

CAPTAIN CALAMITY'S SOVEREIGN STATE OF FORVIK

Micronations and the Failure of Cultural Nationalism

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Abstract

Micronations are often viewed as humorous phenomena, but, when linked to serious political movements, they have the potential to exert real political influence. In 2008, Stuart Hill (known as Captain Calamity) founded the micronation of Forvik on a small island in the archipelago of Shetland (Scotland, UK). Arguing that Shetland had never become part of the Scottish state, Hill sought to use Forvik as the springboard for a Shetland-wide self-determination movement. Although Hill's rationale was primarily economic, Shetland possessed a strong pre-existing sense of cultural distinctiveness and tendencies toward cultural nationalism, which came to be popularly associated with Hill's project. The Forvik micronation, however, received virtually no popular support, and, since its founding, Hill has struggled to make his argument heard through an amused global media and a hostile court system. Ultimately, this micronation has been detrimental to the development of a genuine Shetland self-determination movement and has weakened Shetland's culturally rooted resistance to wider Scottish nationalism. This study illustrates how, far from bolstering associated nationalist movements, some micronations may lower them into ridicule and defeat.

Keywords

Micronations, Forvik, cultural nationalism, Shetland, independence movements

Introduction

A micronation (also known as *micropatria*) is a place that claims to be a sovereign state or autonomous political entity yet possesses a very limited (or non-existent) resident population and is not recognised by sovereign states (apart from other micronations). Micronations are thus distinct from microstates, which are simply very small (in terms of geographical size or population) autonomous political entities, such as San Marino, Isle of Man, Nauru, and Hong Kong. They are also distinct from places claiming statehood but lacking widespread international recognition that nevertheless possess a form of legitimacy in practice and that could conceivably someday gain recognition, such as Somaliland, Republic of China (Taiwan), and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (North Cyprus).

An element of comedy is often present when discussing micronations. This is a mixture of circumstance and design. Many would regard the idea of a single individual or handful of individuals declaring independence as inherently humorous, and the very futility of this gesture perhaps invokes a sense of comedic inevitability. At the same time, however, many micronations are designed to be funny. As McConnell et al note:

Micropatrias... mimic and in many ways parody established sovereign nation-states. Micropatrias are spaces where forms of humor and seriousness intertwine and entangle to allow for playful and critical approaches to sovereignty through national representations and diplomatic performances. These representations and performances vary along a continuum of functions, intents and styles in terms of the explicit and implicit expressions of humor, seriousness, playfulness and criticality.
(2012: 810)

Through humour, micronations can comment upon the at times arbitrary and absurd nature of nationality and diplomacy. They do not, however, typically present the possibility for a serious corrective to these problems, both because such tiny self-proclaimed nations *never* achieve international recognition and because they are only rarely manifestations of popular will on the local level. For example, the Principality of Sealand, the Republic of Kugelmugel, and the Conch Republic represent (or represented) political statements but not genuine attempts at establishing separate governments and do not (or did not) have connections with significant local self-determination movements in the United Kingdom, Austria, and the USA respectively. A few micronations are, however, linked to actual self-determination movements on a broader scale. For example, the Principality of Hutt River is a reflection of longstanding secessionist impulses in Western Australia (Sabhlok, 2012), and Freetown Christiania seeks to provide a genuine alternative to the form of governance practiced by the Danish state (Midtgaard, 2007). The present paper discusses another such politically relevant micronation, namely the Sovereign State of Forvik, located in the archipelago of Shetland (Scotland, UK).

I. Personal introduction

Because of my personal feelings involving the micronation of Forvik and my personal interactions with its founder, I think it most intellectually honest to write the present article in a personalised manner, which should not, I hope, detract from the scholarly relevance of the discussion. As I am not a Shetlander myself, I possess no special right to pontificate on Shetland's politics and cultural identity; I am simply someone who is passionate about the place and its people. In a recent two-part article in the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* (Grydehøj, 2013a, 2013b), I presented the story of a young man who set out to achieve one great thing and succeeded in achieving the exact opposite. This man, David MacRitchie, chose the North Sea archipelago of Shetland as the intellectual focal point for his academic and ethno-political project, for what a scholarly observer referred to as "that monument of misguided industry" (Cross, 1919: 238). Concluding this article, I noted that this was not the only story of influential mainland-Shetland intellectual interaction and that:

As "sites of creative conceptualization" imbued with "fallacious simplicity" (Baldacchino, 2010: 14-15), small islands have the potential to intensify

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the power of the cultural, scholarly, and political logics to which they are subjected both from within and from without (Grydehøj, 2013b: 113).

The present article tells another such story. It is a story that I have long avoided telling. Over the years, I have written a fair number of articles, not to mention a doctoral thesis, concerning the culture and politics of Shetland (Grydehøj, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Throughout, I have studiously refrained from even hinting at this story's existence. Every so often, anonymous peer reviewers have enquired about the glaring omission of 'the case of Forvik'. My response has always been that this case is at once too insignificant and too complex to engage with comfortably in the context of a scholarly examination of Shetland identity and political development. But is this true? Is this the reason for my silence? Or is it rather that the case of Forvik is too robust a rebuke to, in the words of Robert Burns, "the best-laid schemes o' mice an' men"—that its very insignificance and absurdity make it all the more depressing that yet another man's 'monument of misguided industry' has quite concretely made a mockery of issues about which I care deeply?

This special issue of *Shima* represents an opportunity to grapple with some of these concerns and to do so in a context that neither gives Forvik undue prominence nor treats it merely as a joke. Forvik has indeed made an impact on Shetland, affecting serious aspects of community life—namely, how far the community is willing to compromise on its sense of local culture and identity.

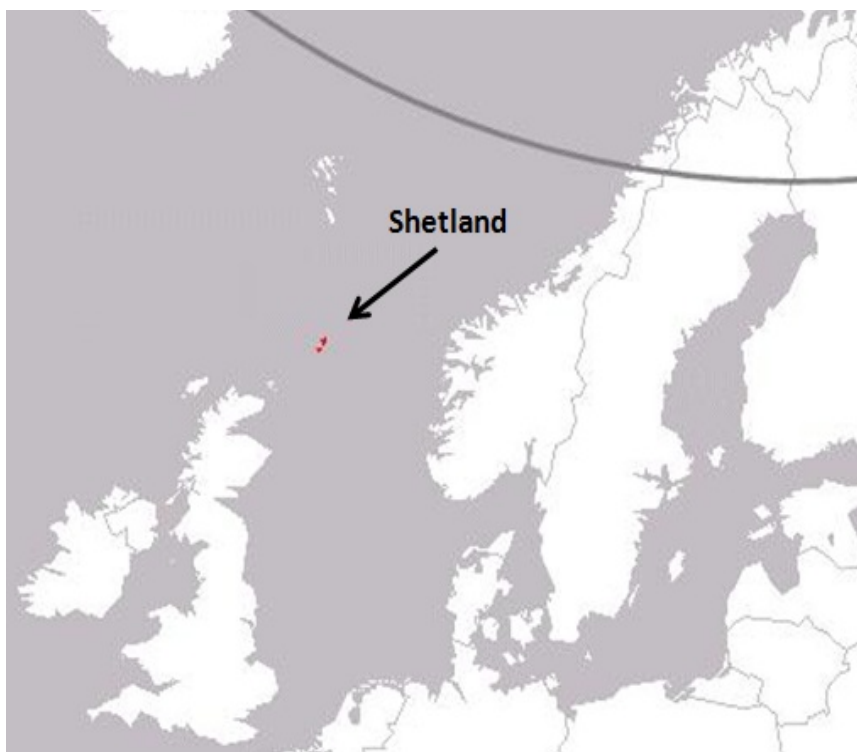


Figure 1: Map of Northern Europe showing position of Shetland (adapted from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Blank_Template_for_Greater_Europe.PNG)

II. Cultural nationalism in Shetland

I began my PhD research with the Elphinstone Institute at the University of Aberdeen in 2006. My research set out to determine why Shetlanders took such an interest in their culture. Here was a community of around 22,000 people, situated far out in the North Atlantic (see Figure 1), which had somehow developed not only a strong sense of local identity but also a remarkably strong desire to do something about it; Shetland was (and is) awash in local books, local music, local museums, basically local everything—including a local autonomy/nationalist movement.

The high point of Shetland's autonomy movement arguably came in the 1980s. In 1987, the joint candidate for the autonomist movements in the archipelagos of Orkney and Shetland managed a respectable 15% of the vote in the parliamentary elections, and 'Shetland Movement' candidates had success in the local elections of 1986, 1990, and 1994. Even after the Shetland Movement proper faded away, its former members continued taking an active role in local politics and sitting on the Shetland Islands Council (hereafter, *SIC*) local government. For instance, Sandy Cluness, a Shetland Movement candidate in 1986, served as SIC convenor from 2003-2012.

The sense of cultural nationalism and exceptionalism in Shetland is linked to the islands' history. Vikings began settling the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland in around 790 CE, either displacing or exterminating the indigenous population, who were linked with the Christian Pictish culture of mainland Scotland (hereafter, *Scotland*). The Northern Isles were integrated into the Norwegian state in 875 and maintained a strong Scandinavian culture until Lowland Scottish influence made inroads in the mid-1100s. Orkney and Shetland were pawned to the King of Scotland by the King of Denmark-Norway as part of a dowry in 1468 and 1469 respectively (Grydehøj, 2008b). However, it was only in 1581 that the Northern Isles genuinely came under Scottish administration, when the Stewart earls came to power on the islands. Although an anti-Scottish sentiment seems to have developed early, Shetland first gained a specifically Nordic/Viking-influenced local identity concept in the mid-1800s, and even this did not develop into the form of cultural nationalism that we know today until the 1930s (Grydehøj, 2013b).

Cultural pride is one thing, but the ability to do something about it is something else, and it is here that Shetland has excelled. The sense of cultural distinctiveness relative to the rest of Scotland and the UK prompted Shetland's local government to respond vigorously to the development of the North Sea oil industry. In 1974, the UK government granted Shetland minor but crucial additional powers that allowed the archipelago to make considerable financial profit from the oil industry and thereby fund major social and cultural development projects. As a result, although the SIC today has largely the same legal jurisdictional capacity as other Scottish local governments, it acts across a significantly wider scope of issues and at a higher level (Grydehøj, 2012, 2013c).

I undertook my own ethnographic fieldwork in Shetland over a period of seven months in 2007. During my research, I conducted semi-structured recorded interviews with 75 residents from a wide range of social, gender, age, educational, employment, and geographical backgrounds within the islands. The interviews – amounting to around 170 hours of recorded speech – primarily concerned the nature of local identity and local conceptions of Shetland's history. Through my role as a youth worker in the Lerwick youth clubs, I also gained insight into the opinions of young people in the archipelago.

Although based in the main town of Lerwick, I travelled elsewhere in the archipelago for fieldwork. Since my residence there, I have kept in contact with various Shetlanders and have visited the islands on numerous occasions for both work and pleasure.

2007 was an exciting time for Shetland. The Scottish National Party (SNP) succeeded for the first time in forming a government in the devolved Scottish parliament, raising the spectre of Shetland being pulled into an independent Scotland. At the same time, debate flared up concerning the islands' economic future, with the SIC pushing for the development of a major onshore windfarm, which would power local finances by providing electricity for a considerable chunk of Scotland. At the time of writing, the windfarm debate remains ongoing, and the Scottish nationalism debate is approaching an important milestone, namely the SNP-led referendum on Scottish independence from the UK, which will take place on 18 September 2014.

In my 2007 ethnography, I met with a widespread sense – among both native Shetlanders and incomers – that Shetland was special and that the people of Shetland were distinct from other peoples. I also encountered a strong apathy toward the idea of Shetland being governed from Scotland and a good deal of support for Shetland having the power to make its own decisions separate from Scotland. Conceptions of cultural distinction and belonging were under conscious negotiation and were well formulated. A typical expression of this was given to me by former high school headmaster, 70-year-old Geordie Jamieson: “You’re Shetland first. You’re maybe Scottish or British second, whatever hierarchical role you want to play. But yeah, I’m very proud of being – in inverted commas – ‘Shetlander’, whatever that ultimately means” (Geordie Jamieson, recorded personal interview, 7 July 2007, Uyeasound).

Communications officer for the Shetland Amenity Trust, 46-year-old Davy Cooper, presented an even more clearly schematised conception of what makes Shetland culture distinctive:

There’s sort of three elements to Shetland culture. There’s the Scots element, which is quite strong, stronger than some people would have you believe. There is a strong Scandinavian element to it as well. Um, whether that Scandinavian element is a real one or whether it’s one that people have decided that they want is open to question. And there’s also an element, that fact that it’s a group of islands, and I think island cultures are different than mainland cultures, and I think that is an almost universal thing. So, you’ve got a combination of those three elements that I think is what makes Shetland unique. (Davy Cooper, recorded personal interview, February 2007, Lerwick).

Other Shetland researchers have found similar results (for example, Malm, 2013; Koivunen, 2012). In 2007, I did not encounter a widespread desire for independence. Could the tides, however, have been shifting? The sense of local cultural distinction led to disquiet about the SNP’s Scottish independence project. Indeed, the SNP achieved just 16.6% of the Shetland vote in the 2007 elections, dropping to 12.1% in the 2011 elections. In 2007, I found people musing (idly, I thought) about Shetland remaining part of the residual UK in the event that Scotland became independent. Perhaps the strengthening of Scottish nationalism was in the process of activating Shetland’s cultural nationalism?

III. Udal law and Shetland independence

A matter of relatively minor interest to me during my 2007 fieldwork was the work of SOUL, the Shetland and Orkney Udal Law group. SOUL argued, basically, that Orkney and Shetland had never genuinely become part of Scotland (and subsequently, the UK and the EU). The argument was that the Northern Isles (or rather, the allegedly small portion of their land that had been owned by the Danish-Norwegian crown) had simply been pawned to the King of Scotland and could be redeemed by the pawner (the Danish-Norwegian crown) at any time. SOUL further noted:

We were pawned by and technically remain part of the Norse Empire, since 1814 of Norway. Both Norse and British Empires have passed away. In the process, their possessions were all allowed Self Determination. Except Orkney and Shetland. We are now being immersed in the new Empire of Europe. Before we are, everyone in Orkney and Shetland should understand what has been lost; what there is to lose and what may be gained from the options now before us. What is not an option is to ignore the situation (SOUL, 2003).

Besides claiming that the Northern Isles possess the right to self-determination, SOUL argued that the former Scandinavian/Norse legal system ('udal law') should still be in force in Orkney and Shetland and that this legal system held out significant advantages for the island communities. I will not go into detail here regarding the specifics of SOUL's argument, but suffice it to say that the argument finds little support among serious historians (Smith, 2010) or legal authorities (see below), who believe Orkney and Shetland to have long since become legitimately part of Scotland.

SOUL (founded in 2003) was the work of a very small group of individuals and never received widespread support. The organisation was led by and closely associated with an incomer to Shetland, the Englishman Stuart Hill (born 1943). Significantly, Stuart Hill had become a laughing stock in Shetland prior to getting involved in Shetland nationalism, and at the time when I first visited Shetland in 2007, he was known primarily for his ill-fated attempt to circumnavigate the British Isles in a homemade boat; he began sailing north from Kent, England in May 2001, and following a total of seven lifeboat/helicopter rescue operations, he was finally conclusively shipwrecked on 21 August off the coast of Shetland—where he decided to settle. Already long before his final shipwreck, Hill's maritime misadventures had earned him the nickname of 'Captain Calamity' in the British press, and Shetlanders still know him by this moniker today.

It should thus be borne in mind during the forthcoming discussion of Hill's nationalist activism that his project was perhaps doomed from the start precisely on account of the project being *his*. This is important to note because, considering the sense of cultural distinction and antagonism to Scotland, Shetland nationalism need not have been a lost cause. Indeed, udal law and uncertainties over Scottish claims to the islands had been deployed by Shetland nationalists of various kinds in the past (Jones, 2012). As late as 2007, Frank Renwick, Baron of Ravenstone, published a satirical novel that envisioned the discovery of a 1699 text on udal law leading to a bureaucratically fomented Shetland self-determination movement, which transformed in turn into a socialist revolution—which transformed into failure (Baron of Ravenstone, 2007).

IV. The micronation of Forvik

When I spoke with Hill in 2007, he was still deeply engaged with the SOUL project and felt that, given time, he could gain popular support by demonstrating that an independent or autonomous Shetland would have the ability to control its own oil, fisheries, and taxes (outside of 'malignant' European Union influence), eventually developing into a Gulf State-like paradise of wealth. Eventually, however, having presumably despaired of SOUL's low-key activism affecting the desired sea-change in Shetland public opinion, Hill tried a more active approach. On 21 June 2008, he presented a 'Declaration of Direct Dependence' for the tiny (2.5 acre) uninhabited island of Forewick Holm (hereafter, *Forvik*, as referred to by Hill) off Shetland's west coast (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Forvik, with the island of Papa Stour in the background. (Source: Robbie, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Forewick_Holm_%28aka_Forvik_Island%29_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1780521.jpg)

After setting out the arguments he had made through the SOUL project, Hill proclaimed:

Accordingly I, Stuart Alan Hill, being the udal owner of the island of Forvik, do declare that the said island of Forvik owes no allegiance to any United Kingdom government, central or local, and is not bound by any of its statutes. I offer my services as Steward to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and acknowledge her rights as being the same, and not more, than were originally granted to King James III in 1469.

Further, I hereby invite residents of Shetland to join with me to set up a true and just administration, based on principles of democracy that will ensure the elected representatives carry out the wishes of the people and that will serve as a model to which the rest of Shetland can aspire.

Further, I hereby invite residents of Shetland to join their properties with that of Forvik in a federation under such new administration. Further, I also invite any suitable person from any country in the world, who supports these aims, namely to become free of liars, thieves and tyrants in government, to become a citizen of Forvik.

It is my earnest desire that Forvik will provide an example for Shetland to follow and that Shetland in turn will provide an example for other countries

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and regions, the people of which would prefer a system where their politicians represent, rather than rule them (Hill, 2008).

Hill claimed a status for Forvik similar to those held by existing British crown dependencies such as the Isle of Man, Jersey, and Guernsey. Focus was no longer on the relative benefits of udal law, but Hill used the concept of the free, land-owning udaller to suggest that other pieces of land in Shetland could join Forvik in the crown dependency; he thus envisioned a piecemeal territorial expansion of Shetland autonomy.

Although Forvik's transition from being part of the UK to being a dependency of the British Crown officially took place on 21 June, Hill preceded this with a 18 June declaration on the *Shetland News* website, leading to immediate, heated discussion on the *Shetlink* online forums. Already on 19 June, the *Guardian* (a national UK newspaper) ran a story entitled 'Captain Calamity leads breakaway of Shetland islet from the UK', quoting Hill as saying "You can do things which annoy the government and just keep prodding and poking until something happens ... The idea is to be an annoyance" (Hill, quoted in Carrell, 2008). We can thus note that Hill approached the subject humorously from the start; although his intentions were serious, he was well aware of the inescapably comic nature of his project. Tellingly, the *Guardian* article was footed by short descriptions of other 'micronations' (Sealand, Frestonia, Gay and Lesbian Kingdom of the Coral Sea Islands, Hutt River Principality, and Minerva) (Parker, 2008). On 20 June, the *Shetland Times* reported on Hill's plans for Forvik to be free from UK taxes; possess its own gold-backed currency; produce its own postage stamps; host companies tax free; claim "the sea and seabed up to a limit of 200 miles, or to the median line between it and other states;" and eventually develop "offshore banking and financial services." The overall tone of this article was, however, sardonic, with statements concerning the UK government's lack of interest in Hill's activities and with then-SIC Convenor Sandy Cluness stating "I would, essentially, ignore him" (Riddell, 2008a).

Hill's actions precipitated a 'media maelstrom' (Robertson, 2008a), and over the following weeks the story became a hot – though light-hearted – news item in the international media. Hill, who had a string of unsuccessful entrepreneurial ventures behind him (including the failed *Shetland Independent Newsletter* in 2007), sought to earn income from his Forvik project. In the words of the *Shetland Times*:

He intends setting up an online voting system for his parliament, The Ting, and is also looking for "responsible and well-connected people" to act as ambassadors in all parts of the world.

Honorary citizenship is on offer via the internet for £60 (1 Forvik gulde) which will entitle holders to a share of the principality's future profits. At this stage only Shetland residents can buy a small plot of Forvik and landowning citizenship for £120, which gives a voting right in the Ting to decide where all the incoming funds will be spent (Robertson, 2008).

In July 2007, Hill claimed that 100 non-Shetland residents had purchased honorary citizenship and that three Shetland residents (including one native-born Shetlander) had purchased landowning citizenship (Robertson, 2008c), and in late 2011, he claimed that there were around 200 citizens (Carrell, 2011). Hill's <www.forvik.com> website does not currently provide information on the total number of honorary and landowning

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citizens, but it should be noted that the method of obtaining citizenship has now changed, with individuals being able to pay £20 for annual membership or £200 for lifetime membership, which seem to grant the same rights as did the former form of citizenship.

In line with the assertion that Forvik was a crown dependency, Hill invited Queen Elizabeth II to visit the island (Robertson, 2008b), and on 06 November he formally petitioned the Queen to confirm its crown dependency status. It should be noted that Hill had written to the Queen on a number of occasions in 2006, 2007, and early 2008, resulting, however, only in form letters noting that “the Queen’s position as a constitutional Sovereign precludes her from intervening in this matter, which is the responsibility of the Scottish Executive” (Bonici, 2007). As Hill apparently received no response whatsoever to his 06 November 2008 petition, he eventually, on 23 February 2011, declared Forvik to be a ‘sovereign state’ in a ‘Declaration of Independence’ signed (electronically) by 10 other ‘members’ of Forvik.

Events in the interim though had already served to cast grave doubts over Hill’s micronationalist project. First, there was the difficulty of maintaining any kind of real presence on Forvik proper, an island in a highly exposed location with no pre-existing permanent structures. In the beginning, Hill was making trips to and from the island in a homemade boat while constructing a residence on Forvik, and though he continued to live primarily in the town of Cunningsburgh on the Shetland mainland, he apparently overnights occasionally on Forvik in a tent. On 08 September 2008, however, this attempted residency received a major setback: Hill’s boat began taking on water at its mooring on Forvik, and when his attempt to move it to a more sheltered location led to his being stranded and sinking without engines in dangerous waters, Hill had no recourse but to call the coastguard services for rescue assistance (Cramb, 2008).

The situation took a further bizarre turn in March 2009 when Mark King, from whom Hill claimed to have acquired Forvik, claimed that Hill had failed to pay for his purchase of the island and was thus not its legitimate owner. King, it may be noted, is a resident of the neighbouring island of Papa Stour, which is subject to severe depopulation and social problems (Grydehøj, 2008a). King opposed Hill’s use of the island as well as the sale of citizenship/membership and had found himself troubled by debt collectors seeking monies owed by Hill in relation to his *Shetland Independent Newsletter* venture (Riddell, 2009a). The next week, in response to Hill’s protestations against these claims, King sought to “put a permanent end to his (ie Hill’s) career of misrepresentation and mischief” by stating that he was legally unable – under both udal and Scots law – to make a gift of Forvik to Hill on account of the island in fact being mortgaged and would be having Hill’s small house on the island dismantled (King, quoted in Riddell, 2009b). Hill reacted with an open letter to the *Shetland News* website warning that he had set up coastal defences that would damage any boat seeking to land on Forvik (Bevington, 2009). Despite this rhetoric, to my knowledge, Hill has spent very little time on Forvik since 2008, with the result that his claims of dependence or independence now lack most of their territorial thrust.

Part of the intention of Hill’s Forvik project was to force the government of the UK, Scotland, or Shetland to take legal action against him, thereby allowing him to contest Scotland’s jurisdiction over Shetland in a court of law. Hill argued that the government’s failure to bring him to court amounted to an acknowledgement on its behalf that it could not defend Shetland’s jurisdictional status. Thus, for instance, Hill’s refusal to pay council tax to the SIC or to pay value-added tax (VAT) to the UK government’s HM

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Revenue & Customs went unchallenged for some time, despite Hill's explicit request for his case to be heard.

Eventually though, Hill got his opportunity to be heard in court, and on 22 September 2011 he was declared bankrupt by the Lerwick Sheriff Court as a result of monies owed to the Royal Bank of Scotland. Sheriff Philip Mann engaged with Hill's argument that the Scottish courts had no jurisdiction over him, commenting:

If you're correct I might as well just close up my computer, fold up my papers and walk out now, because all these people [in the court] would potentially have the same argument you would have. The people of Shetland have accepted the jurisdiction of this court for hundreds of years. This is the first time someone has come to challenge the jurisdiction of the court in the way you have done. As a matter of international law, Scottish courts and Scottish lawmakers have undisputed jurisdiction, and I don't see how I can competently make a ruling that I'm sitting here incompetently (Mann, quoted in *Shetland Times*, 2011a).

Hill's legal troubles continued when, in December 2011, the police in Shetland finally decided to take action against his driving of two vans (on the Shetland mainland) without tax, insurance, and appropriate certificates. Hill had claimed that these were consular vehicles of Forvik and were thus not covered by Scottish regulations. As Hill was unable to pay the court fine, he was sentenced to 100 hours' community service (Carrell, 2011), with Sheriff Graeme Napier noting that "I can't help feeling you have got yourself into a very difficult situation for reasons I know you think are laudable, but you could find yourself in significant difficulty" (Napier, quoted in *Shetland Times*, 2011b). Having failed to carry out his community service, Hill was arrested in July 2012 and spent 12 days in prison in Aberdeen—maintaining, he claimed, a hunger strike throughout his imprisonment (Bevington, 2012a; Hill, 2012a). Hill was back in court already in September 2012, however, for continued failure to complete his community service order, though now Sheriff Philip Mann decided to remove Hill's platform for further activism via the courts by waiving the sentence (Bevington, 2012b).

In a further blow to his Forvik project, in July 2012, the Scottish courts again rejected Hill's contention that Scotland had no jurisdiction over Shetland, with Judge Lord Pentland offering a relatively detailed argument in relation to Hill's claim regarding the Royal Bank of Scotland (McConville, 2012; *Shetland Times*, 2012). Although Hill has continued to advocate for Shetland self-determination, his activities have taken a less confrontational form as of late.

The last time I personally met Hill was in April 2012. I was on the bus to Shetland's airport—accompanied, as it happens, by the rather more successful campaigner for the rights of islanders, Godfrey Baldacchino of the University of Malta. In our subsequent conversation, Hill described to us his country's space programme (which had apparently been subcontracted out to an individual in Australia) and his plans to create a network to encourage people elsewhere in the world to proclaim their own plots of land to be sovereign states. When I put it to Hill that this latter aim was perhaps incompatible with the assertion that Shetland is a legally exceptional case as far as its disputed position with the UK is concerned, he did not seem to understand.

V. Discussion

Micronations in general are interesting from a political science perspective inasmuch as their ability to enjoy continued existence is balanced against their success in achieving other aims. Hill's appearances in court have all been because of his activities on the Shetland mainland, not on Forvik. Even when he built permanent structures on the island without planning permission, the issue was not taken up by the authorities, who perhaps did not view pursuance of the matter to be worthwhile. Similarly, the SIC and the UK government have not pursued Hill for unpaid taxes; living on a pensioner's salary, supplemented by relatively small amounts of income from his various business ventures, Hill is simply insufficiently important to warrant state attention. It is only by failing to pay private creditors and by arguably endangering the lives of the public by driving illegally that Hill has been able to press his case in court.

Despite Hill's assertions, it is not particularly difficult to get away with claiming that a tiny piece of land is its own country—as long as one does not really inconvenience one's host state. Stunts such as producing a humorous 'Guidebook to Forvik' (Hill, 2012b) are both easy to accomplish and unlikely to be contested. This lack of contestation is not proof that the host state has conceded the validity of these claims; it is merely proof that the host state does not really care. It is only when micronations begin exerting what is regarded as a significant negative influence on the host state that democratic host states intervene, as we can see in the example of Denmark's Freetown Christiania. As McConnell et al (2012, 810) note (with direct reference to Forvik), "While these (non)responses can be dismissed as non-recognition, therefore lending no legitimacy to the declared sovereignty of the micropatria, they nevertheless make transparent the esoteric quality of recognized conventional sovereignty." This esoteric quality could conceivably offer the potential for negotiation of sovereignty via paradiplomacy or informal diplomacy, and it remains possible that a micronational project resembling Forvik could act as a sort of stalking horse for genuine nationalism, as a testing ground for discourses of independence. It would, however, need to first possess popular legitimacy on the road to gaining legal legitimacy.

Forvik does not possess popular legitimacy. I have not personally met any Shetland resident who supports Hill's actions, though such people do exist, as evidenced by supporters on the *Shetlink* internet forum and the dozen or so people who took part in a series of events concerning 'Sovereign Shetland' that Hill organised in 2010. There are considerably more people who express sympathy with Hill's aims (increased self-determination for Shetland) or believe in his historical research but feel that he has gone about his activism in the wrong way. Whatever his level of support, I suspect that very few of these Shetland residents have been convinced by Hill *per se*; rather, they had a pre-existing belief that Shetland would benefit from greater self-determination, and as it happens, Hill has been the most vociferous public proponent of this in recent years.

And herein lies the problem. Forvik is unusual among micronations inasmuch as it builds upon a serious pre-existing movement toward greater self-determination. This may be somewhat incidental, for Shetland's is very much a cultural nationalism, rooted in a degree of affiliation with Scandinavian culture and distinction from Scottish culture, frequently with undercurrents of cultural exclusiveness (Grydehøj, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). Hill's project, meanwhile, has always focused on the potential economic benefits of greater self-determination or independence; profits from North Sea oil, tax haven status, fisheries control, and freedom from the European Union. Nevertheless, as is clear from the Norse Romanticism evident in the statements of many of Hill's sympathisers, his

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appeal – such as it is – is rooted in the cultural nationalism that existed before he washed up on Shetland’s shores.

VI. Conclusion

With the vote on Scottish independence looming and with the mooted Shetland windfarm development holding out the possibility of new major source of local income, now is a time of great change for Shetland. Even if Scotland does not vote for independence, the coming years will likely involve changes in the Scottish government’s relationship with its subnational jurisdictions. Who can say what a credible, home-grown, grown-up self-determination movement might have achieved in this time of immense national and local change? Is it possible that Hill’s activities have closed off the space for a serious discussion of Shetland’s jurisdictional future? When I ask Shetlanders these questions today, they generally answer ‘no’; there is no evidence of a widespread desire for independence, and if there were, Hill would represent no impediment. But I am not so sure. So thoroughly has Hill dominated the Shetland autonomy/independence discourse that it is difficult to say what might have occurred had he not founded SOUL and staked his claim on Forvik. The way in which the planning-on-the-back-of-an-envelope iconoclasts in Hill’s camp have dominated the debate over the past decade seems to have left space only for the manoeuvrings of political operators like Members of Scottish Parliament Tavish Scott (Shetland) and Liam McArthur (Orkney), who have been tempted to posture about self-determination in pursuit of other political objectives (such as scuppering the Scottish Nationalist Party’s plans for Scottish independence)—and who may thus be relatively unconcerned about gaining public support for actual greater self-determination. So toxic has heart-felt discussion of Shetland autonomy become that, in contrast to when I undertook my ethnography in 2007, there is now considerable willingness among even ardent Shetlanders to cynically deploy cultural nationalism to the detriment of Scotland, without viewing it as necessary that Shetland itself benefit as a result.

It would be a pity if conceptions of cultural distinctiveness were allowed to either slip into the hands of sub-Quixotic charlatans or permitted to become the sole property of sharp-elbowed political accountants (no matter how well-intentioned they may be). Shetlanders could benefit from an emotionally genuine *and* thoughtful discussion of why they value their local identity and what they can do to protect it. But because the Shetland nationalism and autonomy debate has been so thoroughly devalued and discredited, this is very unlikely to happen—and Shetlanders will thereby lose the opportunity to either take a historic step toward greater self-determination or take a historic step toward making peace and common cause with Scotland. So you will have to excuse me for not having been particularly eager to write an article about that harmless eccentric Captain Calamity and his amusing micronation of Forvik.

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