

Strategic Narratives for Public Diplomacy: Final Paper

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Introduction

Strategic narratives are imperative in public diplomacy for political actors to shape a perception and meaning of the past, present, and future to then shape political behavior and international relations. Narratives give political actors an opportunity to influence others, pursue their diplomatic goals, and manage discourse; ultimately, they are a means of influencing others (Miskimmon 2017, p. 2). Strategic narratives are used around the world today in high risk environments, and are often relied upon to establish peace.

This paper will examine the public diplomacy of the current policy debate regarding the border separating the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom (UK) in Northern Ireland in the context of the UK leaving the European Union. Since the 1990s, the border has been an open border due to the Northern Ireland protocol; this protocol “allows lorries to deliver goods without having paperwork and goods checked when they cross the border from Northern Ireland into the Republic of Ireland” (BBC, 2022). This has shown to be a battle of contesting narratives, as three states are involved; the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain. Although Northern Ireland is part of the UK, for the purpose of examining narratives it will be discussed as independently from the Greater UK. The paper will examine this conflict in two theoretical lenses; assessing the system, issue, and identity narratives of each involved state, as first discussed by Alister Miskimmon, et al in “Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order” and how narratives are formed, projected, and received as discussed by Alister Miskimmon, Ben O’Loughlin, and Laura Roselle in “Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations.” The paper will examine how each country is promoting their own desire regarding the border, while first providing historical context on the volatile border and past public diplomacy efforts.

Historical Context

Since 2005, the border has been almost nonexistent as the security and checkpoints were removed due to the Good Friday Agreement signed in 1998. The lack of a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland is vitally important for the peace of both countries and the greater UK. Throughout what has been dubbed “the troubles”, or the series of conflicts in Northern Ireland from 1960s – 1990s, bridges and roads were closed and patrolled by police with comprehensive security checks that disrupted daily life and restricted those who lived close to the border. Most bombings, shootings, and violent acts took place near the border and a policing culture shaped the area for nearly 30 years. A soft border has ensured peace among all parties.

Audience, Key Actors, Mass Media

To understand the narratives that are contested among Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the UK, we must first understand the media landscape. Notably, as Ireland and Northern Ireland share one island, their media overlap as well. Media in Northern Ireland overlaps in print, television, and radio with Ireland. Additionally, the media in Northern Ireland is shared with the media in Great Britain, due to the fact that they are both in the UK. Additionally, the UK press has a strong presence in Ireland, and is featured prominently; both the Irish Daily Mail and the Irish Sun are British publications that put forth Irish versions of the news.

Before discussing the competing narratives among the three states, the theories at hand must first be defined; according to Miskimmon et al, “system narratives are about the nature of the structure of international affairs”. System narratives shape our worldview. Identity narratives are “about the identities of actors in international affairs that are in a process of constant negotiation and contestation.” Issue narratives “are strategic in the sense of seeking to shape the

terrain on which policy discussions take place”. Issue narratives are narratives regarding one issue in one moment in time. System, issue, and identity narratives all contribute to framing problems; according to Entman, “Frames in the news are typically part of the reporting process for three different classes of objects: political issues, events, and actors. Often the same set of news stories simultaneously frame one or more objects, providing framing information not just about an event, say, but also about a related issue or actor” (Entman 2004). Framing helps us learn politics about public diplomacy and how our messages are interpreted by others. Framing is discussed later in the paper through narrative formation, projection, and reception.. The chart below presents the identity, system, and issue narratives that frame the public discourse regarding the border.

Country	Identity narrative	System Narrative	Issue Narrative
The Republic of Ireland	Pro-EU Pro-peaceful island of Ireland Responsibility to keep the border civil	Independent country, previously betrayed by the UK Member of the EU Shared history and landmass with Northern Ireland	Strict border laws set place by the UK Possible disturbance of the peace with border rules

Great Britain	Non-EU country Dismissive of Ireland	Previously had a hand in Irish exodus, the famine, and the troubles	Abiding by international law with borders Protecting their own trade policies with enforced borders
Northern Ireland	Intermediary between Ireland and the UK Long history of betrayal and violence within the borders	“The little guy” Shared identity with both Ireland and the UK Had little say in Brexit	Navigating a violent border that disrupts daily life

In regards to Ireland and the UK, policy debate regarding the border has risen recently. There are several narratives that are being contested in the media by the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain, which are all examined below. Each country is promoting their own desire regarding the border, with deep histories underlying their messages.

The Irish Narrative

The Republic of Ireland believes that the UK has always involved itself in Irish affairs when it is not welcome, and there is a long history of abuse that leaves most Irish people believing that UK involvement is never welcome. The President of Ireland cites British imperialism frequently, as it is a vital component of their past and therefore current relationship.

Great Britain Counter Narrative

The British Parliament and non-state actors have publicly said several times that the UK does not intend on installing a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and they want to maximize trade among the three countries. Nobody outside of Britain seems to believe this is true, thinking that Britain will take any loophole it can to somehow hinder the relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland by disrupting the lack of border and the Good Friday agreement.

Northern Ireland Narrative

Northern Ireland projects the fear of a hard border the loudest in the media; they claim the border is a highly volatile place for the trade and security purposes, and both Ireland and the UK have means and intention to exploit Northern Ireland and the on-going policy debate for personal gains. Political party representatives are extremely vocal in the media, with rallying cries in the papers as well as protests happening in cities and on border lines.

Aspect of Narrative Contestation	Irish Narrative	GB Counter-Narrative	Northern Irish Narrative
Formation/Content	The UK has always meddled in Irish politics and trade and should leave Ireland alone	The UK does not intend on installing a hard border, and wants to maximize trade with Ireland/Northern Ireland	The border is a highly volatile place for the island of Ireland. Both GB and Ireland could try to exploit it for their personal gains.
Projection	Irish politicians such as the President speaking about this only when asked	Non-state actors such as professors, business leaders, etc. publicly speaking upon this narrative	Political party representatives (ie, unionists, democrats) putting forth rallying cries in the news and protests.

<p>Reception</p>	<p>The Northern Irish are weary of Ireland’s messages, thinking that Ireland is trying to secretly advocate for a United Ireland</p>	<p>Most people believe that the UK will not try to disrupt the Good Friday agreement</p>	<p>Their message is received broadly as the UK and Ireland pushing NI out of the way for trade purposes</p>
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Conclusion

In sum, it is a complicated clash of narratives for a few countries with dark, complex histories. Where there really should only be two narratives (The UK and Ireland), there are three, due to Northern Ireland’s own history as part of the UK. The intricacies in messaging around this policy issue are sensitive, and state agents need to navigate this conflict carefully to not evoke a hostile war of words. The narrative within Great Britain must be one that holds empathy for the very recent political trauma that plagues both Northern Ireland and Ireland. The people who experienced the political warfare and terrorism at the border are still alive today, and the “UK as an interventionist” narrative has not yet ceased. The same narrative advice can be applied to Ireland; they must speak with caution, understanding that Northern Ireland is still slightly volatile due to modern history. The most encouraging narratives to these countries will be

narratives that promote collaboration, allyship, and free-trade; narratives that paint all countries as winners and none as losers will promote peace and prosperity in this tumultuous policy discussion.

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