Ethnopolitical Mobilization in the North Sea Region

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Presented at the International Political Science Association
World Congress, Santiago Chile
15 July 2009
Abstract

This paper tests Cartrite’s (2003) model of ethnopolitical mobilization using three similar cases, Faroe, Shetland, and Orkney, based in part on fieldwork done there in 2008. The Faroese, a highly ethnopolitically mobilized case, appear poised to reconsider the issue of independence from Denmark in the relatively near future. Shetland and Orkney, as regions within Scotland, represent cases sharing many features with Faroe but in which ethnopolitical mobilization appears to be in the very early stages, although somewhat exacerbated by and against Scottish nationalist mobilization. Cartrite’s model anticipates Faroese ethnopolitical mobilization very closely, outperforming that of Miroslav Hroch (1968 [2000]) on which it is based. While the model seems to anticipate Shetlandic and Orcadian activism reasonably well, the low levels of mobilization there limit the robustness of the test, although the cases do provide important insights into the initial dynamics of ethnopolitical mobilization the earlier study was unable to develop in detail.

Introduction

Cartrite (2003) established a model of ethnopolitical mobilization that attempted to account for the longer historical trajectory than studies typically evaluate and address the question of why only a small subset of potential politically active ethnic groups ever becomes so. Drawing from Hroch (1968 [2000]), the model articulates four distinct “phases” of ethnopolitical mobilization: (1) cultural (non-political) activism; (2) political advocacy; (3) non-competitive party formation; and (4) competitive party formation. These phases are evidenced by the kinds of organizations that are formed (as the dependent variable), with the probability of the realization of higher phases of mobilization being impacted by changing international norms, state policies and conceptualizations of the legitimacy of subnational identity groups, and, most powerfully, the establishment of such symbols as a flag, anthem, holiday, and the standardization of the local language and the occurrence of a literary movement; the research demonstrates that these “constructed” elements interact with each other to further increase the probability for higher levels of ethnopolitical mobilization than does each element on its own.

The functional dynamic that ties these distinct phases together relates to the satisfaction of two necessary conditions. First, cultural traits shared by a (sub)set of individuals must be
understood by them as in fact delineating a group distinct from other groups. Second, this differentiation must come to be understood as giving rise to claims for targeted political rights and institutions.\footnote{This argument derives from Kalyvas’s (1996) evaluation of the rise of Christian Democracy in Western Europe.} Strong primordialist arguments take the first condition as almost automatic, while the spread of nationalism in the modern period suggests the second condition is unproblematic. Cartrite (2003) suggests that most ethnopolitical mobilization in that study, when it advances, does progress through these phases (although movements may become “stuck” or even regress) precisely because the early phases facilitate the satisfaction of the first condition while the later phases focus on generating acceptance of the second.

While one could perhaps conceptualize a scenario in which the second condition is satisfied absent the first, in all likelihood the delineation of the group precedes or perhaps occurs simultaneously with the articulation of political rights for the group. However, this study takes neither of these as unproblematic for any putative nation. Further, it assumes that individuals within the group will vary in the degree to which they accept either or both propositions. Particularly in cases of “ethnogenesis,” what appears to be involved is the (gradually) growing but uneven acceptance by individuals within the putative ethnic group that in fact such a group exists; this may begin with a few committed activists and may in fact never convince all putative members, but it may be the case that beyond a certain (potentially nonspecifiable) threshold, an autocatalytic process begins in which ascription to the identity is relatively unproblematic for many individuals.

It follows that even for a group that satisfies the second condition, in which many or most members believe that their distinctiveness gives rise to political rights, the group need not be in agreement about what those rights are. Indeed, most ethnopolitical movements in Western Europe have members subscribing to a range of, sometimes incommensurate, goals. Necessarily,
therefore, and unlike many models of nationalism, Cartrite expressly rejects bifurcating the universe of ethnopolitical cases based on the political aspirations of some members of the putative ethnic group, namely independence versus those movements that aspire to something less. It also does not attempt to explain variations in tactics (such as the choice of violent means by some members of some groups). Nor does it try to account for, in particular, variation in levels of electoral support for ethnic parties in national elections, studies of which tend to dominate the literature, at least for European cases. The issue, then, for Cartrite is not what accounts for varying levels popular support for well-established ethnopolitical movements, but rather what accounts for their emergence (although the model does demonstrate that, in fact, the realization of higher levels of ethnopolitical mobilization over time necessarily entails the broadening of popular support beyond a small group of committed activists).

The findings of that study suggest that models focusing on economic advantage/disadvantage, a critical role played by the bourgeoisie, and historical experience fail to account for the emergence of ethnopolitical movements. Further, models focusing on capitalist development expressly, or the technological achievements associated with industrial capitalism, cannot account for the variance in the occurrence or timing of ethnopolitical mobilization. However, modern conceptualizations of the nation (per Herder) and popular sovereignty (per Rousseau) clearly play a role, as do changing norms regarding the rights of ethnic groups and self-determination. German Romanticism clearly lays the intellectual foundation for these movements, and intellectuals play a prominent role, particularly in the earlier stages of ethnopolitical mobilization, as they attempt to preserve and reify the ethnic identity through both symbols and, in particular, literature and the standardization and subsequent teaching of the local language. Modern state policies, particularly regarding public education (e.g. Weber 1975), also
play an important role. So although Cartrite does not find support for strongly modernist theories (such as Gellner), there is clear evidence that the modern period does provide an array of conditions important for ethnopolitical mobilization broadly.

The model was built based on the fifteen linguistically-distinct ethnic groups in France, Spain, and the United Kingdom, tracing ethnopolitical mobilization from 1800-2003. While this approach captured a range of cases in building the model, it arguably left few cases for model testing. Further, by selecting only linguistically-distinct cases (which the literature tends to use as a proxy for distinct ethnic groups), the model did not evaluate the relative importance of having a separate language in terms of ethnopolitical mobilization, although, in fairness, non-linguistically distinct group mobilization tends to be defined as “regionalist” rather than “ethnic” and is almost always treated as a distinct phenomenon despite many shared characteristics.

The research presented in this paper is intended to test Cartrite’s model with three new cases: Faroe, Shetland, and Orkney. Although part of Denmark (and therefore arguably rather distinct from the French, Spanish, and British cases), the Faroese case is similar in many respects to the cases explored in the earlier study and should, therefore, be a reasonable test for the model. Shetland and Orkney, however, represent more difficult tests of the model, in that while distinct regions within Scotland, they have not had (at least arguably until very recently) a separate language in the modern period around which to generate any sort of ethnic movement. The three cases share many similarities (again particularly Shetland and Orkney), both with each other and, to a somewhat lesser extent, with other Western European cases. The emphasis must necessarily be, therefore, on the differences between them and how well (or poorly) the model anticipates these differences. As these cases tend to be overlooked in the literature, the paper will provide reasonable background detail on each case before comparing the differences in ethnopolitical
mobilization in detail, concluding with an evaluation of the performance of Cartrite’s model in explaining these cases.

Faroe

The Faroes, an archipelago of volcanic islands located in the North Atlantic between Norway and Iceland and having as their nearest neighbor the Shetland Islands, were likely first “settled” by Irish monks in the seventh century. Norse settlement from Shetland, Orkney, and the Hebrides (islands off the west coast of Scotland) likely began in the ninth century, followed by direct settlement from Norway in the tenth century (Nauerby 1996: 28-29). The northern latitudes, steep volcanic geology of the islands, and severe winters render most of the islands unsuitable for agriculture beyond very small areas, with sheep-herding rapidly becoming the predominant economic mode (indeed the Faroese name Føroyar means “sheep islands”), supplemented by bird catching, and later whaling and fishing. As a result, the demographic carrying capacity of around 4400 inhabitants was apparently reached no later than the thirteenth century and was not exceeded until the late 18th century; even the post-Black Death (1350) demographic rebound in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries failed to exceed this apparent upper limit (Wylie 1986: 14).

The Faroese language is, not surprisingly, derived from Old Norse, which the Norwegians brought to Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, and on to Iceland and Greenland.2 The Faroese agreed to pay tribute to the Norwegian king in about 1035 and came under direct control of the Norwegian king in 1180, with the local bishopric at Kirkjubøur coming under the jurisdiction of the archdiocese of Niðaros (Trondheim) in 1152. The western orientation of the Norwegian kingdom, aided by the proximity of Faroe to other Norwegian holdings in Shetland,

2 The languages derived from Old Norse, while related to Danish, Swedish, and standard Norwegian, are mutually unintelligible with those languages.
Orkney, and the Hebrides, as well as its location on the route to the much larger colony at Iceland as well as Greenland, kept the small colony of Faroe in close contact with the political and commercial powers in Bergen and at the heart of the Norwegian kingdom (Nauerby 1996: 29).

However, the union of the Norwegian and Danish crowns in 1380 and the subsequent reorientation of Norwegian interests towards the Baltic issued in a period of relative isolation for Faroe. Although trade with the Hanseatic League was allowed in 1361, by the sixteenth century all Faroese trade was under a monopoly charter, sometimes to private individuals and sometimes to royal trading companies. This economic control, and subsequent laws against trade with “foreigners” further increased Faroese isolation. The Reformation, effected in 1535, led to the replacement of Latin in both church and legal affairs by Danish, further strengthening the power of Copenhagen over the islands. However, although an Icelandic bible was produced in 1584, no Faroese version was produced during this period; as a result, Faroese died as a written language (Wylie 1986: 25).

Despite occasional contact with Dutch, French, English and other traders (and pirates), the continuance of the trade monopoly and the limited goods the Faroese produced for export (primarily woolen stockings) in their largely cashless economy exacerbated the isolation of Faroe from the rest of Europe up until the late eighteenth century. The population remained very small (in no small part due to very restrictive marriage laws expressly intended to limit the size of the population (Wylie 1986: 69-71)) and dependent on, in effect, Danish subsidies through the allowance for the trading company to operate at financial losses. Danish words were increasingly evident in Faroese, so much so that by the late eighteenth century Jens Christian Svabo was motivated, as so many others did in Europe at the time, to collect Faroese ballads and
folktales before the language became extinct (which he personally, although Faroese, thought would benefit the people of Faroe by allowing them to more fully integrate into Danish society).

It was the nineteenth century that was to transform Faroese society and, along the way, lay the groundwork for the vibrant ethnopolitical mobilization that was to emerge near the end of the century. A number of factors, including slight changes in landholding patterns, peace in Denmark after 1722 and a related drop in grain prices until the 1770s, and a more effective operation of the royal monopoly, contributed to a gradual but persistent increase in the population, facilitated later by the introduction of the potato towards the end of the century. Fishing and pilot whale hunting became increasingly important as sources of both food and economic activity, particularly during the Napoleonic wars. The population exceeded 5,000 in 1801, expanded to over 8,000 by mid-century, and was approximately 15,000 by the end of the century; with immigration to Faroe largely unknown, this expansion was a function of domestic population growth resulting from the shift away from herding to commercial fishing, particularly after 1830, which enabled the economy to support far larger numbers of inhabitants than had heretofore been possible.

Following the Treaty of Kiel (1814), in which Denmark lost possession of mainland Norway to Sweden but retained Faroe, Iceland, and Greenland, the ties to Norway weakened even further; indeed, institutionally Faroe became an amt (district), undifferentiated from the rest of constitutionally unitary Denmark. The onset of commercial fishing, on the other hand, opened Faroese society to outside influences, trends which were accelerated by the ending of the royal monopoly in 1856. Political liberalization in Denmark in 1831 and 1849 raised questions regarding the constitutional status of Faroe in the unitary Danish state, and the influence of German Romanticism increasingly led scholars to build upon Svabo’s work not to record a dying
language but to preserve and revive it among a growing, increasingly outward looking Faroese population.

A small number of scholars took up the issue of preserving Faroese in the early 19th century, following the writing of Svabo’s (unpublished) collection, in which he relied on a phonetic system, informed by Danish spelling conventions and diacritical marks; the manuscript also contained a Faroese-Danish-Latin dictionary. In 1811 an Icelandic grammar was published, demonstrating that Icelandic represented an altogether distinct language, with its own conventions and marks, from the other Scandinavian language and stimulating interest in the place of Faroese in the linguistic family. Some considered it to be a dialect of Icelandic, while others suggested that it had, in fact, evolved to become a dialect of Danish. Subsequent publications of Faroese ballads occurred in 1822 and 1831, again pointing to the need for a standardized form of written Faroese to be established.

The issue of how to write Faroese, with some advocating for the application of Icelandic methods and characters while others stressed the appropriateness of using Danish conventions, would divide the emerging linguistic scholarly community for the remainder of the century. A second, parallel issue involved the desire by some, who tended overwhelmingly to advocate the Icelandic written approach, to purge the language of Danish words, relying on Old Norse or Icelandic words as substitutes. The counter-argument was that such a language would be, in fact, far removed from the spoken language, was therefore elitist in nature, and would inevitably be difficult to teach to a population increasingly familiar with written Danish (particularly after the establishment of compulsory public schooling in 1844).

In terms of Cartrite’s model of ethnopolitical mobilization, while the publication in 1822 of Faroese ballads may represent a convenient, if somewhat arbitrary (given the prior efforts of
Svabo) starting date for the initiation of cultural mobilization, it is clear that the first half of the
nineteenth century represents the initial phase of ethnopolitical mobilization. Activism initially
focused on the preservation of Faroese culture and language, with later efforts directed at
resolving the issue of how to write the language. Political advocacy, in which cultural elites
advocate for institutional accommodations for the culture but do not organize to send individuals
to participate directly in government, appears in 1849 with the reorganization of the Danish state
under the new constitution. Since the time of the Treaty of Kiel, Faroe’s autonomy had been at
its nadir, being governed as a district (amt) as were all other parts of the Danish realm, with the
partial exception of Iceland. Although Faroese were elected to both the new lower and upper
houses, Naubury, among others, cautions that this should not be understood as an expression of
nationalist sentiment, but rather a preference for locals over Danish appointees (1996: 46; see
also Debes 1995: 72). However, the constitutional reforms led to the reestablishment of the
Faroese Løgting, albeit as only an advisory body.

It proved to be the Education Act, which was withdrawn in 1854 due to popular
resistance, which proved to be the focus for the emergence of cultural political advocacy,
although there were simultaneous efforts to have Faroe, which was not even mentioned in the
new constitution, institutionally differentiated from the rest of Denmark. The (hotly contested)
establishment of a written standard for Faroese and arguments for the need to preserve the
expression of Faroese culture in education were given further impetus by the explicit recognition
of Faroese distinctiveness. However, political advocacy took on a more organized form when,
after a series of meetings among Faroese students in Copenhagen, the Føroyingafelag (Faroese
Association) was established in 1881.
The emergence of ethnopolitical nationalism in Faroe can be conveniently dated to 26 December, 1888, since referred to as the “Christmas Meeting,” in which a running debate in the only Faroese newspaper (Danish language) among linguists was brought to a head, leading to the formation of a parallel Føroyingafelag in Faroe. Participants were in general agreement that the Faroese nationality was most clearly evidenced through its language and that the extinction of the language, which participants appear to consider a very real possibility despite prior efforts to preserve the language, would lead to the extinction of the Faroese as a nation. In January 1889, the group published a programme demanding the protection and extension of Faroese, particularly in the spheres of religion and education. The group also established the first Faroese language periodical.

The emergence of a clear, domestic group advocating for the Faroese language and, in their own terms, the Faroese nation, served to polarize Faroese politics. While conservatives did not consider themselves Danish, they argued that it was the union that had enabled the Faroes to expand and open up to the world, economically, socially, and culturally, and that the ties to Denmark should be preserved. These tended to advocate the use of the Danish orthographic conventions and Danish loan-words, arguing that attempts to impose an “Icelandic” spelling were both a guise for secessionist aspirations and elitist, as the language as both written and spoken would be dramatically different from that in use by the common folk and difficult for them to learn.

Conversely, the “radical” wing in the linguistic debate argued that, in fact, the differentiation of Faroese from Danish was the primary mechanism to preserve Faroese identity, despite the difficulties their agenda imposed. Some, but not all, in this camp did indeed seek to loosen the ties binding Faroe to Denmark, particularly in the wake of the establishment of
Icelandic Home Rule in 1904. In 1906 the radical Jóannes Patursson, elected to the Danish parliament in 1901 and a member of the Løgting, returned from Copenhagen with his “Proposal” (as it continues to be referred to), which outlined the extension to Faroe of additional competencies, a demarcation of what was to be considered purely internal Faroese matters and what would be administered as Danish affairs, and an annual contribution to Faroe from the treasury. This became the single political issue in the elections of 1906 (both for the Løgting and for representatives in both chambers of the Danish parliament); opponents of the Proposal won all three elections.

In the wake of these events, two political parties emerged: Sambandsflokkurin (Unionist Party), advocating the retention of close ties to Denmark, and Sjálvstýrisflokkurin (Self-Rule Party), which advocated further devolution. The language issue continued to be the dominant political concern dividing the two camps until the appearance in the 1930s of the Javnaðarflokkurin (Social Democratic Party), a Unionist party with more sympathy for nationalist concerns and representing an ideological left position on social and economic issues. Faroese was not recognized as the primary language of education until 1938 and in church affairs the following year.

The Nazi occupation of Denmark and subsequent friendly occupation of Faroe by the United Kingdom was to have a decisive impact on Faroese nationalism. The Faroese were allowed by the British to govern themselves through the Løgting and a provisional constitution passed in May 1940. The islands experienced an economic boom with the rise in fish exports to Britain (albeit with heavy loss of life and material). The self-rule movement split, with the more secessionist wing emerging as the Fólkaflokkurin (People’s Party) and realized one seat shy of a majority (12 of 25) in the 1943 elections; the rump Self-Rule Party and the Social Democrats,
both of which were relatively flexible in terms of accommodating changes to Faroe’s institutional status, joined the Unionist Party in the government. The Faroese flag, first established by students in Copenhagen in 1919, was flown on Faroese ships during the war and recognized by the British as the legitimate flag.

Following the liberation of Denmark, it was clear to all parties that the political situation could not return to the *status quo antebellum*, both because of the wartime experience and the independence of Iceland in 1944. As a result, a referendum was held in 1946 in which voters were asked to choose between two options: secession or the “Offer,” which entailed Danish recognition of the provisional constitution while retaining Danish oversight in internal matters. The People’s Party, fearing a majority would support the “Offer,” asked that those not in favor of full independence but supportive of more extensive local governance vote “no” rather than for either of the two options. In the end, a slight majority of valid votes cast (the “no” votes were considered invalid) were in favor of independence. The Danes were “stunned” by the results (Rógví 2004: 35) and the process of establishing an independent government was initiated, both in Faroe and in Copenhagen. However, the Unionists argued that, in fact, the “no” votes meant a majority of voters were against secession and asked the Danish government to intervene. A further debate erupted regarding the legal nature of the referendum as either binding or consultative. Eventually Danish King annulled the results and an election was called in which Unionist forces won overwhelmingly.

This confusing turn of events led to negotiations which established Home Rule in 1948. The Faroese were granted jurisdiction over a wide range of issues, with most foreign, defense, and legal competencies being retained by Denmark. The Faroese language and flag were officially recognized, although Faroese did not replace Danish as the principal language of the
courts until 1985. In many respects, then, the objectives of the Christmas Meeting were not realized until almost a century later (Debes 1995: 80).

In the wake of the failed referendum, the Tjóðveldisflokkurin (Republican Party) was formed as a left-of-center secessionist party, completing the two-axis constellation of political parties that persists through the present. In 1972 Faroe opted out of the Danish ascension to the European Community. In 1998 the Republican and People’s Party each won eight seats and the Social Democrats, with seven, agreed to join in a pro-independence coalition. However, negotiations with the Danish government broke down, resulting in more devolution of authority without any steps made towards full independence. Since then, shifting coalitions have prevented any clear, stable preponderance for either secession or continued Home Rule; however, this issue, which generated the first two parties in Faroe, continues to dominate Faroese political life.

As it has since the 1830s, commercial fishing continues to dominate the Faroese economy and represents over 90% of its exports. The vulnerability of Faroe to downturns in this single industry were made plain when fishing catches dropped precipitously in the early 1990s, leading to an economic and banking crisis. Since then, however, the economy has rebounded, with Faroe having very low unemployment and very high GDP per capita. The annual block grant from Denmark has been voluntarily reduced over the past few years, and the Faroese even put together a $51 million loan for troubled Iceland during the financial crisis of 2008. Although the presence of significant oil reserves west of Shetland raise the prospect for fields in Faroese waters, to date no significant reserves have been identified. Interestingly, in personal interviews conducted in July 2008 with people covering a range of positions regarding independence, it was the overwhelming consensus that the discovery of significant oil fields would lead, almost
immediately, to Faroese secession, as economic uncertainty appears to be the strongest remaining argument levied by unionists.

**Shetland**

Unlike the volcanic Faroes, the Shetland Islands are the remains of a submerged mountain range that erosion and glaciation have smoothed over time. As a result, although Shetland (567 sq. mi.) and Faroe (540 sq. mi.) are approximately the same size, there is far more land available for pasturage and, to a much more limited degree, agriculture in Shetland than in Faroe. Ruins of Shetland’s Neolithic population as well as Pictish artifacts clearly demonstrate that the islands have been occupied for millennia. The islands were the northernmost outpost of Pictish culture and, as such, lay on the extreme periphery of the known world of the British Isles.

Shetland was settled by the Norse in the same series that settled Faroe, although the record does not indicate how the Norse interacted with the Picts they found; what is clear is that Norse culture initially intermixed with and subsequently replaced Pictish starting in the eighth century (Fenton 1978: 14). The second wave of Norse settlement in the ninth century appears to have involved the occupation of remaining available land, and estimates of the Shetlandic population during the Norse period range from 12,000 (Smith 1984: 6) to as high as 20,000 (Small 1983: 28, although many contend this figure is far too high), which appears to have reached at least the lower bound relatively quickly. The local variant of Old Norse spoken in the islands was called Norn, which died out in the eighteenth century.

Initially, Shetland (and Caithness on the Scottish mainland) were part of the powerful Earldom of Orkney and, as a result, during the early centuries of Norse rule their paths were intertwined. Unlike its position in the Pictish world, Shetland found itself at the center of the sprawling Norse empire in the North Atlantic, close to Norway and on routes to Faroe, Iceland,
and Greenland and close by Orkney. This, when combined with the dramatic population increase, made Shetland a far more interconnected and vibrant place than perhaps at any point in its history.

In 1195, as a punishment for Earl Harold’s tacit support for the attempted removal of King Sverre from the Norwegian throne, Shetland was taken from the earldom and placed directly under the control of the crown (as were Faroe, Iceland, and Greenland, all as part of a wave of the consolidation of royal power in Norway). Royal control over Shetland was efficient and effective during this period, ensuring Shetland’s orientation was eastward (Crawford 1983: 33-6), with the crown tightly regulating and restricting trade, as in Faroe and elsewhere.

The relative decline of Norwegian power during the fourteenth century caused the crown to appoint the Sinclairs, a Scottish family, as administrators of Shetland. Scottish penetration of Shetland prior to this period was limited to the church hierarchy, as Shetland remained part of the diocese of Orkney (Donaldson 1983: 9). But in the years prior to 1469, the Scottish presence was very limited, the focus of the islands was eastward, and the language most widely spoken was Norn.

After almost three centuries of pursuing separate paths, Orkney and Shetland were brought back together with the pledging of Orkney (1468) and Shetland (1469) as redeemable collateral for the dowry of Margaret, Princess of Denmark in her marriage to James III of Scotland. Although it appears the crown fully intended to redeem the islands when funds were later realized, the Scottish crown rebuffed these later attempts and officially annexed both Orkney and Shetland to Scotland in 1472. Unlike the Norwegian crown, which tightly regulated trade with Shetland, the Scots opened up the islands to trade immediately, with links being expanded with the Hanseatic League and the Dutch, in particular. There was, in the decades
immediately following the transfer, a relative wave of Scots immigration to Shetland, mainly as traders in the now open markets, who brought with them their Lowland Scots language. While this wave subsided in the early seventeenth century and was not repeated, there was a steady trickle for many centuries of Scots moving to the islands, gradually changing the culture there (Donaldson 1983: 13-5).

Thus during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Shetland again found itself at the center of a great crossroads, but increasingly with was a function of its fisheries and the trade with Continental Europe they engendered (Goodlad 1983: 107-9; Smith 1990: 31-2). The expansion of trade led to a population growth during the seventeenth century up to about 20,000 as more jobs and currency enabled a larger population to be sustained. However, Scottish (and later British) centralization of authority and taxation in the seventeenth centuries undermined this vibrant cosmopolitanism, trade with the outside world decreased, and the population declined during the first half of the eighteenth century. During this period Norn was clearly being replaced by Scots as the language of the people as formal education was introduced and the Presbyterian Church increased its effectiveness; Graham highlights evidence suggesting most Shetlanders were bilingual by 1630, with Norn being the language of the home and Scots that of business, commerce, the church, the courts, and the church (1981: 220).

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a revival in fishing trade, in part due to technological improvements in fishing, and a population boom that would carry through to the middle nineteenth century, when Shetland reached its peak population of over 31,000 (Thomson 1981: 151). This was followed, in the years after World War II, by the dramatic growth of the hand knitwear industry and an expansion of the small tourist sector. However, the population begun its slow decline after 1871 to its current rate of roughly 22,000 inhabitants, particularly
through emigration resulting from the freedoms and opportunities provided by the 1872 Education and 1886 Crofter’s Acts. And the direct administration of the islands by London following the war restored a sense of being very much on the periphery of the British world (Smith 1984: 282). Indeed, according to Donald, writing in 1969:

> It seemed impossible to persuade the central authorities that a community as remote from London as Prague or Genoa had its own peculiar problems and prospects… I submit that London can understand Shetland no more than Shetland can understand London, but we in Shetland do not decide what is best for London. Yet in London were and are taken decisions which affect the basic fabric of social and economic life in these islands, taken it would seem, on all too many occasions, by persons with little or no knowledge or understanding of the Shetland situation. (Donald 1981: 214-5)

The discovery of North Sea oil has led to a partial reorientation of Shetland from periphery to crossroads, as Lerwick provides an excellent jumping-off point for oil crews and workers from many countries are again present there and at the vital Sullom Voe oil terminal. Oil revenues have bolstered the local economy, partially managed through trusts overseen by the Shetland Islands Council, established in 1975. Tourism has continued to expand as well, diversifying the economic base of the islands, with fishing by far the largest industry in 2008.

In 1947 the New Shetlander literary magazine was established to provide local authors an outlet for their creativity; from the beginning the magazine has published works in Shetlandic, the local Scots dialect. In 1969, to mark the 500th anniversary of the transference of Shetland to Scotland, students created the Shetland flag (the colors of the Scottish Saltire but with a Scandinavian cross design; it was not officially recognized until 2005). In 1979 a first attempt at a Shetlandic dictionary was made as a small group attempted to preserve the local dialect. And the Shetland Movement, which produced candidates for election, appeared on the political scene from 1977-1987.

Much of the current energy regarding Shetlandic identity focuses on the desirability of standardizing and teaching the local dialect. Some argue that to standardize the dialect across its
many variants in the islands would be to effectively kill an organic, evolving language. Others see in attempts to standardize and teach the language the possibility of a “nationalist” agenda for possible secession from Scotland and/or the UK. As was the case in Faroe, proponents of language standardization argue that such a move will help save a dying culture independent of the political implications of such an advent.

Interestingly, Scottish nationalism, the successful reestablishment of a Scottish Parliament, and the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) goal of independence appear to be exacerbating this debate. Individual interviews clearly indicate that Shetland is perhaps the least Scottish part of Scotland, with clear evidence of its Norse roots and ties to Norway and Faroe, in particular, found throughout the islands. In the 1997 referendum on devolution, Shetlandic turnout was among the lowest in Scotland and support for the parliament (and its taxation powers) was tepid at best. Interestingly, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament increased the institutional distinctiveness of Shetland: in addition to the Shetland Islands Council, the islands represent a single constituency in the Parliament (Orkney and Shetland comprise a single constituency in Westminster). Calls by the SNP for independence raise concerns for interviewees, most of whom expressed the desire that the whole issue be set aside for the time being. However, the possibility of a Faroese secession clearly impacts the view of some interviewees as pointing to the potential secession of Shetland from any Scottish secession and of outright independence. For the time being, however, these are salient, if purely speculative, concerns.

**Orkney**

The Orkney Islands represent, in geographical terms, the opposite extreme from Faroe of the three cases presented here. They are within eyesight of mainland Scotland, are smaller in
area than the other two, and yet because of their relatively flat topography they provide by far the most arable and fertile land of the three island groups. Indeed, people in both Shetland and Orkney quip that “a Shetlander is a fisherman with a bit of land; an Orcadian is a farmer with a boat.”

Orkney’s Neolithic ruins are so numerous and in such condition that the area has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site. Based on these remains, it is clear that Orkney provided inhabitants with significant material resources from which a relatively large population could be sustained. And the proximity to northern Scotland made Pictish occupation of the islands a relative certainty as that culture expanded up the northeastern coast of Scotland.

While Shetland lies near the route from Norway to Faroe and beyond, Orkney, off the northern tip of Scotland, lies on the route to the Hebrides, Ireland, the Isle of Man, and other areas the Norse first raided and then undertook to settle. This strategic location, with close proximity to Caithness and Sutherland in Scotland, and the favorable agricultural conditions contributed to the Earldom of Orkney becoming a legitimate Norse power in its own right, under the control of the Norwegian crown but only weakly so, and oftentimes serving as a base to challengers to the king; the jarls (earls) were able to establish a more institutionally integrated society well beyond that of neighboring Shetland, further suggesting the social, political, and economic power of the islands (Cant 1984: 173). Orkney’s position in the region, including its management of the Hebrides, Caithness and Sutherland during the early Norse period, also contributed to ongoing Scottish interest in Orkney from an early date. The families of the Orkney Earls intermarried into Scottish nobility early and became enmeshed in political events there, such that the earls were largely Scottish in the early 13th century (Donaldson 1983: 8-9).
However, this process occurred mainly after Shetland was severed from Orkney, leaving only the unified diocese as a formal linkage between the two.

The lack of significant control of Orkney by Norway and, later, Denmark allowed Orkney to remain reasonably open to trade for agricultural goods, woolens, and fish during the period, again in contrast to Shetland (and Faroe). When combined with the earlier infiltration of Scots into Orcadian society, including the lowland Scots language, the transference of Orkney to Scotland in 1468 represented a far less severe transition than did the change in Shetland the following year. However, from this point forward the Orcadian and Shetlandic experiences under Scottish and later British rule are similar in most important respects, including the importance of North Sea oil for the local economy, with the exception that Orkney was Scotized earlier (and perhaps more completely) than Shetland, appears to have experienced more relocation by Scots to the area, its economy has always been and remains more diversified, and its contacts with (and perhaps in part reactions against) the Scottish mainland more intense.

Perhaps not surprisingly, attempts to standardize the Orcadian dialect of Scots and the establishment of other symbols has lagged behind that of Shetland. An Orcadian literary journal, *Orkney Voice*, with some publications in the dialect, appeared in 1983 but folded in 2002 when no younger editors could be found take over the journal. A dictionary and grammar, produced again by a small group of intellectuals, only appeared in the late 1990s. And a flag was designed and accepted, by referendum, in 2007.

Individual interviews suggest that, from the Orcadian perspective, Shetlanders are more “aggressive” or “in your face” about their identity than are Orcadians. However, there does also seem to be a stronger sense of anti-Scottishness in Orkney than in Shetland (where Edinburgh is often thought to be as removed from local interest as London or Brussels). In the 1997
referendum, both turnout and support for the two issues was lower in Orkney than in Shetland, with Orcadians rejecting granting taxation powers to the new parliament. Indeed, the prospect of a “no/no” vote in Orkney led to discussions regarding the implications of including a region under the new jurisdiction which had rejected the institution; that this issue was avoided with the “yes/no” vote appears to have simply pushed the question off to a future date.

Comparing the cases

In terms of Cartrite’s model of ethnopolitical mobilization, there are clear differences between, in particular, Faroe on the one hand and Shetland and Orkney on the other. Phase I (cultural activism) was initiated in Faroe by Svabo in the late eighteenth century and became increasingly evident in the 1820s. Cultural activism, at least in terms of efforts regarding the local language, appear in Shetland in the 1940s and in Orkney in the 1970s, with both movements still addressing issues of the dialect as a language and the purpose of trying to preserve and extend their usage. Phase 2, that of political advocacy, appears in Faroe in the 1870s, again very similar in both timing and nature to many of the groups surveyed by Cartrite (2003). A distinct effort at advocacy separate from elections, perhaps in the form of interest group formation, is not immediately apparent in either Orkney or Shetland, perhaps in part because the role of interest groups in the British system is fairly limited. Non-competitive party formation as defined in Cartrite’s Phase 3, and developed more fully by Miodownik and Cartrite (2006), does not appear in Faroe, which seems to have “skipped” to Phase 4 with the formation of a self-rule party contesting both local and Danish elections in Faroe. The Orkney and Shetland movements contested elections in the 1980s and persist as organizations, but

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3 However, it should be stressed that Miodownik and Cartrite argue that the formation of non-competitive ethnic parties appears to be an attempt to demark the “territory” as perceived by the political elites prior to attempting to be electorally competitive in any district in cases where the territorial boundary is contested. In the case of Faroe the territory is unproblematic, thus obviating this functional necessity.
membership is very small and it is not clear that their brief appearance on the political stage warrants; in the original study contesting two consecutive elections was required for coding purposes. Thus what needs to be explained is the dramatically more substantial ethnopolitical mobilization in Faroe than in Shetland and Orkney and, to a lesser extent, the more subtle differences between the latter two.

The three cases share many similarities that can reasonably be ruled out as explanatory factors. All three are, of course, island groups, which should facilitate the differentiation of the local identity from the larger group relative to groups sharing territory with the dominant group, but would not account for the variance here. All three were settled by the Norse at approximately the same time, with the complete elimination of prior cultures in the cases of Shetland and Orkney shortly after Norse settlement and were subject to attempts by the Norwegian crown to assert its control during the same period. All three had economies in which trade in woolen goods was the significant export through the middle ages, and all three experienced a shift towards commercial fishing. All three have relatively small populations. All three are distant from their respective metropolitan capitals, although in the modern period all three were institutionally penetrated by their respective controlling powers. Finally, the three maintain ties with one another, which might lead to a convergence of exogenous factors such as changing environmental conditions, relations with outside powers, etc. and internal responses within each case.

Physical Proximity to the Metropole

One key difference between the cases is in physical proximity not to the metropolitan capital but to metropolitan territory. Faroe is quite distant from both Norway and Denmark, being closest to Shetland and Iceland but relatively isolated in the North Atlantic. Shetland
represents a middle position, being equidistant from Bergen and Aberdeen, but reasonably close to both Orkney and Faroe. At the other extreme, Orkney lies within sight of northern Scotland. This differentiation, with clear implications for trade, ease of communication, and likelihood of population transfer and exposure to the dominant group, suggests that Orkney should be the most vulnerable to its metropolitan culture and Faroe least so or, put differently, that ethnopolitical mobilization should be easiest in Faroe and most difficult in Orkney.

**Language survival and distinctiveness**

As stated above, the survival of the Faroese language was doubted by Faroese activists as recently as the late nineteenth century, as they struggled to establish a written form for the language and protect it from further erosion in the face of the growing importance of Danish through, in particular, education. Indeed, Faroese was considered by many during this period to be merely a dialect of Danish and not worth preserving; thus the contemporary status of Faroese as a distinct language is, in fact, a function of the efforts of activists to “invent” this distinction through their explicit efforts to purge the language of Danish loan words and establish an Icelandic alphabet.

Both Shetlandic and Orcadian are, as stated above, distinct dialects of lowland Scots, itself not an official language in Scotland (although Ulster Scots has official status in Ulster). In this respect, they are dialects of a language related to but distinct from English. However, Cartrite (2003) argued that at least part of the emphasis on Scots Gaelic by the nationalist movement was because Scots was too similar to English to facilitate the differentiation of Scottish culture from English. It may be the case, therefore, that Shetlandic and Orcadian will suffer from being too close to English to allow for effective mobilization. At this point, language
activism appears restricted to a relatively small number of committed intellectuals, with their efforts not yet generating widespread acceptance.

Two caveats must, however, be raised here. First, although the distinctiveness of Faroese vis-à-vis Danish is seemingly greater than that of the Northern Islands dialects and English, which itself could help explain Faroese ethnopolitical mobilization compared to the other cases, there is no appreciable difference in the distinctiveness of Shetlandic versus Orcadian that could account for the less significant but nonetheless evident difference in ethnopolitical mobilization between these cases. And second, while the prospects for the establishment of Shetlandic and Orcadian as primary languages appear dim, efforts to save Faroese were at one point considered equally futile. While the circumstances are, of course different, particularly considering that Faroese continued to be widely used in the home during the period of cultural mobilization while Orcadian and Shetlandic are much less widely used, prudence suggests being sensitive to giving too much weight to this single variable.

Demographic size and change

A third key difference between the cases is the much larger size of the contemporary Faroese population than those of Shetland and Orkney: over twice as large. Indeed, the Faroese population, at approximately 48,000, approaches the common rule-of-thumb minimum size for language survival of 50,000 speakers. If in fact it is the strength of the local language that informs the strength of ethnic identification and subsequent ethnopolitical mobilization, this variable itself would seem to hold the key.

However, as reflected above, the Faroese population was, until quite recently, very small and historically well below those of Shetland and Orkney. As Table 1 highlights, the Faroese population only surpassed the other cases in the early 1930s and exceeded 40,000 only in the
1970s, well after ethnopolitical mobilization was underway. Conversely, Shetland and Orkney have had relatively larger populations for centuries, with significant population growth in the mid-nineteenth century, yet lagged behind Faroe in terms of ethnopolitical mobilization even then.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Faroe</th>
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<td>2007</td>
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Compiled from Wylie 1986; Fenton 1978; Faroe in Statistics 2009; Shetland in Statistics 2008; and the Orkney Islands Council.

These data certainly challenge the notion of a “minimum threshold” for ethnopolitical mobilization raised, but not evaluated, in Cartrite (2003). However, it is perhaps the nature of the demographic growth that needs to be taken into account. Recall that in Faroe, demographic expansion occurred almost entirely due to the growth of the Faroese population, allowing for the retention of the unwritten language and resilience of the local culture in the face of expanding Danish administrative control. Conversely, variations in demographic size in Shetland and Orkney were a function of internal demographic growth, emigration away from the islands, and immigration by Scots to both Shetland and Orkney, but with Orkney experiencing the larger share. Thus people representing the dominant culture settled in, and partially replaced, those from the local culture in Shetland and Orkney, while no such dynamic occurred in Faroe.
Economic diversity

Cartrite (2003) dismissed the range of theories that focus on economic determinants of ethnopolitical mobilization, suggesting that the theories are so varied and contradictory, and because economic issues are likely always to occur alongside other political issues, that the models themselves yield little explanatory value, particularly over the longer historical trajectories explored by that study. However, before assessing the possible impact of variation in the economies of the three cases and the implications for accounting for variation in ethnopolitical mobilization, this paper must address an interesting finding based on individual interviews in all three cases as well as subsequent interviews in Scotland: in every case interviewees identifying themselves as opposing further devolution or independence would raise the general issue of economic uncertainty such changes could entail and, although no one was able to give specific examples of economic problems to be expected, each gave a general sense that the uncertainty was enough to lead them to oppose political change. Interestingly, supporters of devolution and independence often agreed that economic uncertainty was a real possibility; however, these individuals most often emphasized that issues of identity preservation were simply more important than economic uncertainty, leading to their political positions. In other words, people on both sides of these issues tended to agree that there was (perhaps considerable) economic uncertainty associated with further devolution or independence, but proponents most frequently argued that the salience of economic uncertainty was lower than issues of identity, suggesting that the key dynamic is not the empirical issue of economic uncertainty but its relative salience within the group relative to other issues.

In light of this finding, then, one might expect that the greater the potential for economic uncertainty the lower the likelihood for ethnopolitical mobilization (assuming that the greater the
uncertainty the greater the issue salience) and, further, recent experiences with economic
downturns might reasonably increase the salience of economic uncertainty. All three cases have
economies stronger in many measures (unemployment, per capita GDP, etc.) than their
respective metropolitan averages. And all three cases, not surprisingly, have similar sectors in
their economies (i.e. fishing, knitwear, tourism, agriculture), although Faroe does not have
significant online oil reserves as do Shetland and Orkney.

Unfortunately, the three governments report economic data very differently, making
comparisons particularly difficult. However, some general conclusions can be drawn from the
varied data. Fishing overwhelmingly dominates the Faroese economy in terms of employment
and exports (fishing accounted for 95% of export values in 2008 (Faroe in Statistics)), with
knitwear and tourism comprising very small sectors. As stated above, this overwhelming
reliance on fishing makes the Faroese economy vulnerable to sudden, if temporary, shifts in the
catch in a particular season, as the economic collapse of 1992 amply demonstrated. Shetland too
has fishing as the largest source of economic productivity, although in 2007 this represented less
than 50% of economic activity, with government services coming in second, followed by oil and
distantly by agriculture, tourism, and knitwear (Shetland in Statistics 2008). However,
employment figures suggest that Orkney’s largest sector is now tourism, followed by agriculture
(particularly beef), fishing, and oil. So although the mix is similar in all three cases, the
distributions appear to vary dramatically.

It is the Faroese economy that appears to be the most vulnerable and has suffered the
most significant collapse in recent years. The Orcadian economy, by contrast, is far more
diversified and less reliant on the uncertainties of fishing than the other two, with Shetland
occupying a middle position. One possible explanation linking this pattern to ethnopolitical
mobilization would be that Orkney, because of its tourism, might have more to lose through devolution or independence than the other cases; however, such an argument presupposes an erection of borders and travel restrictions that appear unlikely to occur in the Schengen area, even were Orkney, in an extreme scenario, exit the European Union as well as the UK. In any event, this rationale was never articulated by interviewees as the explanation for their concerns. In the absence of any causal linkage, this variable again appears to fail to account for ethnopolitical mobilization.

**Experience as an independent state**

Cartrite (2003) demonstrated that variation across the cases in terms of experience as an independent state and years incorporated into the metropolitan polity were not significant predictors of variation in levels of ethnopolitical mobilization. At first blush, these variables perhaps do not vary significantly across the cases such that this aspect of the model could be tested. Each experienced a brief period of independence after Norse settlement, but each came under the control of Norway by the twelfth century. The only variation in this regard was the greater relative autonomy of Orkney compared to the others, although this would actually work opposite of the expected relationship of a stronger experience with independence leading to stronger ethnopolitical mobilization. However, Orcadian distinctiveness in this regard was eliminated many centuries ago. Of course, the transference of Shetland and Orkney to Scotland necessarily entailed changing institutional factors, but institutional penetration of these cases appears to have been unproblematic from the outset.

Before dismissing these variables, however, the Faroese experience does suggest some impact of independence on ethnopolitical mobilization resulting from the experience of local autonomy during the British occupation. Clearly developments in Faroe had progressed
significantly prior to World War II such that there was an existing ethnopolitical infrastructure that could be mobilized during the war. But the wartime experience itself clearly changed the dynamic, such that none of the parties considered a return to the *status quo antebellum* as a viable possibility. While the wartime experience may stretch the concept of “independence” and represents a highly unusual experience (with a comparable situation found in German-occupied Flanders during both World Wars (Cartrite 2002)), the Faroese experience does suggest that under the right circumstances such experiences have clear effects on ethnopolitical mobilization.

**Contagion effect**

A final variable, and one not taken into consideration by Cartrite (2003), is the potential for contagion effects from one case to another. The impact on Faroe of Icelandic ethnopolitical mobilization, which occurred earlier and to a more significant degree, has been to provide a clear path towards home rule and independence that the Faroese leadership have explicitly referenced. Furthermore, the Faroese fully expect that they serve as an example to Greenland, but also to Shetland and Orkney, which interviewees invariably included in their conceptualization of a Nordic community.

Personal interviews in Shetland suggested that many there are very aware of the dynamics in Faroe and the potential for secession there, and consider it to be perhaps the most relevant example for them to reference. Interviewees in Shetland also expect that Orcadians are watching them closely as an example, in terms similar to Faroese expectations about Greenlanders. This was confirmed by Orcadians, although many thought the Shetland case an example of being too aggressive. Nonetheless, and perhaps not surprisingly, Orkney does seem to be sensitive to Shetland to a very high degree, and less so to Faroe.
Tracing and evaluating contagion effects would be a difficult undertaking at best. Yet evidence from interviews indicates that such effects are very real, with two of the cases both looking to other examples and expecting themselves to be viewed as examples for others. How strong this effect is would be difficult to say, but it does clearly raise the prospect that, for example, if Faroe should indeed become independent, this would have a very direct effect on Shetland and a more distant effect on Orkney. Put differently, while there are clear differences across the cases, the potential for contagion suggests that these cases do move together to some degree.

Conclusion

The Faroese case appears to support Cartrite’s (2003) model very well. With the exception of non-competitive party formation, each of the phases is realized, in sequence, involving the kinds of constructed elements highlighted in that study. Interestingly, both Debes and Naurby expressly refer to the fit of Faroese ethnopolitical mobilization with Hroch’s model. Debes argues that Hroch would assume independence for Faroe and, therefore, the model ultimately fails, although a close reading of Hroch suggests that, in fact, a successful bid for independence is not central to his model. Naurby’s critique is, however, more central. He points to the emphasis placed by Hroch on the role of a large middle class not only for providing the intellectual leadership of the movement but also as the basis for its popular support. For Naurby, this dynamic fails in Faroe on two bases. First, Faroese society, while clearly containing a range of socio-economic positions from rich to poor, had tended to have a narrower range than most societies given the harshness of the environment and the limited opportunity for significant economic gain relative to others; additionally, he highlights the lack of clear breaks in this continuum consistent with distinct classes. Second, even were one to allow for a poorly defined
but existent middle class, for much of the period of the movement most people in Faroe, working in the fishing industry, would necessarily be defined as working, rather than middle, class.

In this respect, Cartrite’s divergence from Hroch captures the dynamics highlighted by Debes and Naurby. Faroese ethnopolitical mobilization, while a function of intellectual efforts at identity (particularly linguistic) activism, does not rely on intellectuals or the middle class to explain later ethnopolitical mobilization. Rather, it is the successful establishment of these symbols that itself informs the likelihood of increasing acceptance of both the group identity and political rights associated with the group. Such acceptance must in fact be realized within the working class, particularly under modern conceptualizations of democracy. Thus Cartrite’s (2003) model appears to explain the case of Faroe quite well.

Shetland and Orkney represent, in some sense, cases of ethnogenesis. While all interviewees in these cases quickly expressed their sense of being Shetlandic or Orcadian, it is clear many do not see this identity as an “ethnic” identity clearly differentiating them from the Scots. And very few indeed perceive of their identities as giving rise to specific political rights and claims. However, the efforts of the linguistic activists in both cases do seem to parallel similar efforts undertaken in many cases, including Faroe, in the nineteenth century, although they also seem to be encountering difficulties not faced by most of those cases. Although Cartrite did not study groups without a distinct language, arguing consistent with the literature that a distinct language serves as a useful proxy for ethnic identity, the model suggests that language issues will dominate the early period of ethnopolitical mobilization. Further, the model does predict (based especially on the case of Occitan in southern France) that movements unable to reach agreement on language standardization and education have a very low likelihood of realizing higher levels of ethnopolitical mobilization. While Cartrite’s model may be understood
to reasonably account for the current dynamics in these cases, ethnopolitical mobilization is at such a low level that caution should be observed in assigning the model a strong predictive power. However, these cases may be very informative of the dynamics at work in the earliest phases of cultural activism and may provide evidence for how these processes unfold in ways that the earlier study was not able to explore in detail, as these dynamics had largely played out in the historical record, as in the case of Faroe.
References


