Pasts, Futures, and Connections between Scotland, Ulster,¹ and Ireland: a critique of some historiographical tendencies

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The diversity of historical interactions between Scotland and modern Ireland, especially Northern Ireland, is not in doubt. But the nature and effect of the paramount Scottish influences upon Northern Ireland are disputed. That there are also cognate disputes pertaining to the future of Northern Ireland, and the likely future of relations between Scotland and Northern Ireland, raises fundamental questions as to the purpose of academic study of such historical questions. Even scholarly depictions of the past of Scottish-Irish connections may make implicit assumptions about how the legacy of these connections may impede or nurture certain future developments in both locations. To offer any such depiction may thus be to make political recommendations on some fiercely contested present controversies, such as the likely political future of these constituent nations or regions of the British Isles or north Atlantic archipelago.

This paper reviews perceptions of likely futures of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland which historically-informed commentators have advanced, identifying four strands in such analyses. Because none of these perceptions are entirely sound, this essay is partly an illustration of the seductive, and at times delusive, attraction of historical and political parallels and analogies. Significantly however, a common deficiency in such analyses lies in exaggerations of the significance of connections, parallels and affinities between Northern Ireland (or Ireland) and Scotland. Armed thus with a caution as to the errors that such overstatements may produce, this paper offers its own estimates

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as to the historical nature of Scottish interactions with Ireland, and some linked projections as to their futures.

A first set of historically-informed interpretations of recent and future Scottish, Irish and Northern Ireland interactions is framed around assumptions that the political unity of Britain is fragile and unbalanced, due to the domination of the state by the south east of England, and around the idea that a closer European Union (EU) which has transformed Ireland provides a context for the emergence of a Scottish state which will not lapse into ethnic exclusivism. According to one important such analysis, advanced by Tom Nairn, Scotland is forcing the pace in the disintegration of the United Kingdom, and the closest corollary on the island of Ireland to the emerging independent Scottish state is an independent ‘Ulster’. Nairn argues that Scotland will be able to attain a viable and equitable form of civil society if purged of the undemocratic features of political life and culture associated with Britishness and the British state: such peoples of Britain ‘need to be liberated from Britain.’ Somewhat more audaciously, Nairn also suggests that ‘Ulster’ (i.e., Northern Ireland) can comprise a viable and peaceable independent political entity if removed from the distortions created by artificial links with Britain/England. He argues thus that the continued English-British ‘protectorate’ over Northern Ireland provides Northern Ireland Protestants with an incentive to maintain a unionist British ideology, which enlists British aid in sectional interests, rather than engage their energies in the more desirable work of constructing a civic ‘Ulster’ nationalism. It is Britishness that is thus the fatal disrupting influence on the current Northern Ireland peace process.

John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, accomplished scholars of the Northern Ireland conflict, argue: ‘It is tempting to see Nairn’s espousal of independence for ‘Ulster’ and his hostility to the Irish nationalist minority as a reflection of stereotypical Scottish Protestant prejudices about Irish Catholics - laced with the politically correct language of the New Left Review.’ Notwithstanding Nairn’s occasional (and now dated) references to the ‘Catholic, under-developed’ south of Ireland, this view of Nairn is rather unfair. But other criticisms are more apposite. Unsurprisingly, Nairn is far better at the comparatively easy task of detecting reactionary tendencies and amnesia about Northern Ireland within British society than in the far more (and possibly intractably) difficult task of describing a viable future for Northern Ireland.
unionism and loyalism are caused by Britishness or by the existence of the British state is hardly a fair way in which to apportion responsibility, and lets some fairly disreputable movements local to Northern Ireland unnecessarily off the hook. To provide one striking if distressing example, Jason, Mark and Richard Quinn, three boys from a cross-denominational family under the age of 12, were not murdered at Ballymoney in county Antrim in July 1998 because of the links of their killers to the British state, but because said assassins had latched onto a loyalist protest at a decision made by that same British state (in this case the decision not to allow the Portadown Orange lodge to parade down the contentious upper Garvaghy Road). Said killers’ probable preference for identifying with ‘Ulster’ rather than ‘Britain’ should ironically, on Nairn’s analysis, be much closer to the basis for the required tolerant civic ‘Ulster’ nationalism than most other political formations in Northern Ireland. The problem is that as McGarry and O’Leary suggest, unionists are not confused Ulster nationalists, and loyalists are not confused socialist rebels against multinational capitalism as the reading advanced by Nairn (among others) of the Ulster Workers’ Council strike of 1974 would suggest. The degree to which an independent Northern Ireland would be economically stable is also highly questionable; it might be enhanced by an international role played by the EU, but this is doubtful. In any case Unionists’ suspicion of the EU suggests that they are hardly ready for it to fulfill the role in Northern Ireland currently occupied by the British state. A further problem with Nairn’s projected future for Northern Ireland is that while identification with ‘Ulster’ among unionists is strong, almost no significant political actor in Northern Ireland has such an independent state as its main objective, and leading political figures have persistently rejected it. Until this changes it is hardly a plausible future for Northern Ireland.

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It is maintained by other commentators that features of the above analysis are accurate. The unity and stability of the UK are unbalanced due to its historical (and near-colonial) domination by England, specifically southern England, which has adversely affected economic development in the Celtic countries and accentuates political grievances. Independence in the context of closer European union may, it is thus argued, be the political future of Scotland; but according to a cognate analysis, it is not an independent Northern Ireland, but the supposed success of
the independent (and in the future, united) Irish state that presages and parallels the likely success of an independent or semi-independent Scottish state. This is an argument that attracts the Scottish National Party, and appears to find confirmation in a perceived helpful political contribution from the EU to the resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland, and to the recent rapid growth of the Irish republic’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy. The latter certainly suggests to many Scottish nationalists that a small nation neighbouring England may in the twenty-first century have a viable economic alternative to subsisting as an undistinguished region in the British economic system.

The prospect that an independent Scotland may follow in the footsteps of independent Ireland flatters the vanities of some Irish nationalists. The affirmation of such an event or prospect is not however alone mooted by historical commentators inspired by the largely discredited model of internal colonialism, or by representations of the Scots solely as the victims of imperialism; certain recent economic and political difficulties of the United Kingdom seem to support such a view of the future of both Ireland and Scotland. The rapid catching up of the Republic of Ireland’s per capita GDP with that of the United Kingdom can appear to undermine one aspect of the unionist case against a united Ireland. The Thatcherite dismantling of the UK welfare state has further enervated the former argument that to be a Catholic discriminated against in employment and supported by the British taxpayer in Down was more profitable than to be a free and employed citizen of the Irish republic in Donegal. Conservative British governments’ attacks on ‘dependency culture’ were also perceived as an attack on Scotland, where the state had historically played a larger economic and social role. In consequence, unionism in both Scotland and Northern Ireland has been politically weakened.

Christopher Harvie, also a noted analyst of contemporary Scotland and an enthusiast for a closer European union of the regions, further argues that given the high proportion of the Scottish population with Irish connections, a Scottish-Irish Agreement might have made a more positive contribution to the Northern Ireland question than the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. There is no necessary agreement amongst Irish and Scottish nationalists as to the specific implications of these recent economic developments in Britain and Ireland: the degree of autonomy envisaged for Scotland in some such quarters may be
unclear, and valorization of the Celtic Tiger economy may be vitiating in other cases, such as Denis O’Hearn’s, by a desire to prove that no state can be ideal in a partitioned Ireland.\textsuperscript{22} But there is an agreement that the unitary United Kingdom state failed both Scotland and the island of Ireland, so that political reconstruction, or even territorial redivision, is or was necessary.

In this post-devolution moment,\textsuperscript{23} historians’ perspectives are less likely to affirm the inevitability of the Anglo-Scottish union of 1707 and the durability of British unity. There is thus an increased tendency in the writing of the Scottish past, if not to overstate the historical resistance in Scotland to union with England, at least to exaggerate its proximity to a systemic nationalism.\textsuperscript{24} This is most obviously true of the historical representation of eighteenth-century politics, especially Jacobitism.\textsuperscript{25} In the case of some historians of Scotland, there appears thus to be a recent inclination to see the Jacobite (or 1790s radical) auld alliance of Scotland, Ireland, and France as anticipating the current project of united and independent states of Ireland and Scotland within a European context. However accurate such a view is in describing the eighteenth century, there is surely potentially a significant sleight of hand in understating the intervening discontinuities prior to the twentieth-century rise of party political Scottish nationalism.\textsuperscript{26} The number of commentators ready to try to explain such discontinuities\textsuperscript{27} is surely indicative of how they comprise deep political as well as historical flaws with the pairing of Scotland and Ireland’s past and future in this way, and the allied implication that there is some sort of irreversible logic to growing Scottish autonomy in a European context.

In what may be regarded as one of the more subtle examples of this type of historical interpretation, Harvie appears to admit this discontinuity in mapping the transition from Scots’ self-representation at the nineteenth-century height of the Union according to Anglophone values, to their more recent self-casting as ‘Celts.’ Harvie however seems elsewhere to naturalize the latter development in representing nineteenth-century Scotland as a society that failed to generate ‘nationalism’ in accordance with European norms.\textsuperscript{28} More recent economic and political factors underscore problematic features of these assumed historical Scottish-Irish connections. Whatever the merits of treating Scotland and the island of Ireland as natural economic units,\textsuperscript{29} the Scottish and Irish nationalist critique of the conduct of UK fiscal policy exposes the (doubtless considerable) limitations of
English and British Euroscepticism more than it does advance a convincing rationale for why Scotland should reclaim the independence of its fiscal policy from Westminster in order to surrender it to the European Union. To emphasize Europe as a context in which Scotland, under the inspiration of the Irish example, can now emerge as a political entity would appear to depict Scotland as a natural ‘region’ of an ever closer European union, suggesting that Scotland has missed the finite era of the nation state. If independent Ireland, and continental Europe and its nationalisms, have mapped out Scotland’s irreversible future, the latter has thus fallen greatly behind.

These considerations - notwithstanding the intention of this recent group of historically-informed commentators - emphasize historically-embedded differences between Ireland and Scotland, which may well underpin future differences in their evolution. The imbalance between Irish and Scottish experience has really changed rather little since Irish nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell suggested during the Irish home rule campaigns that Scotland’s acceptance of the Union showed that it had ‘ceased to be a nation.’ The legacy of the Anglo-Irish Agreement has arguably proved more propitious than Harvie assumed would be the case, but in any case there is surely little evidence of the level of interest in the future of Northern Ireland in Scotland which would make a Scottish-Irish agreement the sort of landmark he suggested. Analogies, affinities and connections between Scotland and Ireland in the present and in the past can be exaggerated. Further, British unity has proved stronger historically and in the present than certain Celtic commentators have suggested, certainly more so than a ‘European’ identity (as the debacle over the European Union’s 2004 constitution suggests). Southern Ireland’s secession from the UK, it can be argued, is an exception rather than a precedent for Scotland.

A third historically-informed interpretation of the present and future focuses on the historical movement of people from Scotland to Ulster, notably the settlement of Scottish Presbyterians in Ulster from the seventeenth century. In the medium-term, Presbyterians in Ulster made a significant contribution to late eighteenth-century Irish radicalism and republicanism, although that radicalism’s nature and extent is debated, and its extent may often be exaggerated. In the long term, in any case, it is clear that Scottish migration to Ulster from the seventeenth century
consolidated the hold of Protestantism within north-east Ulster, a crucial foundation to the twentieth-century partition of Ireland, and therefore has an ongoing significance to proportions of the population of Northern Ireland. Narratives of the experiences of Ulster-Scots migrants to Ulster from the seventeenth century, and those of members of the linked ethnic group, the Scotch-Irish, the product of a further largely eighteenth-century migration to the US, have been retold for centuries. There has also emerged a sizeable scholarly body of work in Ulster-Scots and Scotch-Irish studies, focusing analytically on these groups’ history and culture. But there has also been a renewal of historically-informed discourses characterized by an avowal or foregrounding of the significance of Ulster-Scots or Scots-Irish identity, and an assertion that a distinct Ulster-Scots history, culture and language underpins and explains the politics of many Northern Ireland unionists.

At its best, it can be argued that the concept of an ‘Ulster-Scots people’ gives unionists a wide international community with which to identify, and is thus preferable to manifestations of unionism which amount to a rather redundant form of British nationalism shared by few in Britain itself, or a merely negative opposition to a united Ireland. There are a number of criticisms that can however be posited of the idea that connections with Scotland through past processes of migration can, have or should particularly affect the identifications and politics of modern inhabitants of Northern Ireland. Firstly, it can be complained that the Ulster-Scots idea, no less than Northern Ireland unionism or British nationalism, contributes to political or cultural balkanization in Northern Ireland, and is derivative of existing political structures rather than changing them. Consciousness of Ulster-Scots culture has received institutional encouragements within the context of the Northern Ireland peace process. This peace process is closely wedded to an analysis of Northern Ireland as a society divided between two ‘traditions’ or ‘cultures’, requiring the solvent of a parity of esteem between them. This analysis presupposes that representation and institutional embodiment of such traditions is, so long as it is reciprocal, a conciliatory influence upon the conflict, so that in so far as it can represent itself as one of or part of one of those ‘two traditions’, Ulster-Scots culture, traditions and language are both facilitated by the peace process and seen as helpful towards it. There is however a criticism of this two-traditions approach (and thus of the peace process) that it
entrenches a binary opposition between these two traditions, minimizing individual mobility between or outside of them, and thus consolidating communalism and zero-sum ethnic competition in Northern Ireland. This is distinct from the somewhat more unforgiving argument that some traditions deserve less institutional support than others. This is an argument which has been made against Irish nationalism, although on academic grounds it could be argued that the centrality of political-inspired myth-making and misrepresentation to their modern origins makes Scotch-Irish and Ulster-Scots identities more plausible targets for such strictures.

Much modern scholarship in the field of Scotch-Irish and Ulster-Scots history does demonstrate a high standard of professionalism; but even apart from the more overtly political nature of populist publications there often seems to be a political subtext to even scholarly work in the field. The contemporary *Journal of Scotch-Irish Studies* clearly has scholarly pretensions, yet asserts in its mission statement that: ‘the Society and the Scotch-Irish people are American. The adherence of the Scotch-Irish to our national ideals has been no better stated.’ Not surprisingly, this guileless affirmation of Scotch-Irish identity and United States nationalism leads to neglect of unwholesome episodes in Scotch-Irish history, such as the well-attested and large role played by individuals of Scotch-Irish ancestry in the founding of the Ku Klux Klan. In a Northern Ireland context, to emphasize the historical and even cultural significance of the connections of the people of modern Northern Ireland to Scotland is to stress a dimension of the province’s past and present which is not Irish in a way that seems to be directed against the political agenda of Irish nationalism. There undoubtedly are organic and long-term connections between this objective and the project of writing Ulster-Scots history, even at a scholarly level. There is also an implication even in such scholarly accounts (although more obvious in the case of politically motivated popularizers) that the core narrative of the Ulster-Scots and Scotch-Irish is a suppressed narrative; the Ulster-Scots people have not been given their due, not least on account of the misrepresentations effected by writers sympathetic to Irish nationalism. This is objectionable on the grounds that is close to affirming crude stereotypes of the Catholic Irish as garrulous deceivers, ethnically programmed to be skilful in the dark arts of media manipulation, a stereotype that impedes political dialogue in Northern Ireland. It may in any
case be argued that self-congratulatory Scotch-Irish and Ulster-Scots narratives have historically been propagated powerfully, backed by socially and politically privileged agencies, in ways that altered the course of Irish history.48

In the present context, however, the main criticism that can be made of recent articulations of the Ulster-Scots idea is not that they have a political agenda, but that that agenda is far too weak to influence the future of either Northern Ireland or Scotland. In so far as emphasizing the strength of an identification of present inhabitants of Northern Ireland with Scotland has a specific political objective, it suggests that the future relationship of the two countries is likely to be (and should be) a close one. Former Ulster Unionist Party leader David Trimble even speculated in 1991 on the idea that if Scotland were to secede from the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland might prefer a political orientation to independent Scotland rather than to the English-dominated state that would remain.49 There is no sign of any interest in Scotland in such an arrangement, especially among Scottish nationalists. And the main political weakness of those who would assert the importance of Ulster-Scots culture is that the community with which they identify is largely imagined. There is almost no interest in and support for the Ulster-Scots idea in Scotland, and, indeed, there is really rather little support for it in Northern Ireland, where the political context makes it more immediately relevant, and practically no body of opinion that may be regarded as an 'Ulster-Scots public.'50 This is not to trivialize the importance that some inhabitants of Northern Ireland may ascribe to ancestral links to Scotland and other connections to Scotland. But it seems an exaggeration to suggest, as some do, that from the twentieth century, the Ulster-Scots held a 'cultural hegemony ... over the entire Protestant population of the north of Ireland.'51 Presbyterians are the largest group of Protestants in Northern Ireland, but have only ever been one of several such groups, Church of Ireland Episcopalians (of high and low social standing) in particular having played a key role in the province’s past. Perceived connections to Scotland thus comprise only a fragment of what makes some Northern Ireland Protestants unionists, and identify more strongly with 'Ulster' and/or with Britain than with Ireland. The unionist-nationalist division thus largely subsumes any political importance Ulster-Scots identity has. Scholarly and non-scholarly analysis which foregrounds this identity thus has similar defects to the other strands of analysis
here reviewed; it overstates the importance of connections between Northern Ireland and Scotland, and understates the resilience of British institutions and identities.

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A fourth and final dimension of historically-informed consideration of Scottish-Northern Ireland connections can at least not be faulted on the latter grounds. This is examination of past and present connections between Scotland and Northern Ireland, which situates these specifically in a wider British context. By and large this interpretation of Scottish-Northern Ireland affinities is advanced by those who are unionists or are sympathetic to unionism, who do not expect or want Scotland to secede from the United Kingdom, and who want Northern Ireland to retain close political connections with Britain.

The work of Graham Walker particularly develops these points. Walker suggests that ‘the Ulster loyalist sense of identity is far more understandable to Scots (than to the English), whatever their views on the desirability of a united Ireland. Scots can sympathize with Ulster loyalist frustration regarding the English equation of ‘English’ and ‘British’. Scots know very well about religious sectarianism and about a system of education segregated, in effect, according to religion. Scots can readily relate to the potency of Orange and Green symbolism.’ Walker thus suggests that Scotland and Northern Ireland, being ‘close cousins’ could do much beneficially to ‘deconstruct the concept of Britishness’ and demonstrate that ‘two centralised nation states do not adequately reflect the interactions within and between these two islands’. He suggests that Scottish nationalists might thus be induced to come to a greater understanding of the ‘Ulster loyalist’ case.52

Walker thus argues that there is much in the recent experience of Northern Ireland that has a resonance in Scotland that it does not elsewhere in Britain. Migratory movements support this argument, though in this case it is migration from Ulster to Scotland; the extent of immigration from Ireland to Scotland was larger in the nineteenth century as a proportion of the recipient population than that from Ireland to England and/or Wales.53 In part in consequence, the Orange Order retains a strong following in Scotland of around 50,000, even if it has never played the role there that it has in Northern Ireland.54 Glasgow soccer clubs and their followings retain religious affiliations, so that Celtic and Rangers remain the two most popular soccer clubs in many parts of Northern Ireland, respectively largely followed by Catholics.
and Protestants, while many Scottish Glasgow Celtic supporters appear to identify more closely with the Irish tricolor than with any Scottish flag. S5 Sectarianism in Scotland, as Walker suggests, also still has other manifestations.

It is certainly true that there is, not just within Scotland but within Britain at large, a level of denial about a recent national past of sectarianism, and about the extent to which this sectarianism in its day intersected with, and continues to reverberate in, the circumstances of Northern Ireland. S6 At the same time, however, Walker and other associated writers S7 suggest that Scottish-Northern Ireland connections within a British context are not artificial and reactionary expressions of Britishness as Nairn would suggest, but an unusually authentic expression of Britishness. Thus for Walker, Edwardian Liberal Unionist business elites in the west-centre of Scotland and Ulster were ‘probably the most enthusiastic adherents of British identity in the UK as a whole’. S58 Responding to Joseph Lee’s positing of affinities between early twentieth-century unionism and racial supremacism, Walker further suggests that Presbyterian liberal Unionists in Ulster with Scottish connections such as Thomas Sinclair (the author of the famous Ulster Covenant of 1912) gave Unionism a distinctly progressive inflection. S59 In the current circumstances, such writers emphasize the civic rather than ethnic content of Northern Ireland unionism, and especially that the British traditions and institutions to which unionism is linked possess a flexibility and openness superior to the reactionary ethnic intolerance of Irish and other forms of nationalism. S60 Arguably this greater scope to represent plural identities within Britishness has been further demonstrated since Walker wrote by the activation of devolved institutions of government in Scotland and Northern Ireland, devolution thus now comprising another connection between the two. Clearly this is the polar opposite of Nairn’s view that it is the ‘Britishness’ of Northern Ireland unionism that renders it reactionary and exclusive.

There are however problems with this interpretation of Scottish-Northern Ireland interactions, which as Nairn suggests, S61 seems often to be inspired by a limited self-congratulatory perspective on British identities. The logical corollary of assertions that Northern Ireland unionism is a form of British identity, and that British identities and institutions are uniquely marked by their tolerance, is that the intolerance and violence that has typified Northern Ireland’s recent past cannot have anything to do
with the British, and must be the fault of Irish nationalism. Even apart from its inaccuracy, notwithstanding the accompanying assertions about the tolerance of one’s own traditions, this is tantamount to an articulation of stereotypes of the Irish as atavistically violent that are crude and intolerant. Walker’s analysis also conflicts with that of some scholars - in some cases sympathetic to unionism - who draw attention to connections between Presbyterianism and ‘conservative’ dimensions of unionism, or dimensions particularly resistant to political compromise. Even apart from the question of its links to Britishness or Scotland, however, there are serious doubts about how far the characterization of Northern Ireland unionism as civic is reasonable, at least in relation to its most common manifestations. Walker and other unionist sympathizers may see the British-Irish Council created through the Good Friday Agreement as a symbol of British unity (including bonds between Scotland and Northern Ireland and their devolved institutions) that they would like to see strengthened, but as matters stand the significance and functions of this body are fairly insubstantial and its ultimate significance may be of a different character, with Irish nationalists hoping for support for Irish unity from Scottish politicians thereon.

The major problem with Walker’s political analysis, however, is that once again parallels and the potential for connections between the Scottish and Northern Ireland societies are significantly overstated, and attempts to compare them actually highlight differences between the two. That the course of devolution in Northern Ireland since 1999 has been heavily interrupted, unlike that in Scotland, comprises one disjuncture between the two. A review of some recent incidents provides others. In July 2001, Jack Ramsay, Grand Secretary of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland, was quoted as suggesting that some Protestants in Scotland, including his own Orange order, might feel obliged to act as a paramilitary force analogous to the Ulster loyalists, fighting to preserve their Britishness, if the Scottish National Party ever got a majority in Scotland and tried to institute its policy of independence. In February 2001, a proposed visit to Scotland by the Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern to unveil a monument to the victims of the Irish potato famine was cancelled when the local Labour MP Frank Roy suggested that because the visit coincided with a Rangers-Celtic soccer fixture, sectarian tensions would be raised and violence might ensue. These incidents seem to indicate a dimension to Scottish politics very like
Northern Ireland, but in fact they are insubstantial, and the sequels indicate the politically performative nature of the widespread perceptions of difference between Northern Ireland and Scotland. Ramsay was obliged to insist that he had been quoted out of context, and Roy was rapidly forced to resign his position as parliamentary private secretary to the then Secretary of State for Scotland Helen Liddell. Further, Roy’s predictions as to the possibility of sectarian violence in Motherwell and Wishaw were felt so wide of the mark that many commentators felt obliged to advance audacious conspiracy theories (some involving connections between Roy and Ulster loyalism68 or to former Secretary of State for Scotland, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, John Reid) to explain how Roy could have got it so completely wrong: ‘It is hard to find anyone else who takes such a pessimistic view of the people of Lanarkshire’, wrote the Scottish newspaper the *Sunday Herald*. ‘Scotland has [rather] been an important part of the [Northern Ireland] peace process by providing an example of how to move away from sectarianism.’69

As mentioned, it is in fact not clear that Scotland has played an ‘important part’ in the Northern Ireland peace process. But what such responses indicate, as Walker indeed seems to admit,70 is that few Scots want to have the dialogue with Northern Ireland he desires, partly because they do not want to get too closely involved in the problems of Northern Ireland out of a fear (however unnecessary) of importing the conflict, and partly because Scottish nationalists show no sign of seeing themselves as politically kindred spirits of Northern Ireland unionists in the way he suggests. Indeed, the dim echo of Northern Ireland’s sectarian antagonism itself which Walker tries to amplify in Scotland is indicative of the fact that Scots tracing their roots to Ireland via historically recent migrations may as easily have Irish nationalist as unionist ancestral affiliations,71 so that many Scottish nationalists (among others) may indeed be as likely to sympathize with the Irish nationalist agenda as any which would consolidate Northern Ireland’s links to Britain.

Northern Ireland unionism meanwhile has no obvious equivalent movement in Scotland; the role which the Orange Order has historically played in Northern Ireland cannot be compared to its role in Scotland, where it has been much weaker, being often seen solely as an immigrant movement, as well as undermined by the denominational context in Scotland (in a way which, ironically, Orangeism in England was not).72 None of this
is surprising given that the differences of the modern history of Ulster from the history of Scotland are as fundamental as those of the modern history of southern Ireland. Practically the whole population of Ulster was divided by the Plantations between settler-colonists and natives, a division that reverberates through subsequent events and present politics. Scottish history was marked, and Scotland so divided, by no such event, and in consequence sectarianism in contemporary Scotland plays no truly analogous role to that which it has played in Northern Ireland, and does not have the same history or degree of intersection with political or national questions. Conversely, if British culture, and within that Scottish culture, is considered to be characterized by tolerance in the way self-congratulatory commonplace (and some academic analysis) suggests, the clear consequence is that Scottish people, no less than other Britons, see even unionists in Northern Ireland as having very little in common with them.

All of these four imagined patterns of Scottish, Northern Ireland, and Irish interactions thus depict the current and future context in only partial and problematic ways. In spite of their evident political and interpretive disagreements, they also share other commonalities. All four strands reviewed tend to overstate the past and present significance of parallels, connections and potential equivalences between Scotland and Northern Ireland (or Ireland). Writers reviewed above (with the partial exception of the fourth strand) all understate the resilience of British institutions and identities, and there is also a linked common tendency to represent England in reductive ways. Christopher Harvie suggested in 1994 that the British Parliament was ‘a south-east English regional assembly’, governing only in the interest of that area. That may have appeared true for part of the Thatcher and Major years, but only accurately describes certain aspects of parliament’s work at that time, and anyway seems to have been disproved since 1997. It is also somewhat inadequate to suggest that the historical weakness of politicized English regional identities has been a malign influence. Nairn’s depiction of loyalist sectarian violence as the fruit of Britishness is awry. But the justification of loyalist paramilitarism and protest - sometimes framed in the mode of Ulster-Scots identity - as a self-defence against the imminence of wanton British betrayal and appeasement of republican terrorism is also far too simplistic; if further proof were needed, the British government’s recent shenanigans which pressured the
Provisional IRA alone (thus far) among paramilitary groups to decommission its weapons surely demonstrate this. Murray Pittock, Walker and Nairn all bemoan the historical prevalence of ‘the assertion of a central type of Anglo-imperialist value as ‘universally British,’ and O’Hearn argues ‘Ironically, if England could stop acting like the imperial world power that it no longer is, and reconcile itself to being an equal partner in … a semi-peripheral alliance [i.e., as a national unit of a close European union], it too could play a crucial role in changing the world-system.’ Yet arrogant or ‘internally colonialist’ English presumptions to be the definitive expression of Britishness have by no means historically been uncontested, or even necessarily been a source of imbalance in the United Kingdom. Furthermore in the aftermath of devolution, the English appear largely happy with their own new institutional underrepresentation within the UK; there is little interest in regional assemblies within England itself, or an English parliament, and the dynamic for further constitutional change (if there is any) seems most likely to come from Scotland. There is a rival simplistic English nationalist discourse, which suggests that the English would indeed be better off as a separate independent state, without its troublesome and expensive ‘Celtic fringe’. But this English political nationalism, self-consciously modeled as ‘the English “Sod Off” school of Anglo-Scottish relations,’ is not politically popular in England, and also does not seem as destabilizing as some have assumed.

These considerations may seem to validate Walker’s diagnosis as that which adopts the highest and most appropriate estimate of the resilience of Britishness amongst the four here reviewed. Separatism does not, at least at present, predominate in Scotland, Northern Ireland, or any part of the United Kingdom. The future of Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland, however, is not predetermined, and to predict it is both necessary and difficult. Reports both of the United Kingdom’s death and of a stable future in Northern Ireland have been exaggerated. The past, present and future significance of Scottish-Northern Ireland interactions has also been frequently overstated by historians and historically-influenced commentators, and these interactions are unlikely in themselves to hasten the arrival of any projected future for any region. Exaggerated claims for the benefits (or demerits) of Scottish influence on Ireland north and south are mutually contradictory and may obscure the real (and mild) influence that it does have. But what may yet influence the future
is the perception of the importance of affinities and parallels between these regions. Political belief is not necessarily constrained by historical reality; and any of the described four understandings as to what is the appropriate pattern of interactions between Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland could still become important, if backed by sufficient popular belief.

Notes
1 Throughout this paper, the term ‘Northern Ireland’ is used to refer the current six-county political unit that is part of the United Kingdom. The term ‘Ulster’ is used to denote the historical nine-county province of Ulster, deprived of administrative significance by the partition of Ireland of 1920-2, as well as the entity more recently ‘imagined’ or politically identified with by individuals or groups within Northern Ireland, individuals or groups usually with unionist or loyalist political affiliations.
3 Nairn, *After Britain*, pp. 11, 10.
16 The staunch Irish nationalist Tim Pat Coogan carefully records that a Scottish friend told him: ‘We’d be better off getting into Europe, and getting the Brussels lolly like you boys,’ Tim Pat Coogan, Wherever Green is Worn: the story of the Irish Diaspora (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 249.
21 Harvie, Scotland and Nationalism, p. 216.
27 Graeme Morton, Unionist-Nationalism: governing urban Scotland, 1830-1860 (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999); Lindsay Paterson.


29 O’Hearn, ‘The two Irish economies.’

30 Coogan unconsciously expresses this difficulty – at the same time as betraying a modish reaction to contemporary political developments – in arguing that ‘the whole movement towards a Europe of the Regions, making for increased local autonomy, slots into Scottish developments’, Coogan, Wherever Green is Worn, p. 249.


pp. 76-88; Mick Fealty, Trevor Ringland, and David Steven, A Long Peace? The future of Unionism in Northern Ireland (Wimborne: Slu
ger O'Toole, 2003), p. 29.


58 Walker, ‘Scotland and Ulster’ p. 97; Walker, Intimate strangers, p. 29.


63 David N. Livingstone and Ronald A. Wells, Ulster-American Religion: episodes in the history of a cultural connection (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), pp. 12, 93-4, 139-44; Bruce, Conservative Protestant Politics, pp. 25-95, especially p. 54.

64 Bruce, Conservative Protestant Politics, pp. 83-8.


67 ‘Orange Order’s threat to take up arms’ Sunday Herald, 8 July 2001.

68 Coogan, pp. 231-52.


70 Walker, ‘Scotland and Ulster’ pp. 103-6.
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