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Celtic Football Club, Irish Ethnicity, and Scottish Society

John Hoberman observes in *Sport and Ideology* (1984) that “sport has no intrinsic value structure, but it is a ready and flexible vehicle through which ideological associations can be reinforced,”¹ and Eric Hobsbawm asserts that “the identity of a nation of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people.”² Implicit in these comments is the belief that sport has the capacity to embody and express identity and community—in its national, cultural, ethnic, religious, social, political, and even economic dimensions—in a way that few other social manifestations can match. Celtic Football Club in Scotland, a professional soccer team based in Glasgow, offers a vivid case study of these observations and assertions, including aspects of the nature of community and supporter associations involved in Scottish football. For countless supporters, Celtic is far more than “merely” a football club.³

As an institution founded by and for the Irish Catholic immigrant diaspora in the West of Scotland, the role of the Celtic Football Club in the cultural and ethnic identity of this part of the Scottish population warrants attention for a number of reasons. As Thomas Devine notes, the Irish community in Scotland has not, until recent years, “been effectively integrated into the wider study of Scottish historical development.”⁴ Nevertheless, what has been overlooked in academic research has received extensive attention in the domain of popular commentary, particularly within the Scottish sports media. Sport can echo and reproduce ethnic and national distinctiveness, as well as reflect social tensions

1. John Hoberman, *Sport and Political Ideology* (London: Heinemann, 1984), p. 10.
2. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 4.
3. See Joseph M. Bradley, *Celtic Minded 2: Essays on Celtic Football Culture and Identity* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 2006).
4. Thomas M. Devine, “Introduction,” in *Irish Immigrants and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries; Proceedings of the Scottish Historical Studies Seminar* (Strathclyde: John Donald Publishers, 1991).

and cleavages. While the dominant discourses present the idea of Scotland as “one” people on a range of cultural and identity indicators, the case of Celtic partly demonstrates how that dominance is manufactured as a social reality and norm by discounting, marginalizing, demeaning, or corrupting minority distinctiveness and difference: in effect, by disempowering a minority community.

Among second- and third-generation Irish populations for whom white skin, local accents, and assumed cultural similarities have traditionally been taken to reflect a community effortlessly assimilated to the “white” Scottish (British) majority,⁵ the resolute Irish identity of Celtic and its fans challenges those assumptions. The act of supporting Celtic is involved in the reproduction, maintenance, and expression of Irishness in Scottish society, and thus, important to understanding the processes of identity formation in a multi-ethnic Britain. This occurs within the context of ongoing debates concerning multiculturalism in Britain as a whole, as well as within animated, and occasionally acrimonious, deliberations regarding the contested subject of “sectarianism” in Scottish society.⁶

Much of the research reported on here arose from the *Irish 2 Project* conducted in the first years of the present decade, a sociological inquiry that looked at questions and issues of identity among people born in Britain of at least one Irish-born parent or grandparent. In addition, a web-based review of all mainstream Scottish newspapers over the period of research since 1990 shows that the discourses and narratives appearing in the print media problematize the Irishness of the Celtic Football Club and its supporters. Several hundred direct and indirect references and comments on Celtic—as well as hundreds in other media outlets—leave no doubt that a particular sort of commentary is dominant, all-encompassing, and recurrent, threading through editorials, letters pages, popular articles, news columns, and radio and television discussions.⁷ In other print media, the commentary on Irishness in Scottish society unambiguously demonstrates the links between sport and cultural and national identities.

5. See: T. Modood, “The Changing Context of ‘Race’ in Britain: A Symposium,” in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 30, 1 (1996), pp. 3–13, 36–42; Harry Goulbourne, *Race Relations in Britain Since 1945*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).

6. For examples of press attention to the subject, see: *Scottish Catholic Observer*, 3 February 2005, p. 5; *Sunday Herald*, 29 January 2006, p. 11; and *The Herald*, 31 January 2006, p. 32. For academic attention, see Joseph M. Bradley “Celtic Minded,” and “‘We Shall Not Be Moved!’ Mere Sport, Mere Songs?: A Tale of Scottish Football” in *Fanatics*, (London: Routledge, 1998) pp. 203–18; Jim Conroy, “Yet I Live Here. . .” A Reply to Bruce on Catholic Education in Scotland,” *Oxford Review of Education*, 29, 3 (September, 2003), 403–12; Thomas Devine, *Scotland’s Shame: Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000).

7. For additional examples of such discourses, see Bradley, *Celtic Minded 2*.

In a word, discourse that is deeply critical of the club's Irish identity is embedded in Scottish society.

The interview-based research centered on ideas of self, family, community, and nation among persons living in Britain for whom some, most, or all of their family originated in Ireland. Questions on sport and football formed a portion of the overall study, along with examinations of notions relating to history, religion, politics, health, work, family, and social life. Regardless of gender, age, and social class, all respondents in Scotland—with only one exception—reported that Celtic was their favored football club, and further, that this had significance for their sense of Irishness in Scotland.⁸

Celtic Football Club traces its origins to 1887 and 1888, when it was founded by first- and second-generation Irish immigrants in Glasgow. At that time, the vast majority of Catholics in Scotland were from Ireland, and the words “Catholic” and “Irish” were essentially interchangeable in the West of Scotland. Although never constituting a Catholic club in an institutional sense, or an organization meaningfully influenced by Church matters or interests, the immigrant Irish community and its offspring has historically provided the vast

8. This project was financed by the government-sponsored Economic and Social Research Council in 2001–02, and looked at questions and issues of identity focusing on people born in Britain of at least one Irish-born parent or grandparent. Interviewees have been given pseudonyms for the purpose of reporting findings. For Scotland, one focus group comprised people who were Protestant, not Catholic; this also entailed a number of individual interviews with these respondents. They are not included in this part of the work but will contribute to other aspects of the research produced from the overall study. All interviews and group discussions were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The qualitative evidence presented here is a result of these interviews. Focus groups for the *Irish 2 Project* were conducted in different locations in England and Scotland with second- and third-generation Irish people. In total, thirteen focus groups were run, four in London, three in the Glasgow area, and two in each of the remaining locations. In-depth interviews were also conducted in the same locations (116 in total) with approximately 24 in Scotland). Participants for both parts of the research were recruited through a variety of methods, including community groups, local newspapers, radio programs, and Irish ethnic newspapers. The research team placed special emphasis on recruiting second- and third-generation Irish people from a variety of backgrounds including those with one or two Irish-born parents and one, two, or more Irish-born grandparents. A nonrandom stratified quota sampling method was used, drawing on a statistical profile of demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The aim was to ensure that important variations in the profile were represented in the overall sample, including by age, social class, and gender, rather than to produce statistical representativeness. The qualitative data generated by discussion group members assisted in the formation of questions and themes raised in individual interviews. All subjects signed a consent form that explained the purposes and uses of the resultant data and all interviewees were informed that pseudonyms would replace their real names in any resultant publications. The project's transcriptions have been logged with the Economic and Social Research Council in England.

majority of staff, players, and supporters over the course of Celtic's life, and Catholic characteristics have long permeated aspects of the club and its supporters' identities and culture.

Part of Celtic's original purpose was to raise money for charities serving the Irish Catholic poor in the city's East End. The club's beneficiaries frequently included such specifically Irish causes as the Evicted Tenant's Fund, then an important aspect of Irish nationalist politics. Off the field, the national question was of crucial importance to Celtic's founders, as it was within the larger immigrant community. Club officials, players, and supporters alike were often involved in politics. They supported Irish Home Rule, campaigned for the release of Irish political prisoners, opposed what they viewed as British imperialism in the Boer War and South Africa, and supported the at-the-time contentious petition for Catholic schools to be maintained within the state system.

Although other Irish football clubs had existed in other parts of Scotland, many were forced to go out of existence owing to a number of factors, including antagonism toward such cultural and social expressions of Catholicism and Irishness.⁹ Celtic, however, had the advantages of sound management, a fervent base of support, and on-the-field success—all of which helped to sustain it in a generally hostile anti-Catholic and anti-Irish environment.¹⁰ Its location in the midst of a large and supportive Irish community proved crucial to its survival.

Still, despite quickly rising to become the most significant Irish team in Scotland, Celtic's presence and subsequent success also caused problems. For example, in 1896, Celtic and Hibernian (an Edinburgh side that had emerged from the Irish community in the capital) were on top of the Scottish league: this prompted the newspaper, *Scottish Sport*, to note the dominance in Scotland of two Irish teams and asking where was the Scottish team that could challenge them?¹¹ This challenge explicitly reflects the ethnic nature of the Scottish game from its earliest years.

The problematic nature of Celtic and its supporters' Irish and Catholic identities in Scotland is not only an historic fact, but also a contemporary issue that is frequently debated and discussed in Scottish society, particularly within

9. See: Gerry P. T. Finn, "Racism, Religion and Social Prejudice: Irish Catholic Clubs, Soccer and Scottish Society—1 The Historical Roots of Prejudice," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8, 1 (1991), 72–95; Finn, "Racism, Religion and Social Prejudice: Irish Catholic Clubs, Soccer and Scottish Society—11 Social Identities and Conspiracy Theories," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 8, 3 (1991), 370–97.

10. See Tom Campbell and Pat Woods, *The Glory and The Dream, The History of Celtic FC, 1887–1986*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1986).

11. Bill Murray, *The Old Firm: Sectarianism, Sport and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), p. 11.

the sports media.¹² The dominant discourses with regard to Celtic and its support can be seen in Scotland's best-selling tabloid newspaper, *The Daily Record*, and one of Scotland's most well-known football commentators, Jim Traynor. On the eve of Celtic's UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) Cup Final match in Spain in 2003 the columnist wrote,

Celtic, a Scottish team whether some of their fans are willing to admit it or not. . . . Celtic ARE Scottish so they belong to more than the supporters who follow them week in, week out. . . . This is Scotland against Portugal . . . right now Celtic, albeit unwittingly, are flying our flag.¹³

The phrase "albeit unwillingly" clearly suggests that Traynor believes the club's supporters' cultural and ethnic allegiances lay elsewhere. A Sunday broadsheet added to the hostile views regarding Celtic supporters' Irishness, complaining that Celtic's identity "still contains a large Irish component."¹⁴ Still another Scottish sports journalist offered a similar observation; decrying the renditions of Celtic and Irish folk songs occasionally played live before matches during the soccer season, he believed the fans should not have such songs "imposed" on them, "especially coming from the musical equivalent of Darby McGill [*sic*] and the Little People with their 'Have A Potato' style of hokey Irishness."¹⁵

In *The Scottish Sun*, journalist Bill Leckie referred to the Irish diaspora in Scotland as the "pseudo-Irish" who support Celtic, and decried their penchant for "diddy-dee music."¹⁶ Such hostility is further demonstrated in a *News of the World* newspaper column that again reflected on the ethnic identity Celtic and its fans. For columnist Gerry McNee, Celtic's stadium was full of

Plastic Irishmen and women who drink in plastic Irish pubs and don't know their Athenry from their Antrim when it comes to Irish history or politics. . . . Celtic must stop . . . flashing their Irishness . . . if Celtic are so keen to flaunt their Irishness perhaps they could do us all a favour and relocate to Dublin.¹⁷

These commentaries, by well-known figures, would deny any public visibility or acceptability of the desire of Celtic and its fans to be seen as Irish, to esteem their Irishness, or to display Irish symbolism. At a certain level, such discourses refuse to acknowledge the Irish diaspora in Scotland, let alone its right

12. See Joseph M. Bradley, "Facets of the Irish Diaspora: 'Irishness' in 20th Century Scotland," *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 6 (1996), 79–100.

13. See Jim Traynor, *Daily Record*, 19 May 2003, p. 3.

14. Allan Massie, *Scotland on Sunday*, Week in Review, 29 July 2001, p. 9

15. Ewing Grahame, *Herald*, Sport, 8 April 2002, p. 1.

16. Bill Leckie, *Sun*, 8 April 2002, p. 50.

17. Gerry McNee, *News of the World*, 5 June 2001, p.15; 10 July 2001, p. 69.

to consider itself in some way Irish and not “typically” Scottish. These observations from the sports pages and elsewhere can be viewed as part of an assimilationist, as opposed to integrationist, approach toward Irish identities and cultural expressions in Scotland. The club and its support is relentlessly detached and alienated from—and simultaneously denied—the relevance of its roots, origins, heritage, and identity. A continual stream of alienation and denial also harbors the capacity to disempower and disorient Celtic supporters in relation to their Irish identities. Further, and adding substantially to the intended alienation, these most central and significant identities of the support and the club are also branded and represented as “sectarian.”

Around the period of the 2003 UEFA Cup Final, the letters to newspapers amply demonstrated the contested nature of Celtic’s Irish identity. Two examples from the *Daily Record* reflect this:

I was absolutely appalled and disgusted when watching the UEFA Cup Final. I am sure I am not the only non-Celtic supporter who was urged to ‘get behind’ the Scottish team. How many Scottish flags were in the stadium? I counted one but maybe I couldn’t see the others due to the sea of Irish Republican flags in display. Isn’t it about time that people like this decided which nationality they are?¹⁸

I could have sworn the UEFA Cup Final in Seville was between teams from Scotland and Portugal, but judging by the flags in the stadium I think it was actually Ireland against Portugal; there were more American, Canadian, or Australian flags than Scottish. . . . I can’t imagine what the rest of the world thought as they watched this disgraceful sight which was attended by some of our politicians who supposedly abhor this type of behaviour. This was not a good reflection on our culture and a bad night for Scottish sport.¹⁹

The latter correspondent was, in fact, criticized by several letters in subsequent editions of the *Herald*. However, the apparent linking of Celtic fans’ flying of the Irish flag with sectarianism—which the writer states politicians “supposedly abhor,” thus implying that they are somehow derelict for not taking action against flying the flag—revives the arguments and accusations of the Scottish Football Association against Celtic beginning as early as 1952, when the ruling body within Scottish football ordered the club to cease flying the Irish flag at its stadium. The association, which represented all football clubs in Scotland, considered the display of the flag as having nothing to do with Scotland and an incitement to “sectarian acts and behaviour.”²⁰ Another supporter’s letter to a

18. *Daily Star*, letters, 26 May 2003, p. 20.

19. *Herald*, letters, 23 May 2003, p. 19.

20. Brian Wilson, *Celtic: A Century with Honour* (Glasgow: Willow Books, 1988), p. 94.

Sunday broadsheet denied Celtic's Irishness, stressing that the club should end such manifestations.

Celtic should remind their fans that they are a Scottish club. They should stop flying the tricolour on their stand and consider restoring it only when their fans waving the Scottish Saltire outnumber those waving the tricolour.²¹

There are innumerable examples of such criticism toward Celtic and its supporters' Irishness. The media and fans of other teams regularly call for the Irish flag to be removed.

In 2004, Aiden McGeady, a first-team Celtic player who was born and raised in Glasgow, chose to play for Ireland in international soccer. McGeady is third-generation Irish, and chose to represent his family and migrating community's country of origin, rather than Scotland, his country of birth and upbringing. The public reaction regarding McGeady's decision demonstrated the problematization of the Irish diasporic presence in Scotland. McGeady's decision met extensive negative media comment, as well as verbal abuse from opposition fans of almost every team in the Scottish Premier League during the 2004–05 season and subsequently. At the stadium of Hearts Football Club in Edinburgh, a BBC Scotland football commentator stated that he was to interview McGeady after the match, adding, "I'll need to take down a bottle of whiskey and some shortbread to Scottify him." Earlier in the broadcast, another commentator, Gordon Smith, who in 2007 became the chief executive of the Scottish Football Association, observed, "He may well have chosen to play for Ireland, as far as I'm concerned the boy was born in Scotland and that makes him Scottish and that's the end of the matter."²²

A *Daily Record* sports writer defended the verbal abuse of McGeady at this and other matches:

This isn't about sectarianism, this is about being Scottish and proud of it. McGeady has been educated here, used our health service and learned all his football in Glasgow. . . . It's time all Scottish Celtic fans got over their obsession with Ireland. The fact that Glasgow sports shops sell as many Ireland football tops as Scotland football tops is both pathetic and ultimately unhelpful.²³

Several years previous to this, Raymond Travers, a sports columnist for the *Scotland on Sunday* broadsheet newspaper, anticipated the McGeady case when he wrote, "there is a section of the Celtic support, in particular, who turn my

21. *Scotland on Sunday*, Sports, letters, 24 March 2002, p. 20.

22. BBC *Radio Scotland*, Sports/soccer broadcast on 25 April 2004.

23. John McKie, *Daily Record*, 1 January 2005, p.11.

stomach with their allegiance to the Republic of Ireland in preference to the nation of their birth.”²⁴

Contentiousness over the visible presence of Irishness in Scotland, and the links made between football and religious, cultural, national, and ethnic identities, extends beyond football and has significance outside the sporting arena. One example occurred in 2003, when a debate ensued regarding the organization of a St. Patrick’s Day Festival in the town of Coatbridge (population 45,000), near Glasgow. For several weeks the issue dominated letters to the local newspaper. Although some letter writers defended the celebration, much of the hostile comment reflected a belief that, despite Coatbridge being a town where a majority of people are of Irish descent, such a celebration should not take place. This was, in fact, the only such celebration that took place in Scotland, despite a longstanding and significant Irish presence in numerous other towns and villages in the west-central belt.

Letters to the newspapers sounded remarkably similar to those occasioned by Celtic’s appearance in Seville. Correspondents repeatedly emphasised the primacy of Scottishness over Irishness:

While I realise the vast population of the area we live in comes from Irish descent, I would think by now we would class ourselves as Scottish.²⁵

This is one of the many factors which results in the cancer of sectarianism, which still blights our society.²⁶

Why wasn’t there anything similar to celebrate the Queen’s Golden Jubilee? . . . The Fields of Athentry being sung by 3000 people with Celtic tops on a Saturday afternoon. . . .²⁷

How can this be organised when no corresponding celebration is ever planned for St Andrew’s Day—you know the patron saint of the country we actually live in. . . .²⁸

In Scotland, ethnic and religious news or events routinely prompt similar responses. Issues Irish and Catholic in Scotland often become a focus for overt critical public comment.

The wide-ranging and encompassing nature of the dispute over displays of Irishness manifests itself in other aspects of everyday life. The comments of the *Irish 2* respondents make this clear; significantly, the interviewees also give sub-

24. R. Travers, *Scotland on Sunday*, 9 November 1997, p.13.

25. *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser*, letters, 12 March 2003, p. 37.

26. *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser*, letters, 12 March 2003, p. 37.

27. *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser*, letters, 19 March 2003, p. 44.

28. *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser*, letters, 19 March 2003, p. 39.

stance to the claim of Celtic's relevance beyond the football environment, by emphasizing the club's role in creating, maintaining, and providing an expressive outlet for their Irishness. Ironically, an important finding of this research is that the public character of these celebrations and expressions of Irishness in reality also disclose their hidden nature, even invisibility, within other facets of Scottish life, and even within the context of supporting Celtic.

This latter point links with Daniel Burdsey's studies of British-born Asians who achieve success in England as footballers. His research shows that those players who have either consciously or unconsciously underemphasized their Asianness and in some cases, "sought to decrease the degree to which their cultural difference is apparent," are the most successful of young aspirant British-born Asian footballers.²⁹ In other words, practices and attitudes more acceptable to the "white" mainstream are gradually adopted as cultural capital; or are imposed upon Asianness with little or no comment, reply, or resistance. Burdsey suggests that regardless of how "ethnic" the player's private, or publicly undisclosed, family and social life may be, the required cultural passport can be acquired or achieved only if he or she complies with the mainstream codes of what is acceptable.

In a similar way, made particularly clear in the case of Aiden McGeady, if Irishness is maintained as a visible and esteemed identity with respect to Celtic, the cultural passport required for acceptance cannot be acquired. The perceptions of the interviewees suggest that press reporting in relation to the Irish and Catholic nature of Celtic and its support strongly indicates a need to negotiate Irishness in Scotland. Further, the interviewees report that such contestations are not restricted to the football arena, but extend to other areas of everyday life that have economic and social implications for the interviewees. The perception of the interviewees, virtually all of whom indicated support for Celtic, also confirm that the team is both an important aspect of Irishness in Scotland and provides a public indicator of how Irishness is perceived as well as socially managed.

Many interviewees disclose concern and even fear that they may be "caught" or "revealed" as being Catholic, as a Celtic supporter, as being Irish, or as simply esteeming their Irishness. They are aware of how these identities can be used against them, how isolated they can feel, and how they might be portrayed and referred to negatively and inferiorized by hostile people who do not share their religious or ethnic background. They have an intimate knowledge, born from experience and insider community learning, of the cultural codes involved in

29. Daniel Burdsey, "One of the lads"? Dual Ethnicity and Assimilated Ethnicities in the Careers of British Asian Professional Footballers," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27, 5 (September, 2004), 757.

reading contested social situations. The interviewees realize when, how, and why they must disguise their Irishness, downplay its relevance, and even discard it. They understand their Irishness as dominated by the hegemony of anti-Catholicism, anti-Irishness, Scottishness, and Britishness. Further, they recognize the sectarianism they experience as being culturally embedded, but an encounter rarely, if ever, publicly acknowledged.

Philomena Donnelly described how Celtic was an aspect of Irish Catholic cultural life in Scotland that needed to be dealt with sensitively:

There was times when they wouldn't [want to be identified by the popular labels of Celtic, Catholic and Irish], it wasn't as openly discussed I suppose, almost like the football wouldn't be discussed if people were coming round who you knew weren't Celtic fans. . . . I can remember once when I was very young, I was about 7 or 8 and I got a baby doll for Christmas and I fancied a guy at school at the time, I must have been a bit older, called John Paul, but I told my mum that I was naming this baby doll after the Pope and her friends were coming in and I remember her saying 'don't say that in front of them, just call it John in front of people, because that would be easier'. . . . I know he [my father] takes an awful lot of abuse for Celtic but whether it goes on to Irishness I don't know.

This difficulty in being negatively imagined as a member of the Catholic-Celtic-Irish community in the context of Scottish society was also experienced in the late 1960s by the then-teenager, Joseph John Flanagan:

when I started work, I got a job as an apprentice in the works my father was in, which was absolutely great. Going into this environment which was very much not a Catholic environment, very much managed by the Scottish Protestant background. Now he (Father) hadn't spoken about that to me but when I went over there the guys were wearing their football colours and you had a hard hat to wear and that kind of stuff, so the Rangers stickers and all that. So I put the Celtic stickers on mine, he went ballistic. I had not to do that. That was just something that was private, you keep that and I would never get on if that was, you know if I was going to wear them . . . so didn't blow it from the rooftop. . . . Didn't talk about your background, just didn't talk about that kind of stuff, just avoided the conversations. You were almost expected to conform into a subservient role. Do your bit, go away home.

The connection of Celtic to other aspects of second- and third-generation Irish Catholic life in Scotland, and the subservient role mentioned by Flanagan, was also alluded to by seventy-year-old James Haggerty. Haggerty's narrative exposes the way that people who wish to "fit in" and obtain esteem can often only acquire this by acquiescing to ongoing assimilative pressures that result in a corresponding dilution of their own ethnic distinctiveness. When Haggerty

embarked on a working life outside his community, he said of his previously open and relaxed Irish identity,

I tended to cover that up. . . . The Irish part of it that was the part, if you like, it sort of [was] on a back boiler, out of the road, used when I was with the Irish crowd back home. . . . I knew that I couldn't cope with that identity in work. . . . I don't know about promotion and so on but if you know, the men above and so on were all probably Masons and so on and I think it could have . . . made life kind of miserable and as it was I got on fine with everybody.

For Francis Daly, the workplace also presented a site for potential conflict and downplaying Irishness. Again, Celtic appears as part of a triangle of ethnic identity—Irish, Catholic, and Celtic football—that attracted hostility and suspicion, and led to a privatization of identity.

I would be exposing myself if I were to be outspoken about Irish things or about being a Catholic or being a Celtic supporter. . . . I know it would go against me, it wouldn't do me any favours. . . . See I wouldn't emphasise my Irishness either because it's just, it can be too, it's not worth it, because it opens up a can of worms for a lot of people and they can't accept it. People don't, there's a thing about, it's dangerous to be quite outspoken . . . Scottish society does not accept people of Irish origin, they don't like it.

Similarly, Rosaleen Ashling Gaffney noted the hostility within Scottish society to Irishness:

a lot of people would comment on, especially they pick up on your name, you know, Rosaleen Ashling Gaffney, straightaway they pick up on your name, that you're Irish. A lot of people it's fine but then some people don't like it . . . they would just make maybe fly comments about, you know, you being Irish or the fact that you would be a Celtic fan, things like that. . . .

Joseph John Flanagan also made the connection with other aspects of his life as a third-generation Irish Catholic living in Scotland. The inhibitions he had assumed in his lifestyle with regard to Celtic also permeated Flanagan's working environment and life generally outside of his Irish and Catholic place of upbringing. Like Philomena Donnelly, Flanagan stated that he, too, experienced the idea of changing names to disguise identity in unknown or potentially unfriendly company while fashioning another more acceptable designation. The sometimes confused but disguised nature of Flanagan's identity was also inferred when asked whether he would support Ireland or Scotland in international football:

If I'm honest? I mean my next door neighbour's a great guy, old man, Scottish through and through . . . if I was watching it in the house and he came in to watch

it with me, for his sake I would be a Scottish fan. If I was watching it privately, with Peter or Mark [his sons], I would be supporting Ireland.

Flanagan felt little affinity with the Scottish international football side, and viewed Celtic as his national team—although he also indicated how uneasy he was with expressing this outside of groups of similarly minded people. He signalled a desire to fit in as shown by a contextual desire to be seen to support Scotland, “for the sake of” his older neighbor. Numerous other respondents mentioned the privatized aspect of the constitution of Irish identity in Scotland. Francis Daly said:

When I went to a primary school, maybe 95–98 percent of the kids at the primary school were of Irish descent. All of the teachers, with the exception of one, were of Irish descent. She was a Lithuanian. But it wasn’t encouraged, anyone showing an Irish identity wasn’t encouraged at all. It was encouraged in the house perhaps, in certain families. . . .

Daly also noted that an otherwise privatized Irish identity could be publicly celebrated in the context of Celtic Football Club:

You were allowed to go see Celtic matches and express your Irish identity . . . it’s maybe a lot more important, it’s not just the football club of course, it’s a lot more. Celtic is all about attitude and that as well. You know you can express an Irish identity and there’s safety at Celtic Park, whereas you wouldn’t be able to express it out. . . .

Celtic has allowed the respondents an expression of their Irish identity in a public space, in the company of thousands of other like-minded individuals, devoid of the “usual” hostility and suspicion. Interviewees who made connections between Celtic and other cultural, social, and political aspects of their lives frequently referred to the significance of Celtic to Catholics of Irish descent. Second-generation Glasgow Irish Peadar McGrath went so far as to say that:

I’ve no interest in football. . . . I don’t watch football, but sometimes I’d turn the radio on and listen to the Celtic game hoping that Celtic would win but I don’t go to see them . . . the only way I’ve got any interest in Celtic at all is, I’m not actually interested in football, my interest in Celtic is I see them as the Irish team in Glasgow.

As McGrath suggests, only in Celtic-related social circles did he experience comfort in self- and in-group recognition. Among interviewees, the dominant experience of being openly “Irish” was of being a stranger and unwelcome. Harry McGuigan referred to this “unease” that many Celtic supporters encounter in negotiating their Irish identities in Scottish society. “When Irish emigrant’s children had nothing, the only thing they had to anchor themselves

here was Celtic. Why should they apologise for that and why should Celtic?" Pauline Rice's comments echo her identification of remembered deprivation:

My identity with Celtic, again, is the underdog, my strength of feeling is that it associates me with the injustices that have been attached to Celtic Football Club over the years . . . we never had a discriminatory policy at any time at Celtic, you know there was never a religious discrimination. . . . My strength of feeling for Celtic goes back to having to fight for where we've got and from the poverty that we've come from and what we've done from that. I see the Irish culture over here doing the exact same, getting to the top having had to struggle to get there and that would be my association with Ireland and Celtic but again I don't apologise for thinking we should be able to sing Irish songs if we wanted to because Irish men have been involved with Celtic from the start.

A majority of interviewees saw Celtic as pivotal to the Irish in Scotland in relation to their sense of history, heritage, cultural Catholicism. James Brannigan provided a succinct statement of the team's primary role:

They represent the Irish who had to leave Ireland. . . . They've never been an Irish only or a Catholic only club because that would be wrong. But, Celtic is essentially about us—it's our team, our club and our community. . . . Celtic wouldn't be here without the Irish. Ireland's history helps explain the institution that is Celtic Football Club. Every time we win a big match it's a celebration for a community. We can come together and we can celebrate publicly. We are recognised and the rest of the country can see us even though many of them ignore or despise us. . . . Just to see the green and white hoops running out is evidence that we've survived despite what many have thrown at us. Seeing the tricolour and the shamrock somewhere publicly where we don't 'usually'—usually we have to keep them hidden, is the greatest thing about Celtic.

Thus, Celtic's symbolic, social, and cultural role among much of the Irish diaspora in Scotland is fundamental. The vast majority of the team's support comes from this segment of the Scottish population. Even when a third-generation, Glasgow-based interviewee was asked about his sense of home, John Flynn's reply not only stated how he continued to be Irish in Scotland but also reflected the place of Celtic in this specific Irish diasporic setting.

Home's where the heart is. Home's Glasgow. I tell you the last couple of weeks I've seen Johnny Crawley the Cork singer at the Riverside. I've seen *Juno* at the Citizens. I've seen the *Ploughboy* [*sic*] of the *Western World* at the Arches and we were at the Irish concert last night in the Concert Hall and we've got Celtic as well, so if we only had Old Ireland over here. I think we've got it. No I'm quite happy with that, you know. I do feel at home in Ireland. . . . There's a lot of places I love in England, cause I've got a lot of friends too but I do feel particularly at home in Ireland too. I don't feel, and I think it's like when Ella goes to Italy [his

Scots-born, Italian-identifying wife], she still feels kind of comfortable there you know. But I do too, I don't think . . . in Ireland I definitely feel at home but if anybody said to me, where's your home, I'd say Glasgow.

Even if some or many of the diaspora have become Scottish, the *Irish 2 Project* shows that second- and third-generation Irish individuals in Scotland can also identify themselves as Irish or see Irishness as their primary or favored identity. This, then, is one of the main themes to emerge from this research: the links respondents construct between their ethnic origins, Celtic Football Club, and expressions of Irishness, reveal that not everyone born in Scotland wishes to be imagined as a Scot.³⁰

Another significant theme to arise from the *Irish 2 Project* is the perceived difficulty in being Irish in Scotland for those who are consciously part of the multi-generational Irish community. The evidence demonstrates that supporting Celtic in Scottish society, the one football club and fanbase in Britain where Irishness is a defining aspect, can invite not only communal solidarity, succour, esteem, and celebration, but also opprobrium, invective, sectarian labelling, denial, and occasionally violence, and the possibility of social and economic discrimination. This is important to understanding past and present Irish identities in Scotland. Such hostility also links to Mary Hickman's thesis, in *Religion, Class and Identity* (1995), that Irish people in Britain have been subjected to a process of "denationalising."³¹

Irish 2 Project interviewees report that hostility toward their Irishness is frequently manifested in the workplace and in everyday social life, including hostility from other members of the Irish diaspora. This latter experience, in turn, can be viewed as another reaction toward hostility and antagonism and as a response to the pressures to assimilate.³¹ There are members of the Irish diasporic community in Scotland who have chosen, or learned to adopt, other more acceptable identities which are not Catholic, Irish, or supporters of Celtic. The disregard and marginalisation of Irish identity over the course of many decades, and its lack of positive recognition in Scottish society, sustains sectarian attitudes toward Catholics of Irish descent. The West of Scotland is a specific location where ethnic difference and the sustenance of Irish identity are subject to such pressures. The sample of newspaper articles reveals the construction of Irishness in Scotland as oppositional to indigenous Scottish and British identities. The Scottish print media appears to be engaged in a resolute endeavor to have Irish diasporic identities marginalized and negatively labelled as "sec-

30. Joseph M. Bradley, "Images of Scottishness and Otherness in International Football," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 9, 1 (March, 2003), 7–23.

31. Mary J. Hickman, *Religion, Class and Identity: The State, the Catholic Church and the Education of the Irish in Britain* (Avebury: Aldershot, 1995).

tarian.” This has been a continual feature of modern Scottish society. In the print media, the Irishness of Celtic and its supporters is often treated as aberrant, disloyal, alien, and sectarian.

Nonetheless, despite the contestation and assimilative and conforming pressures, Irishness can be recognized as remaining a significant element in the lives of the *Irish 2 Project* respondents in Scotland. The narratives of these interviewees also demonstrate that in Scotland, football is bound up and inherently linked with the process of community construction. For those descended from Ireland in Scotland and who view Celtic as intrinsic to their Irishness, the club remains a site for the preservation of their cultural traditions, customs, and political preferences. It functions as a mechanism for the socialization and sustenance of Irishness in Scotland. The team exists as a site for a sense of community born from the majority of these supporters sharing familial and kinship origins in Ireland. It constitutes a setting for friendship and association with people often intermarried, having experienced the same denominational school format, sharing similar geographical spaces in Scotland—frequently in the Glasgow and Lanarkshire areas, within a thirty-mile radius of Celtic Park in Glasgow—and with a sense of belonging to Ireland, Catholicism, Irish history, and Irish culture. Celtic’s Irish identity and the multigenerational Irish immigrant community that has sustained this as the central component of the club and its fan base, makes it a unique football club in Scotland and beyond. Celtic and its supporters constitute a distinctive representation of Irishness in the worldwide diaspora.

The *Irish 2 Project* shows that, with respect to the Irish in Scotland and Britain more generally, Celtic and its supporters’ Irishness challenge notions of assimilation amongst the children and grandchildren of Irish migrants. As Hickman stresses, this points to the need for more nuanced understandings of white diasporic identities, as well as of Scottishness and Britishness. Without the diasporic community’s sense of Irishness in Scotland, Celtic would not exist, have become established, or have gained widespread recognition as one of the most significant institutions in world football. Not only does this study offer weight to the views of Hoberman and Hobsbawm in relation to sport and identity but it specifically demonstrates that support for Celtic Football Club discloses otherwise hidden—and, in the eyes of their possessors, repressed—aspects of the Irishness of the Irish ethnic minority in Scotland, while simultaneously reflecting experiences and identities frequently marginalized, unheard, ignored, and denied.