A union of convenience or a committed political relationship?:
The changing identity of Ulster unionism within the United Kingdom

Abstract:

This paper aims to analyse the changing perspectives of 'Britishness' among elected unionist representatives from the Democratic Unionist Party and the Ulster Unionist Party in Northern Ireland. This is part of a wider, overarching investigation into the changing nature of the concept of Britishness. Devolution, the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2015 General Election have all reshaped contemporary understandings of Britishness among unionist political parties. By analysing unionist politicians' understandings of contemporary Britishness, based on a select number of in-depth interviews conducted by the author, this paper will demonstrate that there is now an urgent need for academic debate about the ways in which British political identity is constructed in Northern Ireland, and the strength of the relationship, both politically and culturally, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Within this structure, particular interest will be given to the perceived strength of the historical and cultural relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland and to observe how this further impacts on Northern Ireland's political relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. The paper will conclude by suggesting that there has been a collapse of a 'traditional' notion of Britishness as the meta-narrative of identity within Northern Ireland, and that this has important political implications for both government in Northern Ireland and for continued relations with the wider United Kingdom. Conclusions developed from the research will provide a valuable contribution to the significant lack of prior research in academia on the important and continued impact which Northern Ireland plays in developing and influencing the concept of British identity.

Introduction:

Contemporary discussion about the changing nature of Britishness in the United Kingdom has been a significant area of interest for political researchers.  Northern Ireland has often been viewed as a place apart, a problem child to be kept at arm's length.  However, recent threats to the stability of the Union have come from Scotland, not Northern Ireland.  Traditionally, the close cultural and religious ties between Northern Ireland and Scotland have acted as an anchor for British identity in Northern Ireland and during the years of political and social turmoil have acted to hold fast the connection to the Union.  Recent events such as the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the 2015 General Election have contributed to the ever evolving and shifting definition of Britishness: what it means to be British not only within Great Britain but within the whole of the United Kingdom.  This paper will address how these political events as well as the perceived affinity between Northern Ireland and Scotland have impacted upon the identity of unionist elected representatives in Northern Ireland.  Material collected from interviews will be used to identify key areas of interest concerning the way in which participants understand their national identity and to outline their reactions to current threats and pressures on the Union.  The relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland will then be discussed in greater detail as the possibility of Scottish independence threatens the perceived affinity, historical and cultural, between these two regions of the United Kingdom.


Conceptual framework:

In order to achieve the above structure it is first necessary to provide a framework which is capable of encompassing the diversity of the relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland. Elective affinity has been chosen as it best encapsulates the two distinctive strands of unity which bind the regions to the United Kingdom.  The first of these strands is that of the 'elective' connection: that is, the political relationships which hold the Union together.  Based on this principle, regions such as Northern Ireland and Scotland elect to remain within the Union through political acts and legislation.  By electing to remain a member of the United Kingdom, regions such as Northern Ireland and Scotland are stating that they believe that this is in the best interests of their nation and that the positives that arise from being a member of the United Kingdom far outweighs any benefits that they might gain as non-members.  In the case of the United Kingdom, benefits include financial aid to the regions through the distribution of financial expenditure as outlined in the Barnett Formula, national

protection through the British military and the continued benefits which are provided by the National Health Service.

The second strand of this framework relates to the 'affinity' or cultural connections which ties the United Kingdom together. Traditionally, Northern Ireland and Scotland have been the two regions of the United Kingdom with the closest cultural similarities and practices. This can often be viewed through areas such the use of the language of Ulster Scots in both regions, the shared history of immigration and the Plantation of Ulster, as well as a strong religions bond through the prevalence of the Presbyterian Church in both Northern Ireland and Scotland. However, in the case of the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom, the affinity connection is somewhat weakened by the cultural differences between Northern Ireland and England. Whilst Northern Ireland shares cultural similarities with Scotland, these connections are less obvious with England. This may be due in part to the hyper version of Britishness which is found in Northern Ireland. Unlike in other regions, unionists within Northern Ireland promote a version of Britishness which is more visible than that found in England. This can be seen in the current flag flying dilemma in Northern Ireland in which the Union Flag now flies above statutory buildings on designated days only. Although this is the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom it is seen as an infringement upon the culture of members of the unionist community.

Elective affinity aptly allows for the diversity of each region while within the Union, but recent events have sought to weaken the bonds which tie the United Kingdom together. From its creation in 1921, Northern Ireland has been viewed as the most unstable region of the United Kingdom. This was mainly due to the history of ethno-national conflict in Northern Ireland and the reluctance of the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican community to accept Northern Ireland as a state. Even after the Republic of Ireland voted in 1998 to remove their constitutional claim over Northern Ireland by removing Articles II and III of the Irish Constitution, Northern Ireland's place within the United Kingdom was by no means secured. Subsequently the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 created the Principle of Consent in order to address the insecurity of the unionist community. Under this principle, Northern Ireland could only become part of a united Ireland if it was the express will of the majority of the population. For seventeen years Northern Ireland has maintained its place within the Union and has developed stronger bonds than ever before. The economic strengths and benefits which Northern Ireland receives as a member of the United Kingdom has been one of the

strongest arguments in favour of the Union for both communities, particularly after the collapse of the Irish economy and the fall of the Celtic Tiger weakened the arguments that a thirty-two county united Ireland would be economically viable. More people in Northern Ireland than ever before are electing to support the Union. In the 2011 Assembly Election, unionist parties won 55 of the 108 seats available and the Democratic Unionist Party received 30% of the overall first preference votes, showing continued support for the political parties who promote and support the continuation of the Union (Russell, 2011: 3).

While Northern Ireland has become more secure within the Union, the same cannot be said of Scotland. In 2014 Scotland held a referendum on whether they should leave or stay within the United Kingdom. This was the result of a surge in support for the Scottish Nationalist Party which was then led by Alex Salmon and subsequently by Nicola Sturgeon. The Scottish Independence Referendum of 2014 was the closest the Union has come to collapsing in recent decades. Historically, debates surrounding the possibility of Scottish independence are not new. In 1977, Nairn wrote in his work *The Break-Up of Britain* about how Scotland will become 'a centre of disruptive development … and compelled, therefore, along a path of political separation' (1977: 190). To break a historical tie which binds the United Kingdom is no trivial matter and many of the participants interviewed in this study shared their concern over this event. As summarised by Kenny (2012), 'The break-up of a political union is no small thing, because treaties, customs, languages and cultures get knitted together over the centuries and there are shared memories, which go way back'. Had Scotland voted differently in the independence referendum, where would this have left Northern Ireland within what remained of the United Kingdom? The main fear in Northern Ireland surrounding the Scottish independence referendum was that of an 'existential anxiety: unionists think that the Scots could never vote for independence and yet fear that they may elect to do so' (Aughey, 2013: 227). For Northern Ireland, this could have resulted in them losing an important part of their connection to the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland has always connected on a greater level to Scotland than to the rest of mainland Britain and the loss of such a close ally and friend within the Union may have alienated Northern Ireland further from the rest of the United Kingdom. As argued by Macleod (2013: 649), 'at a moment when even as the Anglo-Irish relations appear to have been resolved, the spectre of a referendum on Scottish independence hovers on the horizon with all its implications for Britishness and what would remain of the "United" Kingdom'. However, Scottish

independence did not come to pass as the referendum resulted in a victory of 55% No to 45% Yes Scotland, meaning that Scotland voted to remain within the United Kingdom.

However, the perceived relationship with Scotland that has been championed and promoted by Northern Irish unionists never truly seemed to be equal or to provide a two-way support mechanism. Walker (2012: 380) has commented that during the period of The Troubles in Northern Ireland Scotland did very little to help to bring an end to the conflict. As argued by political thinkers such as de Castella and Judah (2013), although historically Northern Ireland 'shares strong cultural links with Scotland … there has been no mention of a political bond between the two should the larger nation break away,' implying political indifference between the two countries should independence have become a reality. Lord Empey, a unionist commentator from Northern Ireland, has argued that the current Scottish situation has the ability to reignite difficulties which have lain dormant in Northern Irish society in recent years, 'I don't wish to exaggerate, but if the Scottish nationalists were to succeed it could possibly reignite the difficulties we have just managed to overcome' (cited Maxwell, 2012).

Political institutions such as the British Irish Council have helped to promote and continue close political and cultural bonds between Scotland and Northern Ireland. As stated by Ramsey (1998), 'they offer an opportunity to bring Scottish expertise in the management of inter-communal tension to bear on Northern Ireland' (cited Coakley, 2014: 92). Walker (1998) outlined, 'Both the Scottish and Northern Irish constitutional debates today converge strikingly around questions of the future of the UK as a whole and of identity and the meaning of ideas of 'Britishness', and of sovereignty and legitimacy'. However, it is also necessary to accept that 'we also have to account for the differences in the Unionist ideology of Scotland and Northern Ireland' (Farrington and Walker, 2009: 136). McDonald (2014) argued, 'Unlike the Ulster variety, Scottish unionism doesn't need, or indeed want, to fly the Union flag 365 days per year, or even on 18 designated days'. Although historically and culturally close, Northern Ireland and Scotland are two separate if related political entities and must be treated as such. As Sweeney (2014) puts it, 'Unionist and Nationalists have resonated upon Scottish shores for generations. Our culture of flag flying and our attitudes to marches and parades differ little from those of Ulster'. Walker (2010: 251) stated that 'political interactions between Scotland and Northern Ireland, as a matter of devolutionary relevance, have both a significant history and a contemporary resonance'.

The Scottish connection:

The Scottish Independence Referendum has had a clear effect on the relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland. While unionists have breathed a sigh of relief that Scotland voted to remain within the Union, they know that the result was not decisive enough to lay the question of Scottish Independence to rest for good. However, the historical and cultural ties which bind Northern Ireland and Scotland remain strong. As journalists like Kenny (2012) have claimed, 'Ulster Unionists have always championed the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but their more particular attachment has been to Scotland rather than to England', a country which they share more in common with, both historically and culturally. One of the reasons for this affinity is that the historical relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland can be traced back to the seventeenth century and the plantation of Ulster by settlers from Scotland. The extent of migration between Scotland and Northern Ireland has contributed towards many of the connecting themes of identity such as the history of Protestantism, and in particular Presbyterianism, within both Scotland and Northern Ireland. Migration between these two regions also led to shared historical sectarianism and hostility towards Catholicism. Kidd (2008: 12) outlined this in the statement, 'Irish migration into Scotland during the nineteenth century had sharpened indigenous Lowland Protestant hostility to Ireland's Catholic nationalism and had encouraged sympathies with the predicament of Ulster Scots'. As further surmised by Walker (1995: 22), 'Anxiety over Irish Catholic immigration into Scotland certainly exercised many Protestant minds, although it is not clear that, outside the ranks of demagogues (often immigrant Ulster preachers) it produced any doubts about Protestantism's cultural dominance in Scotland'. While both countries have their own unique political situations, their common experience within the Union has helped to contribute to a greater sense of cohesion and togetherness, at least for Ulster unionists.

Cultural similarities between Northern Ireland and Scotland are often viewed as two sides of the same coin, meaning 'there is, in effect, little or no difference between, Ulster Scots and Scottishness … they are simply two components of the same culture' (Wilson and Stapleton, 2006: 24). As encapsulated by McCartney (2013), 'To grow up in Northern Ireland is to be linked to Scotland in some visceral way I can't quite explain'. Academic research on national identity is ineffective without an in-depth examination of key cultural identities. However, the relationship with unionism is not straightforward for as McCrone observes (1984: 129-130), nationalism does not have to be solely portrayed on the political stage as it

can also be promoted through culture as well.  Walker outlined this view in the statement, 'In both Scotland and Northern Ireland the principle "actors" in this sphere were the same: namely, the respective unionist parties and minor political pressure groups; the Protestant Churches; and the Orange Order' (1995: 62).

Protestantism, in particular Presbyterianism, is perhaps the most influential cultural link between the two nations.  According to Kidd (2008: 7-8), unionism and nationalism are compatible within the Union and that religion is one of the ways in which this has been achieved.  As stated by Ferguson, 'Religion to them has always been more of a badge of identity than a question of ethnic origin' (cited Crozier, 1990:43).  However, in recent years this defining feature of identity has come under threat against issues such as secularisation and changing concepts of identity.  Vann (2005: 234) further reinforced this belief in his argument that 'the notion that Protestantism contributed to a sense of "Britishness" in Britain and Ireland is challenged'.  Therefore, if the defining link between Scotland and Northern Ireland of 'common Presbyterian religious and cultural bonds' may be weakening this could have  a serious impact on the security of both regions within the United Kingdom (Walker, 2010: 245).

No work surrounding the importance of Protestant culture in both Scotland and Northern Ireland can be complete without discussing the negative cultural impacts.  Sectarianism is one cultural aspect which has significant influence in both countries.  Football, in particular the clubs of Rangers and Celtic, have long been used as a metaphor for sectarian tensions within both Northern Ireland and Scotland.  Sectarianism in Scotland has long been viewed as a legacy of the historical tensions Catholic and Protestant migrants from Northern Ireland brought with them to Scotland (The Scottish Government, 2013).   This argument was condensed by Kenny (2012) in the statement, 'when Rangers play Celtic, which side raises a Scottish nationalist flag? Neither. Rangers considers itself "British" and flies a Union Jack while Celtic is characterised as Irish, and flies the Tricolour'.  In recent years much has been done by both governments to ensure that the problem of sectarianism is no longer ignored. Professor Devine at Edinburgh University reinforced this by arguing, 'Sectarianism is moving in the right direction.  It used to be worse than it is now' (cited McKeown, 2013). However, much can still be done in both regions to address this issue.

The language of Ulster-Scots is another key cultural and identity bond between the two regions. Brought to Northern Ireland 'nearly 400 years ago' by plantation settlers, Ulster-Scots is perhaps the strongest connection between Protestants and Unionists on both sides of the Irish Sea (Ulster Scots Agency, 2014). The 2011 census showed that 8.1% of people in Northern Ireland had 'some ability in Ulster-Scots', with percentages in North Antrim being above average with Ballymoney at 29.43% and Ballymena at 22.15% (Scots Language Centre, 2014). McCall (2002: 215), encapsulated this in the statement:

> 'where is the Ulster-Scots reinvention taking the Ulster unionist identity? Towards an independent Ulster? Towards an exclusive Northern Ireland within the UK? Towards alliance with Scotland? Towards a culturally enriched region of the UK, the island of Ireland, and Europe? The correct answer probably is: not very far.'

The role of the Orange Order within Northern Ireland and Scotland also contributed greatly to a shared sense of identity and culture. As surmised by McCauley and Tonge (2009: 266), 'Britishness has often taken on particular characteristics, such as Protestantism and Orangeism'. The Orange Order is an institution with strong cultural ties in both Northern Ireland and in Scotland. The Orange Order is a Protestant cultural organisation which was founded in Northern Ireland in 1795 (The Orange Order: 2014). Tonge *et al* (2011: 403) provided a precise synopsis of the role of the Order in the statement that 'The Orange Order is a cross-denominational organisation committed to the defence of the Protestant faith, support for Northern Ireland's constitution and loyalty to the monarch'. According to Southern (2007a), the Orange Order does not only work to promote a sense of Ulsterness, but also maintains and develops the traditional connection within Ulster Protestantism to British identity. As summarised by Southern (2007a: 85), the 'co-presence of Ulster and British symbolism in an Orange parade is not contradictory, but illustrates the duality of sentimental beliefs and cultural bonds'.

It can be argued that 'regional dimensions to Britishness should not prevent recognition of the transcending features of British identity which function as salient unifying symbols of belonging' (Southern, 2007a: 85). Although the Orange Order was originally reactionary in nature, it has diversified over the course of its history to represent or include most Protestant denominations and unionist political outlooks. As argued by Jackson (1989: 12), 'the growth of Orangeism represented the speedy invention of tradition; even so, and despite its vital bond with anti-catholicism, the appeal and significance of the Order ultimately transcended

its origins, its specific membership, and questions of religious definition'. As well as the obvious connection to Northern Ireland, the Orange Order has Lodges right across the United Kingdom and worldwide. By being a member of the Order, even if not within Northern Ireland, there is a sense of cultural belonging promoted between individuals who share religious or cultural backgrounds. As outlined by MacPherson (2014: 91), 'Membership of the Orange Order, then, not only shaped their Irishness, Scottishness, Englishness or Britishness but also helped to focus their religious, social and emotional subjectivities'.

As argued by Walker (1995: 67), the Orange Order 'brought a style of politics to Scotland very reminiscent of Northern Ireland'. Attempts over recent years by the Orange Order in Northern Ireland to become more influential in the Scottish independence debate have been academically and politically ignored. For example, statements by Orange Order historian David Hume that Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland should have been eligible to vote in a referendum on Scottish Independence was met with criticism by both Northern Irish and Scottish politicians and political commentators (Devenport, 2012). It is noteworthy to analysis the historical background to this statement. As argued by Leask (2012), Hume was merely reiterating that in 1912, Scots Unionists supported the Ulster Covenant and the creation of Northern Ireland and that the Scottish referendum on independence may have been the time to repay this favour. This defence of the Union by Northern Irish Orangemen was not only done to support their Scottish counterparts, it was also a distinctive stand against what they perceived to be the end of Britishness as it is known. A useful synopsis provided by Ferguson is that the threat of Scottish independence was 'not just on their nationality but on their political and territorial position' within the United Kingdom (cited Crozier, 1990:41-42). The relationship between unionism and the Orange Order in Northern Ireland is an area of vast political and cultural interest. Again, this is an area of political research which has been vastly ignored in academic discussions surrounding Britishness. Boal *et al* (1991: 104) postulated that, 'While the unifying strategies of both the Orange Order, and unionism, testify *inter alia* to the social reality of religious divisions, the implications for Ulster Protestant society of cleavages along denominational and other religious lines have to date not been explored extensively by social scientists'.

<u>The impact on Unionist representatives in Northern Ireland</u>:

The close nature between Northern Ireland and Scotland may have become strained due to the campaign for Scottish independence, but the elective affinity that prevails between the regions and the United Kingdom will continue to promote close cultural links and the right of both populations to elect to remain within the security of the Union. The following section will include contributions from some of the participants who have been interviewed so far and how questions of identity and place within the Union have contributed to unionist designated politicians understanding of the Union and Britishness.

According to Parekh (2000: 7-8), 'national identity should be defined in political rather than ethnic or cultural terms', yet within Northern Ireland this has been notoriously hard to achieve due to the community divide which is still prevalent today. Within the United Kingdom, 'Britishness in Northern Ireland remains a complex historical, religious, social and political phenomenon' that contains many layers of personal meaning for each individual identifying with it (McAuley and Tonge, 2009: 281). This may be due in part to the indifference of the rest of the UK which many unionists in Northern Ireland perceive. Historically the relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom has never felt secure. As Robbins claimed, 'Of course, Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom but its internal affairs and cultural distinctiveness did not impinge on Britain' (cited Crozier, 1990:11). The current devolution settlement is ambiguous: on the one hand, Northern Ireland's position in the UK is less anomalous but part of a larger process of constitutional reform; on the other hand, the particular arrangements for devolution in the Belfast Agreement of 1998 continue to identify the difference of Northern Ireland's position within the UK. It is possible then to read its identity positively (more in the UK mainstream) or negatively (Westminster wishes to distance itself from sovereign responsibility). When discussing the identity of unionist politicians from Northern Ireland it would be easy to assume that their identity is *naturally* British. However, from the interviews which have been conducted so far this view oversimplifies a more complex reality and it is important to review this assumption. Preliminary findings show that the identity of unionist representatives is multi-dimensional with many complex factors competing to shape this identity. In this paper is presented a selection of participant responses to demonstrate the nature of this complexity. Here is an introductory sample:

> 'Ah, my identity is Unionist, I would consider myself to be a traditional unionist.'
> (Interviewee 1: 2015)

'First and foremost I feel I'm an Ulsterman and that is that I feel that I'm not English. I'm not a little Englishman … but I am very much a part and parcel of this island, that I'm proud of being born on this island. Umm, that I reclaim it for me, that I'm proud of my Irish heritage as much as I am of my Scottish and British heritage, but I am first and foremost very provincial and I'm an Ulsterman.' (Interviewee 2: 2015)

'…whenever I'm asked where I'm from, I tell people that I'm from the United Kingdom. Umm, I tell them that I'm from the island of Ireland, but the north of Ireland, being part of the United Kingdom and … that I think that Northern Irish identity is something that is becoming stronger and stronger … as we start to mature.' (Interviewee 3: 2015)

'I'm unionist politically, uh, very much so … Ah, I, geographically I live in Northern Ireland. I class myself as Northern Irish as much as British. I also class myself as an Ulsterman. I also class myself as being an Irishman … You know, there was so many things associated and attached to the island of Ireland and I'm comfortable within that, it's comfortable within my skin to be an Irishman, an Ulsterman, ah, a man from Northern Ireland and being British. So that's probably, in a roundabout way, I'm comfortable in my skin, I'm comfortable and I'm confident in who I am and there's no reason why an individual can't be multi-faceted.' (Interviewee 4: 2015)

Politically, Northern Ireland is in a unique position within the Union in that the loyalty of Ulster unionism does not lie with the Westminster government, but instead to the Monarchy. This is due in part to a feeling of being left out in the cold which has been experienced by unionist politicians in Northern Ireland. As surmised by Interviewee 1, 'Maybe content more with the crown and the symbols than with the actually parliament because the British parliament, as a unionist, I believe that it has let us down in the past, you know' (2015). This conditional loyalty states that unionist politicians in Northern Ireland will only support the British Monarchy so long as there is a Protestant monarch on the throne. Should this situation change to allow a Catholic monarch to rule, this loyalty may and can be withdrawn. However, it is necessary at this point to mention that the law of succession has changed now, meaning that this may become a reality in the future. The conditional loyalty of unionism in Ulster towards the Union also extends to Westminster. It is a core contradiction within unionism that whilst Northern Irish unionists wish to remain part of the United Kingdom, they do not always wish to take on certain legislation. This conditional loyalty is interesting particularly when it comes to legislating for social issues such as abortion which they share with many Catholic nationalists.

As outlined by Interviewee 2 (2015):

'I think that there are social issues and moral issues and things like that which we might have different views on. I mean for example … the views from Northern

> Ireland on abortion are … what people would say are out of step with what England is. No, England is out of step with where we are. I mean, that's always the way I view it, you know? It's not about a hierarchy within the Union. We are all equal within this Union and we have this particular view on let's say abortion and on some moral issues and on sabbaterianism which is stronger here that maybe what it would be in other parts. Those things might make us peculiar in the eyes of English people, but those things make English people peculiar in the eyes of an Ulsterman.'

Interviewee 3 also shared a strong moral opinion on the issue of abortion:

> 'The issue of the unborn child is also another one that's very important to me. Umm, I was brought up to respect life. I do respect life whether its life of the people who are around me, talking, living, breathing today, or indeed, ah, a child that's within the womb … and I believe very strongly in that.' (2015)

In this regard Ulster unionism can be seen as having a pick and mix approach to which aspects of the Union it wishes to endorse, allowing politicians to choose those aspects which best suit their own political needs.  One can realistically surmise that by actively resisting the will of Westminster governments and by publically disapproving of their actions the Orange Order and unionists can be seen as disloyal to the British Monarch.  However, the power to refuse specific legislation from Westminster does not always have to be viewed as a negative political development.  The ability of Northern Irish politicians to develop and to decide upon their own legislation may just be a sign that devolution is working as it has allowed the devolved institution to stand on its own two feet and to legislate accordingly.

The Orange Order has traditionally played a huge role within unionism in Northern Ireland. The Orange Order and unionism share numerous characteristics, the majority of which stem from having shared roots within Protestantism.  Like unionism, 'membership of the Order reinforced a British identity based upon loyalty to the crown.' (MacPherson, 2014: 107).  As synopsised by Brown (2003: 31), the contractarian nature of the Orange Order allows it to be simultaneously loyal to the British Crown, while also being rebellious and at loggerheads with Westminster governments.  This can be surmised by the statement, 'My loyalty is to the British Throne being Protestant.  I have no loyalty to any Westminster government' (Brown, 2003: 31).  As with unionism, the Orange Order contains a complex form of British identity which not only contradicts itself, but is also at odds with the traditional meta-narrative of Britishness which is experienced within Great Britain.  Brown also noted that within the Orange Order there is an under-appreciation of the British constitution in that its unwritten nature actively seeks to promote the ideal that loyalty to the Crown consequently results in

loyalty to parliament, members of whom swear an oath of loyalty to the Queen. As Brown (2003: 33) argued, 'They often cannot see that loyalty to the Crown inheres loyalty to democratic parliamentary government and to ongoing democratic change'.

Southern (2007b: 169) argued that Protestant culture and identity within Northern Ireland has become increasingly alienated from that of Great Britain in recent years. The phenomenon is parallel to the current political changes which also affected Protestant identity, such as low electoral turnout, voter apathy and the removal of British flags from government buildings except on designated days. As construed by Southern (2007b: 169), 'Cultural alienation is treated as a separate analytical construct to that of politics and focuses on the emotional properties of Protestantism, whether in the form of the British identity of the Protestant and its symbolic displays in Northern Ireland, or … in the form of the Loyal Orders'. In relation to unionism, this growing sense of disaffection continues to influence political unionism. Issues such as the prevention of the Orange Order from following traditional parade routes and the increasing feelings of apathy among Protestant voters who traditionally identified with Britishness and feel that their identity is being destroyed or curtailed in order to comply with a nationalist agenda all impact on the political environment within Northern Ireland.

In conclusion:

To conclude, this paper has outlined that the traditional views of British identity surrounding unionist designated politicians in Northern Ireland are too narrow to reflect the growing multi-faceted approach to both personal and political identity within Northern Ireland. To be British in Northern Ireland varies somewhat from the rest of the United Kingdom. It can simultaneously mean a reassurance in the strength of the Union and the connection to Great Britain, a sense of geographical pride and a feeling of home, an acknowledgement of the growing sense of being Northern Irish and a recognition of the importance of the connection to Ireland both historically and culturally. These identities may be at times conflicting, but within Northern Ireland they combine to create a unique version of British identity that has developed along a tangent to the sense of Britishness commonly found within Great Britain. Britishness in Northern Ireland is neither black nor white, but a constantly evolving and adapting identity that can mean numerous things to numerous people and it is this which makes the study of Britishness within Northern Ireland so unique to political research. As for the relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland, this may not be as close as it has

been perceived to be in the past. While Northern Irish unionists breathed a sigh of relief to receive the news that Scotland had voted to remain within the Union, the rise of the Scottish National Party at Westminster in 2015 and the narrow margin of victory in the referendum meant that this issue has not been decisively laid to rest. With this knowledge, it is now an interesting development that Northern Ireland's place within the Union is as secure as it has ever been and that the threat to the security of the future of the Union now comes from Scotland. How this continues to impact upon the future of the Union is yet to be seen, but one thing is for sure: Northern Irish unionists have been and remain an integral component in making both British identity and the Union what they are today.

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