ON EAGLE’S WING:
IMAGINED TRANSATLANTIC COMMUNITIES
IN THE ULSTER-SCOTS REVIVAL

The North-South Language Body which was born out of the Belfast Agreement of 1998 is comprised of the Irish Language Agency, and the Ulster-Scots Agency. The overall remit of the latter Agency is “to promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language, to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots.”

Regarding this “attendant culture” the Agency specifically states that it “seeks to foster an ever growing desire amongst individuals and community groups to express their cultural identity through the arts, music (fiddle, drums, pipes, fife etc.) and song, dance (Highland, Set and Country dancing), poetry and prose, and performance”.

In the latest Ulster-Scots revival there has been particular focus on migration history, language and music. This is evidenced for example by the development of the Ulster American Folk Park with its Annual Appalachian & Bluegrass Music Festival and by the setting up of several Northern Irish “Ullans”, bluegrass, gospel and country influenced groups. Yet another example of this phenomenon is to be found in the launch in 2004 of the musical and “oratorio”, On Eagle’s Wing, (named after one of the first vessels to carry Ulster emigrants to North America) which purports to “celebrate the history of the Scots-Irish over 500 years” in music and dance.

An exploration of the latest Ulster-Scots revival raises interesting issues of cultural, political and religious identification. Revivals in general tend to re-interpret the past in accordance with a need for “imagined communities” in the present (Benedict Anderson, Georgina Boyes), often using language and music as potential markers of group identity. To what extent is the Ulster-Scots revival a spontaneous aesthetic movement and to what extent has it been culturally and politically manufactured by ideologists and politicians? To what extent does the process of Ulster-Scots revival mirror other popular revivals of folk and traditional culture?

This article will explore the links between cultural politics, in the context of the Belfast Agreement and devolution, and the revival of interest in Ulster-Scots history, language and music.


«На орлином крыле»: воображаемые трансатлантические сообщества Ольстер-Шотландского Возрождения

Языковая организация «The North-South Language Body », который появился после Белфастского соглашения 1998, состоит из Ирландского и Ольстер-шотландского языковых агентств. Сфера компетенции последнего — "содействие изучению, сохранению, развитию и использованию Ольстер-шотландского как живого языка, чтобы поощрить и развивать весь спектр культуры и способствовать пониманию истории Ольстер-шотландцев". Что касается этой "культуры", указывается, что "поощряется к развитию постоянно растущее желание среди отдельных лиц и общественных групп, стремящихся выразить свою культурную самобытность через искусство, музыку (скрипка, барабаны, трубы, флейта и т. д.) и песни, танцы (Хайленд, Набор и Страна танцы), стихи и прозу, и другую творческую деятельность ".

В последнем возрождении Ольстер-шотландцев особое внимание было направлено на историю миграции, языка и музыки. Об этом свидетельствует, например, развитие Американского Ольстерского фольклорно-парка и проводящиеся в нем фестивали, а также создание различных северо-ирландских групп с фольклорными названиями. Еще один пример этого явления можно найти в запуске в 2004 году мюзикла и "оратории", “на орлином крыле", (названный в честь одной из первых судов для перевозки Ольстерских эмигрантов в Северную Америку), который претендует на “празднование пятисотлетней шотландо-ирландской” в музыке и танце.

Исследование позднего возрождения Ольстер-шотландцев поднимает интересные вопросы культурной, политической и религиозной идентификации. Возрождения, как правило, по-новому интерпретируют прошлое в соответствии с актуальной необходимостью смыслов и запросов "воображаемых сообществ" (Бенедикт Аnderсон, Джорджина Бойс), часто используя язык и музыку в качестве потенциальных маркеров групповой идентичности. В какой степени это Ольстер-шотландское возрождение представляет собой спонтанное эстетическое движение, а в какой является продуктом идеологии и политики? В какой степени
The term Scotch (or Scots) Irish is used in a historical sense, more particularly in North America, to refer to “Descendants of Presbyterians from Lowland Scotland who settled in Ulster, the northernmost province of Ireland, in the 17th century and subsequently emigrated from there to America”. The term Ulster-Scots (sometimes spelled Ulster Scots), on the other hand, is more politically charged and used in Northern Ireland to refer to the descendants of Lowland Scots who migrated to Ireland, but also to refer to the variety of anglic Scots spoken in Northern Ireland.

In the past thirty years there has emerged an Ulster Scots revival focussing notably on language and music. As Martin Dowling has pointed out this is a neo revival in that it builds upon earlier emergences of Ulster-Scots ideology and identity, notably during the period of the Home Rule crises. The previous movement was expressed in the publication of a number of historical narratives and also, more formally, in the Ulster Covenant of 1912, an anti Home Rule petition which drew its defensive inspiration from the Scottish National Covenant of 1638 and its name from the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 (the official title of the Ulster Covenant is “Ulster’s Solemn League and Covenant”).

The current revival also has academic origins. Transatlantic scholarly research on the Scots Irish and Ulster-Scots intensified after the first Ulster-American Heritage Symposium at the University of Ulster in 1976 as part of a more general growth of research into the role of ethnicity in American life fuelled by the bicentenary of the Declaration of Independence of the United States. The biennial symposium is now held alternately in Appalachian and Northern Irish academic institutions. The Ulster American Folk Park, focussing on migration from Ulster to North America, was also set up in the bicentennial year, and has hosted the Annual Appalachian and Bluegrass Festival for the past seventeen years.

Although academics have been taking renewed interest in Scots Irish and Ulster Scots history since the 1970s, it is only since the 1990s that a more visible revival has emerged even if it remains a minority phenomenon, even amongst the traditionally Unionist Protestant community. Several processes would seem to have provided the conditions for this revival. As Fintan Vallely has demonstrated, one of the outcomes of the Troubles was a tendency by the traditionally Unionist protestant community to turn away from identity with Irishness and Irish culture, a phenomenon which corresponds to a general tendency of distancing from the other side in time of conflict, an intensification of “us and them” type mentalities.

At the same time identification with Britishness was also becoming problematic. Ulster Scots activist Doug Elliot suggests that the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was the “first big jolt” regarding such identification. This, Elliot surmises, coupled with a lack of political or cultural education amongst young Protestants, may have begun to raise levels of interest in identity.

The processes of globalisation, “ever closer” European Union, devolution and the decline of the status of the British monarchy have been perceived as resulting in an increasingly disunited kingdom in which Britishness, like the Union Jack, seems to be undergoing a process of symbolic deconstruction into its constitutive elements. These developments would appear to undermine the potential of Britishness to fulfil the ideological, political and cultural identification needs of the traditionally Unionist Protestant community.

Meanwhile, over the past 40 years, the Irishness which has provided an identity marker for the traditionally nationalist Catholic community has been enhanced by the jet age linking of the Irish diaspora, the formerly perceived economical miracle of the Celtic tiger and the global success of Irish cultural exports. In a context of apparently exponentially expanding Irish economic and cultural influence it is perhaps unsurprising that there should be an attempt to revive and reinvent a wider form of Scots Irishness or Ulster Scotsness as a potential marker of a correspondingly larger oppositional cultural identity.

The revival was more particularly bolstered by The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement which provided the framework for institutional recognition and financial backing. Section 3 stipulates that:

“All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.”

In practice this has translated into the setting up of the North/South Language Body made up of two agencies, Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch, which are both supported by generous cross border funding. The North South Ministerial Council defines their remit as follows:

“Foras na Gaeilge is responsible for the promotion of the Irish Language throughout the island and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch is responsible for promoting the study, conservation, development, and use of the Ulster-Scots as a living language: to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots.”

Formal institutional support has assisted the development of various explorations and expressions including the setting up of The Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster; the development of regular Radio and television broadcasts; history, dance, music and language courses and classes grant-aided by the Ulster-Scots Agency; musical, literary and storytelling events; websites, print and internet publications etc.

The neo revival differs from the previous revival in that it reinvents an Ulster-Scots identity which places greater emphasis on what might be termed an imagined pan Scots Irish transatlantic cultural community, an imagined diaspora, with emphasis on westward movement and triangular links between Scotland, Northern Ireland and North America.

This would seem to build on the writings of Ulster-Scots activist Rev. William F. Marshall whose publications were part of an attempt to compete with a perceived enlisting of American support for Home Rule as exemplified by his poem “Ulster Sails West” written in 1911:

In his 1943 publication, also entitled Ulster Sails West, Marshall renewed and further developed his claim of the contribution of the Ulster Scots to the building of the United States, at a time of renewed calls for an end to the partition of the island of Ireland during the Second World War. His 1943 publication was celebrated by a 60th anniversary Ulster-Scots mural sponsored by the North Antrim Cultural & Musical Society and unveiled in 2004 in Ballymoney by the United States Consul for Northern Ireland:

* North South Ministerial Council website: http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/index/north-south-implementation-bodies.htm
* e. g. the Ulster-Scots Agency website: http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/

The artist, Kenny Blair, describes his mural as follows:

“...you have the picture of an early trapper and his dogs, who probably, a generation before that would have been from these shores in a farming capacity. But they went there and settled along the East Coast and helped mould, I suppose, the whole American continent. And then again, we have the emblem of the Ulster-Scots, which is the Red Hand and the thistles.”

More recently still, in the wake of The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, the westward turn would seem to have acquired increased economic and cultural significance. During the first decade of the 21st century unionist and nationalist leaders came together in a concerted drive to encourage American investment, notably through the United States Northern Ireland investment conference of May 2008. The clear objective of this conference was to bolster peace in Northern Ireland through improved economic conditions which might be achieved, as in the Republic of Ireland, through massive American investment.

Bill Clinton had explicitly encouraged hopes of American investment and prosperity during his three visits to Northern Ireland in an attempt to cajole British and Irish leaders into compromise and agreement. On his first visit to Belfast in November 1995 Clinton made a key speech in front of a giant Christmas Tree shipped over...
specially for the occasion from Belfast’s twin city, country music capital Nashville, Tennessee, reminding the crowd of the numberous American presidents of Scots Irish ancestry and of his own Scots Irish roots telling the crowd that America and Northern Ireland were “partners for security, partners for prosperity, and most important, partners for peace” before switching on the Christmas lights”.

Clinton’s proclamations of pride in his “Scotch-Irish Southern Baptist” identity would seem to coincide with a more general cultural revival of the American South, and, co-incidentally of the Scots Irish. Mel Gibson's blockbusterm The Patriot (2000) emphasises Scots Irish connections, while films like O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000), Songcatcher (2000), Cold Mountain (2003), and Walk the Line (2005) all suggest a revival of southern musical traditions, more particularly blues, gospel, Appalachian, bluegrass and country. The white, mountain man thus appears rehabilitated in contrast with the former stereotype of the moonshine crazed, degenerate hillbilly of Deliverance fame.

The popularity of Bill Clinton in Ireland during the late 1990s was paralleled by that of another southerner, country music star Garth Brooks. Country music had been popular throughout Ireland, declining somewhat during the 1980s, as in America, before reaching a new peak with the commercial country pop of Garth Brooks who set a Northern Irish attendance record with his five nights in a row in Belfast’s King’s Hall in 1998.

This southern cultural and musical revival would therefore seem to provide a convenient potential identity marker for the present Ulster-Scots revival. I would like to briefly consider two examples of such linguistic and musical identification. Firstly the Low Country boys recording of “My Ain Countrie”; secondly the musical On Eagle’s Wing.

“My Ain Countrie” was issued on a 2007 Smithsonian CD album compilation of contemporary Northern Irish music entitled Sound Neighbours: Contemporary Music in Northern Ireland.

The album was a resultant publication of the 2007 “Rediscover Northern Ireland” cultural program launched in association with the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institute, the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland as part of a strategy to pave the way for the investment conference of 2008. The program included more than 40 events to highlight trade and business, arts and culture, tourism and education concluding with the participation of 160 Northern Irish musicians, storytellers, craftspeople, chefs and cultural experts at the 2007 Folklife Festival.

The program insisted on transatlantic links between Northern Ireland and the United States, including the cultural heritage of migration. Musical aspects of this heritage were prominent and the CD booklet states that the aim of the compilation is a celebration of “the richness and diversity of the region's musical traditions following a ten-year period of relative peace and stability, and the restoration of Northern Ireland’s political institutions.” The title of the CD is of course a play on words suggesting that Northern Irish nationalist and unionist communities are now good cultural and political neighbours, living harmoniously together and thus, by implication, creating a safe “neighbourhood” for American investment.

“My Ain Countrie” is a cover version of a song which was initially popularised in the late 19th century by Ira D. Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos which started out as Sankey's personal resource repertoire before being published in the 1880s to become a highly influential evangelical hymnbook. Sankey, also known as “The Sweet Singer of Methodism”, was an American gospel singer and composer associated with evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Sankey provided gospel songs to heighten fervour at Moody's revival meetings which played a part in the "Third Great Awakening", a period of revival of religious activism in American history from the late 1850s to the early 1900s characterised by a sense of social activism which affected pietistic Protestant denominations on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite increasing civil unrest and conflicting advice, Moody and Sankey travelled to Ireland in the 1870s, helping to spread the evangelical revival and its attendant gospel songs in Ulster. “My Ain Countrie” was further popularised by the Glaswegian street evangelist and gospel singer William McEwan who recorded the song in 1911. The Low Country Boys version follows the melody of the McEwan recording although differing in style and tempo largely owing to the bluegrass string band arrangement.

The lyrics of the song are borrowed from a poem written in the anglic Lowland Scots, or “Lallans” (from the Scots word for “Lowlands”) dialect by American Mary Augusta Demarest and were first published in the New York Observer in December 1861. Demarest was of Scottish descent and lost her mother at an early age. She was left in charge of a Scottish nurse, from whom she learned the Scots dialect whilst her grandfather sang Scots lullabies to her as a child. Demarest allegedly based the poem on the story she heard of Scotsman John Macduff and his young bride whose health began to fail from homesickness after emigrating to America and who only recovered after her husband brought her back to Scotland. The poem was put to music in 1864 by Jane T. Hanna and harmonized for choral song by Hubert P. Main in 1873 becoming a gospel favourite of the “Third Great Awakening”.

The Low Country Boys have described tracking down the original after obtaining a handwritten copy in the personal collection of William Wilson, the deceased grandfather of two members of the group. They insist therefore on musical and family continuity in the same way they insist on their homeland in the Ards peninsula as being one of the earliest places of the Scottish Montgomery settlement in Northern Ireland.

A am far frae ma hame an I’m weary aftenwhiles For tha lang’d fer hamebrerin’ and ma Faithier’s welcome smiles An A’l ne’er be fu’ content, aye until ma een dae see Tha gowden gates o’ Heaven, an’ ma ain countree. Tha earth is fleck’d w’ floo-ers, mony tinted,
The Low Country Boys are a bluegrass style acoustic string band with guitar, banjo, mandolin, electric bass, Appalachian dulcimer and four part harmony singing in the “high lonesome” style. They describe their musical style as “Ulster Scots, Scots and Old Timey Hillbilly Gospel Music” clearly suggesting triangular transatlantic musical and linguistic links.

The image and name of the group are also in the country or bluegrass mould reminiscent of the comical band name the “Soggy bottom boys” from O Brother, Where Art Thou? The Low Country Boys themselves indicate that the “Low Country” refers to their home area in the wet, low-lying middle section of the Ards Peninsula.

The Low Country Boys are however merely one example among several Ulster-Scots revival groups with varying political stances including the more Scottish influenced Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra and its various offshoots and splinter groups, such as Willie Drennan’s Transatlantic Hillbilly Band while John Trotter’s Ulster Scots Experience would appear to have narrower, more radical Ulster connections:

The second example I wish to consider is the ill-fated attempt to emulate the global success of the Celtic Riverdance with the launching in 2004 of On Eagle’s Wing, described by its producers as a “Transatlantic Scots Irish musical extravaganza”.

The name of the show implicitly suggests the triangular transatlantic Ulster Scots diaspora since it evokes the golden eagle, an icon of wild Scotland (and unofficial symbol of the country), which are reputed to cross the narrow stretch of water separating Scotland and Northern Ireland, while the bald eagle is the National emblem of the United States of America.

One of the first emigrant vessels to leave Ulster for the New World was also named Eagle’s Wing although it in fact had to turn back due to bad weather. Paradoxically, the cast and crew of the musical also had to be flown home from Atlanta shortly before the world premiere due to financial difficulties. The Sunday Tribune reported that Lord Laird, former head of the Ulster-Scots Agency accused the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of acting in breach of the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement arguing, just before boarding the flight home, that the Ulster-Scots language was not getting the same level of support as Irish:

“I can’t abide the fascist bigotry that exists and the determination to ignore Ulster Scots. Well, we’re not going away you know. We want our slice of the cake, we want our day in the sun.”

The Guardian meanwhile quoted another of Lord Laird’s declarations:

“All we want is equal status. There is a culture of fascist bigotry on behalf of both the Irish and British governments: they simply don’t think we exist. They have thwarted us at every turn. We have been airbrushed out of Irish history — for their own political agenda.”

After the spectacular flop of the premiere the show was rapidly transformed into a television show and documentary issued in DVD format in 2005 and aired on BBC Northern Ireland and PBS. A significantly scaled down version was scheduled for several dates in Ireland in 2008 but there have been no announcements regarding a renewed attempt at an overseas tour.

As Martin Dowling points out On Eagle’s Wing presents a selected historiography which represents the Scots Irish as “dispossessed” victims of history: a strategic stance in vying for sympathy, support...
and funding. This is a simplified and conflated representation of Northern Irish history with no reference to the complex realities of migration patterns, cultural interaction, influence and fusion. There is also an absence of reference to events with negative connotations such as the Lowland Scots implicit participation in the dispossession of the native Irish or the expulsion of the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears.

Finally the second striking feature is the hyperbole surrounding the show. It is suggested in the documentary that it has the largest stage currently on tour, the best dance troupe currently operating anywhere in the world, the finest traditional musicians in the United Kingdom etc. The symbolism confirms this: biblical sounding references to golden and bald Eagles soaring high (Isaiah 40:31); miraculous crossings of water; water drawn from a deeper well; the biblical analogy of Moses leading the chosen people out of Egypt to the Promised Land (the character of the preacher uses the terms “promised land” and “zion”); claims to have moulded present day America; the seventeen presidents claimed to be of Scots Irish origin; the founding of country music: “Even our music would become downright country” we are told.

It is significant that the show spends much time on the American leg of the journey with bluegrass and country music and dance routines but also images of graveyards, statues and frontier pioneers, while, paradoxically, Scots Irish specialist Tyler Blethien warns against the dangers of ancestor worship. As the camera lingers on the statue of Andrew Jackson the narrator declares: “It’s not our style to blow our own trumpet but we did play a big part in making this country great”. One of the main songs of the show “Shout my name” mirrors the need for self-identification and attention:

The director John Anderson says that it is a “big story” and a “big show”. The show appears to present characteristics of pantomime, of the tall story, of the Jack Tale common in Appalachia. This is not surprising since Anderson and several of the people involved in the production have also worked in pantomime. Vladimir Propp’s Morphology of the Folktales might be loosely applied to the storyline: the young hero (the Lowland Scot), guided by a helper with special powers (the Presbyterian minister) has to leave home and family because of impending danger (the “Killing Times”, famine etc.) and ends up after a long voyage and a series of trials and tribulations, involving much sacrifice (the Siege of Derry; Frontier life; the War of Independence), founding a family and finding land, fame and fortune (President of the United States) after having successfully defeated the ogre (the King of England).

The British sociologist Stuart Hall has suggested that lost status may lead to a mingling of greatness played out in pantomime-like form in an attempt to come to terms with new circumstances. Beyond commercial opportunism and cultural commodification On Eagle’s Wing may therefore correspond to a form of mythification, a form of psychosocial compensation for the feeling of being unjustly left out, ignored, forgotten and relegated to decline whilst the oppositional marker of Irishness has appeared to be on a spectacularly rising tangent.

Yet according to Marshall MacLuhan the medium too is the message. In both examples the medium is at least partly collaborative. “My Ain Countrie” was part of a cross community reconciliatory album and the Low Country Boys participated in the Folklife Festival associated with the album. On Eagle’s Wing has an international management team, cast and crew including Mark Dougherty, former Musical Director with Riverdance. Ullans is not used whereas Lewis born Alyth McCormack sings in her native Scottish Gallic. There is Irish traditional music on the Ulster leg and the bodhrán makes a brief if perhaps token appearance, notably in front of Lambeg and African type drums in sequences reminiscent of the cross community initiative Different Drums, whose track “Northern Man” opens the Smithsonian compilation. Finally there is an almost comical paradox in the fact that the DVD begins and ends with the shamrock of the Irish Tourism advertisement:

“You can hear it in the echoes of ancient castles, in the proud words of warrior poets. You can see it in the smiles of countless new friends. There’s something of Ireland in all of us.”

Identity is a moveable feast, and, as Benedict Anderson has pointed out, folk revivals in general tend to reinterpret the past in accordance with a need for “imagined communities” in the present. Such reinterpretation takes selective account of history and culture. Revival may moreover present a spectrum ranging from nostalgic nationalism or ethnonationalism to more cosmopolitan or apolitical stances. As has been the case for other folk revivals, the Ulster-Scots revival would seem to present various facets with a tendency towards a narrow, nostalgic and selective interpretation of history thus perhaps providing a cultural mirror of the walls of political divide and partition in Ireland.

As Helen O’Shea has pointed out the emergence of Ulster-Scots music as part of a more general linguistic and cultural Ulster-Scots revival would therefore seem to mirror the emergence of a predominantly Catholic Gaelic Irish revival in Northern Ireland. The tendency, within Northern Ireland, to focus on a binary opposition between a reinvented and artificially rarefied Catholic Gaelic Irish culture on the one hand, and a reinvented and artificially rarefied Protestant Ulster-Scots culture on the other, would therefore seem to provide a cultural reflection of the political battle lines of 20th century conflict in Northern Ireland in a way which may tend to mask the historical reality of complex patterns of shared cultural, linguistic and musical forms, characterised by exchange, interaction, borrowing, conversion, hybridism and fusion.

One clear indication of the historical complexity of cultural exchange and fusion is evidenced by the fact that there are a significant number of Catholic Ulster-Scots speakers whilst some Scottish migrants to Ulster came from Gaelic speaking areas in Scotland. Closer analysis of Ulster-Scots and traditional Irish music in Northern Ireland does in fact reveal this fusion of influences with a certain number of shared styles, instruments, songs and tunes. It is also more clearly apparent in such cross-community musical projects as Different Drums of Ireland which began in 1991 “as a deliberate exercise in community relations”, bringing together those two most symbolic of Northern Irish instruments, the bodhrán and the lambeg drums. It is also implicit in the 2007 Folkways compilation Sound Neighbours: Contemporary Music in Northern Ireland which brought together musicians from both sides of the community divide.

In the decade following the 1998 agreement there has nevertheless been greater exchange and increased crossing of the musical divide, most notably through shared musical experiences and adoption of shared instruments. Robert Watt, from Maghera, trained initially as a purely traditional Highland bagpiper playing in the Tamlaigh O’Crilly pipe band. Since then, however, he has also
learnt to play the Lowland pipes, Border pipes, the Irish Uilleann pipes and the Irish 'penny' whistle. Watt would clearly seem to recognise the inescapably multicultural nature of music in Northern Ireland, having declared that he has been exposed to traditional Irish music all his life, picking up many Irish tunes on his collection of High and Low whistles.

An excessive focalisation on the constructed cultural walls of division between Gaelic Irish language, culture and music, and Ulster-Scots language, culture and music may also tend to mask and exclude other important influences in Northern Ireland, including significant Highland Scottish, Borders, and English influences but also the influence of smaller groups of settlers over the centuries, such as the French Huguenots, or, in more recent times, Poles and Eastern Europeans. It remains to be seen whether the increased exploration of the roots of various forms of traditional and "folk" musics in Northern Ireland may eventually lead to recognition of the wider, constantly evolving and multiple complexity of musical and cultural traditions in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the whole of Ireland, and in the British Isles.

In his controversial publication God’s Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster Donald Harman Akenson argues that there has been a common thread in the views of Ulster Scots Presbyterianism, the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church, and Israeli Judaism, “each of which are committed to an Old Testament-like covenant with God that promises them the land they struggled to get if they make the commitment and sacrifice necessary in such a covenant” (the red hand symbolism for example). The idea of promised land or eldorado was widespread in European colonialism and the ensuing territorial struggles have sometimes lead to a wider and unfortunately enduring propensity of the human spirit to engage in “ethnonationalism”

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What better conclusion than the four lines from another song on the Sound Neighbours CD compilation, “Donegall Road”, initially released on The Note that Lingers on (2003) in which Colum Sand’s reminds us (if it were necessary) that globalisation and recent immigration may help us understand that there are infinitely more than just two cultures in Ireland:

““And here’s tomorrow coming, children laughing hand in hand Their skins are different colours, may they help us understand If we’re teaching culture here — it’s a thing we often do It’s time that we were learning to count higher up than two”