Celtic FC’s 1967 Lisbon Lions: why the European Cup victory of the first club from Britain was a defining moment for the Irish diaspora in Scotland

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

In 1967, in Lisbon, Celtic Football Club, won the European Cup becoming the first club outside of Portugal, Spain and Italy to win it. The win was and is totemic for the Irish Catholic immigrant community in Scotland that has historically supported Celtic. We suggest the significance of the win reveals intersections of ethnicity, religion, nationalism, and the politics of ‘sectarianism’ in Scotland. During a period of discriminatory practices and attitudes towards Irish descended Catholics in Scotland, this iconic win for a Scottish based club born of Irish Catholics personified for this diaspora that (on one level) their day had arrived. This article explores the socio-cultural significance and legacy of ‘Lisbon 67’ for insider and outsider groups in Scotland. We reveal that soccer remains a central component of group memory connecting the past, present and future. We suggest Celtic’s win offered confidence and hope to a marginalized group within Scotland.

\textbf{Introduction}

On the 25 May 1967, in the Portuguese capital Lisbon, Celtic Football Club defeated the Italians Internazionale from Milan 2–1 to become the first club from Britain to win the European Cup. The competition for the Champions of Europe’s football leagues began in 1955. Until 1967 only four clubs from Spain, Italy and Portugal had succeeded in winning it. By 2018 barely twenty-two clubs had managed to win the continent’s most prestigious football trophy. Celtic’s win capped an unprecedented season in which, a club formed and sustained mainly by large sections of the Irish diaspora in Scotland, won every competition it entered. Yet, despite such unprecedented sporting greatness this Celtic ‘story’ originated from much more modest and humble beginnings. Celtic’s eleven players were all born in Scotland. Ten of them were raised within twelve miles of Celtic’s stadium in the east end of Glasgow (the other player coming from only thirty miles away). All Celtic’s players came from working-class\textsuperscript{1}, labouring and semi-skilled backgrounds, with several originating from areas classified today in Scotland as ‘deprived’ (SIDS – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation). Celtic’s side cost £42,000 (less than one million pounds in 2019) to assemble; only two players arriving as paid transfers during manager Jock Stein’s time (for £30,000 and £12,000 respectively). The ‘Lisbon Lions’ as they became known is widely considered as the greatest team in the club’s history. In the final they defeated the Italian masters of the effective ultra-defensive ‘Catenaccio’ system with their own trademark attacking cavalier football. All Lisbon Lions
progressed through typical school, youth and Catholic parish football teams during a period preceding modern 'Soccer Academies'.

Despite Celtic’s win being reported widely and documented regularly through the years, we contend that the overwhelming majority of such discourse has considerably overlooked the magnitude and iconographic significance of this defining socio-cultural moment. Almost all, and certainly most, contemporary and subsequent comments and observations around the win in Lisbon neglect the symbolic nature and iconographic character of the Lisbon victory. For example, McNee’s best-selling, club sanctioned official history of 1978 (90 years since foundation)\textsuperscript{2} notes that 15,000 supporters, mainly from Scotland, travelled to watch their team play in the final. He records other related facts and statistics, including a revealing but passing comment on how so many of the Celtic support attended the celebration of Catholic Mass on the day of the final.\textsuperscript{3} He mentions that an Irish accordion band and 60,000 fans welcomed Celtic back to Celtic Park with the trophy – after 200,000 had lined the streets on the team’s bus journey to the stadium. The rest of McNee’s story is typically journalistic and mainly concerns the game itself and wider celebrations. Apart from the reference to Catholic Celtic supporters attending Mass little of this account distinguishes Celtic’s win from those of British sides Manchester United, Nottingham Forrest, Aston Villa or Liverpool within the following decades. Similarly, McColl’s\textsuperscript{4} official biography is largely written in a tabloid newspaper style, noting players’ thoughts and impressions, personal stories and memories of events. The journey to become winners and the final in Lisbon are accounted for with little reference to the overall social and cultural significance of the win. Campbell and Woods’ often excellent narrative of Celtic Football Club’s one hundred years centenary celebration (1887/88)\textsuperscript{5} briefly recognizes the club and its supporters’ Catholic and Irish distinctiveness. However, in what is widely considered to be the definitive historical publication on Celtic Football Club, the European Cup Final in Lisbon is confined to just a few pages reporting the game itself: again the deep and profound impact this victory represents for many Celtic supporters – in ethnic, community, religious and diasporic terms – is conspicuous by its absence.

In the months after the victory Scottish journalist Ian Peebles wrote the best-selling book, Celtic Triumphant.\textsuperscript{6} His first words refer to ‘the Scots’ as being ‘intensely patriotic’ before adding ‘yet, in sport, we usually recogniseour limitations’.\textsuperscript{7} Representing this as a Scottish (even Scottish nationalist) – victory – accompanied by the self-proclaimed humility to recognize ‘Scottish’ limitations,\textsuperscript{8} he adds:

\textit{We will admit, for instance, that we are unlikely to produce the next World heavyweight champion … until less than a year ago we would also have been prepared to concede that football’s greatest club prize, the European Cup, was also beyond us …… [In Lisbon] we Scots were guilty of underestimating our potential.}\textsuperscript{9}

Peebles’ rhetorical framing of Scotland (and Scots) as being unlikely to produce world class sporting champions works as a device to magnify his following point that:

\textit{No matter how much one may try to look at this achievement dispassionately, it would be unfair to dismiss it as anything less than absolutely fantastic. What else can you say about a team that won the toughest competition of all at their first attempt …… the first British side to win the European Cup. (Our emphasis)}

Peebles’ account of Celtic’s European Cup win is justifiably described as ‘absolutely fantastic’ but the iconic nature of the win as a defining moment of socio-cultural significance is reduced to being simply proclaimed as a ‘Scottish victory’ and limited to being ‘the first British side’ to win the European Cup. Nevertheless, such partial, inadequate and constraining articulations like these combine to offer an acutely superficial account when one intimately explores Celtic’s win: especially in terms of its relationship to wider social, ethnic, religious, cultural and political factors in, and in relation to, Scotland. Peebles asks rhetorically, ‘what else can you say about a team’ from Scotland that won the European Cup? We suggest more than has currently been said (or written). When CLR James famously asked ‘what do they know of cricket who only cricket know?’\textsuperscript{10}, he was of course
imploring us to irrevocably connect the sporting realm with the social (economic, cultural, political and historical) conditions in which the sport is formed and developed.

From the embers of colonialism, mass starvation, revolution and rebellion in Ireland flickered the flame of an Irish Catholic diaspora in Scotland negotiating and forming its identity: and from 1888 until today Celtic Football Club has been one of their most revered totems. Fifty years after the event, the enormity of Celtic’s achievement was recalled by historian Professor Tom Devine. In 2017 Devine encapsulated the extraordinary significance of the win in Lisbon for Catholics of Irish immigrant descent in Scotland, suggesting that Lisbon 1967 represented:

a key factor in the long story of the emancipation of the Catholic Irish in this country [Scotland] . . . . . . in terms of signal events, the Lisbon Lions victory probably stands alongside the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1982. 11

This essay examines this defining moment of Celtic’s European Cup win by contextualizing its wider historical context in order to more fully acknowledge the non-football enormity of this iconic sporting achievement. Only in this way can it be fully appreciated and understood, and the socio-cultural significance of sport be illustrated, in ways which reveal the power of football to carry the hopes and dreams of imagined communities of a diaspora. 12 In what follows, we chart the origins of Celtic Football Club, illustrating the intimate historical and political contexts of the club rooted in British colonialism, starvation and Irish migration. The club’s Catholic and charitable origins and identities are briefly presented to contextualize the significance of the club and its evolution to the wider Irish diasporic experience in Scotland. We then illustrate how elements of Celtic and Irishness in Scotland have been Othered, treated with suspicion and hostility. Importantly, we highlight how such Othering is not unique to Irish diasporic people in Britain. We suggest that those who are genuinely concerned with tackling ethno-religious prejudice in Scotland avoid dysconscious and subtle Othering in the name of tackling so-called ‘sectarianism’. The final section considers the Lisbon 1967 victory as an iconic and defining moment of self-recognition and celebration for the Irish diaspora in Scotland. Ironically, we contend that this was partly linked to the occasion (naturally, to some degree) being represented as a Scottish and British victory, enabling the previously viewed Outsiders to celebrate within permissible boundaries of identification in Scotland.

Celtic Football Club: a socio-historic overview

Hunger and starvation

The starting point for locating Celtic’s origins is the cataclysmic mass death dealing Great Starvation 13 (An Gorta Mor) in Ireland, when millions of people died or were forced to flee what was at the time a British ruled island. Irish immigration to North America and Britain increased to extraordinary levels. As one of the nearest accessible countries with a tradition of providing employment at least in part due to its often vigorous British imperialist economy, Scotland became a noteworthy site for Great Hunger and post-Great Hunger refugees and immigrants. The vast majority of these Irish men and women were Catholic. 14 Thousands of Catholics migrated from Lithuania, Poland and Italy, but the vast majority of Catholics in Scotland, mostly located in the country’s west-central belt, are either ethnically Irish or a significant element of their familial and cultural background is Irish. Largely due to An Gorta Mor refugees the number of Catholics in mid-nineteenth century Scotland rose from around 50,000 at the onset of the devastation to 150,000 by 1850 and 332,000 in 1878 (750,000 by the new millennium). An Gorta Mor was to irrevocably change the nature of the Catholic Church in Scotland and Irish immigration during this period, and thereafter was the critical reason for this expansion. 15

Throughout the Great Hunger years the number of refugees fleeing to Scotland gathered pace and in Glasgow there was a corresponding increase in the number of recorded deaths, mostly related to the massive rise in cholera fatalities as a result of the frantic and wretched nature of the Great
Hunger influx. Aligning with the increase in ‘Famine’ refugees to the greater Glasgow area, articles decrying the influx appeared regularly in the Scottish press, usually blaming the Irish for ‘importing typhus fever, corrupting the lower orders of Scotland by setting the most pernicious example of dependency on parochial aid, and of spreading criminality’. It is unsurprising then that one popular aspect of fear exhibited by the overwhelmingly Protestant majority and its institutions related to Catholicism and its ‘foreign’ adherents. Prejudice towards minority Irish Catholics came not only from traditional religious or political foes but was evident throughout society.

Poverty, charity and Celtic FC

The growth of the Catholic faith is a vital component in understanding Celtic’s formation and subsequent evolution. As Irish immigration resulted in the re-emergence of Catholicism in Scotland and as Catholic Churches evolved so also did Catholic charities. This further development was also of central importance to the emergence of Celtic FC. During, and immediately after the Great Hunger, and despite some advances in the provision of support for the impoverished, the vast majority of Scotland’s poor had no welfare safety net. Many people were frequently unemployed while some of the worst housing in Europe existed in and around Scotland’s west-central belt. Notwithstanding Glasgow being well on its way to becoming the shipbuilding capital of the world during the 1880s, with Glasgow’s River Clyde producing almost a fifth of the world’s shipping output by the time of the First World War, life expectancy in Scotland was forty-five for women and forty-two for men. Despite its great and growing wealth and colonial status, Glasgow and Scotland contained profound inequalities in relation to education, health, housing, class and employment.

Seeking to address and counter poverty and inequality, the Catholic Organization Society of Mary (Marists), came to Glasgow in 1858 and forthwith made a formidable contribution to, amongst other things, the education of poor Irish Catholic children in the East End of the city. In the decades after many of the worst excesses of An Gorta Mor had subsided, football became a highly popular game throughout Britain, especially for working men who were then acquiring more leisure time. In Glasgow, Irish immigrant Marist teacher Brother Walfrid, and some of his Irish-Catholic compatriots, saw in the development and immediate popularity of soccer an opportunity to raise money to feed poor immigrant Irish Catholics in the east end of the city. The main purpose in the club’s formation was explained in a circular issued in January 1888:

The main object of the club is to supply the East End conferences of the St Vincent de Paul Society with the funds for the maintenance of the ‘dinner tables’ of our needy children in the missions of St Mary’s, Sacred Heart and St Michael’s. Many cases of sheer poverty are left unaided through lack of means. It is therefore with this object that we have set afloat the ‘Celtic’.

Celtic’s ethno-religious make-up, along with its early successes on the football field, helped attract crowds to football that had not previously been experienced in Scotland. In 1888, the first full year of its existence, the club gave over £400 (a sum worth around £40,000 in 2018) to charity as well as playing matches for charitable events in various parts of the country: the income for which was estimated at £150. Its regular contribution was £20 a month to each of the children’s ‘dinner tables’ of the three East End parishes. During its early years Celtic’s founders also frequently donated to Irish ethnic and political bodies. An Irish nationalist dimension involved in the establishment of Celtic is emphasized by Wilson who notes that although the decision:

to form Celtic Football Club is rightly identified with the needs of Catholic charity in the East End of Glasgow . . . . the early nature of the club, and the direction it pursued, owe at least as much to the influence exercised by the political organisation which spoke for the vast majority of the Irish in Scotland in the 1880s, the Irish National League.

Although Celtic’s founders established a symbol of, and representation for, Irish Catholic migrants in much of Scotland, the club did not exclude on the basis of religion or ethnic or national origin. Moreover, throughout Celtic’s history, many of its legendary players, staff and supporters have
derived from non-Irish and/or non-Catholic backgrounds. Indeed, the club’s most successful (and celebrated) manager Jock Stein – manager of the immortalized Lisbon Lions – stands out among many Protestant/non-Catholic iconic players and staff, including four of the eleven players that won the European Cup.

While not a Catholic football club, as some observers inaccurately describe it, Catholics and Catholicism understandably have been central with regard to Celtic’s origins, ethos, successes and identities (traditional and modern). Without Catholics, Catholicism and the Catholic Church in Scotland, there would be no Celtic Football Club. This fact is fundamental and pivotal to understanding the club’s origins, appeal, evolution, resilience and identities: and also in terms of understanding Devine’s aforementioned comment regarding Lisbon 1967 representing a defining moment in the journey towards the emancipation of Catholics of Irish descent in Scotland. The Catholic aspect of the club is unique because this is in contrast to virtually all other professional football clubs in Scotland and Britain that have somewhat inevitably reflected the traditionally dominant local, regional and national identities and cultures of the vast majority of the population on the island which were, broadly speaking, products of a (Protestant) church and state combination. Celtic’s distinctive identity contrasts sharply with dominant forms of Scottish and British identities.

**Imagined Scottish-British community**

In contrasting popular and/or dominant forms of British identity with her own Black, Ghanaian-British identity, Hirsch astutely exclaimed:

> The narratives that you see on the television, in film and at the theatre shape nothing less than your sense of your own life, your very perception of yourself. My first exposure to the notion that there were other black people in the world, and that some of them lived in nice houses and had happy marriages, was watching American sitcoms.

There is a degree of equivalence with the Irish diaspora in Scotland, who also experience such discrepancy between their own perceptions of their identity and widely accepted, promoted or dominant forms of Britishness. Aspects of these popularly promoted forms of Britishness can be charted on the annual calendar and are performed and reproduced ‘like clockwork’. From the Royal Family’s much lauded and publicized Church attendance on the first day of each New Year, through to the Queen’s Christmas message on the last week of the year, numerous re-produced imaginings of a British identity exists. In sport specifically, there is ‘the Boat Race’ representing the country’s two elite university teams (Oxford and Cambridge Universities) competing for ancient bragging rights while subtly reinforcing classist conceptions of sport, amateurism and the British establishment. There is also the Derby, the Six Nations, the FA Cup Final, and Wimbledon, all patronized by royalty and celebrated as ‘ours’. Away from the sacred practice of sport, there is Guy Fawkes night in November – a celebration of the burning of the Catholic ‘traitor’ who tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605 – followed by Remembrance Sunday, many aspects of which commemorate and celebrate British militarism. Moreover, public statues, paintings and school curricula reveal a British history and identity that is partial, questionable or alien to many people in Britain, particularly the country’s ethnic and religious minorities. When Scottishness and Britishness are officially represented/imagined, these can exude elements of Protestantism and/or anti-Catholicism. For example, the ceremonial opening of the Scottish parliament involves the (Protestant) Church of Scotland centrally involved in ‘Kirking of the Parliament’, while the United Kingdom’s ‘constitution’ has historically prohibited Roman Catholics from becoming the (unelected) Head of State.

One of the most popular and celebrated imaginings of Scottish identity in sport involves the Scotland rugby union team being supported by British Royal Family member, Princess Anne, whose enthusiastic and public singing of the (unofficial) Scottish national anthem *Flower of Scotland* before Scotland’s matches transforms a Scottish rebel song into a harmless folk tune embraced by
the British establishment. In literature, the celebrated poet, Robert Burns – whose 25th of January birthday has historically represented a national day of Scottish celebration – is memorialized annually across parts of the world with Burns Nights, which often represent Scottishness with Masonic rituals and a ‘Loyal Toast’ to the Queen embedded into the order of service. Accompanying these narrow but popular signifiers of Britishness and/or Scottishness that were (and still are) regularly re-presented by and personified in a series of imagined British/Scottish symbolic signs, was an absence, an invisibility, and indeed an antagonism to explicit symbols and imaginings of alternative identities, especially those perceived to challenge or disrupt officially preferred narratives relating to colonialism, starvation and British rule in Ireland (or indeed unelected Heads of State underpinned by non-Catholicism or anti-Catholicism, depending on one’s interpretation).

**Celtic FC and Irishness: Scotland’s lingering ‘other’?**

Celtic’s non-prejudicial and inclusive outlook was in stark contrast to how they perceived others to behave towards their own, mainly, Irish-Catholic constituency. For many players, supporters and observers, identifying with Celtic in a traditionally Protestant and imperialist Scotland/Britain is characterized by having to face experiences broadly perceived as discriminatory, prejudicial and hostile towards Catholicism, Irish ethnicity and Celtic.34 In 1896 Celtic and Hibernian were top of the Scottish league, prompting a popular Scottish sport newspaper to note the dominance of two Irish teams, asking where was the Scottish team that could challenge the incomers.35 While it might be reasonable in sporting terms to seek a ‘Scottish’ team to challenge the perceived ‘outsiders’, a logical assessment of contemporary events would be justified in suspecting prejudice was one motivating factor for such ‘Othering’ of the ‘Irish’.

Up till the 1990s Scotland was still a place where there was a widely-held perception – firmly rooted in a history of anti-Catholic discrimination and prejudice – that Catholics (especially of Irish origin) could only progress so far in numerous parts of society’s economic, social and political life. This was the reality throughout much of Scotland’s banking, industry, media and football up to and including the 1980s.36 Rangers’ non-Catholic employment ‘tradition’ that ended in 1989 was merely a high profile public demonstration of these practices. In this sense, Rangers’ anti-Catholic (or non-Catholic) ‘tradition’ which became widely tolerated and arguably accepted, represented more than a petty prejudiced football rivalry point scoring exercise, damaging as that was. One interpretation is that it encapsulated, legitimized and reproduced, in the ‘safety’ of sport, the pernicious (and racist) idea that Catholics were less than equal. Exacerbating such Othering of Irish-Catholics further, when Rangers’ non-Catholic ‘tradition’ was critiqued in Scotland, it was sometimes (and continues to be) misrepresented merely as one half of a ‘sectarian problem’ of equal culpability between ‘Protestant Rangers’ and ‘Catholic Celtic’.37

Beyond Rangers in Scottish football and partly reflecting an inter-war, anti-Catholic and anti-Irish Institutional Church of Scotland (Protestant) campaign, in 1952 the Scottish Football Association ordered Celtic to take down the Irish national flag from its stadium or be suspended from football.38 Although the confrontation with Celtic and its supporters’ ethnic Irishness eventually waned and the Irish flag survived at Celtic Park, the emblem’s presence continues to be the subject of widespread hostility.39 In the contemporary sports arena in Scotland, opposing fans sometimes disparagingly sing to Celtic supporters, ‘Can you sing a Scottish song?’ or boo Celtic’s supporters’ singing of the Irish ballad ‘Fields of Athenry’. Additionally, Celtic’s associations with Catholicism has also been targeted and problematized.40

Othering takes various forms. In twenty-first century Scotland it is ‘less likely’ to be employment-related or structurally embedded prejudice. MacMillan illustrates what we contend to be an often overlooked form of Othering of the Irish diaspora in Scotland. He highlights that Scotland’s multi-generational Irish community remains ‘absent from socio-economic, political and cultural research, novels, histories and media stories’. In many spaces where one might expect historical or
contemporary references regarding Scotland’s largest minority, dominant narratives remain silent on, for instance, An Gorta Mor or the Irish Rebellion of 1916 and their relevance and consequences for Scotland (and Britain). This is especially acute in terms of Scotland’s responsibility as part of the major occupying colonial power involved in both situations, and, in the aftermath of An Gorta Mor, in relation to the subsequent mass immigration to Scotland, the consequential revival of the Catholic Church and the emergence of Celtic Football Club. Indeed, such omissions resonate with the somewhat partial recordings, representations of, reticence and even silence regarding, Celtic’s iconic European Cup victory in a range of newspapers, documentaries, books and relevant commentaries.

We argue that structurally prejudiced practices have either largely ceased or become more diluted or difficult to locate, and for some, this has been sufficient to view ‘sectarianism’ (often represented as a conflict between Protestants and Catholics) in twenty-first century Scotland as almost exclusively between a small number of extreme individuals, groups or organizations. However, such analyses miss the important point that traditional and deeply embedded acts of anti-Catholicism in Scotland are now overwhelmingly subtle and dysconscious rather than explicit and orchestrated.

There are parallels here with other minorities who have experienced being Othered in Britain. For example, Hirsch acknowledges being Othered by individuals who would be horrified at being branded racist or prejudiced. She illustrates the complexity of Othering by highlighting that despite being British born and raised, as a descendent of Ghana, Britain offered ‘the painful reminder that home was a place that had surveyed me as alien, questioned me about my background, and expected me to provide explanations.’ Revealingly in discussing twenty-first century Britain, she adds ‘this country of mine has never allowed me to feel that it is where I belong.’ Hirsch laments that this can be partly explained by the powerful and dominant cultural reference points of British identity. Discussing literature, poetry, art and history, she laments, ‘[b]ut there were no images in which I saw myself reflected.’ Hirsch and the black communities in Britain shared with the Irish diaspora in Britain the perception (merited or not) that their cultures, histories, heroes/heroines and ultimately identities were unworthy of recognition, inconsequential and too foreign, alien and in breach of popular or permissible expressions of Britishness.

**What do they know of Lisbon 1967 who only Lisbon 1967 know?**

Denying or reducing such histories is a crucial element when assessing the significance and legacy of Lisbon 1967. CLR James famously illustrated the intimate connections between self-identity and an imagined people’s ‘whole past history’ when contrasting the differences between the West Indies and England. He insightfully stressed:

> West Indians crowding to Tests bring with them the whole past history and future hopes of the islands. English people, for example, have a conception of themselves breathed from birth . . . We of the West Indies have none at all, none that we know of. To such people the three W’s, Ram and Val wrecking English batting, help to fill a huge gap in their consciousness and in their needs.

The Lisbon Lions similarly did for the Irish diaspora in Scotland what (James suggests) the West Indies cricketers did for West Indians. Where the three W’s (Everton Weekes, Frank Worrell, Clyde Walcott), Sonny Ramadhin and Alf Valentine helped West Indians fill a huge gap in consciousness and needs—an undoubtedly made more powerful by beating England, a significant part of the colonizing nation-state that had arguably contributed to the lack of self-identity James so eloquently lamented—Celtic had Billy McNeil (captain), Tommy Gemmell (goal scorer) and Stevie Chalmers (winning goal scorer). The Lisbon Lions enabled a stateless people [of two nations] to celebrate their marginalized and sometimes despised identities, to exclaim to Scotland, Britain and Europe, that they too had a consciousness, a past history and future hopes, and that their identity had value where they were otherwise often marginalized and Othered.
As Maya Angelou describes, ‘[T]he ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.’

The cumulative effect of being Othered can, consciously or not, lead to a search for belonging. CLR James showed that for West Indians this place was the cricket field. For many of the Irish diaspora in Scotland, this place was (and remains) Celtic Park. This is where their songs and symbols could be experienced, expressed and even celebrated without embarrassment or fear. For every Lord Nelson the ‘British’ celebrated these Celtic supporters had James Connolly – a Scottish born Irish rebel, socialist and republican, a leader of the 1916 Irish Rebellion.

Songs lamenting ‘Famine’ and oppression represent many Celtic supporters’ identities, more than Loyal Toasts to royalty, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the immortal memory of Masonic Robert Burns, the Battle of Trafalgar, British militarism or the Queen’s message on Christmas Day.

In this context, the following excerpts substantially extend the breadth and depth of this study. These emerge from three primary sources; a focus group conducted in early 2019, the testimonies of the Irish 2 Project (I2P), and from a range of Celtic-related literature. They demonstrate that many Irish Catholic descended people in Scotland continue to esteem their Irish ethnicity, and often in relation to Celtic.

Ex-Celtic footballer and manager Tommy Burns commented that Celtic footballers had to remember that it’s more than just a football team they’re playing for. They’re playing for a cause and a people.

This cause and people are further imagined by I2P interviewee Monica McKevitt who considered Celtic as constituting a big part of being Irish . . . . I think it’s because, to me like you’re away from Ireland so that kind of holds some of your Irishness to a certain extent.’

Another I2P participant believed Celtic and Celtic Park provided, in an otherwise hostile Scottish context, a safe environment in which to openly express Irishness.

It’s not just the football club of course, it’s a lot more . . . . You know you can express an Irish identity and there’s safety at Celtic Park, whereas you wouldn’t be able to express it outside [of the Celtic environment].

Demonstrating a degree of reflexivity to acknowledge the inclusiveness of the self-imagined identity of Celtic, another I2P interviewee added:

Celtic is our standard bearer in Scotland. They’ve never been an Irish only or a Catholic only club because that would be wrong. But Celtic is essentially about us – it’s our team, our club and our community. . . . . Every time we win a big match it’s a celebration for a community.

Another I2P interviewee made a distinct connection with the joy of Celtic’s win in Lisbon, the marginalization of those of Irish descent in Scotland and the socio-psychological mindset that many of them share:

Things started changing [then]. I mean when Celtic started hitting the high spots at Lisbon and that, it definitely gave us all a great boost then and we didn’t seem to be so much the underdog any longer.

For Celtic and its supporters 1967 has become a moment when the underdogs in Scottish society became the most successful underdogs on the field of play. Some of the impact and meaning of Celtic’s victory in 1967 was expressed by supporters and others in The Lions of Lisbon – a book published to commemorate Celtic’s triumph. Sixty-seven people offered views of the game and a number of comments reveal the ethnic, historical, community, migrant, class, religious, social, political, cultural and equality elements of this momentous victory. Managing director Stephen Breen is cited stating:

Eleven local boys who overcame defensive drabness to conquer Europe with unstoppable attacking play that was a victory for football everywhere. Bertie Auld [Celtic player in Lisbon] starting singing ‘The Celtic Song’ in the tunnel. While the Scottish establishment treated the Irish as second class citizens, the Lions defeated this with beautiful, uplifting football that gave us back our pride. Part of the fairy tale that makes Celtic a life-long love affair.

Writer Des Dillon declared:
Two weeks before my seventh birthday something spread a Christmas tingle in May. At that age it was all about feeling. Meaning came later. A black and white coin operated telly, crouched silence, held breath, streets deserted. Cheers. Bit lips, Rosaries from the women. A frightening cheer and tear choked throats. The Coatbridge Irish filtered onto streets blinking like a people emerging from the dust of war.

Academic Jeanette Findley also expressed a rich vein of ethno-religious memory around the occasion:

It was the best week of my short life. I made my Confession on the 19th, my Holy Communion on the 20th, my Confirmation on the 24th and Celtic won the European Cup on the 25th. I was the centre of the world that week. When Tommy Gemmell scored the equaliser my two big brothers held me up and waived me about. Could life get any better?

Former teacher Des Murphy spoke of his encounters while attending the game in Lisbon. Again some aspects of the fundamentals of Celtic FC permeate this account:

What I remember was I kept meeting old school friends (I had left school only the year before). As most of us were Catholics and it was a holiday of obligation we headed for a church. There were a few old ladies in black, a few rich people with seats inside the alter area, and masses of Celtic fans with scarves and banners. The locals were totally bemused.

The origins and roots of the club reflect another teacher Ged O’Brien’s memories of Lisbon’s importance:

At my father’s knee I learned that Celtic were the club founded by us: the poor Irish. They were our team. From afar, I observed a scene that fulfilled the dreams of millions. ‘Nanny’ Robinson’s television set flickered, as eleven titans did battle on my behalf. The unconquerable Lions answered the fervent prayers of an eight-year old boy. On that day, I was proud to be alive.

Poet Niall O’Gallagher reflects on the ‘way it had been’, and for him, ‘the way it was to be forthwith’:

The Lisbon Lions; Gemmell, Simpson, Chalmers, Johnstone and the rest, they are the bhoys who conquered Inter in 1967. No one had seen their like in the hoops since Cuchulainn [an iconic Irish legendry hero from 1500 years ago, who played hurling and not soccer] himself had played at Parkhead, each famous name now heard in our prayers, in place of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Out-with the multi-generational Irish-Catholic community in Scotland a sense of similar achievement and meaning for the Irish in Ireland and abroad amongst the greater Irish diaspora is captured by educator Kevin Rooney. Born in Belfast in the 1960s though settled in London for a number of years, Rooney experienced:

unalloyed joy! A sense that things could get better. From Lisbon a beautiful, penetrating ray of sunlight shone in Belfast, then a cold, dark place where Catholics like my family suffered discrimination, lacked political and economic equality, were told to keep down and know our place. We are more than a football team. Solidarity, friendship, universalism, Brother Walfrid, Lisbon Lions, Celtic, you are a beacon of hope.

In a 50 years commemorative 2017 newspaper article, one journalist made an unusually revealing connection regarding Celtic’s Irish ethnic, diasporic (Ireland, Scotland, USA) and Catholic core and substance, concurring also with the subservient position of Catholics of Irish descent in Scotland, saying that the win in Lisbon:

marked a literal and symbolic mingling of two seminal moments in the history of Irish Catholic identity. Seven years after Kennedy’s election [a picture of JFK hung in the Celtic Boardroom for a number of years] helped validate Irish Catholics in the US, their counterparts in Glasgow were still struggling for recognition. Discrimination was rife; whole industries were out of bounds. The fans who travelled to Lisbon knew what it meant to be asked what school they attended. And that discrimination extended to football.

Such iconography being invoked as part of the Irish diaspora collective identity in Scotland was also characterized in the Lisbon focus group. Dom connects the defining moments of an Irish-Catholic becoming President of the United States and, similar to Devine, Celtic winning the European Cup, as key moments for the Irish-Catholic diaspora’s emancipation in Scotland:
I would say Lisbon plus many other things you know, maybe even JFK, Irish Catholic becoming president of America . . . so many things have added to us getting up the ladder . . . . See when I walk up the Celtic Way58, and I’ll sometimes say to people, think, 130 years ago this was a soup kitchen. And now people are driving up in their fine cars and their refinery and whatnot. That’s how far we’ve come. And as you say, the Lisbon thing was more than a football victory. It was a coming of the Irish Catholics in Glasgow. We had arrived. From the soup kitchen to where we are today is a big achievement’. (Dom, Lisbon Focus Group)

For Tommy (Lisbon Focus Group), Lisbon helped enable a new start, a fresh confidence in being the equal of other groups in Scotland.

We’ve put our head above the parapet now because of what we achieved over the years, through football and other things. There’s many Catholics now in high ranking positions . . . We’re no longer afraid to stand up and be counted. (Tommy, Lisbon Focus Group)

During the same discussion, and returning exclusively to the significance of the Lisbon victory, John Fallon (a member of the ‘Lisbon Lions’ participating in the Focus group) adds: ‘we (Lisbon Lions) changed a lot of attitudes for the good. We boosted the Catholics and the Irish.’

In a newspaper article written in 2017 to commemorate the 1967 achievement, Celtic supporter Derek Kirwan saw the Lisbon Lions as iconic, way beyond the confines of a football field: ‘They were our heroes in a way that Muhammad Ali might be for black guys in America’.59 Lawrence Donegan, a grandson of Donegal immigrants, in same article said, ‘Lisbon is the perfect storm of the football experience, the Lions are part of me culturally, who I am, where I am from, what I think, it’s all in one beautiful bundle.’ The journalist that composed the article added her own gloss on her research: ‘Their achievement was a powerful beacon of achievement for an immigrant community that had been forced to deal with sectarianism and political marginalisation in Scotland.’

Such discourses evidence football has the capacity to go beyond ‘mere’ sport and in fact, almost certainly finds its lifeblood in the extra-sporting passions and meanings that link it to everyday aspects of life, especially those that are social and invoke notions of community. In this context, and significantly for Celtic and its community of supporters, such comments demonstrate the club’s emblematic and symbolic nature as intrinsically linked to the Irish and Catholic identities of the immigrant diaspora in Scottish society. Beyond matters of faith, for over a century Celtic has been the most publically significant cultural and symbolic champion of the Irish Catholic diasporic community in Scotland. Over several generations Celtic has in particular become part of a shared biography for many thousands of Irish descended Celtic supporters, a part of their self-definition. Celtic is a conduit and public space for the construction and expression of diasporic Irishness, an iconic football club with a multi-layered hybrid identity reflecting its birth from poverty born from the consequences of imperialism, and its crucial cultural role within the Irish community in Scotland. Celtic is defined by its unique roots, identities, links and associations with Ireland and Catholicism, an underlying charitable ethos as well as being a club open to players, staff and supporters regardless of ethnicity, nationality or religion: this despite the ethnic and religious hostility often faced by the club and its supporters in Scottish life. Traditionally these have been key attributes for Irish-immigrant-descended Catholics while, within a Scottish context, making the club and its fan base conspicuous as Scotland’s renowned cultural, ethnic and sporting Other. Nonetheless, despite facing prejudice and discrimination in sport and wider society, by the 1960s and 1970s, led by a Scottish Protestant manager, Celtic had become one of the most illustrious teams in world football, acquiring a then world record nine Scottish League Championship titles in succession and winning the European Champions Cup in 1967.

Lisbon 1967 permitted the Irish in Scotland an iconic moment – indeed, a legacy – to celebrate a widely represented Scottish and British sporting success that was at its core much more than that, because it was also very much theirs. Yet, the fact it was perceived solely as a Scottish and British success by other observers permitted the Irish diaspora in Scotland to celebrate in some ways their win without coding or camouflaging their identity for fear of causing offence.
The ground breaking *Beyond a Boundary* charted CLR James’s alienation in his own country as a result of internalizing the colonizer’s cultural and structural norms. In contrast, Hirsch’s account of being Othered in the country where she was born and raised speaks of the diasporic longing for a ‘home’ that she has not lived in. For many Irish diaspora in Scotland their experiences are a combination as well as variations of these positions. In common with Hirsch, there is often a longing for their diasporic country (Ireland) accompanied by a feeling of being negatively Othered in their country of birth and residence. In common with James, the Irish diaspora in Scotland face alienation from, and can be opposed by, their colonizer’s norms, values and customs. But unlike James’s experiences, they live in the colonizer’s country. Lisbon 1967 was a moment for the multi-generational Irish in Scotland to feel proud of their diasporic heritage and to live in their Scottish home in ways that permitted them and others to recognize that they also belonged in, and in some fashion to, their country of residence – however momentarily for some.

**Conclusion**

Contemporary Scotland is not a bastion of anti-Irishness or anti-Catholicism and Lisbon 1967 does not exclusively belong to the Irish diaspora community in Scottish society. Likewise, Irish diaspora identities are not one-dimensional, universally experienced or easily internalized, even by those that strongly esteem their Irish ethnicity in Scotland and elsewhere. In many societies, negotiating dual and multiple identities can be problematic, sometimes paradoxical, and challenging in ways that are still poorly understood and only occasionally acknowledged. As Hirsch notes in relation to her Otherness, when she first self-identified as ‘black’ in her teens her mum asked her how she thought her (white) dad felt at that. This can be seen to capture the essence of negotiating contrasting elements of one’s identity even among family members – never mind in the world of employment and general public life, including sport. It can involve avoiding inviting trouble by expressing one’s Otherness too openly. Furthermore, for many diasporic individuals, such challenges compete with simply being comfortable in one’s skin (literally and metaphorically). Hirsch observes ‘many people I know have learned to code their otherness.’ In a Scottish context with regard to Irish-Catholic signifiers, this is often referred to as ‘keeping the heid doon’. This can occur due to a fear of attracting hostility or it can be simply trying to fit in. They are always nonetheless, indelibly contoured and conditioned by the very context in which they seek to be maintained, expressed and celebrated.

As Celtic supporter O’Gallagher recognizes, Lisbon 1967 was the defining moment that temporarily and partially (at least) removed the long-term and widely held inhibitions that many Celtic supporters had regarding being open, spontaneous and carefree in publicly displaying their footballing allegiance, by concealing, suppressing and camouflaging it. O’Gallagher exclaims, ‘the glorious Celtic, the champions of Europe, we’ll never put our scarves in our pockets again.’

Yet, despite Lisbon 1967 fostering a new-found confidence for many of the Irish diaspora in Scotland, there remain lingering cultural prejudices requiring recognition and acknowledgement of their existence before they can ever be overcome. For example, at special moments in Celtic’s history when Irish symbolism has been prominent and more public, sections of Scottish society continue to openly question and problematize this. When Celtic participated in the UEFA Cup Final of 2003 in the Spanish city of Seville, forty-six years after Lisbon, one letter writer to a Scottish newspaper (in common with many other observers at the time), wrote:

I could have sworn the UEFA Cup Final in Seville was between teams from Scotland and Portugal, but judging by the flags in the stadium I think it was actually Ireland against Portugal . . . . . . I can’t imagine what the rest of the world thought as they watched . . . . . . This was not a good reflection on our culture and a bad night for Scottish sport.
While preventing such petty prejudices is problematic, permitting such Othering to go unchallenged works to normalize it. Framing Irish symbols as part of the problem of ‘sectarianism’ in Scotland reveals the dysconscious reality of prejudice that the Irish diaspora in Scotland still experiences. Just as Hirsch proclaimed ‘the era of racism without racists is the story of my life, the Irish diaspora in twenty-first century Scotland could proclaim the era of “sectarianism” without bigots is the story of their life.’ As Hirsch further observes in relation to the denial of Black history and identity:

Interwoven into this branding is the idea that we don’t see race, that this is a good thing, it represents the ability to transcend prejudice. But this has become part of the problem. It is denial, avoidance and obfuscation. You cannot just paint everyone in the families of the future a pleasant shade of light brown, and expect questions of identity, racial difference and histories of oppression to disappear.

Celtic supporters flying the Irish flag is not in and of itself troublesome: it certainly isn’t for Irish descendants in Australia, Canada or the USA. Indeed, the questioning and problematizing of Celtic supporters flying the Irish flag is itself a problem as such Othering narratives go unchallenged in mainstream public Scotland and are largely accepted as desirable in contesting ‘sectarianism’. Subtle prejudices are built into the very foundations of contemporary anti-sectarianism discourses in Scotland revealing a fundamental ontological flaw. The justification appears ‘on the surface’ to rest on the simplistic notion that difference is bad, that everyone flying the same (presumably Scottish or British) flag is a way to tackle ‘sectarianism’. It is not ethno-religious prejudice, hostility and discrimination that is being identified or being popularly referred to through dominant ‘sectarian’ discourses in Scotland. It is having a noticeable religious/ethnic identity different from that of the majority (past or/and present): Irishness and Catholic identities are frequently viewed, constructed and represented as problematic. Such frameworks work to reduce or deny difference, significantly too, overlooking the history of oppression, starvation, colonialism and struggle in and between Ireland and Scotland/Britain.

Hirsch’s following comment could be written for the multi-generational Irish diaspora in Scotland:

One of the side effects of a society that claims not to see race is that anyone whose appearance is an excessive reminder of difference needs to conform. Failing to do so is frequently perceived as an act of radical politics.

Whitewashing diasporic identities – camouflaged as tackling religious hate – and seeking uniformity, is not a solution to prejudice. These identities do matter, and them mattering is natural, normal and not something that dominant and powerful voices should seek to prevent -especially not in the name of anti-bigotry. Moreover, the shared history, struggle and identity of the Irish diaspora in Scotland assume heightened radicality partly because they have been silenced, censored and sectarianized for so long in Scotland and Britain.

Just as CLR James cautioned against examining the remarkable cricketing feats of England’s WG Grace and the West Indies’ Wilton St Hill, unless viewed in relation to the social history of England and the West Indies respectively, Celtic’s European Cup victory loses its more meaningful significance unless examined in close relation to the history of Scotland’s Irish Catholic diaspora. To paraphrase James, when Celtic triumphed as European champions on what other occasion was there ever – among the Irish diaspora in Scotland at least – such enthusiasm, such an unforced sense of community, of the universal merged in a team of eleven (local) sportsmen or sportswomen? We might also consider how the success of 1967 has enriched the memory of many within the Catholic community of Irish descent in Scotland. Celtic’s 1967 victory is not merely the story of a great sporting accomplishment – as extraordinary as it was and remains – it was a landmark and iconic moment in the social and cultural history of a country (Scotland) and a people (Irish-Catholic diaspora) within that country.
Notes

1. There is an argument for one player (Jim Craig) being described as coming from a lower middle-class family. Either interpretation makes little difference to the general point.

2. McNee, *Celtic History*, 24.

3. It was a Holy Day of Obligation in the Catholic calendar.

4. McColl, *Celtic*.

5. Campbell and Woods, *Celtic Football Club*.

6. Peebles, *Celtic Triumphant*.

7. Ibid., 1.

8. In much football discourse in Scotland, Scotland’s great rivals England are often represented as being arrogant and over-expectant. Reproducing the imagined humble, non-expectant ‘Scots’ for a Scottish readership gives more power to both inter-connected and compounding national stereotypes.

9. Peebles, *Celtic Triumphant*, 1.

10. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, 233.

11. See Auld and Maley, *The Lions of Lisbon*; Garavelli, *Insight*.

12. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

13. ‘The Great Starvation’, ‘The Irish Famine’, ‘The Potato Famine’, ‘The Great Hunger’, ‘An Gorta Mor’ are all used to describe these events from 1845 to 1852 when millions of Irish starved. Language here is both political and powerful. Famine implies that the death and destruction resulted from lack of food caused by crop failure (potato blight) when it was Colonial (mis)management, the commodification of ample food resources and the significant inequality that resulted from the distribution of colonial power that resulted in death and destruction (see Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine*).

14. Bradley, *Ethnic and Religious Identity in Modern Scotland*, 145. In 1755 the government commissioned Webster (previously Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland) to obtain data for the first census of Scotland.

15. McCaffrey, *Roman Catholics in Scotland in the 19th and 20th Centuries*.

16. Neal, *Black 47, Britain and the Famine Irish*, 80.

17. Devine, *The Great Irish Famine and Scottish History*, 27.

18. In 1847, the anti-Catholic journal, *The Witness*, associated Roman Catholicism with dependence and indigence, and Protestantism with vitality and progress, ‘a widely-held Victorian nostrum’. See Gallagher, *Glasgow the Uneasy Peace*, 16.

19. The Welfare State, introduced in 1945, sought to offer some protection from the state to citizens who found themselves impoverished.

20. Burrowes, *Irish*.

21. Handley, *A History of the Province of the British Isles*, 43.

22. Wilson, *Celtic*, 1-17.

23. Ibid.

24. Kay and Vamplew, *Beyond Altruism: British Football and Charity, 1877–1914*.

25. Wilson, *Celtic*.

26. Stein was voted by the Celtic support to be the greatest ever Celt.

27. Murray, *The Old Firm*. See also, Gordon Waddell, *The Sunday Mail*, May 2010, 23. Additionally, when one of us discussed this article with a Scottish born and raised sport-related academic colleague, she expressed surprise to learn that Celtic had ‘more than a handful’ of non-Catholic supporters.

28. Hibernian FC, formed in Edinburgh in 1875, have some overlapping elements with Celtic in terms of origins. In terms of identity, there is no longer any genuine comparison. See Kelly, ‘Hibernian Football Club’ for a full discussion.

29. Colley, *Britons*.

30. Hirsch, *British*, 227.

31. Perhaps the most up-to-date account of this is McBride, *Rethinking Sectarianism*.

32. This is also the case, for many of those in Britain who self-identify as British.

33. Kirking originates from Kirk, the word used in Scotland to describe a (Protestant) Church of Scotland Church.

34. See Bradley, *Celtic Minded* series.

35. Mackay, *The Hibees*; Docherty and Thomson, *100 Years of Hibs 1875/1975*.

36. See Kelly, “‘Sectarianism’ and Scottish Football”.

37. Ibid.

38. Wilson, *Celtic*, 94.

39. Former Celtic chief executive Fergus McCann disclosed that when Celtic hired Scotland’s national stadium Hampden Park (in 1994 when Celtic Park was re-developed) that its owners Queen’s Park Football Club ‘inserted a clause in the lease – a ‘deal breaker’ as their attorney made clear – that forbade ‘the display of any
foreign flag’ (author’s emphasis). See McCann, ‘Hampden Park’. For other examples, see Daily Star, letters, May 26, 2003; Scotland on Sunday, Sports, letters, March 24, 2002.

40. Kelly, ‘Sectarianism’ and Scottish Football.

41. In extreme cases, this has been a purposeful and politically motivated decision. For example, even the mere opinion that Ireland belongs to the Irish was so problematic to the British establishment in those days that Paul McCartney’s song ‘Give Ireland back to the Irish’ was banned by the BBC (among other broadcasters). Revealingly, the British establishment insinuated that expressions of support for Irish independence from Britain equated to supporting the (Provisional) IRA.

42. See Bruce, Glendinning and Rosie, Sectarianism in Scotland; Bruce and Glendinning, ‘Sectarianism in the Scottish Labour Market’.

43. Hirsch, British.

44. Ibid., 4.

45. Ibid., 32.

46. Ibid., 35.

47. James, Beyond a Boundary, 233.

48. Cited in Hirsch, British, numberless page preceding the introductory chapter.

49. Both authors were schooled in different regions of Scotland and neither received any school lesson that mentioned or discussed James Connolly or the Irish Rebellion. This despite Connolly being born and raised in Edinburgh as 2nd generation Irish and the rebellion involving the British state as a key protagonist. Like most interviewed for the Irish 2 Project, neither author received any formal schooling in relation to their own Irish ethnic/immigrant backgrounds or that of the vast majority of those they were schooled alongside. Knowledge of Connolly (and the Easter Uprising) amongst the Irish diaspora in Scotland has often been prompted by references to him (and the Easter Uprising) in song within the Celtic support/Irish diasporic home/family settings.

50. Of course this is not to deny that some Celtic supporters have no interest in James Connolly or that some do not have an interest in any of these typically imagined British signifiers.

51. This focus group involved five men ranging from 68 to 78 years of age who attended the match in Lisbon in 1967. This exploration produced rich oral testimonies, re-iterating the views of those who articulated the larger socio-cultural significance of Celtic’s victory.

52. This project was financed by the Government-sponsored Economic and Social Research Council in 2001-02 and essentially looked at questions and issues of identity, focusing on people born in Britain of at least one Irish-born parent or grandparent. Interviewees have been given pseudonyms for the purpose of reporting findings. The work was carried out by J. Bradley, S. Morgan, P. M. Hickman and B. Walter. For further references see http://www.anglia.ac.uk/geography/progress/irish2/.

53. Also see McBride, Rethinking Sectarianism.

54. Bradley, Celtic Minded, 6.

55. Irish 2 Project Scottish based Irish 2nd and 3rd generation respondents.

56. In parts of Scotland asking what school someone attended is often interpreted as a coded method of asking what religion (as well as ethnic background) one is.

57. https://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/insight-the-pilgrimage-to-lisbon-to-watch-the-lions-play-1-4420814.

58. The Celtic Way is the modern pedestrianized walkway that leads up to the front entrance at Celtic Park.

59. The New European, May 26 – June 1, 2017; Paddy Hoey, ‘Why The Lions Still Roar’.

60. Hirsch, British, 119.

61. An example from one of the authors’ own childhood was when he noticed his mother – usually in the company of non-Catholics – begin replacing the word ‘chapel’ with ‘Church’ in keeping with the majority Protestant term for a Christian place of worship.

62. See Bradley, Celtic Minded, 51.

63. Hirsch, British, 156-57, our emphasis.

64. See Flint and Kelly, Football, Bigotry and Scotland, introduction and conclusion chapters especially.

65. Hirsch, British, 50.

66. James, Beyond a Boundary.

67. This is not to overlook the significance this event had and continues to have for others within and beyond Scotland, who are not from an Irish Catholic immigrant background.

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