

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority Languages in Northern Ireland

Gavin Hart

University of Huddersfield

Abstract

Does increasing immigration change the nature of language politics in a party system underpinned by ethnic valence strategies? This paper utilizes qualitative data to illustrate the manner in which debates on linguistic pluralism have become enmeshed in the politics of ethnic defense in Northern Ireland. It will be shown that language politics in this context is driven by the powerful pull of bi-national considerations. This is despite the fact that migrant languages have become increasingly common in the territory. The research provides insight into the manner in which ethnically defined parties have engaged with multicultural diversity, in the context of increasing immigration. It is shown that Sinn Féin representatives largely ignore discussions about wider language diversity, preferring to focus on narratives related to Gaelic. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) tends to utilize the broadened range of minority languages as a shield to repel nationalist demands for greater state support for Gaelic programs. The analysis of this evidence suggests that ethnically defined parties are ill-suited to the demands of a multicultural society and immigration-generated diversity.

Keywords

Gaelic; Ulster-Scots; multiculturalism; consociationalism

Introduction

The issue of linguistic diversity and specifically of minority languages lays in the heart of the cultural politics in Northern Ireland. This paper investigates the manner in which language politics have been played out between the dominant ethnic-tribune parties. The findings are derived from a range of qualitative resources including original interviews, Hansard material, press releases, and electoral manifestoes associated with Sinn Féin, the ascendant party within the nationalist/republican bloc, and the DUP, the largest unionist/loyalist party. The paper begins by discussing the legacy of ethnic conflict in the region and the consociational framework that has been designed to manage division in Northern Ireland (Mitchell et al. 2009; Wilford, 2010).

* Gavin Hart, Centre for Citizenship, Conflict, Identity and Diversity, University of Huddersfield, Queensgate, Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, HD1 3DH, United Kingdom; G.Hart@hud.ac.uk.

The paper then moves on to consider the extent to which Northern Irish society has become more multicultural as a result of immigration in recent years. Some space is given here for the discussion of multicultural principles and their relationship with minority language debates (Kymlicka & Patten, 2003; Karim, 2007; McMonagle, 2010; McMonagle & McDermott, 2014; McDermott, 2017). The article then moves on to provide a detailed investigation into language politics in Northern Ireland as they have been played out between Sinn Féin and the DUP.

The research highlights the manner in which these parties have largely ignored the needs of migrant communities due to an excessive focus on autochthonous minority languages. It is understood, of course, that there are other important parties operating within the Northern Irish party system, and that there are a broader range of narratives with respect to linguistic diversity. However, the primary focus of the paper is the investigation of how the tribune parties have adapted to an increasingly multicultural society. It must be recognized that the Alliance Party, The Social Democratic and Labour Party, and the Ulster Unionist party also have strong positions on minority languages, though these parties are currently less powerful in influencing executive decision-making than Sinn Féin and the DUP. Before we can proceed to analyze the statements made by the party representatives on these issues, it is useful for us to consider the context in which these debates have taken place in Northern Ireland and to lay some theoretical foundations for the study. Our point of departure will be to outline the history of inter-communal antagonism in Northern Ireland and the key aspects of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA).

Consociationalism, Bi-Nationalism, and Party Politics in Northern Ireland

The Northern Irish substate has been constructed around competing demands for national self-determination. The territory was separated from the rest of the island of Ireland in 1921 when the British government agreed to allow greater autonomy for the fledgling southern Irish state (Dixon, 2008). The outcome of the partition was an inter-generational conflict in Northern Ireland fought between Irish republicans, Ulster loyalist paramilitaries, and the British security forces. This conflict was mediated by the GFA, which outlined the mutual validity of both British and Irish identities and recognized the wider diversity in Northern Irish society (Tonge, 2013). The Agreement paved the way for power-sharing institutions that have functioned sporadically since their inception in the late 1990s (Bew, 2019). The logic that underpinned this settlement was largely derived from consociational principles (for an alternative opinion, see Dixon, 2005).

Consociationalism is defined by a selection of institutional arrangements designed to manage deeply divided societies by avoiding inter-communal conflict. The model revolves around the principles of executive coalition, proportionality, group autonomy, and mutual veto rights (Lijphart, 1975; 2004). The approach is “top-down” due to the assumption that elite level accommodation can substitute for “cross-cutting solidarities” between different ethno-religious groups in the wider society (Lijphart, 1975, p. 7). However, critics of consociationalism have argued that far from overcoming division, this approach will entrench communal conflict within an institutional framework (Dixon, 2008; Taylor, 2009). Furthermore, they suggest that the institutional logic of consociationalism will offer little incentive for elites to reach out beyond communal boundaries, focusing instead upon cultivating electoral support through sectional appeals to their ethnic base (Horowitz, 2000).

The wisdom of adopting this particular approach to power-sharing in Northern Ireland has been the subject of a wide scholarly debate in its own right (McGarry & O’Leary 2006a; 2006b; Taylor, 2009; Wilford, 2010). For our purposes here, it makes sense to consider what consociationalism has meant in terms of inter-party competition in the arena of cultural politics, particularly with regard to linguistic issues. Though the peace agreement has been mostly successful in mediating conflict, it has done little to remedy cultural division in Northern Ireland. Instead of conciliation, cultural conflicts have become the primary focus of party politics in the territory. The traditional hardliners have risen to dominance in the executive with Sinn Féin and the DUP outflanking their intra-bloc rivals, the SDLP and the UUP (Southern, 2019).

This evidence would seem to support critics of consociationalism who claim that the model rewards ethnic militants through incentivizing communal defense tactics (Taylor, 2009). Proponents of consociationalism have defended their model, arguing that hardliners had moderated their positions and adopted “ethnic-tribune” strategies (Mitchell et al. 2009). This argument states that these parties are resolute on issues directly related to cultural defense, while becoming increasingly flexible in other regions of governance. However, the issue of migrant languages falls into an unusual position in these debates. It is not directly related to the traditional bi-national division in the territory, yet it does overlap with matters related to ethnic defense.

In terms of cultural politics in Northern Ireland, conflicts that explicitly set the symbols of British unionism against those of Irish nationalism have provided the primary substance of inter-party debate. The GFA explicitly recognizes

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

the deeply entrenched nature of this cultural division in the territory and guarantees equality of recognition for the two primary communities. However, the agreement also recognizes the existence of wider diversity in Northern Ireland and makes specific mention of the need to protect linguistic pluralism in all of its varieties (NIO, 1998). Despite the recognition of wider diversity set out in the Agreement, party politics has been dominated by a cultural stand-off between unionism and nationalism in which Sinn Féin and the DUP have prospered (McAuley & Tonge, 2009).

This “zero-sum” cultural impasse has contributed significantly to periods of governmental deadlock at the heart of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland (McCulloch, 2018). Until recently, divisions over language policy have played a key role in undermining devolution. The stand-off between Sinn Féin and the DUP has been underpinned by the failure to agree on how the state should accommodate demands for an Irish language act. This barrier has been overcome for now through the creation of statutory commissions designed to promote both the Irish language and Ulster-Scots (Haughey, 2020). The breakthrough represents a welcome development that has enabled power-sharing to resume, though it seems unlikely to resolve the underlying cultural gridlock unless Sinn Féin and the DUP can find ways to make concessions without appearing to have lost the battle. However, this bi-national deadlock lags behind the reality of an evolving Northern Irish society (McKee, 2016). As a result of increasing immigration throughout the previous decade, multicultural diversity has become significantly more apparent in Northern Ireland.

An Increasingly Multicultural Northern Ireland

While Northern Ireland has traditionally been understood as a bi-national society, this has not reflected the full scope of internal diversity in the territory (Hainsworth, 1998; Doyle & McAreavey, 2016). However, it is reasonable to state that Northern Ireland is a society traditionally affected by outward rather than inward migration. During the period of “the troubles” Northern Ireland experienced high levels of emigration, with very little immigration compared to other territories throughout the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Western Europe (Russell, 2012; 2016). Consequently, the literature on diversity in Northern Ireland has tended to focus upon managing the conflict between the two largest ethno-national groups, with little attention given to other forms of ethnic pluralism (Finlay, 2006).

The excessive focus on this binary division has served to set back important debates on immigration and integration in the territory (Geoghegan, 2008a;

2008b). Ethnic diversity outside of the two primary communities has long been ignored or overshadowed, with the concerns of the majority communities dominating the political agenda (McVeigh, 1998). In recent years, this has become increasingly problematic as Northern Ireland has become more diverse in its demographic composition. Two major factors have precipitated this significant shift in migratory patterns in the province. First, the period of relative peace between the major paramilitary organizations in Northern Ireland has meant more people have chosen to settle in the territory. Second, demographic changes have arisen as a result of the EU expansion that allowed greater freedom of movement between Western Europe and the A8 accession countries (Doebler et al. 2018). Following the GFA, and the expansion of EU membership to include the A8 members, there was a sustained period of significant inward migration into Northern Ireland, which tailed off following the financial crisis in 2008 (Russell, 2012; 2016). Nonetheless, we should not underestimate the extent to which language diversity has been enriched in Northern Ireland as a result of this shift in migratory patterns.

For instance, the 2011 census revealed that over 50,000 residents in Northern Ireland used something other than English or Irish as their first language (Krausova & Carlos, 2014). This included a significant array of linguistic diversity. There were growing numbers of Lithuanian, Filipino, Portuguese, Slovakian, and Latvian speakers, to list but a few (NISRA, 2011). Overall, more than 175,000 migrants were estimated to have entered Northern Ireland between 2000 and 2014; around 32,000 were estimated to have settled in the territory (Russell, 2016, p. 3). Given that the total population of Northern Ireland is only around 1.8 million, this suggests the significance of these changes for the accommodation of diversity in the territory (NISRA, 2019, n.p.). By these measures, it is possible to speak of Northern Ireland as a multicultural society, at least in the descriptive sense in which it is noted that the population is marked by multiple strains of diversity (Modood, 2007). However, it is less clear whether multicultural protections have been accorded to minorities outside of the primary communities in the territory. In order to highlight this, it is useful for us to devote some attention to explaining what multiculturalism is and how it relates to minority languages.

Multiculturalism and Minority Languages

Multiculturalism is a normative political philosophy and an approach to public policy that seeks to protect and foster cultural pluralism in diverse societies. The multicultural canon is split across a range of different schisms, most notably between its liberal and communitarian variants (see Kymlicka,

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

1995; Parekh, 2006). However, its proponents are joined by a common argument that traditional approaches to the management of diversity—such as the assimilationist “melting pot” and varieties of liberal, difference-blind neutrality—are insufficient to meet the requirements of equal citizenship in societies marked by cultural pluralism (Modood, 2007). Multiculturalists argue that minorities should be actively recognized and supported by the state in order to maintain their distinctive cultural practices. It is argued that this is necessary to protect minorities from the cultural “swamping” that would see these groups lose their unique character (Taylor, 1992). These theories have come under fire from a range of different perspectives (e.g., Okin, 1999; Barry, 2001; Cante, 2014). It is impossible here to do justice to the full range of debates on multiculturalism, but it is sufficient to say that despite a range of criticisms, it remains an important and controversial component in arguments on cultural accommodation (Meer, 2016; Modood, 2017).

The multicultural theory has significant insight to bring to our discussion of language politics in Northern Ireland. Traditionally, immigrants have been expected to assimilate within the host society, particularly with reference to linguistic matters (Kloss, 1971). There are many good reasons, of course, for migrants to learn the official language(s) in their state of residence. However, many migrants wish to maintain a sense of connection with their culture of origin, particularly with respect to passing on certain values to the next generation (Karim, 2007). It seems reasonable to suggest that as Northern Ireland becomes increasingly diverse, its governing parties might take steps to accommodate new groups and offer support to maintain wider linguistic diversity. This is not to suggest that migrant languages should necessarily be given the same support as internal linguistic forms, but that efforts could be made to prevent the cultural swamping of migrant groups (Varenes, 1999). At the least, we might expect the governing parties to extend a basic recognition of societal diversity and work to empower migrant groups to maintain their own languages.

In terms of outlining any form of state support for minority languages in Northern Ireland, there is scant recognition of immigration-generated diversity (McDermott, 2017). For instance, the only legislative framework in place for protecting minority languages is the *European Charter on Minority Languages* (C.O.E, 1992), which engages solely with autochthonous languages, making no provision for the support of migrant communities. Though it might seem reasonable to assume that debates around minority language rights could move beyond the confines of bi-nationalism, to take into account a broader spectrum of linguistic diversity, research carried out by McMonagle (2010)

and McMonagle and McDermott (2014) suggests that this has not been the case. These authors explicitly cite the influence of political parties as a barrier to this when they state that:

Although policy debates have acknowledged that increasing linguistic diversity has occurred, the competing interests of the political parties have tended to act as a barrier to the actual implementation of policy and legislation that fulfil the real needs of the languages in question. (McMonagle & McDermott, 2014, p. 247)

McMonagle and McDermott refer here to a stand-off that sees republicans point the finger of blame at British colonialism for the demise of the Irish language. Unionists counter with a suggestion that the Irish language has become a political tool that has been abused by Sinn Féin. The manner in which minority languages—particularly Gaelic—have been politicized is deeply problematic (Pritchard, 2004). Indeed, the current political impasse masks the reality that many British people in Northern Ireland continue to learn Irish as part of their recognition of the mutual heritage shared by both national and religious traditions in the island (Meredith, 2013). Despite this broader societal reality, the stand-off over legislative support for Gaelic dominates the arena of language politics in the territory. The rest of this paper will turn now to highlight the key positions in language politics as discussed by Sinn Féin and the DUP. This will enable us to consider whether these ethnically defined parties have responded to the realities of increasing linguistic diversity in Northern Ireland.

Sinn Féin: Fighting for the Irish Language

Sinn Féin near exclusively argues in favor of greater state support for the Irish language, rarely invoking the wider varieties of diversity in the territory. Camille O' Reilly (2016) identified Sinn Fein's traditional approach to the Irish language in terms of a "decolonising discourse" (p. 34). The work contrasted this linguistic framework with rights-based approaches and cultural heritage discourses. The evidence presented here suggests that Sinn Féin blends a selection of differing discourses in their discussions on minority languages, but their focus seldom extends beyond Gaelic. The following quotation is drawn from an interview with a Sinn Féin representative, in which they outline an argument in support of the Irish language based on a narrative of shared heritage:

I believe that the Irish language belongs to everyone. Whether you are Protestant or Catholic or from any country in the world, it is a beautiful language and it is part of the heritage for everyone on the island. I love it when I go into local schools and I see people from all

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

different cultures learning that beautiful language, because it is their language as much as it is mine. (SF2, personal communication, 2013)

However, there are also occasions when Sinn Féin representatives draw on ideological refrains about the poor treatment of the Irish language under British Imperial rule. The quotation below provides an example of this tendency and suggests the multilayered discourses that Sinn Féin brings to minority language debates:

For hundreds of years the British government tried to ban the Irish language and tried to keep it down so that people couldn't use it and stopped using it. That's where we're at, that's why the Irish language isn't as strong as it should be. But there is a big revival going on now. (SF3, personal communication, 2013)

A further narrative utilized by Sinn Féin when discussing language policy is found in their characterization of unionists as bigoted, small-minded, or racist. In the back and forth of Assembly debate, language policy was an issue that regularly came to the fore. The following quotations were taken from contributions to Assembly debates on language policy. They serve to exhibit a key feature of the combative exchanges on Gaelic that have dominated political discussions on the protection of minority languages. The first quotation comes from a Sinn Féin representative during a private member's debate on the Irish language:

The determination of unionist politicians to block any recognition of the Irish language is a misguided and macho demonstration of anti-Irish bigotry. It is almost as if unionism has decided to define itself by how ferociously anti-Irish it has become. That is nothing short of pathetic. (Hansard, 2007)

This type of narrative has been fueled to some extent by the actions of certain unionist politicians that have sought to ridicule the Irish language. The most high-profile incident involved DUP representative, Gregory Campbell, during an exchange in the Assembly in which he parodied an Irish phrase commonly used by Gaelic speakers in the chamber:

Curry my yogurt can coca coal yer. The Minister has outlined what she is talking about with the Irish language strategy and an Ulster-Scots strategy. Would it not be more inclusive to have a minority languages strategy so that nobody would feel left out? (Hansard, 2014a)

While this type of incident is far from commonplace in the chamber, it has certainly served to drive Sinn Féin's representation of political unionism as bigoted in its approach to the Irish language. The quotation below was one of many responses from Sinn Féin representatives to Campbell's attempt at humor in the Assembly:

Unfortunately, this is nothing new from the DUP who have blocked the development on an Irish language act, and whose representatives have a long history of insults to the Irish speaking community [...]. While this might be funny in Gregory's little closed world, it is hugely insulting to all of those who promote the huge benefits of endorsing and enhancing bilingualism in our society. (McCorley, cited in McGreevy 2014)

Interestingly, while Sinn Féin is very keen to discuss protection of their favored minority language, they have much less to say about wider linguistic diversity. The interviews in this study were able to put this point directly to representatives of Sinn Féin. When asked what level of state support should be provided for external minority languages, they often had very little to say or would argue that such issues were primarily a matter for the private sphere. The statement below, which was taken from an interview with a Sinn Féin representative, illustrates this type of approach to external minority languages:

I don't actually know, certainly they should receive help to learn the language here and obviously the working language here is English. So, people coming to live and settle here do need some help to integrate. Learning the language is very important and they should be facilitated to do that. Obviously, people come with their own culture and they bring their own language, so I don't know why you need to support other languages, because they are coming with their language. (SF4, 2013)

Sinn Féin has made the Irish language part of their platform for the promotion of ethnic group interests. However, as a consequence of this, migrant languages are relegated: they are expected to be preserved in the private sphere. This suggests a selective engagement with multicultural principles. Sinn Féin seeks protection for a particular linguistic minority, but any focus on migrant languages is secondary. There is an expectation that allochthonous languages are a private matter rather than a public one. This seems to accord with assimilationist or difference-blind approaches to cultural accommodation. This view is grounded on the conception of Northern Ireland as a bi-national society, with limited diversity beyond the two primary communities. This preoccupation with the Irish language has overshadowed the wider range of linguistic diversity in Northern Ireland. In response to these nationalist demands for greater support for the Irish language, unionist politicians have often constructed defensive narratives as an attempt to repel these perceived cultural assaults. In order to highlight this trend, we will now turn to examine some of the DUP's arguments that have been employed in their contributions to minority language debates.

DUP: Counter-Strategies

As Sinn Féin has argued for further funding for Irish language programs in Northern Ireland, unionists have adopted a series of blocking measures aimed at countering these demands. The most common of these arguments is constructed around the suggestion that support for the Irish language is simply a political project of Sinn Féin. This is evident from the quotation below that was taken from an Assembly debate on the Irish language:

The problem in regard to the Irish language is that, back in the early 1980s, at the time of the hunger strikes and soon after, when Sinn Féin started really stepping up its cultural war, we had a Sinn Féin publication that stated clearly that every word spoken in Irish was another bullet in the freedom struggle. That was talking about cultural war. It was not speaking about cultural wealth. (Hansard, 2013)

The second line of defense in the DUP's struggle to block further support for the Irish language comes in their suggestion that it is too costly a project and should not be considered a spending priority. This type of approach is evident from the quotation below that comes from an interview carried out with a representative of the DUP:

I have no issues with people wanting to express their identity, and the Irish language is part of that, but there does have to be two recognitions here. First of all, financially, there is a limited pot of money, and there are things out there which are much more important than protecting language and that sort of thing. So we do have to be very conscious of that and I think the public want us to be good stewards of the money that we are given in this assembly. (DUP3, personal communication, 2014)

More common still is a tactic of utilizing the presence of ethnic minorities as a shield against the claims of Irish nationalists. This is a device frequently employed by unionists in order to block demands for greater support for the Irish language. We see this strategy brought to the fore in the following quotation that comes from an interview with a DUP representative:

So if there is funding to go to the Irish language, well then it would be only correct and right that we should be allocating funding for the study of other languages. To be honest with you, I would much rather see a large amount of money going into Cantonese. If we are spending hundreds of millions of pounds on encouraging outside investment from China, India, Russia, let's start supporting languages that will help that process, rather than supporting languages purely for the sake of identity. (DUP1, personal communication, 2013)

The quotation above builds an argument in favor of supporting a wider spectrum of multicultural language diversity, but this is coupled with a

rejection of measures in support of Gaelic. In this sense, immigrant languages are being used to prop up arguments based on the logic of the DUP's cultural defense strategy. Divisions over Gaelic dominate inter-party debate on language policy. Sinn Féin utilizes language as a resource to highlight their strong credentials as representatives of their ethno-national community: the DUP raises defenses against this onslaught, arguing that Sinn Féin has weaponized the issue to support their own ethnic-defense positioning strategy. Furthermore, we see that DUP representatives often use migrant communities as a prop to buttress their arguments. Not only are immigrant languages ignored by nationalists, but they are also politicized by unionists. This cultural deadlock is mirrored in discussions of Ulster-Scots. Here we see evidence of an impasse built upon competing conceptions of equality played out between the two parties.

Ulster-Scots

A second arc of inter-party debate associated with internal minority languages has opened up around the issue of state support for Ulster-Scots. This issue is most closely associated with political unionism, though the dialect is spoken to a greater or lesser extent across various communities in Northern Ireland (McCall, 2002). Interestingly, the DUP representatives consulted in this process were split between the majority who argued directly for expansion of support for Ulster-Scots and a minority who suggested that the dialect had been cynically used as a counterweight to the Irish language. Sinn Féin representatives tended to be open to the idea of funding for the Ulster-Scots dialect. They see Ulster-Scots as non-threatening and generally acquiesce to some degree of state support. Yet these representatives argue that numerical equality of funding is not possible between the Irish language and Ulster-Scots due to the issues of scale. These strategies are underpinned by differing conceptions of equality: some of the DUP representatives are pushing for actual numerical equality, whereas Sinn Féin speaks in terms of a proportional vision of resource distribution (Dworkin, 2002). We will first turn to consider the manner in which DUP representatives approach these discussions. A common device utilized by representatives of the DUP is to equate Ulster-Scots with the Irish language and argue that the funding disparities illustrate the manner in which unionist culture has suffered since the Agreement. This is evident in the quotation below that is drawn from an interview with a representative of the DUP:

The reality is that the funding is very badly balanced. There are vast amounts of money being put into the Irish language, very little into Ulster-Scots. I am just not comfortable with it at all, because I don't

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

believe that Irish is being used as a cultural expression in Northern Ireland, I believe it is being used a political weapon. I wouldn't endorse anything that would foster its advancement. (DUP3, Personal Communication, 2014)

This claim that Ulster-Scots was treated unfavorably in comparison with Gaelic was a recurring theme across the interviews. The following quotation makes a similar case that Irish has received disproportionate levels of funding when compared to Ulster-Scots:

Previously there has been quite exorbitant funding of the Irish language, and minimal funding of Ulster-Scots. There was very little examination of whether there was a political slant to the manifestation of the Irish language. (DUP5, Personal Communication, 2014)

However, a small but significant minority of the DUP respondents developed this argument to suggest that Ulster-Scots had explicitly been used as a counterweight to the claims being made on behalf of the Irish language. This is evident in the quotation below in which an interviewee spoke of a sense of unease with how Ulster-Scots had been used in this way:

Well, Ulster-Scots is a dialect rather than a language as such. I believe to some extent that the funding that has gone in to it, is to kind of salve the conscience of people who allocate funding to Irish language. I believe Ulster-Scots could be well funded within that community, but if the price of that funding is that we have to accept the Irish language being thrust upon us, then no, don't do it. (DUP4, personal communication, 2013)

These types of arguments suggest the manner in which Ulster-Scots has been pitted against the demands for linguistic support made by Irish nationalists. Interestingly most of the Sinn Féin representatives interviewed in this study argued in favor of increasing state support for the Ulster-Scots language. However, these arguments were generally made alongside the suggestion that Irish should receive greater funding, and that parity was not possible due to a lack of public interest. This type of argument is evident in the quotation below that was taken from an interview with a Sinn Féin representative:

I have no problem with funding things to do with culture and Ulster-Scots is part of that. The problem is that what happens is that some unionists have called for equal funding between Irish language and Ulster-Scots. Now, when you think that there are Irish language schools, how can you give the same funding for Ulster-Scots when there are no Ulster-Scots schools? (SF2, 2013)

The quotation above highlights a key strand in Sinn Féin's arguments on Ulster-Scots; it is stated that parity cannot be achieved because of an imbalance

in educational provision between the autochthonous minority languages. This is further illustrated in the exchange below in which the Sinn Féin Education Minister is taking questions from an MLA representing the DUP:

Mr Humphrey: The Minister will be aware of his Department's funding and resource responsibilities for the Ulster-Scots Agency. Given what he has just said, what extra resources will he put into the education system and sectors across Northern Ireland to promote Ulster-Scots education? Indeed, given the ongoing disparity in funding between Irish and Ulster Scots, what more can he make available to help to address that?

Mr O'Dowd: My Department funds on the basis of need. The Member will be aware, and I have said this in answer to previous questions, that we have a thriving Irish-medium sector. We have over 4,000 children being taught through the medium of Irish, and that number continues to grow. We have over 20 specific Irish-medium units or schools. Unfortunately, we do not have any for Ulster Scots. (Hansard, 2014b)

The exchange above serves to highlight the reactive dynamics that characterize the ideological posturing of these parties in relation to language issues. While the DUP member goes on the attack over the issue of Ulster-Scots, the Sinn Féin representative defends greater funding for Irish by focusing on the disparity between demands for educational facilities associated with autochthonous minority language groups. These debates are driven by different interpretations of equality. Arguments made by both parties in these debates are marked by a narrow vision of linguistic diversity in the province with multicultural principles applied selectively according to the perceptions of group interests.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has considered the extent to which tribune parties in Northern Ireland have adapted their positions on minority languages in the context of an increasingly multicultural society. These parties have built their platforms on the defense of a particular ethnic group. This has resulted in minority languages becoming embroiled in a zero-sum, political stand-off. Given that matters related to immigration-generated diversity fall outside of traditional inter-communal fault-lines, we might expect that tribune parties could accommodate migrant languages, while remaining firm on matters that relate to traditional societal fissures. Instead, we have seen that the tribune model does not allow for the flexibility that its proponents would suggest. In this instance, migrant languages are caught in no-man's-land while trench warfare takes place on either side.

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

The research has found that Sinn Féin and the DUP pay very little heed to the fact that linguistic diversity has changed in Northern Ireland. In the case of Sinn Féin, we see a keen interest in support for a single minority language: Gaelic. Yet there is little discursive space given to recognize the wider varieties of linguistic diversity in the territory. In this sense, the party is acting on behalf of its sectional interests rather than seeking to represent the people of Northern Ireland. This is reflected in the strategy adopted by the DUP. The largest unionist party does invoke wider linguistic diversity when language policy is raised. However, these discussions are used as blocking measures for further support for the Irish language. A second element in the DUP's discursive repertoire on minority languages is the argument that Ulster-Scots has not received equality of funding to that of Gaelic. Here we see a clash of competing conceptions of equality. DUP representatives draw upon a sheer numerical variety of equality, whereas Sinn Féin's focus imposes a proportional approach. Ultimately, throughout these discussions, the parties place a near-exclusive focus upon Irish and Ulster-Scots, ignoring the presence of wider language diversity in Northern Ireland.

If we consider trends in public opinion, it becomes apparent why Sinn Féin and the DUP might wish to maintain their strong stance on communal defense in matters of cultural pluralism. In the NILT survey (2010), when asked whether they agreed with the following statement "It is the job of our politicians to fight the corner for the community that they come from," 46% of Catholics either agreed or strongly agreed, and 53% of Protestants either agreed or strongly agreed. This contrasts with only 28% of Catholics who disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 23% of Protestants who either disagreed or strongly disagreed (NILT, 2010). Unfortunately, the NILT survey has not put this question to respondents more recently so that we might consider the evolution of this issue over time.

However, recent polling data suggests the importance that DUP voters attach to blocking an Irish language bill. A survey carried out with nearly a thousand DUP voters suggested that 62% were opposed to a standalone Irish language act (Manley, 2020, para. 2). Sinn Féin partisans are marginally more flexible, with 49% stating that they would accept "nothing less" than a standalone Irish language act (Manley, 2020, para. 6). Both parties have contributed to a situation where compromise on language issues is at best difficult: at worst, outright impossible. Given the relatively small and diffuse nature of the migrant groups resident in Northern Ireland, it is difficult to imagine a situation whereby the full spectrum of linguistic diversity will be recognized, respected, and protected. For parties that have profited electorally from being

recognized as staunch defenders of their particular communities, there is little incentive to extend multicultural protections for language groups beyond the traditional communal binary.

References

- Barry, Brian. "Muddles of Multiculturalism." *New Left Review* 8: 49 (2001).
- Bew, Paul. (2019). "The Irish language issue and Brexit continue to block Stormont's restoration – they may not be resolved for some time". *Politics Home*
<https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/foreign-affairs/brexit/house/house-magazine/107192/lord-bew-irish-language-issue-and-brexit> (Accessed 23/11/2019).
- Cantle, Ted. "National Identity, Plurality and Interculturalism." *The Political Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2014): 312-319.
- C.O.E (1992). "European Charter on Minority Languages" Council of Europe online.
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages> (Accessed 04/05/2020).
- De Varennes, Fernand. "Equality and Non-discrimination: Fundamental Principles of Minority Language Rights." *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 6, no. 3 (1999): 307-318.
- Dixon, Paul. "Why the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland is not Consociational." *The Political Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2005): 357-367.
- Dixon, Paul. *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*. London. Macmillan International Higher Education, (2008).
- Doebler, Stefanie, Ruth McAreevey, and Sally Shortall. "Is Racism the new Sectarianism? Negativity towards Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in Northern Ireland from 2004 to 2015." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 14 (2018): 2426-2444.
- Doyle, Carey, and Ruth McAreevey. "Patterns and Processes of Recent Migration to Northern Ireland." *Irish Geography*. 49, no. 1 (2016): 47-72.
- Dworkin, Ronald. *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*. Cambridge. Harvard university press, (2002).
- Finlay, Andrew. "Multiculturalism after the Good Friday Agreement." *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 19 (2006): 8-17.
- Geoghegan, Peter. "Multiculturalism and Sectarianism in Post-agreement Northern Ireland." *Scottish Geographical Journal* 124, no. 2-3 (2008a): 185-191.
- Geoghegan, Peter. "Beyond Orange and Green? The Awkwardness of Negotiating Difference in Northern Ireland." *Irish Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (2008b): 173-194.
- Hainsworth, Paul. *Divided society: ethnic minorities and racism in Northern Ireland*. London. Pluto Press, (1998).
- Hansard, (2007). "Private Members' Business: Irish Language"
<http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/record/reports2007/071009.htm> (Accessed 13/07/2017).
- Hansard. (2013). "Private Members' Business: Ad Hoc Committee: Parliament Buildings"

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

- <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/official-report/reports-12-13/26-february-2013/>(Accessed 13/07/2017).
- Hansard. (2014a). "Oral Answers to Questions: Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure"
<http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/report.aspx?&eveDate=2014/11/03&docID=211611> (Accessed 13/07/2017).
- Hansard, (2014b). "Oral Answers to Questions: Education Minister".
<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/official-report/reports-13-14/04-february-2014/>(Accessed 11/07/2017).
- Haughey, Sean. "Worth Restoring? Taking Stock of the Northern Ireland Assembly." *The Political Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2019): 705-712.
- Horowitz, Donald L. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Oakland. University of California Press, (2000).
- Karim, K. H. (2007). Nation and Diaspora: Rethinking Multiculturalism in a Transnational Context. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 2(3), 267-282.
- Kloss, Heinz. "Language rights of Immigrant groups." *International migration review* 5, no. 2 (1971): 250-268.
- Krausova, Anna. & Vargas-Silva, Carlos. (2014). "Northern Ireland: Census Profile". Migration Observatory. <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/northern-ireland-census-profile/>(Accessed 23/11/2019).
- Kymlicka, Will. "Multicultural Citizenship: a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights". Oxford. Clarendon Press, (1995).
- Kymlicka, Will, and Alan Patten. "Language Rights and Political Theory." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 23 (2003): 3-21.
- Lijphart, Arend. *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. Oakland. University of California Press, (1975).
- Lijphart, Arend. "Constitutional Design for Divided Societies." *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 96-109.
- Manley, John. (2020) "Poll shows DUP voters 'entrenched' on Irish language act opposition" The Irish Times online.
<https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/01/09/news/poll-shows-dup-voters-entrenched-on-irish-language-act-opposition-1809114/>(Accessed, 20/05/2020).
- McAuley, James W., and Jonathan Tonge. "Britishness (and Irishness) in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement." *Parliamentary Affairs* 63.2 (2010): 266-285.
- Meer, Nasar, *Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Debating the Dividing Lines*. Edinburgh University Press, (2016).
- Meredith, Fionola. (2013). "Ulster says Tá". The Irish Times online.
<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/ulster-says-t%C3%A1-1.1350425>
(Accessed 21/05/2020)
- McCall, Cathal. "Political Transformation and the Reinvention of the Ulster-Scots Identity and Culture." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9, no. 2 (2002): 197-218.

- McCulloch, Allison. "The Use and Abuse of Veto Rights in Power-Sharing Systems: Northern Ireland's Petition of Concern in Comparative Perspective." *Government and Opposition* 53, no. 4 (2018): 735-756.
- McGarry, John, and O'Leary Brendan. "Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and its Agreement. Part 1: What Consociationalists Can Learn from Northern Ireland." *Government and Opposition* 41, no. 1 (2006a): 43-63.
- McGarry, John, and O'Leary Brendan. "Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and its Agreement 2.-What Critics of Consociation Can Learn from Northern Ireland." *Government and Opposition* 41, no. 2 (2006b): 249-277.
- McGreevy, R. (2014). "Racism claim after DUP member 'speaks Irish' in Assembly". Belfast Telegraph online. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/racism-claim-after-dup-member-speaks-irish-in-assembly-1.1986769> (Accessed 14/07/2017).
- McKee, Rebecca. "Love Thy Neighbour? Exploring Prejudice Against Ethnic Minority Groups in a Divided Society: the Case of Northern Ireland." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 5 (2016): 777-796.
- McMonagle, Sarah. "Deliberating the Irish Language in Northern Ireland: From Conflict to Multiculturalism?" *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 31, no. 3 (2010): 253-270.
- McMonagle, Sarah, and Philip McDermott. "Transitional Politics and Language Rights in a Multi-ethnic Northern Ireland: Towards a True Linguistic Pluralism?" *Ethnopolitics* 13, no. 3 (2014): 245-266.
- McVeigh, Robbie. "There's no racism because there's no black people here': Racism and Anti-racism in Northern Ireland." *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland* (1998): 11-32.
- Mitchell, Paul, Geoffrey Evans, and Brendan O'Leary. "Extremist Outbidding in Ethnic Party Systems is not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland." *Political Studies* 57, no. 2 (2009): 397-421.
- Modood, Tariq, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea*. Cambridge. Polity Press (2007).
- Modood, Tariq. "Must Interculturalists Misrepresent Multiculturalism?" *Comparative Migration Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 1-17.
- NILT, (2010). "Political Attitudes". Northern Ireland Life and Times online https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Political_Attributes/CORNER.html (Accessed 04/05/2020).
- NIO, (1998). The Belfast Agreement. Northern Ireland Office online <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement> (Accessed 23/11/2019).
- NISRA, (2011). "Demography Annual Report". NISRA online https://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/publications/annual_reports/2011/RG2011.pdf (Accessed 23/11/2019).
- NISRA (2019). "Population". NISRA online. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/population> (Accessed 23/11/2019).
- Okin, Susan. *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*. Princeton University Press, (1999).

When Bi-nationalism Meets Multiculturalism: Ethnic Politics and Minority ...

- O' Reilly, Camille C. *The Irish Language in Northern Ireland: The Politics of Culture and Identity*. New York. Springer, (2016).
- Parekh, Bhikhu. "The Political Structure of Multicultural Society." *B. Parekh (2nd ed.), Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (2006): 196-238.
- Pritchard, Rosalind MO. "Protestants and the Irish language: Historical Heritage and Current Attitudes in Northern Ireland." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 25, no. 1 (2004): 62-82.
- Russell, Raymond. "Migration in Northern Ireland: an update." *A Research and Information Service Research Paper, Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly* (2012).
- Russell, Raymond. "International Migration in Northern Ireland: an Update." *Belfast: Research and Information Service, Northern Ireland Assembly* (2016).
- Southern, Neil. "Post-Agreement Electoral Decline: the Ulster Unionist Party and the Problem of Decommissioning." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 24, no. 4 (2018): 456-477.
- Taylor, Charles. "Multiculturalism and "the Politics of Recognition: An essay by Charles Taylor." Princeton University Press (1992).
- Taylor, Rupert. *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Routledge. (2009).
- Tonge, Jonathan. *Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change*. Abingdon. Routledge, (2013).
- Wilford, Rick. "Northern Ireland: the Politics of Constraint." *Parliamentary Affairs* 63, no. 1 (2010): 134-155.