form of representation in which a British “we” category might be represented as a singular folk sharing a common culture or identity.

Tom’s denial of European identity combined with an overt expression of particularistic pride in English national identity was characteristic of people with far-right political beliefs. In contrast, people with more liberal political beliefs tend to treat any overt display of national identity as a potential indicator of incivility or intolerance (Condor, 2000). These respondents typically used island clichés as rhetorical devices by which to avoid explicit references to national cultures or character more generally.

In the run up to the exchange reported in extract 5a, the interviewer had been struggling to enlist Ned into talk about nationhood. Ned had been extremely resistant, and the interviewer had eventually attempted to put Ned on the spot with a direct question concerning his own sense of national identity. In response, Ned

embarked upon a lengthy narrative concerning alternative, more significant, modes of self-classification. In extract 5a we see him using a reference to island status as a means by which to avoid directly answering the interviewer's question:

**Extract 5a: "I Happen to be on an Island"**

- 1 Ned [. . .] erm, and I'm northern European, I'm not Latino, erm, and I  
 2 happen to be on an island that's off the main continent  
 3 I Mm.  
 4 Ned erm, but I'm European, I'm European and I'm Europho- erm, Europhile  
 5 too, I adore Europe.  
 (*Ned, aged 72, Liberal Democrat Party supporter*)

A comparison of extracts 5a and 4 allows us to appreciate the different kinds of rhetorical work that could be performed by "island" allusions in relation to talk about the EU. In extract 4, Tom used a reference to island status to establish the naturalness of "our" sense of separation from Europe. In extract 5a Ned uses the same rhetorical resource to establish the relative inconsequentiality of nationality or citizenship ("*I happen to be on an island . . .*" lines 1–2) and to establish the European status of the United Kingdom as an incorrigible geographical fact. Shortly afterwards, Ned uses another idiomatic reference to island status, this time to establish the irrationality of those who oppose the United Kingdom's membership of the EU:

**Extract 5b: "I Think It's Threatful to Be a Little Island"**

- 1 Ned [. . .] I think when we get, perhaps, in a few- er, later, when, when the  
 2 deb- the debate, the arguments are properly presented, when we get  
 3 informed debate rather than Daily Mail (.) and Sun type stuff, then  
 4 maybe the argument will swing, I don't know, I hope so, erm, I hope  
 5 so, and I, and it doesn't, I don't find it a threat at all, on the contrary, I  
 6 think it's threatful to be er, to be er (.) a little island sort of off-shore,  
 7 and bobbing about in the North Sea

In extract 5b, Ned is arguing that those people with conservative political attitudes who suggest that EU membership threatens British political sovereignty are ill informed (the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* are right-wing popular newspapers). By way of contrast, he presents his own opinions as grounded not in media "arguments" but on a recognition of a simple, incorrigible, fact of global geography.

Ned was a rather unusual respondent in so far as he was inclined to express a positive attitude to the European Union in combination with a strong sense of European identity. Most respondents in England who supported the EU attempted

to dissociate their attitudes towards EU *membership* from claims concerning their subjective sense of *identity*, in much the same way as respondents in Scotland were inclined to distinguish their attitudes in favour of British citizenship from claims to a British identity. In these cases, respondents used the island trope both to manage this apparent inconsistency in their accounts and to inoculate against the possible inference that their denial of European identity might reflect a nationalistic commitment to a British identity.

Prior to the exchange reported in extract 6, Zoë had expressed strong support for the EU, which she had justified with reference to an in-principle opposition to particularistic national (English, Welsh, etc.) or state (British) identities. However, when asked specifically whether she would “*class*” herself as “*a European*” Zoë avoids answering the question directly and refers instead to a generic “*problem*” caused by the existence of the English Channel.

**Extract 6 “We’re Physically Separated from It”**

- 1 I Mm. (.) Okay. Would you ever class yourself as a  
 2 European? [ . . . ]  
 3 Zoë No. I think a lot of the British, English British problem with  
 4 that whole European issue comes from the fact that we’re  
 5 physically separated from it by, you know, the Channel, the  
 6 water, that other countries don’t have that struggle, they share land  
 7 borders, so, they’re facing issues on a more daily basis than we are.  
 (Zoë aged 26, Labour Party supporter)

Here, we can see how the island trope enables Zoë to represent her denial of European identity as a consequence of a given fact of physical geography rather than a reflection of her own personal motives or intentions. The use of the island trope enables Zoë to elide her own experience with a generic Anglo British “*struggle*” (hence universalising and thus mitigating her own personal account), but without invoking those discourses of common and distinctive English or British culture, character, or identity that she had earlier explicitly rejected on antiracist and internationalist grounds.

*English Residents in Scotland*

In addition to the two populations of respondent discussed so far, our study also included a sample of 72 respondents who had moved from England to live in Scotland. Of these, 45 (62.5%) spontaneously alluded to Britain’s island status. In these cases references to island status were less inclined to be involved in the context of talk about politics and citizenship than in the context of talk about civil society and community membership. More specifically, these respondents typically used references to Britain’s status as an island as a means by which to

manage communitarian discourses, in which Scottish identity is treated as a prerequisite for social integration and “belonging.”

In a series of analyses based on the current data set, Kiely and his associates have documented the various “identity strategies” that people from England may use in order to negotiate acceptance into Scottish society (e.g., Kiely, Bechhofer, & McCrone, 2005; Kiely, McCrone, & Bechhofer, 2005). The problem facing people who move from England to Scotland is that there is in fact no kind of identity to which they can legitimately lay claim that will enable them to claim rights to residence and social acceptance. Scottish identity is typically defined against an English “other,” and hence to claim an English identity is to define oneself a priori outside the boundaries of Scotland’s imagined community and also to imply the self-relevance of negative English national stereotypes (e.g., snobishness, intrusiveness, unfriendliness). To claim an identity as Scottish was usually regarded as an illegitimate attempt at identity appropriation. To define oneself as British (which in England is often understood as an inclusive “common ingroup” category) was seen to be liable to be interpreted as synonymous with “English” and, moreover, as an indicator of a “typical” irrational and imperialist English tendency to deny the reality of Scottish national specificity. Finally, to downplay the significance of national identity altogether, another strategy that is often used as an inclusiveness device in England was inclined to be treated as evidence of “typical” English ignorance concerning the cultural and political significance of nationhood.

Analysis indicated that people who had moved from England to live in Scotland typically used “island” references to negotiate this minefield of identity politics. Extract 7 comes from an interview conducted in Glasgow, in which the (Scottish) interviewer is questioning a young man who had moved from England two years previously. This provides an interesting illustration of the sensitivities that people from England display when confronted with matters of nationality in Scotland, and of the possibility of “cross-cultural” miscommunication between two people who are using the same referent (in this case, the term “the British Isles”) to refer to different things. Extract 7 starts at a point at which the interviewer is asking the respondent how he understands the term, “*the country*,” and provides him with two possible response alternatives, “*the British Isles*” and “*Scotland and England*.” Both of these formulations reflect common forms of understanding in Scotland, but neither in fact correspond to the way in which nationhood is typically represented in England, where the term “country” would variously refer to England, to Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) or to the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland), and where the term “British Isles” is normally treated as a geographical rather than a national referent. Ben’s interpretation of this question is not, however, that the “response options” he is being offered reflect a Scottish vernacular understanding, but rather that the interviewer is positioning him as a “typical English” person who is liable to be guilty of conceptual and terminological confusion:

**Extract 7: “Before ‘The Country’ was the British Isles without Ireland”**

- 1 I: We’re sometimes interested in what people might think of  
 2 when using words like “the” country, whether they tend to  
 3 be thinking of the British Isles or Scotland and England,  
 4 how people  
 5 Ben: It’s certainly changed since I’ve been up here. Before “the country”  
 6 was the British Isles without Ireland, you have divisions.  
 7 I: That’s interesting. Do you know why “without Ireland”?  
 8 Ben: Probably for just the simple reason that I’ve never been there.  
 9 Also I know there’s Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland but I  
 10 knew Southern Ireland definitely wasn’t because they had a different  
 11 currency and they were not part of UK. So when I saw when  
 12 someone said “the country,” I’ve got the vision in my head,  
 13 England, Wales and Scotland. Now, being up here, I used to,  
 14 in my first year, fall into the trap of saying “in England,” and then  
 15 I’d say “oh, no, no, in Britain.” Or “this is very English or very  
 16 British.”  
 17 And now, I don’t think, so I started to be careful how I would say  
 18 something.  
 (Ben aged 21, Scotland resident 2 years, Conservative Party supporter)

In his first reported turn, Ben responds by partially accommodating to the interviewer’s category of “the British Isles” (claiming that before he came to Scotland he viewed “the country” as “the British Isles” *but* “without Ireland”) but then going on to display an understanding of the constitutional distinction between *Northern Ireland* (which is part of the United Kingdom) and *Ireland* (which is not). Despite Ben’s attempt to qualify the category “the British Isles,” the interviewer’s prompt, “*Do you know why ‘without Ireland’?*” (line 7) renders this response accountable, and Ben again replies by using partial accommodation and then going on to demonstrate that he “knows” (lines 9–10) that “*the British Isles*” is not the same as the *United Kingdom* (line 11), or Great Britain (“*England, Wales and Scotland,*” line 13). His subsequent narrative of personal enlightenment (“*I used to . . .*”) indicates that Ben is adopting a position of deference to the (supposedly superior) forms of national discourse used in Scotland.

Although in extract 7 Ben is resisting the Scottish colloquial use of “*The British Isles*”; it was interesting to note evidence of linguistic assimilation, in so far as many of the respondents who had moved from England often came to adopt the term “*the British Isles*” as a euphemistic reference to the United Kingdom. However, although these respondents had adopted a new vernacular terminology, they used this to manage a rather particular type of rhetorical business. People who had moved from England tended to use “island” references in general, and “*the British Isles*” in particular, to claim rights to social inclusion without challenging

the indigenous residents' claims to distinctive national identity, culture, or character.

**Extract 8: "We All Live in the Isles and We're All British"**

- 1 I: You know before, we were talking about being or feeling a sense of  
 2 being British. If I said "Britain" "Britishness," would it make you  
 3 think of particular things, almost conjure up things in your mind?  
 4 John: I'm not sure. (pause) Like, what kind of things?  
 5 I: It's just that, for some people, it might spark an instant reaction and  
 6 they think of certain things that they associate with Britain or  
 7 Britishness. But other people may not so it may just be that you  
 8 don't.  
 9 John: No, not really. I suppose, if you say to (.) this is not me. I think of  
 10 Britain as being England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland [*sic*]. If you say  
 11 to some Scottish people "are you British?" They'll tell you they're  
 12 not, they'll tell you they're Scottish, NOT British. But, with me, I  
 13 just think we're all British. We all live in the Isles and we're all  
 14 British, basically.

(John. Aged 17, Scotland resident 6 years, Labour Party supporter)

In extract 8, John presents an account of "Britain" as a superordinate category including all of the component nations of the United Kingdom whilst also displaying awareness that the term may mean something different to indigenous Scots. However, he avoids directly responding to the interviewer's request for particular substantive images associated with Britain or Britishness. Rather, John uses an allusion to island status ("*We all live in the Isles*," line 12) to present common ingroup membership ("*we're all British*") both as a simple ("*just*") matter of shared geographical location.

Women who had moved from England to Scotland were particularly inclined to treat the task of negotiating inclusion into Scottish civil society as a question of "acceptability." In these cases, the dilemma involved a perceived need to be seen to assimilate to local culture but without leaving oneself open to charges of appropriating or aping a Scottish way of life, and a need to be seen to be participating in civil society, but without leaving oneself open to charges of intrusiveness. In extract 9 we see Sandra use the "British Isles" formulation in a strategic attempt to manage the "acceptability" problematic through a claim to inclusive British identity that nevertheless does not challenge Scottish claims to national cultural distinctiveness:

**Extract 9: “Yes, I am English but I Live on the British Isles”**

1            Would you tend to think of yourself as being very much  
 2            British rather than English, or  
 3 Sandra    Yeah, I think I’d rather be called British than English  
 4 I           Do you know why that is?  
 5 Sandra    Well, it’s part of wanting to accept, wanting all to be  
 6            acceptable. I don’t want to, it’s acceptance of somebody  
 7            different. If I say there’s a bit of the, maybe it isn’t,  
 8            maybe I, yes I am English but I live on the British Isles  
 9            and I’m not at all, what’s the word, not patriotic but  
 10 I          Nationalistic?  
 11 Sandra   Nationalistic, yes. I don’t think I’m, I’m like the English  
 12            but I’m no better or worse than Scottish or Welsh or  
 13            whatever, and I would ask for acceptance of all those  
 14            things, just like I would ask for acceptance of liking a  
 15            particular kind of wallpaper. I mean, I know it’s silly. Are  
 16            you with me? Am I making sense?  
 (*Sandra, aged 47, resident Scotland 3 years, Liberal Democrat Party supporter*)

In this case, Sandra is using a reference to island status to underwrite a claim concerning the functional insignificance of national identity. Her yes . . . but assertion (“*yes I am English but I live on the British Isles*”) acknowledges her ontological status as English but treats this as less significant than a collective British identity which is underwritten not by a sense of commonality of culture or character, but by a fact of common geographical location. At the same time, the geographical frame of reference allows Sandra to treat the nationality of individuals as a mere “accident of residence.” This enables her to treat nationality as a matter of personal identity and individual rights, and hence as representing no more legitimate a basis for determining social inclusion than any other idiosyncratic personal characteristic.

**Conclusion**

In this paper we have considered some ways in which allusions to the geographical boundaries of imagined community may be used as a substitute for references to the common and distinctive character or “identity” of the population. Although this specific study relates specifically to interview accounts in a U.K. context, there is no a priori reason to suppose that similar representational forms will not be used in other, quite different, settings.

First, a recognition of how people may use territorial references as a rhetorical substitute for social categorical accounting (“people like us”) may contribute to our understanding of the general phenomenon of stereotype suppression, albeit

focusing on its rhetorical rather than purely cognitive aspects (see also Condor, in press). Second, a consideration of how, when, and with what consequences people choose to represent the boundaries of social or political groups in territorial terms might also expand the remit of current social psychological work on the “flexibility” of social categorical representation. To date, most work deriving from social identity or self-categorization perspectives understands variations in “frame of reference” to be a function of the specific level of abstraction used, or the specific comparative outgroup against which a national ingroup is contrasted (e.g., Hopkins, Regan, & Abell, 1997). However, since constructs such as nation, state, or community may be imagined in both social and in geographical terms, it follows that flexibility of representation may also take the form of a shift in what Goffman (1974) would term the “primary frame”: that is, between a social and a natural (in this case geographical) formulation.

Third, our observations concerning the very different orientations displayed by people in England, in Scotland, and people who have moved from England to Scotland, suggest that when political psychology does adopt a “cultural perspective,” this may not always be achieved by simply equating the constructs of “culture” with “nation-state” (cf. Haste, 2004). In so far as political psychologists are concerned to add a “cultural dimension” to their work, they cannot simply assume a priori that cultures will present themselves as conveniently prepackaged in ways that correspond exactly with the territorial boundaries of extant polities.

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