Unionism, Identity and Irish Unity: Paradigms, Problems and Paradoxes

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ABSTRACT

This article explores unionist concerns about Irish unity and asks what forms of Irish unity might accommodate those concerns. It also explores the concept of accommodation and the status of unionist fears—do they concern physical or ontological security? Thus the article is concerned with paradigms of thought, the conditions of accommodation, respect and recognition, the nature and meaning of identity, as well as with the institutional and constitutional forms of a possible future united Ireland. It attempts to free a discursive space away from identity politics and to open a wider range of constitutional futures to negotiation and informed choice.

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INTRODUCTION: THE TWO TRADITIONS PARADIGM

What form of united Ireland, if any, could accommodate unionist identity?[1] The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (hereafter the Agreement) provided for equivalent protections for minorities north and south in rights and equality legislation. It was widely understood that there would be equivalent protection for unionists in a possible future united Ireland as there are for nationalists in Northern Ireland. For example, Northern Ireland could maintain devolved government with consociational power-sharing and parity of esteem under Irish as under British sovereignty, the British-Irish Council could play an important role in guaranteeing British-Irish interdependencies, and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference could ensure a continued British voice allowing fair play, particularly for unionists.[2] Nationalists have suggested ways that unionists might be accommodated in a possible future united Ireland in a new constitution, with new institutions and cultural symbols.[3]

It is right morally as well as politically to respect and accommodate others rather than forcing them to accept other cultural norms or insisting that they convert to another identity. John Hume had consistently put forward the principle of equal respect and recognition of each tradition and identity on the island. He used it to argue for major and necessary reforms, and he was quick to criticise those who—in the name of their own tradition, identity and interests—downgraded others.[4] Hume's principle became hegemonic: it was articulated in the New Ireland Forum Report (NIFR) of 1984 where a pluralist, egalitarian and accommodationist Two Traditions Paradigm was accepted by all of the nationalist parties in the Forum.[5] It informed the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

[1] By 'unionists' I refer to those who identify with the historical tradition of support for the union in Ireland and Northern Ireland. See pp 6–8 below.

[2] Tom Hadden, 'Plus ça change?' *Fortnight* 479 (2020), 8–11; Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland* (III Vols, Oxford, 2019), 312–63.

[3] Richard Humphreys, *Beyond the border: the Good Friday Agreement and Irish unity after Brexit* (Dublin, 2018); Mark Daly, *Unionist Concerns & Fears of a United Ireland. The Need to Protect the Peace Process & Build a Vision for a Shared Island & A United People*, Based on the recommendation of the *Report by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement 'Brexit & The Future of Ireland Uniting Ireland & Its People In Peace and Prosperity* (Dublin, 2019), available at: https://senatormarkdaly.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/unionist-concerns-fears-of-a-united-ireland-the-need-to-protect-the-peace-process-build-a-vision-for-a-shared-island-and-a-united-people.pdf (10 November 2020); Seamus Mallon with Andy Pollak, *A shared home place* (Dublin, 2019).

[4] P.J. McLoughlin, *John Hume and the revision of Irish nationalism* (Manchester, 2010).

[5] The SDLP, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour accepted the principle in 1984; Sinn Féin accepted it in the 1997–98 negotiations, and argued strongly for it after 2007.

The Two Traditions Paradigm was at its most effective politically when used by Hume and others to counter prejudice and inequality. Since equality has been achieved, however, it has given rise to paradoxes. The paradigm has been used in the last decade to defend unionist identity by arguing that the British flag should fly from Belfast City Hall every day; to facilitate competitive communalism in political life while protecting dominant blocs, not those critical of them; and to argue that Irish unification should not happen until 'there is wider and deeper acceptance of it among the unionist community'.[6] That 'wider and deeper acceptance' is likely to take quite some time. Increasing numbers of unionists—over 40% in 2019—say that they would find a united Ireland 'almost impossible to accept'.[7] Arlene Foster says she would probably leave Northern Ireland in the event of a vote for Irish unity.[8] Many argue that Irish reunification would destroy their British identity, which depends upon the Union.[9] Some say they could accept Irish unity only if Ireland re-joined a new Union, with acceptance of British flags, membership of the British Commonwealth, even allegiance to the Queen. Some, in the name of equality for 'their identity', would take up arms against a democratic decision.

Mallon made his argument from generosity, not from a 'two traditions' perspective, and he knew full well that the Agreement did not give any veto to unionists on Irish unity. Unionists' expectations of their likely fate in a future united Ireland may be countered factually: southern Protestants gave up their political unionism after 1922 and, despite problems, their identification with the wider British world was sustained for many decades.[10] By comparison, unionists in the north are likely to maintain even more of their distinctive traditions, experiences and perspectives after Irish reunification, not least because of their greater demographic weight in the reconstructed

[6] Paul Nolan, Dominic Bryan, Clare Dwyer, Katy Hayward, Katy Radford and Peter Shirlow, *The flag dispute: anatomy of a protest*, Queen's University Belfast Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice (2014); Timofey Agarin and Allison McCulloch, 'How power-sharing includes and excludes non-dominant communities: Introduction to the special issue', *International Political Science Review* 41 (1) (2020), 3–14; Mallon, *A shared home place*, 176–7.

[7] See Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys, FUTURE1, available at: https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/polatt.html#conpref (14 September 2020).

[8] *The Irish News*, 5 April 2018, available at: https://www.irishnews.com/news/brexit/2018/04/05/news/arlene-foster-says-i-would-probably-move-if-there-was-united-ireland-1297022/ (16 November 2020).

[9] This argument has recurrently been used against reform, for example against the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. For a rebuttal, see Jennifer Todd, 'The limits of Britishness', *Irish Review* 5 (1988), 11–16.

[10] For discussion of the conflicting interpretations of this history, see Joseph B. Ruane, 'Ireland's mysterious minority: a French-Irish comparison', in Ian D'Alton and Ida Milne, *Protestant and Irish: the minority's search for place in independent Ireland* (Cork, 2019), 283–302.

Irish polity. But both Mallon's and unionists' views gain their plausibility from the Two Traditions Paradigm: both assume that it is necessary to accommodate national identity just as it is; Mallon believed that over time such accommodation would lead to a growing together of the traditions. Similar assumptions are at the basis of the Irish coalition government's concept of a 'shared island' (2020), and they inform the argument that growing together in a shared Ireland is the prerequisite of a united Ireland.[11]

These claims are problematic. In conflicts where identity has been asymmetrically constructed and oppositionally defined, respect for one identity involves disrespect for another. The assumption that peoples will grow together in a stable equal environment assumes that the problem lies in lack of knowledge, contact and mutual understanding. But if antagonism is also generated by asymmetric and oppositional constructions of identity, then there will not be gradual incremental improvement through equal interaction. The lesson of the last century of partition and the last half century of reform is that better relations do not evolve gradually. Respect for the two traditions gave a path to equality, but it has become increasingly difficult to maintain those traditions in equality and harmony.

In short, we need a shift of paradigm to insist that 'group identity' is not a moral trump-card or political veto-right and to provide a more reflexive and dialogic perspective on identity. A New Ireland Paradigm retains the values of accommodation, respect and recognition but sees them as values to be attained and sustained through iterative change in the meanings and values surrounding identity. The Irish can stay Irish and the British, British —to paraphrase Hume—but the meaning of being British and Irish has to change if we are to reach a position of mutual respect. The New Ireland Paradigm recognises that such identity change does not evolve gradually or automatically or cumulatively; opportunities, resources, cultural signposts and dialogue are necessary. The ideal is to build a political order that enables a moving cultural mosaic, where each evolving group benefits from interaction with others. The question in this article is whether and how a united Ireland can facilitate this.

[11] 'The *Irish Times* view on a shared island: a blueprint for better relations', *Irish Times*, 10 September 2020, available at: https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/the-irish-times-view-on-a-shared-island-a-blueprint-for-better-relations-1.4351714 (12 September 2020). These assumptions were common amongst the Irish political elite in the 1990s and 2000s, when it looked like a positive British-Irish and Northern Irish dynamic had been set in motion. See, for example, John Coakley and Jennifer Todd, *Negotiating a settlement in Northern Ireland 1969–2019* (Oxford, 2020), 293.

On the New Ireland Paradigm, everyday national identities and traditions in Northern Ireland are conceived as already dynamic, content-ful, internally contested and asymmetric in their construction. So, British identity has as its *content* a set of *contested* beliefs, values and expectations about religion, public morality, state form and peoplehood, and about the way they are logically configured (emphasising stateness prior to peoplehood), in a way that is *asymmetric* with Irish identity (where peoplehood is prior to stateness), with content and configuration changing *dynamically* over time in response to geopolitical opportunity, party political interests, and everyday practices. To call this package of beliefs, values and expectations 'identity' is to point to the fact that it is at once historically embedded, deeply personalised and politically organised. There is thus a dynamic of identity change—underlying changes in experienced content, meaning and oppositionality occur as social practice changes and more sudden changes in identity categories happen as new group alliances are forged in response at once to political events and to changing everyday meanings. Claire Mitchell describes a radical process of change in everyday practices, experiences and meanings since the Agreement—a similar process occurred in the 1960s.[12] But from the early 2010s to the present, everyday change has co-existed with a hardening of unionist group identity. The Two Traditions Paradigm disguises this complexity and protects the simplicity of group identity. The New Ireland Paradigm emphasises the dissonances between identity as experience and identity as groupness, and highlights alternative possible constructs of group identity which can protect the continuity of experience, memory and value.

The Two Traditions perspective—as put forward by successive Irish governments and many southern political commentators—sees the main priority as good relations in Northern Ireland and the main danger lying in constitutional change before good relations are achieved. A dialogic perspective notes the danger that good relations will never be achieved in Northern Ireland until the question of constitutional change can openly and reasonably be discussed. Dangers lie in every direction. Rather than safety lying in a hands-off Irish approach to Northern Ireland, such an approach locks the 'two traditions' into an old fight and encourages unionist intransigence and republican haste. Confrontation is dangerous and so too is the acceptance of

[12] Claire Mitchell, 'Divided politics, blended lives', *Fortnight* 479 (2020), 27–29.

group identities as they are. Hasty change is a major problem but so too is delay when windows for discussion and dialogue exist.

Thinking about a united Ireland is helpful because it shows the limits of accommodation, and the need to change our paradigms of thinking. It encourages us to explore the forms of socio-political order that can help produce fruitful co-existence, recognition and respect, whatever state happens to be in control. Thinking about unionism is helpful because nationalist assumptions, especially in the south, are challenged more effectively by the task of devising a united Ireland that unionists and Protestants would find minimally acceptable, than they are by questioning their own attitudes to the United Kingdom.

Thus, this paper is concerned with paradigms of thought, the conditions of accommodation, respect and recognition, the nature and meaning of identity, and how change happens. It begins with an empirical overview of unionism and the differing unionist objections to a united Ireland. It goes on to show how some of these concerns could be met in a united Ireland, and how to progress what Humphreys calls 'accommodation now'.[13] It critically interrogates some features of unionist group identity in an attempt to free a discursive space away from identity politics and to open a wider range of constitutional futures to negotiation and informed choice.

UNIONISM

Unionism as movement and ideology

Over half of Protestants in Northern Ireland identified as 'Irish' or 'Ulster' in 1968, although most supported the Union; they switched national identity categories in the early 1970s and have since remained predominantly and stably 'British'.[14] Within this, meanings, attitudes and expectations vary very widely. There have been debates in the scholarly literature over whether unionism is a form of national identity politics or principled civic politics; nationalism, non-nationalism or nested nationalism; reactionary or

[13] Richard Humphreys, 'Virtual Féile an Phobail: accommodating Unionist British identity now', 7 August 2020, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8QW_ptVM8Q (12 September 2020).

[14] John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1990), 67–82; Bernadette Hayes and Ian McAllister, *Conflict to peace: politics and society in Northern Ireland over half a century* (Manchester, 2013), 55–6.

liberal/socialist; supremacist or vulnerable.[15] In fact, it was and is all of these, rooted in its particular way of constructing the British sphere as layered and nested with other levels of territorial politics, and its construction of diverse Protestant groups into an umbrella alliance that is primarily polity-centred rather than people-centred.[16] This also made it potentially fissile, intermittently ontologically insecure, and quick to favour repressive policies.

Unionism in the United Kingdom took different forms for the different political parties and for the different parts of the kingdom. In Scotland, it was common for Scots to see the Union and the empire as in Scotland's interest, so that for sustained periods unionism and nationalism were not antithetical.[17] In Ireland, in contrast, a sense of the Irish nation was elaborated in opposition to conquest, colonisation and disadvantage. A constructive British unionism intent on winning Catholic support was attempted too late, and failed to recreate the benign Scottish scenario—at least not until after 1998.[18] This had major implications for the logic of unionism. Unionist politics in Northern Ireland did not—as in Scotland—base itself on shared perspectives, values and interests, but rather forged an alliance of all and only Northern Protestants, uniting different everyday values, identities and beliefs in a unionism whose sole defining characteristic was the Union itself. It brought together many diverse Protestant sub-groups into a unity of identification with the British state and, if some found cultural depth in its historical resonances and wide global reach, others focussed on culturally thinner and residual aspects—its anti-Catholicism, or its industry.

Ulster unionism was therefore vulnerable to defeat not simply in its interests but in its very being—in its unified alliance of Protestants in Northern Ireland, in its capacity to reproduce this potentially fissile alliance, in its self-definition as part of the Union, in its values (centred on the Union itself). It was threatened by nationalists in Northern Ireland, by the Irish government

[15] For key discussions see Arthur Aughey, *Under siege: Ulster unionists and the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (Belfast, 1989); Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *The state in Northern Ireland: 1921–1971: political forces and social classes* (Manchester, 1979); Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: the war of ideas* (London, 2003); T.P. Burgess and G. Mulvenna, *The contested identities of Ulster Protestants* (Basingstoke, 2015); Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland* (Cambridge, 1996), 84–106; Jennifer Todd, 'Two traditions in Unionist political culture', *Irish Political Studies* 2 (1) (1987), 1–26; Graham Walker, *A history of the Ulster Unionist Party: protest, pragmatism and pessimism* (Manchester, 2004).

[16] Jennifer Todd, 'Unionism and the challenges of change', *Irish Political Studies* 35 (3) (2020), 335–55.

[17] Colin Kidd, *Union and unionisms: political thought in Scotland 1500–2000* (Cambridge, 2008).

[18] After 2007, nationalists and Catholics increasingly preferred the UK with the devolved Good Friday Agreement institutions to a united Ireland. See Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, NIRELND2, available at: https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/polatt.html#conpref (18 October 2020).

which now had an international voice, and by the British government on which it was dependent. It adapted to change only grudgingly, and at the cost of its own unity.[19] The Good Friday Agreement has, according to some unionists, already eroded their British identity, and a united Ireland threatens to destroy it. But the question should not be how to protect unionist group identity in all possible constitutional circumstances. The question is rather how a future united Ireland might recognise and foster the values, experiences and everyday practices that allowed unionism, past and present, to express a valued way of life—not simply to organise contentious politics—so as to facilitate continuity and an evolution of traditions rather than a sense of identity under siege.

Unionist perspectives on a united, independent Ireland

For well over a century, unionists have made clear their objections to any sort of self-governing, unified Ireland. Four main themes recur:

- *Modernisation*: bad economic prospects, regressive policies, parochial vision and traditionalist values would prevail in a united, independent or self-governing Ireland
- *Difference and identity*: religious, cultural and/or racial difference of populations, north and south, would make minority status intolerable and threaten to destroy the distinctiveness of unionists
- *Sovereignty*: the importance of maintaining British state sovereignty and imperial unity and power
- *Violence*: the likelihood of violence and disorder, and the prospects of humiliation of and retribution for the Protestant and unionist population should Ireland be united.

In the late nineteenth century Ulster unionist objections to Home Rule were multiple: class dominance; economic ruin; loss of Crown and Empire; Rome Rule. Thomas Macknight, editor of the liberal newspaper, the *Northern Whig*, made clear his own professional upper middle-class perspective: Home Rule would

[19] On unionist fission after the fall of Stormont, see Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, *The state in Northern Ireland.*

> place the loyal in the power of the disaffected; the wealthier, educated, professional and more industrious classes under their social inferiors, the comparatively ignorant, the comparatively idle; they who were attached to the Crown and to the Empire under those who made no secret that their ultimate object was national independence.[20]

Unionists were determined to resist coming 'under the influence of a bitterly prejudiced, ignorant and disaffected populace in the towns south of the Boyne, and of the peasants in the southern country districts, still more prejudiced and ignorant and not less disaffected'.[21] Macknight was one of the liberals: the conservative and Orange emphasis was on race, empire, and religion.

With the foundation of Northern Ireland in 1921, the unionist government put a greater emphasis on the dangers of violence and the need to protect sovereignty than before. Condemnation of the cultural policy of the Irish government was even more heartfelt than condemnation of its economic conditions and policy. Dennis Kennedy detailed the concerns in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, including: the 'persecution' of the Protestant minority and encouragement of the IRA; the dominance of the Catholic religion; the betrayal of the Treaty in the increasing separatism and 'severance of the links with Britain'; the traitorous Irish neutrality in World War II; and, throughout, the cultural backwardness of the 'Gaelomaniacs' who insisted on 'flogging a dead horse'. [22]

By the mid-1950s, newly confident liberal unionists reconfigured the modernisation arguments for the post-war era.[23] Ulster, as they said, stood 'on the side of freedom'. It stood with the Western Free World, rather than standing aside as did the Republic of Ireland in World War Two; it upheld the right 'to exercise our minds without trammel or restriction', in contrast to the authoritarianism and censorship in the south; it took a forward-looking modern perspective, rather than backward Gaelic revivalism; it embraced the global reach of the Union rather than Irish parochialism; and this stance led to economic progress. To these modernising values, they added royal allegiance.

[20] Thomas Macknight, *Ulster as it is, or twenty eight years' experience as an Irish editor* (II Vols, Vol. II. London, 1896), 334.

[21] Macknight, *Ulster as it is*, 385.

[22] Dennis Kennedy, *The widening gulf: Northern attitudes to the independent Irish state, 1919–49* (Belfast, 1988).

[23] See the contributions by Hanna and Maginnis in Lord Brookeborough, W. Brian Maginnis, and G.B. Hanna, *Why the border must be: the Northern Ireland case in brief* (Belfast, 1956), Government of Northern Ireland Publications, PRONI 1726/10.

Meanwhile conservative unionists re-emphasised the differences of racial origin, religion, and political allegiance between north and south.

In the next 50 years, Northern Ireland lost its comparative economic advantage over the south. The Republic of Ireland became a small, open, highly globalised society, a full member of the EU, economically more dynamic than Northern Ireland, culturally outward-looking and highly mobile. Catholic social teaching was increasingly removed from public law culminating in referendums to legalise marriage equality (2015) and liberalise abortion law (2018), although, as in Northern Ireland, the churches retain a strong hold on the education system. In the 2000s, for the first time, the Republic had more immigration than emigration. By the late 2010s, as Irish unity has again come onto the political agenda in response to Brexit, unionist arguments have changed in tone. Modernisation concerns are no longer evident: there is continued focus on economy and welfare but in the frame of individual resources—pensions, bus-passes, health benefits—not on progressive politics or the booming economy. Concerns about cultural difference, sovereignty and violence remain of importance. I illustrate these points by reference to two qualitative research projects conducted in 2019: one involved focus groups with those thought likely—like Arlene Foster—to leave Northern Ireland after a vote for unity; the other involved interviews with everyday non-activist unionists who live in mixed neighbourhoods and/or participate in mixed social practices.[24]

Cultural difference north and south is highlighted by both groups but in different ways. Among the non-activists there is considerable awareness of the Irish referendums on marriage equality and abortion and less fear of 'Rome Rule' than even a decade ago. There is no longer the self-confidence of nineteenth century liberals, nor the breezy optimism of the unionists of the late 1950s and 1960s. In the interviews, the respondents were simply uncertain, wondering what change would entail and how Protestants in the south felt about being a minority there. They noted, somewhat questioningly, the

[24] James Wilson conducted focus groups with members of the Independent Orange Order, with a Loyalist Flute Band, with UDR/Irish Regiment Veterans, and with people in the East Belfast Mission. James Wilson, 'Brexit and the Future of Ireland: the fears of Northern Protestants concerning unity', in Daly, *Unionist concerns & fears of a United Ireland*. Dornschneider and Todd conducted interviews with over 30 individuals in 2018/9, slightly more Protestants than Catholics: only the interviews with Protestants are discussed here, with a focus on unionist voters and supporters. Stephanie Dornschneider and Jennifer Todd, 'Everyday sentiment among unionists and nationalists in a Northern Irish town', *Irish Political Studies* (2020), available early online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2020.1743023 (16 November 2020).

ambivalence in the south: 'somebody said that the Irish Republic didn't really want us because you know they have enough on their own plate without bringing in more'.[25]

British sovereignty was also valued by many of these non-activist unionists, some of whom would 'definitely' not want to lose it.[26] But even those who would feel the loss most deeply had already accepted the Agreement and would accept a democratic decision in a referendum. Some would make the best of it; others would consider their position pragmatically and move to the UK if their personal economic prospects would be damaged in a united Ireland; and a few would positively welcome the change—one respondent said 'Oh, I'd grab a united Ireland with both hands. It has to be better than Britain who doesn't give a hoot about us anyway'. [27]

In the focus groups, in contrast, a sense of cultural difference was entwined with extreme fears of sovereignty change that would make unionists a minority in a strange land. There was intense fear of assimilation and of being treated as 'second class Planter citizens' and 'alien planters who don't belong here'. There was concern that close connections with 'kith and kin' in Great Britain would be lost forever, that the primacy given to the Irish language would marginalise them and that they could not be truly British in a united Ireland, under rule by triumphalist republicans, with their British heritage removed: 'effectively our home would become a foreign state'.[28]

There were continuing fears of violence among all groups. The non-activists feared that loyalists would provoke violence, and, like some of the everyday nationalists we interviewed, worried that the transition period would bring instability and economic and security dangers. For participants in the focus groups, the fear was of republican triumphalism and unionist defeat and humiliation; nationalists would expropriate unionists' farms and take their land; there would be show trials of ex-members of the British security forces; there would be a return to murder and violence.

[25] JF1MWP10—the coding indicates that this was tenth interview of this series. It was conducted by (see bold): **J**ennifer with a **P**rotestant **f**emale of the eldest (**1**st) generation, a **m**anual worker **W**est of the Bann.
[26] JM2PWP12.
[27] JF1PEP15.
[28] Daly, *Unionist concerns & fears of a United Ireland*, 48–52.

Table 1: Continuity and change in unionist concerns

	1890s–1910s	1920s/30s	1950s/60s (liberals)	2010s 'loyalist' focus groups	2010s everyday unionists
Progress: Economy values, Modernity	Yes	Yes	Yes free world	Personal economic well-being	Personal economic well-being: south more progressive than north
Difference: Culture, religion, race	Yes Religion Class	Yes Religion, race	Yes Culture	Yes Culture, religion, peoplehood	Yes: uncertainty
Violence: retribution, disruption, marginalisation		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, although much fear focussed on own side. Distrust of republicans
Sovereignty:	Yes, but not yet strongly threatened	Yes	Yes	Yes	Accept GFA procedures to decide sovereignty

Responding to unionist concerns

How far can unionist concerns about cultural difference and political identification in a united Ireland be answered by institutional or constitutional reform?

Enabling individual choice

For a united Ireland to be minimally acceptable, unionists' everyday cultural choices, practices and preferences would have to be respected. They would have to be able to freely pursue their British-oriented interests and British-centred cultural practices. Where this is simply a matter of individual choice and lifestyle, it is already facilitated by existing provisions. Whether unionists value the festivals and ethos of multi-racial Britain, BBC news, premier league football, the Proms and/or the West End, all are equally available in a united Ireland (through the Common Travel Area and broadcasting agreements) as they are at present in Northern Ireland. Irish as well as Northern Irish students and workers spend time in the wider British world of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The 'authentic faces of everyday unionism' that John Wilson Foster saw smiling out from the *Ulster Tatler* can keep smiling and the magazine remain in production—a united Ireland would be unlikely to touch the car sales, receptions and golf-clubs of the local bourgeoisie on any part of the island and, as long as Ulster consumers are willing to pay for their own *Tatler*, economies of scale would be unlikely to force cultural homogeneity.[29] Those who identify with the history and culture of Britain and the empire would find much to reflect upon on the island where the British heritage remains strong. Those who prefer Protestant cultures to Catholic would find remnants of Protestant culture across the island and, in any likely future, the local public culture in East Ulster would remain Protestant, retain its distinctive Ulster-Scottish regional architecture, ethos and predominantly Protestant population. Today there is a spectrum of regional styles, accents, religions and sites of diverse religious and national memories in the Irish state. This spectrum would be broadened and deepened in a future united Ireland even were it to be a unitary state.

There would be some losses: for example, unionists would lose access to their own MPs in the British House of Commons. But, as Senator Mark Daly has suggested, it might be possible for the British government to increase the number of unionist peers in the House of Lords, thus allowing continuing, if diminished, input into British political debates.

[29] John Wilson Foster, 'United Ireland campaign is based on a delusion', *Irish Times*, 19 March 2018.

Public culture and the institutions of socialisation

A united Ireland of any sort would maintain rights for self-organisation by voluntary groups which are de facto or in principle single-identity—from St Vincent de Paul to the Girls Brigade to the Orange Order. If mutual understanding and iterative identity change is desirable, then inter-cultural contact between such 'single identity' organisations should be incentivised.

More difficult questions arise when institutions of socialisation are publicly funded, and particularly when they express different national affiliations. The spectrum of publicly funded civil society organisations includes museums (culturally important but optional for individuals) and education (legally compulsory). Here it is necessary to balance collective goods—including communication, mutual understanding and shared projects—against group choice and tradition.

From a Two Traditions Paradigm, the existing institutions would continue in a united Ireland with continued funding, either proportional to use or with parity between the traditions or an agreed mix. Thus, educational establishments and practices in Northern Ireland could continue unchanged, as would those in the south, with differential standards between each part of the island regarding the teaching of Irish, examination systems—GCSE in Northern Ireland if parents so choose, Leaving Certificate in the south—and differential ease of access to universities in Great Britain.

From a New Ireland Paradigm, the aims of diversification, choice and mutual enrichment of traditions would govern organisation throughout the island. In education, the still-contentious issue of the Irish language might be resolved by making it available and recommended at all schools but with opt-out clauses—these already exist for pupils who have spent some years abroad—and by no longer requiring all primary teachers to be proficient in Irish. Additional languages, including Ulster Scots, might be offered if there were local interest. Another potential problem—compulsory religious education in school hours and the mainstreaming of church practices like communion preparation within schools—might be resolved by moving religious education outside school hours, as is already done in some schools in each jurisdiction. More critical again is the question of syllabus, examinations and pathways to third-level education. Maximally, the ideal would be that all pupils throughout the island have a choice of the international baccalaureat, GCSE or the Leaving Certificate. This would require grouping of schools to give economies of scale and provision for special cases, facilitated by regular

educational exchanges and publicly funded summer-schools in different parts of the island. It would enable—particularly relevant for unionists—freedom of movement for education throughout the United Kingdom, with fees set at the domestic British level for British citizens living in Ireland. Such changes would be costly but they would also be transformative, and this would definitively answer unionist complaints about Catholic dominance in the Irish education system. A principle of diversification and choice consistent with mutual enrichment of traditions might be politically and legally articulated such that each departure from it would have to be carefully justified.

Ideally, unionist culture(s) would become part of a complex cultural mosaic, in which the culture(s) would evolve and from which all would benefit. This would engage a multiplicity of voices—from immigrant and traveller communities to gendered, class-based, ecological and other movements, such that the southern nationalist consensus would itself be diversified and no longer a threat to a unionist minority. It would require considerable change in majoritarian nationalist assumptions. For one example, RTÉ as the 'national broadcaster' would have to become all-island, co-existing with the British and independent channels, and would necessarily give up its angelus bells at 12 noon and 6pm.[30] A whole range of public institutions and practices—from public holidays and commemorations to museums—would have to be 'proofed' not just for equality but also for diversity and mutual communication and enrichment.

The state, political culture and cultural capital

Most fundamental is the impact of Irish unity on unionists' accumulated cultural capital—the political culture, the habits and know-how that give citizens ease of access and mutual recognition within public institutions. A change of sovereignty changes its value. In contemporary Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement, British cultural capital is no longer the only entry ticket to political influence and cultural status. In a united Ireland, the task would be to ensure that it did not become a source of disadvantage and that accumulated (southern) Irish cultural capital was relativised as a social and political resource.

[30] Unless, of course, it included symbols of all varieties of religions, from Church of Ireland psalms to Presbyterian hymns, evangelical speaking in tongues, Muslim calls to prayer and Jewish recitations: since RTÉ has long been a voice of the southern national consensus, it raises an interesting case-study of the extent to which that conservative consensus can be—or wants to be—transformed.

Three key areas are the constitution (which defines the rules of parity), the political institutions (which enact them), and the symbols of state (which express and reinforce them). Each requires in-depth discussion. Here I simply sketch how the paradigm of analysis affects the way parity might be understood in each domain.

One may articulate the principle of parity in a more conservative or in a more transformative way.[31] On a Two Traditions Paradigm, parity is between named groups, identities and traditions (as discussed in the New Ireland Forum Report of 1984) and the task would be to amend the existing Irish constitution to ensure this. One might for example refer to constituent Irish and British peoples on the island, or (better because it allows for internal diversity and future change) to a Protestant minority with a particular historical sense of belonging in the north-east and historic British linkages. Principles of parity would have to navigate the difficult problem of at once recognising specific groups, and providing for equality of citizenship and rights. There would be a risk of marginalising those peoples not named in the constitution, reifying those named, and positing an Irish-nationalist majority with significantly greater ownership of the state than the others—similar problems have beset the Constitution (2001) of what is now the Republic of North Macedonia. In order to clarify the ideas and promote discussion, I outline overleaf some of the key concepts that might be included in a constitution informed by the Two Traditions Paradigm.[32]

On a New Ireland Paradigm, the task would be to create a new constitution that would affirm a set of constitutional values by reference to which the specific institutions and cultural provisions on the island would be assessed over time. It might indeed refer to the historical conflict as a starting point and benchmark, noting a determination to overcome the divisions and antagonisms that have resulted from tragic historical struggles—in this sense it would be situated in its universalism. But it would not explicitly protect named peoples, and thus in principle would be open to very wide-ranging engagement from those who identify with any group and with none, with any perspective or with many, with a large and loud population (northern unionists) or a small and silent one (southern Protestants).[33] This would overcome

[31] Colin Harvey, 'Imagining a new Ireland', *Fortnight* 479 (2020), 5–7.

[32] A new preamble is necessary which would define the 'peoples' (plural) who enact the constitution explicitly to include the Irish nation and the Protestants of the north-east who have the right but not the obligation to be part of this nation.

[33] On the distinctive silence, see Ruane, 'Ireland's mysterious minority'.

Concepts for consideration for amendments to the Constitution of Ireland: Two Traditions Paradigm

A NEW PREAMBLE (*from nation to peoples, adding in the Protestant people*)

We, the peoples of the island of Ireland, do hereby enact and give to ourselves this Constitution.

This Constitution amends the Constitution of Ireland (1937), which spoke for the Irish nation, specifically also to recognise the historic place of the Protestant people of the North East of the island, who have long distanced themselves from the Irish nation and have a long historic relationship with Great Britain and its peoples.

AMENDING ARTICLE 1 (*self-determination for the peoples, collectively, protection of minorities*)

The peoples of the island of Ireland hereby affirm their inalienable, indefeasible and sovereign right collectively, and with due concern to protect minorities, to choose their own form of Government, to determine their relations with other nations, and to develop its life, political, economic and cultural, in accordance with their own genius and traditions.

AMENDING ARTICLE 2 (*Irish nation and Protestant people*)

It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the Irish nation. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage. Within and beside the Irish nation exists a strong Protestant people in the North East of the island with a long historic relationship with Great Britain and its peoples. Members of this population have and retain the right to be part of the Irish nation, part of the British nation, and part of both, and to be respected and included (on an equal basis to all members of the Irish nation) in the political/social life of the island whatever their decision in this regard.

AMENDING ARTICLE 3 (*future projects and guiding values*)

[To be amended to affirm the firm will of the peoples of Ireland, in all their diversity of their identities and traditions, to develop the prosperity and political harmony of the island and its openness to the wider world in a way that will overcome past antagonism.]

Concepts for consideration for a new Constitution of Ireland: New Ireland Paradigm

A NEW PREAMBLE (*from nation to people)*

We, the people of the island of Ireland, do hereby enact and give to ourselves this Constitution

NEW ARTICLE ONE (*self-determination for the people collectively, protection for diversity*)

The people of the island of Ireland in all the diversity of their identities and traditions hereby affirm their inalienable, indefeasible, and sovereign right collectively, and with due concern to protect minorities and to cherish the diversity of voices on the island, to choose their form of Government, to determine their relations with other nations, and to develop their life, political, economic and cultural.

NEW ARTICLE TWO. (*From nation to people, and the place of historic nations within this*)

It is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in the island of Ireland, which includes its islands and seas, to be part of the people of the island of Ireland. That is also the entitlement of all persons otherwise qualified in accordance with law to be citizens of Ireland. The people of the island is constituted by different and distinct historical communities, traditions and identities, which have historically been understood as conflicting religions and nations. Without prejudice to the cultural expression of historic nationality and peoplehood, and to the special linkages it brings with people living abroad who share these heritages, we, the people of the island of Ireland, affirm its political and democratic unity.

NEW ARTICLE THREE (*future project and guiding values*)

It is the firm will of the people of the island of Ireland to develop values and relationships [an indicative list of these values may be given here] that allow mutual respect and shared projects across the diversity of peoples and perspectives on the island, and in common endeavours with their British and European neighbours and across the world, in order to give a new beginning to their politics after centuries of division, conflict and violence.

the fear that the state would be defined by the culture of the majority—it would instead be defined by shared values in terms of which cultural exclusion might be criticised, and which could be further elaborated over time. To write a new constitution, however, would require an extended period of dialogue, deliberation and drafting which has yet to be seriously discussed in the Republic of Ireland. In order to clarify the ideas and promote discussion, I present above a draft of some concepts that might be included in a constitution informed by the New Ireland Paradigm.[34]

Either constitutional approach would allow for a range of state forms, from unitary state to various forms of federation, devolution, autonomy or decentralisation. Because of the dangers of majoritarianism, it is often suggested that a form of devolution for Northern Ireland may be attractive for unionists.[35] On the other hand, a unitary state could allow greater movement away from exclusivist and oppositional groups, not least by opening public political culture to a wider multiplicity of voices—gendered, travellers, new Irish, people of colour, religious. By internally dividing the southern nationalist 'bloc', this would facilitate a shared island in the same way as the division of the majority Catholic-background population in France into anti-clerics and Catholics in the late nineteenth century facilitated strong Protestant and Jewish participation in republican politics.[36]

Finally, the choice of paradigm will determine how symbolic relations—flags, emblems, anthems—should be ordered. The Two Traditions Paradigm holds that there should be equal rights for the different national communities: unionist Britishness should be protected in British flags co-equal with Irish, and in the British national anthem played as well as the Irish, at least in regions with strong unionist populations (or in some views only

[34] Central features of this draft are the recognition of a singular people (not peoples or nation) of the island of Ireland as the overarching political actor, in which is included a multiplicity of identities, traditions, nations, perspectives and voices. It gives an initial attempt (article 3) to articulate the values that would inform political life. The Irish nation is not mentioned.

[35] Richard Humphreys, 'What do we talk about when we talk about a united Ireland', *Fortnight* 479 (2020), 2–4, suggests that devolution is required by the Good Friday Agreement. This, I think, is misleading because the Agreement also incorporates procedures for revision, and most certainly a new and revised British-Irish treaty would be necessary in the event of a united Ireland. Note that a recent study shows that some unionists might prefer a unitary state, especially when exposed to arguments about the difficulties of maintaining a devolved Northern Ireland within Irish sovereignty. John Garry, Brendan O'Leary, John Coakley, J. Pow, and Lisa Whitten, 'Public attitudes to different possible models of a United Ireland: evidence from a Citizens' Assembly in Northern Ireland', *Irish Political Studies* 3 (35) (2020), 422–50. DOI: 10.1080/07907184.2020.1816379 (16 November 2020).

[36] Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, 'Protestant minorities in European states and nations', National Identities 1 (11) (2009), 1–8.

in what is now Northern Ireland). It would suggest that unionist desire for continued British connections be addressed by some British government involvement, for example through the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. This vision of a shared island would reproduce the cultural parity that already exists in post-1998 Northern Ireland. If it wished to make northern unionists at home throughout the island—surely a necessary goal—it would generalise it to the whole island. However in Northern Ireland what counts as cultural parity is highly contested because the identities and traditions are asymmetric.[37] Similar contest would be reproduced in a united Ireland, dissatisfying unionists, antagonising nationalists and angering those who wish for a way beyond the 'blocs'. Even pragmatically there is good reason to move to the alternative paradigm.

On the New Ireland Paradigm, identities are in a process of evolution and change, and thus a new political symbolism is appropriate to a united Ireland. To develop new flags, emblems and anthems would undoubtedly be very painful for nationalists, and for all in the Republic of Ireland who take pride in the state. However, it would allow the historic significance of a united Ireland to be recognised, the ethos of the new society to be symbolised and it would exemplify parity for all who participated in the process of constitutional revision.

Up to this point there are indeed real challenges in creating a united Ireland in which unionists could feel at home. Whether those challenges are greater in a 'two traditions' model where stable parity is hard to achieve but where instability might be partially insulated within a devolved Northern Ireland, or in a new Ireland model which demands greater change across the island but also provides values to motivate participation, is a matter for public debate that should now begin. But on neither paradigm are the challenges insuperable; the ways forward are imaginable and in principle negotiable, and the choices clear.

[37] Joseph Ruane, 'Modelling Ireland's crises: north, south, and north-south intersections', in Niall Ó Dochartaigh, Elizabeth Meehan and Katy Hayward (eds), *Dynamics of political change in Ireland* (London, 2017), 93–109; Coakley and Todd, *Negotiating a settlement in Northern Ireland, 1969–2019*, 546–7.

ZERO-SUM ISSUES, ONTOLOGICAL INSECURITY AND INCENTIVISING CHANGE

There are also harder issues, which cannot be tackled within a Two Traditions Paradigm. The focus group participants in James Wilson's study had non-negotiable concerns.

- Retribution and violence. They feared that their farms would be taken away by nationalists. They feared being killed
- Identity. In face of the triumphalism of the IRA they would be unable to be truly British
- The past. They anticipated becoming scapegoats in show trials. They believed British memorials would be removed, and connection with British kith and kin would be lost. In effect their past and its meaning would be erased, together with the British linkages that helped sustain that meaning
- Total loss. Effectively 'our home would become a foreign state'.

These are not—on any objective analysis—the likely consequences of Irish unity. No united Ireland government—so long as it could maintain control over its territory—would permit farms to be taken away from their owners, or the common travel area (connection with British kith and kin) to be removed, or all British memorials to be taken down, or show trials to be undertaken. But simply to dismiss these claims is to miss the grain of truth they express: the possibility that the Irish government might temporarily lose control to paramilitaries in some districts. If, for example, loyalists violently resisted a democratic decision to enter a united Ireland, this might provoke republican counter-mobilisation and might overwhelm Irish government security resources. The Irish government should address these issues of physical security explicitly and immediately.

To dismiss the claims is also to mistake their status: they speak as much to ontological as to physical insecurity. The respondents are so concerned about their identity, their past, their sense of belonging and the meaning of their lives that they may be prepared themselves to unleash the security problems that they fear: ontological insecurity could provoke a loyalist first strike. Their fears will not abate until their ontological insecurity is addressed, and this, notoriously, cannot be reassured by reasoned argument, pragmatic appeals or appeasement.

These respondents explicitly link personalised identity and state belonging. They appear to understand the connection with British 'kith and kin' in a political sense, as dependent on belonging in a common state. There is an elision of home and state such that it is possible to think that 'our home would become a foreign state'. This is more than the fear of becoming a minority. It is a fear that their British identity and the meaning of their past would be obliterated with state change. Even when unionism wins, when nationalists stand back or are beaten down, the insecurity of identity remains.[38]

What is at the basis of this unassuageable insecurity? Is it a sense that republicans are ready to chase them out like the *pieds noirs* in Algeria? Is it colonial guilt? Is it a fear that they are not really British at all?[39] Is it simply the fear of a once-dominant group that is losing its dominance? Liam O'Dowd in 1990 pointed to analogies with the settler mentalities described by Albert Memmi.[40] These analogies are no longer strong. There is no wide cultural or ethno-racial gap of the type Memmi outlined—in Northern Ireland, people eat the same food, speak the same language with the same accents, live in the same sorts of houses, increasingly intermarry, and 'home' for unionists has long ceased to be imagined as England or Scotland. If unionists once showed off their civilised superiority to Catholics and nationalists, now their status has fallen and they no longer hold significant economic or political advantage. Increasingly it takes a well-honed sensibility in the observer, and an intent to display community belonging in the observed, to 'tell' Protestant from Catholic.

The major cultural difference between unionists and nationalists now lies in their perspective on the British state: unionists identify with its history, accept its cultural norms, welcome its victories, internalise its self-image, even name their children after its heroes. In the past, their relationship to the state was reproduced through the industrial economy of empire and it permitted Protestants and unionists to maintain economic, political and cultural advantage. Now it is simply a contingent political connection that upholds communal and cultural continuity with the past, and a connection that can be

[38] This was clear through the Stormont period. It is equally clear today: the percentage of Protestant supporters of the Union who would find it 'almost impossible' to accept a united Ireland increased radically between 2012–2014, at a time when the nationalist threat was decreasing. See Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys, FUTURE1, available at: https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/polatt.html#conpref (16 November 2020).

[39] As Cochrane puts it, 'the fear is that Northern Ireland is as British as Gibraltar, or as British as the Falkland Islands, and both are a long way from Finchley'. Fearghal Cochrane, 'It's a long way from Finchley', *Fortnight* 479 (2020), 15–16.

[40] Liam O'Dowd, 'Introduction' to new edition of Albert Memmi, *The colonizer and the colonized* (London, 1990).

cut. The resulting fear of identity loss is—perhaps paradoxically—better symbolised by the position of the Algerian Harkis than of the European *pieds noirs*.

The Harkis are a descent group constituted in 1962 by French and Algerian ascription. They include a subset of those men of Algerian descent who worked and sometimes fought for the French in the Algerian civil war, and their families and descendants, who neither worked nor fought for the French state in Algeria. The French state was omnipresent throughout Algeria in the 1950s, relocating whole villages for security reasons. Most Algerians were in close contact with it and many men worked for it, for a wide variety of reasons and with a wide range of relations with resistants. Algerians' right to French citizenship was removed in 1962.[41] After the French departure, and in a situation of internal Algerian conflict, some of those who fought with the French were massacred, some returned safely to their villages, and some families—who came to be known as the Harkis—fled the massacres and ended up incarcerated in camps in France, no longer permitted to visit or to be buried in Algeria.[42] It was others—Algerians and French—who defined the Harkis as a distinct group with a history of collaboration. The meaning of their historical past and its contingency was thereby taken away from them. The uncertainty of the war years, the pervasive presence of the French state in war-torn Algeria, the multiple linkages between those who resisted, those who fought for the French and those who changed sides to resistance in the final stages of war, the contingency by which some who worked and fought for the French simply went back to their villages while others fled, is replaced with an ascribed identity that denies the complexities of experience. One way out is to deconstruct the dominant image of the past to show the ambiguities of colonisation for all parties to the conflict.[43]

Loyalist ontological insecurity equally lies in the fear of being defined only by enemies, the 'triumphalist republicans', as collaborators and 'planters'. They imagine losing their 'home' because the British will reject them as soon as the British state gives up sovereignty. Thus they stand to lose the meaning of their history and their sense of self-esteem. The analogy with the Harkis is, I think, as striking as it may be counter-intuitive. It reveals loyalists' sense of local belonging and the interdependencies and interlinkages across the islands

[41] Law of 13 April, 1962. F. Besnacli-Lancou and G. Maceron, *Les Harkis dans la Colonisation et ses Suites* (Ivry sur Seine, 2008), 18–19.

[42] Benascli-Lancou and Maceron, *Les Harkis*, 20–32, 81–161.

[43] L-J. Sims, *Rethinking France's 'memory wars': Harki and Pied Noir collective memories in Fifth Republic France* (PhD Thesis, University North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015).

that cross-cut the native-settler distinction. And the worst has already happened. Full British state belonging and cultural dominance has long been in retreat in Northern Ireland, and definitively so with the Agreement. Unionist group-identity has become thinner and increasingly vulnerable to others' ascription. Only a deconstruction of the colonial past can give a way out for loyalists who presently see the sole alternative to British national assertion as their own annihilation.

The Two Traditions Paradigm does not recognise the inherent fragility of unionist group identity, especially for this group of unreconciled unionists who know their particular identity could not be protected in a united Ireland. But rather than attempt to sustain an already problematic groupness, we need to ask how a reconstruction of identity narratives can be facilitated in a new (united or Northern) Ireland. Four suggestions follow from the New Ireland Paradigm.

(i) Move discussion away from given national identities. Reject the assumption that these are to be protected just as they are. Nationalists win when politics focusses on identities because they have a people-centred identity that adapts more easily to institutional change than does unionists' polity-centred identity.
(ii) Focus discussion on the principles and values that will be relevant to all constitutional futures. The very process of deliberation on these principles is likely to facilitate iterative identity change.
(iii) Critically assess the practices and principles of the British and Irish states. This should go together with an opening up of the ways that different sets of ex-unionists and Protestants dealt with ontological insecurity in the past. The point is not to generate empathy but rather to generate understanding of different ways of thinking.
(iv) Encourage a diversity of voices and a multiplicity of perspectives. The south has to be brought into the dialogue, with an emphasis on its own divisions.

If such developments become the cultural backdrop of public discussions of policy, then unionist and loyalist identity narratives are likely to change, not to embrace nationalism but rather to contemplate and negotiate multiple

possible alternative futures, and, should a united Ireland be democratically decided upon, to negotiate its optimal form.

CONCLUSION

John Hume's principle of equal respect and institutional recognition of each tradition and identity on the island, and his assumption that working together would lead to growing together, allowed the peaceful mobilisation of nationalists and the achievement of major reform from the fall of Stormont to the Agreement. But the Two Traditions Paradigm that served peace and equality so well in the last half of the twentieth century needs to be amended for the 21st century when equality between the traditions is close to achieved and identity divisions are as strong as before.

A reflexive and dialogic approach, as in a New Ireland Paradigm, would insist that mutual respect and recognition does not come from protecting identities but rather it requires autonomous change in them. Unionists, nationalists and others have both the political right and the moral obligation to participate in a multi-sided dialogue on possible constitutional futures. Such discussion is of course difficult. It is also valuable in itself, allowing reflection about a better society, about the role of constitutional values in political life, and about the ways to rebuild political relations. As such, it increases everyday agency and gives new sources of self-worth to those whose certainties are challenged in the process. It hones citizens' capacity for reflexive deliberation, and this is of value whether the political future lies in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland or in a united Ireland. Such reflexive deliberation would not make a united Ireland desirable to unionists, but it might, should a united Ireland be democratically decided, allow it to be negotiated into an acceptable and viable form.

Read a response to this article by Máire Braniff, 'Traditions, Lives and New Identities in a Dynamic Political Landscape', https://doi.org/10.3318/ISIA.2021.32b.9