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How the "Northern Irish" National Identity Is Understood and Used by Young People and Politicians

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The conventional understanding of the nation within social psychology is as a category of people or "imagined community." However, work within the discursive tradition shows that citizens tend to discuss nationhood in a variety of modes, including the use of nonhuman categories such as references to the physical landscape of the country. This article aims to give a more comprehensive overview of how young people understand the Northern Irish identity, a new and potentially inclusive national category in a divided society, and how politicians articulate it in rhetoric. In Study 1, students (N = 286) discussed this identity in 44 peer-led focus groups. Thematic analysis of their discussions shows four distinct ways in which it is constructed: as a distinctive people, as an identity claim, as a "hot" political project, and as a "cold" or banal indicator of place. In Study 2, Members of the Legislative Assembly at Stormont (N = 49) responded to open-ended questions about the Northern Irish identity. Each of the parties used different conceptualizations for rhetorical effect. These results give a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of national identity and its ability to promote political agendas.

KEY WORDS: banal nationalism, divided societies, national identity, Northern Irish

Nations, in contrast to states, tend to be presented as ancient and inclusive (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). They are however, not stable over time, as political actors compete to articulate an idea of nationhood that can be accepted as authentic. Approaches focusing on talk have emphasized that the nation is a flexible rhetorical resource that can be presented in a variety of ways in order to promote different agendas. Across Europe and the United States, increased societal division, heightened concerns about migration, and new national independence movements have meant this contest to construct rival understandings of the nation that correspond with the perspectives of different political actors has reached a new peak in activity. While some aim to articulate an inclusive nation as a shared, common ingroup identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) that is composed of all citizens, others argue for exclusivity to promote xenophobic policies (Condor, Gibson, & Abell, 2006).

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The aim of this article is two-fold. First, by focusing on how citizens talk, it aims to give a more comprehensive account of different understandings of one, ostensibly inclusive national category in a deeply divided society. Second, it uses these results as a framework to analyze and expose differences in the ways in which rival political elites articulate this same nation.

The case study for this article is the Northern Irish identity, a new, cross-community identity in a society where nationalisms have a long-running salience and a profound influence on political life. It is commonly associated with a new, postconflict generation, for whom sectarian division is less relevant. It is the preferred identity of approximately one quarter of residents, and crucially, equivalent proportions of Catholics and Protestants (ARK, 2015). It has been said to have an ambiguity of meaning that is one of its main appeals (Trew, 1998). This ambiguity, and perceived inclusivity in a divided society, makes it an ideal candidate for studying the ways in which a national identity can be contested and reformulated in ways that can be either inclusive or exclusive.

In Study 1, an analysis of focus groups consisting of young people from the region shows that this identity is articulated in four ways: as a distinctive people, as an "identity claim" that may be disingenuous, as a "banal" marker of place, and as a "hot" political project. While these forms are identifiable in the text, it is also the case that participants "meander" between forms, even within a single sentence. Each of these correspond with forms of national identity identified in previous literature, but there are also calls for refinement. The additional novelty of this approach is that it compares each in a single analysis but also shows how they are used differently in political rhetoric.

In Study 2, the same four forms are found in interviews with elite-level politicians. It is also shown that each are used differently such that each party's representatives define the concept in line with their own ideological interests. Sinn Féin, as the largest nationalist party, and with a militant republican background, are the most skeptical. They do, however, tend to articulate it as an identity claim, made by a particular section of society. In contrast, the moderate nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) are more inclined to discuss it as a people. That is, "the Northern Irish" are all of the people in Northern Ireland, regardless of their self-identity. This distinction is also found within unionism. The historically more hard-line Democratic Unionist Party occasionally refer to all people in the region as Northern Irish in an effort to undermine claims of Irishness. The Ulster Unionists are relatively more likely to say it is an identity claim, and so a matter of personal choice. The centrist Alliance party, with its explicitly antisectarian message, use it as part of a moderate political project.

It is concluded that inconsistent results found in previous research can be explained with reference to the multidimensional nature of the Northern Irish identity. Furthermore, it is proposed that political rhetoric that makes use of the nation can be fruitfully analyzed with an awareness of heterogeneity. This article also contributes to the increasing literature that complicates an understanding of the nation as a category of people, or as an "imagined community" of people (Anderson, 1983). It also contributes to the work on shared identities in divided places by showing how categories that may appear as inclusive common ingroups can be articulated in a way that is less inclusive.

Understanding the Nation

It has been two decades since Reicher, Hopkins, and Condor (1997) made their call for the nation to be given greater attention in social psychology. At that time, they not only expressed concerned about the lack of focus on nationhood, but they also expressed the limitations of a normatively individualistic approach that can result from a cognitivist perspective. Too often, the nation has been understood as just another category, without appreciation for the historical and spatial dimensions that set it apart or for how it emerges through interaction and argument. The social identity approach (Tajfel, 1974) was promoted as an avenue for future research, in part because it involves a working definition on the nation as a salient social category of people that resonates well with Anderson's

"imagined community" (1983). A focus on language was also encouraged as a way of demonstrating the variation and consequentiality of different constructions of the nation in talk.

The following years saw research on political and lay understandings of the nation collected from a wide variety of sources such as politicians' talk (Condor, 2006), accounts of national identity among soldiers (Gibson & Condor, 2009), as well as football fans (Abell, Condor, Lowe, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2007), Irish Travellers (Joyce, Stevenson, & Muldoon, 2013), Scottish land owners (McCrone, Stewart, Kiely, & Bechhofer, 1998), and far-right nationalists (Condor et al., 2006). From the discourses of these citizens, the variety of different linguistic constructions of the nation were analyzed, indicating how this category could be constructed in terms of people, places, institutions, histories, and customs. As a result, the largely cognitivist definitions of national identity in previous research were problematized and, in particular, the nation as a person-category shown to be used less often than may have been expected.

The nation can then be seen as not only an imagined group of people, but as a flexible resource to be drawn on to achieve rhetorical goals. Far-right nationalists, for instance, tend to frame the nation in an ethnically exclusive way to promote a reduction in immigration (Condor et al., 2006), while football fans discuss their country merely as the location of their residence to detract from accusations of jingoistic nationalism (Abell et al., 2007).

While this corpus of work has highlighted strategies used to construct the nation, this article brings each into contrast with the other in an effort to compose a more comprehensive overview. Secondly, it shows the purpose of this variety by examining how these different forms are mobilized in political rhetoric in a particular context in order to promote different ideological positions.

Talking of the Nation

Qualitative approaches focus on processes of identity management that occurs between people in their interactions (Antaki, Condor, & Levine, 1996). As such, the nation can be understood not only as an imagined collection of people, but also as a performance of nationhood. This could take the form of state ceremonies or commemorations (Stevenson & Abell, 2011), but it can also be as simple as a vocalized claim to belonging to a group. Indeed, a close examination of the ways in which people articulate their national identity reveals a great deal of complexity and sophistication in the ways in which they present themselves. Work looking at English (Condor, 2000) and Scottish identities (Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart, & McCrone, 2001) show that choosing to make a claim of national identity can involve complex management of talk that negotiates political concerns and accepted norms.

However, the absence of talk can also play a significant aspect in the performance of national identity. Billig (1995) famously asserted that attitudes towards the nation are not only informed by such overt displays of ceremony, or even explicit signifiers of national belonging, but can be constituted through much more banal, commonplace, and taken for granted factors. The fabric of everyday life, such as road signs (Jones & Merriman, 2009), car licence plates (Leib, 2011), and local vernacular architecture (Cusack, 2001) may remain largely unnoticed in everyday life, but all operate to signify the nation.

The spatial element of nationhood is one particular source of the background to daily life that sets the nation apart as different to other forms of identity (Reicher et al., 1997). Indeed, the banality of place-based nationhood contrasts with racial articulations of belonging (Anderson, 1983; Condor et al., 2006). Concerns about racism is one reason why some English people may prefer to discuss their country in physical terms, either as "an island" (Abell, Condor, & Stevenson, 2006) or simply "here" (Condor, 2000). English, rather than British, national identification has been shown to be perceived as more common among right-wing and even racist nationalists. In order to counter this perception, fans of the English national football team tend to more comfortable explaining their support as due to their location of residence, rather than political nationalism. (Abell et al., 2007). Similarly, while aware of the ethnically White associations of claims to Englishness, some residents

of Manchester with Pakistani heritage have said they are willing to use the term as a banal reference to their location (Condor et al., 2006). Residency within a region is also shown to be one of the strongest rules that permit claiming Scottishness (Kiely et al., 2001).

Recent work looking at different articulations of national identity in Ireland have highlighted a "hot," more explicit form of claims to nationality that contrast with more banal forms (Paasi, 2016). Hotter claims appear to be related to status and legitimacy such that lower status groups such as Irish Travellers, who may experience higher levels of societal exclusion do more discursive "work" to emphasize their legitimate claims to belonging (Joyce et al., 2013). Similarly, Irish identifiers north of the border, who are legally outside the Irish Republic, make their claims in a manner that is more emphatic than those in the south to whom Irishness is a more taken-for-granted fact (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). This hot national identity can be related to the literature on collective action that show strong claims to collective identity can be an impetus for, as well as a result of, movements for political change (Drury & Reicher, 2000; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

The nation as a social identity, an identity claim, as banal, and as "hot" are presented here as if distinct. Condor, however, shows that different forms are commonly hybridized in talk so that discussion of the nation is "now a community, now an environment, now a component in a global political system" (2006, p. 659). Research has yet to examine these types together and to investigate how and why they are used in discourse to achieve particular ends.

For an analysis to show the variety of ways in which a national identity can be constructed and used, the case study should be one that has a contested meaning. It should lack many of the taken-for-granted aspects of the nation state. Finally, there should be potentially meaningful political consequences of the category construction. The Northern Irish identity fits all of these criteria. This is a particularly unusual identity as it has only recently emerged. Therefore, it lacks many of the historic roots, commemorative practices, and state institutions that more typically give substance to national identity. Yet still it is chosen as a national identity, in preference to either British or Irish by a substantial proportion of the people who live in Northern Ireland. The abnormality of this identity then and the contested nature of its status makes it a suitable site for the investigation of the various ways in which national identity can be constructed.

The Northern Irish Identity

Northern Irish was first given as an option on surveys in the late 1980s (Moxon-Browne, 1991), replacing Rose's hybrid category of "Anglo-Irish" (1971). It is now the preferred option for 25% of citizens, making it the third most popular in the region, and the only one that is accepted by equivalent numbers of both Catholics and Protestants (ARK, 2015). The limited body of work that has investigated Northern Irish identification has shown that it tends to be associated with more conciliatory attitudes towards outgroup members and higher levels of intergroup contact (Furey, Donnelly, Hughes, & Blaylock, 2016; Hayes, McAllister, & Dowds, 2007). It is typically presented as a "common ingroup identity" (a superordinate identity that is inclusive and composed of two or more subordinate social categories) due to its perception of inclusivity (Hayes & McAllister, 2009; Lowe & Muldoon, 2014). However, there is also evidence of ingroup projection (the "projection" by individuals of perceived ingroup characteristics onto the superordinate identity (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008) such that the prototypical Northern Irish identifier is more likely to be considered a Protestant (McKeown, 2014).

It has been suggested in the literature that there is a greater tendency for young people to prefer this identity (Hayes & McAllister, 2009). Recent survey data supports this assertion, showing that Northern Irish is the most popular identity option among 18–24 year olds (ARK, 2015). Media reports have suggested that it is associated with a new, postconflict generation for whom the traditional conflict between British and Irish national identities is less salient, and other less political dimensions

of division are more important (Belfast Telegraph, 2012, December 12). As such, it potentially constitutes a new emergent form of national identity that could both transcend previous conflict and form the basis for cross-community solidarity. For this reason, a youth sample is used in Study 1.

The political significance of this identity is also a matter of some debate. It has been claimed that Northern Irish is related only to social, and not political, attitudes (Lowe & Muldoon, 2014) and that those identifying this way have only a low level of cognitive commitment (Trew & Benson, 1996). It may then be considered nonpolitical, and so of limited significance in this context. However, there is also some evidence that it is actually related to moderate, centrist politics in the region, particularly the Alliance Party (McNicholl, 2017; Tonge & Gomez, 2015) and with a preference for the constitutional status quo (Garry & McNicholl, 2015). Consequently, Study 2 examines the talk of politicians to show how it is presented in ways that correspond with their ideological positions.

Members of each of the parties in Northern Ireland attempt to articulate different understandings of the national category in order to promote their own political perspective. Among nationalist parties, who aim to reunify both parts of Ireland, and separate from the United Kingdom, the SDLP and Sinn Féin not only differ in terms of their strategy but how they articulate Irishness. Gallagher (1988) described activists engaging in a "contest for meaning," such that meanings are attached to "symbolic labels of the social group" (p. 12). Similarly, the unionist parties, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) present alternative forms of Britishness, with the DUP emphasizing a national identity that is regional and focused on Ulster Protestants, while the UUP place a stronger attachment to the wider U.K. home nation (Todd, 1987). Each party's contestation over understandings of the nation have been well established, but there is virtually no current research looking at how they articulate a Northern Irish national identity. This is of particular interest given the perception of Northern Irish identity's unique inclusiveness in the region (Trew, 1998).

The overarching research questions driving this study can then be articulated as follows: (1) How is the Northern Irish identity understood and used in young people's discussions? (2) How do local politicians discursively frame and deploy the Northern Irish identity in political rhetoric?

STUDY 1

Focus Groups with Young People

Sample

All participants were first-year undergraduate psychology students (N = 286, Male = 60, Female = 226) that undertook the focus groups between 2014 and 2015. To avoid preempting national self-classification, the national identity of participants was not solicited. Inspection of the transcripts indicates that while the class was a heterogeneous mix of national identities, the majority were Irish identifiers.

Procedure

In a scheduled methods class, psychology students at Queen's University Belfast were invited to take part in focus groups. This exercise formed part of their methods training. They took place in two sessions, one year apart, in April 2014 and April 2015. At the beginning of the class, consent forms were distributed along with a list of discussion prompts. Before beginning, students were told that the study aimed to understand their thoughts on the Northern Irish identity. Focus groups were self-selected, insofar as they were based largely on their seating arrangements within the room. The study involved 45 focus groups, typically with five participants each, and lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. Within each group, a moderator was self-selected, as was someone who took notes on their discussion. Moderators and annotators both took part in the discussion. Some moderators deviated from the discussion prompts to widen the conversation, while others stayed close to these questions.

Analytic Procedure

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed as part of the process of familiarization with the text. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This is a flexible form of analysis that has no strong underlying theoretical framework. Analysis can be open, whereby text is coded based on the diversity of concept evident in the text or can be conducted in a more closed manner, as is the case in this article. This means that the text is approached with a particular research question in mind because this study is considered a mapping exercise to describe the different ways in which the nation was articulated. As such, the data were approached with a view to code the different ways in which Northern Irishness was framed in each instance. This can be considered nontheoretical to the extent that there was no presumption as to the nature of the nation or national identity as based in language or in cognition. It was sufficient to focus the analysis on the different ways in which participants articulated the nation. In this study, no attempt is made to explain the motivations of participants for using different themes in their talk. The political attitudes of participants is not known, and so this would be inappropriate. This analysis is conducted in Study 2, where the party membership of participants is known.

The text was read several times to gain a further familiarity with the text. Initial codes were generated before overarching themes could be identified. This coding procedure focused entirely on how the national category was being constructed in each case. The themes were reviewed and refined using constant comparison by analyzing deviant cases in the text. The final themes were then defined and named before writing up the results.

Analysis

Four ways of articulating Northern Irishness were identified. These were labeled: “Northern Irish as a People,” “Northern Irish as an Identity Claim,” “Northern Irish as a Political Project,” and “Northern Irish as an Indicator of Place.” These forms are presented below as distinct. However, as Condor (2006) has shown previously, there are elements of hybridity whereby, for instance, the Northern Irish are considered as a “people,” as part of a rhetorical device to promote a “political project.” This movement between forms was observable in the transcripts. The way each was used together in political discussion is the focus of analysis in the second study. For this study, each is explained separately.

Northern Irish as a people. This understanding of Northern Irish is presented in the form most commonly found in social psychological work on category formation: as a distinct group of people. This is the nation as a social identity. Within this theme, the term “Northern Irish” is viewed as all people from Northern Ireland, regardless of how they prefer to self-identify. Irish and British identifiers, who make up a large majority of citizens in the region, are now either willingly or unwillingly a subgroup of a shared Northern Irish common ingroup.

Extract 1. “It’s not necessarily something that we wanted but we have it” [Focus Group 27]

1. I would consider myself to be Northern Irish rather than Irish. I don’t know…
2. I feel that I identify more with people from this area of the country, when you go
3. down south you don’t get treated like you’re from this country. You know rightly
4. when you go down south they treat you like you’re a northerner from the north, I just
5. don’t think we are the same and it’s not necessarily something that we wanted but we
6. have it.

Extract 1 is typical of this form of Northern Irishness. Their membership of the nation is not due to personal preference, but rather is based on salience. While Irish and British identification tend to imply political attitudes, this is not the case for Northern Irish in this extract. Similarly, the Northern Irish are a people distinct from the state. On two occasions, the speaker refers to “this country,” meaning the 32 counties of Ireland. While experiences “down south” enforce the salience

of Northern Irishness, this participant appears unwilling to legitimize the Northern Ireland state discursively in a way that mirrors the talk of Sinn Féin members (McNicholl, 2017).

Participants also indicated that there were also some elements of cultural distinctiveness and unique character traits of the Northern Irish, although many struggled to find anything that was not either Irish or British. As evidenced in Extract 2, there was broad agreement that people in the region had a unique accent and a dark, cynical sense of humor that outsiders found difficult to understand.

Extract 2. (Focus Group 13)

1. Yeah there's definitely the dark, when you hear people who've been friend for
2. years talking to each other, and everyone, they know it's fun, they know what's
3. going on whereas you see English people they just don't get it you know.

Regional food (the Ulster Fry and local varieties of bread) were the only cultural products that set those in the region apart from others. British and Irish were the standard comparators, but there was also a good deal of comparison to the United States.

Northern Irish as an identity claim. This form differs from the previous iteration in that it is Northern Irish as a performance of identity rather than as a superordinate common ingroup. The Northern Irish are no longer all those who reside and were brought up in Northern Ireland but are only that minority of people who actively choose to claim the identity. This choice can be due to a wish to emphasize that "we are all the same" and that social division is anachronistic, or it can be used as a disingenuous "safe-label" to avoid confrontation as it does not immediately expose the speaker's community background. This has been noted in other literature (Todd, O'Keefe, Rougier, & Bottos, 2006).

Extract 3. "You're not giving it away" [Focus Group 16]

1. F2 I think that's what the issue is with a lot of people. I don't want to say that
2. they're, Irish or British because a lot of people would say, you say you're Irish
3. then you're a Catholic, and you say you're Irish then you're Protestant and
4. that's the distinction so a lot of people would be like, no actually I'm Northern
5. Irish so there's no…
6. I You're not giving it away.
7. F2 Yes. And it's like a good balance it is too.

Extract 4. "You never know who you are talking to" [Focus Group 2]

1. I Are there places that you'd be more inclined to say you're Northern Irish, say
2. at home, or at university?
3. P1 Like, I think there's places like if somebody asked you your nationality you'd
4. probably be a bit hesitant to say "oh I'm Irish" or "I'm British." Like you
5. have to be as more like a… not safety, but like… sort of…
6. I Just to be tactful.
7. P1 Yeah you'd have to be sort of tactful around… it could be dangerous, if they
8. really strongly express the belief that you are a certain nationality.
9. P2 You never know who you're talking to.

A similar scenario is repeated in several focus groups. Someone, often portrayed as a sectarian acquaintance, or as in this example, "lots of people," give them an unwanted categorization as either Catholic/Irish or Protestant/British, or they make demands of them to reveal their ethno-national type. This is considered poor social etiquette in a region where discussion of politics has a real potential for causing offence. In this extract, claiming a Northern Irish identity is a small act of rebellion against what is suggested to be a common social norm of forced categorization.

Furthermore, Northern Irish is used as a disguise. By "not giving it away," one's religious identity is not revealed, as it is accessible to both Catholics and Protestants. Therein lies the perceived "balance."

Those who commit a forced categorization are here framed as having an "issue" that there is a moral imperative to challenge. This overcoming of sectarian behavior is linked elsewhere to a familiar narrative on regional history. That is, in the past, there was a simple delineation between Irish and British, but in this new postconflict society, articulations that are more complex are now possible and to be encouraged. This is a form of myth making, as patterns of identification have always been complex and subject to change. It is a myth that also resonates with the "political project" form described in the next section.

Northern Irish as a political project. A political dimension to Northern Irishness is also evident that resonates with policy positions of centrist parties and that designate as neither nationalist nor unionist. In its extreme form, Irishness and Britishness are both framed as a problem and a source of sectarian division. This can be considered part of a political project that often included policy recommendations that would legitimize this identity.

Extract 5. "The Political Project of Northern Irishness" [Focus Group 34]

1. I: Should there be a Northern Irish flag or passport?
2. F1: I think it would probably help a lot; it would remove that texture of religion
3. completely. Well it wouldn't completely remove it but it would make it…
4. F2: Sort of equal.
5. F1: Yeah.
6. F2: Cause, like if there was a Northern Irish flag then it would have reduced all
7. the conflict around the flag that happened at the City Hall [The flags dispute of
8. 2013], if there was a Northern Irish flag then both sides would be represented
9. and it's like you're bringing it together more than separating. And I think it
10. would be a lot easier than anything else. The way it is now you can go either
11. Irish or British or you can have both, whereas like if there was a Northern Irish
12. one it would be so much easier, so much easier.

It is of particular interest that specific policies promoting a Northern Irish identity are said to "remove the texture of religion." Northern Irish appears as a neutral civic identity, similar to the liberal republican ideal of a state that sees no differences between citizens. Although neutral concerning religious background, it is not always perceived to be constitutionally neutral. Some nationalist participants found it difficult to accept the neutrality of a national identity that appears to legitimize the Northern Irish state, and so is ideologically unionist [FG7, FG13, and FG27].

Extract 6. "Moving forward together" [Focus Group 13]

1. I Describe the typical person who sees themselves as Northern Irish, what
2. background would they have, what views would they have, and would you be
3. more or less likely or interact with them?
4. […]
5. P1 I think it would be more likely younger people these days. I think older
6. generations are more entrenched in their group. I think a lot of people now,
7. after the troubles they're all about moving forward together so.

"Bringing people together" is the prominent feature of this political project. Discussion of the design of a new flag for the region highlights this. Suggestions include a synthesis of the Irish tricolor and the United Kingdom's Union Flag, but it was also the case that some focus group participants suggested an entirely empty, white flag [FG8, FG12, FG21, FG36]. This reflects repeated discussion on whether this identity is a composite identity or a new and culturally sterile third national category.

Northern Irish as an Indicator of Place

The final form of Northern Irish found in the transcripts was as a banal indicator of place. A large number of participants defined their Northern Irishness as derived from where they lived. This was presented as a matter of fact which required little self-reflection. The following extract gives a typical account.

Extract 7. "They only care about where they live." [Focus Group 39]

1. F2: I think I do feel Northern Irish more than I feel Irish or more than I feel
2. British because I think it's controversial to say that you're either of those and it doesn't really work for me.
3. F3: I'd probably be more Northern Irish just because that's where I'm from.
4. I: So is it where you're from that you're Northern Irish?
5. F3: I don't know, I haven't really thought about it like that, it's just where I'm
6. from.
7. […]
8. F3: Maybe like if they had sort of stronger views and you might be more likely
9. to say that you're Irish or British, that's obviously something that they're passionate
10. about but maybe when people say that they're Northern Irish they might just be like
11. they just don't really care about all that and they only care about where they live.

Extract 8. (Focus Group 32)

1. P1: Probably I do see myself that way more due to where I grew up rather than my
2. own personal decision. Like, I've always just associated myself with Northern
3. Irish, that's because of my location rather than me actually taking a personal
4. choice over it, so I've always seen myself as that, it's never been taken.

Often a place-based rationale was given along with expressions of disinterest in politics. While the Northern Irish identity can take on a form that is political, this place-based form has a banal quality that may explain its low level of cognitive commitment (Trew, 1998).

Northern Irish identification is contrasted with Irish and British national identities to show the relative lack of associated strong feelings. Those who do not hold such strong views, and see them as divisive, can fall back on an ostensibly apolitical form of Northern Irishness that relates only to one's location of residence.

When based on place, political attitudes, and identity claims, distinctive character traits are no longer important. Northern Irish is an identity that can be chosen by any of those who live in that part of the British Isles. There is then a potential for this to be a particularly inclusive form of identity as there are none of the usual requirements for entry, such as centrist political attitudes, or even preferring to call oneself Northern Irish.

STUDY 2

Interviews with Elected Representatives

Sample

All 90 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) were asked to take part in a short interview with a representative of Ipsos-MORI in 2017. In total, 49 MLAs agreed to take part. This included members of all five main parties (DUP: 18; UUP: 6; Alliance: 3; SDLP: 7; Sinn Féin: 13) and two members of smaller parties. This was during a period of political crisis at Stormont. Attempts to

Table 1. Frequency Table Showing the Number and Proportions of Occurrences of Each Theme in the Interviews by Members of Each Party

	People	Place	Claim	Political project	#MLAS
DUP	34 (33%)	17 (17%)	18 (17%)	34 (33%)	18
UUP	2 (9%)	6 (26%)	7 (30%)	8 (35%)	6
Alliance	6 (22%)	4 (15%)	8 (30%)	9 (33%)	3
SDLP	9 (24%)	9 (24%)	12 (32%)	7 (19%)	7
Sinn Féin	4 (11%)	10 (26%)	13 (34%)	11 (29%)	14
Other	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	4 (44%)	1 (11%)	2

form a new power-sharing executive between the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin had failed over disagreements surrounding an Irish Language Act, marriage equality, and a controversial botched green energy incentive.

Procedure

Interviews took place face-to-face in the MLA's offices at Stormont. All interviewees were asked the same open-ended questions on the Northern Irish identity. MLAs were invited to discuss the Northern Irish identity from their own party's perspective. Interviews were transcribed and anonymized before being delivered to the researchers. The researchers were only made aware of the party each participant is a member of, and not their names.

Analytic Procedure

Analysis of the transcripts aimed to determine the different ways the Northern Irish identity was constructed and to see how politicians linked it to different political agendas. If it can be shown that this four-part taxonomy of the nation is employed by each party differently, this would suggest this is a fruitful way of analyzing political discourses on the nation. The mapping exercise in Study 1 isolated the distinct forms Northern Irish identity can take. This analysis shows how each form is used in political discourse. It is very likely that the participants in Study 1 did use language to promote their own political perspective rhetorically, but the lack of information on their views makes any analysis of how they instrumentalize their talk speculative. As the analysis in this study enquires into "how" discourse is used as part of argument, this procedure can be best considered a rhetorical analysis in line with the work of Billig (1987). The function of different formations for speakers with different political agendas could then be isolated and understood in the context of a divided society.

Commonalities within parties in terms of interpretive repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and differences between them were noted. Constant comparison was also used to find evidence of irregularities and deviant cases that could undermine the conclusions from Study 1 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Analysis

Table 1 shows how each party's members differ in terms of the number of times each of the themes occur. Sinn Féin members are relatively less inclined than the SDLP are to talk about the Northern Irish as an overarching category of people but are more likely to discuss them as one group who claim this identity. Similarly, comparing the DUP with the UUP, there are more uses of the term to include all people in the region, rather than as an identity claim. It should be noted that this quantitative analysis did not form the basis of the thematic analysis of the interviews.

The Alliance Party. The Alliance party are the smallest of the five and appear the most likely to support Northern Irish identification. Their voters are more inclined to claim this identity (ARK, 2015), and their MLAs use the term "Northern Irish" most often (McNicholl, 2017). They are an

explicitly antisectarian party that designate as neither unionist nor nationalist and place a "shared future" and "shared education" at the top of their priorities (Alliance, 2017). These centrist and antisectarian policy positions of the Alliance party resonate heavily with the "political project" of Northern Irishness seen in Study 1. When asked directly, all of the three Alliance participants claimed a Northern Irish identity with little equivocation, and all suggested it was "only to be a good thing."

Extract 9. "Takes us away from them and us."

1. It would be positive and it's maybe how I would identify myself. I think it takes us
2. away from the "them" and "us," the unionist/nationalist descriptor. It makes us more
3. regional. And I think as we are starting to see the breakup of the United Kingdom it's
4. going to become more important. I think we are going to see more people identify as
5. Northern Irish than British or Nationalist, British or Irish.

In this extract, a number of the different forms of Northern Irishness can be seen in an argument promoting this identity. This meandering between different forms was also evident in the focus groups. As before, Northern Irish is framed as a unified "People" under a superordinate social identity that "takes us away from us and them." Following this disavowal of "us" and "them," the respondent goes on to use the word "us" again ("It makes us more regional"), but in this case the "us" is everyone in the region, regardless of self-identity. Northern Irishness as Place is here suggested to be the basis of forming a new identity.

The narrative of a historical trajectory towards Northern Irish and away from Irish and British as the region moves out of conflict is also presented in a way that forms part of a "political project," but it also frames this move as a change in how individuals claim their identity. This project is political as it positions claims of Irishness and Britishness as a barrier to unity, but there is an absence of a clear policy on the union with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Other policies are suggested elsewhere in some of the transcripts that promote "our own national anthem and our own flag" in order to instill "a greater sense of pride." The four forms of Northern Irishness are evident here, but each is used together and hybridized as part of an argument in line with the desegregationist policies of this party.

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The DUP is the largest party in the Assembly. They are a strongly unionist party who wish Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom. They are considered a hard-line, right-wing, unionist party due to their roots within working-class loyalism, the anti-Catholic statements of their founder, Reverend Ian Paisley, and their disapproval of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement (McGarry & O'Leary, 2004). The party played a key role in the beginning of the 2013 Flags Dispute. Several weeks of protests followed organized DUP opposition to the removal of the Union Flag from Belfast City Hall. They currently oppose the introduction of an Irish language Act as it is considered by some as a threat to the British identity of the region. While this political orientation of the DUP may seem at odds with the centrist project of Northern Irishness, of the 18 members interviewed, only three indicated they did not consider themselves in any way Northern Irish.

Extract 10. "That would mean our chances of a united Ireland are nil."

1. It's positive, I have Roman Catholic friends who identify themselves as Northern Irish.
2. That would also mean our chances of a united Ireland are nil, because of what's
3. happening in the protestant community: 99% of Protestants want to remain British, and
4. the Roman Catholic community is now split between Republican Irish, Northern Irish
5. and British. So they would never get a majority vote. As a Northern Ireland supporter
6. it is noticeable the number of members from a nationalist area now playing for NI, and
7. feel comfortable with that identity. Gone are the days where people used to jump ship
8. and play for the Republic.

On the surface, this extract shows several ways in which the interviewee understands the Northern Irish as a unified people. They refer to their Catholic friends, perhaps in an effort to undermine potential accusations of sectarianism. The use of "our" in line 2 appears to be inclusive of all people in the region. Discussion of the Northern Ireland football team also shows an effort to promote a single team in which all people in the region should feel an affinity. Historically, Catholic football players in Northern Ireland have played for the Republic of Ireland team (Ferguson, 2015).

Claims to unity are undermined elsewhere. The "they" in Line 5 could either refer to political opponents but may also refer to Catholics more generally. Discussion of the Northern Ireland football team indicate that the appeal of this identity is that claims to Northern Irishness are taken as acceptance of the union. While presented as a way of reducing sectarianism, there is an effort to make salient the division between northern and southern Catholics.

This form of Northern Irishness is not a superordinate identity inclusive and composed of members of both communities. It is a subordinate regional identity under Britishness in much the same way as English, Scottish, or Welsh. Other members give similar accounts that while comfortable with this identity, it is "still an identity of being British and part of the UK. It's just the expression of our culture." Some DUP members did, however, express concerns that Northern Irish identification could correspond with a "dilution" of their Britishness.

Northern Irish identification among Catholics is then a way of promoting unionism as a political project. This is quite a different project to that discussed in the focus groups, or by the Alliance party, but is still identifiably a political project form of Northern Irishness. This project is promoted using the Northern Irish as a "People" form. Regardless of self-identity, northern Catholics are expected to give their first loyalty to the football team of this region as part of a cultural unification of the two communities and a distancing from the Republic. This too is a hybridizing of the social identity and the political forms.

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). The Ulster Unionists are considered the more moderate unionist party when compared with the DUP (Garry, 2009). They were one of the early supporters of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and have not been accused of the same informal connections to loyalist paramilitaries. Jennifer Todd (1987) differentiates between Ulster Unionism and the Ulster Loyalism (associated with the DUP) by showing the differences in their respective imagined communities. While loyalism is focused on supremacy for Ulster Protestants within Northern Ireland, Ulster Unionism is more deeply connected with its wider U.K. home nation, partially reflected in their (albeit changing) institutional connections with the British Conservative Party. In contrast, Ulster Loyalism's fidelity to the greater United Kingdom is conditional upon their reciprocal support. This distinction is evident in the difference in how they approach framing this identity.

Extract 11. "That's entirely up to them."

1. In terms of members, our core purpose is to maintain unity with the UK and England.
2. An individual support uses it [the Northern Irish identity], that's entirely up to them
3. But our supporters have that purpose and that's what they're aiming for and they
4. wouldn't be Northern Irish in their eyes. Unless it's a subsection within their British
5. identity. I have no problem with that, on a regional basis.

Although this participant is more critical than that seen in the previous extract, all six of their interviewees gave some level of affirmation of a Northern Irish identity. As before, Northern Irish is framed as subordinate under a wider British identity. It is a place-based regional identity, while the "people" category is reserved for the wider United Kingdom.

This difference sets them apart from the DUP. While the DUP members were keen to suggest that everyone in Northern Ireland is part of wider "Northern Irish people" category, UUP members were more likely to discuss Northern Irishness as an identity claim. For them, it is a choice that individuals make as their preferred way to describe themselves. Provided it is taken without diluting or

eroding their British identity, this is said by some to be a positive move towards "normalizing" the region. Several interviewees mention economic stability and political "normality." "Normalizing" means accepting the constitutional status quo, and the Northern Irish identity could play a role in this change. While a matter of individual choice, participants did express concerns about the implications of moving away from British identification.

The SDLP. Until the early 2000s, the SDLP were the largest nationalist party in the region. Originating the civil rights movements of the late 1960s, they are now widely considered the voice of moderate, constitutional nationalism, having consistently opposed physical force republicanism. This differentiates them from Sinn Féin, who have formal connections to the Provisional Irish Republican Army. While Sinn Féin have only recently accepted the "principle of consent" (that unification can only occur with the support of the majority of those in Northern Ireland), the SDLP have always supported this. Also unlike Sinn Féin, the SDLP only organizes north of the border. In much the same way as Ulster Loyalism and Ulster Unionism are differentiated by their imagined community, the SDLP focuses on politics within Northern Ireland, while Sinn Féin organizes on an all-Ireland basis. This may go some way to explain why six of the seven SDLP interviewees indicated they had at least some sense of a Northern Irish identity.

Extract 12. "Not being so binary"

1. I think that more people would be comfortable with the concept of their identity not
2. being so binary. But with that said I don't think it would be necessary to be wholly
3. British or wholly Irish. You're somehow missing the point. Butoverall I see it as a
4. positive thing. I see it as a positive, and some of the other data I have seen around people
5. who are choosing that identity. Can you be Northern Irish plus something else? Or can
6. you only be British or Northern Irish or Irish? I would be interested to know if you have
7. to decline being Irish or British to be Northern Irish. I don't know if you have to choose.

The word "comfortable" appears 31 times in the transcripts of all MLAs. This word has two functions. First, it shows that it is the individual's right to self-identify as they wish. Second, it points to the negative feelings associated with being labeled in a way they do not endorse. This extract frames Northern Irish identification as the result of complex internal enquiry: a series of questions an individual is forced to confront unless they are so overly simplistic as to "miss the point" and base their identity on a single marker.

The MLA gives a standard definition of a common ingroup identity (the "People" form) to describe Northern Irish. Indeed, many MLAs from each party frame Northern Irish in this way to some extent, but in the SDLP, this appears to be the dominant understanding. It is composed of Irish and British parts, over which Northern Irish exists as a superordinate category. This is in contrast to the unionist suggestions that Northern Irish exists as a subordinate category beneath British.

It is also in contrast to the Alliance extract, who also propose Northern Irish is a unitary people, but this is constructed as a third way, "a movement away from us and them," rather than a synthesis of these parts. The Alliance "political project" form of Northern Irishness considers Irish and British to be problematic cultural relics that are necessarily antagonistic. If this extract shows a SDLP variant of a Northern Irish political project it is one that means it is entirely acceptable to maintain one's own traditional identity, but there is a moral imperative to be self-reflective and recognize both Irish and British "dimensions."

Sinn Féin. Although Sinn Féin designate as "nationalist" in the Assembly, they describe their ideological position as republican. Their principal goal is to bring about a united Ireland, and so there is skepticism among members about an identity that is associated the Northern Ireland state. Only four out of 13 participants indicated any acceptance of a Northern Irish identity, and in all cases, this was heavily qualified. Several gave very short answers and simply rejected the authenticity of Northern Irishness entirely. One interviewee described their feelings on this identity as

"Disaster. Fudge. Offensive." Several claimed the identity was a divisive media creation that undermines Irishness in the north. Others were more detailed and reflective and even moderately supportive of an identity that could be inclusive of different groups. The following extract is atypical in its vehemence, but it does reflect the overall negative attitude of most members.

Extract 13. "Young ones feel very Irish but they feel the pressure not to say it."

1. Denial of Irish national identity, which wouldn't happen in USA, France, or Australia.
2. It's terrible. Young ones feel very Irish but they feel the pressure not to say it. Even in
3. their UCAS forms [Forms for entry into universities] if you answer Irish, the next
4. question is what are your leaving cert results from down south. They are being
5. corralled. That is why the GAA and other organizations are so popular because they
6. don't do that. Whereas UCAS forms are just the worst example. Just imagine you were
7. Gaelic and Irish in your orientation and it asks for your leaving cert results so then you
8. have to go back and change it to Northern Irish. They are being corralled, forced.

Northern Irishness is proposed to be antithetical to Irishness, rather than as an overarching common ingroup. It is rather an identity claim that young people are feeling pressure to claim disingenuously due to bureaucratic presumptions that all people in Northern Ireland are Northern Irish. The superordinate category is then being imposed on an unwilling population of Irish identifiers. Irishness is then treated as a problem in a highly unusual manner, as highlighted with references to other countries where national pride is considered normal.

Both Irish and Northern Irish are presented as identity claims that individuals choose for themselves. In a state where there has been a long history of delegitimization of Irish culture and language, the identity claim form of national identity is then particularly useful. A liberal argument can be presented that infers that one can be Northern Irish if they wish, but this should not be imposed. Similarly, any attempts to undermine Irishness is illiberal, as it removes choice.

Intriguingly, when asked if there is any part of their identity that could be considered Northern Irish, even the above interviewee replied "No. My regional identity perhaps, but not national." This "place" form of Northern Irishness was almost the only form that appealed to Sinn Féin members. This may be due to the apolitical nature of this form and that there is no requirement to call oneself Northern Irish, or even acknowledge a cultural similarity to the cohabitants of the region.

General Discussion

Implications for the Understanding of the Northern Irish Identity

The first contribution of this research is that it shows that when discussing the Northern Irish identity it tends to be used in a multidimensional way and not simply as a social category of people. This has been obscured in previous work. While the literature on the Northern Irish identity has largely positioned it as a common ingroup identity due to its perceived inclusiveness for members of different communities (Hayes & McAllister, 2009; Lowe & Muldoon, 2014) that can also act as a safe label to disguise one's background (Todd et al., 2006), the important differences between these forms has not been highlighted before. Indeed, these are two quite different constituencies. The Northern Irish "people" category is a common ingroup inclusive of all citizens in the region who are said to be similar to each other in important respects. The "identity claim" aspect on the other hand makes up only 25% of people in the region who actively self-label this way. Previous literature has also shown the correlations between this form of identity and voting patterns (Tonge & Gomez, 2015). However, this qualitative analysis gives a more comprehensive view of how individuals understand the political aspect of the Northern Irish identity. The banal spatial dimension of Northern Irishness is a novel finding of the present research.

Moreover, the analysis shows that these different forms can be employed strategically by political actors for rhetorical effect. This is significant in light of claims that this identity relates to social,

but not political attitudes (Lowe & Muldoon, 2014). Similarly, it has been suggested that there is a low cognitive commitment to Northern Irish when compared with British and Irish (Trew, 1998). This study contributes to this debate by suggesting previous results may be only applicable to those who actively claim a Northern Identity, or those that see themselves as Northern Irish simply due to where they live.

The analysis also highlights differences between parties with regard to how they understand and articulate nationhood. Some parties, particularly the Alliance party, use it as part of an explicitly political project and an identity claim and so a move away from Irish and British. The SDLP largely framed it as a common ingroup identity that is superordinate over, and composed of, Irish and British elements, creating a new distinctive people with cultural hybridity. Unionists were more likely to articulate the Northern Irish as a subcategory beneath a British superordinate identity, but with differences between parties. While the UUP tended to frame it as an identity claim chosen by a section of the population, the DUP frame it as a unitary people as a way of dividing Catholics, insisting upon their loyalty to a Northern Irish state. Sinn Féin were largely dismissive of Northern Irishness, but even some of the most adamant acknowledged a place-based regional identity, or as an identity claim.

There are differences evident between the two unionist parties that are mirrored to differences found between the nationalist parties. The DUP is relatively more likely than the UUP to describe all of the people of the region as Northern Irish. UUP members are more likely to articulate Northern Irish as an identity claimed by a proportion of people in the region. This resonates with Jennifer Todd's (1987) research that shows how the two wings of unionism see their home nation as either the whole of the United Kingdom (for the UUP) or Ulster (for the DUP). While the DUP emphasize the people of Ulster as a single people, the UUP see Northern Irish identifiers as similar to those from England, Scotland, and Wales who can freely choose to identify this way and/or as British.

This difference in perceived home nation can account for the differences found between the two nationalist parties. Sinn Féin, who, unlike the SDLP, are a party that stands in elections in all parts of Ireland, and place greater emphasis on the immediate need for Irish reunification. It could then be argued that Sinn Féin are in some respect similar to the UUP in that they view their home nation as broader than Northern Ireland. This may go some way to explain their relative lack of emphasis on the Northern Irish as a people, when compared with the SDLP, and their relative greater emphasis on the identity claim form.

Implications for the Understanding of National Identities

The second contribution is that it adds to the literature analyzing language to highlight complexity, as well as the spatial and performative aspects of national identity (Abell et al., 2006; Condor, 2000; Joyce et al., 2013). None of the four forms of nationhood that have been shown here are entirely new, as they have been pointed to in other research (Abell et al., 2006; Anderson, 1983; Condor, 2006; Joyce et al., 2013). The novelty lies in setting each form against the other to highlight distinctiveness and in showing how each is employed to realize rhetorical goals. Each of these forms is not simply shown to exist, but they also serve a particular function in political talk. There is then a contribution to an understanding of how the nation is understood and how political rhetoric makes use of these understandings.

The four-fold understanding of the nation uses elements found in the literature since Reicher et al.'s (1997) call for a greater focus on the nation. Although the mapping exercise does not isolate any entirely new ways of understanding the nation, it does refine them. In particular, the connection between banal nationalism and place is here emphasized in a way that resonates with previous analyses of English football fans (Abell et al., 2007) and also the geographical basis for national identity (Abell et al., 2006).

Previously, each aspect has been studied in isolation, often in a way that can be methodologically closed, and so the multifaceted nature of identity in talk has been obscured. Each form is deployed in political discussions, aiding the management of identity, even for those who deny its importance to them. Only by focusing on how these forms and displays are used in concert does a fuller picture of the consequences of national identity in everyday life become clear. This article can then be seen as an extension and refinement of the argument put forward in the Lost Nation of Psychology (Reicher et al., 1997).

This article does not attempt to give a new definition of the nation. Rather, it shows that in talk individuals use four main modes when discussing the Northern Irish identity and that a recognition of this is a helpful device to explain differences in political rhetoric. Attempting to generalize these claims for other national identities could provide useful insights but should be conducted with caution. The Northern Irish identity is a particularly unusual example in that it is relatively new, exists in a deeply divided society, and is disclaimed by the majority of residents. However, the fact that these same forms can be found in the existing literature focusing on other nations in the British Isles (Abell et al., 2007; Abell et al., 2006; Kiely et al., 2001) indicates that future discursive work in other places is worthwhile and could throw light on nationalistic rhetoric. An awareness of these four modes in future study of divided countries, where new and contested forms of identity are emerging, is particularly encouraged.

Implications for the Understanding of Shared Identities in Divided Societies

Recent history has shown an increased contestation regarding how the nation should be understood. Antimigrant sentiment and xenophobic attitudes have undermined the capacity for some nations to be formulated as inclusive categories or common ingroups. The creation of common ingroup identities, particularly through intergroup contact, is one of the most common technologies for peace in the past 20 years (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). When civil strife takes the form of a conflict between national identities, what may appear to be inclusive categorical boundaries can be revealed to be more complex through this four-fold understanding. What seemed like a superordinate group can simultaneously be a new third grouping that actively claims this identity for different reasons. It can also be a subordinate identity underneath a dominant superordinate group, while maintaining the appearance of an inclusive category.

If a new superordinate category is to be suggested as a way of reducing prejudicial attitudes between groups, it must be articulated in a way that gains the maximum level of acceptance, while not appearing to be more closely associated with any one of the subgroup identities. A new national identity is a particularly difficult concept to receive wide recognition as the power, authority, and authenticity of the nation is in large part derived from it perception as ancient and unchanging, and uncontroversial enough to form the banal background to daily life (Ranger & Hobsbawm, 1983). For this reason, the "place" form of the nation is particularly worthy of further attention. Even some of those participants who were most vehemently opposed to a Northern Irish identity could still acknowledge a regional dimension to their identities. This form does not insist upon changes to one's claims to Irishness or Britishness, or even to change their political attitudes. It merely means an acceptance that this is a place in which they live and can be proud of. This may only mean a weak attachment to coresidents from other communities, but even this possibility is worth investigation.

Further Research

The data analyzed here are collected from scenarios that are somewhat artificial, and so future research could benefit from more ecologically valid sources. The focus groups were conducted by students in a methods class and may have been moderated by a professional researcher differently. However, it is the case that some of the most valuable data came from the relaxed discussion between friends that this permitted. Similarly, the interviews with MLAs were conducted after an assurance

that their answers would be anonymized. This reduced the degree to which this can be considered political rhetoric, as it allowed the members to discuss their own perspectives more freely and perhaps have courage to deviate from the party line. Future research in this area should then make use of "live" data from naturally occurring discourse.

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APPENDIX

Moderators' Questions and Prompts

1. Do you each consider yourself to be Northern Irish?
   - Why/ why not?
2. If you do, are you proud to be Northern Irish?
   - Why/ why not?
   - What things would you be proud of, ashamed of?
3. Would other people consider you to be Northern Irish?
   - Why/ why not?
   - Who would they be?
4. Are there places where you would be more inclined to say that you are Northern Irish?
   - At home?
   - At university?
   - Abroad (United Kingdom, Ireland, or other country)?
5. When was the last time you used the term "Northern Irish"?
   - Where and with whom did you use it?
   - What were you talking about?
6. Can anyone be Northern Irish?
   - Who can be Northern Irish; who can't be?
   - Can people who move here become Northern Irish?
7. Describe the typical person who sees themselves as Northern Irish?
   - What background would they have?
   - What views would they have?
   - Would you be more or less likely to interact with them?
8. Should there be a Northern Irish flag or passport?
   - Why/ why not?
   - What would it look like?
9. Is there a sense of humor that is Northern Irish?
   - How is this different from English, Scottish, or Irish humor?
10. Are there any other aspects of popular culture, food, or anything else you'd describe as Northern Irish?