Northern Ireland in the Second World War

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Word Count: 83,159
### Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVIA</td>
<td>Ministry of Aviation and Successors</td>
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<td>CAB</td>
<td>Cabinet Papers</td>
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<td>C.I.D.</td>
<td>Committee of Imperial Defence</td>
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<td>C.O.H.</td>
<td>Control of Official Histories</td>
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<td>C.R.O.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Relations Office</td>
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<td>DO</td>
<td>Dominions Office</td>
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<td>HO</td>
<td>Home Office</td>
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<td>J.I.C.</td>
<td>Joint Intelligence Committee</td>
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<td>LA:</td>
<td>Local Authorities Papers</td>
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<td>PRONI</td>
<td>Public Record Office of Northern Ireland</td>
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<td>TNA</td>
<td>The National Archive, Kew</td>
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<td>VE Day</td>
<td>Victory in Europe Day</td>
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Note on Terminology

In this text where the words ‘nationalist’ and ‘unionist’ are found in lower case, they refer to individuals or political views and beliefs. Where these same words begin with capital letters, they refer to the political parties.
This thesis is an examination of how the Second World War has been commemorated in Northern Ireland. It seeks to explore how popular and official understandings of the war were constructed around two key moments. Primarily, it looks at the Victory celebrations to mark the end of the war in the West in May 1945. Secondly, it examines the importance of the publication of the official war history *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* in November 1956. By looking closely at how the Northern Irish government planned for the victory celebrations and how this ritual unfolded, we can reveal much about Northern Irish society at the end of the war. This thesis shows that the state-led, official commemoration served only to alienate the Catholic community. Exploring how the Northern Irish press recorded this event highlights the underlying tensions existing between both communities at the time. This thesis argues that the Northern Irish government used the victory celebrations to project a positive image of itself to the British government. Equally, in 1940 the Northern Irish government rather pre-emptively commissioned the writing of its own official war history, separate from the *United Kingdom Official War History Series*. This decision, taken by the Northern Irish government, was intended to ensure that Northern Ireland’s role in the war would never be forgotten. After 1945, the unionist government, preoccupied with securing its constitutional positioning within the United Kingdom, intended to make this official history a permanent memorial to Northern Ireland’s contribution to the war. Written, therefore, to exaggerate Northern Ireland’s part in the war, this official war history can be seen as a reflection of unionist insecurity. It is through these commemorative processes that ideas of national identity and belonging are explored.
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Introduction

Walking along a demarcated path, flanked on either side by imposing colours of red, white and blue and green, white and orange, one could easily imagine oneself walking along an interface area in Northern Ireland. Yet this would be a mistake. This path does not lead to a house but rather takes the visitor on a historical journey from the partitioning of Ireland, the creation of the Northern Irish state, the period euphemistically known as ‘The Troubles,’ and on to the present day. This is a historical path on ‘The Road to “Northern Ireland”.’ The Tower Museum in Derry, which opened in October 1992 as part of the Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service, had as part of its permanent exhibition an exhibit which retold the history of the creation of the Northern Irish state. It structured sections of this exhibition by providing two different, indeed conflicting, interpretations leading up to the partitioning of Ireland and the subsequent events that took place in Northern Ireland on account of partition.1

Whilst the story begins by explaining how unionists and nationalists differed over their understanding of Home Rule; with unionists vehemently opposed to any separation from the union with Great Britain, the visitor is invited to choose along which side of the path he/she will walk. To the left is the unionist interpretation; to the right the nationalist reading – both revealing how ‘popular and professional versions of the past collide’.2 As the path bends on approaching the period of the First World War, this visual demarcation of territory is suspended, now the brightly coloured pavestones are replaced by the exposed, neutral grey colour of the stone. The narrative has

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1 From a discussion with museum attendants at the Tower Museum, they explained that a small section was added to the exhibition space in 2011 to mark Derry City receiving the City of Culture 2013. This addition looked at migration to the city. Interview author with museum attendants, 29 December 2011.
changed. The First World War, in true revisionist stance, is seen as representing a moment of respite in the unionist and nationalist conflict. Both communities are shown to have volunteered to fight alongside Britain, although it is clear that both had different motivations.\(^4\) This thaw in relations, however, is only temporary and as the visitor moves towards the end of this narrative section he/she is reminded of the importance of the Easter Rising of 1916 in disrupting this temporary calm which the First World War had brought to Ireland.\(^5\) As the visitor leaves this shared space and heads towards the founding of the Northern Irish state, he/she is confronted, yet again, with choosing which side of the road to walk.

Out of the Home Rule Bill, passed in 1914 but suspended until the war had ended, came the Government of Ireland Act (1920). This Act saw the creation of two separate governments in Ireland – one in the North and the other in the South. The exhibition story recalls the War of Independence, the partitioning of the country and the subsequent Civil War in Ireland. As traced in the exhibition, this period is seen as another dividing moment in the history of not only Ireland but the newly formed Northern Irish state. It is only when one approaches the 1930s that a more circular, open area is seen: a place markedly void of any encroaching colours. This section houses an exhibition on Northern Ireland's - particularly Derry's - involvement in the Second World War, and discusses issues such as unemployment in the 1950s, housing, gerrymandering, the role of the border, and emigration and immigration to Derry. The

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\(^4\) Bell, 'Modernising History', pp. 250-251. George Boyce makes an insightful comment when he writes that the Great War was 'a turning point in the making of modern Ireland, and of Irish and Ulster identities', even if these identities were shrouded in 'ambivalence'. He argues that, 'The Catholic Irish soldier answered the call of Faith and Fatherland and also King and Country; so did the Ulster Protestant soldier. But neither could be certain that these would prove, in the end, compatible loyalties.' So whilst Catholics fought so that Britain would carry through and deliver on the third Home Rule Act suspended until after the war, Protestants fought so that Britain would not force such an Act upon Ulster unionists. George Boyce, 'Ireland and the First World War', History Ireland 2, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994), p. 48 and p. 53.

\(^5\) It must be noted that it was not the actual Easter Rising and its failure per se that resulted in such overt support for the rebels. In fact, many Irish people disagreed with the Easter Rising, which saw the 'rebels' occupying the General Post Office and other key points in Dublin to force British troops out of Ireland. Rather, it was the subsequent treatment and execution of the rebels at the hands of the British which caused such acrimony. After the Easter Rising, the British government court-marshalled ninety men and had the intention of passing the death sentence. Out of this total, fifteen were executed. Nuala Johns argues that 'The brevity of the conflict, the intensity of the state's response and the proximity of a general election to these events allowed the rebellion immediately to enter the public's imagination and to take on proportions perhaps greater than the material event itself.' Nuala C. Johnson, Ireland, the Great War, and the Geography of Remembrance (Cambridge, 2003), p. 143. See also Roy Foster who states the executions created 'martyrs' of the men. Roy F. Foster, Modern Ireland: 1600-1972 (London, 1989), p. 485. For an overview as to how Irish newspapers interpreted the Easter Rising see Joseph Lee, Ireland, 1912-1985: Politics and Society (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 28-38.
latter topic, subsequently added to reflect on Derry having been awarded UK City of Culture for 2013.

From the perspective of this thesis, the point of interest is how the story of the Second World War has been constructed. Like the First World War, located in an aesthetically neutral space, it is framed as a shared experience. The narrative that one reads on the descriptive panels, and the video through which one watches a series of black and white clips, boasts of how the war years were ones of ‘excitement’. One panel reads how ‘Thousands volunteered to serve in the forces.’ Derry enjoyed a ‘cosmopolitan atmosphere’ distinct from the depressive years of the 1930s with the arrival of foreign and British troops, the holding of concerts, and the marriage of local girls to American servicemen. ‘Hollywood Comes to Derry’ reads another panel. To furnish this story, glass cabinets exhibit wartime memorabilia amongst which are a ration book, Civil Defence uniforms, an Air Raid Precautions Officer’s badge, an identity card and a Thanksgiving dance programme for 1942.

Unsurprisingly, while the panels describe these servicemen in the city, there is no discussion of the segregationist policies of American troops. In Northern Ireland, just as in other parts of Britain, this saw African American troops entertained separately from white Americans - with the former unable to enjoy Home Hospitality from the local population. Nor is there any mention of fears of women having relations with the African American servicemen, which did indeed take place.6 While the exhibition does comment on wartime relations and the fact that many women married American servicemen, there is no reference to the increased number of offences related to prostitution and the prevalence of brothels, which arguably catered to foreign servicemen.7 Derry’s, and by extension Northern Ireland’s, wartime narrative is

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7 While there appeared to be an increase in such offences, Leanne McCormick also argues that women could be arrested merely for talking to servicemen. Therefore, such heightened vigilance from police led to more arrests at this time. Leanne McCormick, "Filthy Little Girls": Controlling Women in Public
therefore safe and collectivising. The simplicity and openness of this space stands in stark contrast to the earlier period, and places the story of the Second World War in an unproblematic category.

The aim of this thesis is not to specifically de-construct these myths associated with the war years. Rather, it seeks to use the example of the Tower Museum merely as a starting point from which to show that the war years were not so unproblematic. Instead, this thesis will demonstrate that the celebration of the end of the war in Europe, in May 1945, revealed a society that was anything but united and arguably far removed from that portrayed in the museum. This thesis aims to show how, in a divided society like Northern Ireland, the performance of joint commemoration at that time was not only impossible but was tainted by underlying political and sectarian tensions. How this war is then represented in a permanent memorial – the official war history *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* – is also informed by such contradictions and processes of negotiation. To do this, I will place this thesis within two academic contexts. The first is the general field of literature on Britain and Northern Ireland in the Second World War, the latter still relatively limited. Firstly, I will look at literature relating to Britain’s war experience - before turning to the rather slower paced production of scholarly studies on Northern Ireland during the war to provide an overview of Northern Ireland during the war. The second academic context in which this thesis will be set is within the ever-growing literature on memory studies, such as collective memory formation and remembrance.

In order to attend to how the war was remembered and celebrated in Northern Ireland, the methodological approach in this thesis relies heavily on primary source material. Making a concerted decision at the early research stages that this thesis would not be an oral history of the war years – a subject already covered by other scholars - I decided to approach this topic through two sources: archival research and the more mediated form of newspapers. In order to understand how the war was interpreted, its meaning constructed by both nationalists and unionists, and how it was commemorated and remembered; newspapers have been employed as an unrestricted means of examining cultural representations. As journalists can be seen as an ‘authoritative

Spaces in Northern Ireland during the Second World War”, in Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (eds.), *Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century* (Dublin, 2010), pp. 103-118.

interpretive community’ which engages with its readers, the use of newspapers as an historical source provides access to issues concerning society at that time. To show what was taking place behind the scenes, how those in power were imagining and forming their own interpretations of the war, I rely on archival material held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast and The National Archive in London.

Challenging the People’s War Myth: Britain and Northern Ireland

The Tower Museum is not unique in its collectivising narrative of the Second World War. Although it attempts to explain Northern Ireland’s, and specifically Derry’s, troubled past, it frames its narrative on the Second World War as unproblematic, as a type of ‘People’s War.’ It is worth noting that in the years coinciding with the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the end of the war, heritage and museum services across Northern Ireland jumped on the commemorative bandwagon, portraying the war years as some of the best, if not the least polemic, in the state’s history. Both the nationalist and unionist press in Northern Ireland featured story after story describing Northern Ireland’s wartime experience, sprinkled with human interest stories about acts of heroism by Northern Irish citizens and life on the Home Front. The war years became depoliticised; they offered a vision of a time of communal solidarity through such a sentimentalised framework. Street parties took place over commemorative periods and newspapers ran sensational headlines such as, ‘Hero Who Dodged the Nazis’, ‘Ulster All Decked Out for Victory’, and ‘When the Yanks Were Over Here …’ As part of a project set up by Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service and the Causeway

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10 Bell, ‘Modernising History’, p. 230.
Museum Service – *Our Lives* – oral history interviews were arranged to record the wartime memories of people across Northern Ireland.¹³ These were subsequently published in book form, which was accompanied by a CD-ROM of some of the interviews.¹⁴ This act of re-membering the war brought the private stories of individuals into the public domain, through the publication of a book documenting these narratives.

Financial gain could have been a motivating factor in this instance, but it can be argued that something deeper was taking place. Northern Ireland, like other parts of the United Kingdom, was carried along in a frenzy for all things related to the war years. That this war could offer the possibility of a shared experience, much desired in the post ceasefire glow, was an added bonus. Since the 1994 ceasefire the trend within the heritage industry to re-market Northern Ireland as part of a tourism drive encouraged the quest to find reconciling narratives.¹⁵ Some historians have argued that such media-fuelled commemorative anniversaries provide, ‘occasions for retelling the mythic national narrative of “our finest hour” to those already familiar with it, and for extending its public reception to a younger generation’. At the same time they provide a space for ‘contesting as well as celebrating received memories’.¹⁶ What this thesis will demonstrate is that the memories created in May 1945 around the celebration of the end of the war in Europe, and the institutionalisation of memory in the publication of the official war history in 1956, are actually significantly different to those which have been propagated, most notably from the 1990s. This thesis argues that while there is a need to reassess this dichotomy and challenge the myth that the war years offered a shared experience in Northern Ireland, one must always be aware of the changing significance of memory to suit present political, social and cultural concerns.

In 1999, in his study of Britain during the war, Mark Donnelly summarised this trend when he wrote, ‘It remains the most striking paradox in contemporary British

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¹³ As an interesting aside, a similar project had taken place in St. Albans, Hertfordshire to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of war. This project was similarly titled *The Time of Our Lives* and featured photographic evidence of the war years, which was then transformed into an exhibition and a small booklet. These commemorative projects show the interest in the Second World War, particularly with reference to recording wartime memories. See Kim Louise Walden, 'Photo-Reminiscence Project: The Time of Our Lives', *Oral History* 19, no. 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 56-59.

¹⁴ Jane Williams, (ed.), *Our Lives: The Second World War and its Legacy in the Northwest and Causeway Regions* (Coleraine, 2006). I was fortunate enough to sit in on some of these interviews which took place across the summer of 2005.

¹⁵ Bell, 'Modernising History', pp. 228-229.

¹⁶ Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 'The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration', pp. 4-5.
history: a global conflict which killed some 60 million and which left the legacy of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and countless acts of barbarism has evoked nostalgia, pride and even sentimentality in Britain for over fifty years. The Second World War, not only in Britain but in the United States of America and other victorious countries, has lent itself to definition as a 'good war'. Britain’s memory of the First World War, its sheer brutality and the ineptitude of British Generals; witnessed not only in the poetic writings of the likes of Sassoon, Graves and Wilfred Owen, but also Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, locate the experiences of that war within popular memory. Writing on Fussell’s pioneering work on the memory of the First World War Martin Evans argues that Fussell’s examination of poetry and literature, and its implication for the cultural understanding of war, encouraged this trend of interest in war studies from a cultural perspective.

Whilst Fussell’s book may have reignited an interest in the First World War, at the same time the popular memory of the Second World War was being explored by the Popular Memory Group at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Graham Dawson played a prominent role in this group from 1979 to 1985. Their study looked at how the popular memory, or the ‘cultural significance of the past in the present’ was witnessed through memories both private (individuals and social groups) and public (the state, political groups and cultural organisations). What was of main interest was how this memory of the Second World War was used at different periods of British history, becoming a ‘reference-point in competing versions of Britain’. In the early 1980s, for example, Margaret Thatcher reinvigorated the memory of the war years by recasting Churchillian rhetoric of a strong imperial Britain to justify the Falklands/Malvinas War of 1982. Alongside these more imperialistic qualities were

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22 Graham Dawson and Bob West, 'Our Finest Hour? The Popular Memory of World War II and the Struggle Over National Identity', in Geoff Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and
those mythical, or at least, sentimentalised qualities associated with British society during the war. The values that were championed included equality of sacrifice, shared experience and democracy. As Geof Eley writes:

Thus for a long time after 1945, World War II provided a template for the popular political imagination. To form the rhetorical binding for the postwar consensus, it entered British cultural memory as a narrative of popular democratic accomplishment, requiring elaborate and extensive dissemination.

In short, the memory of the Second World War that had been popularised after the war had ended, offered a comfortable, patriotic and collectivising narrative, which served the purpose of uniting British society.

Yet historians writing on Britain during the Second World War have long since revised, and still challenge, this popular myth of a unified nation; an image which was propagated during the war by J. B. Priestley. Representing an ordinary Englishman, in his Postscripts programme aired on the BBC from 1940-1941, Priestley ‘caught the mood of Britain in 1940 like no one else’ combining ‘both sentiment for the past and hope for the future’. Yet this image was not to remain unchallenged for long. Angus Calder in his aptly named book The People’s War, first published in 1969, uncovered the less savoury aspects of wartime Britain: absenteeism, poor labour relations leading to strikes, class conflict, fear leading to looting, and xenophobia. Calder argued that the extensiveness of the ‘People’s War’ ideology was part of its fame: appearing in films, the press and the radio. Equally, Paul Addison, despite making some changes to his original treatise of 1975, highlighted again in 1994 that there was not an overwhelming political consensus during the war. The war, he claimed, did in fact ‘engender a growing

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but diffuse sense of class consciousnesses’, which reached its apogee in the Labour Party’s victory in the General Election of 1945.27

By the 1980s and onwards, historians were deconstructing in force not only the ‘People’s War’ narrative but its sister trope – the ‘Myth of the Blitz’. Three historians debated amongst themselves how best to debunk or explore this idea. Clive Ponting, taking a more direct tack, set about providing as much evidence as possible to systematically deconstruct the myth. He wrote, ‘The purpose of this book is to strip away the myth and examine the events of 1940 from a different perspective. The result is a radically different, less comfortable view of Britain’s “Finest Hour”.’28 Just one year later, Calder published his own book examining what he termed the ‘myth of the Blitz’. His aim was not to equate “‘Myth’” with “‘untruth”, still less to “lies”’ - of which he argued, Ponting was guilty.29 Instead, he argued that one of the defining features of myths was their ability to gloss over discrepancies whilst at the same time promoting consensus. In this sense, during the war, myths not only had the power to ‘distort’ events that had taken place, but they were also able to play a role in how people dealt with and “‘made sense’” of their present circumstances.30

Nevertheless, Malcolm Smith, approaching this topic almost ten years later, proposed that Calder himself was guilty of the crime of which he had accused Ponting; that is, ‘attempting to deconstruct the myths counter-factually’.31 Rather, Malcolm Smith argued that the best approach was to realise that:

Myths, in other words, are not there simply to be debunked in the name of historical accuracy; they are important historical events in their own right, and they are central to the common sense and to the history (which is part of the ‘common sense’) of the period in which they hold sway.32

32 Smith, Britain and 1940, p. 6.
According to Smith, only through attending to and learning from the construction of myths, rather than simply debunking them, would historians develop a better understanding of the past.

Despite the similarity and difference between these three historians’ work they paved the way for and contributed to a revision of the war years. Influenced by political developments at home, which witnessed Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative Party come to power in 1979, commentators from the left denounced that the war had not brought about radical social change. In their study of women’s wartime work, Penny Summerfield and Gail Braybon reveal that no great post-war changes occurred on account of women’s greater access to employment during both the First and Second World Wars. Many women, they argue, were in fact quite content to return to their pre-war roles as mothers and housewives. They conclude their study by pointedly adding that after the Second World War had ended ‘what was important in life was still emphatically male, whether one was looking at work, leisure, politics, language or for that matter the way that historical accounts were written’.33

Sonya Rose has examined the multiple facets of national consciousness during the war by applying a range of theories relating to citizenship, identity politics and nationhood. Interested not in how post-war discourse of the war had been constructed, Rose’s work looks closely at how it was ‘envisioned in the public culture at the time’.34 She has probed the limitations of ideas such as national solidarity and equality of sacrifice in wartime Britain. However, her study, like most other studies on Britain during the war, overlooks or scantly addresses Northern Ireland; a topic which she recommended was for another author and for another time.35 Focussing on issues of class, gender, regional diversity, sexuality and race, within the framework of national identity and citizenship, she astutely explores the contradictions and ambiguities in Britain during the war and

33 Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, Out of the Cage: Women’s Experiences in Two World Wars (London, 1987), p. 287. Lucy Noakes builds on this work showing how men in the British Armed Forces were united through common experience and masculinity whereas women were consigned to, and understood through, terms relating to the home and family. Lucy Noakes, War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity, 1939-91 (London, 1998). Marilyn Lake, in her study of women during the Second World War in Australia, reaches a different conclusion about women and work arguing that ‘women were not so much pressured to return to old, traditional “roles”, as historians have usually asserted: rather they were invited to step into an alluring, exciting future. In place of the adventure of economic independence, women were offered the adventure of sexual romance’. In this way, there was no return to traditional forms of femininity. Marilyn Lake, 'Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II', in Gordon Martel (ed), The World War Two Reader (New York, 2004), p. 361.
35 Rose, Which People’s War?, p. 198.
highlighted the fragile constructions of nationhood and national identity. She shows how class tensions were heightened not diminished, race issues were brought to the fore, sexually promiscuous women threatened to upset the gender order and stability, and national consciousness was challenged. So whilst there was indeed a ‘People’s War’ (to unite to fight a common enemy), she shows that it did not break down tensions and any changes that were effected, such as women’s employment, were to be ‘for the duration only’.  

Steven Fielding’s work also adds to this body of literature by questioning how much people sought social and political change after the war. Whilst he, along with other historians, has acknowledged that there was a decisive shift to the left; he questions the sincerity of that move and whether the electorate actually fully grasped Labour's policies. He argues, ‘Historians have emphasized the radicalising impact of the war to the almost complete exclusion of the possibility that it might have provoked a different set of responses.’ That Labour won, Fielding argued, was more to do with the electorate’s ‘reaction against the Conservatives’, and a desire for the Beveridge Plan to be implemented. 

In Northern Ireland the situation was different. The British General Election of 1945 brought with it insecurity for unionism in Northern Ireland. Fear of a successful Labour Party, traditionally favourable to the unification of Ireland, was unsettling for the Northern Irish government, even if such fears proved unfounded. On approaching its own elections, the Northern Irish government raised concerns that Unionists needed to close their ranks and maintain unity. Again, this fear was pre-emptive, however the election results revealed that their vote actually decreased from the last election in 1938. In 1945 the official Unionist Party won 33 seats, down by 6 seats from 1938. At the same time, the Nationalist/Republican vote increased from 8 seats in 1938 to 10 seats in 1945. Northern Ireland’s Labour Party enjoyed an increase of one seat giving the party a

36 Rose, Which People’s War?, p. 123.
38 Fielding, ‘What Did ”The People” Want?’p. 637.
39 Brian Barton, 'The Impact of World War II on Northern Ireland and on Belfast-London Relations', in Peter Catterall and Sean McDougall (eds.), The Northern Ireland Question in British Politics (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 61-63.
mere two seats. In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that Joseph Lee would conclude:

Closer yet to home, Northern Ireland showed just how little difference participation could make to mentalities determined to resist fundamental change. Material improvement did occur after 1945, thanks largely to British largesse. No ‘new and vastly different world’, however, opened up for the North after the war. Ancestral animosities continued to flourish, oblivious to the changes occurring in the wider world. Northern Ireland may as well have been a neutral of Éire vintage for all the difference that ‘tensions, liberations, shared experience, comradeship in suffering’ made to her ‘new thinking about the future’. Some new personal relationships were no doubt forged under the bond of common danger but tradition would remain in safe custody in Basil Brooke’s solicitous hands.

In this sense, Lee emphasised the determination of the Northern Ireland government not to use the war experience, with its shared suffering, to improve community relations. Of more importance were the success of the Unionist Party in the General Election and the maintaining of the constitutional link between Britain and Northern Ireland.

Over the past two decades, historians working on Northern Ireland during the war have begun to debunk the Northern Irish government’s own version of the wartime myth. This myth, in essence, contained all the necessary ingredients of the ‘People’s War’ myth, but with one exceptional and unionist-determined added feature – that of loyalty. The day after Britain declared war on Germany, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir James Craig, in front of a packed House of Commons announced, ‘we here to-day are in a state of war, and we are prepared with the rest of the United

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Kingdom and Empire to face all the responsibilities that that imposed upon Ulster people’. He continued, offering Northern Ireland’s support, by adding:

There is no slackening in our loyalty. There is no falling off in our determination to place the whole of our resources at the command of the Government in Britain … I have already communicated … that anything we can do here to facilitate them in the terrible times that lie ahead they have only just got to let us know and we will do it.\textsuperscript{42}

Publicly pledging Northern Ireland’s assistance during the war, the Prime Minister made it known where Northern Ireland stood. As a part of the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister assured the British government that Northern Ireland would loyally support Britain. Yet despite these public proclamations of loyalty, for the British government circumstance was the determining factor that brought Northern Ireland more fully into the war.

It was not until the fall of France in May 1940 that Northern Ireland was deemed strategically imperative for the British war effort. The Irish government’s refusal to relinquish the Treaty Ports, which had been returned by the British government in 1938, and the unsuccessful attempt by the British government to barter some agreement for the ending of partition on condition of Irish involvement in the war, combined to make Northern Ireland strategically important.\textsuperscript{43} With the closing of shipping lanes to the south, Northern Ireland offered the most westerly approach and extensive development took place most notably in the ports and harbours of Derry and Belfast.\textsuperscript{44} Nevertheless, despite the fact that Northern Ireland’s importance was only an off-shoot of the unsuccessful attempt to persuade de Valera to abandon Ireland’s neutrality, the Northern Irish government was sure to make great political capital out of its wartime involvement. Northern Ireland could no longer be used as ‘tempting bait’ to persuade de Valera to allow Britain use of the Treaty ports, or permit British troops to


\textsuperscript{44} Dermont Francis, Brian Lacey, and Jim Mullen, \textit{Atlantic Memorial: The Foyle and the Western Approaches 1939-1945} (Derry, 1995), pp. 13-20.
enter Ireland, even before a threat of invasion. Robert Fisk interprets this situation to mean that:

De Valera’s very refusal to hand back Eire’s Atlantic harbours now served only to emphasise the loyalty of Northern Ireland’s unionist population whose six small and generally poor counties had become a defensive bridgehead to America. The province was not just a willing armourer, but a bastion in the Battle of the Atlantic.45

Yet for all the Northern Irish government’s declarations that the region was loyal, there was a noticeable ‘slackening’ in their loyalty. Writing in June 1942, one of the founders of Mass Observation, Tom Harrisson, on a trip to Northern Ireland recorded his astonishment at the situation in Northern Ireland. Having only just studied the Merseyside and Humber areas, Harrisson wrote, ‘the lack of war urgency … is most striking’. Northern Ireland, he claimed, was ‘entirely different’ to other areas he had visited, so much so that ‘Many of the things which are taken for granted by the average Englishman or Scotsman … like clothes rationing or transport difficulties … are … still the source of considerable irritation and resentment.’ He described a feeling of ‘guilt’ brought about by being in Northern Ireland, recording that there was a noticeable ‘slackness in the atmosphere’, illustrated by ‘seeing men lying about in the morning on the grass outside the City Hall [Belfast] or sleeping with their feet up in the backs of cars’. This led him to conclude, ‘One realises that … in Britain the whole tempo has changed from peacetime and anyone who behaved in a peacetime way now in London or Liverpool would at once be noticeable and might even cause a riot.’46

Contributing to this lethargic attitude was the high level of unemployment, and the inability to extend conscription to Northern Ireland.47 Although the Northern Irish government had petitioned for conscription on four different occasions – 1939, 1940, 1941 and 1943 - opposition from nationalists and the Catholic Church persuaded the

47 For a discussion on the problems with extending conscription to Northern Ireland, see Bowman, *De Valera*, pp. 203-204 and pp. 244-246; Fisk, *In Time of War*, p. 91, p. 103, pp. 509-522.
British government that whatever benefits could be gained by its extension would be over-ridden by the trouble it would instigate.48 Memories of trying to impose conscription on Ireland in 1917 to 1918 reminded the British government of the potential problems this could cause, particularly at a time of war.49 For these groups to be conscripted into the Armed Forces of a country which they had always held to have oppressed Ireland was inimical. In addition, it could not be ignored that conscription would have disproportionately affected the catholic population more than the Protestant community.50 More Protestants had been employed in reserved occupations; therefore the call up would have been met by Catholics, many of whom had no desire to fight in a war which they saw as a British war. As James Loughlin argues, the failure to apply conscription ‘not only pointed up dramatically the limitations of British national sovereignty in Ulster, but also seriously diminished the region’s ability to demonstrate whole-hearted commitment to the national struggle’.51

Without the extension of conscription overall recruitment was low, which again challenged the government’s loyalty trope.52 Many Protestants did not enlist for fear that they would return to find their jobs occupied by Catholics or Southern Irishmen.53 An initial burst of 2,500 per month characterised the beginning stage of the war. However, by the spring of 1940, the number had decreased to below 1,000, and by December 1940 to approximately 600. These figures encapsulate a trend that was to hold throughout the war.54 Out of a total of over 5 million who served in the British Armed Forces during the war, Northern Ireland’s contribution was unimpressive.55

So whilst all these factors combined to question Northern Ireland’s loyalty, other incidents within Northern Ireland served to challenge the People’s War myth. Writing about civil defence recruitment in Northern Ireland, Brian Moore’s book, The Emperor of Ice-Cream, is a tale about a young seventeen year old Catholic, Gavin Burke,
who joined the Air Raid Precautions in November 1939. Having joined the Air Raid Precautions in Belfast himself during the war, Moore writes from an autobiographical perspective. In it he documents the sectarian and ever present suspicious nature of Northern Irish society during the war. In the early stages of the novel, Gavin’s Republican family background is revealed when he and his mother are met by his aunt’s Liz’s rather crude comments on Gavin’s new post in the Air Raid Precautions. Aunt Liz, horrified at her nephew’s decision to join the Air Raid Precautions scoffed, “Deirdre, surely you realize that these A.R.P. places will be filled with the scum of the Orange Lodges. Are those the sort of companions you want for a boy of his age?” Whilst Moore was writing with literary licence, he suggests that public perceptions and inherent distrust within a divided society had obviously not been overcome during, or on account of, the war.

Despite the existence of sectarian tension during the war, sectarianism could not be held accountable for the civil defence problems in Northern Ireland. Rather, blame for poor air defences and planning for the eventuality of attack rested with the Northern Irish government, and resulted in a tragic number of deaths during the Belfast blitz. Across the nights of 15/16 April and 4/5 May 1941, up to 1,000 people are said to have died. At the beginning of the war, Sir James Craig openly admitted to the Northern Irish House of Commons that Northern Ireland lacked the necessary equipment and forms of protection in the eventuality of an attack. Despite this realisation he reminded those present that his government had communicated with the British government to, “Take care of the most vulnerable parts; look after them first; we are somewhat removed from the danger zone, if I may use that expression; we will hold on and do what we can until you are able to supply us with the necessary equipment.” Courting British favour, Craig’s decision, and the government’s subsequent failure to secure necessary defence equipment, especially after the fall of France when Northern Ireland became a more prominent target, revealed the ineptitude of the Northern Irish government. The attack on Belfast produced the largest death toll


57 There is an ever growing literature on the blitz ranging from academic studies, to memoirs and novels. See Brian Barton, *The Blitz: Belfast in the War Years* (Belfast, 1989); James Doherty, *Past 381: The Memoirs of a Belfast Air Raid Warden* (Belfast, 1989); Sean McMahon, *The Belfast Blitz: Luftwaffe Raids in Northern Ireland, 1941* (Belfast, 2010); Moore, *The Emperor*.

on a raid on a single city across Great Britain. Denis Ireland, an outspoken Protestant Nationalist, wrote uneasily about what he described as the Northern Irish government’s ‘schadenfreude, a delight in disaster’. According to Denis Ireland, for the Northern Irish government the blitz ‘was final and irrefutable proof that there was no such thing as the Irish Sea’.

While the blitz saw Catholics and Protestants flee for protection together in the crypt of Clonard Monastery in West Belfast, little was done by the government to take advantage of such a traumatic event to build on community relations. The dead of the blitz were, if possible, buried in their own separate graveyards; a ‘potent image in itself of sectarian division’. In his novel, Moore documents how an injured Protestant lady refused to be treated in what she called the “papist hospital” – the Mater hospital in Belfast. He also records his protagonist Gavin Burke witnessing looting after the blitz. Dawson Bates exposed to the Cabinet that on account of people fleeing the city at night to ‘ditch’ in the surrounding hills, others were taking advantage of the situation and charging for the privilege to sleep in barns. That people were taking advantage of the situation at a time of panic is not unusual; such scenes also took place also in Britain. However, it does challenge the ‘People’s War’ myth.

Whilst there is ample evidence to suggest that Northern Ireland was not a homogeneous society during the war years, historians have failed to take this knowledge and apply it to how the war has been remembered, or even how possible it was to commemorate the ending of the war in 1945. This thesis, therefore, aims to fill this gap in knowledge. Other historians working on Northern Ireland have sought to provide the nuts and bolts, to uncover more facts and figures relating to the war years - I aim to explore how people constructed a meaning for the war, how the government attempted to control it, and how this meaning was then conditioned and mediated through the press and the official war history commissioned by the Northern Irish government. To achieve these objectives, this thesis looks at the more nuanced ways in which memory of war is expressed or contested through commemorative activities. By drawing on the

61 Barton, Northern Ireland, p. 121.
62 Moore, The Emperor, p. 155.
63 Moore, The Emperor, p. 158 and p. 166.
64 This information is found in Barton’s work however he does not annotate with a reference. Barton, Northern Ireland, p. 49.
burgeoning memory literature, I will show that the image created nowadays, as witnessed in the Tower Museum, is a gross simplification and exaggeration of Northern Ireland's wartime experience. Rather, Northern Irish society was much more complex than the post-war narratives have permitted it to be, and this can be demonstrated via the examination of how the Second World War was commemorated and remembered.

The Commemoration of War

What is the actual purpose of commemorating war? What happens when that commemoration takes place in a divided society? Who instigates or controls such commemorative acts? These are all searching questions, requiring careful reflection. A starting point would be to look at how commemoration works and this, in itself, requires some basic preconditions. Commemoration can be individual but more often it is a social act. In this way, it feeds on group identification and relies on memories that are formed from such group activities. This statement is not a novel idea. French Sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, pioneered a theory which argued that there is something social about how individuals remember and forget. In essence, he put forward an approach which opened up social science to the implications of social and historical factors on how individuals remember. Although originating from and initially following sociologist Emile Durkheim’s teachings, Halbwachs’ treatment of Durkheim’s work was notably less orthodox. For Halbwachs, memory formed by the coming together of individuals in groups helped foster a collective memory whilst safeguarding individual memories. These individual memories, therefore, formed the key components of collective memory and collective behaviour, which are nourished by the socio-historical context. Halbwachs states:

The individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory. In other words, the various groups that compose society are capable at every moment of reconstructing
their past. But, as we have seen, they most frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it. There are surely many facts, and many details of certain facts, that the individual would forget if others did not keep their memory alive for him. But, on the other hand, society can live only if there is a sufficient unity of outlooks among the individuals and groups comprising it.\textsuperscript{65}

Whilst group acts like commemoration give expression to what Halbwachs terms a ‘unity of outlooks’, his functionalist approach fails to adequately explain what happens to counter or conflicting memories – those memories which do not fit within this neat framework. Peter Burke, after all, reminds us that it would be misguided to believe that within groups there is no form of conflict.\textsuperscript{66} Northern Ireland is a specific case in point. Yet following the thinking of Halbwachs, the group is necessary to the survival of the memory which is stored and accessed through group interaction and in social settings. The evolution of these groups may be determined by political, social or cultural changes, which is indicative of the importance of external influences on how memory is created and maintained.

Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka have taken this argument further, asking why group belonging is important. Their thesis looks at the significance of what they term ‘objectivized culture’ such as ‘texts, images, rites, buildings, monuments, cities, or even landscapes’. They argue that through the interaction between such ‘objectivized culture’ and ceremonial activity, ‘a close connection to groups and their identity’ takes place. According to them, this means ‘that a group bases its consciousness of unity and specificity upon this knowledge and derives formative and normative impulses from it, which allows the group to reproduce its identity’.\textsuperscript{67} For this reason, they prefer to define a kind of association between memory, culture and the group to cultural memory. This type of memory explains how a ‘concretion of identity’ takes place, which defines ‘sharp

\textsuperscript{66} Peter Burke, \textit{Varieties of Cultural History} (Ithaca, 1997), p. 55.  
\textsuperscript{67} Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, \textit{New German Critique} 65 (Spring-Summer, 1995), p. 128.
distinctions between those who belong and those who do not’. Cultural memory therefore:

comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.

Therefore, it naturally follows, that in a divided society such aspects of ‘objectivized culture’ are - in the minds of its members - actually subjective and can only apply to one group over another. In Northern Ireland, in particular, group identification is often maintained by a clear definition of what a group is not as opposed to what it is. Those groups in society, who associate themselves closely with more powerful groups such as the state, find that their memories become the dominant ones. For those others, who choose not to actively associate themselves with these more powerful groups, they find that their memories are at best counter-memories, or at worst repressed.

Whilst every commemorative act, be it a ritual, a ceremony or the creation of a memorial involves processes of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion; in Northern Ireland these take on a unique flavour. The ‘politics of memory’ which are at play with all memory work reveals that different ‘agencies’ acting in different ‘arenas’ control how events will be celebrated, recorded, and remembered. It is in this way, some historians argue, that state-centred approaches to memory reveal the manipulative aspect of memory creation. Whilst state organised ceremonies may act as a reaffirmation of power relations within society, it is going too far to write them off as

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68 Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory', p. 130.
69 Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory', p. 132.
manipulative. Offering an insightful reason as to why certain events are commemorated, John Bodnar states:

Adherents of official and vernacular interests demonstrate conflicting obsessions. Cultural leaders orchestrate commemorative events to calm anxiety about change or political events, eliminate citizen indifference toward official concerns, promote exemplary patterns of citizen behavior, and stress citizen duties over rights. They feel the need to do this because of the existence of social contradictions, alternative views, and indifference that perpetuates fears of societal dissolution and unregulated political behavior.

Yet there is more at stake than just resisting social disturbance. Acting in their own way, governments, political and religious leaders, and the media, use commemorative acts to shape ‘preferred’ readings of the past. On this ‘public stage’ from which these memories are formed, there are ‘many actors who often speak from contradictory scripts’. Therefore, what becomes the ‘dominant memory’ are those which ‘achieve centrality and luxuriate grandly; others are marginalized or excluded or reworked’.

Despite, or because of, the fact that commemoration particularises and localises rather than collectivises, there is more of a need to commemorate the past. This is obvious in the case of Northern Ireland where acts of remembrance, such as parading and mural painting, are often reflective of - or causes of, political unrest and violent clashes between nationalists/republicans and unionists/loyalists. Nevertheless, celebrating one’s traditions and culture is of paramount importance in such divided societies, if only because they allow, in the most visible and audible manner, the renewal of one’s identity. At the same time, commemoration relies on this recycling of memory,

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75 Zelizer, Covering the Body, p. 3.
of engaging with narratives within the framework acceptable to the groups involved.\textsuperscript{78} It is in this socially determined manner, Wulf Kansteiner argues, that people remember and forget:

The very language and narrative patterns that we use to express memories, even autobiographical memories, are inseparable from the social standards of plausibility and authenticity they employ. In this sense ‘there is no such thing as individual memory’.\textsuperscript{79}

Through group interaction, individuals construct their own understanding of the world. They do this by referring to and sustaining group memories, which are formulated within acceptable frameworks within the group.

Speaking about what they have termed ‘templates of war remembrance’, Timothy Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, explain how ‘cultural narratives, myths and tropes’ are employed in the remembrance of past events.\textsuperscript{80} How people remember and speak about an event is very much defined with pre-determined discourse. Alistair Thomson and Graham Dawson, highlighting the psychological and social dimension to remembering, show how this applies to war remembrance. Thomson, in his study of Anzac veterans, reveals how these veterans mis-remember wartime experience to fit in with present concerns and pre-existing public discourses. Their stories, therefore, do not seek to openly challenge these pre-conceived notions, but look for validation amongst other veterans.\textsuperscript{81} Equally, Dawson’s research on the construction of the British ‘soldier hero’ of adventure stories, locates itself within this

\textsuperscript{79} Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', \textit{History and Theory} 41 (2002), p. 185. Susan Crane contests this notion that there is no such thing as individual memory. She argues that in thinking about collective memory, it is useful to go back to the individual ‘who articulates it’. Susan A. Crane, 'Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory', \textit{American Historical Review} 102, no. 5 (Dec., 1997), p. 1375.
\textsuperscript{80} Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 'The Politics of War', p. 34.
\textsuperscript{81} Alistair Thomson, \textit{Anzac Memories: Living With the Legend} (Melbourne, 1994), p. 9. See also Penny Summerfield’s work on women war workers during the Second World War, which informs this discussion. From oral history interviews, she has discovered that women’s narratives about their role during the war comply with pre-existing narratives about the role of women in society. Penny Summerfield, \textit{Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War} (Manchester, 1998).
theory of ‘composure’. He argues that narratives, created around British soldier heroes and masculinity, need to fit comfortably within already accepted cultural scripts of masculinity.\(^{82}\) Paul Connerton adds to this body of work by stating, ‘The narrative of one life is part of an interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity.’\(^{83}\)

This aspect of pre-determination, of spoken and unspoken rules that must be adhered to, combine to show the constructed and limited nature of commemoration. In a divided society such as Northern Ireland, in which memories of different groups compete with each other, such limitations flag up the issues at stake in such commemorative acts. To be associated with a group that is not your own, is problematic and potentially alienating. The ever-growing literature on remembrance of the First World War in Ireland pays testament to the potential instability that commemoration can provoke. By looking at how the First World War was commemorated through public ceremonies, memorials, poetry and other literary texts, historians such as Keith Jeffery, Jane Leonard, Catherine Switzer and Nuala Johnson, have all highlighted the problems with performing or participating in such acts.\(^{84}\) Johnson reminds us that ‘The narrative of war commemoration in Ireland was consistently in dialogue with the narratives attendant on the national question. The war did not represent in Ireland an opportunity for the divergent voices of Irish nationalism and unionism to unite.’\(^{85}\) The memory of this war became politicised and played out against the background of the Easter Rising, which made commemoration of the former problematic in a post-war world. Equally, the Northern unionists’ adoption of the memory of the 36\(^{th}\) (Ulster) Division at the Battle of the Somme, served to alienate and write out nationalist involvement in that war.\(^{86}\)

In the interwar period the commemoration of the First World War in Northern Ireland became an overwhelmingly unionist endeavour. As Keith Jeffery points out, in

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\(^{85}\) Johnson, *Ireland, the Great War*, p. 12.

\(^{86}\) James Loughlin, ‘Mobilising the Sacred Dead: Ulster Unionism, the Great War and the Politics of Remembrance’, in . Adrian Gregory and Senia Paseta (eds.), *Ireland and the Great War: "A war to unite us all"?* (Manchester, 2002).
Northern Ireland nationalist ex-servicemen were condemned as traitors by republicans. Having fought to gain independence for Ireland, which was never realised, they could not openly participate in commemorative ceremonies. At the same time, Northern unionists framed this wartime experience into their ‘explanatory myths’, transforming it into ‘a struggle to free Ulster of the menace of Irish nationalism’. In this context, and with little change in the Northern Irish political situation in relation to unionist control of the government, the question must now be asked; could the commemoration of the Second World War in May 1945 have been experienced in a different manner?

Interestingly, despite the interest in World War One commemoration in Ireland, little scholarly research has looked at how the Second World War has been commemorated. One explanation points to the fact that the Second World War is jointly remembered with the First World War on Remembrance Sunday. However, it also suggests that the commemoration of the Second World War is seen as less problematic than the first. In her study of Belfast City Hall, Gillian McIntosh briefly touched on how Belfast celebrated the announcement that the war in Europe had ended. Although her account of Victory in Europe Day is factually correct, she fails to document the less savoury aspects of that day. Understandably this book, written as a testimony to Belfast City Hall, may not have lent itself to such critical engagement. Nevertheless, it is an episode in Northern Irish history which is worth examining in more detail.

Chapter one of this thesis looks at how the Northern Irish government prepared to celebrate the end of the war. It documents the level of communication between the Northern Irish and British governments to plan this celebration. Drawing on ritual theory, it argues that this event was planned, not with the intention of providing a commemorative event for both nationalists and unionists in Belfast, but with the unionist community in mind. It was this group, and this group alone, that was represented at the official Victory ceremonials.

Chapter two then looks at how the Northern Irish press reported on the victory celebrations in May 1945. By tracing these reports and editorials throughout the month of May, it shows that although there were isolated moments of what could be described

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88 Loughlin, 'Mobilising the Sacred Dead', p. 146.
89 Gillian McIntosh, Belfast City Hall: One Hundred Years (Belfast, 2006), pp. 118-125.
as joint celebration between the two communities, how the press framed the narratives on these celebrations suggests that there were underlying tensions, which the commemorative activities brought to the fore. This chapter argues that the victory celebrations were unable to transcend communal differences. As will be shown, the press was unable and at times unwilling, to promote the commemorative activities as consensus building moments.

Chapter three moves on to reveal the reason why the victory celebrations were unable to represent a shared experience: conflicting national identities. To mark the end of the war, the British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, and the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera, made two political speeches on the 13 and 16 May respectively. These political broadcasts received much attention in the Northern Irish press. On the one hand, the unionist press associated itself with Churchill’s speech in which he condemned Irish neutrality and praised Northern Ireland’s role in the war. On the other hand, the nationalist press added to the debate by challenging Churchill’s attack on Ireland’s neutrality and his references to Northern Ireland’s loyalty during the war; a loyalty which it equated with unionism. An analysis of editorials, specially commissioned articles and letters-to-the-editor, provides a unique opportunity of understanding how difficult it was within such a divided society to commemorate the end of the war in any joint manner. At the same time, this chapter will demonstrate that the press, perfectly aware of its audience, framed not only what it wrote about the victory celebrations but how it covered the two political speeches with its audience in mind.90

The final chapter of this thesis explores how the memory of the Second World War was institutionalised. The decision by the Northern Irish government to sponsor an official war history, to ensure that Northern Ireland’s contribution in the war would never be forgotten, highlights the importance that the Unionist government attached to the war years. The chapter argues that Northern Ireland in the Second World War was clearly motivated and executed in such a way that it is more akin to a propagandist history than a piece of sound historical work. Therefore, it served the purpose of ensuring that the memory of the Second World War was firmly grounded within a unionist discourse, and acted as a permanent reminder to the British government of the strategic importance of Northern Ireland during the war.

The four cases studies taken together in this thesis aim to show that while commemoration and the construction of memory in a divided society is problematic, the Second World War did not offer a reconciling moment in Northern Ireland’s history. Rather, acts of commemoration of the war served to highlight the differences within Northern Irish society.
Performing Victory: The Official Planning for Victory Day and Thanksgiving Sunday in Northern Ireland

Absence of a lead at the top was universally commented on, particularly on VE-Day, when thousands of people wandered aimlessly through Belfast’s streets with nothing to do and all day in which to do it ... In spite of the fact that peace was approaching for days by instalments it seemed to be nobody’s business to make any attempt to gather up the people’s feelings and give to them some worthy expression.

Editorial, Belfast Telegraph

Despite months of preparation and communication back and forth from the Northern Irish government to the British government, the Northern Irish government had failed; failed to give a voice to the people of Belfast and to provide release for the pent up emotions the war years had generated. The Editorial writer of the Belfast Telegraph merely voiced what others were thinking; that the government and Belfast Corporation had not planned the victory celebrations with the ordinary population in mind. It was quite clear that for the Northern Irish government, what the people wanted (or needed) was not really a consideration. What was of concern was not that Northern Ireland should arrange victory celebrations for the two days of national holiday - Victory Day and the

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1 Belfast Telegraph, ‘After-Thoughts’, 10 May 1945.
day after - but that attention be directed towards those events which could be structured and framed into an official interpretation of the meaning of victory: Thanksgiving Sunday and the victory parade.

The victory celebrations, as planned by the Northern Irish government in consultation with the religious authorities of the various Protestant Churches and Belfast Corporation, were a performance. They were directed to show, in the most public manner, Northern Ireland’s loyalty to the British Crown. As a ritual the victory celebrations followed closely those taking place in London and contained all the necessary pomp and pageantry to demonstrate Northern Ireland’s loyalty to Britain. However, under these instructions, they catered for only one section of society: the Protestant, unionist community. Official Catholic Church participation in the ceremony was not sought. Not that the Catholic population or religious authorities made any attempt to be included.

Revealingly, at no point throughout the whole preparations did the committee, set up by the Northern Irish government, stop to consider why exactly it was preparing such a formal victory celebration. With no clear purpose other than the desire to follow in Britain’s footsteps the committee made only provisional arrangements for the anticipated victory celebrations from September 1944 to May 1945. Without detailed information from the British government about its plans the Northern Irish committee was hesitant to make substantial progress. Nevertheless, in the end, despite such hesitancy, the Northern Irish government succeeded in organising an official thanksgiving service for invited guests and an elaborate victory parade which could be viewed by patriotic and enthusiastic Belfast citizens at a distance.

Primarily, this chapter explores the importance of ritual in Northern Irish society. By looking at the theoretical definitions of ritual, it shows how, in the Northern Irish case, ritual serves not to unite society but rather acts as a catalyst to further divide an already divided society. Secondly, the chapter examines the stages of planning and preparation by the Northern Irish government and Belfast Corporation for the victory arrangements. In this process and through the exchange of correspondence between the Northern Irish and British governments, it becomes apparent that the Northern Irish government relied heavily on the British government. This reliance can be read in a way that discloses underlying Northern Irish insecurities about its relationship with Britain in a post-war world. This chapter argues that moving the focus of the celebrations away
from Victory Day itself to Thanksgiving Sunday was symptomatic of these anxieties. In order to make Britain realise the role that Northern Ireland had played in the war, it was necessary to be able to demonstrate this in a well-organised and visible manner; the spontaneity of Victory Day would not lend itself to such a performance.

From this premise, the chapter ends with an examination of the then Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Sir Basil Brooke’s discussion of the Motion to be passed to the King, on 15 May 1945, to mark the end of the war. It argues that the content of Brooke’s speech actually provides a unique glimpse into what was behind the formalities of the victory celebrations. In addition, it proposes that while the Northern Irish government imagined itself and portrayed itself as a part of the United Kingdom, its desire to send a message of congratulations to the Russian and American governments called into question this constitutional position. These varied ways in which the Northern Irish government imagined itself as a semi-autonomous state within the United Kingdom and a part of the Empire but, at the same time, acted more like a Dominion, sheds light on the conflicting manner in which the Northern Irish government perceived its anomalous existence. This chapter also argues that concerns over a Labour Party victory in the impending General Election provoked a great deal of anxiety for Stormont, anxiety clearly evident in the elaborate thanksgiving service and victory parade organised by the Northern Irish government.²

Ritual and Northern Ireland

In order to understand fully the implications of the official state preparations for victory, it is necessary to first look at the theoretical implications of ritual in society and then more closely at its role in Northern Irish society. Only by doing so can this chapter be understood in its correct context - which argues that rituals were (and still are) seen as social markers of difference and projections of identity. They are not, as some neo-

² ‘Stormont’ refers to the name of the Parliament and building of the Northern Irish government. In this period it is often used interchangeably to refer to the devolved government. As an example of its use see Derek Birrell and Alan Murie, Policy and Government in Northern Ireland: Lessons of Devolution (Dublin, 1980), pp. 1-3.
Durkheimians would propose, symbols of social cohesion or shared values, something Durkheim termed the ‘collective effervescence’. In a society where identity is not only social but also very much bound up with political and religious connotations, this easy distinction is problematic.

As a type of ritualised act, activities such as mural painting in Northern Ireland highlight the divisiveness of a society where unionists/loyalists and nationalists/republicans create murals which engage visibly and publicly in the political debate between the two communities. As markers of division, it is not only the aesthetic appeal of these murals or their geographic location that gives them such power, but the importance the local community - their viewers - place on them. Equally, other cultural activities, such as parading, have rarely been able to reconcile the two communities. Engagement in any of these activities not only asserts communal identity through highlighting difference, but serves an active role in the ‘construction of sectarian space’. Examined in this context, official state rituals have the potential to act as defiant symbols of communal identity.

Such types of performative rituals in this atmosphere are, therefore, more often than not, ‘politically charged and responsive to wider socio-historical shifts and currents’. In Northern Ireland, where the Catholic minority and Catholic clergy have historically questioned the actual legitimacy of the state, association with state-led rituals is problematic and at times confrontational. Rituals, therefore, become associated with either the Protestant or Catholic community and are rarely celebrated together. The manipulation of ritual in Northern Ireland to unite both communities was, and arguably is, almost never achieved. Instead what often occurs is an illusion of homogeneity,

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whereby the existence of the dissenting ‘other’ is ignored. This can be illustrated in David Chaney’s argument that ‘The political character of ritual is therefore always present, particularly in civic rituals, but these political aspects are usually expressed paradoxically through being denied in favour of an integrated community’.8

Developing on Durkheim’s theory, Steven Lukes warns of the oversimplification of seeing ritual as representative of this ‘collective effervescence’, and points to the inability of such theories to accommodate dissenting views within society. Challenging the types of rituals used to justify this claim, Lukes questions the methodology used by those who advocate this stance, arguing that there is a need to move beyond the notion that rituals unite society and look more closely and analytically at the cognitive element to such ritualistic events.9 If ‘value consensus’ is what ‘maintains the equilibrium of the social system’, Lukes begs the question, what happens to the social system when there is no shared ‘value consensus’?10 Instead, for Lukes, the idea that society can be united by a ritual is unjustified, for ritual is not a direct mirror on society. Advocates of such reasoning, he states, fall prey to official interpretations that serve only ‘to define as authoritative certain ways of seeing society’.11 Therefore, they give more power to certain groups over others and institutionalise the more powerful group’s invention of society.12

Putting forward a working definition of ritual, Steven Lukes suggests that ritual represents a ‘rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance’.13 Rituals, Lukes asserts, need to be intellectually challenged and key propositions need to be considered by asking for whom and by whom are the rituals organised? Why are they deemed important or not as the case may be and by whom? And notably, ‘How are such rituals used strategically by different groups, exerting or seeking power in society’.14 It is precisely these questions that will be addressed throughout this chapter, in which this ‘ambiguity’ of ritual is explored.15 Influenced by this theoretical groundwork, this

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10 Lukes, Essays in Social, p. 62.
11 Lukes, Essays in Social, p. 54. Emphasis in original.
12 Lukes, Essays in Social, pp. 67-69.
13 Lukes, Essays in Social, p. 54. Emphasis in original.
chapter will look at whether the victory celebrations were shaped by a unionist agenda. It will ask for what purpose did Northern Ireland have such elaborate victory celebrations? Did the government's commemorative plans take into account the political divisions within society? And, finally, it will address what the official state-led ceremonies revealed about how the Northern Irish government imagined itself.

The pre-existing knowledge and discursive frameworks associated with ritual are important in understanding the significance of the victory celebrations in Northern Ireland. The most explored example of ritual in Northern Irish society is that of the annual Orange Order parades, particularly those taking place throughout the month of July. Here the issue is not only about marching but the ‘right to perform a particular ritual’ as a part of one’s custom, despite the sectarian nature of these acts. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is more beneficial to provide examples that are less overtly sectarian, but which still demonstrate the power of ritual in Northern Ireland to exert collective group identities. The commemoration of Armistice Day, the day that marked the end of the First World War, provides a useful comparative example to appreciate the intricacies associated with the ritual symbolism of Thanksgiving Sunday and the victory parade in Belfast in May 1945.

Although the two world wars were significantly different and the reasons for people in Ireland joining the British Armed Forces notably different in each, the one constant factor is that both Catholics and Protestants joined the British Services during both. In the First World War motivations were varied, with financial necessity, adventure, camaraderie, and an assertion of masculinity amongst the reasons why young men volunteered. There was also the moral determinant to fight against Germany for the rights of small nations. However, for Irish nationalists, enlistment was also fuelled by the hope that their involvement would ensure the implementation of the suspended Home Rule Bill once the war ended.

Despite the large numbers of Catholics and nationalists who enlisted, the commemoration of the First World War in Ireland was complicated by events that transpired during the war years. In 1916, two significant events took place that

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drastically impacted the cultural significance of the war years for citizens of Ireland both North and South: the Easter Rising in Dublin and the Battle of the Somme. Juxtaposing these two events against each other, D. George Boyce describes the former as ‘a Republican rising to throw off British rule and arouse the nation from its political inertia’ while the latter is seen by Northern Ireland’s Protestants as ‘a key symbolic event in their emergence as a distinct people with a special history, one almost guided by providence’. The 36th (Ulster) Division, which fought in the Battle of the Somme, was a predominantly unionist/loyalist division made up of members of the Ulster Volunteer Force. This force, which had only been created in 1913, was vehemently opposed to Home Rule. The sheer number of deaths at the Battle of the Somme, at which the 36th (Ulster) Division had a leading role, and experiences in the First World War in general, had (and still have) a strong significance for unionists.

For Northern unionists, the fact that Irishmen from other parts of Ireland fought traumatic battles during the war did not matter. They were to co-opt the memory of this event as their own, lending weight and depth to their feeling of ‘Britishness’. In comparison, the British execution of the rebels in Dublin provoked such a widespread negative reaction in Ireland that it served to transform those men into martyrs, and contributed to Sinn Féin’s success in the Irish General Election of 1918. These developments, therefore, created a unique situation in Ireland in which ‘The thirteen rebels executed by the British after the Rising were remembered; the thousands who died in France and Gallipoli were not.’

After the war, the partitioning of the country came into effect in May 1921. A truce was reached in the War of Independence in July 1921 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in December 1921. However, the Civil War that broke out in June 1922 over the terms of the Treaty divided the country. Nationalist aspiration that their involvement in the First World War on the side of Britain would bring about Home Rule was a painful disappointment. Keith Jeffery argues that the Irish state chose, after its formation, to largely disassociate itself from the involvement of its citizens in the First World War. Similarly, David Officer recounts how this refusal to deal with the

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fact that many Irishmen had fought alongside the British became symptomatic of the Irish Free State, in the post-war years. The situation in the North however was different. In Northern Ireland, the unionist population made political capital out of its involvement in the Battle of the Somme and repackaged this memory into a heroic narrative, which reminded the Crown that they could not be ‘abandoned to Papism and Fenianism’. As Boyce explains:

Thus the Great War, and especially the Somme battle, was captured by unionists for the unionist tradition; it contributed to the unionist myth, that between 1910 and 1921 there emerged in the north of Ireland a solid, united self-reliant, and successful Ulster movement, which made good its claim to statehood, if not nationhood, and whose claim was sealed in blood: the blood of the men at the Somme.

This complete refusal to engage with Irish participation in the war is an over-statement. Jane Leonard offers a more nuanced interpretation of how the war was remembered in Ireland. She suggests that the British Legion was still an important institution in Southern Ireland in the 1930s and organised Armistice Day parades. However, despite such attempts to memorialise the war, she admits that the number of these parades decreased after 1945. For her, the problem was nothing to do with ‘amnesia’ – deliberately forgetting that the Southern Irish ever participated in the war – but rather understanding why this caused such ‘resentment’ and ‘embarrassment’. Foremost in her argument is the idea that ‘Opponents of Armistice Day in Dublin claimed it

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commemorated the former British presence rather than the Irish dead in the Great War.²⁷

Clearly this tension around Armistice Day commemorations would have been inscribed into popular memory in both parts of Ireland. It was certainly not lost on the Northern Irish government, considering the importance unionists placed on the memory of the Battle of the Somme. The hijacking of this event by unionism and the difficulty experienced in Ireland when commemorating the First World War, acted as a reference point for Northern nationalists in relation to any commemorative acts that marked the Second World War. It can be plausibly argued that overt celebration of the end of the Second World War was already problematic for Northern nationalists, given how the First World War had been remembered and commemorated in the inter-war years.

Moreover, any official acts of commemoration in Northern Ireland were always going to be divisive, if only because of the divisions already existing within society. Gillian McIntosh’s work on the part played by official state rituals in Northern Ireland in the 1930s posits that there was a definite and deliberate homogenising of the unionist community by the state.²⁸ Focussing, as her work does, solely on unionist commemoration, she provides evidence suggesting that in their search to affirm and strengthen unionism, these rituals ‘spoke primarily, although not exclusively, to a unionist audience.’²⁹ Nevertheless, their main aim, she argues, was opportunistic: to make ‘the abstract Northern Irish state, its place in the union, and its unionist identity tangible to the unionist community and to onlookers’.³⁰

That said, these memorable state occasions - a visible expression of unionist loyalty to Britain and the Crown - were taking place in the context of overt disassociation of the Southern Irish state from both Northern Ireland, and indeed Britain. Throughout the years of economic depression in the North, Eamon de Valera, in his role of President of the Executive Council, removed the oath of allegiance to the

²⁸ McIntosh analyses the following ceremonies that took place in the 1930s: the opening of Stormont in 1932; the dedication of the statue to Edward Carson in 1933; King George V’s silver jubilee celebrations held in Belfast, coupled with Carson’s funeral in 1935; and the visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth on their Coronation in 1937. Gillian McIntosh, The Force of Culture: Unionist Identities in Twentieth-Century Ireland (Cork, 1999), pp. 36-68.
²⁹ McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 37.
³⁰ McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 36.
King from the Irish Constitution in May 1933. He subsequently went on to dismantle the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 by taking advantage of the abdication crisis of King Edward VIII in December 1936 to remove all references to both the governor-general and the King from the Irish Free State’s Constitution.\(^{31}\) His declaration of a new Irish Constitution in 1937, in which Article 2 claimed jurisdiction over the complete island of Ireland, proved irksome and an affront on the existence of the Northern Irish state. Nevertheless the then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir James Craig, refused to place too much concern on it.\(^{32}\) Such acts, arguably, only served to strengthen the Northern Irish government’s resolve to resist any attempts to end partition.

Within Northern Ireland itself, relations between Catholics and Protestants were strained at this time. In June 1932, a large pilgrimage by Northern Catholics, including those nationalist members of the Northern Irish Parliament, Joseph Devlin, Senator T. J. Campbell, Cahir Healy and T. Mc Loughlin, made their way to Dublin for the Thirty-First International Eucharistic Congress. This congress was considered a major event to profess one’s Catholicism and to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, as Dublin played the host to Catholics from all over the world. However, for the Irish state, the hosting of such an event represented much more: it publically revealed the identity of that state as being a Catholic nation.\(^{33}\) Interpreting these acts, McIntosh highlights that this mass movement of ‘confident’ Catholics served as a ‘threat to unionism’, resulting in Catholics being attacked in Larne, Ballymena and Belfast on their return journey to Northern Ireland.\(^{34}\)

Despite these sectarian motivated attacks, within four months relations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland appeared to have improved. The Outdoor Relief Riots of October 1932 saw both communities unite to demand better relief and conditions. This temporary respite, however, ended in July 1935 with the

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\(^{31}\) Members of the Irish parliament, the Dáil, had to swear an oath of allegiance to the King as it was a Commonwealth parliament. De Valera also refused to pay the land annuities owed to Britain. The British Government reacted by imposing the Irish Free State (Special Duties) Act which placed a 20 per cent tax on approximately two-thirds of goods exported from the Irish Free State to the United Kingdom. Confusion in Britain over the constitutional position of Northern Ireland resulted in many traders refusing to import goods from Northern Ireland, not understanding that the two parts of the country were governed separately. Near bankruptcy threatened many businesses in Northern Ireland as a cause of this uncertainty. Sean McDougall, *The Projection of Northern Ireland to Great Britain and Abroad, 1921-39*, in Peter Catterall and Sean McDougall (eds.), *The Northern Ireland Question in British Politics* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 37.


\(^{34}\) McIntosh, *The Force of Culture*, p. 41.
eruption of sectarian rioting in Belfast. Both these developments, taking place within a few short years, served to emphasise the ‘complexity of real politics and consciousness’ in Belfast.\footnote{Ronaldo Munck, Bill Rolston, and Gerry Moore, \textit{Belfast in the Thirties: An Oral History} (Belfast, 1987), p. 6.} Unemployment, poverty, suspicion over housing issues, coupled with attention directed at the various ritualistic displays by the Northern Irish government and nationalist involvement in the Eucharistic Congress, all combined to add fuel to the flames of the 1935 riots.\footnote{A. C. Hepburn, “The Belfast Riots of 1935”, \textit{Social History} 15, no. 1 (Jan., 1990), p. 96.} In such a period of unpredictable communal tension, the holding of rituals only served to destabilise an already fragile co-existence.

By the time Northern Ireland was implicated in the Second World War, the situation had somewhat improved in the North. Nevertheless, whilst Northern Ireland’s involvement in the Second World War gained it political kudos with the British government, the latter’s offer of an eventual end to partition if the Irish government joined the Allied war effort (an offer made after the Fall of France in May 1940) left the unionist camp reeling with despair over such treachery by the British government.\footnote{Bowman, \textit{De Valera}, p. 231; Robert Fisk, \textit{In Time of War}, pp. 186-219.} In a telegram to the then British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, Sir James Craig decried ‘To such treachery to loyal Ulster I will never be a party’.\footnote{PRO PREM 3/131/2 Craigavon to Chamberlain, 27 June 1940 as cited in Fisk, \textit{In Time of War}, p. 207.} At this stage, the importance which the British government placed on the Northern Irish state seemed less significant than that directed towards Southern Ireland. Therefore, the insecurities that this situation created amongst Northern Ireland’s unionists were hard to shift.

Such an insecure relationship with Britain meant that by the time the end of the war was in sight the Northern Irish government was determined to capitalise on its wartime involvement. Concern that if the Labour Party won the General Election it might aim to unite Ireland was all the more palpable for the Northern Irish government, considering the British government’s earlier dealings with de Valera over possible reunification. Moreover, traditionally the Labour Party in Britain had adopted a pro-Nationalist stance, highlighting its desire to eventually end partition. However, the unionist government need not have worried. The Labour Party realised the importance of Northern Ireland’s strategic positioning for the security of Britain. In the post-war years, Clement Attlee and Herbert Morrison tried to assuage anti-partitionist demands...
within their party, recalling the strategic necessity to have Northern Ireland’s support. Nevertheless, unsure of the political outcome, Unionists called for their rank and file members to unite to ensure that a catastrophe such as a united Ireland could not be realised. In this atmosphere of uncertainty over the future of partition it was deemed imperative that the unionist government gain political capital out of their wartime involvement. What better way to do that than through another powerful, ritualistic demonstration of loyalty, which it ensured took place during the widely publicised victory celebrations.

Imagining the Victory Celebrations and Government Planning

The planning for the anticipated, yet unknown, victory day celebrations began in late August 1944. Robert Gransden, Secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet, made clear the government’s desire to begin preparations for the celebration of the end of the war. Writing to Commander Oscar Henderson, private secretary to the Governor of Northern Ireland, Gransden intimated his concern that plans needed to be made in advance to mark the end of the war, or at least 'pigeon-holed, ready for immediate action'. Within this correspondence it was established early on that any official state-led ceremonies for the victory celebrations would involve close cooperation with Britain. The Governor, after all, acted as ‘the representative of the Crown’ in Northern Ireland and was a ‘possible channel of formal political control’ over Northern Ireland.

40 When work for the newly created Northern Irish government and parliament began on 7 June 1921, employees were needed to occupy important governmental roles. These positions were subsequently filled by men either on loan from the British government or permanently transferred by the British government to Northern Ireland. On 27 September 1921, it became known who would take up these jobs. Robert Gransden was one of the men sent from London to Belfast, where he had worked in the Treasury. John Andrew Oliver, *Working at Stormont: Memoirs* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 56-57.
42 Despite the Governor holding this power, Westminster rarely called upon him to exert this power, preferring to leave the Northern Irish Government to its own devices. Birrell and Murie, *Policy and Government*, p. 12.
Aware that arrangements were already being put in place in Britain, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir Basil Brooke, proposed that an ad hoc committee be established in Northern Ireland to facilitate the coordination of activities between the Services and the Belfast Corporation. He called upon the Right Honourable William Lowry, Minister of Home Affairs, to establish this committee, providing Lowry with a list of suitable candidates whom he proposed be included.\textsuperscript{43} The Prime Minister suggested that Major McConnell would represent his Department. In addition, he recommended that Henderson, as private secretary to the Governor of Northern Ireland and Sir A. Wilson Hungerford, parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs, should be considered; the latter acting as a suitable deputy Chairman.\textsuperscript{44} Although not an order, this suggestion was indicative that the Prime Minister expected these men to be included in the committee.

Lowry quickly established this committee in September 1944 and made it known to the Prime Minister that he intended to approach the task in two stages. The first stage would decide the necessary fundamental points as to the form, timing and location of the events and the second would be the establishment of a small Executive Committee to ensure that proposals were correctly implemented.\textsuperscript{45} Of paramount importance to Lowry was that initial decisions were taken by ‘persons representing the Government’, only then could representatives of the Services, Civil Defence, Fire Services and the Belfast Corporation become involved.\textsuperscript{46} Rhetorically asking the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Lowry wrote:

\begin{quote}
With the setting up of the Northern Irish Government in 1921, the Ministry of Home Affairs was responsible for issues to do with the police, the courts, health, housing, local government and the poor law. Oliver, \textit{Working at Stormont}, p. 16.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Brooke to Lowry, 20 September 1944. Gransden was later to make it quite clear to Robinson, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs that the Cabinet Offices and the Prime Minister’s Department would offer assistance to the committee but that ‘These various ceremonials have always been looked on as falling within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Home Affairs.’ PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gransden to Robinson, 7 April 1945.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
The initial committee comprised of the Chairman, the Right Honourable William Lowry (Minister of Home Affairs) who was replaced by the Right Honourable John Edmond Warnock in November 1944. Others included were the Inspector General, Commander Oscar Henderson (private secretary of the Governor of Northern Ireland), Sir Alexander Wilson Hungerford (parliamentary secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs), Major McConnell (assistant secretary to the Cabinet) who was replaced at some point around February 1945 by McWilliam and Adrian Robinson (permanent secretary to the Minister of Home Affairs). Lowry put forward a tentative list of those whom he thought should be included in the Executive Committee, dependent entirely on what type of events they decided to arrange. The list included Sir Wilson Hungerford as Chairman and acting as a representative of the Ministry of Health and the local authorities, a representative for the Inspector General, the Commander of the Fire Service, representatives of the three Services and a representative of the Civil Defence Services. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Lowry to Brooke, 28 September 1944.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Lowry to Brooke, 28 September 1944.
\end{quote}
I think the very first thing that we have got to decide is whether in this matter we are going to follow the procedure that has been adopted on lesser occasions – e.g. Red Army Day and so on – and have a combined Government and Belfast Corporation ceremony to take place in the City or whether we should have some Government ceremony at Stormont and co-operate with and assist the Belfast Corporation and the principal local authorities, as for example, the county boroughs and boroughs, in promoting ceremonies throughout the Province.\(^{47}\)

The attention directed to the form of the ceremony, as opposed to the purpose, suggested that the holding of victory celebrations required no thought or justification at all. Rather what needed to be ascertained was the type of ceremony appropriate for such an event. Out of the two scenarios proposed by Lowry, the former scenario was adopted. This decision was made despite Lowry admitting that this type of ceremony ultimately placed less emphasis on the Northern Irish government and more on the Lord Mayor and the Corporation. It also, he claimed, led to additional problems with the other larger municipal authorities as it gave ‘rise to a certain amount of jealousy’.\(^{48}\) Although there is no indication that the committee was concerned over the participation of nationalists in the ceremony, an event taking place at either location would have precluded their attendance anyway. Stormont however may have been the least inclusive of two uncomfortable venues. There are arguments for both.

The location for the commemoration is important. From its opening in November 1932, the elaborate Stormont building, located on a hill on the outskirts of Belfast, was seen by the unionist government as a symbol of the maintenance of the Northern Irish state, ‘a permanent monument to partition and the triumph of Ulster unionism’.\(^{49}\) Whilst it is difficult to discern why exactly a joint ceremony was chosen, the

\(^{47}\) PRONI CAB, CAB/9CD/250/1: Letter Lowry to Brooke, 28 September 1944.
\(^{48}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Lowry to Brooke, 28 September 1944.
distance of Stormont from Belfast city centre may have contributed to the decision to hold the ceremony in the city. On the other hand, Alan Greer writing about the creation and building of Stormont, has argued that the location of Stormont, away from the city centre, served to promote the idea that the parliament represented the whole of Northern Ireland and not just Belfast.\(^\text{50}\) This lends credence to Lowry’s feeling that there would be less disapproval if the ceremony was held at Stormont than in conjunction with the Belfast Corporation in the city centre.

Equally, City Hall in the centre of Belfast was not considered by the city’s nationalists as a neutral place for civic duties; representing the place where the Solemn League and Covenant had been signed in September 1912. This Covenant, in protest against the Third Home Rule Bill - passed that same year - was seen as ‘the most impressive domestic political display of resistance in Ulster, perhaps in the United Kingdom, in the twentieth century’. Moreover, where it was signed ‘marked the City Hall in a high-profile and partisan way as a symbol of unionist power and Protestant culture’.\(^\text{51}\) Nevertheless, in true ritualistic form, the government decided to hold part of its ceremony at City Hall. Whilst the government agreed to have a joint ceremony between itself and the Corporation, it did not detract from the government’s participation or suggest that its influence would be minimal; in fact, the opposite was true - with those representing the government primarily making the policy decisions, after which a small executive enacted them. Of pre-eminence for the government was that events organised were comparable with those taking place in London. In order to ensure this, Major McConnell, assistant secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet, was instructed to initiate contact with Mr. A. J. Kelly of the Home Office in an attempt to ascertain what intentions the British government had for this memorable occasion.

The main line of communication between the Northern Irish government and the British government had been the Cabinet Office at Stormont and the Home Office in Whitehall. However, as Birrell and Murie make evident, there was no ‘Home Office interest in devolved matters, and Stormont’s contact with the Home Office was mainly about minor matters such as constitutional points about legislation or visits of diplomats’.\(^\text{52}\) In the earlier years of the Northern Irish state, the Home Office did not

\(^{50}\) Greer, ‘Sir James Craig’, p. 378.

\(^{51}\) Gillian McIntosh, *Belfast City Hall: One Hundred Years* (Belfast, 2006), p. 73.

\(^{52}\) Birrell and Murie, *Policy and Government*, p. 11.
have any officials in employment that were experts on Northern Irish affairs. Nevertheless, there was an element of ‘mutual understanding’ between the Home Office officials and their counterparts in Northern Ireland. Despite this lack of specialisation on issues relating to Northern Ireland, the Home Office would entertain Northern Irish queries whilst other government departments, such as the Treasury, would be more reluctant to accommodate the unionist government. Birrell and Murie describe the relationship between the Cabinet Office at Stormont and the Home Office at Whitehall on administrative concerns as follows:

It consisted primarily of correspondence concerning international agreements, visits by representatives of foreign governments, and appointments to United Kingdom advisory bodies. The business of liaison between the Cabinet Office and the Home Office was literally a daily affair, although owing to the routine nature of the communications the Home Office did not need to have a full-time civil servant dealing solely with Northern Ireland affairs before 1969. However, since 1940 an assistant secretary from the Cabinet Office had been seconded for service in the Home Office and was available for consultation with officials there.

Throughout the planning stages, Kelly provided McConnell and then McWilliam, assistant secretary to the Cabinet, with detailed information of the British proposals for the victory celebrations. However, the over-reliance of the Northern Irish officials on receiving this information from Kelly prevented the committee from confidently implementing any policies until it had consulted the British government’s confirmed plans. Kelly’s insistence on the need for supreme secrecy meant that at times McConnell and then McWilliam could not openly share the material with the committee until it had

55 Arthur, *Special Relationships*, p. 27.
been officially approved in London.\textsuperscript{57} Despite clear indications that both governments had been at least tentatively thinking about victory arrangements by November 1944, Kelly appeared anxious over this rather premature speculation on victory urging McConnell, ‘Mean time [sic], with respect, I think there should be a “damping down” outside official circles of armistice talk.’\textsuperscript{58}

The decision to adopt policies similar to those taking place in Britain meant that the committee, at these early stages, did not put its own stamp on the victory arrangements. Such cautious tactics had a debilitating effect on the committee and made the Northern Irish government appear, to its citizens, to be lacking in direction about the Victory arrangements. On 4 April 1945, the Home Office released to the British press a detailed statement with information on the proposed holidays for schools, industry, essential services and transport to mark the end of the war.\textsuperscript{59} The Northern Irish government for its part only released a short statement to the press on 9 April 1945. This message, brief and elusive in content, merely told the reader that a committee had been established under the direction of the Minister of Home Affairs, the Rt. Hon. J. Edmond Warnock, and that ‘The intention is that the celebrations in Northern Ireland shall take the same general form as those in Gt. Britain.’\textsuperscript{60} It was clear that more information would only be released once the Minister of Home Affairs had consulted with the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, in London on the 11 April, after final decisions had been made.\textsuperscript{61}

On the 16 April, Morrison officially asked Sir Basil Brooke, on behalf of the British War Cabinet, to take on the responsibility of arranging the thanksgiving service

\textsuperscript{58} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Handwritten letter Kelly to McConnell, 31 October 1944.
\textsuperscript{60} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Document: Ulster’s Preparations for Victory Day, 9 April 1945.
\textsuperscript{61} Morrison, like other British ministers, preferred to allow the Northern Irish Government to govern itself without too much interference. Barton, ‘Relations between Westminster and Stormont’, p. 203. By way of example, in March 1922, the Speaker of the House of Commons at Westminster had made it clear that there would be no debating of issues of internal concern to Northern Ireland at Westminster. The British government, therefore, had avoided getting involved in most affairs relating to Northern Ireland from the birth of the Northern Irish state until 1972, when direct rule was imposed from Westminster. Arthur, Special Relationships, pp. 22-23. This further distanced Northern Ireland’s affairs from Britain and caused ‘public indifference’ in Britain in relation to Northern Ireland. McDougall, ‘The Projection of Northern Ireland’, p. 37. Such apathy may also explain why the Northern Irish government was often at pains to stress the constitutional link between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, making apparent at any opportunity the difference between Northern Ireland from Southern Ireland.
in Belfast: an indication that Northern Ireland would not be represented at the London service. On advising the Prime Minister of the inability to predict when the war might end, Morrison urged that the plans ‘may have to be put into operation at short notice, and you may think it desirable to set in train at once the making of the preliminary plans’.  

Realising the need to make serious progress with the arrangements in Northern Ireland, McWilliam immediately contacted Kelly. He argued that on account of Brooke having received the request from Morrison, plans on certain points must have been finalised by the War Cabinet. He pressed that Kelly ascertain what decisions had been reached, ‘if any’, and relay these to him in confidence. This, he said, was of paramount importance as ‘Mr. Warnock’s Committee on arrangements in Northern Ireland are finding it extremely difficult to make much headway in the absence of some clear indication of the line which is going to be taken in Great Britain’.

The lack of information was reflected in the limited progress the committee had made up until April 1945. This sense of confusion amongst the Northern Irish people was matched by the Ministry of Education. Unclear about the government’s policies, its secretary, Mr. Brownell, urged that Robinson, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, provide some clarification of the government’s position regarding holidays both for schools and industry. Brownell specifically questioned which two days would be designated holidays for schools, particularly if the ceasefire was announced on a Saturday. He also wanted to ascertain whether an additional day of paid holiday, as referred to by the British government, would be applied in Northern Ireland to both industry and schools. He wrote:

> The Imperial announcement also refers to ‘an additional day of paid holiday’ at a later date ‘to be determined according to local circumstances’. This lead will doubtless be followed in Northern Ireland and, on the assumption that the additional day would be granted as a holiday in schools in Great Britain, this Ministry would follow suit.

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62 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Morrison to Brooke, 16 April 1945.
63 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter McWilliam to Kelly, 20 April 1945.
64 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Brownell to Robinson, 9 April 1945.
For Brownell, it was of upmost importance that any announcement prepared by the Northern Irish committee had to resolve the points of contention discussed in his letter. Additionally, he requested that the Ministry of Education be permitted to preview those sections of a draft proposal that related to schools ‘so as to make certain that the wording fits in with our Regulations governing authorised closings’.65

Unsurprisingly, and with the agreement of the Governor, the policies adopted by the Northern Irish government differed little from those implemented in London. Yet it was not until after a Northern Irish Cabinet meeting on 3 May 1945 that the Government Press Officer sent final arrangements for the victory celebrations to the local newspapers.66 Having originally decided as early as October 1944 that no official celebrations would take place on those days of national holiday - Victory Day and the following day – the committee remained steadfast in its decision and its plans remained unaltered.67 However, Sir Basil Brooke and the Lord Major of Belfast, Sir Crawford McCullagh, suggested that if prior warning could be issued, they and other public figures such as the Governor, would give speeches at City Hall.68 After Churchill declared the war over, flags were also to be flown from government buildings, church bells were to be rung and Churchill’s speech was to be broadcast through loudspeakers at City Hall.69 In addition, on Victory Day, churches of all denominations were asked to remain open. Theatres and cinemas were expected to stay open until their normal closing hour, whilst dance-halls which had applied to local authorities to remain open later than usual, were expected to be considered ‘sympathetically’ by the local authorities.70 As some Presbyterian groups were known to disapprove of the holding of

67 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter McConnell to Kelly, 20 October 1944. The British government had hoped that if hostilities gradually ended that the ‘mood of the public might be averse to elaborate celebrations and it was considered undesirable that more than a very limited amount of public rejoicing should be organised’. See PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Kelly to McConnell, 1 November 1944.
70 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: ‘Government Announcement – Celebration of the Termination of Organised Hostilities in Europe’, 3 May 1945. The Governor was angered that the Northern Irish government could not ensure the late opening hours of public houses, similar to Britain. He threatened to put forward an Order-in-Council to guarantee this late opening. Gransden, on considering the Governor’s position, replied that the Cabinet felt that they could do little to alter the statute which dictated the opening hours of licensed premises in Northern Ireland. He did, however, propose that he would suggest to local authorities that they should accommodate the late opening of dance halls. Gransden had argued that in Northern Ireland there was no break throughout the day in which licensed premises closed, as took place in England. Therefore, he stated that a prolongation of opening hours
dances in general, in this instance it was probably better for the Northern Irish government to re-enact those policies that were taking place in Britain.\textsuperscript{71}

Despite the fact that the committee had toyed with the idea of having military bands stationed in the grounds of City Hall and around Belfast on Victory Day, none were actually arranged.\textsuperscript{72} An interested Belfast citizen, Mrs Mabel Mitchell, was granted permission from the Northern Irish government to arrange thanksgiving services in Belfast city centre and its outskirts on the night of Victory Day. These services were to be introduced by the playing of the national anthem followed by the hymn ‘O God Our Help in Ages Past’.\textsuperscript{73} Equally, the Ulster United Prayer Movement had organised for a thanksgiving service to take place at noon in the City Hall grounds on Victory Day.\textsuperscript{74} In relation to holidays, Northern Ireland was to get the same holidays as those taken in Britain, including an extra day of holiday granted for factories.\textsuperscript{75} It was clear that the government’s decision not to prepare anything for Victory Day itself by way of entertainment activities had spurred other groups and local people to make their own alternative arrangements. How the government imagined the victory celebrations was clearly not in tune with the local population. Direct appeals to the government to hold public services were an indication that some kind of structured activity for Victory Day itself was needed for the local population.


\textsuperscript{72} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Document: Notes of Meeting held on 21 February, 1945, to Discuss Arrangements about the European “Cease-Fire” Celebrations.

\textsuperscript{73} PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Handwritten letter Mitchell to McCullagh, 4 May 1945. There is no indication of which organisation Mrs Mitchell worked for as she sent a personal letter to the Mayor herself. However, it appears that Mrs Mitchell had been married to Lieutenant Colonel A. B. Mitchell, a Belfast surgeon. PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Handwritten letter Mitchell to Major Hay (Secretary to the Major), 8 April 1945.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, ‘Ulster rejoices in Victory’, 9 May 1945.

\textsuperscript{75} Brownell, the secretary to the Ministry of Education, somehow misinterpreted this statement. In a letter he sent to Gransden on 1 June 1945 he recalled the ‘Imperial announcement’ made in April 1945 from which Brownell had inferred that an extra day of holiday, to be determined by the government, would also be extended to both schools and industry. Having issued a circular in May 1945 to the tune that the Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland would grant an extra holiday to schools, Brownell asked Gransden for his advice on resolving the problem. Gransden’s reply was unhelpful in that he rested the blame for this misinterpretation with the Ministry of Education itself stating that both the British and Northern Irish government statements had been clear on the holiday situation. Such fundamental errors suggest that there were at least communication issues in Stormont or that the indecisiveness of the Victory committee did not help prevent such confusion. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Brownell to Gransden, 1 June 1945; PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Document: ‘Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland – Victory Day, signed by Brownell, May 1945; PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gransden to Brownell, 5 June 1945.
The Religious Dimension to the Celebrations

The glaring lack of ceremonials open to ordinary people on the two days of national holiday is evidence of the Northern Irish government’s priorities. The main focus was to be Thanksgiving Sunday and the victory parade, which arguably had less to do with giving expression to the Northern Irish people and more to ensuring that Northern Ireland had its own state ceremony to place it on a par with the other capitals in the United Kingdom. Interestingly, as early as October 1944, the Right Reverend Andrew Gibson, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland representatives of Saint Anne’s Cathedral in Belfast, had expressed their interest in preparing the thanksgiving service to commemorate the end of the war.\(^6\) Rev. Gibson however, uneasy with the rather relaxed attitude of the government in relation to the religious aspect, was forthright in impressing his opinion that such a service needed to be planned well in advance. He explained in no uncertain terms that the inherent uncertainty of when victory would be announced meant that holding a ‘combined service’, regardless of whichever Church was asked to administer the task, was an ambitious and time-consuming affair and one that demanded a great deal of attention. He added that:

> I am of opinion that the Sunday following the ending of the war will be observed in all our congregations as a Day of Thanksgiving. And should that day co-incide with the appointment of His Majesty there might be little time for preparation.\(^7\)

For Rev. Gibson, such an ‘occasion is too big and too sacred, should the War end more unexpectedly than we dare hope, for anything in the nature of an observance to be


\(^7\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gibson to Henderson, undated but likely to be sometime between 16 October 1944 to 19 October 1944.
planned without due care’. For the religious authorities, advanced preparation was the only course of action that would do justice to such a memorable occasion.

Despite the concerns of Rev. Gibson, the committee did not appear overly concerned about inquiries from the various religious authorities. Instead, Henderson merely proposed that if the religious authorities were concerned, the Heads of the Churches should meet to discuss the service. This somewhat removed, for the meantime, the problem from the committee. Aware of the potential for disagreement, this meeting, Henderson decided, would be best facilitated by the Cabinet to ‘avoid squabbles’ amongst the religious leaders. After this initial sign of slight enthusiasm, for many months there was little discussion of the thanksgiving service, partly because enquiries from McWilliam to Kelly in late February 1945 had proven fruitless. At this point, the only assurance Kelly could give McWilliam was that no further decisions had been made but that plans were being continually revised. Kelly specified that he had been informed that the arrangements for the celebration of the end of the war “will be taken off the ice at the proper time”. Nevertheless, by the end of March, the British government had made significant decisions on its thanksgiving service, which compelled the Northern Irish committee to delegate the responsibility for maintaining contact with the religious authorities to a small sub-committee of two: Robinson, permanent secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs and McWilliam, assistant secretary to the Cabinet.

In the end, a combined service took place in Saint Anne’s Cathedral in Belfast on 13 May. The preacher at this service was the Right Reverend Andrew Gibson, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland while the lessons were read by Rev. W. L. Northridge, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Right. Rev. John Hind. The Bishop of Connor and the Dean of Belfast

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78 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gibson to Henderson, undated but likely to be sometime between 16 October 1944 to 19 October 1944.
79 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Henderson to McConnell, 19 October 1944.
80 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Handwritten note written by McWilliam dated 18 February 1945, which indicated that Kelly had advised him by telephone that final decisions were still pending further review. This handwritten note is found on a teleprinter message from McWilliam to Kelly, 17 February 1945.
82 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gransden to Bishop William Down, 7 April 1945.
also took part in the service.\textsuperscript{84} After careful discussion between Gransden and Henderson, it was decided that tickets to the service were to be issued by the Dean and Chapter of Saint Anne’s Cathedral. This decision was similar to that which had taken place at the United Service of Thanksgiving on the Silver Jubilee of Their Majesties in 1935. For Gransden, this was seen as a ‘more appropriate’ precedent to follow than that adopted for Lord Carson’s funeral. On the latter occasion, the Ministry of Home Affairs, along with the Dean, issued the tickets. For the victory celebrations, despite giving the religious authorities some power over the distribution of tickets, this power was restricted by the committee’s pre-condition that it should be consulted in the preparation of the guest lists.\textsuperscript{85}

The guests invited to the Belfast service did not differ greatly from those invited to the official thanksgiving service in London.\textsuperscript{86} In London, however, there was more of an emphasis on the civilian dimension. The Interdepartmental Conference held in London to discuss the British government’s plans proposed that apart from political, diplomatic and military guests, there should be workers from agriculture, transport, public utilities, mining, armament industries and ‘if possible men and women decorated for gallantry during raids’, invited to the thanksgiving service. In addition, to include the younger generations, representatives of the Youth Organisations were to be invited and, on the spiritual side, representatives of ‘the clergy of all other denominations – Jews, Baptists, etc’ were to be asked to attend. Moreover, to show the importance of the role

\textsuperscript{85} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gransden to Robinson, 7 April 1945.  
\textsuperscript{86} Those guests invited to the service included: Government House, the Prime Minister and his guests, the Minister of Home Affairs and his guests, the Cabinet, Privy Council, the Senate, the Northern Ireland House of Commons, Northern Ireland Representatives in the Imperial Parliament, His Majesty’s Lieutenants and Deputy Lieutenant, the Heads of the Departments of the Civil Service, Benchers of Inns of Court and the Recorder of Belfast, High Sheriffs, Heads of the United Kingdom Departments in Northern Ireland, City Administrators, Dr. Lindsay Keir from Queen’s University, the Editors of the four local newspapers - the Belfast Telegraph, the Belfast News-Letter, the Northern Whig, the Irish News - the British Legion, the Red Cross, Saint John’s Ambulance, representative of Civil Defence, Lady Montgomery (Mother of Field Marshall Sir Bernard Montgomery), the Earl of Caledon (brother of Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander), Mr. G. I. Marshall and Miss Ursula Eason of the BBC, the Reform Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Trade, the Inspector General, the American Consul General, Belfast Harbour Commissioners, Belfast Water Commissioners, the Belfast Corporation, the Heads of the Services and the Allied Services, Local Government Associations, Pre-Service Units, and contingents of the various groups of the Armed Forces and voluntary groups, totalling 200 people. An approximate number for all those invited totalled 684 people. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: ‘Distribution of Tickets’.
As an indication of the popularity of the thanksgiving service, Reverend McClure, the Vicar Choral, on distributing the maximum of 60 tickets set aside for the Belfast Corporation urged the need to return any tickets that would not be used as he claimed that they would ‘be eagerly sought by others’. In the end, Major Hay had exceeded McClure’s limit with the unexpectedly high number of 37 members of the Corporation and 36 ladies as their guests wanting to attend. PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Handwritten letter McClure to Dunlop, 3 May 1945. PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Letter Hay to McClure, 10 May 1945.
of the housewife during the war, the Conference suggested, ‘if at all possible some representative British housewives who have carried on in the Metropolis amidst all the difficulties and dangers of war’ should be amongst those invited to the service.\(^{87}\)

In Northern Ireland, war workers were included in the service; however, the focus was mainly on those in shipbuilding and engineering.\(^{88}\) There was no mention of considering the attendance of housewives to the service and absolutely no discussion of representatives of the other denominations being invited.\(^{89}\) Instead Warnock, the Minister of Home Affairs, had written to the Heads of all the Churches in Northern Ireland, including the Cardinal Archbishop of Armagh, Cardinal MacRory, to ask them to prepare their own services.\(^{90}\) Interestingly, those Nationalist members of the Northern Irish House of Commons who had not sworn an oath of allegiance to the British Crown were not invited to the service. However, there is evidence that a Catholic Auctioneer, James Boyle, was invited. It is, nevertheless, unclear whether the Lord Mayor’s secretary, who had invited him, was aware that he was a Catholic. It is also plausible that he was a member of the Corporation. In any case, he kindly turned down the offer with the excuse that ‘the Catholic Church has also arranged for a Thanksgiving Service to be held on the same day’.\(^{91}\)

The attendance of Catholics at the service must have been of some concern for the government. In communication with Rev. H. N. McClure, who had been attending to the invitations, the Lord Mayor’s Secretary had intimated that out of the sixty

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\(^{87}\) In addition to those already mentioned, the more lengthy guest-list proposed by the Interdepartmental Conference for the London ceremony also included: the Cabinet, the Diplomatic Corps, the Heads of the Services, the High Commissioners, representatives of the Judiciary, Heads of the Civil Service, the Board of the Admiralty, the Army Council, the Air Council, the Dominion and Allied Naval, Military, and Air Liaison Officers, representatives from the Merchant Navy, and Civil Defence representatives. In addition to the Heads of the Fighting Services there were to be contingents from the ‘rank and file of the Fighting Services, including, for instance, men and women from the A.A. Command, the Bomb Disposal Services, the Observer Corps, and if possible convalescent personnel; Voluntary Organisations; and representatives of ‘miscellaneous bodies’ such as E.N.S.A. and N.A.A.F.I. As the document suggests, this is similar to what took place on 12 November 1918 when King George V attended the thanksgiving service at St. Paul’s Cathedral. See PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Document: Second Report of the Interdepartmental Conference.

\(^{88}\) McIntosh states that the Northern Irish government’s pride in the admirable war production of munitions, ships, rope and different fabrics meant that war workers were given a prime part to play in the visit of the king and queen in July 1945. They were also treated to a garden party in Botanic gardens. Perhaps their neglect at the thanksgiving service in May 1945 was compensated by the Royal visit. McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 121.

\(^{89}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: ‘Distribution of Tickets’.

\(^{90}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Robinson to Gransden, 2 May 1945. For more information on MacRory and his anti-British stance see Fisk, In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster, and the Price of Neutrality, 1939-1945: 93, 355, 458 and 512-513.

\(^{91}\) PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Letter James Boyle to Hay, 7 May 1945.
members of the Corporation, ‘a certain number will definitely not attend’. Whether this is a reference to those Nationalist Councillors is unclear, but it is a plausible inference. Attendance at the service in Belfast, therefore, seemed to imply some degree of political and religious solidarity on the part of unionists, and a disregard, either enforced by the government or voluntarily, on nationalist attendance. Looking at this in an abstract manner, their invisibility served to write them out of the war effort and made this event another defining moment of unionism.

The formality of the ritual and its close association with the government was, whether deliberate or not, always going to restrict the nationalist contribution. As the Governor reached the Cathedral he was greeted by a Guard of Honour of the three Services and a band. On entering the Cathedral, state chairs were reserved for the Prime Minister, His Majesty’s Lieutenants, the Lord Chief of Justice, the Heads of the Services, their guests and the Cabinet, whilst the Belfast Corporation sat in their designated area. This hierarchical positioning of the guests, and the symbolism of the Governor, transformed the public space of the Cathedral into a sacred display of patriotism and loyalty to the British Crown. In the Cathedral, the ‘unity of Ulster’s thanksgiving was symbolised by .... people of all Protestant denominations’ taking part in ‘prayer and praise’. ‘Ulster’s’ unity was therefore defined as a Protestant affair and the invited guests were welcomed inside the Cathedral to the playing of the National Anthem, just before the service began.

Rituals often have a dramatic element depending on which props are employed and, in this case, the members of the Council of the County Borough of Belfast wore their robes, retaining them for the procession from City Hall to the Saluting Base. The

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93 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Henderson to Gransden, 5 May 1945. The committee decided that the Governor was to be greeted by this reception guard because the historic city ceremony at Temple Bar was to take place in London. This ceremony was a formal procession in which troops lined the streets from Temple Bar to the Cathedral. At the Cathedral, the procession was met by a Civil Defence Reception Guard. However, in Northern Ireland they did not find it necessary to have a formal procession to the actual Cathedral. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gransden to Henderson, 3 May 1945. See also PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Teleprinter Message Kelly to Gransden, 3 May 1945; PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Memo by Ministry of Home Affairs, 3 May 1945.
94 PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Minutes of Meeting of VE-Day Committee Held on 1 May 1945.
97 PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Letter Dunlop to Members of the Council of the County Borough of Belfast, Administrators and the Recorder, 10 May 1945. David Chaney, writing about civic ritual, notes
Governor also asked that any guests invited to the service, who had been awarded war medals or decorations, to have them clearly on display. Those guests still serving in the Armed Forces were to attend in service dress adorned with medal ribbons, but without swords. In order to share in this theatrical moment and make the service more accessible to the ordinary citizen, the editors of the local newspapers who had been invited to the service were pre-warned by F. M. Adams, the Government Press Officer, of the expected attendance list and general plans for the day’s events. In particular, the *Belfast News-Letter* ran a detailed article on all these points, including the estimated numbers of servicemen and women taking part in the parade. Reporting on the rituals in this type of detail enabled reporters to encourage readers to feel part of the day’s events, even if, having no invitation, they could not physically take part in the service.

The unifying potential of ritual - a neo-Durkheimian argument - has been followed by Edwards and Shils on their examination of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, which took place in London in June 1953. For them, this was a moment that transformed British society into ‘one large family’. The Prime Ministers, queens and ambassadors of the Commonwealth of Nations present at the ceremony were imagined to be a ‘family of nations’. However, this homogeneity was not applicable to Northern Ireland at the thanksgiving service of 1945. Not being represented at the official service in Saint Anne’s Protestant Cathedral, the Catholic Churches held their own independent services, which were widely attended by a large number of those in the British and United States Armies. Although the editor of the *Irish News* had been invited to the official thanksgiving service, the newspaper dedicated very little column space to the said service, concentrating instead on those services taking place in the Catholic Churches.
Considering the Catholic Church in Northern Ireland refused to recognise the existence of the Northern Irish state, it would have been difficult for Catholics to attend the official state-led service, not to mention the animosity that existed between the Protestant and Catholic faiths. Only a few days earlier at a Confirmation ceremony in Strabane, His Lordship Most Reverend Dr. Farren, the Catholic Bishop of Derry, had warned parents of the dangers of Catholic children forming friendships with children of other faiths. Pleading that caution needed to be exercised, he described:

the shame and the disgrace of Catholic people who had gone into Masonic and Orange halls to play games, and allowed their names to appear in the public Press side by side with prominent members of the Masonic Order.\(^\text{104}\)

It was evident that bigotry and suspicion existed within both communities and that public perceptions were clearly important. Therefore, the holding of the official thanksgiving service in the Protestant Cathedral would have been perceived by the Catholic community as a Protestant, unionist service which united the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches and which excluded Catholic participation.

**The Performance of Victory**

Despite the centrality of the thanksgiving service and the victory parade for the government’s victory celebrations, by May 1945 little attention had been given to the planning of the parade. As with the thanksgiving service, the committee decided not to progress until it received definite plans from Britain. Nevertheless, whilst waiting for information on the British arrangements, the committee made no concerted effort to become acquainted with the plans prepared by other local authorities in Northern

\(^{104}\text{Irish News}, \text{‘Derry Bishop’s Warning to Parents’}, 5 \text{ May 1945.}\)
Ireland. This lack of communication implied a serious weakness with the strategy of the victory committee, and also alluded to a rather Belfast-centric attitude in relation to the event.\(^\text{105}\) It was not until 3 May that Robinson and the representatives of the Services agreed that local authorities should notify Service units in their areas, with the suggestion that they help organise their own parades.\(^\text{106}\)

The reluctance to progress before that point with the victory parade arrangements rested in the uncertainty about who would take the salute at the March Past. Following tradition, it was argued that if Royalty took the salute in London then the Northern Irish government was responsible for organising the parade in Belfast. On the other hand, if Royalty did not take the salute then the responsibility fell on the Belfast Corporation. In the end, the Corporation organised the victory parade and had the task of discerning which Services were available to participate.\(^\text{107}\) So determined was the Northern Irish government that a similar parade should take place as the one in London, it ignored the joint pleas of the Bishop of Down and Dromore and the Bishop of Connor that a parade should not take place on Thanksgiving Sunday. Robinson, on writing to Gransden, intimated that the Bishops ‘were strongly of opinion that in Northern Ireland, irrespective of what is done in England, the victory parades should not be held on Thanksgiving Sunday but on some week-day’. Whilst acknowledging and appreciating the requests of the religious authorities, he admitted that ‘the Committee recognise the general desirability of following England as closely as possible on this matter’, and revealed that the Heads of the Forces had been asked to work alongside the local authorities in Britain to organise the parades, which would take place on Thanksgiving Sunday.\(^\text{108}\)

Such constrictions left little room for originality, but then originality was not deemed important. The parades that took place in Belfast and London were therefore similar, if not in their size then at least in their general make-up.\(^\text{109}\) In Northern Ireland,

\(^{105}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Robinson to Gransden, 2 May 1945.

\(^{106}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Memo by Ministry of Home Affairs, 3 May 1945.

\(^{107}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Memo by Ministry of Home Affairs, 3 May 1945.

\(^{108}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Robinson to Gransden, 2 May 1945.

\(^{109}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Home Office Circular No. 97 /1945 ‘Celebration of the Termination of Organised Hostilities in Europe’ signed A. Maxwell, to the Clerk of the Council or the Town Clerk, the Clerk of the Licensing Justices, 30 April 1945. This circular was forwarded to Chief Constables by S. A Baker of the Home Office in Whitehall on 30 April 1945. Earlier a less detailed circular was sent to Chief Constables in Great Britain. See Home Office Circular No. 94/ 1945 ‘Announcement of V.E. Day’ signed S. A. Baker to the Chief Constable, 28 April 1945. On 2 May 1945, Gransden forwarded these circulars to relevant ministries in Northern Ireland. Both of these circulars were passed on to Robinson,
the parade of 3,000 strong was to include a mixed display of national and international troops: the British Armed Forces; the Royal Canadian Navy; the United States Forces; the Belgian Army; the Ulster Home Guard; the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Special Constabulary. Civilian Organisations taking part in the march past included the British Red Cross; the Women’s Voluntary Service; the Girl’s Training Corps; the Old Contemptibles Association; the British Legion; the National Fire Service; Merchant Navy; and Munitions Workers. Exact marching precision was expected with 15 paces being maintained between Detachments and 100 paces between Services. All troops were to march in columns of three, except for the Royal Ulster Constabulary, which was to march past in a column of four with bands providing the music. Even the form of dress had to be strictly adhered to, with marchers permitted to wear greatcoats or waterproof capes only when gathering at the assembly point. After that, and during the march past, these coats had to be removed.110 Those taking part in the parade had to exercise a disciplined manner whilst assembling and leaving the parade, being warned that they were to ‘be under the eyes of the local populace’.111 In short, the concise arrangements for the victory parade suggested that victory was to be performed through a visible display of order and patriotism.

The parade itself was greeted with much enthusiasm as people and families gathered on the streets of Belfast hours before the parade was to commence. The Belfast News-Letter described scenes of ‘eager spectators ... swarming on the roofs of air-raid shelters and clinging to statues, lamp-posts and trees above the heads of a throng which packed Donegall Place solidly right back to Castle Junction’.112 Describing the scene in a theatrical and vivid manner the newspaper continued:

A hush fell on the crowd. A number of men in hospital blue had come out of the City Hall and, some on crutches, some hopping on one leg, made their way to a space along the processional route marked ‘Reserved for Wounded.’ One of them, a mere boy in

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110 PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Ceremony to Celebrate the Cessation of Hostilities in Europe. 1715 Hrs 13 May, 1945.
appearance, was carried out on a stretcher. Raising himself on one elbow, he looked around at the crowd. He, too, was smiling.\textsuperscript{113}

These men were soon followed by the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, the High Sheriff and members of the Corporation, who took up positions on the Saluting Base near the wounded men.\textsuperscript{114} This embodied display of patriotism and self-sacrifice, poignantly witnessed by one of the wounded soldiers being carried on a stretcher to the designated ‘Reserved for Wounded’ area, the war ‘literally inscribed’ on their bodies, was the message that the Northern Irish government wanted to make to the British government.\textsuperscript{115} Although the identity of these wounded men is not specified, the message that both the government and Corporation were trying to put across was that Northern Ireland had suffered - just as other parts of the United Kingdom and through this experience Northern Ireland was a part of an ‘imagined British community’.\textsuperscript{116} The pre-conditions for such thinking already existed amongst the unionist population, but the success of the parade was to be gauged through the spectators.

Having had little direction or involvement in the victory celebrations up until this point, the parade offered a chance for the spectators - the local populace of Belfast - to share in the victory experience. The \textit{Belfast News-Letter} tried to capture the mood with the heading, ‘Nation Gives Thanks for Victory’. Yet to which ‘Nation’ was it referring? Writing for a Protestant readership, the newspaper created a symbolic representation of an imagined nation in Northern Ireland, even if this nation included men and women from other Allied countries. As Ewan Morris aptly writes:

Groups of people become nations by identifying with common symbols, and individuals become aware of their membership in the


\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘Victory Parade in Belfast’, 14 May 1945.


nation as they become conscious that they share their attachment to certain symbols with others.¹¹⁷

The ‘Nation’ in this case was constructed to demonstrate on a superficial level the collectivising effect of the victory celebrations. There was no room for dissent in these events and so, like the official thanksgiving service, the appearance of order and loyalty to the British Crown was paramount. In order to secure this façade and for security reasons, the police ordered that passes be issued to permit people entry into City Hall grounds to view the March Past.¹¹⁸ This restriction of the symbolic and public space of City Hall to permit holders only, testifies to the latent message in the collective victory proceedings: the government wanted to institutionalise the parade (and the service in the Cathedral) as a unionist event, attended by only those loyal to the Crown and determined to maintain the union with Britain. Despite this semblance of order, there were moments when the spectators became more than mere onlookers. The Belfast News-Letter described how enthusiastic crowds blocking the route of the parade made it appear ‘doubtful whether there would be sufficient space for the procession to proceed’.¹¹⁹ However, whilst the Belfast News-Letter directed criticism about the lack of crowd control not only at the Services, but toward the organisers of the parade, it simultaneously highlighted the ‘eagerness’ of the people to witness this ‘historic spectacle’.¹²⁰

A Speech with an Ulterior Motive?

These staple ceremonies in which the Northern Irish government performed its oneness with Britain became a definition of what it was like to live in a unionist Northern Irish state. These embodied performances were more than displays of loyalty. They were displays of memory that reminded those taking part that Northern Ireland,

being a part of the United Kingdom, enjoyed the King as its Head and was determined to maintain that constitutional relationship. Just as the memory of the First World War in Northern Ireland had been cast as a unionist affair, so too was the Second World War, with all its ceremonial associations to the British Crown, in May 1945. A part of this story then is the realisation that the unionist government held the power in Northern Ireland and without a proper opposition in government, the unionist view would prevail. This ceremonial occasion came to represent another:

means by which one group advances or defends its interests by exaggerating the degree of consensus and hiding the realistic interests of other groups. Thus, potential conflicts in the public arena are hidden from consciousness.121

In this sense, the thanksgiving service and victory parade were presented as collectivising events, even if these events made nationalist participation problematic.

Despite the elaborate, official victory celebrations which could have been interpreted as evidence of unionist self-confidence, the Northern Irish government’s reliance on following the British example complicates this hypothesis. Northern Ireland gained much recognition for its wartime role, which, due to its strategic position made it an important player on the Allied side. Nevertheless, aspects of the wartime effort did not always reveal a positive contribution, as the introduction to this thesis has shown. In order to bolster its image at home and abroad, it could be argued that the government used the memorable moment of the victory celebrations to showcase Northern Ireland’s positive contribution to the war. If there was any doubt about why so much attention had been directed into replicating the ceremonies in London, the speech made by Brooke in the Northern Ireland House of Commons to a Motion to be addressed to the King, on 15 May 1945, clearly revealed the agenda of the Northern Irish government. Whilst on a theoretical level it is important to notice how ‘embodied memory’ is witnessed through such performative rituals as the thanksgiving service and

victory parade, it is also beneficial to be aware of how these were complimented by the 'textual or discursive memory' found in the speech made by Brooke to the King.\textsuperscript{122}

Addressing the Northern Ireland House of Commons, Brooke recalled the example Royalty had set during the war years, where it had acted as an 'inspiration' for all its 'loyal subjects' due to its 'self-dedication', 'courage' and 'far-seeing and fearless leadership'.\textsuperscript{123} What was more elaborately discussed however was the role Northern Ireland had played in the war. 'We in Ulster', exclaimed the Prime Minister, 'have been in this war heart and soul. Every member of our Ulster community has had his or her part to play in shaping the pattern of victory'. Ulster's 'sons and daughters' had contributed to the war by going out to fight with 'high hearts', industrial workers had 'laboured untiringly', farmers had 'made strides in agricultural methods' while many others joined voluntary services. All this, Brooke claimed, was 'gladly given and without thought of thanks or reward'. Rather, Ulster was 'proud to be a part of the United Kingdom, linked with its people and with the people of the Allied nations in the greatest struggle the world has ever known'.\textsuperscript{124}

Whilst Brooke reiterated the fact that Northern Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom, it was also important for the Northern Irish government to emphasise Northern Ireland’s connection with the other Allied nations. To do this, Brooke offered a message of congratulations to the American and Russian governments for the victory, which they had helped to achieve. However, by carrying out this act, the Prime Minister seemed to propose that Northern Ireland was different to other parts of the United Kingdom; that it was somehow more worthy than the rest of the United Kingdom to

\textsuperscript{122} Spillman and Conway, 'Texts, Bodies, and the Memory', p. 81.
\textsuperscript{123} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: The Prime Minister - Motion for an Address to His Majesty. This part of the motion, which focuses on the King, appears to have been written at some point in September 1944. The file in which it is located suggests that Gransden had asked Sir Arthur Quekett, Parliamentary Draftsman, to propose amendments to the draft speech that Gransden had prepared. See PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter Gransden to Quekett, 18 September 1944. The fact that some or all of the speech was seemingly written by Gransden/Quekett is not as important as the fact that it was made in the name of the Prime Minister. The implied message in the speech is what matters most in an analysis of such official addresses. For a discussion of this see John Wilson, Politically Speaking: The Pragmatic Analysis of Political Language (Oxford, 1990), p. 10 as cited in Katy Hayward, 'The Politics of Nuance: Irish Official Discourse on Northern Ireland', Irish Political Studies 19, no. 1 (2004), p. 20. The Belfast News-Letter published the full text of the speech on 15 May 1945 stating that it was an address to be made by Sir Basil Brooke to the King in the House of Commons on the following day. See Belfast News-Letter, 'Ulster Commons: Address to the King To-Day', 15 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{124} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Prime Minister’s Speech on the Motion for an Address to His Majesty Following the Announcement of Victory in Europe. This part of the motion, which looks more into Northern Ireland’s role, appears to have been written months after the first part directed to the King himself.
offers its own message of gratitude. At the same time, this act contrarily suggested that
the Northern Irish government saw Northern Ireland more as a Dominion than a
fundamental part of the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, despite these contradictory
moves, Brooke ensured in his concluding remarks that Northern Ireland’s constitutional
position was clearly defined. In a poignant statement, redefining this constitutional
position and providing an explanation for why his government had engaged in such
elaborate victory celebrations, Brooke remarked:

In the final part of the struggle we in Ulster, along with the people of
Great Britain, will continue to the end. I have used the expression ‘we
in Ulster along with the people of Great Britain.’ We cherish our right
to use that phrase. The truth behind it – our continued association
with Great Britain as a part of the United Kingdom – gave us the
right to take part in this mighty struggle and gives us now the right to
rejoice and to express our rejoicing.\footnote{PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Prime Minister’s Speech on the Motion for an Address to His
Majesty Following the Announcement of Victory in Europe.}

This overemphasis on the notion of Northern Ireland having a ‘right’ reveals what was
at the heart of all this pomp and pageantry: the insecurity of the Northern Irish
government in a post-war world, and the determination of the unionist government to
ensure that its place within the United Kingdom would not be called into disrepute.
Only by the partitioning of Ireland and Northern Ireland’s disassociation from Ireland
was it possible for Northern Ireland to be a part of the war. Nevertheless, Brooke’s
statement is full of fallacies: Northern Ireland had no ‘right’ – it was obliged to come
into the war as it lacked the constitutional powers to make such decisions. However,
this speech served as a reminder of the need to maintain that separation and protect
Northern Ireland’s role within the United Kingdom.
Conclusion

As a ritualised event, the Northern Irish government, in consultation with the Belfast Corporation and the Services, managed to pull off a successful Thanksgiving Sunday service and victory parade. There appeared to be no serious mishaps and both were well attended. However, the fact that the government never stopped to actually ask why they should even organise such commemorative acts, or how this event could be celebrated in a manner which could unite both nationalists and unionists, is intriguing. At no point during the course of arranging for this commemoration did the government consider how the nationalist community and its Church leaders could integrate into the festivities. The failure to even address these issues suggests that the government never intended this celebration of the end of the war in the West to be anything more than a confirmation of unionism and an expression of national identity.

Events leading up to the war had demonstrated the instability of community relations in Northern Ireland, and had shown how the mobilisation of ritualised acts could disrupt this fragile existence. Ritual in Northern Ireland was not and could not be a device for promoting social solidarity, as neo-Durkheimians would argue. Having an official state ceremony, which united all the Protestant denominations, merely served to alienate the Catholic Church. That the latter would not participate in such an ecumenical affair was problematic. However, there is no indication that the government had even tried to make this a possibility. Instead, Catholic participation was ignored – it did not fit into the structure of events that had been planned for the commemoration.

In any case, the spectacle of unionism linking Northern Ireland so irrefutably to the British Crown and Empire would have been antithetical to the Catholic Church and its followers. It is therefore difficult to imagine what other type of service could have been planned for such an event – perhaps one void of all connections to British imperialism? This, however, would not have sufficed unionist needs. The government was clearly using the event to demonstrate the importance of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom and its unfaltering loyalty to Britain, the Empire and the Commonwealth. Sir Basil Brooke’s speech to the King said as much. The questions then posed by Steven Lukes’ argument at the beginning of this chapter – of whether, why and for whom these ritual events produce such solidarity – have been adequately answered.
However, in this process of over concentrating on the official, arguably state-building dimension to the commemoration, the government and Corporation had overlooked the needs of the ordinary person. That an editorial comment in the *Belfast Telegraph*, a newspaper normally supportive of the government, would complain that there was little in the way of entertainment for the people, highlights the priorities and failures of the government and Corporation. The spectacle of the victory parade did go some way to accommodating the people but these events were, nevertheless, displays of patriotism to the British Crown and connected Northern Ireland closely with Britain. For a nationalist observer, this association would have been difficult to accommodate, let alone celebrate.

As the next chapter will show, there were potential moments in the victory celebrations that witnessed shared rejoicing. If the committee had dedicated less time to the official dimension of the commemoration and more time to galvanising people’s relief, then the story being told here could have had a different outcome. Building on Durkheim’s theory of the power of ritual in encouraging group cohesiveness, David Kertzer on the one hand justifies Durkheim’s argument by stating, ‘Thus, ritual can promote social solidarity without implying that people share the same values, or even the same interpretation of the ritual.’ On the other, he sees strength in the line of argument proposed by Lukes and states that ‘far from promoting social solidarity in the first place, rituals often foster social divisiveness’. Nevertheless, Kertzer, by realising the potential of ritual to unite one group at the expense of another and thus ‘undermining the solidarity of the society as a whole’, reveals how:

Ritual proves valuable to many political groups and movements in just this way. All this leaves ritual with a more important political role than it would have if it only served to cement whole societies. Since it can bind together all sorts of political groups, it plays a key part in the political struggle of competing power seekers, factions, and

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subsocieties [sic], and it is a valuable tool in building nationalism, societal chauvinism, and the conditions for war.\textsuperscript{128}

As this chapter has shown, the Northern Irish government used the victory celebrations to ‘bind together’ unionism. Fear over the possibility of a Labour victory in the upcoming British General Election, particularly with Labour’s history of support for Irish unity, also created the atmosphere in which the victory commemoration should be read. The insecurity of the government was masked by these elaborate displays of patriotism to Britain, but they are unveiled through an examination of the inflexibility of the victory committee to organise the victory celebrations in a manner remotely different to the British government. Brooke’s plea to the King that Northern Ireland had a ‘right’ to be a part of the United Kingdom is visibly demonstrated through the choreography of the thanksgiving service and victory parade. As one editorial writer for the \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, referring to Northern Ireland’s strategic role in the war stated ‘Yesterday’s victory parade through the streets of Belfast was proof that it is a continuing asset.’\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{128} Kertzer, \textit{Ritual, Politics}, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘How the North Saved Eire’, 14 May 1945.
Belfast is a very strange city – so strange that there are very few occasions when Catholics and Protestants can rejoice together. The ending of the war provided one of these occasions. I am sure there are many people in the city who would wish that more of these occasions would arise. German airmen were no respecters of peoples or religions when they came over here. Catholic and Protestant homes were destroyed, and Catholic men and women died as a result of the attacks. Catholics and Protestants flocked out the roads together, sheltered in others homes, and condoled with one another.

‘Random Jottings’, *Irish News*¹

¹ *Irish News*, ‘Random Jottings: VE Day Celebrations’, 15 May 1945. This quotation was taken from the ‘Random Jottings’ section of the *Irish News*, which was a ‘gossip column’ set up by Sydney Redwood who became Editor of the newspaper in 1928. This was at a time when circulation was low on account of the prolonged effect of partition on the newspaper’s distribution, and a split in northern nationalism since 1916. Redwood was therefore hired to inject new life into the newspaper. ‘Random Jottings’ became one of his modernisation projects. As Eamon Phoenix recalls, the stories were taken from a “‘northern notebook’”, to which the newspaper’s staff was invited to contribute paragraphs for the fee of a half-crown per “jotting”. See Eamon Phoenix, ‘The History of a Newspaper: The *Irish News* 1855-1995’, in Eamon Phoenix (ed.), *A Century of Northern Life: The Irish News and 100 Years of Ulster History 1890s-1990s* (Belfast, 1995), p. 28. See also James Kelly, a journalist from the *Irish News* who contributed his first piece to the ‘Random Jottings’ column. James Kelly, *Bonfires on the Hillside: An Eyewitness Account of Political Upheaval in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1995), p. 33.
Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) was awaited with as much anticipation in Northern Ireland, as it was in other Allied countries. It was seen as a time when society came together to celebrate war’s end. As the main nationalist newspaper in Northern Ireland, the Irish News described how the experience of war, the blitz and shared suffering during the war fostered joint memorialisation. In this manner, Northern Ireland’s overt celebrations were not dissimilar to those taking place across Britain. In London, there were scenes of brotherly rejoicing, ‘amazing comradeship’ and ‘good will’ in which the people celebrated in an ‘exuberant’ but ‘disciplined’ manner. Outside of the capital, in Yorkshire, as in many other places, inhabitants celebrated with street parties and bonfires. Civilians in Northern Ireland directly experienced the brunt of war, not only materially, socially, culturally and economically, but through death. The Belfast blitz and the bombing of Derry brought the war home to a province which had, up until those attacks in 1941, felt immune to the war, even if the development of war industries and rescue and repair ports had made it a clear military target.

As a response then, to the end of a war that had brought traumatic scenes of devastation to parts of Northern Ireland, celebration was not an unusual reaction. However, a more detailed reading of how the Northern Irish media recorded events on and around VE Day intimate that the collectivising spirit of Victory Day was nothing more than a momentary experience. A closer examination of press reports and editorials reveal that the excitement over the war ending eclipsed the significance of the event: an event very much bound up with notions of national identity. The current political preoccupations at the end of the war, coupled with the fact that there still existed animosity between Catholics and Protestants - even if the shared experience of the blitz had offered a reconciling moment - meant that VE Day became intertwined and lost in a world where acts of commemoration were loaded with political connotations. Read in a more critical manner, the hyperbolic statement noted above appears as an idealistic rather than realistic assertion of Northern Ireland’s Victory Day celebrations.

2 In this thesis Victory in Europe Day will be interchangeable with Victory Day and VE Day.
3 Sean McMahon argues that during the war there was a ‘temporary lull in mutual animosity’ especially at times of air attack. He argues that the ‘Luftwaffe were oddly undiscriminating in its attacks and Shankill Road women and children found themselves companionably sharing the deep cellars of Clonard monastery with Falls Road “Fenians”’. Sean McMahon, The Belfast Blitz: Luftwaffe Raids in Northern Ireland, 1941 (Belfast, 2010), pp. 10-11.
5 ‘VE-Day Celebration’, Wakefield Express, 12 May 1945 as cited in Gilbert, The Day the War Ended, p. 189.
6 Brian Moore, The Emperor, p. 8; McMahon, The Belfast Blitz, p. 14 and p. 18.
Using the build-up to Victory in Europe Day and Thanksgiving Sunday as its focal points, this chapter will examine how the unionist and nationalist Northern Irish press wrote about and framed its narratives regarding the end of the war. Explorations of how society celebrates monumental occasions, rituals or national holidays, and how it employs national symbols, such as flags and national anthems, reveals much about relations within that society and national identity. How the media records these events places a more nuanced interpretation on them, especially in Northern Ireland where the readership of the press was and is dictated along political and religious lines. Through the coverage of VE Day, it becomes clear that both the Catholic and Protestant communities, represented by the press, were trying to find their own place in the celebrations.

As this chapter will show, acknowledgement of nationalist involvement in VE Day would have implicated this community in a war, often termed as a British war, from which disassociation was preferable. However, at the same time, there is evidence to suggest that this very same community was seeking a narrative that made sense of their involvement, for itself. The narrative it needed was one that could accommodate both participation in the war, rejecting any association that this had to Britain, whilst still confirming their Irish, Catholic national identity. In the search for a suitable discourse, one can see a kind of identity crisis for nationalists, played out in the press. Lacking a role in Northern Irish society, it appeared that they were searching for a common language that could combine all these elements in the face of an Irish government that appeared disinterested in their plight.

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8 Although Articles two and three of the 1937 Irish Constitution had laid sovereign claim to both parts of Ireland, it could be argued that the Irish government was certainly not concerned with ending the partition issue during the war, despite rhetorical claims to the opposite. In fact, for de Valera, Irish neutrality was of greater importance than the issue of partition during the war. On a few occasions he did direct his attention to the north, particularly when American troops were stationed there without his prior consent, and by sending Irish Fire Brigades to Belfast during the Belfast blitz. Whatever gratitude and commonality of experience northern Catholics could deduce from de Valera’s decision to help put out the fires in Belfast during the blitz, was short-lived. In a speech made by de Valera in Castlebar after the attack, he defended his decision of sending firemen north. In his own newspaper, the *Irish Press*, it was reported that he had attended to a ‘disaster’ rather than some act of war. Robert Fisk argues that this deliberate choice of words ensured that de Valera would not suffer Axis repercussions for humanely attending to a disaster that could be classed as bordering on humanitarian action. However, all in all, he appeared acquiescence in relation to northern nationalist concerns during this period. It comes as no
The lack of clarity regarding the position Northern nationalists were expected to take on the outbreak of war was epitomised in the uncertainty as to whether the declaration of neutrality was to be extended to the north as well as the south of Ireland. This, coupled with the Irish government’s decision not to permit northern Catholics to join the Irish Army, only served to dislocate Northern nationalists even more, especially at a time when the British government was welcoming the recruitment of Catholics from both Northern and Southern Ireland. As Enda Staunton claims, this latter act was the ‘moment of epiphany’ that ‘northern nationalists were nobody’s children’. This sense of abandonment can be clearly discerned from the confused reporting in the nationalist press on Victory Day in May 1945.

In the unionist press there was no such internal turmoil (as that witnessed in the nationalist press) and constant references to the loyalty of Northern Ireland, coupled with overt displays of British iconography, served to link Northern Ireland within a wider British narrative. At the same time, the unionist press ensured that they carved out their own assertion of identity, which fitted nicely with unionist traditions. For them, the war experience and VE Day were a symbol of their allegiance to the British Crown and a unionist affair. The considerable coverage of the victory festivities in the unionist press revealed that a popular memory of the war was being constructed, which affiliated ‘loyal Ulster’s’ war experience very closely not only to unionism, but to localised unionist traditions such as the Twelfth of July celebrations. This chapter will therefore explore key questions by examining the importance of the case study of the Victory Day celebrations to our understanding of the war in Northern Ireland. This chapter will also look at the way in which victory celebrations were reported in newspapers and how this represented a metaphorical manner in which to define identity. Although the focus is on the journalistic side of how memory is created, it will advance a more nuanced interpretation of relations between Catholics and Protestants.
in Northern Ireland. It will also question the impact of war on a divided society and how this enables or restricts memory construction.

The first part of this chapter addresses the theoretical foundations by positioning the role of the media in the creation of memory, and particularly the politics of memory in Northern Ireland. By examining how the press frames particular discourses in relation to the war, this chapter will reveal that the constructed nature of the narratives created were socially, culturally and politically determined. The second part of this chapter primarily explores how the media reported the celebration of the end of the war as a collectivising experience for both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. The chapter then proceeds to challenge this narrative by closely examining other parallel discourses, evident in the newspaper reports and editorials. To do this, it will primarily look at how the nationalist press reported the event before turning to the unionist press. The main argument proposes that in all the newspapers consulted, focusing mainly on Belfast and Derry, there was a clear politicisation of VE Day, albeit more predominantly evident in the unionist press.

Towards a Theoretical Understanding

The use of local newspapers to gain an understanding in the dynamics of memory creation will be explored in this chapter. The newspapers selected, the Derry Journal and the Londonderry Sentinel focus mainly on Derry, whilst the Irish News, the Belfast Telegraph and the Belfast News-Letter, look at Northern Ireland in broader terms but discuss in greater detail news relating to the Belfast area.10 The Derry Journal and Irish News predominantly enjoyed a Catholic, nationalist readership whilst the Londonderry Sentinel, the Belfast Telegraph and the Belfast News-Letter had a Protestant, unionist readership.11 Acknowledging the devoted readership of the press is important to give substance to Benedict Anderson’s claim of anonymous communities in a nation ritually reading

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10 The Derry Journal was a tri-weekly newspaper, the Londonderry Sentinel a tri-weekly morning newspaper, the Belfast Telegraph an evening paper, the Belfast News-Letter the oldest Irish paper established in 1737.
11 For information on Northern Irish newspapers see Phoenix (ed.), A Century of Northern Life; Jack Sayers, Crying in the Wilderness: Jack Sayers: A Liberal Editor in Ulster 1939-69 (Belfast, 1995).
newspapers on a daily basis. The collective act of reading, according to Anderson, serves the purpose of linking readers together in an abstract fashion and by extension, helps in the imagining of the nation. According to Anderson, it logically follows that a nation is an ‘imagined political community’ because ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’. This idea of ‘a deep, horizontal comradeship’ of newspaper readers within a nation is interesting when applied to Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland during the war the reading of newspapers was aligned to two very different political ideologies and cultural traditions. Therefore, the frames of reference in these distinct newspapers, or cultural products, are symptomatic of widely held views within each community. For the nationalist community, newspapers were an important point for the dissemination of information and a place to engage in debate. Lacking significant representation in the Unionist controlled Northern Irish government due to their abstentionist policies; nationalists relied on the press and the clergy to voice their concerns. Journalism was therefore important in reaching a wider audience and engaging in the public sphere. The polarisation of newspaper readers into two distinct camps helped in the construction and definition of two very different group identities and provided the material for the construction of distinct memories. Through a shared vision of the past, accessed through the press, Halbwachs’ basic argument that individuals create collective memories through group membership is realised. After all ‘Communication is a critical element of collective memory’.

Narratives however are only imagined constructs composed with a particular audience in mind. It is through processes of selection and omission, drafting and redrafting that narratives are formed that are acceptable to a particular person or group, and help in the creation of collective identity. Distinct collective memories are formed through the engagement or lack of engagement with these narratives. Although

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15 During the war, four of the six Nationalist MPs abstained from Stormont while the four senators attended. For an in-depth analysis of the divisions amongst northern nationalists see Staunton, *The Nationalists*.
journalists, in their own right, are ‘memory agents’\(^{18}\), it is necessary to be aware that journalists have their own agenda; often demonstrated through the narratives that they tell.\(^9\) At the same time these discourses are also influenced and developed by the writer’s understanding of the special political, economic, social and cultural circumstances of a particular area.\(^{20}\) Newspaper reports therefore, ‘exist within a cultural context that relies on the assumed knowledge of the common past shared by the consumers’.\(^{21}\) This intricate understanding of the workings of society cannot and does not overlook the restrictions placed on writers who write for a particular newspaper, particularly those that adhere to a strict political outlook.\(^{22}\) This interplay of association and disassociation will be clearly demonstrated in the newspaper coverage of VE Day.

As this chapter develops it will become clear that the framing of certain reports in the press, in relation to the victory celebrations, although a reflection of a particular communities’ experience of VE Day, are also a display of the crisis of identity that this event brought to the fore. Although most of the texts cited are written by individual journalists, their views are very much embedded in the political, social and cultural life of their readership. Journalists thus have the power, through their stories to:

affect whether we see ourselves as one community or many groups, whether we think critically about our past or just accept it as ‘the way it was,’ and whether and how we see the past as relevant to the present and the future.\(^{23}\)

In other words, journalists play a prominent role in the shaping of collective memories. As will be shown, the narratives about VE Day and the war itself in the Northern Irish press attested to the creation of these distinct (and different) collective memories for the Catholic and Protestant communities.


\(^{23}\) Edy, ‘Journalistic Uses’, p. 73.
The role of the media in the construction of public memory is a fruitful theoretical foundation to employ in this chapter.24 Any story of the present ‘is laced with an intricate repertoire of practices that involve an often obscured engagement with the past’. In this manner, ‘This renders journalism a key agent of memory work, even if journalists themselves are averse to admitting it as part of what they do.’25 Being a ‘site of memory construction’,26 stories told in the press about VE Day are inherently bound up not only with contemporary happenings, but with a retrospective glance backwards, which is informed by the social, political and cultural aspects of Northern Ireland. This interaction between the past and the present helps in the strengthening of a particular national identity, which comes through in the newspaper texts.

Towards a Shared Experience

After hearing rumours that Hitler had died at the end of April, Northern Ireland, like other parts of the United Kingdom, awaited with much anticipation the announcement that the war in Europe had ended. Confusion over how the end of the war would be signalled, when this would take place, and how many days of national holiday would be granted, was experienced as much in Northern Ireland as in Britain.27 Despite this uncertainty, excitement that the end was in sight was evidenced in preparations that were taking place across the United Kingdom. In Belfast in particular, people rushed about trying to buy flags for the occasion. An estimated figure recorded that from 1 to 3 May, somewhere between 6,000 to 8,000 flags, ‘the majority being Union Jacks’ were sold in a Belfast city centre shop.28 Belfast was cloaked in a type of ‘victory spirit’ that

26 Carolyn Kitch, ‘Placing Journalism Inside Memory - and Memory Studies’, Memory Studies 1, no. 3 (September, 2008), p. 311.
27 Diarists who had written for Mass-Observation during the war testify to this uncertainty as to when exactly the war would end. For those who were in employment, this inability to provide a determined time in the build up to Victory Day complicated when the days of national holiday were to be taken, and indeed much criticism was voiced at this lack of foresight. Incidentally, despite many people preparing and decorating streets for the anticipated announcement that the war had ended, when Victory was officially declared, celebration was characterised as being of a spontaneous nature. See Dorothy Sheridan, Wartime Women: A Mass Observation Anthology, 1937-45 (London, 2000), pp. 227-247.
was evident in the streets adorned in colours of red, white and blue. In loyalist Sandy Row there was ‘plenty of jolly noise and plenty of colour, for Union Jacks by the score were being waved by youthful hands. Even the air-raid shelters had “gone gay” in coats of red, white and blue’. Unionist sections of Belfast were expressing victory through the fluttering of flags.

On 8 May, the British government officially announced that the war had ended. Following similar procedure to the British House of Commons, the Northern Ireland House of Commons met and adjourned without dealing with any pending issues on the agenda. At Stormont, members of the Commons and Senate attended a short thanksgiving service in the main hall of Parliament Buildings. In attendance at the House of Commons were a large number of Unionist members, including the Cabinet; Labour and Nationalist Members of Parliament did not attend. In the Senate however the three Nationalists were in attendance. The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Sir Crawford McCullagh, and the Mayor of Derry, Senator Sir Frederick Simmons, speaking in the City Hall in Belfast and the Guildhall in Derry, respectively, advised citizens to remember that although victory had been achieved in the West, the war in the East was still ongoing. This advice was merely a repetition of what a Home Office circular and a statement issued by the Northern Irish government in the press informed the public to do only days earlier.

At City Hall, in front of ‘one of the largest [crowds] ever witnessed’ in Belfast, Sir Crawford McCullagh urged that citizens “must not forget that we are still at war and much remains to be done before the world is at peace. We must not go slack”. Calling on those present to remember all those who died in the blitz and were injured during the war, he further reminded the crowds that ‘Our men still have much fighting

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31 Correspondence between the Cabinet Office in Northern Ireland and the Home Office in Whitehall had stated that the British government did not expect, as early as February 1945, that there would be a clear Armistice Day. The Home Office indicated to the Cabinet Office that, similar to what took place at the end of the war in 1918, that if the House of Commons was not sitting on that date it would be recalled in order to mark the event. However, if it was sitting, it would be adjourned shortly after the announcement of the end of the war had been made and that the members would attend a small thanksgiving service afterwards. See PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/250/1: Letter A. Kelly to Mc William, 26 February 1945.
before them and they must have our continued support.\textsuperscript{35} This support could be shown, McCullagh argued, by not complaining about continued wartime restrictions in the post war world. Instead, the city should ‘rejoice’ in the victory achieved as ‘We have a right to be proud to belong to a great nation and to have played our part in the past struggle.’\textsuperscript{36} Citizens, McCullagh recommended, should “Celebrate the victory and go back to work.”\textsuperscript{37} Northern Ireland, as McCullagh made evident, was irrefutably tied to the British nation through victory and common sacrifice.

Despite calling on their citizens to enjoy the victory celebrations, both Mayors did express concern about fear of lawless behaviour. Considering there were no official plans for VE Day or the following day that could direct people’s attention, both Mayors called for careful decorum. The Mayor of Derry, together with the policing services, urged ‘fellow-citizens’ and members of Her Majesty’s Forces in the city to act with ‘true citizenship and dignity in our rejoicings for the great victory won for our Empire and the whole world’.\textsuperscript{38} There were fears that the celebration would escalate into disorderly and lawless behaviour fuelled by alcohol, as it had after Armistice Day 1918.\textsuperscript{39} During the 1918 celebrations, boisterous crowds, particularly shipyard workers, were said to have caused damage to a cinema and forced entry into pubs in the city.\textsuperscript{40} It is unsurprising then that the \textit{Londonderry Sentinel} revealed that on the advice of the police, shops had reinforced their windows and removed all their contents for fear of damage caused by ‘peace-day demonstrators’ in Derry.\textsuperscript{41} Derry was, after all, a predominantly nationalist city, so the threat of disorderly behaviour may have been more acute. One shop, which had actually taken the Police’s pre-emptive warning seriously, removed all valuables leaving behind only the jarring message “We salute the brave heroes who won us freedom”.\textsuperscript{42} Similar preventative measures took place in Belfast, which saw

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘Victory Day in Belfast’, 8 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘Victory Day in Belfast’, 8 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, ‘Ulster Rejoices in Victory’, 9 May 1945. The drafts for this speech can be found in PRONI LA, LA 7/3A/122: Drafts of Speech by Mayor of Belfast, Sir Crawford McCullagh.
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Londonderry Sentinel}, ‘The Germans are Defeated – Mayor’s Appeal to Citizens’, 8 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{40} McIntosh, \textit{Belfast City Hall}, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Londonderry Sentinel}, ‘VE-Day in Derry’, 8 May 1945. See also \textit{Derry Journal}, ‘Derry and the War’s End’, 9 May 1945.
many larger stores protecting their windows, this time ‘from the pressure of surging crowds’.43

However, such pre-emptive measures were hasty. In Belfast the day passed with only minor incidents such as damage to a telephone box on Royal Avenue.44 The case was similar in Derry with Captain P. S. Bell, the Resident Magistrate, congratulating the people for the lack of disturbances caused by the celebrations.45 In Belfast, British sailors and soldiers were witnessed diving into a large static water tank, whilst another British sailor climbed on to a statue of Queen Victoria and placed a cigarette between her lips.46 An American sailor joined in on the fun by “borrowing” a tram route board, climbing to the top of a lamp-post, and singing popular songs with the board being used as a ukulele.47 Another American sailor managed to climb on top of a monument in City Hall, Belfast, which commemorated the arrival of American servicemen to the city.48

The Belfast News-Letter observed that in Belfast ‘The scenes of jubilation in the principal thoroughfares of the city reached their height late in the evening when huge bustling crowds engaged in merry-making.’ Despite the large numbers, the newspaper added, the crowds ‘Generally speaking … were orderly.’49 Mr. J. H. Campbell of Belfast Custody Court proudly remarked that it was a glowing tribute to the citizens of Belfast that there were no court cases arising out of the victory celebrations. For him, that a city of half a million inhabitants could celebrate so profusely with the Allied Forces present, showing such decorum amidst such rejoicing, was a positive attribute to the city.50 In Belfast, the Belfast Telegraph reported, ‘There were no strangers in the crowd. All seemed

46 The Belfast Telegraph reported that the cost of the damage done to Queen Victoria’s statue in the City Hall grounds was £22 10s. This sum, it noted, would pay for the repair of a new cross to the orb and a new sceptre on the statue. This suggests that it was not only this lone sailor, as discussed above, who was climbing upon the statue. See the Belfast Telegraph, ‘Victoria Statue Damage’, 31 May 1945.
48 Belfast News-Letter, ‘Ulster Rejoices: Belfast “City Without Strangers”’, 8 May 1945. The Belfast News-Letter in a separate article talks of soldiers mounting a bus at Piccadilly Circus. In the unionist press, the emphasis on demonstrating the similarities between the stories reported in Belfast and those in London is uncanny. This is not to say that these events did not take place, but that the inclusion of them in the press reports is intriguing and could be used to place Northern Ireland’s experience, even during VE Day, as somewhat similar to that in London. See Belfast News-Letter, ‘London Letter: West End Crowd’, 8 May 1945.
intent on enjoying themselves. They did.\textsuperscript{51} The newspaper editorialised, ‘The crowds were big and high spirited, but always good humoured, and one was able to wander among them for hours in the city centre without seeing an untoward incident.’\textsuperscript{52} Equally, the \textit{Belfast News-Letter} added weight to this statement and in similar terminology remarked, ‘For hours on end Belfast was a city totally without strangers. Everyone greeted everyone else in communal cheerfulness.’\textsuperscript{53}

The “Joy Blitz”, as the period became termed in the \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, had taken a few “casualties” who had ‘celebrated not wisely but too well. These remained in bed to-day to make up for lost time’.\textsuperscript{54} This play on words referred to the tragic air raids on Belfast, with the newspaper revising the script of the traumatic experience of the blitz into one which documented the resilience of the people. Workers in essential services were said to have diligently continued with their work - with a substantial number of employees in the aircraft factories and other industrial companies in the city and throughout Northern Ireland turning up for work. For one worker, the reason for doing so was simple: “we’ve still got the Jap, to finish. We’ve got him groggy now – another punch in the solar plexus and he’ll be out for good. And then – whoopee again!”.\textsuperscript{55} This was a narrative of perseverance not dissimilar to the ‘People’s War’ trope discussed in the introduction, which placed Northern Ireland within a wider wartime discourse. As has been shown in the previous chapter, only one complaint originating from an editorial in the \textit{Belfast Telegraph} was voiced in relation to the VE Day festivities and that had nothing to do with the manner in which the common people were celebrating, but was directed at a notable lack of leadership in coordinating the celebrations.\textsuperscript{56}

Instead, the image the press articulates is one of spontaneous celebration of activity organised from the bottom-up. It was the people themselves and not the state which gave expression to the celebration on Victory Day and the following day. The editorial in the \textit{Belfast Telegraph} proudly described the scene in which the leader of a chorus, which had been performing in a nearby theatre, came to City Hall to conduct the community singing. What a wasted opportunity, reflected the editorial, by those at

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘Victory Night Scenes’, 10 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘After-Thoughts’, 10 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘Ulster Folk Return to Work’, 10 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘Ulster Folk Return to Work’, 10 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘After-Thoughts’, 10 May 1945.
the ‘top’ to ‘gather up the people’s feelings and give to them some worthy expression’. It was a shame, it argued, for ‘all these things showed that with a proper organised lead the occasion could have been made even more memorable’.

Despite the lack of involvement by the government and the Corporation, Mrs. Mabel Mitchell, who is briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, had contacted the government early in May to discuss the feasibility of organised thanksgiving services for the night of VE Day. Concerned not to interrupt any state-planned services, Mrs Mitchell suggested that open-air services could take place across prominent locations in Belfast such as City Hall, Donegall Place, High Street, Great Victoria Street, Shaftesbury Square and York Street, on the evening of VE Day. In his reply Mr. E. Warnock, Minister of Home Affairs, offered his reassurance that such a “proper and natural” idea would not “cut across any Government arrangements”. Subsequently, Mrs Mitchell organised these services, which took place at City Hall and the symbolic empty ground in High Street on the evening of 8 May 1945. High Street, one of the main streets in Belfast City Centre, had been bombed during the blitz and was therefore a fitting location to hold such a ceremony.

There was evidently a desire from the people at a grass-roots level to hold their own services, but it also leads to an acknowledgement of women both during and after the war. Whilst this could be understood as women’s supportive role in the war within a patriarchal Northern Irish society, it can also be indicative of Mrs Mitchell’s realisation that there was need for a form of release; to attach meaning to the end of the war in the West, in the form of services of thanksgiving. Other services also took place across Belfast with the Ulster United Prayer Movement, led by Mr. Robert Clyde, holding a service at City Hall. A united Protestant service was also held in a Belfast prison.

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59 Belfast News-Letter, ‘Thanksgiving: Open-air Services in Belfast’, 3 May 1945. All of these areas suffered badly in the Belfast air raids as they represented those areas closest to the aircraft factories, the shipyards and the economic areas of the city. York Street was severely attacked during the Belfast Raids in April/May 1941 due to its proximity to the aircraft factories and shipyards. See McMahon, The Belfast Blitz, p. 66 and pp. 126-127.
61 High Street was badly damaged in the May Raid 1941. It was one of the main shopping streets in the city. McMahon, The Belfast Blitz, pp. 146-147.
62 Mary Muldowney examines this idea of women acting in supporting roles in which they epitomised the image of the Home Front for which the men were fighting, Muldowney, The Second World War, p. 167.

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The importance attached to the thanksgiving services incorporated ideas of jubilation and relief, but it also signified the opposite and ever-present personal bereavement.\textsuperscript{64} Jay Winter argues that people, whom he terms ‘fictive kinship’ groups, join together not necessarily because these are tied by blood but out of a desire to act as ‘agents’ in the act of remembrance.\textsuperscript{65} Through their collective acts these groups create ‘families of remembrance’, which interact in that unclassified area between individual remembering and state-orchestrated acts of commemoration. As Winter argues, the work of such ‘small-scale agents’:

occupies the space between individual memory and the national theatre of collective memory choreographed by social and political leaders. They flourish at a point between the isolated individual and the anonymous state; a juncture almost certainly closer to the individual than to the state.\textsuperscript{66}

Turning the theoretical focus away from those acts controlled by the state to those voluntarily undertaken by ordinary people discloses not only the dynamics within society but also the failings of the state. It also documents the power of people, over the government, to provide release and give expression to the war. In this process, the groups involved in these small-scale thanksgiving services created their own collective memories of the war, which were different to those imagined by the state. As already noted in the previous chapter, official arrangements by the government and the Belfast Corporation to collectivise people’s relief did not materialise until Thanksgiving Sunday, 13 May, when the official ceremony was held in Saint Anne’s Protestant Cathedral.

Whilst the official thanksgiving service was confined to invited guests, the descriptions in the press of attendance at other places of worship were testament to the success of the day. Crowded congregations were witnessed in all the Masses in the Catholic Churches in Northern Ireland. At Saint Peter’s Catholic Cathedral in Belfast, a

\textsuperscript{64} For a detailed analysis of the role of grief in the aftermath of war see Jay Winter, \textit{Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History} (Cambridge, 1995).

\textsuperscript{65} Winter, ‘Forms of Kinship’, p. 40.

\textsuperscript{66} Winter, ‘Forms of Kinship’, p. 41.
Solemn High Mass was given to a full congregation, some of whom were members of the American and British Armies. The same took place at St. Patrick and St. John’s Churches and a service was held at the Belfast Synagogue. Men from the local district around St. Peter’s Pro-Cathedral put up bunting in the streets, which was ‘appropriate to the occasion’. As opposed to the colours of red, white and blue, the Papal colours were in prominence, and every home displayed a flag. In Belfast other services took place among Presbyterian youth organisations, the Y.M.C.A., and different Orange Order Lodges. Some of these services were accompanied by parades with one parade organising a March Past before making its way to the Methodist Church for prayer. Despite the Orange Order’s aversion to holding parades on a Sunday, a day that signified a sacred day of rest, church parades were permitted. As Neil Jarman states, for the Orange Order, Church parades direct ‘attention on to the religious principles that underpin the institution and provide its unifying core – principles that are frequently occluded in the public sphere’. Mr. Robert Clyde again organised another service, this time in a tent in High Street. Regardless of the restrictive nature of the official thanksgiving service, the people of Belfast were clearly intent on marking, in their own way, the end of the war.

The official victory parade was applauded as a huge success in the press with large crowds having assembled along its route. However, ‘Observer’ writing for the Irish News remarked that although the crowd had congregated for the parade in bad weather, ‘the parade did not arouse great enthusiasm’. Speculating on reasons for the subdued atmosphere the writer proposed, ‘Perhaps the people have cheered enough since VE Day, or maybe the reason for the dullness was that very few of those taking part in the parade had seen any active service in the war.’ ‘The Roamer’, writing for the Belfast News-Letter, apportioned blame elsewhere saying that the problem lay not in the participation but in the lack of policing. Clarifying the statement, ‘The Roamer’ added, ‘hundreds who had taken up positions before the City Hall were at times more keenly

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69 Jarman, Material Conflicts, p. 100.
concerned about preserving their limbs than about seeing the parade. They had to be! As the parade passed, the overexcited crowds that gathered to watch the procession overwhelmed the small number of policemen on duty, thus causing some disruption. Despite all the efforts by the government, the Victory Day committee and Belfast Corporation to organise the parade, crucial safety measures had been sidelined.

In Derry however, the press recording of VE Day was noticeably different and an analysis suggests that the celebration differed from the centre (Belfast) to the periphery (areas outside the administrative centre and seat of government in Belfast). Although the local press recorded some disorderly occurrences, alcohol-fuelled lawlessness was not a major concern, and the boarded-up shop windows proved nothing more than a hasty reaction. Rather, unrest in Derry and the surrounding areas appeared to be of a more sectarian nature. Brian Barton, commenting on the announcement that war had ended and victory in the West had finally been won states that across Northern Ireland ‘feelings of expectation finally erupted in spontaneous expressions of relief and unconfined jubilation’. ‘Both communities celebrated’ he adds, ‘though not necessarily with the same emphasis or intensity’. Reflecting on this situation Barton concludes:

In Londonderry itself, popular expressions of delight and celebration over VE Day were somewhat muted, not just because of thoughts of those who had died. It may be that this predominantly nationalist city lacked enthusiasm for celebrating allied victory in what many perceived to be England’s war.

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74 This idea of periphery and centre had been explored by Lynette P. Spillman, Nation and Commemoration: Creating National Identities in the United States and Australia (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 34-37. See also Nuala Johnson who argues that during the 1919 Peace Day parade throughout Ireland, in Dublin and in many towns in Northern Ireland, the parade passed off peacefully ‘at least in daylight hours’. However, in areas ‘more remote from the administrative centre of the island, support was more muted’. Johnson, Ireland, the Great War, p. 78.
75 Londonderry Sentinel, ‘Victory Celebrations in Derry’, 12 May 1945. The Irish News noted that all public houses had sold out of their alcohol early on 8 May resulting in them having to close long before they were legally required to do so. See the Irish News, ‘VE-Day in Belfast’, 9 May 1945.
76 Barton, Northern Ireland, p. 135.
77 Barton, Northern Ireland, p. 139.
As Barton’s observation reveals, the complicated nature of commemoration in a divided society was brought to the fore in the case of Derry. It was particularly difficult to disassociate the commemoration of the end of the war from sectarian constraints and conflicting emotions. As will become more evident in the remainder of this chapter, despite attempts to frame a narrative that could accommodate nationalists and unionists, the sectarian nature of the celebration was never far from the surface and at times revealed itself in the most visible manner.

A Nationalist Narrative

Churchill’s voice was greeted in Derry by the sound of ‘Unionist cheering’, the ‘sound of city sirens’ and the ‘bells of the Protestant Cathedral’, the Derry Journal reported on 9 May, the day after VE Day.⁷⁸ By implication, nationalists, according to the image portrayed by this nationalist newspaper, took no part in celebrating the announcement. In contrast, the Irish News acknowledged that in Belfast ‘Bonfires blazed in many areas of the city, and not until the early hours of this morning were the main streets cleared of the merry gatherings’.⁷⁹ However, this collectivised experience was not associated with the nationalist press’s recording of events that had taken place in Derry. Creating an image of an exclusively unionist affair, the Derry Journal described scenes of rejoicing in ‘Unionist districts’ which, amidst flying the flags of the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes, burned an effigy of the Taoiseach, Eamon de Valera.⁸⁰

Whilst it would have been only natural to fly these flags as a symbol of international unity in defence against Nazi aggression, as the flying of the Stars and Stripes shows, the Union Jack had always been considered by nationalists to be a provocative symbol adopted by unionists to visually state their constitutional relationship with Britain. Taking place in the historical context in which the South had

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⁷⁹ Irish News, ‘VE-Day in Belfast’, 9 May 1945
⁸⁰ Derry Journal, ‘Derry and the War’s End’, 9 May 1945. At this time people tended to live in segregated areas with co-religionists. Therefore, the overt description of the area as ‘Unionist’ is intentional and must be noted. For a further analysis of the figures of inhabitants in various areas in the various Belfast wards see Muldowney, The Second World War, p. 219.
remained neutral in the war, even if this neutrality was of a benevolent nature towards the Allies, meant that the iconography of the Union Jack was loaded with imperialistic connotations. In addition, the flag was also used to manipulate space in order to demarcate those areas considered to be loyal or disloyal to Britain, symbolising ‘an important expression of unionist identity, and a way of claiming public space for loyalism’.\(^1\) For Catholics and nationalists it was ‘a Unionist party symbol, and to many it was also a sectarian symbol, a substitute Orange banner’.\(^2\) To openly celebrate an event that exhibited such loaded iconography would have been in conflict with nationalist ideals.

Not only was the Union Jack a symbol which nationalists could not accommodate, but the allegation made by the \textit{Derry Journal} that unionists had set fire to an effigy of de Valera complicated the picture. The burning of effigies of war leaders was a common occurrence in Britain but none could have been quite as politically motivated as the burning of an effigy of de Valera.\(^3\) While the \textit{Derry Journal} made it known that effigies of Hitler had been tossed onto bonfires, in an area designated as ‘Unionist’ the Taoiseach was likened to Hitler. What makes this situation more intriguing is how the \textit{Londonderry Sentinel} retaliated to this accusation by charging the \textit{Derry Journal} of misrepresenting the past. Revealing the sectarian constructions at play and without giving gravity to the allegation it wrote: ‘according to the “Derry Journal,” an effigy of De Valera also went up in flames’.\(^4\) Whether or not this event actually took place is irrelevant, the \textit{Derry Journal} by its mere accusation had made a damming political point. The \textit{Londonderry Sentinel}, in an attempt to reverse this charge, highlighted that festivities had taken place in Protestant and Catholic areas of the city. Bonfires, it wrote,

\(^{1}\) Morris, \textit{Our Own Devices}, p. 107.
\(^{3}\) On the evening of VE Day, residents of a street in Wakefield marked the end of their celebrations with a mock funeral cortege, which was led by leaders of the Allied countries. Inside the hearse was an effigy of Hitler that was ‘unceremoniously bundled out of the hearse and on to the fire’ whilst residents continued with their merriment of singing and dancing. \textit{Wakefield Express}, ‘VE-Day Celebration’, 12 May 1945 as cited in Gilbert, \textit{The Day the War Ended}, p. 189.
\(^{4}\) \textit{Londonderry Sentinel}, ‘Victory Celebrations in Derry’, 12 May 1945. The burning of effigies and flags to make a political statement was not uncommon in Ireland at this time. There was a public dispute in the south of Ireland which saw students from the two ‘rival’ colleges in Dublin - Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin - burning the Irish Tricolor and Union Jack, respectively. See \textit{Derry Journal}, ‘Trinity College Scenes’, 9 May 1945. See also Leonard, ‘The Twinge of Memory’, p. 102.
were ‘lit in all areas of the city, and there were as many in the Bogside as in the Protestant districts’.85

It becomes clear that the nationalist *Derry Journal* was clearly politicising VE Day, revealing as much about its insecurities in implicating nationalist involvement in commemorating such an event as it did about the political situation between unionists and nationalists in the city at this time. A city with a predominantly nationalist majority would have found it difficult to fashion a place within this celebration, whilst at the same time staying true to its political convictions. It was therefore less problematic for commemoration to be construed as a unionist pursuit.

In one report the *Derry Journal* ran the headline, “How Orangemen Celebrated V-Day” with subtitles “Catholic Houses attacked in Cloughmills” and “Parochial House Windows and Doors Broken In”.86 Through clever narrative devices the report apportioned blame to ‘Orangemen’, some of ‘military age’ who, after parading around the village at night in ‘drumming parties’ and singing ‘party songs’, proceeded to smash fifty windows in Catholic houses. By highlighting the age of the Orangemen, it also insinuated that if truly loyalist these men should not have been in Northern Ireland at that time but should have been recruited into the Services. Adding more insult to injury, the newspaper revealed that one of the houses attacked was that of a disabled ex-serviceman of the last war, whose two sons are in the British Army, one of them serving at present in Germany, while the other is a prisoner in Japanese hands.87 By attempting to propose that if Orangeism was anything more than rhetoric, the juxtaposition between these Orangemen of military age attacking a home of a disabled ex-serviceman whose sons had actually volunteered to fight alongside a country that Orangemen were supposedly so closely associated, suggested an uncomfortable truth about the limits of their loyalty to the British Crown. It also exposed their deeply sectarian outlook, which was clearly not suspended during the victory celebrations.

If anything, the period around the victory festivities gave these Orangemen an opportunity of expressing what the end of the war meant to them by attacking Catholics living in the predominantly Protestant area of Cloughmills. According to the *Derry Journal*, so horrific were the incidents that, on witnessing one house being shot at by a

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85 *Londonderry Sentinel*, ‘Victory Celebrations in Derry’, 12 May 1945. The reference to the “Bogside” is of an area located in the city side of Derry which is, and was, a republican, nationalist stronghold.
man wielding a shot gun, ‘Catholic mothers with their children left the village for safety in the homes of friends in adjacent rural districts’. Such sectarian attacks were not limited to Cloughmills. Fintona and Beragh in County Tyrone experienced similar demonstrations. At a meeting in Omagh Rural Council, a Catholic Councillor living in Fintona charged Unionists and Orangemen with shouting party chants outside his house in the early hours of VE Day. In addition, the Derry Journal reported on the harassment of a Catholic Reverend by Protestant youths, demanding that he ring the Church bell, a sign used across Northern Ireland to indicate that the war had ended. In replying to them that he would not, the newspaper recorded that these youths proceeded to enter the Church yard from where they rang the bell. On leaving the yard the youths were said to have been seen waving ‘Union Jacks in a defiant manner’. By supplying these three overtly sectarian reports in succession on one broadsheet, the demonisation of Orangeism became an unambiguous part of the nationalist narrative about VE Day, at least in the Derry Journal.

By focussing on such sectarian and negative aspects to VE Day, the Derry Journal was disassociating nationalist from unionist commemoration. Dedicating little column space to the actual festivities, the Derry Journal, under its own terms, was in a way writing out nationalist involvement or at least demonstrating that this was not a topic of great importance for the newspaper. The Irish News, on the other hand, tried to find a narrative plot that could accommodate nationalist inclusion. As the opening gambit to this chapter indicates, there was an attempt to show the collectivising potential of the war especially at times of acute danger, such as German Luftwaffe attacks over Northern Ireland. The memory of such a traumatic experience was being employed to re-frame the war into some kind of shared, if only temporary, experience.

However, remembering Catholic and Protestant people ‘ditching’ in the nearby hills offers only one side to the story, and ignores political and social problems associated with such acts. Mary Muldowney has found evidence that suggests in the period after the air attacks, billeting amongst those of a different religion was not exceedingly common. She argues that ‘Even if families were willing to offer accommodation or to stay with members of “the other” religious community, the

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attitudes of social agencies discouraged this as a policy. Moreover, as an indication of the Stormont government’s inability to use this traumatic experience to show the degree of humanity evident and possible in the region, it appeared more worried about how the billeting of these poor people would affect those better off, and also the safety of the statue of Carson located outside Stormont.

The blitz experience, despite all attempts to prove the contrary, did not offer a reconciling moment. Yet, the editorial writer in the Irish News, by stressing how German air raids did not discriminate between Catholics and Protestants, was trying to universalise the experience as a means of locating nationalists within the war story. Describing in language of common sacrifice and effort, the editorial writer added:

It was only natural that they should rejoice together at the ending of what was an ordeal for all of us. There were mothers on the Falls Road as well as the Shankill Road who waited in dread each day of seeing a telegram boy coming with the worst news. The ending of the war was therefore, no particular person’s joy; it meant joy for everyone. In the Catholic districts of the town bonfires burned as brightly and the people sang and danced as gaily as in other parts. In the vacant ground in High Street boys and girls sang songs in Irish and danced Irish dances, and they were joined in the merrymaking by people of different religions.

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90 Muldowney, The Second World War, p. 121.
91 McMahon, The Belfast Blitz, p. 61.
92 Irish News, ‘Random Jottings: Common Ordeals’, 15 May 1945. The Falls Road was a republican, nationalist area of Belfast, whilst the Shankill Road was a loyalist, unionist area. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, a novel written about a young Catholic man joining the Air Raid Precautions (A.R.P.) - much to his family’s disapproval - described the Falls Road as ‘a fiercely Catholic, fiercely nationalist, working-class district’. The novel argues that the conviction of neighbours on the Falls Road in relation to the war ‘could be summed up in the fact that they considered it a point of honor to leave a light shining in their upstairs windows at night in case any German bombers might come over the city’. Whether this is true or a folk tale written in the book published in 1967 is difficult to discern, but the author, Brian Moore, was an ARP warden during the war, and particularly the Belfast blitz. Arguably then the book is autobiographical in nature and reveals Moore’s stark awareness of communal tension. See Moore, The Emperor, pp. 46-47.
Herein lay the contradiction in the nationalist thought process. Despite emphasising that it was a shared celebration, the fact that the editorial writer had to stress this point underlines the sectarian nature of the situation. The press appears to be reclaiming Catholic participation in the war by writing them into the narrative, but in a way that does not detract from their national identity. So whilst Catholics could, and did, volunteer for the British Services, celebration by the young children was done in Irish to which others of ‘different religions’ took part. Two conclusions can be drawn from this quotation: primarily, it must be noted that it would have been highly unlikely that Protestant people had joined in with the singing and dancing to songs in Irish. The Irish language and Irish dancing was, after all, an assertion of an Irish Catholic cultural identity. However, there is every possibility that some Protestants could speak the language. Secondly, by framing the story in this manner, Catholic participation in an event loaded with British iconography seemed more acceptable - particularly if it was done through Irish singing and Irish dancing - that is - carried out under their own terms. Nevertheless, this confused assertion in the nationalist press is arguably synonymous with nationalist involvement in the war.

To recognise their role in a British war was to somehow detract from their Irishness, especially when the south was ‘officially’ neutral. The fact that many Southern Irish had themselves joined the British Armed Forces did not alleviate the situation for Northern Catholics. Whilst the Irish government did not act to stop Irishmen from volunteering for the British Services, ‘it was alive to the political embarrassment their participation could cause at home and abroad’. Especially irksome was evidence of Irishmen deserting the Irish defence forces to fight in the better paid British Armed Forces. Nevertheless this situation, coupled with people migrating to Britain for war work, alleviated the unemployment situation in Ireland and provided a steady income.

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93 Gillian McIntosh argues that during the celebration of the royal jubilee of George V in Belfast in 1935, the official programme describing the celebration remarked that the Girl Guides were Irish Dancing the Fairy Reel to music played by the RUC Band. For her, ‘The event – where a traditional “Irish” dance was accompanied by the band of the Royal Ulster Constabulary – exemplifies the contradiction inherent within unionist image-making.’ Following McIntosh’s argument, the example mentioned above demonstrates the difficulties found in the nationalist press to create a narrative about the victory celebrations. McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 48.

directed back into the Irish economy. In addition, de Valera failed to provide Northern nationalists with any sense of direction during the war years, leaving them to their own devices. No wonder, one could argue, there was such visible tension in their reporting of the victory festivities. As the next section will show, the Northern nationalist association with the war was complicated by the fact that unionists linked Victory Day to a mini-Twelfth of July celebration. By employing this analogy, unionists hijacked the meaning of the war, cloaking it not only in sectarian terms but also in terms of British patriotism and loyalty to the Crown. In this way, the unionist press effectively excluded nationalist participation within this interpretive framework.

A Unionist Narrative

The unionist narrative differed significantly from the nationalist narrative in relation to VE Day. Primarily, the unionist press was intent on showcasing Northern Ireland’s contribution to the British war effort by featuring stories that congratulated Northern Ireland’s wartime contribution. Secondly, analogies made in the press - which linked the celebration of the end of the war to Armistice Day 1918 and which imagined VE Day to be representative of a mini Twelfth of July - associated the commemorative activities and by extension Northern Ireland’s involvement in the Second World War, more closely to unionism and its traditions. The following section will show how the narrative framed in the unionist press was notably more confident than the nationalist narrative; having a more proactive agenda at a time of potential political uncertainty for the Northern Irish state.

Even before the war officially ended, commemorative articles began appearing in the unionist press both highlighting Northern Ireland’s role in the war and indicating that the end of the war was in sight. These narratives went a long way to constructing an image of an ‘Ulster’ national identity that was not so much collective and national, but more aptly described as unionist. These stories of participation in the war symbolised and permitted this discursive formation of a unionist national identity in

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96 Kavanagh, ‘Neutrality and the Volunteers’, p. 86.
Northern Ireland. To a Protestant readership, these stories would have been ‘able to tell a particular type of story about the nation and its importance, a story that resonates emotively with people, that glorifies the nation, that is easily transmitted and absorbed’ and therefore, in the case of Northern Ireland, resulting in a rather one-sided narrative of the war years.  

‘Ulster Played Her Part’ ran the headline of a story printed by the *Belfast News-Letter* on Victory Day. The story was one of a determined Northern Ireland which had been ‘prepared, with the rest of the United Kingdom, to face all the responsibilities’ that war engendered. Although the newspaper alluded to problems over the introduction of conscription to Northern Ireland, it never discussed them in any detail. Instead, it remarked that despite ‘repeated appeals by the Government’ to the British government, some 40,000 men and women had volunteered to join the Services without the compulsion of conscription. In addition, 30,000 men had volunteered for the Home Guard and ‘thousands’ of men and women had signed up for Civil Defence services. According to the newspaper, industry witnessed a significant growth in employment with 69,500 more people employed in Northern Irish industry by February 1945 than at the beginning of the war. The article, proud to demonstrate the collective experience of the war, commented ‘The Province’s effort was an all-out one, nearly everyone – from the child at school to the old-age pensioner can, and with justification, claim to have played a part.’

Yet this narrative was a clear example of gilding the lily. Whilst it stresses the fact that men and women had volunteered to join the Services, it does not disclose that despite unionist annoyance conscription had not been extended to Northern Ireland. Nor does it explain that nationalists were vehemently opposed to its introduction and that recruitment was actually strikingly low. It also avoids making it known to the reader that unemployment was a major concern during the war years. In Northern Ireland in 1939 there were 70,000 people unemployed; in 1942 the figure had decreased to 17,000,

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but was still a significant number.\textsuperscript{102} By 1944, unemployment was still a concern, suggesting that in comparison to Britain, weak mobilisation was arguably influenced in some manner by the lack of compulsion.\textsuperscript{103} In addition, these figures must also take into account the fact that during the war nearly 60,000 people had left Northern Ireland to seek work in Britain, of which five sixths were male.\textsuperscript{104} Therefore, this decrease in unemployment can be partly explained by people leaving in search of work than any substantial increase in jobs created in Northern Ireland itself.\textsuperscript{105} This was also a time when many workers from Southern Ireland had been coming north in search of work; much to the concern of both Andrews’ and Brooke’s governments.\textsuperscript{106}

Despite the high levels of unemployment, the Northern Irish government preferred not to send people to Britain for work; hoping instead that the British government would direct more industrial work to Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{107} The British government however had its reservations. It was reluctant for various reasons - notably transport difficulties to and from Northern Ireland; the availability of capable industries to fulfil contracts geographically closer in Britain; the reluctance to accept dilution of industry; the failure of Northern Irish industries to complete war contracts on time; and the high levels of striking and absenteeism experienced in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{108} Striking, in particular, was a troublesome occurrence as it took place at crucially important periods during the war such as the build up to D-Day.\textsuperscript{109} As Boyd Black concludes:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102] The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA) PRO CAB, CAB/103/427: Note of an interview with Mr. R. R. Bowman, Permanent Secretary, and Mr. W. Allen, Ministry of Labour for Northern Ireland by Hancock, 10 November 1942.
\item[107] TNA PRO CAB, CAB/103/427: Note of an interview with Mr. R. R. Bowman, Permanent Secretary, and Mr. W. Allen, Ministry of Labour for Northern Ireland by Hancock, 10 November 1942.
\end{footnotes}
The absence of conscription and direction of labour meant the Northern Ireland system was even more voluntary than that in Great Britain, and provided a context that contributed to the relative lack of discipline in the labour force.\textsuperscript{110}

All these facts however, were omitted from the newspaper’s congratulatory piece. They did not fit into the story of a loyal, determined ‘Ulster’ contributing its most to the war effort.

Disguising such bones of contention, or rather overlooking certain negative aspects of Northern Ireland’s contribution, could have been done in order to secure British assurance to keep Ireland partitioned. The unionist press had to employ imaginative tropes about Northern Ireland’s participation in the war by highlighting those admirable qualities, whilst low-lighting those acts that were deemed questionable or problematic for the British government during the war. At such an impressionable and euphoric time, it could be argued that whatever narratives were being created would form the basis of a popular memory of the war. Moreover, in the processes of memory creation, selection and omission of information is often used to form master narratives that help feed into certain myths created by society for political advancement. Therefore, by highlighting the positive contribution Northern Ireland had made to the war, and constructing this positive story, it elides the negative side to Northern Ireland’s involvement and creates a narrative backdrop that projected an image that was acceptable to the Unionist government and unionists.

Not only did Northern Ireland have a significant role to play in the Second World War, but the unionist press was keen to revisit how Armistice Day 1918 was welcomed in the North. A virtual reprint of an article that ran in the \textit{Belfast Telegraph} in November 1918 was featured only days before the declaration that the war in Europe had officially ended in May 1945. Armistice Day 1918 was described as one of uncontrollable ‘delirious joy’ in which workers abandoned work to take to the streets in celebration: ‘the sounds of industry gave place to the sounds of general rejoicing’. The newspaper reported that on the streets, flags were in abundant display, people were cheering and a military parade of people playing drums, bugles and fifes took place

\textsuperscript{110} Black, ’A Triumph of Voluntarism?’, p. 19.
through the main streets of Belfast City centre. Officers also took part in the parade on armoured military vehicles and one lieutenant carried a large broom to symbolise that the Allies had made a ““clean sweep” of the enemy - a point of course which was untrue as Germans were still on French soil! The sight of ‘the old flag’, the Union Jack, ‘sent the crowd into raptures of enthusiasm’ and the air was rent with the sound of patriotic singing of “Rule Britannia” and the National Anthem. The “Man in the Street” writing into the newspaper about Armistice Day proudly remarked:

‘one thing I noticed with pride and gratification was the prominence given to the Union Jack in the spontaneous demonstration on the streets this forenoon. Not only so but wherever British soldiers appeared on the streets they were cheered, lauded and honoured’.111

Recalling such scenes of gratitude towards British soldiers and of singing the British National Anthem and ‘Rule Britannia’, located this narrative within a unionist framework.

Reliving Armistice Day would not have been an exceptional act; rather it was a piece of journalism that fitted nicely into the anticipated situation in Northern Ireland in May 1945.112 However, as the previous chapter has already shown, what was problematic (and would have been well recognised in Northern Ireland at the end of the Second World War) is that the memory of Irish involvement in the First World War was contested. The Easter Rising and the 36th (Ulster) Division’s participation in the Battle of the Somme, both of which occurred in 1916, had impacted on how the war was remembered. Whilst in the British context it may have been natural to compare the ending of the two World Wars, in Northern Ireland the sacrifice made by the 36th (Ulster) Division in the Battle of the Somme had become a synecdoche of the First World War. Under these conditions, Catholic participation in the First World War was

111 Belfast Telegraph, ‘1918 Armistice Scenes Recalled’, 4 May 1945
overshadowed and thus made the reporting on Armistice Day in May 1945 politically contentious, at least for nationalists.

Despite these references to Armistice Day, a more overtly sectarian interpretation of the victory celebrations was already being conveyed in the unionist press. The commemoration by the Orange Order of the Twelfth of July, which celebrated the Battle of the Boyne and the Battle of the Somme amongst other things, was being associated with Victory Day. In ‘loyal’ areas of Belfast - the Shankill Road, Newtownards Road and Sandy Row – wrote the Belfast News-Letter, VE Day was welcomed by the sight of ‘Bands of youths in patriotic garb’ parading to the sound of drums and bin lids in streets ablaze with bonfires. Delirious with joy, the Belfast Telegraph remarked how, ‘Up “the Shankill” they never went to bed at all’, choosing instead to make the celebrations into an ‘unofficial “Twelfth” on an official scale’. The Shankill Road, Newtownards Road and Sandy Row, described as ‘loyal’ areas, revelled in the ‘spirit of “The Twelfth”’ which ‘was there, doubled and redoubled.’

‘Every street was a mass of flags and streamers, kerbs and window-stills chalked red, white and blue, and triumphal arches extended welcomes home to the Shankill’s numerous prisoners of war and multitude of other Servicemen.’ Tables were set up in streets where neighbours held street parties, bringing the private domain into the public and turning communal areas into theatres of pomp and symbolic display. In ‘An Ulsterman’s Letter’ which described happenings taking place across Northern Ireland,

113 Belfast News-Letter, ‘Ulster Rejoicing: Belfast “City Without Strangers”’, 8 May 1945. There is no juxtaposition in this text between ‘loyal’ and ‘disloyal’ areas. However, it could be argued that the description of the areas as loyal owes as much to the Protestant majorities that lived in these segregated areas as it does to their loyalty to Britain during the war. In any case, both factors complement each other.

114 Belfast Telegraph, ‘How Ulster Kept VE-Day’, 8 May 1945. Unsurprisingly, the Irish News makes no connection between the celebrations and the Twelfth of July. The only mention that can be found in the Irish News of the Twelfth around VE Day is in the form of a suggestion. Noting that the ‘Twelfth’ celebrations were to take the form of a thanksgiving service in July 1945 with no speeches, ‘Observer’ from the Irish News asked, ‘But why hold a “Twelfth” at all? Why not a fund organised by Orangemen of the North for the starving people of Holland? See Irish News, ‘Random Jottings: “The Twelfth” – a Suggestion’, 18 May 1945. The newspaper explained its reasoning stating that King William III, whom Orangemen honour on the “Twelfth”, was a Dutchman. With such suffering and starvation in Holland at the end of the war, the Pope had sent over £5,000 to provide some material relief. The newspaper proposed, ‘Would it be possible for Orangemen to take a lead from the Holy Father?’ noting that ‘If King William III, was alive to-day, I am sure he would prefer to see food and assistance sent to his people after their heroism, instead of listening to big drums being beaten, and the most recent person who has sent help to the Dutch being vocally abused.’ This last point summarises what the Twelfth meant to the Catholic population and illustrates how using such terminology, in the Protestant press, only served to alienate Catholic assimilation in the end of war festivities, and in effect wrote them out of the story. See Irish News, ‘Random Jottings: A Dutch King’, 18 May 1945.


the author writing for the *Belfast News-Letter* detailed how ‘loyal Sandy Row’ brought in VE Day. It proudly recalled:

And how did loyal Sandy Row usher in VE-Day? I saw nothing of streets ablaze with colour. I award the palm to a little group of women who, as early as Friday evening last, formed up in procession and, headed by a miniature ‘Lambeg,’ toured the locality. At their rear marched a venerable woman wearing an Orange sash! By sure instinct she connected 1690 and 1945, both of them vital years for the world’s freedom. The wilfully ignorant and the evilly-disposed may dub Orangeism an attempt to impose a bigoted ascendancy. Actually the very reverse is the fact. It will tolerate no ascendancy over Bible and Crown. The one it regards as the guarantee of religious freedom, and the other as the guarantee of civil freedom. The enthusiasm of this week promises well for the forthcoming Twelfth. Orangeism on that day will proudly look the world in the face, and say ‘You know what part the North of Ireland played.’

This marrying of victory festivities to the Twelfth of July in a simple, dualistic fashion evaded careful analysis and critical engagement. In short, it created a narrative that would not and could not include Catholics and which associated VE Day with unionism and unionist traditions. Readers would have been attuned to the carefully orchestrated rhetorical tones that resonated in these texts. However, it was a long way, conceptually, from 1690 to 1945, and the ‘freedom’ achieved then did not represent the ‘freedom’ being celebrated over the victory period. Nevertheless, the unionist press made the association: freedom had been achieved in May 1945 from Nazi aggression just as it had in 1690 when the Protestant King William III, the Dutch Prince of Orange, defeated the Catholic King James II of England at the Battle of the Boyne. This defeat of King

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119 It is from King William III that the Orange Order originated its name. T. G. Fraser, 'Introduction', in T. G. Fraser (ed.), *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum*, (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 4.
James ensured that Protestantism was associated with freedom and became the dominant faith in Northern Ireland. Victory thus became equated with freedom.

An event that was annually honoured in a ritual that was not only sectarian in nature - a Protestant display of superiority and ascendancy - but graphically triumphant in nature was being likened to VE Day.\textsuperscript{120} This ritual had no consolidating effect in Northern Ireland; instead it was an example of how a ritualistic event can unleash underlying tension.\textsuperscript{121} It was seen as ‘an affirmation of the Protestant values and unionist creed which underpinned Northern Ireland’.\textsuperscript{122} As a cultural marker, these annual Orange parades differentiated Protestants from Catholics in the most visible manner.\textsuperscript{123} As an analogy, the ‘trigger word’ of the Twelfth would have shown that VE Day was being linked very closely to the politics of unionism or Orangeism.\textsuperscript{124}

As an element in ritualistic activity, parades are an overt display of power, and in the case of Northern Ireland, they are used to visualise Protestant control and identity. Edwards and Knottnerus are not wrong in stating that ‘In perhaps no other arena is the relationship between ritual and power in Northern Ireland more visible than in the Orange Parades.’\textsuperscript{125} Therefore, a contradiction clearly existed in this unionist narrative. Despite having emphasised that nationalists as well as unionists celebrated the end of the war, that Belfast was a ‘city without strangers’, these references which tied VE Day to the Twelfth restricted the collectivising potential of VE Day and by extension symbolically wrote nationalists out of this narrative.\textsuperscript{126} Moreover, the ‘metaphor-based schema’ centred around the Twelfth, which is a common thread throughout the unionist reporting on VE Day, encouraged readers to ‘form a connection ... in their

\textsuperscript{120} Helen Robinson, ‘Remembering War in the Midst of Conflict: First World War Commemorations in the Northern Irish Troubles’, \textit{Twentieth Century British History} 21, no. 1 (2010), p. 81.


\textsuperscript{122} Fraser, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{123} Jarman and Bryan, ‘Green Parades in an Orange State’, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{124} Roland Paris explains that in order to understand analogies and metaphors one must seek out and be aware of the ‘trigger words and phrases’ used. For him, this means that the process of deciphering analogies and metaphors ‘therefore, is not merely an examination of language but rather an investigation into the conduct of politics through language’. Roland Paris, ‘Kosovo and the Metaphor War’, \textit{Political Science Quarterly} 117, no. 3 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 424-425.


\textsuperscript{126} Tony Canavan has argued that unionists have framed the war experience of both World Wars in such a manner that it denies nationalist involvement in both wars. Such unionist participation in the wars Canavan has noted, justified their claim to the Northern Irish state. Any due recognition being given to nationalists, he argued, could threaten the existence of the state. Tony Canavan, ‘The Poppy My Father Wore: The Problems Facing Irish Nationalists in Commemorating the Two World Wars’, in Eberhard Bort (ed.), \textit{Commemorating Ireland: History, Politics, Culture} (Dublin, 2004), pp. 64-66.
mental representations of the text’ of these two very different events. Discussing the role of metaphor, Roland Paris perceptively argues that ‘by selecting their metaphors carefully, political actors can calibrate messages to the sensitivities, prejudices, and emotional associations of particular audiences’. Not only do political actors have the power to do this, as this chapter shows, the press was clearly able to manipulate the memory of VE Day.

Analogies have a purpose to serve whether that purpose is rhetorical, instructive or informative. More often than not, they are simplified narratives that border on the realm of myth to link the past to the present and help in the formation of a collective or social memory. Stripped of their historical complexities, analogies, like myths offer ‘the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity’. By offering this ‘blissful clarity’ that VE Day was simply like a ‘mini-Twelfth’ without much intellectual engagement with how these two events could be likened, the analogy is effective for its simplicity. In this case, of utmost importance are not the details of the analogy but more what such an interpretation is seeking to achieve.

The motivating factors behind connecting these seemingly different events need to be explored if one is to show how the press constructed a particular reading of VE Day. On the one hand, from a spatial and aesthetic point of view, the visual displays of Union Jacks and the parading with Lambeg drums arguably made some association possible between VE Day and the Twelfth. After all, the Twelfth of July celebrations were suspended during the war years to direct attention to the more pressing issue of the war. The same precedent had taken place in the First World War. Bryan remarks that ‘With the odd exception’, from 1940-1944 this day had not been commemorated, but religious services held in the various churches still took place to remember those who had died fighting at both the Boyne and the Somme. The visual embodiment of

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130 David Hoogland Noon argues that historical analogies can be employed for political reasons through the way in which they ‘trigger emotional, even subconscious associations that are equally capable of inspiring, attracting, and recruiting support for a particular political decision’. For this reason, he proposes that there is a need to critically examine what these analogies are seeking to ‘accomplish for those who enlist them’ (italics in original) Noon, ‘Operation Enduring Analogy’, p. 340.
131 Bryan, *Orange Parades*, p. 69.
children dressed in patriotic clothing, women marching and another woman wearing a sash, would have lent itself easily to associations with an Orange Parade, if only for the spectacular element. However, even this is debateable: the gendering of the image is problematic.

The metaphorical image of women as opposed to men leading this parade through the streets is highly questionable, even if they were doing so to collect material to decorate the neighbourhood. The Orange Order was and is a predominantly male group; women have their own separate institution, which rarely takes part in the marching aspect of the parades. During the parading season, although women, children and the elderly normally act as mere observers, Jarman adds that they too play a contributing role:

they may seem little more than a passive audience, but they too are confirming their role. They are witness to their men’s courage and fortitude; they too are forced to make sacrifices; they will maintain the community in their absence: they are providers and nurturers, and thus have their part in assuring the future.

Yet the framing of this narrative in such a way that it privileged the role women played in the victory celebrations could be symptomatic of women’s changed role during the war years. During the war women not only took up war work but also joined women’s Services or the Land Army. The latter two categories required women to don military uniforms, a situation which did not pass unchallenged by those who argued that it de-feminised women and disrupted safe gender boundaries. Social conventions,
which rejected women’s participation in certain industries and the military in peacetime, were temporarily suspended during the war.\textsuperscript{136} In Northern Ireland however, the government’s approach to the employment of women was slightly different. With the lack of conscription and high unemployment rates, the surplus number of unemployed men made the employment of women undesirable.\textsuperscript{137}

Nevertheless, the war affected men and women alike and the symbolic image of women playing the role of men in marching with a ‘miniature’ Lambeg drum, and wearing one of the key components of the Orangeman’s uniform – the sash – suggests two possibilities. Firstly, women had to undertake these roles as their men were either at work in essential services or had joined the British Forces. These women then, in their men’s absence, took on this ‘double burden’.\textsuperscript{138} Secondly, if women at home did indeed hold the important place of the ‘second line’ of protection and defence, as Sonya Rose has argued, the scene of women parading to the sound of the Lambeg drum symbolised a victory dance, not only to celebrate that the war in Europe had ended, but to congratulate the role that women had played during the war.\textsuperscript{139} Women in this instance are seen to be taking on the role of guardians not only of the Home Front, as they had occupied during the war years, but of the traditions of the Orange Order.

What made this situation highly contentious, however, was not the fact that women had adopted these more masculine roles, but that the political connotations associated with such a sectarian ritual were being applied to VE Day. Of all days, Victory Day should have been a day of thanksgiving and a demonstration of the defeat of Nazi aggression and the triumph of civil liberties uncoloured by sectarian connotations. Yet these associations did not matter in the unionist narrative. For them what was important was that on the Twelfth of July 1945, ‘Orangeism on that day will proudly look the world in the face, and say “You know what part the North of Ireland played.”’\textsuperscript{140} The Orange Order therefore adopted the memory of the Second World War

\textsuperscript{137} Clare O’Kane, “To make good butter and to look after poultry”: The Impact of the Second World War on the Lives of Rural Women in Northern Ireland,” in Gillian McIntosh and Diane Urquhart (eds.), \textit{Irish Women at War: The Twentieth Century} (Dublin, 2010), p. 90.
\textsuperscript{138} This phrase is borrowed from Penny Summerfield’s work in which she argues that during the Second World War women had to undertaken the ‘double burden’ of war work and domestic duties. Braybon and Summerfield, \textit{Out of the Cage}, pp. 235-255.
\textsuperscript{139} Rose, \textit{Which People’s War?}, pp. 136-138.
as part of their symbolic repertoire, or at least lent credence to their marching that year by proudly demonstrating the role the North had played.\textsuperscript{141} In other words, as much as 1690 was ‘an essential part of the unionist sense of history’, so too would 1945 - and the Second World War by association - become viewed as such.\textsuperscript{142} A victory of Protestantism over Catholicism in the seventeenth century was compared to an Allied victory for freedom over Nazi aggression in 1945. Conditioned by unionist insecurities, not only of a Labour victory in the upcoming British election which could potentially reignite the partition issue and concern over divisions within Unionism itself, the unionist press was selectively using the memory of 1690 to unite Protestants in response to these pending political concerns.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This chapter has shown that through the multi-faceted reading of the coverage of VE Day, there was an engagement by both nationalists and unionists on some level with the victory celebrations. Nevertheless, the form and degree in which this participation took place was contested. For the part of the nationalist community, commemoration was mainly associated with expressing thanksgiving. For the unionist community, it was an expression of their national identity. The nationalist press clearly struggled to find a

\textsuperscript{141} Dominic Bryan explores how new symbols are incorporated into Orange Parades to represent the changing political situation. Bryan, \textit{Orange Parades}.

\textsuperscript{142} Brian Walker, ‘1641, 1689, 1690 and All That: The Unionist Sense of History’, \textit{The Irish Review} 12 (Spring - Summer 1992), p. 56. Brian Walker notes also that 1641 (the rebellion in Ireland) and 1689 (the year of the Siege of Derry), in addition to 1690 (the Battle of the Boyne), were three important dates for the Orange Order notably in ‘effecting the collective Protestant consciousness and determining the Protestant outlook on the world’. However, he has shown that these dates became of greater significance and were more widely commemorated mainly throughout the nineteenth century which saw the ‘deepening of religious division and rise of unionism and nationalism, especially in the 1880s’. The commemorations served then, he argues, ‘to justify their contemporary positions’. Up until that point, they were not as important to the ‘Protestant consciousness’ as they became in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite the Orange Order giving prominence to these historical events after it was founded in 1795, it was still only a small group of Protestants at this stage and only really grew in prominence after the mid-1880s. Walker, ‘1641, 1689, 1690 and All That’, pp. 56-59. This idea of a unionist ‘sense of history’ is also explored by Alvin Jackson who argues that up until 1969, the analogies most employed by loyalists were those of 1641 or 1690. After that point, unionists recalled the actions that had taken place from 1912-1914 (which dealt with the Third Home Rule Crisis, the Larne gun-running and the beginning of the First World War). See Alvin Jackson, ‘Unionist History (ii)’, \textit{The Irish Review} 8 (Spring, 1990), p. 62.
coherent voice within the wartime narrative. On the one hand, the *Irish News* provided evidence of the nationalist community joining in on the celebrations, whilst the *Derry Journal* rejected any such participation taking place in Derry; here it was a unionist affair. Nationalists, therefore, may have participated, but only temporarily and their participation did not signify any change in their political outlook: they made no association between celebrating Peace as a demonstration of loyalty to Britain, as the unionists clearly envisaged.

In contrast, the unionist press enthusiastically documented how ‘Ulster’ welcomed Peace by drawing particularly colourful references to those ‘loyal’ areas. For the unionist community, Victory Day appeared to provide an opportunity to parade one’s identity, to reaffirm that ‘Ulster,’ celebrating the end of the war in concert with the rest of the United Kingdom, was a part of that family. The unionist narratives are therefore both underpinned by, and reproduce, a particular national identity. However, they do more than that. The press also reveals the sectarian nature of the unionist commemoration. The rhetorical force of the unionist coverage of the occasion made a striking point. By recalling Armistice Day 1918 and implying that VE Day was a mini-Twelfth, the press locates this event firmly within unionist tradition. The image of women marching to the swelling noise of drums and bin lids is not an empty signifier. Just as unionists adopted the memory of the First World War, and in particular the Battle of the Somme, as a defining moment in unionist history, so too were they commandeering the memory of the Second World War as an event for that community.

Within the unionist inventory of political iconography, Victory Day had been given special significance. The symbolic use of the memory of the Twelfth of July celebrations, an event for and of the Protestant community, as being of a similar nature to the Victory Day commemoration was purely a propagandist move for an internal audience, and helped to localise a unionist interpretation of VE Day. An examination of the coverage of the victory celebrations in the Northern Irish press reveals the complexity of commemoration within a divided society. Victory Day did not and could not lend itself to shared celebration, nor could the ideals that the two communities were commemorating be reconciled.
Choosing the Past: Unionist and Nationalist Interpretations of the War

The broadcasts made by Winston Churchill and Eamon de Valera, topical, debatable and assertive, gave an indication of the level of discontent that existed between the two political leaders in May 1945. Despite secret attempts by the Irish government to offer some support to the British government during the war years, clearly abrogating its policy of neutrality, Churchill decided in his victory speech, made on 13 May 1945 (Thanksgiving Sunday), to criticise Ireland’s policy of neutrality. On 16 May, de Valera made a thanksgiving speech in which he directly challenged Churchill’s attack on Irish neutrality and discussed the implications of the end of the war for Ireland. In Northern Ireland, Churchill’s condemnation of Irish neutrality and de Valera’s well thought out response, instigated a flurry of debate between the nationalist and unionist press over the significance of these two speeches. Acting as catalysts, the two broadcasts enabled the newspapers to publically play out underlying tensions that existed between the two communities; tensions which had been cultivated in the past and which resurfaced in the Northern Irish press as a result of the heated debate between Churchill and de Valera.

The wide publication in the unionist and nationalist Northern Irish press of Winston Churchill and Eamon de Valera’s respective victory and thanksgiving broadcasts, showed the significance of these events. What gave the speeches so much importance for Northern Irish readers, and encouraged the deluge of editorials and special articles, were the direct references made about Northern Ireland and Ireland in the broadcasts. Acting as ‘sites of memory’ the interpretations the newspapers made and
the featuring of special articles and letters-to-the-editors revealed the lack of shared, homogeneous conceptions attached to the war years.\(^1\) The broadcasts instigated serious debate between the papers, not only about the content of the speeches, but about deeply embedded issues between the two communities. As these issues were mediated and exposed through the ‘textual resource’ of the newspapers, it became clear that two collective memories had been formed around Northern Ireland’s war experience: a unionist memory and a nationalist memory.\(^2\) This goes some way to explaining the inconsistent reporting on the victory celebrations, as witnessed in the previous chapter. The narratives that the broadcasts produced were not only inherently partial but proved that any unity encouraged by the victory celebrations had encouraged, was superficial.

This chapter will explore how the press, a tool in the process of memory creation, bore witness to the politics of memory played out in the weeks following the political speeches. It will reveal that any attempt by the press or the Northern Irish government to use the events on and surrounding VE Day as a shared experience in Northern Ireland was severely misjudged. A close reading of the fall-out from the two political speeches proposes that the war years in Northern Ireland did not offer a reconciling experience and that no shared, collective memory of the war was at all possible in May 1945. This chapter will show that the few attempts, described in the previous chapter, to reconcile nationalist involvement in the victory celebrations were simply overwhelmed once the press became embroiled in the debate over the two political speeches. Rather, two opposing memories were constructed and promoted through the Northern Irish newspapers to satisfy contemporary political needs.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first part provides a brief discussion on how narratives, created by the press, seek to shape collective memories.\(^3\) The second section of this chapter examines the actual content of the political broadcasts by Churchill and de Valera. Considering these speeches instigated such debate and enabled the press to script how the war would be remembered for its readers, it is necessary to understand what both leaders said to provoke such public engagement. The third section of this chapter assesses how the press interpreted these

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\(^1\) This phrase was coined by Pierre Nora but has been appropriated by Jay Winter. See Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, Representations 26 (Spring, 1989), pp. 7-25; Winter, Sites of Memory.

\(^2\) Wertsch, Voices of Collective, p. 8.

\(^3\) Barbie Zelizer explores how journalists consider the use of their stories as ‘strategic accomplishments’ in ‘shaping how the public remembers’ events. Zelizer, Covering the Body, p. 5.
speeches by looking at newspaper editorials, special articles written by outside contributors, and letters-to-the-editor. This section shows that although the policy of neutrality was battled out between the newspapers, what was at stake was not the righteousness of neutrality during the war, but how the two communities imagined themselves, how they constructed their understanding of the war years and how this reflected on their political outlook.

In order to show the diachronically opposed interpretations of the broadcasts and how these narratives contributed to the formation of conflicting memories, I will examine the press coverage in the nationalist orientated newspapers, before discussing the unionist press. The final section then looks at the political context in Northern Ireland by discussing how concern over the anticipated General Election in Northern Ireland informed the reception of the speeches. It also suggests that for the unionist community the speeches were being used to strengthen group identity in the build up to the elections. That the Northern Irish government was preparing for its own elections alongside the British General Election clearly motivated the unionist press to boast of Churchill’s references to Northern Ireland and to distinguish Northern Ireland from neutral Ireland. Equally, the nationalist press adopted a narrative style that spoke in favour of neutrality but failed to give expression to how Northern nationalists experienced the war. Instead, its focus was on campaigning for an end to partition.

Theoretical Debate

The press acts as a public and accessible ‘cultural form’ of memory, revealing how the past is socially constructed through competing narratives. These ‘cultural tools’ are needed to mediate collective memory, for the latter cannot exist in its own right as some kind of abstract ideal. Rather, collective memory needs to be nurtured in groups that employ these textually mediated resources to create their own collective memory.  


5 James Wertsch speaks of the use of ‘cultural tools’ or ‘textually mediated’ resources in the construction and maintenance of collective memory. See Wertsch, *Voices of Collective*, p. 11.
Power relations are at play in this competition to produce the dominant narrative. Yet the dominant narrative may not always become the most important one: often a vernacular or unofficial narrative reveals a great deal more about a relationship or an event than the official, dominant one. The two sets of narratives created in the Northern Irish press in May 1945, in a sense, represent this dichotomy of official/vernacular. Two instantaneous discourses were created from the 'words' of the speeches to frame the collective memories of the war for the unionist and nationalist communities. There is truth in the claim that 'it is one thing to consider whether or not a given event or process makes it into the collective memory and quite another to consider its cultural depth, breadth, and resonance'. As this chapter demonstrates, the unionist and nationalist narratives served the purpose of creating two collective memories, which were sustained and informed by competing viewpoints, to produce two competing and socially constructed representations of the past. Their durability, a question for another time, will be touched upon in chapter four.

By framing their own understandings of the war, the agendas of the newspapers studied reveal the fabricated, social construction of the past, determined by the concerns of the present. Such public representations of the past, encoded in the cultural form of the newspapers, can only be partially factually correct. The media, claim David Middleton and Derek Edwards, ‘and their concomitant modes of presentation and discourse, constrain or shape what can and cannot be thought, said, written and remembered’. In this way, the accuracy of what is written or said is of less importance than how those working in the media represent the past and provide a believable, useable image. Of course their representation will omit certain important facts and memories, in particular those which are hidden, silenced or personal, but this does not detract from their usefulness in understanding how collective memories are formed. It is how these different social groups mediate and contest each other over the representation of the past that reveals how collective memories are formed.

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7 Wagner-Pacifici, 'Memories in the Making', p. 305.
8 Tota, 'Collective Memories at "Work"', p. 64.
10 Alon Confino discusses those memories that are not widely publicised in Alon Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (December, 1997), pp. 1394-1403.
11 This process of contestation and negotiation can be found in works such as R. Wagner-Pacifici and B. Schwartz, 'The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past', *American Journal of Sociology*. 
therefore methodologically important to be aware of both the process of remembering and forgetting taking place in the construction of collective memory - particularly when an outside agent like the press is instigating this process.

Narratives are not neutral nor do they exist in isolation; they are affected by socio-cultural factors. They are also not full, objective stories of a particular event, instead they are created by a process of selection and omission to form the most believable and coherent narrative. In order, therefore, to understand how these collective memories are formed it is necessary to take into consideration the form in which the memories are recorded, how they are encoded and interpreted, and also the context in which they are written. This three-pronged analysis will go some way in helping to understand the process. The dialogue between the two different narratives is evidence of the contested nature of the past and the difficulties in the construction of collective memory. The newspapers examined in this chapter show how the press and its readers interacted with the political speeches made by Churchill and de Valera, and how they choose to use these speeches to speak about other issues unrelated to the topics discussed in the broadcasts. As will be explored, these matters had more to do with providing voice to and maintaining the collective memories of their respective groups than the speeches themselves.

‘A dignified David against a blundering Goliath’

Winston Churchill’s speech, aired on 13 May and Eamon de Valera’s on 16 May 1945, were both awaited with much anticipation. Not only were these speeches to mark the end of the war, but they would also suggest how the countries were to move forward in the post-war world. Moreover, these broadcasts were performances of the most public kind. Churchill’s speech was listened to not only in Britain, but also in Southern Ireland.
as many tuned in to hear his public announcement. It was even broadcast in America. De Valera, for his part, capitalised on his successful thanksgiving speech by having it published into a small ‘souvenir’ pamphlet that featured not only his own speech, but the references Churchill had made about Ireland. The ‘battle of the broadcasts’, witnessed through Churchill's attack on Irish neutrality and de Valera’s response, resulted in Churchill, in later years, being caricatured as the ‘blundering Goliath’ against de Valera the ‘dignified David’.

After the overt victory and thanksgiving celebrations had ended, Churchill broadcast his victory speech on Thanksgiving Sunday. His speech charted the success of Britain during the war and spoke of the admirable stoicism of the British nation, which he claimed had stood ‘alone’ during the fateful period that witnessed Germany defeat France, the Low Counties and Norway. This was a nation which had ‘borne without a word of complaint or the slightest signs of flinching’ such hardship during the blitz. A nation protected not only by the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy, but by the Home Guard which had been armed ‘at least with rifles and armed also with the spirit “Conquer or Die”’. In the course of his speech, he commended the alliances that Britain had made with Russia and the United States of America in the defeat of Germany. Churchill highlighted how these relationships stood in stark contrast to the help offered by the Irish government, whose closure of the Southern approaches

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13 In fact, the Belfast Telegraph suggested that instead of listening to Radio Éireann's Question Time, listeners in Dublin had tuned in to the BBC to hear Churchill's announcement. Not even 25 per cent of Dublin listeners, according to the newspaper, had been listening to the popular Sunday night programme broadcast from Sligo. See Belfast Telegraph, ‘Dublin and the Broadcast’, 14 May 1945.

14 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Memorandum by John Maffey (United Kingdom Representative to Ireland) 21 May 1945.

15 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Booklet: Mr. de Valera’s Reply to Mr. Churchill: Why Ireland Was Neutral. It is interesting to note that within this Dominions Office file, there are short unidentifiable newspaper clippings which state that although 100,000 copies of the reprint had been made, demand necessitated more copies to be printed. Apparently this demand came from people who wanted to send copies to friends in England, America and other overseas countries. The Irish Press, which published the booklet, even informed Lord Cranborne (Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs) that it was putting it on the British market in order to ‘give the British public an opportunity of considering Ireland’s position dispassionately as we hope, thereby to foster a better understanding between our two peoples’. TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Letter William Sweetman (Editor of Irish Press) to Lord Cranborne, 13 June 1945. Moreover, the cover of the booklet, located in the Dominions Office file read: ‘Mr. de Valera’s Reply to Mr. Churchill’ followed by ‘Why Ireland was Neutral’. However, in Ian Wood’s book he provides an image of the cover of the booklet which reads ‘Taoiseach’s Broadcast to the Nation’. This point is intriguing. If Britain received the former booklet then it suggests that de Valera was trying to make a forceful point to British readers about his policy of neutrality. However, from the file it is difficult to ascertain which booklet was actually in circulation in Britain, especially amongst the public. Ian S. Wood, Ireland during the Second World War (London, 2002), p. 63.


provoked fear of ‘strangulation’ for the British nation. In emotionally charged language, Churchill angrily cried:

Owing to the action of Mr. de Valera, so much at variance with the temper and instinct of thousands of southern Irishmen, who hastened to the battlefront to prove their ancient valour, the approaches which the southern Irish ports and airfields could so easily have guarded were closed by the hostile aircraft and U-boats.\(^\text{18}\)

By singling out de Valera himself as culpable for placing Britain’s security into jeopardy, Churchill was keen to compare this with what had taken place in Northern Ireland. Drawing comparisons between the North and South of Ireland, Churchill added:

This was indeed a deadly moment in our life, and if it had not been for the loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland we should have been forced to come to close quarters with Mr. de Valera or perish forever from the earth.\(^\text{19}\)

It was, therefore, this loyalty that prevented Britain from attacking Ireland and allowed the British Government to exercise ‘a restraint and poise to which, I say, history will find few parallels.\(^\text{20}\)

Yet, not only did the support offered by Northern Ireland make a British invasion of Ireland redundant, according to Churchill it enabled ‘the de Valera Government to frolic with the German and later with the Japanese representatives to their heart's content’. Whilst this damning state of affairs - as far as Churchill was

\(^{18}\) TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: The Times, ‘Mr. Churchill's Five Years’, 14 May 1945. The Irish Government's refusal to allow Britain use of these Treaty ports put much more importance on Northern Ireland strategically. It therefore served to secure, for strategic reasons, the partition of Ireland as a prerequisite to the safety of Britain. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine (London, 1973), p. 522.

\(^{19}\) TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: The Times, ‘Mr. Churchill's Five Years’, 14 May 1945.

concerned - did not represent all Irish people, he was quick to make comparisons. ‘Irish heroes’ like ‘Lieutenant-Commander Esmonde, V.C., D.S.O., Lance-Corporal Keneally, [sic] V.C., Captain Fegen, V.C.,’ Churchill added, stood in stark contrast to de Valera’s public actions. They had fought alongside Britain; it was because of them that ‘all bitterness by Britain for the Irish race’ had died.  

Through this notion of forgiveness on the part of the British, Churchill declared that he hoped that, ‘in years which I shall not see the shame will be forgotten and the glories will endure, and that the peoples of the British Isles and of the British Commonwealth of Nations will walk together in mutual comprehension and forgiveness.’

Engaging with the popular memory of what has now been described as the ‘myth of 1940’; in which Britain stood alone and its people displayed attributes of courage, resilience and determination against the threat of invasion, Churchill was clearly praising his own people. However, by juxtaposing this memory against Ireland’s neutrality, Churchill served to vilify Ireland and in particular the Taoiseach, who he choose to single out in his broadcast. By commenting indirectly on de Valera frolicking with the German and Japanese representatives, Churchill brought to mind two connected points. Firstly, he reminded his listeners that only a few weeks earlier, on 2 May, de Valera, acting as Taoiseach and Minister for External Affairs, accompanied by Joseph Walshe, the Secretary of External Affairs, had visited the home of Dr. Eduard Hempel, the German Minister in Ireland. Widely publicised and criticised, the purpose of this now memorable visit was to personally offer their sympathy to Hempel on the death of Adolf Hitler. Secondly, Churchill deliberately brought to mind how de Valera had refused to expel Axis representatives from Dublin. Both of these acts, but arguably the former in particular, served to paint a rather poor public image of Irish neutrality.

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21 Ian Wood states that Lance Corporal John Patrick Keneally, who had won a Victoria Cross for the part he had played in the army in Tunisia in April 1943, was not actually Irish but was half-Jewish from Manchester. His real name was Leslie Baker. Upon obtaining an identity card and a National Insurance number from an Irish labourer - a John Patrick Keneally - he enrolled in the Irish Guards. Although Churchill was probably unaware of the forgery this man had committed, the fact remained that Keneally had become part of a myth that Churchill had created about brave Southern Irishmen who had joined the British Forces as opposed to the immoral de Valera and his policy of neutrality. Wood, Ireland, p. 94.


24 For an in-depth analysis of this episode known as the American Note of February 1944 in which David Gray, the American representative in Dublin, sent de Valera a note demanding that he expel Axis representatives from Dublin on account of the fact that their residence in Dublin endangered Allied security, see Emma Cunningham, ‘Ireland, Canada and the American Note’, in Dermot Keogh and Mervyn O’Driscoll (eds.), Ireland in World War Two: Diplomacy and Survival (Cork, 2004), pp. 144-158.
Despite worldwide criticism of his visit to Dr. Hempel’s residence, de Valera maintained that his visit was nothing more than an act of diplomatic protocol. Nevertheless, Dermot Keogh brands this act as ‘both myopic and naïve’. According to Keogh, despite maintaining official neutrality throughout the war, de Valera’s action ‘and not his pro-Allied wartime record fixed his place in history for many tens of thousands of people who knew little – and cared less – about the Irish leader’. The timing of this act, taking place just weeks after the discovery of the horrors of German concentration camps, was important and disconcerting. As Mervyn O'Driscoll concludes, this visit was ‘one of the greatest errors of judgement in de Valera’s political career and it coloured international opinion to an inordinate degree for decades’.

Whilst it has been argued that de Valera’s action sullied his own political career - at least on the international stage - it served to promote Northern Ireland’s positioning as a part of the United Kingdom. It can be argued that from the point of view of the Northern Irish government, de Valera’s action was political gold dust. Not only did it differentiate Northern from Southern Ireland (as Churchill also confirmed in his speech), but it gave the Northern Irish Prime Minister the opportunity to voice his opinion on the affair and locate his position firmly within the British camp. Having been asked by a press representative ‘whether he would make any comment on the death of Hitler’, Sir Basil Brooke replied:

‘No one, I feel sure, will expect me as an Ulsterman, as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, and as a loyal subject of the King to shed any tears over Hitler’s death much less to offer obsequious sympathy to any representative of the enemy.’

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25 Keogh, 'De Valera, Hitler & the Visit of Condolence May 1945', History Ireland 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1997), p. 59 and p. 61. Keogh maintains that the visit was not to the German Legation but to Hempel’s residence. He suggests that although de Valera had made it publically known that he had expressed condolence on the death of Hitler, it is arguable that Hempel chose his own home to receive the Taoiseach ‘to avoid any undue publicity’. Keogh also states that aside from protocol, de Valera was influenced by the friendship he had built with Hempel. Keogh, 'Eamon de Valera and Hitler: An Analysis of International Reaction to the Visit to the German Minister, May 1945', Irish Studies in International Affairs 3, no. 1 (1989), pp. 72-73 and p. 74.


By doing what he did, de Valera was the symbol of disloyalty, so much so that Brooke added, “That sort of thing might be done in Dublin but not in Belfast”. Brooke’s reply was extraordinary. The press representative had merely asked for a ‘comment’ yet Brooke used the opportunity to frame his response so that it denounced de Valera and Irish neutrality. The accusation was clear for all to see: Northern Ireland was loyal, Ireland was disloyal and a place apart.

It was in this unsettled and highly emotional context that de Valera made his reply on 16 May 1945. Maurice Moynihan, who was Secretary to the Department of the Taoiseach and Secretary to the government in 1937, stated that ‘It was confidently expected that de Valera would reply, and rarely were his words awaited with such tense eagerness as when it was announced that he would broadcast on Wednesday 16 May’. In many ways the structure of de Valera’s address was similar to Churchill’s broadcast, in that it covered broader issues other than the relationship between Ireland and Britain during the war. However, Joseph Lee saw de Valera’s broadcast as a ‘golden opening not only to divert attention from his recent condolences to Hempel on Hitler’s death, but also from his anglophile neutrality’.

In his speech, de Valera discussed topics that were natural for him to speak about on such an occasion. He praised God for delivering the country from the horrors of war; a grace that would be rewarded with ‘a day of national thanksgiving on which we may publicly express due gratitude to God for His immense mercy in our regard’. He advised listeners of the continuing need for rationing and the need to become more self sufficient in order to help, not only Irish people themselves, but those suffering from the effects of war. Whilst he applauded Irish people for accepting these restrictions he did not thank those men and women who had joined the British Armed Forces or who had taken up war work. Rather, de Valera chose to focus on all those in the Services and voluntary organisations in Ireland for their help during the war years.

Despite his acknowledgement of the devastation that the war had caused, de Valera was unwilling to apologise for remaining officially out of the war. Making clear his reasons for declining to join the war on the Allied side, he reminded listeners of

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31 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Booklet: Mr. de Valera’s Reply to Mr. Churchill: Why Ireland Was Neutral.
Ireland’s experience during the First World War when it had supported Britain and was rewarded with the partitioning of the country. Influenced by this act, the decision not to become a belligerent in the Second World War, he argued, was taken not only by himself, as Churchill had insinuated in his speech, but by ‘practically the entire Dáil and the entire community, irrespective of any personal views which citizens held on the merits of the cause which occasioned the conflict’. So whilst clarifying the Irish position, de Valera also made a point of directly replying to Churchill’s criticisms on Irish neutrality; criticisms which, according to Maurice Moynihan, ‘used expressions regarding Ireland’s official neutrality so offensive as to arouse deep and widespread resentment among the people of Ireland’.  

In comparison to Churchill’s speech, de Valera indicated that he did not want to ‘be guilty of adding any fuel to the flames of hatred and passion’ by giving a kind of response that he would have provided twenty-five years earlier. Instead, he opted for the more restrained version; a path Churchill had chosen not to follow. De Valera, mindful of the rashness of those parts of Churchill’s broadcast that had referred to Ireland, duly made political capital out of them. He acknowledged that it was understandable Churchill may have been overwhelmed in the ‘first flush of his victory’ to make such ‘unworthy’ comments about him and his government, even if he, de Valera, had considered them unwarranted. According to Ian Wood, this ‘hint of condescension’, in which he justified Churchill’s comments for ‘being made in a context of celebration and national euphoria’, was the strong point of de Valera’s ‘low-key and unemotional’ response.

Despite being ‘low-key’, de Valera was methodical in his approach toward counteracting Churchill’s criticisms. Picking up on Churchill’s brash statement that if necessary he would have invaded Ireland regardless of Ireland’s official neutrality, de Valera retorted:

> It seems strange to me that Mr. Churchill does not see that this, if accepted, would mean that Britain’s necessity would become a moral

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33 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Booklet: Mr. de Valera’s Reply to Mr. Churchill: Why Ireland Was Neutral.
code and that when this necessity became sufficiently great, other people’s rights were not to count.35

De Valera asked, if this supposition was true, what separated Britain from ‘other great Powers’ that had followed a similar logic and brought about two world wars? In a chiding remark, de Valera praised Britain for not invading Ireland and, therefore, saving a smaller nation from the advances of a larger one. By ‘resisting his temptation in this instance’, de Valera claimed that Churchill, ‘instead of adding another horrid chapter to the already bloodstained record of the relations between England and this country, has advanced the cause of international morality an important step’. Envisioning these actions bringing about a ‘fresh beginning’ between the peoples of Ireland and Britain, de Valera provided a historical context for his arguments. He reminded listeners that partition and old historical grievances between the two countries had always precluded the development of more amicable relations by remarking:

Could he not find it in his heart the generosity to acknowledge that there is a small nation that stood alone not for one year or two, but for several hundred years against aggression; that endured spoliations, famines, massacres in endless succession; that was clubbed many times into insensibility, but that each time on returning consciousness took up the fight anew; a small nation that could never be got to accept defeat and has never surrendered her soul?36

It is not surprising that de Valera should use his thanksgiving speech to remind listeners of Britain’s imperialism towards Ireland. After all, in Churchill’s thirty-five minute speech, those few paragraphs that dealt with Ireland and Northern Ireland during the war were used to launch an attack on the Taoiseach and neutrality. Moreover, de Valera had always been concerned with returning to past issues, not only in public speeches, but in his own private communication and with statesmen. As Patrick Murray, writing

35 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Booklet: Mr. de Valera’s Reply to Mr. Churchill: Why Ireland Was Neutral.
36 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Booklet: Mr. de Valera’s Reply to Mr. Churchill: Why Ireland Was Neutral.
on de Valera’s constant need to ‘police the evolving public presentation of his career’ argues:

His tendency to provide his adversaries with lengthy disquisitions on the ancient grievances of Ireland arose from his belief that the political problems of the present did not admit of resolution if divorced from their origins in the past.37

So whilst de Valera proposed improving Anglo-Irish relations in his thanksgiving speech, he was deliberately using this moment to voice his anger over the ‘injustice’ of partition, which he claimed had caused ‘the mutilation of our country’. Therefore, just as Churchill used his broadcast to vilify Irish neutrality, so too was de Valera using the opportunity afforded by his reply speech to revisit the partition issue. By focussing on this issue of partition, de Valera argued that whilst Ireland remained divided the Irish government would never involve itself in a war on Britain’s side. However, according to de Valera, an ending of partition would see an improvement in the relationship of the two countries. His speech, therefore, can be interpreted more as a propagandist tool to counteract Churchill’s criticisms and publicise the rights of Ireland’s neutrality.

Contemporaries received these speeches differently, with some realising the folly of Churchill’s outburst. Sir John Maffey, the United Kingdom representative to Ireland, acknowledged de Valera’s pensive reply, remarking that the Taoiseach ‘saw his advantage, found the authentic anti-British note and did not put a foot wrong’. Maffey added, ‘Therefore today, for the Irishman in the Homeland and overseas, it is once again a case of “Up Dev!”’38 For him, Churchill had made a political blunder addressing Ireland’s wartime stance in the manner in which he did, leading Maffey to conclude, ‘Phrases make history here.’39 Even the representative for Canada in Dublin, John D. Kearney, equally asserted, “We had him on a plate. We had him where we wanted him.

38 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Memorandum by John Maffey (United Kingdom Representative to Ireland) 21 May 1945.
39 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Letter Maffey to Eric Machtig (Dominions Office), 21 May 1945.
But look at the papers this morning! Kearney’s revealing statement is important as it illustrates that although de Valera provided a clever reply, he actually had little external support outside of Ireland. Looking from the viewpoint of unionists in Northern Ireland, Dennis Kennedy, writing in the 1980s, suggests that for unionists, Churchill’s response could have only been interpreted positively. He remarks:

Churchill’s victory broadcast of May 1945, with its dismissal of de Valera and its tribute to the friendship and loyalty of Northern Ireland encapsulated and confirmed the Unionist view of the war experience as a vindication of Unionism and the final unmasking of Irish nationalism.41

Interestingly, while historians have realised the significance of these two public broadcasts in terms of how it affected Anglo-Irish relations, they fail to locate properly how they were interpreted in Northern Ireland. Clair Wills explains the significance of these speeches when she writes ‘As so often during the war, Churchill had sought to make neutrality a moral issue, implying a culpable frivolity on the part of the Irish in the face of depotism [sic].’ For his part, de Valera ‘refused to take the bait, turning back instead on his opposite number the political language of sovereignty, national pride and self-defence’.42 Churchill, claimed Robert Fisk, in his angered response was still imagining Ireland as ‘as a colonial dependency’ and ‘failed to see … that the citizens of Eire were no longer British, that neutrality – far from being an unnatural course – was proof of their independence’.43 Each of the two political leaders, O’Driscoll argues, used the speeches to adopt ‘in their own ways the moral high ground’.44 However, Joseph Lee proposes a more pragmatic influence behind de Valera’s speech. He states that:

40 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1229/WX110/3: Memorandum by John Maffey (United Kingdom Representative to Ireland) 21 May 1945.
43 Fisk, In Time of War, p. 539.
44 O'Driscoll, ‘Concluding Thoughts’, p. 293.
This burnished image of sovereign neutrality could hardly be maintained if it emerged that Dublin was cooperating so closely with the ancient enemy. It was vital for the national psyche from an emotional viewpoint, no less than for de Valera from a party political viewpoint, that the extent of Irish cooperation should not receive indecent exposure.\textsuperscript{45}

Yet the question must be asked: how did these speeches affect Northern Ireland? Whilst their political significance (and how they were received) in both Britain and Ireland, has been documented, Northern Ireland appears to have been overlooked. What follows, then will go some way to filling in this gap in historical knowledge and shows that the manner in which these broadcasts were interpreted in Northern Ireland, and publicised in the Northern Irish press, reveal a great deal about Northern Irish society in May 1945.

The Reception of the Two Political Broadcasts in the Northern Irish Press.

The reception of the two political speeches fell within clearly defined and arguably expectant positions. The unionist press in Northern Ireland highlighted not only Churchill’s references to Northern Ireland’s loyalty, but centred its reading of the speeches on Churchill’s admission that if it had not been for this loyalty the British government may have been forced to attack Ireland. The press, therefore, created an image that the Northern Irish government had saved Ireland. On the other hand, the nationalist press firmly located its position in defence of neutrality, speaking not in terms of Northern nationalists – it made little distinction between Northern and Southern Irishmen – but it used the column space to justify neutrality, and forcefully challenge Churchill’s references to ‘Ulster’s’ loyalty.

\textsuperscript{45} Lee, Ireland, 1912-1985, p. 264.
In effect, the Northern Irish press scripted the memory of the war by adopting two distinct viewpoints. By doing so it acted as a ‘cultural authority’, positioning its own viewpoint and, by extension, its readers into a preferred reading. As Barbie Zelizer affirms, ‘Cultural authority helps journalists use their interpretations of public events to shape themselves into authoritative communities.’ By doing so, they are a fundamental component in the moulding of the public memory of events and the forming of collective memories. As is examined below, the competition between the unionist and nationalist press - to justify or challenge their own and each other’s readings of the speeches - created two irreconcilable collective memories of the war years. Motivated by their ‘own agendas’ these narratives are as much about national identity as they are about locating one’s political position.

The Shaping of Nationalist Collective Memory

The introduction to this thesis has already established that how events are remembered, and how they are explained, often come from pre-existing discourses or templates. The nationalist press’s interpretation of the speeches is a prime example of the use of such pre-determined frameworks. The press’s explanation followed clearly rehearsed rhetoric of how Ireland had suffered at the hands of British imperialism, how Ireland was unjustly divided and how, only by reunification, could any significant rapprochement in relations between Ireland and Britain be achieved. This was a clearly constructed and easily identifiable nationalist trope but to localise the narrative, the press did not speak about Northern nationalists’ experience; rather, it challenged what it claimed to be a mythical notion of unionist loyalty.

Discussing or acknowledging Northern Ireland’s involvement in the war was not a clear-cut process. It challenged cultural allegiances in Northern Ireland, distinguishing Northern Ireland from neutral Southern Ireland. For Northern nationalists, the cultural and political significance attached to Northern Ireland’s...
involvement in the war by Churchill made association with it all the more problematic. Therefore to recognise Northern Ireland’s participation in the war would be to publically accept the existence of the Northern Irish state. Nationalists, after all, felt no allegiance to the government of Northern Ireland and directed their outlook towards Dublin, rather than Belfast, as their capital. These ambiguities were witnessed in the nationalist press’s reaction to the speeches, suggesting that memories attached to the war years were as much about tropes of identity, as they were about Northern Ireland’s involvement in the war. The nationalist interpretation focused around three themes: Irish neutrality, international morality, and unionist loyalty.

While Churchill’s speech provided the nationalist press with the political capital to voice its position, the speech itself was written off by the Derry Journal as being nothing more than an unfounded ‘Churchillian outburst’. In a particularly impassioned editorial the Derry Journal interpreted Churchill’s broadcast as evidence that British imperialism was still very much alive when it came to Ireland. By stating that if it had not been for Northern Ireland’s loyalty he would have had to invade Ireland, Churchill, the newspaper claimed, had shown that he was willing to subject Ireland to its ‘second onslaught within a quarter of a century’, for his own needs. The first onslaught – partition – added to ‘seven centuries of struggle for her own liberation’, the newspaper added, had left ‘Nationalist Ireland cold’.

Writing for the Irish News, an author using the pseudonym, ‘Avalon’ employed the memory of the First World War; arguing that with Ireland’s experience during that war, ‘No Government, not even Mr. de Valera’s, could have acted differently and survived.’ Avalon recalled how the British Cabinet at the time, of which Churchill himself had been a member, promised Ireland independence if Irishmen supported Britain in the war. Irishmen, Avalon argued, answered this call and fought alongside Belgium against Germany with an estimated 350,000 ‘volunteers, not conscripts’. Despite fighting for their independence, and with a provisional number that placed those Irishmen who died fighting at double the number of Belgians, Avalon rhetorically added:

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Belgium duly regained her independence. Did we achieve ours? No; Ireland’s reward was the ‘Black and Tans.’ Did Mr. Churchill resign from office in protest? No; on the contrary, he became later a major architect of that undemocratic dismemberment of the country, of that crime of partition for which not a single Irishman, North and South, ever cast a vote. Does Mr. Churchill ever stop to ask himself how differently Ireland might have acted in this war if England had continued to defend in Ireland the principles of freedom and democracy to which she is so devoted elsewhere? ‘Memories are short,’ said Mr. Churchill last Sunday. Yes; but not as short as that.\(^{50}\)

With these memories of past injustices still a defining trope of the nationalist narrative, the nationalist press proposed that the only policy that Ireland could and should follow was one of neutrality. So, whilst the press built upon long-held historical grievances, just as de Valera had done, it also reminded its readers of more recent events like partition, which had acted to weaken Anglo-Irish relations. In addition, it set about challenging Churchill’s reference to the loyalty of Northern Ireland. This was accomplished by defining the ‘loyalty and friendship of Northern Ireland’ as unionist loyalty. It makes no connection between this loyalty and nationalists in Northern Ireland.

In a tactical manner, Avalon claimed that Churchill’s praise of Northern Ireland and its loyalty was ‘marred by a display of petulant misunderstanding about Southern Ireland’s neutrality, and by a monumental misreading of Northern Ireland’s loyalty’.\(^{51}\) Equally, the *Irish News* editorialised that unionist loyalty was an illusory concept. Arguing that not only was it inconsistent, but at times it was anything but loyal to the British Crown. Providing instances in which to undermine this mythical notion of loyalty, the editorial recalled how the Northern Irish Prime Minister, James Craig, had dissolved the Northern Irish House of Commons in 1938 following the then British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain’s attempt to initiate negotiations with de Valera. The editorial dramatically recorded how Craig had ‘flung down the gauntlet and declared an election in an attempt to show that no British Prime Minister would be permitted to interfere in “Ulster” affairs’. Describing his reaction as ‘melodramatic’, the


editorial added that it was this type of ‘loyalty’ that had not only discouraged the development of a ‘good relationship between the two islands’, but had also hindered ‘the cause of international morality which fair-minded statesmen hold dear’ and, if anything, was ‘a threat to the friendship between Ireland and Britain which each nation needs and desires’.52 Adding to this argument, Avalon reminded readers that this type of unionist loyalty was, therefore, not unconditional but ‘conditional on Orange ascendancy’.53 For him, the problem was not between Ireland and Britain, but rather was being created by Northern unionists.

That the unionists were the menacing force preventing better relations between the peoples of Ireland and Britain, was reinforced in a special article written by Denis Ireland for the Irish News. Captain Denis Ireland was a renowned Presbyterian and nationalist who wrote extensively on the injustices of partition.54 As a freelance writer and broadcaster, his name was well known in Northern Ireland and also within the Northern Irish government.55 The latter had tried to close down the Ulster Union Club, of which Denis Ireland was the founding member.56 His engagement with this debate in the press was an indication of the seriousness of the issue at that time. In an open letter to Churchill, he warned what the end of the war would bring to Northern Ireland.57 In an aptly titled article “‘Ulster and the Peace”: An Open Letter to Mr. Churchill’, Denis Ireland attempted to give voice to how Northern nationalists would experience the end of the war. For him, the concept of peace did not signify an end to conflict, but in fact actually made internal conflict in Northern Ireland all the more visible and palpable. He wrote:

54 See in particular Denis Ireland, Six Counties in Search of a Nation: Essays and Letters on Partition, 1942-1946 (Belfast, 1947). He had also fought with the Royal Irish Fusiliers in the First World War.
55 Denis Ireland broadcast on the BBC see McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 88.
56 The Ulster Union Club was set up to ‘invoke the spirit of the Presbyterian United Irishmen like Wolfe Tone and Henry Joy McCracken who first raised the banner of Republicanism at McArt’s Fort on the historic Cavehill, Belfast in 1795’. James Kelly, a reporter from Northern Ireland, explains that fear of this ‘modest effort to revive Protestant nationalism’ resulted in the Northern Irish government ordering the Special Branch of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to raid the Club and the homes of its members, which included Presbyterian clergymen, lecturers, and teachers amongst others. James Kelly interprets this episode as an example of how the government sought ‘to stifle and suppress the slightest movement in the Protestant community away from the orthodox Unionist Party oligarchy’. Kelly, Bonfires on the Hillside, pp. 149-150. For more on the Ulster Union Club see Risteárd Ó Glaisne, Denis Ireland (Baile Átha Cliath, 2000), pp. 122-162.
57 The Irish News welcomed stories from writers such as Colin Johnston Robb (historian), Cathal O’Byrne (Belfast writer), and Louis J. Walsh (lawyer and playwright), who wrote under the pseudonym, ‘Cormac Mac Art’ when documenting the weekly politics. See Phoenix, ‘The History of a Newspaper’, p. 31.
Sir, - In many parts of ‘Ulster,’ including the industrial city of Belfast, the new era of peace in Europe was inaugurated by the thunder of Orange drums. It was an ominous beginning. In present circumstances it means that jobs will soon be scarce again, and that, as a consequence, the old system of industrial gerrymandering will soon be back in full working order.\textsuperscript{58}

For Northern Catholics ““Peace””, Denis Ireland insinuated, would be signalled by a rise in unemployment, which meant that ‘in addition to the open and shameless system of political gerrymandering by means of which “Unionism” is maintained in power, we shall also be threatened by the possibility of industrial gerrymandering as well.’\textsuperscript{59} According to Denis Ireland, in this situation, it would be Catholics and not Protestants, as political gerrymandering had proven, who would suffer discrimination.

Whilst acknowledging the unionist government’s culpability in this situation, Denis Ireland also made clear that this problem had been created as much by the British government as by the Northern Irish government. By playing the ‘Orange card’, he claimed both Winston Churchill and his father, Lord Randolph Churchill, were culpable in ensuring Protestant control in Northern Ireland. Yet Denis Ireland queried why this was so. He asked why Churchill appeared intent on maintaining the political status quo when in 1912 these same unionists had provided evidence of their disloyalty. By drawing attention to the violent reaction of unionists to a speech that Churchill had given in Belfast advocating Home Rule, Denis Ireland recalled how they had conspired to ‘overturn your motor-car in the streets of Belfast in the year 1912, with the intention of “liquidating” you, or at least doing you serious bodily injury’. To add insult to injury, Denis Ireland added, ‘somewhere about the same time the same persons, or persons acting as their agents, connived at sending the plans of Belfast harbour to Germany and invited the Kaiser to come over and help them’. By referring to such examples of

\textsuperscript{58} Denis Ireland, ““Ulster and the Peace”: An Open Letter to Mr. Churchill”, \textit{Irish News}, 16 May 1945.
\textsuperscript{59} Denis Ireland, ““Ulster and the Peace”: An Open Letter to Mr. Churchill”, \textit{Irish News}, 16 May 1945.
unionist indiscretion, Denis Ireland openly challenged how this could be equated with loyalty.60

Rather than focussing so much attention on placating unionists whose sincerity towards Britain was contestable, Denis Ireland suggested ways in which relations could realistically be improved between Ireland and Britain. In a purely nationalist manner, he argued that the only way that Britain’s security could be guaranteed was through the ending of the ‘cancer’ of partition. The fact that the country had been divided, he admitted, served to leave both Ireland and Britain vulnerable as ‘it contributed towards the political disunity of Ireland and the splitting of Irish national sentiment in time of total war.’ This partition was, therefore, wrongly encouraged by those ‘with whom misrepresentation of all things Irish was either a profession or a hobby’. Such bad advice served to feed the ‘myth’ that all an Irish Army would do when confronted with European invaders would be ‘to embrace them as brothers’, suggesting, as Denis Ireland implausibly remarked, ‘that all Irish citizens sleep with pigs under their beds’. This myth, which he said had been imagined by ‘eminent English and Anglo-Irish authorities’, meant the following:

60 These events that took place as a response to unionist resolve to oppose Home Rule were seen as defining moments within unionism and were not interpreted by unionists as a sign of disloyalty. In fact they became a part of unionist mythology. The Larne gun-running episode of April 1914 witnessed Ulster unionists import guns into Larne, County Antrim, as a means of opposing Home Rule by force. This event was directed by Major Fred Crawford and gained twenty-five thousand guns and three million rounds of ammunition for the Ulster Volunteer Force. The importance of the event is that it played a significant part in unionist popular memory. There was, therefore, clearly an element of ambiguity in the loyalty of Ulster unionists – they did not see their militancy from 1912 to 1914 as going against loyalty to Britain – yet for nationalists their actions epitomized their fair weathered loyalty. As Alvin Jackson accords, ‘Larne, and the events of 1912-14 in general, have for long had a symbolic significance within loyalsm’ however, he admits that ‘Unionist militancy at the time of the third Home Rule Bill, reaching a crescendo at Larne, was a measure of the distance between loyalsm and the mainstream of British politics, and it reflected mutual distrust and incomprehension – even between loyalsm and British Conservatism.’ See Alvin Jackson, ‘Unionist Myths 1912-1985’, Past & Present 136 (August 1992), pp. 174-181.
representatives of the first European Imperialism that chose to knock on the door with a rifle butt.  

Whilst Denis Ireland’s letter to Churchill was an opportunity to campaign for the ending of partition, it was also a reminder to Churchill and a call to the newspaper’s readers that the fight to end partition would continue. For the future security of both countries, to stop Ireland being that ‘psychological No-Man’s-Land on Britain’s doorstep’, Denis Ireland advised that better cooperation with Britain realised through unity of the country was needed. Without such reassurance however, he proposed that ‘The thunder of Orange drums in “Ulster” will now, we suppose, yearly readvertise [sic] the fact that the Achilles’ heel is still there – sweet music in the ears of potential war-makers on the Continent of Europe.’

His main point was clear: only through a united Ireland could such concerns be assuaged. In this sense, Denis Ireland’s letter was, in many ways, very similar to de Valera’s reply to Churchill in that both brought partition to the fore. However, Denis Ireland was more forceful in exposing unionists’ flaunting loyalty to Britain as he spoke from a Northern nationalist point of view. His concerns, and indeed his advice, spoke for the Northern nationalist community living in a discriminatory state to which they did not, and would never, feel any political allegiance.

The Shaping of Unionist Collective Memory

The unionist press also seized on Churchill’s reference to Northern Ireland’s loyalty, only this time it used it to trumpet Northern Ireland’s part in the war in contrast to Irish neutrality. As the previous chapter has discussed, Northern Ireland’s contribution was not necessarily that commendable. Its main benefit to the war effort was merely its strategic positioning and this had only been brought about because of the Irish policy of neutrality. Nevertheless, one editorial described how the ‘North Saved Eire’, whilst

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another stressed the immorality of Irish neutrality.\textsuperscript{63} In particular, the \textit{Belfast News-Letter} castigated Ireland for refusing to join the war at a time when not only Britain was in danger but ‘civilisation itself’.\textsuperscript{64} It editorialised that the Southern Irish were nothing more than ‘a disgruntled people’ and the government was ‘certainly a disgruntled Government – sulking in its tent at a time when civilisation itself was at stake’.\textsuperscript{65} Writing into the \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, one writer known simply as ‘Unionist’ summarised de Valera’s ‘confused’ address to mean that ‘rather than help England he was willing to let Christianity and the whole civilisation of the world go down before the paganism, aggression, and brutality of the Nazis’.\textsuperscript{66} According to this argument, the parochial nature of de Valera’s speech was symptomatic of a people who had never fully accepted the moral issues that encouraged the Allies to fight. The \textit{Belfast Telegraph} editorialised, ‘Never has there been a war in which spiritual issues were so supremely at stake, and yet Eire has stood aside.’ De Valera, the newspaper accused, despite having been Chairman of the League of Nations, ‘was found wanting’.\textsuperscript{67}

It is clear that the unionist press, just like the nationalist press, was employing a narrative strategy to make a poignant political point. Whilst the nationalist press referred to the long-term effects of Britain’s reckless expansionism and the Northern Irish government’s discrimination towards its Catholic minority; the unionist press proposed that the Irish policy of neutrality was immoral and cast de Valera in a negative light. Even de Valera’s proposal in his speech for a thanksgiving service was ridiculed in the unionist newspapers. One editorial claimed that such an act would be inconsequential as ‘there will be little mention of those to whom they owe supremely hearty and humble thanks for the preservation of their hearts and homes.’ De Valera, the editorial


\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, ‘Mr. Churchill on Eire’, 14 May 1945.

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, ‘Neutrality and “Partition”’, 17 May 1945.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Belfast News-Letter}, ‘Correspondence: Mr. De Valera’, 22 May 1945.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Belfast Telegraph}, ‘De Valera’s Short Memory’, 17 May 1945. Despite being President of the Council of the League in September 1932 and President of the Assembly of the League in 1938, de Valera was pessimistic about the ability of the League of Nations to protect small nations. Even before the return of the Treaty ports in 1938, de Valera had made it known that neutrality would be the policy of choice for the Irish government in any future war. In 1935, when the League of Nations failed to protect Manchuria and decided not to take action against Italy following its invasion of Abyssinia, de Valera questioned the purpose of collective defence. Murphy, ‘Irish Neutrality’, pp. 10-11. Garret FitzGerald, ‘Eamon de Valera: The Price of his Achievement’ in Doherty and Keogh (eds.), \textit{De Valera’s Irelands} (Cork, 2003), p. 193. For de Valera, the survival of small nations rested upon staying out of international conflicts. In Dáil Éireann on 18 June 1936, de Valera questioned whether Ireland should opt out of the League of Nations following Italy’s successful invasion of Abyssinia, which had begun in October 1935 and ended in May 1936. For more on de Valera and the League of Nations see Lyons, \textit{Ireland}, pp. 550-558.
criticised, would deliberately ignore the role of the Merchant Navy, the Royal Air Force, the Royal Navy, and the British and American troops stationed in Northern Ireland, all of which, it claimed, had enabled him to follow the policy of neutrality. It derided, ‘Had the Battle of Britain not been won would the Eire Air Force have saved the world?’ Without Allied troops based in Northern Ireland, it suggested, ‘all boasts of being ready to meet the enemy would have been so much claptrap’. In fact, it intimated that Britain had supplied the Irish Army with arms and as a result of the British war effort, the unemployment problem had been eased in Ireland. On account of all these factors, the press argued, the Irish government had been able to make neutrality a reality during the war. ‘These facts’ chimed the editorial ‘have been kept from the ordinary people of Eire just as the horrors of the German concentration camps have been deliberately concealed, so that they may not become aware of the debt they owe to Britain, of the horrors they have been spared.’ This reasoning led the editorial to conclude that ‘At the cost even of truth it must be proclaimed that Eire saved herself alone.’

The unionist reaction to de Valera’s speech was as emotional as it was cynical. In de Valera’s attempt to explain the righteousness of the ending of partition, the unionist press localised the debate criticising de Valera for justifying neutrality on the grounds of partition. The *Belfast Telegraph* editorialised:

Prisoner of the past, Mr. De Valera was suffering from shortness of memory when he made Partition the excuse for standing aloof. Earlier in the war he stated explicitly that even if Partition were abolished, that would not affect his policy of neutrality, so that his hypothetical question to Mr. Churchill is valueless as an argument.69

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68 *Belfast Telegraph*, ‘De Valera’s Short Memory’, 17 May 1945. ‘The Roamer’ writing for the *Belfast News-Letter* recorded a correspondent who wrote saying that they had attended a thanksgiving mass in a small church in Southern Ireland. The newspaper reported the writer as saying, “it was encouraging to see so many present at a Sunday service in May, and still more pleasing to find oneself singing ‘God Save the King.’ It was not, however, the first occasion on which I had been reminded of the loyalty of little bands of Protestants in the South and West of Ireland, whose sympathises [sic] were never in doubt during the ‘emergency,’ which Southern newspapers are now permitted to call the war”. *Belfast News-Letter*, ‘Around and About – Gleanings from Town and Country: Thanksgiving in Eire’, 16 May 1945. This letter adds a particularly Protestant dimension even to celebration in the south of Ireland.

69 *Belfast Telegraph*, ‘De Valera’s Short Memory’, 17 May 1945.
Equally, in ‘An Ulsterman’s Letter’ – a special section of the *Belfast News-Letter*, which dealt with topics of local interest - one writer argued that Ireland had escaped the terror thanks to Allied arms but de Valera had ‘failed to acknowledge it’. Instead, the writer concluded, ‘To offer Partition as an excuse for his “masterly inactivity” (a Churchillian phrase which he abundantly deserves)) [sic] was the most futile part of his broadcast.’

These were valid points, for de Valera had indeed placed neutrality above the issue of partition during the war period. However, de Valera also always maintained that Ireland could never be involved in any war when the country remained partitioned. Even if an offer had been put before him to unite the country, de Valera would have dictated the conditions under which this would have taken place. It was from this issue of partition that de Valera derived his moral superiority. John Bowman argues that a secret discussion at the beginning of the war between de Valera and the British representative for Ireland, Sir John Maffey, revealed that de Valera said that he would not change his policy of neutrality whilst Ireland was partitioned. For his part, Maffey had argued that only through entering the war on the Allied side could the partition issue be addressed. Bowman interpreted this stance as the “circle” which:

was to remain the basis of Anglo-Irish relations throughout the war underlining the interdependence of neutrality and Partition, the latter inevitably cited by the Irish to counteract criticism of neutrality.

Yet Bowman was also able to cite times when neutrality was of more importance to de Valera than partition. Notably this can be seen in the private negotiations that took place between Malcolm MacDonald, the Dominions Secretary, and de Valera in June 1940. In these discussions it became evident that for de Valera, a neutral Ireland was considered of greater importance during the war years than a united country - as it was a clear symbolic indication of Ireland’s independence. It must be noted however, that in 1940 many Irish believed that an Allied defeat was imminent. It can be argued,

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71 TNA PRO DO, DO 35/1107/W.X.1/5: Memorandum by Maffey, 14 September 1939, as cited in Bowman, *De Valera*, p. 214.
72 Bowman, *De Valera*, p. 214.
73 Bowman, *De Valera*, pp. 215-239.
however, that there was a clear difference between the public image that the government had been promoting and private diplomacy. Yet the unionist press’s suggestion that partition and neutrality were never interrelated is not entirely correct.

That said, the unionist press did not necessarily care about whether de Valera had placed more emphasis on neutrality, but rather used this example tactically to propose why ‘Ulster’ should remain a part of the United Kingdom. Correcting de Valera, the *Belfast News-Letter* editorialised:

> That, of course, is to ignore the whole case for constituting Northern Ireland a separate State – the overwhelming demand of its people, moved by a deep-seated loyalty, as well as by community of interests, to remain within the United Kingdom.  

Evidently, as this chapter has shown, this homogenizing ‘people’ employed by the newspaper did not actually constitute the entire population of those who lived in Northern Ireland. Instead, the deliberate use of the collectivizing ‘people’ here signified the ‘loyal’ Protestant majority and ignored the Catholic minority. Additionally, this idea of a ‘deep-seated loyalty’ had little, if anything, to do with actual loyalty. Rather, the tactic of conjuring notions of ‘loyalty’ was fuelled not only in reaction to Churchill’s use of the term in his speech, but more importantly out of unionist desire that Northern Ireland remain a part of the United Kingdom. For unionists, it was hoped that partition would be permanent and justified on the grounds that there existed a ‘fundamental difference of outlook between the North and the South’. For unionists, the experience of the war years had proven this argument, and for the unionist press ‘no one has supplied more reasons for the wisdom of it than Mr. De Valera and his policy.’

Despite repeated references to Northern Ireland’s loyalty, the unionist newspapers did not engage in a public debate with their nationalist counterparts, who had publicly challenged this loyalty. This is interesting. Why did they refrain from doing so? It could be argued that, like de Valera, they did not want to add ‘any fuel to the

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75 *Belfast Telegraph*, ‘De Valera’s Short Memory’, 17 May 1945.
flames of hatred and passion’. On the other hand, it is perhaps more plausible to suggest that if the unionist newspapers had become embroiled in such a debate, the limits of their loyalty might well have been exposed at an extremely critical time. As has been discussed in the previous chapters, the context in which both the victory celebrations and these speeches were taking place is important. Northern Ireland, like Britain, was gearing up for a General Election. Within the unionist camp there was concern over the raising of the partition issue during the victory period and fear about the unsettling effect this might have in the upcoming General Election.

The Political Context: The 1945 General Election

Although there was unease about the amount of attention that had been given to the issue of partition, unionists were also aware that the holding of an election at this time, when Northern Ireland had been publically and favourably acknowledged by Churchill, would serve the Northern Irish government well and would promote the maintenance of Northern Ireland as a constitutional part of the United Kingdom. As partition had been raised in the recent political broadcasts between the two leaders and the issue brought once again into the public domain, it was important for the government to capitalise on Churchill’s praise-worthy comments. Due to the impending election, this volatile time was seen as the best opportunity for a victory for the Official Unionist Party and the securing of partition. Instead of holding the election in the autumn, the government brought it forward to 9 and 10 July, arguably to avail of this mood. A political correspondent writing for the *Belfast News-Letter* stated that ‘In some Unionist quarters it is held that the time is ripe for an election.’ The reasoning behind this decision, the correspondent explained, rested on de Valera’s action. ‘Mr. De Valera’, the correspondent wrote, by bringing up ‘the question of “Partition” again, as he did in 1938 … has done much to rally public opinion to the Unionist cause.’

The *Belfast News-Letter* argued that the election would be fought by the government on constitutional issues not ‘merely as a political principle and ideal’, but

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taking into account the economic and industrial benefits of remaining a part of the United Kingdom. Any ‘thinking Ulsterman’, the *Belfast News-Letter* editorialised, who considered unity with Ireland or ‘any Loyalist worthy of the name disposed even to contemplate such an alternative’ would be insane. The editorial clearly explained the crux of the matter writing:

Our place in the United Kingdom must continue to be an issue as long as Mr. De Valera and his supporters insist on making it one, and the surest guarantee against loss of that place is a strong Unionist Government at Stormont, with an unmistakable mandate from the electorate.77

As this statement shows, some of the rhetoric discussed in this chapter may have been influenced by the promise of an upcoming election and is thus purely instrumental.

In an attempt to reap as much political advantage from the situation as possible, on the day following de Valera’s broadcast, the former Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, John Andrews, made his own speech as Grand Master of the County Down Orange Lodge. In his speech he emphasised his anger over the re-opening of the partition issue but stressed to his listeners that partition was “unalterable” and that the Northern Irish Constitution would not be revoked. De Valera’s insistence on promoting the Irish language as the national language in Ireland, placing high tariffs against the United Kingdom, and by “his establishment of an Irish independent republic”, all served, according to Andrews, to alienate Ireland from Great Britain. The former Prime Minister exclaimed that, de Valera’s ‘inaction and actions in this war for the freedom of all mankind’ served to differentiate Northern Ireland from Ireland. De Valera, he argued, had tried to force Britain to coerce Northern Ireland to form a Republic. Andrews confidently remarked:

‘If Mr. De Valera really wishes friendship to exist between North and South, as I do, let him give up his demand to get Ulster under his domination. In my opinion he would be fully engaged if he confined his attention to looking after his own part of Ireland and leaving us to look after ours.’

In an interesting admission, Andrews, whether deliberately or not, implied that Ireland was practically a dictionary Republic, adding that the Irish government should be given an ultimatum by Britain: either it became a ‘loyal, helpful co-partner, and receive all the privileges and responsibilities of that position as the other Dominions do or else get out and plough your own lonely furrow for better or for worse’.

This attack by Andrews did not pass unnoticed in the Irish News. The latter returned with the accusation that even when the Northern Irish government had been left alone to manage its own affairs, it had failed miserably. The editorial, criticising Andrews’ time in office, remarked:

Mr. Andrews himself was in a position to look after many of the affairs of Northern Ireland without interference from Mr. De Valera. Yet during his tenure of office as Minister of Labour unemployment was so widespread that Northern Ireland became one of the industrial black spots of these islands. Later, after a term as local Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he succeeded Lord Craigavon as Prime Minister, he was to discover that his position was not menaced

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79 Belfast News-Letter, ‘What De Valera Has to Learn’, 18 May 1945. F. S. L. Lyons discussing why de Valera did not declare Ireland to be a Republic in name in the new Constitution of 1937 suggests that de Valera had always maintained that the Republic would consist of thirty-two Counties, not twenty-six. In addition, de Valera had often declared that his goal was the end of partition. Therefore, to declare Ireland a Republic, which omitted the northern Counties, would be to further entrench the partitioning of the island. In any case, Lyons argues that a declaration of a Republic at that time would not have affected the attitude of northern unionists or changed their minds about joining a Republic. In this sense then, Andrews’ intimation that Ireland was a Republic was perhaps evidence of his cool disregard of this practical reality. Lyons, Ireland, p. 520.
by any Leader from the South, but by the official Unionist Party, which got rid of him and his ‘Old Guard’.  

By referring to the forced resignation of Andrews in 1943, the editorial was highlighting a very delicate affair to Andrews. As this resignation will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, it is sufficient to say here that high unemployment, inadequate civil defence – made apparent by the Belfast blitz – and industrial unrest, all culminated in increasingly vocal opposition and disillusionment from unionist backbenchers, and lead to Andrews’ resignation. Exploiting this failure by Andrews, the newspaper sneeringly concluded, ‘So that even when Unionists are left to look after their own affairs they do not always succeed in advertising the blessings of Partition, as Grand Master Andrews well knows.’

The debate that ensued from Andrews’ remarks made it clear that Andrews was rallying unionist sentiment on an issue that caused much consternation amongst unionists: partition. As a rallying cry to unionists, the Belfast News-Letter printed an appeal by Andrews entitled the ‘Duty of All Loyalists’. Acting in his capacity as President of the Ulster Unionist Council, he urged voters to support the Official Unionist candidates in the General Election. Discussing Northern Ireland’s constitutional position and the work that the previous governments had done to secure this status and the ‘best traditions of our Imperial race’, he warned, ‘Our enemies never cease to oppose and slander Ulster, and it behoves us as loyal citizens to continue to make it clear beyond all doubt that Ulster is not for sale on a bargain counter.’ For Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom, the ‘onus’ rested with ‘the people of Ulster themselves’, so much so that it was ‘of the utmost importance’ claimed Andrews, ‘that we should leave both friends and opponents alike in no doubt as to our aspirations and fixed resolve’.

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81 Barton, Northern Ireland, pp. 41-65.  
83 The Ulster Unionist Council was founded in 1905 to resist Home Rule. Roy Foster notes that whilst it initially united ‘local Unionist Associations, the Orange Order and parliamentary representatives; in 1911 it provided a convenient berth for extremist Unionist Clubs and the Derry Apprentice Boys, preaching imperial Unionism and the necessity of preserving close links with the Conservative Party’. Foster, Modern Ireland, p. 464.  
Playing on the memory of the war, Andrews framed his argument against reunification by contrasting Ireland’s neutrality with Northern Ireland’s war record. In a statement that was quite clearly open to debate he claimed that ‘Ulster’ had ‘played a magnificent part in every phase of the war’. Whilst this role had been noted by Churchill himself, Andrews was anxious still that:

Great Britain must be shown once again, and Free State politicians taught, that Ulster stands where it has always stood, and that neither by suasion nor coercion can its loyal people be shut out of the United Kingdom and Empire.\(^{85}\)

The importance for unionists to remain united and pro-active in the General Election was therefore to ensure that ‘our glorious heritage’ would be passed on to succeeding generations.\(^{86}\) Interpreting Andrews’ speech as ‘at once a warning and an exhortation’, the *Belfast News-Letter* agreed with Andrews and editorialised, ‘we may trust any Administration at Westminster of which Mr. Churchill is head’ however it warned, ‘but no Government can bind its successors, and it behoves us at all times to leave friends and foes alike in no doubt about our aspirations and fixed resolve’. Only by the success of a Unionist government and Party remaining in Stormont could this security be achieved, ensuring that in ‘Ulster ... neither by guile nor by force can her people be induced to part with their British birthright for a mess of Irish Republican pottage’.\(^{87}\) As in other elections, this one was fought on a similar theme: ‘the future of the state itself’.\(^{88}\)

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\(^{85}\) This statement fits into the framework which F. S. L. Lyons described as ‘the old philosophy of “not an inch”’. Lyons applied this phrase to a remark made in the *Belfast News-Letter* about Lord Craigavon’s stance during the 1938 election in which it stated ‘Lord Craigavon’s purpose in this election is to show that Ulster stands precisely where it did in relation to the Free State, or rather that its attachment to Great Britain and the Empire is as strong as ever and that in no circumstances will they give up their place in the United Kingdom.’ As cited in Lyons, *Ireland*, p.727.


\(^{88}\) Speaking about electoral practices in Northern Ireland for the first fifty years of its existence, Wilson explains that unionist victory and control of power had been mobilised out of a fear that the unionist claim to the viability of the state would be threatened by a demand for an end to partition. This meant that each election had been fought on the same issue – how to maintain the Northern Irish state. Tom Wilson, *Ulster: Conflict and Consent* (Oxford, 1989), p. 70.
Sir Joseph Davison, Grand Master of the County Antrim Grand Orange Lodge at Templepatrick, espoused similar rhetoric to Andrews. At the half-yearly meeting of the Country Antrim Grand Orange Lodge, Davison interpreted de Valera’s reply speech to Churchill as nothing more than a rant on partition and the reason why Ireland remained neutral. Partition, argued Davison, ‘was more than the lives of millions of their co-religionists throughout Europe. It is the one thing that was uppermost in their minds, and was why they maintained neutrality’. Again, as part of this established unionist trope, he too was calling on the immorality of the Irish government’s action; however, he was bringing a new and added religious dimension to the argument. Davison claimed that the “people of Northern Ireland and a great number of members of the Orange Order”, out of a desire to maintain the bonds between the region and Great Britain, had played their part in the war effort. Unlike neutral Ireland, Northern Ireland’s participation had duly been acknowledged and “After the many tributes which had been paid to Ulster by Mr. Churchill from time to time, they had nothing of which to be ashamed.” On the other hand, Ireland should have much to repent and their inaction during the war ensured that the people of Northern Ireland were “determined” that “they would never be associated with Mr. De Valera in his united Ireland.”

Clearly here the ‘people’ again referred to the Protestant unionist population and not the population as a whole.

It was in these dichotomising terms, therefore, that the press, through its editorials and special articles, laid the foundations for two distinct collective memories. Moreover, commentators like Davison, Andrews and even Denis Ireland were also constructing notions of otherness. The fact that there had been very little commentary in the nationalist press about the upcoming election is noteworthy. Instead, the Irish News turned its attention yet again to the issue of partition. Reporting on a meeting of Nationalist members of the Senate and Commons of Northern Ireland, which took place on 18 May, the Irish News stated that the members - on discussing the two speeches made by Churchill and de Valera - agreed that neutrality as a policy was overwhelmingly accepted in Ireland. They added, “Even in the North-east there was no enthusiasm manifested by any representative public body for conscription.” In addition, the members made it publically known what they thought of the tempered loyalty of the unionists. In their statement they said:

‘Mr. Churchill’s tribute to the Tories of Belfast is in striking contrast to his equally picturesque denunciation of the same group in 1912-1914, when he was obliged to fly from their threats of violence.’

Aside from these observations they declared that what was of most importance to them was that the Taoiseach had made it publically known that the ending of partition was ‘still the primary object of the Irish people’.

Again, as in the other reports discussed, the issue of partition had been raised.

**Conclusion**

So what does all this interest in the two political broadcasts tell us about Northern Ireland? As can be seen, there were clear and overt tensions existing between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland at the end of the war. Churchill and de Valera’s speeches set in motion and exposed the existence of two very distinct collective memories relating to the war years. Fostering the development of a critical public space, the press revealed how both sets of narratives were not only context-dependent and built around specific events, but that they evidently had a great deal to do with the relationship between unionists and nationalists. As this chapter has shown, over the weeks, these narratives formed a pattern or template that was easily discernible: the nationalist discourse offered a justification for neutrality that was linked to the issue of partition, and set about deconstructing the unionist grand narrative of ‘Ulster’s’ loyalty. At the same time, the nationalist press recalled old historic grievances between Ireland and Britain to counter claims of Irish immorality, accusing Britain and not Ireland of having a history of infringing international morality. On the other hand, the unionist narrative capitalised on Churchill’s reference to the loyalty of Northern Ireland, at the

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same time as it criticised Irish neutrality for being immoral. However, surprisingly, it did not challenge the nationalist press’s attacks on the credibility of its loyalty. Engaging in this debate would surely have opened Pandora’s box and might have discredited unionism at a time when it was crucially important that unionists remained united.

The collective memory that the unionist press evinced could not accommodate these dissenting realities and it is here that one can see how power relations work in the process of memory formation: a process which consists of the interplay between remembering and forgetting.93 It also explains why the nationalist press continued to debate the credibility of Churchill’s statement about the loyalty of Northern Ireland, finding examples to justify its criticisms. As Anna Lisa Tota correctly argues:

A collective memory needs some kind of form (almost a narrative) simply to exist. But this notion introduces the very question of the strength of the code, its capability to last over time.94

By refusing to engage with the nationalist deconstruction of the loyalty of unionists, the press prevented these questionable factors from becoming enshrined as part of unionist collective memory. In any case, by unionist reasoning, they did not interpret these events as evidence of disloyalty. If anything, such occasions at which unionists had shown their opposition to Home Rule, demonstrated their loyalty, albeit in the most forceful manner. Therefore, the memories the nationalist press constructed of unionist disloyalty would, by the unionist press’s decision to ignore them, become nothing more than mere nationalist rhetoric and an attack on unionism. As John Shotter reminds us, ‘If events do not fit into the frameworks provided by one’s social institutions – into which one has been socialized – then they are not remembered.’95 The events that took place from 1912 to 1914 were clearly of great significance for unionism, however, there was no political gain to be achieved by recalling them in the unionist press in May 1945. Therefore they were ignored.

94 Tota, 'Collective Memories at "Work"', p. 69.
It could be argued that the wider engagement of the nationalist press with the two broadcasts, witnessed through the sheer number of editorials and special articles from external writers, suggests that the press was an important cultural tool giving voice to Northern nationalist concerns. The difficulty of creating a memory of the war years in which many Catholics in Northern Ireland had served in the British Armed Forces, a war in which the Taoiseach had insisted on remaining neutral (even if this neutrality favoured the Allies), is expressed through the thematic narratives found in the nationalist press. It also provides justification for why the editorials and special articles preferred to deconstruct unionist loyalty rather than engage in debate over why Northern Catholics had volunteered.

In this way, both sets of narratives suggest that unionists and nationalists were equally looking for a useable past and framed their discourses with this intention in mind. Unionists engaged in a process of myth-making by creating an image of an uncomplicated past (seen through its refusal to challenge nationalist attacks), and of a loyal ‘Ulster’ which had been forthcoming in its support for Britain during the war. Whilst Alvin Jackson argues that unionists had always been involved in the process of myth-making and were also the ‘victims of myth-making’ particularly in relation to events that had taken place in 1912 to 1914, Brian Walker explains that ‘Such myths are often a response to the modern world and to those key historical events and processes which have shaped it.’ It was, therefore, pertinent for unionists to exploit Churchill’s praiseworthy comments of loyalty during the war. Northern Ireland had demonstrated through its participation in the war that it was an important part of the United Kingdom. The unionist press therefore used Churchill’s broadcast as evidence of Northern Ireland’s importance as part of the United Kingdom: a pragmatic choice considering a General Election was looming. At the expense then of historical accuracy, the unionist narrative is an example of the manipulative side of memory creation with the purpose of creating a usable and profitable past.

Unable to closely associate the involvement of members of the Northern catholic community in the war, the nationalist press spoke about the war mainly in terms of Irish neutrality. In order to create a useable past for the nationalist community in the North there appears to be no space in the ‘textual resources’ specifically

explaining how these nationalists experienced the war years. Overall, domestic preoccupations relating to the ending of partition versus maintaining constitutional ties with Britain, highlight the inability of the war years to offer any kind of reconciliation. In fact, the war served to reinforce the division of the country. Unable to present the war experience as a shared one, the differences between the nationalist and unionist accounts reveal that two very different collective memories have been formed. This need for distinction is therefore closely linked to the politics of identity and the press provided the forum from which the national question could be aired. In short, Northern nationalists looked to Dublin and spoke in terms of neutrality in the hope that one day the country would be united. Whilst unionists, aware that the Northern Irish state could always be dissolved by a British government, and fearing a Labour victory in the 1945 General Election, attempted to prove their worth by showcasing their wartime involvement. As Ged Martin argues, Northern Ireland’s involvement in the Second World War meant that ‘In any case, the war ensured that Northern Ireland had a political credit balance on which it drew for two somnolent decades’. Dennis Kennedy summarises the relationship between the three States at the end of the war:

In a new and real sense North and South were worlds apart. If the war and neutrality proved, to Unionists, the inherent hostility of Irish nationalism towards Britain and the British, they also both underlined the worth of Ulster Loyalism, and its importance to Britain. The wartime experience, in short, proved one of the oldest Unionist arguments – that Britain simply could not, in strategic terms, afford to have all Ireland outside its control.

For nationalists however, searching for a voice in the wartime narrative, they found that only by speaking in support of neutrality, and campaigning for the ending of partition, could they contribute to this debate. It can be argued that the nationalist newspaper coverage of these events revealed that the nationalist community had no place in the story of Northern Ireland during the war. This chapter has, therefore, shown that under

the surface of the discourse surrounding the two political broadcasts there was clear tension between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland in relation to their interpretation of the war years. This chapter has also shown that at the root of the issue was the association of unionists with Britain and the war effort and nationalists in Northern Ireland with de Valera and neutrality. How then can they have shared in the victory experience – passively or abstractly? How will this be remembered? The next part of this thesis will show that by 1956, the memory of the war was very much established within a unionist discourse and encapsulated in the publishing of the official war history, *Northern Ireland in the Second World War*. 
Northern Ireland in the Second World War. Objective History or Propaganda?

There is no doubt that both collectively and individually the Northern Irish did much to help in the destruction of the Nazis and their Allies, but it is questionable whether this provincial history of the war is either necessary or dignified.

Times Literary Supplement

In November 1956, the Northern Irish government published Northern Ireland in the Second World War. This official war history, that took fifteen years to write, was written as part of the Northern Irish government’s agenda, to commemorate Northern Ireland’s role in the Second World. Written separately from the United Kingdom Official War History Series, the Northern Irish government commissioned the writing of this history to act as a permanent memorial of Northern Ireland’s loyalty to Britain. For the Northern Irish government, only through writing their own official history could they highlight Northern Ireland’s importance during the war, a point which, it was feared, might be overlooked in the United Kingdom Official War History Series. Nevertheless, as the above reviewer recognised, Northern Ireland’s almost coincidental contribution was probably not worthy of a separate volume. As a part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland had no choice but to be at war. The commission of its own history therefore

served to accentuate Northern Ireland’s role in the war beyond that which was ‘necessary or dignified’. This chapter explores why and how the Northern Irish government wrote its own official history of the war. It argues that this text was written as part of the unionist agenda to glorify Northern Ireland’s role in the war; something previous chapters have shown was of paramount importance to unionists.

The political conditions in which this project was envisaged are important. In the summer of 1940, after the fall of France, the threat of invasion to Britain was more real than ever before. In these tense circumstances, Sir Winston Churchill sent Malcolm MacDonald, the Minister for Health, to meet with de Valera to discuss the possibility of the Irish government ending its policy of neutrality, or at least allowing Britain use of its ports and aerodromes. However, despite MacDonald holding out to de Valera the promise of an eventual end to partition, the talks came to nothing. In this way, de Valera’s intransigence placed not only Northern Ireland’s loyalty, but its geographic position in a more prominent and strategically important light for the British government. In addition, German air attacks on parts of Northern Ireland but notably Belfast, in April and May of 1941, went some way to shattering the atmosphere of complacency that had characterised the earlier years of the war. Now Northern Ireland had to cast off its imagined immunity and accept not only its vulnerability, but its role in the war.

It can be argued that such political developments, which saw Northern Ireland come more fully into the war, created acceptable circumstances for the commissioning of Northern Ireland’s own official history. A document giving Northern Ireland its due recognition and serving as a permanent testament, as its author John W. Blake wrote, to that ‘rocklike devotion of Northern Ireland’ from which ‘Geography, history, tradition and religion all in some sense differentiated Northern Ireland from Eire.’

Northern Ireland was a place apart and its role had to be commemorated in opposition to Ireland’s neutrality. ‘If’, added Blake, ‘to most of those living in the South neutrality was a rational policy, to their neighbours in the North it was an evasion of duty’. Epitomising the concerns of the government of Northern Ireland, Blake justified the sponsoring of the official history when he wrote:

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2 Blake, *Northern Ireland*, p. 46 and p. 34.
In Ulster … the old loyalties prevailed … That philosophy, which formerly had sustained Ulstermen in their dour opposition to home rule, now underlined their conviction that political destiny and material advantage lay in the preservation of the British connection.\textsuperscript{4}

If the British government ever decided to propose Irish reunification to the Irish government in the post-war period, the official history would stand not only as a reminder to the British government of the strategic importance of Northern Ireland for Britain in any future wars, but also as a memorial to its loyalty during the war.

Little historical research has been done on \textit{Northern Ireland in the Second World War}, although Brian Barton, who has written extensively on Northern Ireland during the war, provided a synoptic foreword to the 2000 reprint of the official history.\textsuperscript{5} His foreword, like Gillian McIntosh’s own study of this text, both based on documents held in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, examines why and how the history was written but does so only from the perspective of the Northern Irish government.\textsuperscript{6} Therefore, both historians fail to look at how this history was interpreted by the various British government departments, its official war historians, and the Services Historical Section (hereafter when discussed in the collective to be known as ‘British commentators’). While McIntosh’s study reveals that the history constructed a particular image of Northern Ireland and Ulstermen, which fitted very much within a unionist discourse, her study is limited by its failure to look at how Blake negotiated the writing of this text to comply not only with the advice offered by the Northern Ireland War History Advisory Committee, but more revealingly the British commentators.\textsuperscript{7} For this reason, this chapter builds on McIntosh’s work but it also examines Blake’s relationship with the British commentators.

To contextualise this chapter, the first part discusses what is understood by the term official history. It examines the benefits and limitations of official history writing,

\textsuperscript{4} Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{5} Personal correspondence with the editorial assistant of Blackstaff press, Michelle Griffin, states that this book was reprinted in 2000 as the publishers believed that there would be a market for the book from booksellers and academics. Email: ‘Book Enquiry!’. Author to Michelle Griffin, 7 May 2008.
\textsuperscript{6} Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland in the Second World War} (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2000); McIntosh, \textit{The Force of Culture}, pp. 144-179.
\textsuperscript{7} McIntosh, \textit{The Force of Culture}, p. 157.
and touches upon the debate amongst academics over the utility of official history. The second part of the chapter looks at how the Northern Ireland official history differed from the *United Kingdom Series*. Primarily, it examines the mechanisms put in place to aid the writing process in both Northern Ireland and Britain. It then moves on to discuss the motivation behind the writing of the Northern Ireland history, and provides a few selected examples to show how the Northern Irish government reviewed draft chapters of the history. This section argues that for the Northern Irish government, maintaining good governmental relations was of more concern than providing factually accurate history. It also reveals Blake’s complacency about this decision. The next two sections look closely at how the British commentators reviewed the history. To do this it primarily considers those chapters relating to civil aspects, before moving on to examine those dealing with military issues. Collectively taking on board all these criticisms from the British commentators, these two sections reveal that Northern Ireland’s war history was motivated more by political and patriotic concerns, rather than utilitarian motives. In short, the chapter concludes by proposing that Northern Ireland’s official war history was more propagandist than sound history.

**What is Official History?**

As a broad definition, official war history can be termed as any work that is commissioned by a government. The reasons for writing official war history are varied and differ from country to country. For the victors, they are written to record success; for the vanquished, to document failure. However, for both, they act as an educational tool and provide a record for posterity of which acts were beneficial and which proved problematic during a time of war. One obvious benefit for official war historians is the access they are granted to confidential official records and to persons with inside knowledge of wartime events. Despite such unimpeded access and support, the writing of official history is fraught difficulty. Although, in theory, the author has the right to

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exercise his own critical judgement with the evidence obtained, in practice official approval is sought before any text can be published. Owing to these stringent controls, this requirement can act as a deterrent from including information which portrays the government in a negative light, or which speaks critically of its members.\textsuperscript{10} In this sense, the combination of these factors makes writing objective official history difficult. Such pressures on the author suggest that official history can never be truly critical and thus, by extension, completely honest.\textsuperscript{11}

Taking into account these advantages and disadvantages, the writing of the British official war histories of the Second World War were influenced by another factor. Informed by the ‘inadequacies’ of the British official histories of the First World War, which were proven to lack objectivity, more caution was exerted over the writing of the histories of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{12} Aware of the need not to make the same mistakes, tension existed between authors, government departments and the Services Historical Sections, particularly over the selection and exclusion of material related to the Second World War. Captain Roskill, United Kingdom official war historian and author of \textit{The War at Sea}, in favour of the writing of official history, acknowledged the aspect of control of the government over the histories. Nevertheless, he argued that the final decision on the content of these histories rested with the authors themselves and only when security issues were at stake were historians forced to concede to the demands of the authorities.\textsuperscript{13}

Despite Roskill’s petition for the credibility of official history writing, some academic historians have expressed their concerns about it. Some argue that there is no freedom for sound historical research in a project commissioned by and for a government. Others are less critical.\textsuperscript{14} For some, working amongst and with those in governmental departments or in corporations has an educative benefit. Robin Higham in his edited volume on official history writing states, ‘Such involvement helps reduce the distance between the ivory-tower study and actuality, while at the same time providing valuable insights into human behavior which can be applied to other

\textsuperscript{11} For a discussion on whether official history can be balanced, honest history see Martin Blumenson, ‘Can Official History Be Honest History?’, in Higham (ed.), \textit{Official Histories}, pp. 38-45. Blumenson was a staff historian in the office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the United States Army.
\textsuperscript{12} Roskill, ‘Some Reasons’, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{13} Roskill, ‘Some Reasons’, p. 13.
historical studies and to enliven teaching."¹⁵ Equally, Roskill clarifies the accusation that official history lacks of objectivity by arguing that the term ‘Official Historian’ does not mean that the author’s work is not objective, but rather signifies ‘no more than that he holds an official – that is to say a Government – appointment’.¹⁶ This appointment merely means that such historians are privy to see classified material, the privilege of which means that they have a ‘duty’ to write an ‘accurate text’.¹⁷

For sceptics this argument is baseless. According to them, official historians select the information they will include in their text and discard that which does not fit neatly into their argument. However, this argument overlooks the fact that all historical writing includes such processes of inclusion and exclusion. When applied to official history, the charge appears greater and leads to the accusation that this type of writing is less objective than other historical writing. Not wanting to offend their funding body, it is argued that official historians impose a type of ‘self-imposed censorship’ on their own work.¹⁸ By working too closely with government records, and within government departments, there is the concern that the historian can ‘acquire that point of view as his [her] own’.¹⁹ Whilst these are all valid points, it must be remembered that self-censorship is not unique to official history writing but takes place in all types of historical writing.²⁰

Whatever the merits of, or doubts about, official history writing, what cannot be ignored is that these histories are state sponsored and each one is unique. Some may be expected to comply with strict guidelines, others less so. The tenacity with which such rules are followed hints at the aims and purposes of these histories. As the next section shows, the Northern Irish history differed significantly from the United Kingdom histories; not only in relation to their guiding principles, but in relation to the degree of support offered to the war historians.

¹⁹ Morton, ’The Writing’, p. 36. Dr. Morton was a former official historian in the Army’s Office of Military History for the United States Government.
Difference between *Northern Ireland in the Second World War* and the *United Kingdom Official War Series*

In 1907, the British government gave the Committee of Imperial Defence the role of coordinating the writing of histories of naval, military and later air operations. The Committee of Imperial Defence, in conjunction with its Sub-Committee for the Control of Official Histories, organised for the preparation of the military histories of the First World War and established a Historical Section under Brigadier-General Sir James Edmonds.

At the start of the Second World War, the Committee of Imperial Defence joined with the War Cabinet Office and became the government organisation delegated the task of writing the official histories of the war. Civil and military departments were subsequently informed of the need to keep war diaries and copies of any documents that would be of use to the writing of the official histories.\(^{21}\) In October 1941, Professor William Keith Hancock was chosen as editor for the civil series. Finding an editor suitable to write the military series however, took slightly longer. It was not until November 1946 that Professor James R. M. Butler was chosen and appointed editor for these. Despite this late appointment, work had started on the military series in April 1945. In contrast, work for the civil series began in 1940. In total, 85 volumes comprised the United Kingdom official histories of the Second World War: 30 volumes dedicated to the civil series, 35 volumes to the military series and 20 volumes to the medical series.\(^{22}\)

For the Northern Ireland official history however, no such body of researchers or extended support network existed. In December 1941, the Northern Irish government set up a small group known as the War Records Committee to begin mapping out and sourcing material for the official history. Correspondence from Dr. D. A. Chart, Deputy Keeper of the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, to government departments, suggested that he had been appointed as its author or at least he ‘considered himself the official author’ of the history.\(^{23}\) Apart from initiating contact with civil servants within government departments, he prepared scripts for the writing


of potential chapters. Similar to what took place in Britain, to aid in the writing process, each Northern Irish government ministry had been asked to keep a war diary during the war years to be used in the writing of the official history.\textsuperscript{24} Despite the effort made by Chart in the initial writing phases, his role as author was short-lived. In April 1945, the Northern Irish Prime Minister, Basil Brooke, appointed John W. Blake, a lecturer at Queen’s University Belfast, as the author of the official history. On his acceptance of this job, Blake was given an honorarium of £250 and a final fee of £1,000 to be paid once the entire work had been completed.\textsuperscript{25} Chart, although no longer acting as the author of the history, was made editor.\textsuperscript{26} Writing on the official history, McIntosh stresses the importance of Chart’s earlier work. She writes:

D. A. Chart had done much of the groundwork for this history; it was he who had made all the initial contacts with the government departments and others in the shipbuilding industry, the railways and so on. Moreover, he had drafted several pieces on areas of the war, and sketched the outline of the project as a whole by the time Blake took over.\textsuperscript{27}

Whilst there is no evidence to explain this change of authorship, nor a record of Chart’s reaction to it, the Chairman of the War Records Committee, Sir David Lindsay Keir – who was also Vice-Chancellor of Queen’s University, Belfast - was aware of the need to act with tact by informing Chart privately of the government’s decision. With the new author instated, a War History Advisory Committee was created out of the War Records Committee to provide Blake with support and guidance.\textsuperscript{28} In addition to this supportive

\textsuperscript{24} PRONI CAB, CAB 3B/6: Draft Memorandum to the Cabinet from the War History Committee by Keir, December 1942.
\textsuperscript{26} PRONI CAB, CAB 3A/16: Letter Chart to Hynes (Ministry of Supply), 7 September 1945 as cited in McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{27} McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{28} Those that transferred from the War Records Committee were: D. A. Chart (Deputy Keeper of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland), F. M. Adams (Government Press Office), R. Gransden, (Secretary to the Cabinet), and D. L. Keir, (Vice-Chancellor of Queen’s University Belfast), who had been Chairman. Other members included J. F. Caldwell, who took over A. Quekett’s role as Parliamentary Draftsman, Professor Sayles (Professor of Modern History at Queen’s), who was later to become Chairman in March 1949, Sir William Scott (Secretary of the Ministry of Finance), and H. Black who
role the committee also read draft chapters of the official history and facilitated contact between the Northern Irish and British governments through its Secretary, Harold Black and the Secretary of the Cabinet Advisory Committee, A. B. Acheson. The fact that the majority of the members of Northern Ireland’s War History Advisory Committee were civil servants meant that at times it actually exercised a more regulatory role on the author. In a sense, their presence on the committee meant that they were able to police what could and could not be disclosed in the official history.

Moreover, while in Britain war historians had been employed to work within the various government departments, in Northern Ireland its sole author did not benefit from this privilege. In the case of Northern Ireland, there was to be no separation of the civil and military parts of the history; instead they were to come under the one cover and Blake was to write, or more correctly, coordinate the writing of them both. Although Blake was the author, he benefited from inheriting the material Chart had collected and prepared himself. In addition, Blake arranged for a group of civil servants to prepare reports on the wartime activities of their own departments. This system, McIntosh argues, was a mechanism that the government was keen to maintain during the war. Through all these modes of gathering information, the Northern Irish war history was therefore written largely from secondary accounts which Blake used in order to research the history in more depth.

This system was not unproblematic and as the years progressed Blake became acutely aware of its limitations. In a memorandum he prepared for a meeting of the War

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29 In an article written in 1953, Margaret Gowing, one of the official historians of the official British history of the Second World War and assistant to Professor Hancock, explains the conditions under which the writing of the official history took place in Britain. Margaret Gowing, ‘Historical Writing: Some Problems of Material Selection’, Operational Research 4, no. 2 (June 1953), p. 35.

30 Chart had written a draft on Ulster regiments in campaigns in France and Belgium including the evacuation from Dunkirk. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/1: Letter D. Lindsay Keir to Basil Brooke, 23 May 1944. By November 1944 he had also written the following draft chapters: “The Continent to the Time of Dunkirk”, “Civil Defence to Great Raids”, and “Agriculture and Food”, which was still being written. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/1: Letter Chart to Gransden, 29 November 1944. In another draft which dealt with the Land Forces from September 1939 to June 1940, F. M. Adams, Government Press Officer and member of the War Records Committee wrote personally to Gransden criticising this draft. He stated that the chapter was ‘A collection of facts interesting enough for filing and reference purposes, but lacking the drama and virility that would make the Record a book to read.’ PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/1: Personal Note from F. M. Adams to Gransden, 19 September 1944. Emphasis in original.

31 McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 163.

32 McIntosh, The Force of Culture, p. 163.
History Advisory Committee in September 1948, Blake expressed his disappointment over the depth of work carried out by the various Northern Irish departments. Blake was not unique in his complaints; Chart had experienced similar problems. For a government which had never before had to write an official history, this work may have appeared superfluous at a time of war, despite Gransteden, Secretary to the Cabinet of Northern Ireland and member of both Northern Irish committees, advising the departments of the need to prepare this information. Moreover, the process was slightly impeded by the disorganisation of some departments. Frustrated at this lack of proper documentation, in the memorandum Blake revealed his reservations. The files, he argued, were ‘generally useful guides to the kind of work performed. But they are not much more’. The material collected, he added, was more of an ‘administrative, rather than organic or historical’ nature, lacking chronology, and proved insufficient for the purposes of the history. The incompleteness of the files, Blake complained, meant that ‘the preparation of this Official History is involving at this late stage an amount of investigation which could have been carried out during the war years’. Lessons, Blake advised, needed to be learned from this unpreparedness.

While these issues may very well be considered acceptable teething problems, they placed a great deal of stress on the author. As he complained to Black, the secretary of the War History Advisory Committee:

I am immersed in the Ministry of Commerce Registry (Linenhall Street) ploughing a deadly furrow through the Indexes, and, occasionally, looking at the contents of a file. In this vast desert there are only a few oases, and yet one has to cross miles and miles of sand!

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33 Gransteden requested that all government departments supply Chart with necessary information. Chart noted that the Ministry of Home Affairs was the only Ministry that had not furnished him with this material in due time. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2: Statement for the War Records Committee of Progress since the Last Meeting of the Committee in December last. (No date but probably December 1942). However, by September 1943, the Ministry of Home Affairs appointed a Miss Campbell to compose the narratives, which were based on a list of topics that Chart had supplied to the Ministry. All in all though, from reading the files it appeared that the ministries felt no sense of urgency in sending the reports. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2: Minutes of Meeting of the Northern Ireland War Records Committee, 10 September 1943.

34 As there are numerous references to this see PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2.

35 PRONI CAB, CAB 3E/15: Memorandum by Blake, 30 September 1948.
It is, I fear, pretty monotonous. Every day, I become more convinced that the writing of the History is the least of my jobs.³⁶

Not only then were the structural arrangements set up in Northern Ireland to help the author noticeably different from the British system, but Blake was inundated with work trying to cover both military and civil aspects within the one volume. Another factor differentiating Northern Ireland’s official war history from those written in Britain was its purpose. As early as January 1942, Professor Hancock said with confidence that the Northern Irish official history was of a unique kind and would not fit neatly with the work being conducted in Britain. After a meeting with Dr. Chart, Hancock concluded ‘The governing idea or emotion seems to be local patriotism. They have no particular scientific purpose and do not seem very interested in funding experience.’³⁷ As far as Hancock could discern, the driving purpose was subjective and not founded on the same reasoning as the United Kingdom Series; the purpose of which was to produce well researched historical studies that would have some utilitarian purpose for the government while maintaining historical integrity.³⁸

Hancock’s assessment was correct. There was a more strategically calculated motivation for the writing of the Northern Irish official history. By commissioning its own history the Northern Irish government realised that it could ensure Northern Ireland’s role in the war would never be forgotten. The official history would act as a testament - a lasting memorial - to the role Northern Ireland had played.³⁹ Moreover, concern was expressed during the war that Northern Ireland’s role would not be given due attention in the United Kingdom Series.⁴⁰ Despite the plausibility of both of these reasons they nevertheless placed a rather disproportionate emphasis on Northern

³⁷ TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Note of Interview – Northern Ireland History - by W. K. Hancock, 27 January 1942.
³⁸ TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: ‘Civil Histories – Circular Letter’ from W. K. Hancock to Postan, 11 July 1942. For an interesting analysis of the difference between the United Kingdom and Australian official histories, in which the former promoted the scientific reasoning behind the history, and the latter which hoped for both scientific and popular history, see TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/285: Letter Hancock to Sir Gilbert Laithwaite (civil Under-Secretary of the War Cabinet), 13 June 1944.
³⁹ PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2: Dr. Chart’s Notes for War Records Committee Meeting, 13 November 1941; To see how the Prime Minister adopts Chart’s reasoning see PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/1: Memorandum by the Prime Minister on the Record of Northern Ireland’s War Effort by J. M. Andrews, 3 December 1941.
⁴⁰ PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2: Minutes of Meeting of Northern Ireland War Records Committee, 11 June 1943.
Ireland and its importance in the success of the war. Within this context it is not surprising that Hancock reached the conclusion that the official war history was being written out of patriotism. Yet by writing its own official history, Northern Ireland actually played an active role in encouraging British war historians to dedicate less space to covering Northern Ireland’s involvement. Terence O’Brien, who wrote about civil defence and air raids on the United Kingdom, encapsulated this point. Whilst writing his own history he decided that there was no need to include Northern Ireland’s story. For him, Blake’s account, “let’s me out” of any description at all of the bombing attacks in NI’. If the reader wanted to learn about Northern Ireland O’Brien added, ‘I merely say to the reader – “if you want to read about N.I. see Mr Blake’s history.”’

While many factors justify the statement that the Northern Irish official history was being written for patriotic reasons, it is certainly more difficult to explain why Blake, an Englishman, was appointed to write this history. Indeed, in June 1943 when Chart needed to appoint an assistant to help with preparing material for the official history, Blake’s services were declined on the grounds that he had been working full time as a Junior Lecturer at Queen’s University. Even a proposal from Querkett, a member of the War Records Committee and Parliamentary Draftsman, that Blake become an additional member of the War Records Committee, was met by resistance from Sir David Lindsay Keir, Chairman of the committee. As the files on this episode detail, no explanation is given for Keir’s opposition, merely that he had been of the opinion that the position should instead be offered to another academic. There appeared to be little enthusiasm for Blake and this was again witnessed in his

41 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter W. K. Hancock to L. S. P. Freer (representative of Northern Ireland in the Home Office), 23 December 1941.
42 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter O’Brien to Acheson, no date but probably at some point around the middle of 1952.
43 John W. Blake was a graduate from King’s College, London, moved to Belfast in 1934 and later became senior lecturer in History at Queen’s University, Belfast. In 1950 he moved to Keele to take up the Chair in Modern History at the University College of North Staffordshire, he was Vice-Principal in 1954 and on the untimely death of the Principal Sir John Lennard-Jones just over one year from taking up the position he also acted as Principal there from November 1954 until 1st September 1956. He left in 1964 to become the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Sir J. F. B Mountford and William Alexander Campbell Stewart, *Keele: An Historical Critique* (London, 1972), pp. 88-89 and p. 147.
44 Keir had suggested that a Professor Todd would be more appropriate for the job. There is no biographical information in the file to discern Professor Todd’s credentials. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2: Minutes of Meeting of the Northern Ireland War Records Committee, 28 June 1943.
candidature being rejected for the writing of the ill-starred popular account of Northern Ireland during the war - *Northern Ireland’s Part in the War for Freedom*.\(^\text{45}\)

Blake was considered unsuitable for the writing of *Northern Ireland’s Part in the War for Freedom* primarily because he was not an ‘Ulsterman’. The fact that he was an Englishmen meant that he lacked local appeal in comparison to a Northern Irish author. Despite having lived for ‘six or seven years’ in Northern Ireland, one commentator remarked:

> he strikes me as not yet being properly conditioned to our Northern environment, and his manner of thought impresses me as rather detached, aloof and academic. He would, I am sure, select and arrange most competently, but I do not know if he would be able to write with conviction and enthusiasm.\(^\text{46}\)

Others merely suggested that Blake lacked the necessary experience to write such a piece of work.\(^\text{47}\) Nonetheless, this statement provides a unique insight into the working of the Northern mind. It suggests that the popular history required a local talent as its author, whereas the official history needed someone with different credentials. The Northern Irish government, by choosing Blake, an academic, not from Northern Ireland as the author of the official history, may have been aspiring for a more serious academic history. Moreover, it seemed of little importance that Blake’s own interests rested in African history, and not Northern Irish history. He was, however, a founding member of the Society for Irish Historical Studies.\(^\text{48}\) It therefore remains unclear why

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\(^{45}\) Nothing came of this proposal as the government struggled to find an author to write the account. Initially St. John Ervine, a popular unionist writer, had agreed to do it but had to reconsider his fee after realising that it would take a great deal more work than he had anticipated. In the end the government stalled because of the fee demanded and Ervine procured alternative work. With an alternative author Jack Loudan requesting an even larger fee, and the subsequent inability to find another suitable author, the government had missed the window of opportunity for publishing this history and the project was scrapped. See PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2.

\(^{46}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/4: Letter A. Tulip to Keir, 22 March 1945.

\(^{47}\) PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/4: Handwritten note from Hall-Thompson (Minister of Education) to Gransden, 25 March 1945 on letter from A. Tulip to Keir, 22 March 1945.

Basil Brooke chose him. His previous interest in working on the official war history may also have been a deciding factor. Yet all this is a matter of conjecture. In any case, what is certain is that regardless of whoever was chosen to write the history, their work was to be closely regulated by the War History Advisory Committee and the Northern Irish government. Therefore, the chosen author was not only selected by the government but carefully monitored during the writing process.

The Relationship between the Northern Irish Government, the War History Advisory Committee and John W. Blake

In the first meeting of the War History Advisory Committee, the committee established the parameters in which Blake and the committee would work. At this meeting it was clear that the government was to be involved throughout the writing process of the history. It was also agreed that in cases of doubt about the content of the history, the committee and Blake would follow the procedure of seeking government approval on those issues:

liable to give rise to controversy or in which some element of secrecy must continue to be preserved; the expression of opinions on Government policy or on the conduct of particular named individuals; and material the disclosure of which would require the prior approval of the British or other Governments.29

In many ways this was similar to the regulatory process that took place in Britain, in which issues relating to security had to be considered by the Joint Intelligence Committee. Nevertheless, this statement made clear that the Northern Irish

29 PRONI CAB, CAB 3F/1/3: Minutes of the First Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Official War History of Northern Ireland, 23 January 1947.
government would be informed, as necessary, on the progress of the official history. In any case, the government was already represented on the War History Advisory Committee - most notably by Robert Gransden, the Secretary to the Cabinet. Blake also encouraged and welcomed the sending of draft chapters to Northern Irish government departments, not only to check factual accuracy but to allow them to comment on any parts which contained criticism of their actions. Of the few cases raised in the minutes of the War History Advisory Committee, there are two references that serve to highlight the restrictive nature of the writing of official history and the unique manner in which unsavoury episodes of Northern Ireland’s wartime history were repressed.

The first of these is witnessed in a draft version of Chapter Six of the history entitled ‘The Air Raids’. In this chapter Blake revealed that during the war considerable tension existed between the Belfast Corporation and the Northern Irish government over the former’s refusal to decentralise the electrical power supply away from the potentially vulnerable Harbour Power Station area. As Northern Ireland’s role in the war increased and more use was made of the port facilities in Belfast, it was pertinent that the Corporation de-centralise this power station, which controlled some ninety per cent of Northern Ireland’s power supply. Despite the fact that the government had asked the Corporation even before the war to undertake these changes, the Corporation remained reluctant, aware that the cost of such work would be met by the city. Belfast Corporation also argued that building another plant outside Belfast would take some four years to construct. Nevertheless, despite protestations, in the autumn of 1940, the Corporation relocated two generating plants to less vulnerable areas - not outside of Belfast but in the city itself, both to East Bridge Street. At the same time, the Ministry of Commerce sought out other areas where extra plants could be developed.

Whilst this was clearly an important part of Northern Ireland’s wartime history, after reading the draft chapter the Ministry of Commerce suggested to Blake that this uncomplimentary episode be omitted. Despite the predominant role the Ministry of

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50 PRONI CAB, CAB 3F/1/3: Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Official War History of Northern Ireland, 19 February 1948. Parts of the history which denounced the government’s handling of the war effort such as Northern Ireland’s lethargic attitude towards the war effort, high unemployment figures until 1941, the low productivity of small engineering firms, and the problems with civil defence were all shown to the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in November 1955 and given approval before they were included in the final version of the history. In addition, Lord MacDermott, Minister of Public Security during the war and then Attorney General for Northern Ireland and Adrian Robinson, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs were also consulted. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/9: Document ‘War History’ by Black, 2 December 1955.

Commerce, which had been responsible for the supply of electricity, had played in this episode, it had asked for it to be removed. The justification for this request is revealing. As the minutes of the War History Advisory Committee reported, the reason was not that Blake had portrayed this problem incorrectly, nor did he misinterpret the situation. Rather, the Ministry feared it would damage ‘the good relations at present existing’ between the government and the Corporation.\textsuperscript{52} This is a clear example of the government allowing present concerns to over-rule sound judgement.

Blake’s reaction to the Ministry of Commerce’s suggestion revealed the process of negotiation he had entered into with the government while writing the history. As the draft version of this chapter was not in the files consulted, it is difficult to ascertain for sure what exactly Blake included and excluded from the original draft. Nevertheless, in the published version of the official history Blake did not ignore the strained relationship between the government and the Corporation and highlighted the noticeable lack of urgency from the Corporation. In a more cautious vein however, he described the episode in a diplomatic and non-accusatory manner. On introducing the topic he succinctly wrote, ‘Railways and electricity supplies may serve as contrasting examples of the good and the not so good.’\textsuperscript{53} Similarly his concluding remarks show an element of detachment and refrain from directing blame:

But all these effective improvements came after the raids: even the reinforcement of the East Bridge Street station was not completed in time. Prior to 1941, very little had been done to minimise the risk of a partial or major breakdown of production, should vital supplies from the Harbour Power Station be interrupted. It was fortunate for Northern Ireland that during the raids the Harbour Power Station, though damaged, escaped major injury.\textsuperscript{54}

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\textsuperscript{52} PRONI CAB, CAB 3E/1/3: Minutes of the Twelfth Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Official War History of Northern Ireland, 8 June 1951. \\
\textsuperscript{53} Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland}, p. 223. \\
\textsuperscript{54} Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland}, p. 225.
\end{flushright}
Whilst it is commendable that Blake included some reference to this affair, showing he had only partly acceded to the request of the Ministry of Commerce, the published text reveals that his criticism was certainly not as caustic as it could have been. Blake therefore appeared to be willing to show tact and accommodate his committee.

The second example, demonstrating Blake’s willingness to bow before the storm and placate the Northern Irish government, is seen in his treatment of the premiership of the former Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, John Millar Andrews. As already discussed in this chapter, Blake and the War History Advisory Committee agreed that the mentioning of ‘named individuals’ was a prerequisite for seeking advice from the government on what could and could not be written. It therefore logically followed that named individuals were consulted if they were discussed in the text. On writing about John Millar Andrews’ resignation in April 1943, his son John Lawson Ormod Andrews asked that a comment, which directly remarked on his father’s lack of leadership, be removed. The ex-Prime Minister’s son, given the opportunity of reviewing those sections of the history that commented upon his father, prior to publication, took offence to Blake drawing attention to his father’s failures as Prime Minister.\footnote{PRONI CAB, CAB 3F/1/3: Minutes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Official War History of Northern Ireland, 9 November 1955.} In particular, he was particularly offended with a statement which read, “Unrest had been partly based on what was loosely described as want of leadership and the need for a Cabinet reconstruction”, and asked for it to be removed.\footnote{PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/9: Letter Black to Sayles, 23 November 1955. It is indeed omitted from the published version. See Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland in the Second World War}: 380.} As a Member of Parliament for North Down, John L. O. Andrews was aware of the criticisms that had been directed at his father, and also sensitive to highlighting these inadequacies in the official history. Despite the fact that it was well-known that Andrews’ premiership had been marred with accusations of a lack of leadership, his son’s request was motivated by a desire not to create a negative image of his father. Andrews’ premiership, however, demanded special attention in the history, even the less palatable aspects, as they formed a part of Northern Ireland’s wartime narrative.

During the war, John Millar Andrews’ professional ability was called into question on numerous occasions. On becoming Prime Minister in November 1940, his reluctance to make extensive Cabinet changes by removing the ‘old guard’ was a formidable blow to his future political career. As Barton argues, his decision to merely
'reshuffle' the government, rather than bringing in new and more able ministers to meet the ever increasing wartime demands, met great resistance. Over the years, mounting pleas for change were heard from unionist backbenchers, junior ministers and within the Unionist Party itself. The government's poor management of industrial unrest, particularly during the October 1942 strike which witnessed 10,000 men from the aircraft, engineering and shipbuilding industries walk out over a proposal to introduce Sunday work, also weakened Andrews’ position. Equally, the horrifying experiences of the Blitz highlighted the government's failure to protect its people and revealed the conditions in which Belfast's poorest lived. These factors, coupled with continuous unemployment in Northern Ireland, all contributed to the resignation of the Prime Minister.57

Despite these grievances being widely known and even publicised in the press, the official war history treats the events leading up to Andrews’ resignation notably mildly. Not only does Blake leave out the secret meeting, held in January 1943, between unionist backbenchers demanding Andrews’ resignation and the appointment of younger ministers, he also ignores the fact that months later, six ministers threatened their own resignations if Andrews remained as Prime Minister.58 Instead, Blake frames his narrative in such a manner as to overlook Andrews’ opposition to handing in his resignation:

During the winter and early spring of 1942-3, there had been signs of growing public dissatisfaction with the Government of Northern Ireland, particularly among Unionist supporters of the administration. Critics inside the Unionist party were disturbed by the party’s defeat in the West Belfast by-election, following as it did upon two earlier reverses. Critics generally were concerned about the relatively high unemployment figure and argued that, if more youth and vigour could be infused into the Government, more war contracts might be placed in Northern Ireland and the surplus labour partially, if not wholly, absorbed ... Long and deserving though their [the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Home Affairs]

57 Barton, *Northern Ireland*, p. 43 and pp. 54-65.
services to Northern Ireland had been, the time was clearly approaching when they must give way to younger men. Mr. J. M. Andrews himself saw this point and, on April 28, he tendered his resignation to the Governor of Northern Ireland.59

Whilst it was common practice to avoid writing anything which could cause distress to the living, Blake exonerated Andrews’ of any blame and glossed over his leadership problems. He even placed acumen on Andrews for graciously bowing out. The long, drawn out process, which led to Andrews’ resignation, indicated that this was not strictly the case. Only after Andrews was effectively given an ultimatum to stand down as Prime Minister, did he do so.

As this section demonstrates, the examples discussed show the level of influence the War History Advisory Committee and the Northern Irish government had over the text of the official war history. It also proposes that Blake, despite attempting to highlight unsavoury aspects of Northern Ireland’s wartime history, was cautious but yet willing to comply with revisions proposed by the government. We can only speculate whether Blake would have placed more emphasis, and examined in more detail, these problematic episodes if he had not been writing the history at the behest of the Northern Irish government. What is certain, however, is that the government influenced to varying degrees how this history was written and what exactly was included in the final published version.

‘Gilding the Lily’ – The Interpretation of the British Commentators on the Civil Aspects of the Official War History60

This section of the chapter examines how civil aspects of the war were dealt with in Northern Ireland’s official history and how they were received by the British

60 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Acheson to Blake, 28 April 1950.
government. It will look in particular at the close working relationship Blake developed with A. B. Acheson, Secretary of the Cabinet Advisory Committee, during the writing process and how this impacted on his style of writing. It will also attend to criticism levelled at Blake from the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Home Office, and discuss how Blake accommodated these criticisms in the published version of the official history.

Owing to the pragmatic working arrangement between the Northern Irish and British governments to share information that facilitated the writing of the official histories, British commentators played an important role in the research and writing phrases of the Northern Ireland official history. In particular, for review purposes, copies of Blake’s chapters were sent to various British government departments, the Services Historical Section, and official war historians for comment. A. B. Acheson, Secretary of the Cabinet Advisory Committee, and H. Black, Secretary of the Northern Ireland War History Advisory Committee, were responsible for ensuring the exchange of these drafts within their respective governments. Only comments written by the United Kingdom official war historians and Acheson were taken out of the formal channel of transmission and sent directly to Blake by Acheson. Through this process, Blake established a strong working relationship with Acheson. Not only did Acheson ensure that all government departments read and commented, if necessary, upon Blake’s work, he also dedicated a great deal of his personal time making his own annotations on the drafts. Although Acheson claimed that he was no specialist, but merely a ‘general reader’, his remarks were the most valuable to Blake, on a more personal level, during his writing process.

Acheson’s comments proved to be amongst the most perceptive and critical from the civil history side. Like Professor Hancock, Acheson noted the overtly political tone of Blake’s work. His concern arose from a reading of a draft of the introductory chapter to the history, which he advised Blake read like a “political pamphlet”. In this

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61 PRONI CAB, CAB 3E/17: Letter Blake to Miss Gowing, 13 January 1949.
62 TNA PRO AVIA, AVIA 46/511: Letter Acheson to Scott (Official United Kingdom war historian who wrote The Administration of War Production), 18 February 1952.
63 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Acheson to Blake, 28 April 1950.
64 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Handwritten note Hancock to Acheson, no date but around 12-17 December 1949.
65 There is no copy of Acheson’s letter in this file which was written in the second week of September 1949. Blake’s description in his reply to Acheson summarises what the latter wrote. The phrase ‘political pamphlet’ is therefore Blake’s but it is his interpretation of what Acheson said.
introduction Blake did not specifically focus on the war years, but instead used this chapter to establish how and why Northern Ireland came to be at war. This chapter, therefore, became a kind of political canvass on which to showcase Northern Ireland’s loyalty to the British Crown. It described in detail the historical background to the Home Rule Crisis, the partitioning of Ireland, the setting up of the Northern Irish State, its constitutional relationship with Britain, and a general description of how Blake imagined the typical ‘Ulsterman’. It was through Ulstermen’s determination to remain loyal to Britain, and from previous experiences of war, that they came to be at war again in 1939. Despite the memory of ‘how the Ulster Division had been mutilated, almost annihilated, on the Somme in July 1916’, Blake wrote, Ulstermen were determined ‘to expedite the winning of the war and the destruction of Hitlerism’.66

It was therefore not surprising, nor did it shock Blake, to learn of Acheson’s criticism. Not only was Blake acutely aware of the criticisms that Acheson had levelled against him, but he agreed with them. Unable to dispute Acheson’s critique, Blake justified his text by admitting that having lived for so long in Northern Ireland, he felt that he had lost ‘a sense of perspective’ and had ‘become too much taken up with the viewpoint of the local community’. Thanking Acheson he revealingly added:

it is therefore refreshing, and even a little disturbing to find that an attempt to expound the Northern viewpoint strikes one like yourself who is housed at the centre of things as a little lacking in objectivity.67

As a text predominantly describing the loyalty of Ulster unionism, it is not difficult to discern to which community’s ‘viewpoint’ Blake was referring. Not only that, in his private correspondence with Acheson, Blake disclosed his understanding of the term loyalty and his need to be tactful when writing the official history.

For Blake, loyalty had a ‘peculiar connotation’ in Northern Ireland and was not a concept that was wholly accepted. The Catholic minority, he claimed, did not subscribe to this view. Blake’s definition of loyalty was therefore defined in terms of

66 Blake, Northern Ireland, pp. 2-3.
67 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Blake to Acheson, 12 December 1949.
opposition to the other – the disloyal nationalist community. In trying to explain what
he meant in his text Blake wrote:

The point I was really trying to make is this: that over the past half
century the Irish Revolution involved a change of sentiment and in
the end the establishment of a Republic in the 26 Counties. The
desire of the British Government to meet the wishes of the Irish
political leaders in the south had the unfortunate and unintentional
effect of encouraging this trend. In contrast, the North, in the face of
great odds including pressure from the British Government,
preferred to remain in the Kingdom. This was the result of their
political philosophy. In this context it was as much an act of faith as a
consequence of their present administrative position inside the
United Kingdom that they came to be at war in 1939.68

In short, Blake had bought into a unionist discourse supporting unionist rejection of
Home Rule and proposed that the British government had put ‘pressure’ on Northern
unionists.69 What his letter to Acheson does not discuss is the fact that the ‘political
philosophy’ of unionists themselves could be, and was, disloyal to the British
government when it suited their purposes, as has been discussed in the previous
chapter. Blake attempted to explain to Acheson the distinction between those loyal and
those disloyal to Britain by suggesting that nationalists in Ireland were reluctant to fight
during the First World War, a statement which was factually incorrect and guided by
political propaganda. Blake wrote:

There is also the point that a state or a part of a state may be formally
at war but in fact, because of the political attitude of a majority of its

68 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Blake to Acheson, 12 December 1949.
69 F. S. L. Lyons argues that Northern Unionists were against Home Rule and the creation of the
Northern state but accepted it as a ‘sacrifice’ as the ‘only way in which Ulster Unionists could be sure of
staying within the United Kingdom until, of their own violation, they joined the rest of Ireland’. Lyons,
Ireland, p. 696.
people, will take little or no part in the prosecution of war. You may take a horse to the water ….', [sic] and this is largely what happened in Ireland in 1914-18.\textsuperscript{70}

Nationalists had fought in the First World War, in large numbers, with the hope that once the war ended the Home Rule Bill would be ratified. Equally, during the Second World War volunteers enlisted from both Northern and Southern Ireland, with a substantial number of Catholics joining. By making this point, Blake revealed how closely he positioned his own interpretation of these events within a unionist discourse.

In this sense, Blake’s private correspondence clearly disclosed a unionist perspective, and suggested that the official history was not written as objectively as it should have been. Despite taking on board Acheson’s criticisms of the overtly political nature of his text and agreeing to make necessary changes to avert such criticism, the published text is still noticeably political in tone and questions need to be asked to what extent the author enacted the suggested changes. Not only is the introductory chapter overtly political, it alludes to Blake’s support of unionism by constructing an incoherent, rather strained, characterisation of ‘Ulstermen’ and Northern Ireland. Reproducing in the official history that which he had written in a letter to Acheson, Blake wrote about the declaration of war in 1939:

\begin{quote}
the response of the people of Northern Ireland to war conditions was also an act of faith, reflecting the political philosophy dominant in the counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. Resolutely determined to preserve at all costs the political connection with the British Commonwealth and Empire, their wartime alignment was the logical outcome of a position consistently maintained since the controversy over Irish home rule had first flared up in 1886.\textsuperscript{71}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{70} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Blake to Acheson, 12 December 1949.

\textsuperscript{71} Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland}, p. 1.
Yet this was not the ‘dominant’ philosophy in all those counties. Some nationalists in those counties would have rejected being drawn into the war, yet Blake overlooks this factor and instead speaks for the unionist community. For Blake, the fact that Northern Ireland went to war in 1939 was because the people believed that there would be no ‘evasion of duty’. Their ‘philosophy’ according to Blake ‘which formerly sustained Ulstermen in their dour opposition to home rule, now underlined their conviction that political destiny and material advantage lay in the preservation of the British connection’. This meant that ‘Northern Ireland, composed of six of the old nine counties of Ulster, conceived that war against Germany was a righteous cause, was, as in the old days, again prepared to fight and to believe herself right.’ A deliberate echo of Lord Randolph Churchill’s famous phrase, this history therefore spoke for the Protestant, unionist population. Although Blake did define “Ulstermen” as being composed two-thirds Protestant, one-third Catholic, his reference to the ‘The people of the province, patriotic by instinct and tradition’ clearly redefined the population he referred to as Protestant.

This nonsensical construction of loyal Ulstermen did not go unnoticed. Acheson was able to highlight two points which directly challenged this ‘philosophy’ Blake had constructed. Acheson drew Blake’s attention to his treatment of the issue of conscription and recruitment in the official history: two aspects of the war which revealed the divisions within Northern Irish society and which seriously called into question this supposed loyalty. As has already been discussed in a previous chapter, the Northern Irish government pressed for conscription to be extended to Northern Ireland four times over the course of the war: in 1939, in 1941 following the Belfast Blitz, in 1943 and again in 1945. The final decision however, rested with the British government as constitutionally it controlled all matters relating to peace and war. Although unionists expressed a desire for conscription, it was resisted by nationalists, the Roman Catholic Church and Trade Union Leaders in Northern Ireland. On 22 May 1941, Cardinal MacRory, the Primate of All Ireland, released a declaration highlighting the Church’s opposition. It stated that Ireland was:

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73 Blake actually includes reference to Lord Randolph Churchill’s ‘prophetic note’ in the history. See Blake, *Northern Ireland*, p. 1.
an ancient land, made one by God ... partitioned by a foreign power, against the vehement protests of its people. Conscription would now seek to compel those who writhe under this grievous wrong to fight on the side of its perpetrators.\textsuperscript{75}

Despite Cardinal MacRory’s impassioned proclamation, some 100,000 Irishmen from both sides of the border enlisted in the British Armed Forces; of this figure some may have already been resident in England.\textsuperscript{76} For Catholics who volunteered the motivation came less from a moral obligation and more out of financial necessity.\textsuperscript{77} Yet, despite this total figure of some 100,000 volunteers, recruitment was less than impressive in Northern Ireland. Moreover, to further aggravate the situation, unemployment was rife at a time when recruitment was very low. Such a situation called into repute the sincerity of Northern Ireland’s commitment to the war. Corresponding personally with Herbert Morrison, the Secretary of State, John Andrews, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland intimated that poor levels of recruitment were affected by the refusal of the British government to guarantee that volunteers would be reinstated in their jobs, once the war had ended. Owing to the fact that Northern Ireland relied on the voluntary dimension to enlistment, Andrews argued that such a concession would be the only means of improving the recruitment rate in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{78}

Surely if Northern Ireland was as loyal as Blake suggested, such a petition from the Northern Irish Prime Minister would have been unnecessary. It appeared that when Northern Ireland was asked to demonstrate its commitment it was more hesitant than Blake’s narrative would lead us to believe. Acheson was quick to notice these inconsistencies and pointed out that Blake’s text was ‘rather less objective than might be expected of a serious historical work’. This, he argued, was not on the same lines as a “white-wash” or a “success story” but nevertheless there was ‘a definite tendency towards gilding the lily, “high-lighting” what is admirable and “low-lighting” what is not quite so admirable; and thus of some distortion in perspective’.\textsuperscript{79} Criticising Blake’s draft chapter on conscription and recruitment, Acheson explained to Blake that his text

\textsuperscript{75} Irish Independent, 23 May 1941, as cited in Barton, Northern Ireland, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{76} Doherty, Irish Men and Women, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{77} Doherty, Irish Men and Women, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{78} TNA PRO HO, HO 45/24212: 820406/79: Letter Andrews to Morrison, 29 May 1941.
\textsuperscript{79} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Acheson to Blake, 28 April 1950.
created an image of ‘a people, “displaying a solid and determined unity of purpose”, and “setting aside political and sectarian differences”’ yet, when it came to demonstrating this unity through agreeing to the extension of conscription to Northern Ireland there was public opposition. For Acheson, with conscription having been ‘readily accepted as almost axiomatic in Britain’, such opposition in Northern Ireland highlighted the fabricated nature of unity and merely suggested ‘that the earlier descriptions of the temper and unity of the people have been overdrawn’.

Not only did Blake’s draft over-emphasise the commonalty of experience, according to Acheson, it lacked sufficient explanation as to why the Northern Irish government, suspecting that the minority population would react adversely to the threat of conscription, went against the War Cabinet’s recommendations and called for its introduction anyway. Without such information, Acheson explained, the draft read as though the Northern Irish Prime Minister, having explored this issue with his Cabinet and the Council of the Ulster Unionist Party, took this stance in order ‘to deal a damaging blow at their non-Unionist opponents’. Moreover, he urged that Blake should not leave the reader to speculate as to why ‘the other side’, notably the Catholic Church and nationalists, stood against conscription. By framing the narrative in this manner, Acheson told Blake that he was leaving the reader with ‘an unsatisfied appetite’ and created ‘a feeling that really important historical issues have been left in the air’.

Blake’s response encapsulated a major difficulty he had encountered while writing the official history: how to record and frame issues that were seen as politically contentious. Well aware of not only the government’s expectations, but his ‘Ulster’ audience for whom he claimed he was writing, Blake revealed the complexity of the situation to Acheson writing, ‘Producing a script which met with the approval of the Northern Ireland official element of the Advisory Committee, and at the same time was truthful, proved to be difficult.’ On recognising his deliberate failure to qualify his statements about why nationalists and the Catholic Church were against conscription, he admitted his reluctance to draw attention to those reasons. In his opinion, such opposition to conscription was based on nationalist unwillingness to recognise the

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80 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Acheson to Blake, 28 April 1950.
81 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Acheson to Blake, 28 April 1950. Acheson later suggested that Blake should remove the reference to the Ulster Unionist Party in order to avoid the reader associating the Northern Ireland government’s wish to have conscription extended to Northern Ireland with the idea that they were only doing so to ‘strike a blow against those who held different views on the issue of Union’. TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Acheson to Blake, 14 July 1950.
constitutional status of Northern Ireland and its government. Partition was seen as an ill caused by the British government, something which Blake argued left nationalists unable to ‘conscientiously reconcile being conscripted to fight in the army of an alien government with their political opinions’. By justifying his aversion to approaching the subject, he alluded to his concern for unionists when he commented:

In any case I was reluctant to have to explain these matters. Any suggestion of discrimination against the minority is, as you know, liable to produce repercussions in Northern Ireland. The Opposition, seeing tyranny in every breath of the wind, is more than usually sensitive. In the circumstances, I did not feel inclined to say anything which might add to their sense of being discriminated against. In Great Britain there is no organised group of consequence which seeks to overthrow the very foundation of organised government. There is in Northern Ireland, and it makes a great deal of difference.82

At the same time accepting that he had not explained in enough detail why the Northern Irish government wanted the extension of conscription, he argued that he could find two reasons for the government’s stance. By introducing conscription, Blake believed the government could force those who refused to accept it - the government’s ‘opponents’ - to leave Northern Ireland and move to Southern Ireland. The second justification centred around Northern Ireland’s desire to share equally in the war experience with the rest of the United Kingdom; a fact that could only be achieved through such equality of sacrifice.

Blake’s correspondence with Acheson reveals that Blake not only overlooked important facts in the history, but had deliberately decided to exclude them from the text. Interestingly, in his published version, Blake appears to have taken on board

82 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Blake to Acheson, 15 May 1950. It is interesting to note that by September 1954, Blake was still experiencing difficulties with finalising the writing of those sections referring to conscription. His reluctance to sign this chapter off as finished meant that he had delayed the checking of the final drafts of the history. PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/9: Letter Blake to Black, 24 September 1954.
Acheson’s criticisms and adjusted his text accordingly, including the material necessary to explain the issues he had privately discussed with Acheson.\textsuperscript{83} Despite producing a more informed chapter in the published version of the official history, from the evidence presented here, it is clear that his inclusion of a more balanced account was only gestural and undertaken reluctantly on his part. In this sense, Acheson played an important role in making Blake aware of his subjective treatment of key issues in Northern Ireland wartime history.

Acheson was not the only British commentator to provide useful advice to Blake in relation to the civil aspects of the official history. The Commonwealth Relations Office, remarking on Blake’s draft on the issue of conscription, also pointed out inaccuracies in the text; in which Blake had implied that conscription in Northern Ireland would have discouraged enlistment of volunteers from Southern Ireland. In no way, claimed the Commonwealth Relations Office, was such a statement justifiable with the evidence of men from Ireland enlisting in the British Armed Forces in Britain. Despite appeals by the Northern Irish government in 1942 and 1943, said the Commonwealth Relations Office, many Irish had already joined the Forces. Moreover, Ben Cockram of the Commonwealth Relations Office argued, if anything, the figures produced in Blake’s work revealed that voluntary service in Northern Ireland accounted for only one quarter of the number of people that would have been attained had conscription been compulsory. According to Cockram, Blake’s text was therefore:

\begin{quote}

a piece of special pleading for the thesis that Northern Ireland’s freedom from conscription did not result in a net loss of manpower – a view not susceptible of mathematical proof and far removed from the much less controversial contention that conscription would not have been worth the trouble.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

Equally, the Commonwealth Relations Office objected to Blake’s inclusion of a table which detailed recruitment figures from both parts of Ireland. The Commonwealth Relations Office argued that the table was problematic as the actual recruitment figures,

\textsuperscript{83} Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland}, pp. 194-200.

\textsuperscript{84} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Cockram to Acheson, 26 June 1950.
at that time, were still inconclusive. A debate that had taken place in the British House of Commons on 19 March 1946 disclosed that although Lord Addison, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, could offer some figures on those who had volunteered from the South, he admitted that these were far from conclusive.\textsuperscript{85} Furnished with evidence, Cockram explained how Sir Basil Brooke had contacted James Chuter Ede, the Home Secretary, over concerns that Southern Ireland’s recruitment figures were more impressive than Northern Ireland’s. James Chuter Ede’s response to Sir Basil Brooke on 28 March revealed that the statistics for both parts of Ireland were ambiguous. With this knowledge, the Commonwealth Relations Office criticised Blake for including a table in his draft which presented ‘an air of completeness and reliability’. This, Cockram argued, was misleading and so too was Blake’s ‘ingenious’ decision to ‘ignore’ those citizens of Ireland who had enlisted in Great Britain particularly ‘since the section is presumably meant to give a broad picture of Irish recruitment’.\textsuperscript{86} Angered at Cockram’s response Blake intimated to Acheson:

\begin{quote}
\textit{In general, the attitude of the Commonwealth Relations Office on my draft re conscription \ldots is, if I may say so with respect, the sort I would rather have expected from the office of the representative in London of the Republic of Ireland, astonishingly naive & lacking in objectivity!}\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

Clearly these charges revealed a troubling lack of objectivity on Blake’s own behalf and his anger at the Commonwealth Relations Office hints yet again at his impartial perspective. His focus on Northern Ireland at the expense of providing a more balanced account, and his inclusion of material which was only partially accurate, reveal how invested Blake had become in espousing a unionist narrative. Whilst it not possible to determine where Blake sourced the material to write this section of his draft, the fact of the matter is, he alone was responsible for ensuring its factual accuracy.\textsuperscript{88} Despite his

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{85} Lord Addison held the position of Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs from 3 August 1945 to 7 July 1947. He was also Leader of the House of Lords from 3 August 1945 to 26 October 1951.
\textsuperscript{86} TNA PRO HO, HO 356/9: Letter Cockram to Acheson, 26 June 1950.
\textsuperscript{87} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Blake to Acheson, 1 November 1953.
\textsuperscript{88} PRONI CAB, CAB 3F/1/3: Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Official War History of Northern Ireland, 19 February 1948.
\end{footnotesize}
protestations, Blake accepted the faults, revised his text and made the necessary changes the Commonwealth Relations Office proposed. However, instead of providing a more reliable account of Southern Irish recruitment, Blake simply omitted the table and declined from commenting on recruitment from Southern Ireland. In this sense, his narrative on wartime recruitment remained limited and Blake revealed that the focus of this history would be solely on Northern Ireland - at the expense of placing its experience within proper context.\textsuperscript{89}

Yet it would be unfair to say that all of the official history was in the nature of a ‘success story’, and that only after being alerted to his subjective treatment of the issues discussed did Blake alter his original text. As has been shown, Blake’s drafts on conscription and recruitment attempted to provide an uncomplicated narrative at the expense of historical accuracy. However a draft chapter on civil defence in Northern Ireland was more forthright in its condemnation of the poor civil defence preparations for Northern Ireland during the war. The draft version of this chapter is not among the papers kept in the archive, but it is possible to gauge from the debate within the Home Office, and the comments which it sent to Acheson, its concern with Blake directing blame at the Northern Irish government for inadequate civil defence in Northern Ireland.

On being asked to read Blake’s draft, A. J. Kelly, liaison officer for the Northern Irish government in Whitehall, complained that the text was too critical of the Northern Irish government. According to Kelly, it failed to comprehend that His Majesty’s Government, and not the Northern Irish government, had been in charge of the ‘active defence’ of Northern Ireland. In the early years of the war, both governments had accepted that Northern Ireland was not a prime target; a decision which had enabled the British government to direct defence equipment to areas of greatest vulnerability, such as London and Southern England. It was only after the fall of France, Kelly claimed, that this situation changed and Northern Ireland’s vulnerability became more serious. In addition to these strategic concerns, Kelly argued that Blake had failed to highlight that ‘a section of the Belfast citizens were men not merely non cooperative but anti-pathetic to civil defence in the early stages’. Not only was there an element of antipathy, Kelly added that scant attention had been given to the fact that the authorities suffered from manpower and material problems. Therefore, said Kelly, this

\footnote{Blake, \textit{Northern Ireland}, pp. 194-200.}
‘hyper-critical’ tone was unwarranted. Those who had worked in the Ministries of Home Affairs and Public Security, particularly Lord MacDermott, he argued, needed to be informed.\textsuperscript{90} Sending this formal reply to Acheson, Austin Strutt of the Home Office in the main endorsed Kelly’s remarks and added ‘it was not the fault of the Northern Ireland Government if the equipment they needed did not arrive until after the event’.\textsuperscript{91}

This interpretation by the Home Office is intriguing as much academic work done since these comments were made has confirmed that the Northern Irish government was woefully unprepared and had failed to realise the seriousness of its apathy regarding civil defence.\textsuperscript{92} The fact that a Ministry of Public Security had not been created until June 1940 and a Minister appointed was one thing, but more worrying was the Minister of Public Security, Lord John MacDermott’s shock that as late as 1940, the Ministry of Home Affairs had actually returned fire fighting equipment to Britain.\textsuperscript{93} That Blake tried to place the blame where it was due is admirable, but it did not take long before he bowed under pressure from the War History Advisory Committee to change parts of his text. Professor Sayles, Chairman of the committee, alerted Blake to Lord MacDermott’s anger over his treatment of the issue of civil defence. While Sayles explained to Blake that MacDermott had asked for the text to be modified, Sayles conceded that the ‘recasting of a few sentences into colourless language’ would placate MacDermott.\textsuperscript{94}

Whilst Blake realised that the writing of this topic would provoke protestations from the government, he faced a challenge even sourcing material from which to write the chapter. Years previously, Chart had found researching the topic demanding as the Civil Defence authorities did not appear to possess any records of their own and were not forthcoming with information on civil defence.\textsuperscript{95} It can be argued that these earlier

\textsuperscript{90} TNA PRO HO, HO 356/9: Letter Kelly to Strutt, 2 April 1951.
\textsuperscript{91} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Strutt to Acheson, 22 January 1952.
\textsuperscript{93} Barton, \textit{Northern Ireland}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{94} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/9: Letter Sayles to Gransden, 10 August 1955.
\textsuperscript{95} PRONI CAB, CAB 9CD/177/2: Minutes of Meeting of the Northern Ireland War Records Committee, 4 September 1944. There was also a concern discussed at a meeting of the War Records Committee that some of the reports produced were inaccurate. By July 1943, as work mounted for the war history, Mr. Meehan, the Public Relations Officer in the Ministry of Public Security became Chart’s assistant. Meehan told the War Records Committee how he had attended a meeting of the National Fire Service in which all those in attendance were dumbfounded as to how the Service had actually been
problems at the research stage, combined with criticisms from the Home Office and Lord MacDermott, resulted in Blake situating his argument in a more intermediate position in the published version of the official history. By way of example, Blake writes:

Air raid precautions make one of those aspects of modern war which can most closely associate governments with their subjects. In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, though the responsibility for policy rested with the Government, the onus of carrying out air raid precautions was placed squarely on the shoulders of the local authorities. The impulse to make adequate provision, therefore, had to come partly from the people, partly from the Government. But Northern Ireland’s geographical situation, remote as it was from the continent of Europe, perhaps encouraged some to hope that they might escape the scourge of enemy air attack. The Government, for its part, had decided early in the war that the risk of air raids was insufficient to justify an expenditure on A.R.P. services which the optimists might condemn as extravagant.96

Whilst certainly not disguising that defence of Northern Ireland was insufficient, Blake also saw fit to direct some criticism towards the people themselves; a public which arguably should have been stirred from its complacency by local authorities and government. He states:

But, during the first year of the war, the general public had not appreciated the possibilities and, as we have seen, it was not until the development of the enemy air attack upon the United Kingdom as a whole made it patent that the turn of Belfast was likely to come that

96 Blake, *Northern Ireland*, p. 207.
the newly-established Ministry of Public Security was able to obtain more public backing for the drive which it had applied to build up the passive defences in the province.97

Writing this history for the government inflicted its own restrictions on Blake and he demonstrated this through his treatment of civil defence by placing blame on both the authorities and the public. If the government had accepted earlier on the seriousness of the need to build up civil defence in Northern Ireland, the Northern Irish people would have been alert to the threat. Yet the civil defence issue, along with the poor recruitment figures, was another example of the complacency of Northern Ireland during the war.

As this section has demonstrated, Blake’s writing was kept in check not only by the Northern Irish government and War History Advisory Committee, but by the British commentators. Of particular influence was Acheson, whose advice Blake fully endorsed. Where Blake appeared to be aggrandising Northern Ireland’s wartime achievement, both Acheson and the Commonwealth Relations Office were quick to advise him to reassess his judgement. Where Blake appeared to be too critical of the government, the Home Office and the War History Advisory Committee challenged him. In these circumstances, Blake summarised his thoughts on the writing of the official history when he explained to Acheson that he had come to believe it entailed ‘a question of an appearance of objectivity rather than of objectivity itself’.98 It was, therefore, with this conviction in mind that Blake wrote the official history.

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98 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Letter Blake to Acheson, 26 June 1950.
British military war historians and the Services Historical Section were jointly concerned about Blake’s history. Criticism was levelled not only at incorrect usage of military language, terminology and technical details, but more importantly his lack of perspective in writing those chapters dealing with the military aspect of the official history. For them the author focussed on certain military events, not to record a significant battle or important development in the war, but instead highlighted less important battles merely because Ulstermen had taken part in them. In this sense the sensational took the place of historical accuracy, with the military parts of the official history reading more like an adventure story, over-emphasising Northern Ireland’s contribution. From a militaristic point of view, these commentators argued that the official history gave a misleading impression of the importance of Northern Irishmen in the war. They even went so far as to suggest that the text proposed the improbable scenario that somehow Northern Ireland had won the war on its own. Such criticism adds support to the argument that this was a propagandist official war history and not a balanced historical work.

Blake however, did not have the same support network as the British official war historians to aid him in writing the military part of the official history. The editor of the United Kingdom Military Series, Professor Butler, had a team of senior officers from the Services who offered him advice on the direction of the histories, and helped in selecting the authors for the series. The official historians chosen were overwhelmingly academic historians, who had been involved in war service, and Service officers who had staff experience. In order to ensure that those volumes of the military series which dealt with land operations included the broader aspects of air and sea operations, there was close cooperation and contact between historians working within the different Services. In addition, research assistants were employed to help in the writing of these histories. Blake, on the other hand, without the benefit of any military experience, wrote his from secondary accounts, war diaries and files held by both the Northern Irish and British governments. Blake had much less on hand advice when writing these chapters; a factor which played a major part in the criticisms the official war historians and Services Historical Section directed at him.

99 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Roskill to Acheson, 4 December 1952.
Whilst these restrictions may justify Blake’s difficulty in fully grasping the correct military terminology to be employed in the text, or his failure at times to completely understand the events he was describing, it does not excuse the propagandist tone of his narrative. In order to illustrate the frustrations felt by the military authorities, it is useful to provide a few examples of the types of comments made. Captain S. W. Roskill, who had been in the Royal Navy and who was commissioned to write the volumes to *The War at Sea*, was one of the most articulate commentators on Blake’s work, finding much to criticise in all the chapters he reviewed. Some of his criticisms were trivial but others were of a more caustic nature. For those of the trivial bent, Roskill complained that Blake’s description of beaches, where he described them as “‘Sloping’”, was nonsensical. For Roskill, this point was redundant. After all, ‘Beaches’, he ridiculed, ‘have to slope!’ In a more disparaging manner, he complained about Blake’s poor use of military language when he wrote:

Trawlers and corvettes do not *cover* convoys, they escort them as do destroyers, sloops, frigates etc. They also hardly ‘sweep the seas of the enemy ahead of them’! Naval people will laugh at such an expression.101

Whilst it might appear that Roskill was being overly critical of Blake’s text, he did draw attention to Blake’s lack of understanding of military terminology and how to apply it in the official history.

There was clearly an element of fault-finding in Roskill’s comments; however he did express a more worrying concern with Blake’s use of sources to write the military aspects of the official history. Roskill voiced particular disapproval over chapter eight - ‘The Ocean Convoys’ - which - covering the entirety of the war, examined events taking place in Northern Ireland and overseas. Despite highlighting problems with the structure and the broad sweep of the chapter, Roskill was more dismayed at the sources

101 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Comments on Chapter V: Remarks (from the Naval point of view) by Captain Roskill, 21 April 1950.
102 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/427: Comments on Chapter V: Remarks (from the Naval point of view) by Captain Roskill, 21 April 1950.
Blake had used, claiming that they were inaccurate. By using contemporary sources instead of more up-to-date post-war material and accounts written by the Admiralty, Blake, he claimed, had made many errors. Moreover, Roskill attacked Blake for only writing about actions that were somehow connected with Northern Ireland. This criticism is summarised when he wrote:

I realise, of course, that Ulstermen served everywhere in British Forces but it seems to me to be stretching local pride too far to give, for instance, Matapan such special treatment because an Ulsterman took part in some of the air attacks!\(^{103}\)

Whilst it is true that Northern Irishmen served in different parts of the British Forces, for Roskill it made no sense to write a narrative about a particular battle just because an ‘Ulsterman’ had fought in it. In addition, by directing attention to the Royal Irish Fusiliers in Malta and thus overlooking other serving units, Roskill claimed that Blake was doing a disservice and causing offence to these other units. Apart from this selective treatment of the evidence, Roskill also added that Blake had not employed correct terminology and phraseology in a naval context. He wrote:

I don’t like the expression ‘to keep control of the Mediterranean’. It shows lack of understanding of maritime war. In no sense did Cunningham ‘control the Mediterranean’ at this time. His influence was only in the Eastern Basin, his strategy defensive and the blow at

\(^{103}\) TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Document: ‘Chapter VIII Northern Ireland History’ by Roskill, 3rd December 1952. The reason why Blake chose to focus on specific units was indeed because “Ulstermen” had served in them. The problem for Blake was that personnel from Northern Ireland were not placed into separate Northern Irish formations, as they were for those coming from the Dominions. Whilst the Army had some battalions which consisted fully or mainly of men from Northern Ireland, it was more common in the other Services to find men enlisting on their own, even if some aircrafts or naval craft had predominantly Northern Irish personnel. Therefore, Northern Irish men were displaced across all the Services and Blake attempted to show this by featuring narratives of the Services in which “Ulstermen” were present. See TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: ‘Note for Record’ by Acheson, 10 December 1953. Brian Barton summarises this situation when he writes ‘apart from the 38th Irish Brigade, there was at no time any large concentration of servicemen from Northern Ireland in any one place; their fighting was scattered over all battlefronts’. See Brian Barton’s new foreword to Blake, *Northern Ireland*, p. xv.
Taranto was an important tactical offensive. But control of nearly all the Mediterranean remained ‘in dispute’. Further on (lines 17-23) the statement ‘the only way …… was to seek out the enemy battle fleet’. To seek out and destroy the main enemy forces is always a cardinal maxim of maritime war.

While some within the Services Historical Section later questioned the merit of specific criticisms made by Roskill, he was determined to express his frustration at Blake’s work. In an outburst of despair, he complained to Acheson:

This is a foul job. I really don’t think it right that we should be asked to put right a job which is full of inaccuracies. I don’t know the status of the author but presumably he has access to official material here in the Services Depts. If so it is disgraceful that drafts should come to us in such a state … I don’t think I can stand a lot of this!

Although none of the British commentators were under any obligation to read Blake’s drafts, the British government supported a ‘sort of freemasonry between Commonwealth historians’ who were writing the official histories of the war. That the United Kingdom official war historians and Services Historical Section expressed frustration is understandable. Blake gave these historians cause for frustration as late as

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105 In an interesting aside, some of Roskill’s detailed criticisms over Chapter eight, “The Ocean Convoys”, were challenged by the Admiralty Historical Section, of which Rear-Admiral Bellairs was a member. Bellairs rebutted that, ‘Captain Roskill’s comments here are controversial. The author’s remarks seem quite justifiable.’ Such disagreement between the various authorities on the military aspect therefore only exacerbated Blake’s problem in how to write these chapters. Additionally, Bellairs seemed annoyed over Roskill’s report intimating to Acheson, ‘For your personal information only, some of Roskill’s corrections are wrong and a few of his comments border on rudeness.’ See TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Document: ‘Chapter VIII Northern Ireland History’ by Roskill, 3 December 1952; TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Document: ‘Historical Section, Admiralty – Remarks on Chapter VIII – Northern Ireland History’, 16 March 1953. TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Bellairs to Acheson, 16 March 1953.
106 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Roskill to Acheson, 4 December 1952.
107 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Acheson to Roskill, 9 December 1952. As evidence of cooperation between the United Kingdom Government and the Australian Government see also TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/285.
March 1953, when Rear Admiral R. M. Bellairs of the Admiralty Historical Section, revealed to Acheson that ‘So far as I am aware, Blake has not been in touch with us at all’ to advise on the writing of sea operations. Despite this glaring revelation, so late in the writing up period of the history, the Admiralty Historical Section promised that it would let Blake see whatever files he felt necessary to facilitate his writing.\(^\text{108}\) This is an astonishing discovery since Blake, at this time, was preparing the chapter on the ocean convoys.

As similar grievances reached Acheson from other officials and narrators about inaccuracies in Blake’s work, Acheson pressed upon them that they be aware that Blake’s location and time restrictions had meant that he just did not have the luxury of fully dedicating himself to the records in London.\(^\text{109}\) For that reason, Acheson argued, he had relied very much on the published works from the British government and commentary from the British side. In fact, in May 1950, in a moment of despair about disparaging comments he had received from the British historians, Blake himself admitted to Acheson:

> This is strictly between ourselves, but it will give you some idea of the difficulties with which I have to contend. It is, moreover, only one of many similar examples. I just have not time to spend months in London, + in the circumstances you will understand that the Colliers, Ellises etc. of this world are going to do a lot to save the Northern Ireland Official History from disaster. I am fixed to depend much upon them. Without their generous assistance, I think I should ‘chuck the job’, more particularly, under the new circumstances confining me.\(^\text{110}\)

The new predicament which Blake alluded to was his intended move to Keele to take up the appointment of Chair of Modern History at the University College of North Staffordshire in 1950. This meant that not only was he still a considerable distance from

\(^{108}\) TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Bellairs to Acheson, 3 March 1953.

\(^{109}\) TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Acheson to Roskill, 9 December 1952.

London, and more so from Belfast, but his professional career was taking on a whole new, and arguably, more time consuming life of its own.

Despite these setbacks and Acheson’s attempt to play the sympathy card, criticism of the official history mounted; hinting not only at problems with the text, but also at questions over the amount of research Blake had actually done. Brigadier H. B. Latham, Head of the Army Historical Section, observed that ‘the author has over-distorted the picture to try and get all the “Honour” for Ulster that he can’. For Latham, such exaggeration led him to believe that it was quite possibly the:

most absurd Official Military History I have read. To follow every ship across the oceans, because it was built in Belfast and to boost at all times the actions of the Army units based in Northern Ireland may lead to a ‘complete nonsense’ and indeed make the latter look rather ridiculous in the eyes of the rest of the Army.  

J. C. Nerney, Head of the Air Historical Branch was equally despondent. The Air Historical Branch, he argued, had supplied Blake with relevant replies to his questions and during his ‘infrequent visits’ ensured that he gained access to documentary material, yet this was not shown in his work. Accepting that the conditions under which Blake had to work were not ideal, Nerney nevertheless added, ‘I am doubtful whether the burden of making up for this deficiency should, in consequence, fall on the historical sections’.

Despite these complaints, the war historians and the Services Historical Section did try to help Blake improve his text. However, Latham was keen to stress that they need not over exert themselves to do this. On being asked to review chapter ten - ‘From Defence to Attack’ – which dealt with Northern Ireland units overseas from March 1942 to May 1944 – Latham stressed to his researchers they were merely to

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112 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Latham to Acheson, 8 December 1952.
113 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Nerney to Acheson, 11 December 1952.
114 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Bellairs to Acheson, 3 March 1953.
check the draft and ensure that Blake had got the ‘general picture right’, and that his narrative on the Northern Ireland units was ‘more in perspective’. Latham revealed his exasperation with the history when he reasoned:

Like all these ‘light hearted’ efforts written for the glorification of special units etc, it has in the past contained some outrageous distortions of the truth. We cannot re-write this history however much we may dislike it. We can usually assume that some effort has been made to get the dates and facts correct, but I have found that even this is not always so.  

Major L. F. Ellis, who had been writing *The War in France and Flanders, 1939-40* for the *United Kingdom Military Series* was also slightly reluctant to provide his services to Blake. Years previously, after having reviewed some of Blake’s text, he had offered his help but Blake never managed to visit him. On being asked for renewed assistance in September 1953, Ellis claimed that Blake’s apparent lack of interest led him to believe that the author was ‘little concerned to get it corrected’ and wondered whether it was ‘worth while’ for him to give it his time again. Despite voicing his dismay, in the end Ellis agreed to give the Northern Irish history some thought, but only after he had completed his own work.

All in all, the likes of Latham, Nerney, Roskill and Ellis were united in their concern. Accuracy of facts aside, they felt that the military side of the history lacked perspective, giving the false impression a la Latham that Northern Ireland units had somehow “won the war on their own!” According to them, a concerted move away from the Northern Irish tale to a more general understanding of what was taking place elsewhere was necessary. Whilst Blake had earlier confided in Acheson that he had become ‘partial, biassed [sic], prejudiced, [even] over-enthusiastic’, his reluctance to enforce these more structural changes was apparent. This reluctance was only

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116 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Ellis to Banks, 23 September 1953.  
117 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Latham to Acheson, 19 November 1953.  
118 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Blake to Acheson, 29 December 1952.
matched by criticism from the British commentators. J. C. Nerney, Head of the Air Historical Branch, argued that such a ‘restricted’ text only served to produce an unbalanced narrative. According to Nerney, Blake’s omission of the actions of the Royal Air Force from the narrative, presumably because they had no special connection in that instant to Northern Ireland or Northern Irish servicemen, weakened the official history. Blake’s reply to Acheson betrayed his frustration at these criticisms:

First of all, the point about perspective. I cannot emphasise too many times that I am not writing a history of the war; the task entrusted to me is to write a history of the Northern Ireland contribution to the war, and I think this is one reason why your historians get the feeling that my script is ‘out of balance.’ Thus, for example, in the case of the siege of Malta, my purpose is to describe the Royal Irish Fusiliers in Malta and not the siege of Malta as a whole.

Whilst Blake’s point is a valid one, his job as a historian was to contextualise and provide wider background to his work if it was to be a sound piece of historical research. If it was not, if it was intended to be a piece of propaganda which exaggerated Northern Ireland’s contribution, then the manner in which he wrote would suffice. Nevertheless, Blake argued that it was particularly unfair of Roskill to criticise him by saying his account was full of inaccuracies. Having taken the information from official sources, he argued, he could not be held accountable if more information had been uncovered since he had last consulted the documents. He surely could not be blamed, nor could his text be criticised for such developments, especially when he was unable to spend long periods of time in London. Despite his excuses, complaints kept

119 These comments were based on a draft of chapter ten “From Defence to Attack – Northern Ireland Units Overseas, March 1942 – May 1944.” See also TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Nerney to Acheson, 27 February 1953. Acheson summarised Blake’s method as follows, ‘He has deliberately designed them so as to throw into prominence those elements in the forces engaged which included Northern Ireland personnel. Thus, a sketch of land and air operations in which the air forces contained no Northern Ireland elements, has little or no reference to the air.’ TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: ‘Note for Record’ by Acheson, 10 December 1953.
121 TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Blake to Acheson, 9 March 1953
mounting from the military point of view.\textsuperscript{122} Having been asked to review chapter eleven, ‘Close of the War in Europe – Northern Ireland Units in Europe and Northern Italy, June 1944 – May 1945’, Brigadier Latham impatiently commented ‘The style is not only unworthy of the subject but of Official History as well’. Not only was Blake failing to understand the importance of certain operations, but he was doing a discredit to those units that had served. Latham bemoaned ‘All this is a weak description of a gallant, and exciting operation, and unworthy of the men who carried it out,’ concluding ‘It is almost impossible to comment fairly on such a book without re-writing whole passages of it.’\textsuperscript{123}

These statements disclosed two important points. Firstly, Blake’s text very much depended upon help from the United Kingdom official historians and the Services Historical Branches, without whose assistance the narrative would most likely have been published in a largely sketchy and factually incorrect form. Secondly, there was clearly no scientific reason for this history, nor was it written to provide guidance for future wars. If there had been, Blake would certainly have placed Northern Ireland’s experiences within its proper, wider context and ensured complete factual accuracy. The Northern Irish history was, therefore, written with a steadfast commitment to ensure Northern Ireland’s role was not forgotten; even at the expense of balanced judgement.

In a last ditch attempt to rectify these issues, Acheson arranged for Blake to meet up individually with some of his critics.\textsuperscript{124} Arguably, the end of 1953 was too late

\textsuperscript{122} It must also be noted that on reviewing the final draft of the entire book in July 1954, Austin Strutt of the Home Office articulated the problem of combining both civil and military affairs within the one volume. Commenting on chapters four, ten and eleven, which dealt with overseas operations in which Ulstermen were involved, Strutt asked ‘Is not so much space out of proportion in a book which, presumably, is intended primarily as a record of war-time activities carried on in Northern Ireland? … In view of the smallness of the Ulster regiments in this vast army, is it appropriate that a quarter of the book should be concerned with the record of the Ulster constituents of the various Armed Forces and the Merchant Navy?’ TNA PRO HO, HO 356/9: Memorandum ‘The Northern Ireland Official History of the War’ prepared by Strutt, 10 August 1954. Blake’s reply to this criticism was that the story of these overseas units was an important part of the Northern Ireland war effort; a war effort which extended beyond the boundaries of Northern Ireland itself. TNA PRO HO, HO 356/9: Letter Acheson to Strutt, 9 December 1954.

\textsuperscript{123} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Latham to Acheson, 19 November 1953. In a progress report of October 1953 which briefly discussed the Northern Irish history with reference to chapter eleven “Close of the War in Europe – Northern Ireland Units in Europe and Northern Italy, June 1944 – May 1945”, Brigadier Latham remarked, ‘I am still not a bit happy about 5, N. Ireland Chapter XI. The author still continues in the same style that we here found so “unfortunate” in the past and with such wide generalities and faulty assessment of the facts it is almost impossible to correct without extensive re-writing, which we have neither the time nor the inclination to attempt.’ TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Document: ‘Extract from Brigadier Latham’s Progress Report for October, 1953’.

\textsuperscript{124} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Acheson to Nerney, 26 November 1953; TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: Letter Acheson to Blake, 27 November 1953.
for such meetings to take place, and as has been shown, many of the historians for the *United Kingdom Series* lamented that Blake had not taken them up on previous offers of personal assistance. In the end, therefore, little came of the meetings except that Blake received guidance on how to improve his text. Having been asked to restructure his operational chapters by writing one or two introductory chapters on the general development of the war and then more specific chapters on Northern Ireland units, Blake refused. Despite the fact that this would have placed Northern Ireland’s experience in the war in its wider perspective, and assuaged his critics, to do so would have been too taxing at such a late stage and was therefore rejected as a feasible option. As a form of compensation, Blake gave assurances to the British commentators that he would clearly explain in the preface of the book the reasoning behind his limited perspective.\(^\)\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^5\)

As much to placate the United Kingdom official war historians and the Services Historical Section, as to situate his own text, Blake explained why his official history focussed solely on Northern Ireland, in the preface to the text. Commenting on the perspective of the history the foreword read:

> Northern Ireland’s war effort at home cannot be readily or satisfactorily isolated from the United Kingdom effort with which it was so closely joined. … Nevertheless, the author has deliberately confined the scope of his account as far as possible to the specific contribution which Northern Ireland made.\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^6\)

This clearly meant that those chapters dealing with the military effort of Northern Ireland overseas had to be assessed not as a ‘commander in the operational theatre’ would have approached it, nor ‘Whitehall: still less that of the Allied High Command’,

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\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^5\) Indeed, Jarrett of the Admiralty unsatisfied with what he described as a ‘partisan account of the part played by Ulstermen’ pleaded that Blake ‘should be asked to make it clear in his preface that where matters of opinion are expressed these are his very own’. TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/429: Letter Jarrett to Acheson, 11 October 1954. The Home Office was also dissatisfied that their recommendation that too much of the narrative was based on men from Northern Ireland in the Services and Merchant Navy and suggested that when reviewed the history would receive a backlash in the Press. TNA PRO HO, HO 356/9: Letter Strutt to Acheson, 15 December 1954.

\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^6\) Blake, *Northern Ireland*, p. xiv.
but rather within the confines of how it had affected Northern Ireland. It was, Blake argued, therefore ‘designed not to afford an overall view of operations, but to reveal the achievement of those Northern Ireland units with whose activities the author is specially concerned’.127

This determination, even at the expense of historical accuracy, to write an official history solely from a narrow Northern Ireland perspective indicates the limited use of this official history for utilitarian purposes. Despite toying with the idea of placing a chronology of events in the appendix of the history, which would place Northern Ireland’s experiences against those taking place elsewhere in order to ‘disarm’ critics of the limited scope of the official history, it was overruled.128 The idea, initially proposed by Acheson and later co-opted by Blake, was seen by the latter as a suitable guide to make sense of the ‘whole jig-saw of events’. More importantly however, he argued that it would ‘provide me with ammunition against the oft-repeated criticism that the book gives the impression that “Northern Ireland won the war on its own”’.129 In the end, however, the table was omitted as both Acheson and Sayles expressed their reservations; the latter especially worried that a table placing Northern Ireland’s events in comparison with those taking place in other parts of the world would make the former look ‘very insignificant’.130

In short, taking on board all the criticisms directed at Blake’s writing – his inability to grasp military terminology or even to write military history, his lack of perspective by focussing mainly on Northern Ireland, his use of sources – there was another determining factor which made Blake hesitant to undertake major structural re-writing of the official history. From his correspondence, particularly to Acheson, Blake revealed that he clearly lacked the time and desire to dedicate too much of his own time to acquainting himself with this type of historical writing. After so many years working on this text, Blake had lost his initial motivation to write the history. Despite being appreciative of the help of the military authorities, Blake appeared, as late as November 1953, to have little or no intention of modifying how he was writing his chapters to fit

127 Blake, Northern Ireland, p. xiv.
128 This idea of disarming critics originated from Acheson who argued that it would dispel those who perpetuated the idea that ‘Ulster won the war almost by itself’. See TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/429: Letter Acheson to Blake, 30 August 1954.
130 PRONI CAB, CAB 3F/1/3: Minutes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Advisory Committee on the Official War History of Northern Ireland, 9 November 1955.
more closely to suggestions proposed by them. After all, the Northern Ireland War History Advisory Committee had previously agreed that the structure which Blake had adopted was the best one for the Northern Irish history. In fact, Blake pointed out to Acheson, those chapters that the British commentators had found much to criticise in, were not met by the same criticism in Northern Ireland, or by the members of the Fighting Services who had consulted them there. Therefore Blake felt assured that for the Northern Irish general public, who he claimed would be the primary readers of the official history, they would be acceptable. In a note for the record Acheson summarised the situation:

I gathered ... that Blake had been considerably disturbed by the criticisms ... His main anxiety is to finish the book, and I feel pretty sure that, rightly or wrongly, he will persuade himself that the method he has followed will pass muster.\textsuperscript{131}

Conclusion

*Northern Ireland in the Second World War* was published in November 1956. It was a history of the war years written from a unionist standpoint. Its aim was to ensure that Northern Ireland’s role in the war would never be forgotten. The story however, had to be one that would prove Northern Ireland’s importance, not only during the war, but its continued importance as a part of the United Kingdom. To do so it presented an uncomplicated, patriotic narrative that described how ‘Ulster’ and ‘Ulstermen’ contributed to the war. This was a narrative, not about the people of Northern Ireland as a whole, but about unionists. As one reviewer wrote:

\textsuperscript{131} TNA PRO CAB, CAB 103/428: ‘Note for Record’ by Acheson, 10 December 1953.
Blake seldom discusses the wartime activity of Northern Ireland’s large nationalist minority except in connection with security problems. It would be interesting to know if many nationalists enlisted in the services, joined the Home Guard, or contributed to agricultural and industrial production … It [the book] is certainly a tribute to the Unionists of Northern Ireland who proved in battle their faith in and affection for the British connection.\textsuperscript{132}

Although all types of historical writing involve processes of inclusion and exclusion, organisation and then analysis, the manner in which Blake wrote this official history revealed how closely he had been working within a unionist discourse. As he admitted to Acheson, he had been hesitant about disclosing in detail the reasons why nationalists were against conscription. He was, therefore, reluctant to give them a voice in the narrative. Equally, Blake was unwilling to take on board the recommendation to re-write his military chapters in such a way as to place Northern Ireland’s experience within the wider perspective. This reluctance meant that instead of producing a balanced survey of operations taking place during the war, Blake was only interested in documenting those battles that involved servicemen from Northern Ireland. The narrative strategy adopted in these chapters creates a rather false impression of the role men from Northern Ireland had played in military campaigns overseas, and serves to neglect the experiences of other men taking part in more important operations elsewhere. Evidently, though, a balanced, objective account is not what Blake had been aiming for or at least not what he could achieve in this official history.

As a genre, official history writing is complex. Whilst it grants the author access to files and information largely closed off to other researchers, this comes at a price. As this chapter has shown, Blake was supported in the writing of the official history by a War History Advisory Committee composed mainly of officials who acted in a regulatory fashion for the Northern Irish government. At the same time, when reservations were voiced from officials or government ministries with regards to revealing unpleasant episodes in the government’s past, Blake negotiated these sections to make them less accusatory. Summing up the problem with official history writing,

\textsuperscript{132} Lawrence J. McCaffrey, ’Other Recent Publications’, \textit{The American Historical Review} 62, no. 4 (Jul., 1957), pp. 968-969.
Robin Higham provides an explanation which explains the shortcomings in official history writing. He writes:

Censorship may be very subtle in official histories. The very fact that the writer knows that his volume is going to appear over his own name and with the approval of the sponsoring department is in itself a blue pencil delicately touching the author’s hand. Because students are apt to take official histories as the gospel, this hidden censorship based on the author’s inhibitions must be considered in weighing the value of each volume.\(^{133}\)

Clearly these factors did inhibit Blake, but as this chapter has shown, Blake himself admitted that he struggled with detaching from the viewpoint of the unionist community. In the writing of *Northern Ireland in the Second World War*, Blake bought into a unionist discourse. His text lacks objectivity and is written in a way which was pleasing to the government of Northern Ireland. This history was never intended to be used for future administrative purposes. Instead, it was to be a tangible manifestation of the ‘loyalty of ‘Ulster’ and the virtues of Northern Ireland remaining a part of the United Kingdom.

Conclusion

In the preface to his book, *The Myth of the Blitz*, Angus Calder wrote, ‘No inhabitant of Ulster, surely, can now believe that the Second World War had any healing effect on that society.’ Calder was not alone in his interpretation. This thesis provides evidence to support Calder’s rather sweeping, yet concise statement. This thesis reveals that throughout the commemorative activities of May 1945, and through the writing of the official war history, the Northern Irish government and the unionist press co-opted Northern Ireland’s role in the Second World War - as an expression of loyalty to the British Crown and a justification to remain part of the United Kingdom. Catholic and nationalist needs, unable to be reconciled within this equation, were simply overlooked and thus ignored.

This thesis began with a proposition asking why the Tower Museum, acting as a place ‘of authority and official knowledge’, had created a public memory of the Second World War in Derry/Londonderry that posited it as unproblematic: a shared experience. I proposed that the commemorative activities taking place across Britain and Northern Ireland to mark the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the war, together with the press’s promotion of the war as a ‘People’s War’, attempted to affirm a mythical notion that the War had been a unifying experience. This mythology, which is highly debatable everywhere in the U.K. – is even more difficult to apply to Northern Ireland. In the case of Northern Ireland, in the post-ceasefire period, it was beneficial to promote moments in Northern Ireland’s history which were not marred by political

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violence. However, this thesis has shown that simplifying this period of history in such terms risks losing an understanding of the importance of the war years in relation to community relations and confirming national identity.

Chapter one showed that group identification and ritualised events played a part in maintaining unionist identity during the war. As the Northern Irish government organised the victory celebrations for Belfast it did so with unionists in mind. For the government, the unionist community was the chosen community of remembrance whilst nationalists were simply ignored. In order to keep on a par with the celebrations taking place in London, the Northern Irish government maintained contact with the British government. The Northern Irish victory celebrations were modelled to both correspond as closely as possible to those taking place in London, whilst also taking their cues from existing unionist commemorative events. By aesthetically loading the commemoration with political iconography associated with Britain and imperialism, and by performing the ceremonials in public spaces closely aligned with unionism, the Northern Irish government made this an event which denied, or at the very least made nationalist involvement problematic. This performance of the collective rites of commemoration during the official victory celebrations served to project an image of ‘Ulster’, which satisfied the Northern Irish government and made evident Northern Ireland’s role in the war and its place within the United Kingdom.

By examining not only the official state ceremonials, but looking closely at how the people engaged in such commemorative acts, chapter two suggests that the social practice of commemoration is complicated when applied to divided societies. Using newspapers as an historical source, this chapter documents the difficulty for unionists and nationalists in celebrating the end of the war together. Whilst there is fleeting evidence that some form of integration took place, how the press – particularly the unionist press – reported on the victory celebrations (through the images it created and the analogies it employed), it is clear that Victory Day was unable to overcome communal tension. By framing their stories of the celebrations in such a way that they linked Victory Day to the Twelfth of July, the unionist newspapers served to fashion this celebration as a unionist affair. Equally, the Derry Journal sought to accredit Victory Day as a unionist event, celebrated by unionists. By doing so, it resisted implicating the nationalist population in the festivities. The Irish News, on the other hand, reporting on how nationalists had shown thanks that the war had ended, made no connection
between this thanksgiving and an affirmation of loyalty to Britain. In this sense, the *Irish News* encapsulates the difficulty of writing nationalists into the commemorations.

Chapter three provides reasons to explain and contextualise why it was so difficult to celebrate an event like VE Day in a shared manner. Churchill's attack on de Valera for Ireland’s neutrality during the war, and de Valera’s carefully orchestrated rebuttal, provoked wide-scale condemnation in the Northern Irish press. The unionist press justified Churchill’s attack, condemned the immorality of Irish neutrality, and reaped the benefits of Churchill’s reference to Northern Ireland’s loyalty during the war. In contrast, the nationalist press justified de Valera, showed support for his policy of neutrality, attacked what it claimed to be Britain’s immoral imperialism, and ridiculed unionist loyalty. The spate of editorials and special articles that dominated much column space in the press for days after these broadcasts were made, called upon readers to actively remember those past events that differentiated unionists from nationalists, bringing to the fore the issue of partition. By doing so the newspapers played a leading role in laying the foundations of two distinct collective memories related to the war years, and redefined unionist and nationalist identities within these narratives.

As the first three chapters of this thesis show, Northern Ireland’s part in the Second World War left the Northern Irish government with a bargaining tool to employ in future discussions over constitutional issues with the British government. For nationalists however, Northern Ireland’s involvement in the war only served to strengthen the boundary between the North and South. The inability of the Northern Irish government to address how nationalists could have been involved in the victory celebrations, the unionist press’s coverage of the victory celebrations as a performance of loyalty to the British Crown, and the nationalist press’s engagement with the political broadcasts in defence of de Valera, are testament to a nationalist sense of isolation within a state indifferent to their very existence. Fionnuala O’Connor summarises this sentiment when she writes about the Catholic community:

This was a suppressed community for half a century: ignored by Britain, abandoned in all but rhetoric by their supposed kith and kin in the Republic, accustomed – most damagingly of all – to the idea
that they could achieve nothing politically for themselves. The
cynicism and suspicion that bred is still there.  

The publication of the official war history in November 1956 further justified this
nationalist sense of exclusion and abandonment. This history, sponsored by the
Northern Irish government so that Northern Ireland’s role in the war would never be
forgotten, defined the role of ‘Ulster’ - the ‘province’ - in terms of loyalty. Equally, the
Northern Irish government’s decision to commission its own official war history in
1940, years before the war had ended, provided evidence of its concern that Northern
Ireland’s role in the war should be memorialised. This was a pragmatic decision. By
creating its own separate history, distinct in content and form from the United Kingdom
Official War History Series, the Northern Irish government could influence representation
of how the war would be remembered.

An examination of the writing process of this history uncovered the difficulties
the author, John W. Blake, faced throughout the writing of the history. By tracing the
various drafting stages of his work, chapter four shows how deeply unsatisfied many of
the British official war historians and the Services Historical Section were with Blake’s
account. Through trying to accommodate the Northern Irish government, and covering
both civil and military aspects within the one volume, its sole author managed to
produce a piece of work which is more propagandist than educational in nature. For the
Northern Irish Prime Minister, Sir Basil Brooke, this was not a matter of concern.
Instead, he showed his gratitude for an official war history that paid a glowing tribute to
Northern Ireland during the war.

This thesis adds to the literature on Northern Ireland during the war but
approaches the subject by calling upon academic studies relating to commemoration. It
examines how the Second World War was commemorated – what rituals were
employed, why, and for whom - and how representations of the past were memorialised
in later years in an official war history. It draws on academic work on memory, the
media and war to examine how the press constructed a meaning, not only about
Northern Ireland’s involvement in the war, but about communal relations in Northern
Ireland during the war. It does this by focussing on newspaper coverage of the war

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throughout May 1945 in order to explore how things really were then, or at least how
they were imagined by the press, and to examine how the press mediated an
understanding of the Second World War. The juxtaposition of narratives created by the
press and the official war history reveal that the Second World War was framed within a
unionist discourse.

The findings in this thesis therefore tap into an aspect of Northern Ireland’s
wartime history that is rarely explored by historians writing on Northern Ireland during
the Second World War. Yet, this thesis is not definitive. It is only a small part of the
wider history of Northern Ireland during the Second World War. There are many ways
in which this research project could be developed. An examination of how the memory
of the war has changed from May 1945 to 2005 would provide a useful counterpart to
this thesis, and would help to develop many of the theories discussed here. This survey
could be extended to look at other defining wartime episodes such as the Belfast blitz,
the Battle of the Atlantic, or Victory over Japan Day. Additionally, a more detailed study
of museums that feature exhibitions on Northern Ireland at wartime would be a unique
case study. As yet, historians working on Northern Ireland during the war have
neglected this aspect of its history.

What this thesis set out to do is to challenge the sentimentalising myth of the
Second World War and to show that this was not a time of communal harmony in
Northern Ireland. Through the process of war commemoration, underlying tensions
between the unionist and nationalist communities came to the fore. This thesis
highlights the fact that in a divided society commemoration is not a simple task. It
excludes rather than includes. Yet, it is through such commemorative acts that one can
understand how societies interact and how identity is created and nurtured.
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