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Nationalism and “sectarianism” in contemporary Scotland

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the relationship between nationalism and “sectarianism”¹ in contemporary Scotland. Constitutional disruptions have reopened fault lines around religion, ethnicity, and a “clash” of nationalisms. Sectarianism, which had long been ostensibly confined to residual culture, frequently features in media and political discourses. At the heart of debates is the question of contested national identities – Scottish, British, and Irish. Based on qualitative research with football supporters in Glasgow, this article examines how identities are reproduced and negotiated in people’s everyday lives. While Scotland has undergone significant political, socio-economic, and cultural shifts which have disrupted traditional patterns of belonging, the legacy of sectarianism is relevant in how people negotiate these changes and make sense of competing aspects of their identities. Further, participants’ narratives suggest that these tensions can influence political behaviours, particularly as the binary nature of referendums poses challenges for reconciling multiple layers of identity.

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Introduction

The 2014 Scottish independence referendum reopened key fault lines around religion (Protestant and Catholic) and nationalism (Scottish, British, and Irish) – a mix of identities commonly understood as manifestations of sectarianism in Scotland. Before the referendum, over 10,000 attended a pro-union rally in Edinburgh organized by the Orange Order.² Following the referendum result, a unionist celebration in Glasgow city centre featured Loyalist chanting and anti-Catholic and anti-Irish slurs (Law 2016). The question of Scottish independence presented a crisis for the British state, albeit one temporarily settled as the electorate voted to stay part of the United Kingdom. Constitutional

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debate re-emerged in 2016 when the UK electorate overall voted to leave the European Union, despite both Scotland and Northern Ireland expressing majorities for Remain. The interplay of nationalism and sectarianism has become an important feature of Scottish politics and society. In 2017, the Conservatives were criticized for reinstating two councillors who had been suspended for anti-Catholic and racist tweets, and in 2018 a Labour Party official was forced to apologize “unreservedly” after making an anti-Catholic comment towards a conference delegate (BBC News 2018). Before a crucial parliamentary vote on then-PM Theresa May’s Withdrawal Agreement in 2019, the Conservatives’ Scottish Minister, alongside representatives of Labour and the Liberal Democrats, met with representatives from the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland who were concerned that proposals for Northern Ireland to remain partially in the EU would “leave an open door to demands for a similar hybrid arrangement for Scotland and another independence referendum” (Learmonth 2019). In January 2020, unionist protestors were ejected from Holyrood for publicly accusing the Scottish National Party (SNP) of being “IRA supporters” (Gordon 2020). In recent years, right-wing gatherings featuring racist and anti-Catholic slurs, pro-Loyalist symbols and British militaristic chanting frequently appear as “counter protestors” at Irish Republican marches, pro-independence events, and at demonstrations in support of refugees and asylum seekers in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement (Small 2020). Sectarianism, which had long been ostensibly confined to residual culture (Williams 1977), has been somewhat revived.

What are the implications of these examples of “sectarianism” for understanding nationalism and national identity in Scotland? Under the SNP Government, particularly following Brexit, there has been a “reimagining” of Scotland as a progressive, inclusive country, especially in comparison to England: a perpetuation of the powerful, enduring narrative of Scottish exceptionalism (Davidson et al. 2018). SNP leaders, as well as some commentators and academics, often emphasize the “civic” nature of Scottish nationalism. Yet the everyday experiences of racialised and religious minorities problematizes the notion of “civic” nationalism, and Scotland is no exception. Recent scholarship has challenged the longstanding reluctance to acknowledge the more sinister aspects of Scottish history, including its disproportionate role in Empire (Devine 2015), and inequalities and discrimination experienced by Irish Catholic migrants (Bradley 2006; Devine 2008). Further, research on contemporary Scotland (Hunter and Meer 2018) emphasizes the structural inequalities and prejudice experienced by racialised and religious minorities. This reality complicates attachment to Scottish national identity for minorities, and historically – given the context of sectarianism – this included Irish Catholics. Yet, although there is a considerable body of work on both Scottish nationalism (McCrone 2001; Bechhofer and McCrone 2014; Liinpää 2020) and sectarianism in Scotland (Bradley 2006; Bruce,

Glendinning, and Rosie 2004; Devine 2000; Rosie 2015), the relationship between the two phenomena is underexplored.

Quantitative research on sectarianism, based predominately on analysis of polling data and attitudinal surveys, demonstrates the decline of structural inequalities, increasing rates of intermarriage, and significant political shifts including increasing Catholic support for independence (Rosie 2015; Bruce and Glendinning 2017). However, less is known about the impact of these shifts on people's identities, and the ways in which both minorities and the "majority" group negotiate different national identities – Scottish, British, and Irish – and experience nationalism in their everyday lives. Based on in-depth qualitative empirical research, this paper provides insights into the interplay of religion, ethnicity, and nationalism. This is explored through the lens of football, which in Scotland is a key context where "rival" identities have historically been concentrated, and reveals how questions of nation and allegiance are weaved into everyday experiences.

The article makes two key arguments. Firstly, while Scotland has undergone significant political, socio-economic, and cultural shifts which have disrupted traditional patterns of belonging, the legacy of sectarianism influences how people negotiate these changes. Secondly, following Brexit, and the likelihood of a second independence referendum,³ it is important to understand how this plays out in politics, as the binary nature of referenda compels people to negotiate multiple layers of their identities. The qualitative findings reveal the nuances, complexities, and contradictions inherent in identity formation. The article thus provides an important contribution to knowledge on the relationship between nationalism and sectarianism in Scotland, and beyond, highlighting the importance of bottom-up approaches which pay attention to the "everyday".

Conceptualising identity, nationalism, and sectarianism

It is important to set out how identity, nationalism, and sectarianism are understood in this study. Following Lawler (2014, 2), the article is interested in *processes* of identity-making, particularly how these are "produced within systems of inequality". As this study explores the continuing salience of social identities and social relations formed historically, awareness of the different forms of *interpretation* of the past, and the importance of collective memory (Conway 2003) is crucial. The meanings that people craft from their everyday lives are shaped by their interpretations of personal, family, and group histories.

Davidson's (2000) distinction between national consciousness and nationalism is useful. He defines national consciousness as the "internal psychological states [which] seeks expression in the outward signs of identity" (18). While national consciousness is something that may be passively expressed

and does not necessarily lead to *nationalism* (indeed Davidson cites the Scots as an example of this), nationalist *movements* are characterized by more active participation. For Ozkirimli (2017), nationalism is best understood as a discourse; a way of seeing, understanding, and constructing the world. Like all other discourses, nationalism is ultimately about power and hierarchy, however Ozkirimli argues that defining the nation is an ongoing process which can be challenged and changed – the dominated can “subvert” the dominant discourse. This paper takes the approach of Bechhofer and McCrone (2010) that since national identity is not conferred upon people by the state, it is crucial to analyse “from below”, exploring how people understand and claim national identities, and how they engage with nationalism in their everyday lives and through their political behaviours. Also relevant is Billig’s (1995) contention that “nationalism” is used to describe secessionist movements which seek to challenge existing territorial settlements or boundaries but less so those that wish to preserve the status quo. What he terms banal nationalism are those subtle, unnoticed symbols of national identity so embedded in the everyday lives of people in established nation states that they reinforce how nationalism is “something that others do”.

There have been longstanding challenges in conceptualising sectarianism in its various global forms. Haddad (2019) argues we should abandon the term and focus on sectarian *identity*, defined as belonging to a collective marked by sectarian cleavages, and how it interacts with national identity. Cheterian (2021, 188) emphasizes that “different sectarian identities have differentiated relationships to power”, illustrating the need to be alive to historical inequalities. Crucially, “race” is central to both nationalism and sectarianism. Miles and Brown’s (2003) stance that nationalism and racism are “interdependent ideologies” illustrates the importance of exploring the interplay of “race” and national identity in analysis of sectarianism. This perspective has influenced the work of scholars such as McVeigh (1998) and Gilligan (2017) in their research on intra-Christian sectarianism in Northern Ireland, as they challenge previous attempts to separate racism and sectarianism (see Brewer 1992) by emphasizing historical patterns of inequality and the racialization of Catholics.

This paper takes the view that sectarianism in Scotland should also be viewed as a modality of racism, given the racialization and structural inequalities experienced by Irish migrants to Britain (Virdee 2014). This requires understanding that there are multiple forms of racism (Garner 2010), with anti-Irish racism relying on cultural differentiation and religion as a basis for racist discourse (Hickman 1998). Understanding sectarianism as a form of racism helps us to move beyond descriptions of tensions between two communities, which Goodall and Malloch (2013, 176) argue can obscure “an imbalance of power between the larger group of mostly Scottish-originating

Protestants and the smaller group of Scottish and Irish Catholics". Though "Catholic" and "Irish" are not interchangeable, and the Catholic minority in Scotland includes migrants from countries such as Italy, Poland and Lithuania, most Catholics come from an Irish background, reflected in the use of the term "Irish Catholic" in this paper.

The roots of sectarianism

Scottish national identity has historically been bound up with a self-understanding of the nation as "white", "Protestant", and closely aligned with "Britishness" (Davidson 2000). The Scottish national identity was constructed simultaneously with that of Britain's, and far from being subsumed by the latter there developed "a dual identity in which Scottishness and Britishness combined and interacted" (Miles and Dunlop 1986, 352). Davidson emphasizes that the Scots were active participants in the British Empire, with Empire "the principle means by which the Scottish and English identities were transcended in a new sense of Britishness" (Davidson 2000, 113). The religious dimension is important, as Colley (1992) argues that by the eighteenth century, British national identity was anchored to "uncompromising Protestantism", with Catholics depicted as both the external and internal "other". This is the context in which Irish Catholics migrated to Britain in the nineteenth century in large numbers, driven heavily by the impact of famine. Their experience in Britain was further shaped by Britain's colonial rule over Ireland, which had been justified by claims of religious and racial superiority. Having been racialised in the Irish colony, Irish migrants became part of the "unrespectable working class", representing "the racialised outsider within the British nation" (Virdee 2014, 24). Racializing and anti-immigrant rhetoric utilized by the media and powerful institutions like the Church of Scotland ensured that Irish Catholics were marginalized within the Scottish nation (Devine 2008). Despite their active role in shaping Scotland's industrial revolution, Irish Catholic workers faced discrimination in the labour market, and high levels of poverty combined with prejudice obstructed the community's integration into Scottish society (Devine 2008).

Socio-economic changes including labour market reforms, an expanded public sector, and educational reforms gradually improved the lives of Irish Catholics in Scotland over the course of the twentieth century. Perhaps most importantly, changes in the labour market from the 1970s and 1980s removed much of the overt discrimination present in certain industries, as local family-based businesses were increasingly replaced by national or multinational firms (Devine 2000). Deindustrialization, which had a devastating impact on Glasgow and the surrounding areas, particularly affected the Protestant skilled working class in engineering and shipbuilding, eroding their

socio-economic advantage in this area. Notably, it took until the 1980s for structural disadvantage to be (mostly) eroded, decades after equality was achieved in other countries where Irish migrants settled (Devine 2008). Moreover, Law (2016, 107) points out that Catholics are “still more likely [than their Protestant counterparts] to experience higher levels of deprivation, morbidity, prison and poverty”. Nonetheless, the decline in structural inequality has profoundly improved Catholics’ life chances. Further, rates of intermarriage and cohabitation are high, with 27 per cent of Catholics married to or cohabiting with a Protestant in 2001 (Devine and Rosie 2020), indicating a significant shift in social relations.

Nationalism, sectarianism and politics

Though sectarianism was rarely overtly present in Scottish politics (Bruce, Glendinning, and Rosie 2004), McCrone (2001, 15) notes that the Conservative and Unionist Party⁴ historically appealed to some Protestants because of its ability to link Unionism and Protestantism, “welded together by a strong sense of British national/imperial identity”. Militant Protestant activity occasionally featured in Scottish politics, notably during the interwar period (Rosie 2008). Anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice also characterized the early history of the SNP, with some sections of the party viewing the Irish in Scotland as a “threat” to the Scottish “race” (Wood 1980). Though such overt sectarian/racist incidents were fleeting and contextual, their legacy cannot be easily dismissed. As Rosie (2008, 158) acknowledges, while there was little success politically, “in the cultural realm they left a wealth of bitter memories”.

The “dual identity” of Scottishness and Britishness came under increasing threat in the second half of the twentieth century. With the Conservatives’ privatization of Britain’s nationalized sectors and the rollback of the welfare state, the institutions “which helped bind Scots into the union now looked under threat from a government which stressed its Britishness” (Mitchell 1996, 99). Although the Labour Party, promising devolution, were the main beneficiaries of the declining Conservative vote, Scottish political nationalism grew too, and the SNP emerged as a political force with the potential to challenge Labour’s dominance in Scotland.

At times, the battle for the Scottish electorate played out along sectarian lines. The SNP’s former leader Billy Wolfe caused controversy when he opposed Pope John Paul II’s visit to what he termed the “Protestant United Kingdom” in 1982 (Torrance 2010). Former Labour politician Dennis Cavan’s memoirs suggest that the Labour Party had to “carefully handle” the selection of candidates in certain constituencies because of sectarian sensitivities, and that Labour exploited Catholic voters’ fears that the SNP sought to abolish Catholic schools (cited in Walker 2016). Walker (2016)

argues that working-class Protestants in deindustrialized areas felt increasingly politically marginalized, perceiving that both Labour and the SNP were preoccupied with “courting” the “Catholic vote”.

The new Scottish Parliament opened in 1999, and various anti-sectarianism projects emerged during the Labour-Lib Dem coalition (1999–2007), however there was no consensus on the nature or extent of the “sectarian problem” (Walker 2016). The SNP’s minority government (2007–11) attracted criticism from Labour for not prioritizing sectarianism in its early years, and further criticism when it *did* begin to treat sectarianism as a greater policy priority, as the SNP were accused of “lacking a proper understanding of the social and cultural realities of the West of Scotland” (Walker 2016, 48).

The 2014 Scottish independence referendum became a focal point for tensions around national identities, but the role of sectarianism is contested, with Rosie (2014) dismissing suggestions of a “sectarian divide” underpinning the debate. Indeed, evidence suggests that people from Irish Catholic backgrounds were more likely to support independence – 70 per cent in one study (Healy 2020) – though we must account for the importance of social class given the overrepresentation of Catholics in more deprived areas (which were more likely to vote Yes). Walker (2016, 64) suggests that the SNP’s campaign attempted “to place Scottish Nationalism in a narrative of resistance to the British State that would appeal to a community conscious of its Irish roots”. While Catholics’ increasingly strong pro-independence stance perhaps reflects a thawing in the historically uneasy relationship between Catholics and Scottish nationalism, evidence suggests that Protestants are more likely than Catholics or those of no-religion to oppose Scottish independence. Walker (2016, 78) notes that the binary nature of the referendum compelled people to make a stark choice: “[it] upset the balance of identities and loyalties that had hitherto held sway. The impact of this on ‘Protestant Scotland’ was profound: it encouraged part of it to assert Britishness at the expense of Scottishness”. This identity struggle has also been played out in the realm of football, as the next section explores.

Scottish football and “sectarianism”

Sport plays a significant role in the construction of social identities and the expression of nationalism, and globally football is a strong driver of cultural and political identities (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001). In Scotland, football has historically been a key site for the expression of religious, ethnic and national identities (Bradley 1997). While Rangers drew its support from the predominately Protestant skilled working class from the nearby shipyards, including a large proportion of the Protestant Irish workforce,⁵ Celtic’s support was traditionally drawn from the poorer Irish Catholic immigrant community. The association of Rangers with Britishness, Unionism and

Protestantism, and Celtic with Irish nationalist and Republican identities has been sustained throughout the years. Yet expressions of Irish nationalism were often met with hostility. In 1952 the Scottish Football Association (SFA) demanded that Celtic cease flying the Irish national flag at their stadium or be disallowed from competing in Scottish football, though the demand was dropped as it could not be legally enforced (Devine 2008). This attention on Celtic's Irish heritage was contrasted by the establishment's then silence regarding Rangers' anti-Catholic recruitment policy, openly pursued for much of the twentieth century. Rangers' first signing of a high-profile Catholic in 1989 indicated a shift in the club's identity, however Healy (2020, 83) claims that under David Murray's chairmanship (1987–2011), "the club celebrated its Unionist and Loyalist values to an unprecedented degree", with increasingly frequent displays of British militarism.

In terms of support for the Scottish national side, Bradley's (1997) research indicated a decline in support for Scotland amongst Rangers supporters – once considered the "backbone" of the Scotland support – perhaps reflecting the unravelling of the dual identity of Scottishness and Britishness around that time. The study found that most Celtic supporters "indicated an ambivalence towards the national side", and more than half stated their support for the Republic of Ireland. With Rangers' strong British-Unionist identity and Celtic's pro-Irish leanings, the expression of Scottish national identity was generally channelled through supporters of other Scottish clubs. In Glasgow, this was predominately through smaller clubs including Partick Thistle, which has historically been perceived as "appealing to those disenfranchised by 'sectarianism'" (Dimeo and Finn 2002, 128).

Historically, the relationship between football club allegiance and political identities has arguably set Scotland apart from other parts of the UK. Research in the 1990s found that Celtic supporters overwhelmingly backed Labour, Rangers fans were above average (of the Scottish population) in support for the Conservatives, and supporters of other teams were more likely to support the SNP (Bradley 1997). Support for the SNP was lowest among Celtic supporters, in part shaped by perceptions that the SNP's vision of Scottish national identity was aligned with Protestantism (Boyle 1995), followed by Rangers supporters who considered the SNP a threat to the British-Unionist identity. Though Whigham, Kelly, and Bairner (2020) correctly caution that sporting nationalism does not automatically correspond to political nationalism, and that there have been considerable shifts in traditional political allegiances in recent years, this historical context is important. The complex interplay between ethnic, religious, and national identities which play out in Scottish football has political significance. "Sectarianism" in football has also been used as political capital: for example, in the 2011 election when Labour tried to challenge the SNP by "championing" concerns about the controversial Offensive

Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act (2012) (hereafter the OBTC Act).⁶

As the binary nature of the 2014 independence referendum left little room for nuanced debates around complex and competing identities, the highly polarized positions that Celtic and Rangers supporters had come to be characterized by were evident during the campaign. The slogans and banners publicly displayed by Rangers supporters were anti-independence, and then Rangers manager Ally McCoist publicly supported the pro-union campaign (Whigham, Kelly, and Bairner 2020). Research by Whigham, Kelly, and Bairner (2020) found that Rangers supporters tended to be pro-union while Celtic supporters were more likely to support independence, though they suggested that these associations were “softening”, particularly for younger supporters. This emphasizes the fluid, complex nature of identities, and the need to understand how these play out in times of social and political disruption.

Methodology

The primary data source for this study consisted of 30 in-depth interviews conducted as part of the author’s doctoral research.⁷ The study also draws on one focus group which was carried out as part of a separate research project on the OBTC Act⁸ and then re-analysed to explore themes of nationalism and sectarianism. This focus group involved three male Rangers supporters, recruited via a Supporter’s Club. For interviews, respondents were recruited through adverts on social media, via personal and work contacts, and “snowball sampling”. The sample was relatively broad (see Appendix 1); participants were supporters of Glasgow-based football teams, most of whom supported Celtic or Rangers, the two clubs which have historically been central to debates on sectarianism. Most participants were male, and ages ranged between 18 and 70. Participants generally had working-class backgrounds, though some worked in professional occupations. Most Rangers supporters came from Protestant backgrounds, and most Celtic supporters from Catholic backgrounds. A high proportion of Celtic supporters interviewed spoke of family connections to Ireland, and many described themselves as being supportive of Irish nationalism and Republicanism. A slight majority of Rangers supporters openly spoke of being Unionists, while three of the younger Rangers-supporting participants (including two Catholics) were pro-Scottish independence. Though this small sample does not claim to be representative, this largely reflects the typical “profile” of the identities of the respective clubs. Although participants were not deliberately recruited on the basis of having strong identifications relating to religion or nationalism, perhaps the focus of the study – which was on football-supporting identities, sectarianism, and the OBTC Act – may have

attracted participants who felt strongly about certain aspects of their identities.

That most participants were male in part reflects the gender imbalance of those who attend football matches, however it is important to be mindful that football has historically reproduced hegemonic notions of masculinity through the valuing of traits such as power and aggression (Connell 1987). This impacted football fandom, as traditionally this form of masculinity created an environment in which violence, homophobia, and sexism were normalized. This gender imbalance may influence how people engage with the issue of sectarianism, which Lindores and Emejulu (2019, 41) argue is “still stubbornly defined and overly associated with white, male, working-class football culture”. While there were no clear differences with the female participants in this study, it is of course possible given their lower level of representation in the data that gender may play a role in the findings. The extent of any possible influence would be open to question, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

Interviews broadly explored how different identities are expressed in the context of football (see Appendix 2). This paper focuses on participants’ reflections on their intersecting national, ethnic, and religious identities, and the implications of these identifications for political behaviours. In-depth qualitative research which provides an insight into people’s lived experiences offers an important alternative to the existing quantitative-based literature on sectarianism in Scotland (Bruce and Glendinning 2017; Bruce, Glendinning, and Rosie 2004; Rosie 2015). My positionality as a researcher is relevant given that the initial impetus for the study derived from my personal experiences as a working class Irish Catholic growing up in Glasgow. While aware of the significant socio-economic, political, and cultural shifts which had addressed the structuring forces of sectarianism, I felt that the impact of such shifts on identities and social relations merited investigation. However, from the perspective that all research is conducted from a standpoint even if this is not explicitly stated, I reflected on my assumptions and interpretations throughout the research process. I transcribed all interviews and focus groups and undertook a close reading of transcripts before coding them manually. Thematic analysis identified four key themes: identities, class, social control, and nationalism. This paper focuses on the first and last themes.

Findings – nationalism and sectarianism in contemporary Scotland

National identities in Scottish football

This section introduces participants’ perspectives on nationalism and national identities through their reflections on supporting the Scottish national side.

All Partick Thistle supporters and most Rangers supporters interviewed tended to respond like Sam, who explained: *I believe if you're born in that country, that's what you support. I'm Scottish, so I support Scotland.* These participants regularly attended Scotland matches and "Scottishness" seemed to be accepted naturally as central to their identity. This was also the case for Celtic supporters who actively supported Scotland. David, for instance, reflected on the assumption that Celtic's historical links with Ireland and his family heritage could produce divided loyalties: *My father was Irish, so I would be half-Irish half-Scottish. But I'm no going to shout about Eire, this is my country, Scotland.* For David, the country he lives in is more important than his ancestry or Celtic's Irish connections. Overall, however, Celtic supporters were more likely to portray a sense of indifference to the national side. For some, the history of sectarianism in Scotland was an influential factor. Barry, who was in his early 20s, said he lacked an "emotional attachment" to the Scottish national side, perhaps influenced by his father's experiences:

I asked him why he doesn't go to Scotland games, and he [said], 'I went quite regularly, and then Celtic players were getting booed'. Players like Tommy Burns, my dad's hero, getting actively booed by Scotland fans because he was playing for Celtic. So I think he kind of felt detached from the national team.

Barry's description of his father's detachment suggests an incompatibility between playing for or supporting Celtic and Scotland. He referred to perceptions of the historic exclusion of Celtic players from the national side, a consequence of alleged anti-Catholicism within the SFA (Dimeo and Finn 2002). Similarly, 18 year old Connor explained that he supports the Republic of Ireland despite not having a family connection because: *Catholics weren't allowed to play for Scotland.*

Other Celtic supporters spoke of having unpleasant experiences with "sectarian" connotations when attending Scotland games. Stephen explained that he stopped attending Scotland games after witnessing hostility towards Catholic Celtic players from fellow Scotland supporters when he was younger: *the number of people who were shouting "fenian bastards" at the two Celtic players playing for Poland. I've never been back since.*

In his research in the early 1990s, Boyle (1995) found that Celtic supporters cited perceptions of discrimination as reasons for not supporting Scotland. He also noted that Celtic supporters were frequently constructed as "disloyal", reinforcing the notion that Celtic, with its Irish Catholic identity, was not truly "Scottish". What is notable is that three decades later, these concerns still exist – including for young, Scottish-born participants, who have grown up in a very different context. For these supporters, the legacy of sectarianism has some influence on their feelings about Scottish nationalism – at least in a sporting sense.

Some interviewees suggested that this detachment from the national side was shifting. Joe described a game between Scotland and Ireland that he watched in an Irish pub in Glasgow frequented by Celtic supporters, where around half of the pub was supporting Scotland. He said this would have been “unthinkable” ten years previous, when *everyone would have been supporting Ireland*. Interestingly, however, Lewis, a Rangers-supporting participant, described his experience attending the game:

The tickets were mixed in together, so Irish fans were sitting with us. And there was ... not sectarian language or anything like that ... but aggression all the same. Lightly veiled maybe, ‘fuck off home’, that kind of stuff. Lightly veiled sectarianism.

This suggests that displays of Irish identity in Scotland are still problematized, beyond what would normally be associated with football rivalry. The everyday activities of watching football are embedded in complex questions of identity and belonging.

Irish heritage and Scottishness

In reflecting on national identities, Celtic supporters with family connections to Ireland often had to negotiate “competing” identities. Importantly, claiming their Irish heritage did not necessarily preclude participants from also considering themselves Scottish. Stephen described his ethnicity as “Scots-Irish” and added: *I’m equally as proud of the Scottish aspect of that as the Irish aspect of it*. Conversely, Peter seemed more reluctant to fully embrace a “Scottish” identity:

I look at myself as a Glaswegian from Irish descent, that’s how I’ve always viewed myself. I’m obviously Scottish, I cannae get away fae this accent and the place I come fae but I don’t identify, I’m no a ... shortbread-tin Jock.

Peter identifies more strongly with the city he lives in and his Irish heritage than Scotland as a nation, and “shortbread-tin Jock” seems to be a thinly-veiled derision of particular aspects of Scottish national culture. Explaining his disengagement from supporters of the national side, he explicitly emphasized the historically unequal relationship between Scotland and Ireland:

It’s kind of joking right, but the Tartan Army, the name of it, the wearing of the Glengary ... for me, certainly members of my family had guys coming through their door with machine guns with these things on, do you know what I mean?

Though Peter stated that he was “kind of joking”, elsewhere in the interview he was highly critical of the British military, partly due to his family’s traumatic experiences in Ireland. Because of the symbolization of “Scottishness”, the “Tartan Army” cannot be disassociated from British militarism.

Several Celtic supporters spoke of personally experiencing anti-Catholicism and anti-Irishness or about stories of discrimination passed down inter-generationally. Joe, a young Scottish-born male with Irish heritage, described feeling that his Irish name was a marker of difference which attracts negative attention. He explained that as a taxi driver, norms such as his name being given to customers triggered concern:

I still feel the need to hide my name badge in the car all the time, because I don't want them seeing my name. I would never have that on show, never ever have it on show. [Now] we've got an app, and apparently it tells you the driver's name. I just think, automatically in my head, think they're going to be going, 'Fenian taxi driver here'.

Some participants felt a sense of injustice that this history has never been fully acknowledged. Matthew reflected on the historical portrayal of the Irish in Britain as a "suspect community":

[Society has] never dealt with the Irish thing, and people's expressions of Irishness is somehow ... means they're about to set up an active service unit of the fucking IRA! [...] It's never dealt with the fact that it has an Irish population, which is the biggest ethnic community in the country.

Some Rangers supporters questioned the authenticity of Celtic supporters' claims to an Irish identity. Eddie commented: *They're always shouting about being Irish, nothing to do with Britain. But you're in Britain. I know it's Scotland, but it's still Britain.* Similarly, Neil observed: *You're talking about fourth-generation Irish immigrants here, they don't have any identification whatsoever with what it means to be an Irish immigrant.* So, while some participants comfortably expressed a dual Scottish-Irish identity, for others there were tensions between the two, and a sense that expressions of Irishness from Scottish people with Irish heritage are unauthentic. This suggests there is a collective memory relating to historical marginalization that shapes how people make and respond to identity claims.

Scottishness and Britishness

Some Rangers-supporting interviewees felt that British and Scottish identities – which once sat comfortably together – were increasingly incompatible in contemporary Scotland. Evidence suggests that people in Scotland increasingly identify more strongly as "Scottish" than "British", though many people identify with both (Bechhofer and McCrone 2014). As the SNP increasingly attempts to differentiate itself from the UK Government, overt displays of Britishness now largely appear to occupy the residual sphere (Williams 1977), most prominent at certain football grounds and outside Rangers-friendly pubs and Orange lodges. Lewis, a Rangers supporter who distanced

himself from Rangers' British-unionist identity, suggested that certain pubs are an outlet for the expression of British nationalism which may not be accepted elsewhere:

They couldn't walk into a pub in the West End⁹ and start spouting off 'the union is sacred' and all that. But Rangers pubs like the Loudon, the Grapes Bar, the District or whatever ... putting up those banners is kind of displaying to them that, you're welcome here, you can express those views with like-minded people.

Likewise, Rangers-supporting Neil admitted that he felt uncomfortable with the club's British-unionist identity:

I'm part of a minority of fans [...] that don't really stand with the Unionism thing, but it is a minority. Unionism, attached to the Union Jack and everything that stands for ... notions of grandeur attached to Empire.

Neil added that he strongly disliked what he perceived as Rangers' relatively recent penchant for displays of British militarism in the stadium. He explained that his Scottish national identity, his commitment to Scottish independence, and his rejection of British unionism and militarism caused him to question his club allegiance because of a sense of incompatibility.

For other Rangers supporters, however, a strong attachment to Britishness influenced their feelings about Scottish nationalism. Donald explained that he attended all home Scotland fixtures for 20 years, but eventually stopped because of the ways in which Scottish nationalism was expressed:

I started to hear the booing of every national anthem, not just the English, or British national anthem, they booed every national anthem for years, and they sing Flower of Scotland, 'send them homeward to think again'. And I thought, 'I don't really want to go to these games anymore'. And I haven't been to a Scotland match now for 15 years.

Several other Rangers-supporting participants emphasized their pride in the British national identity. There was a sense of frustration that Britishness appears to be under "threat" in contemporary Scotland. During a focus group with Rangers supporters, participants felt that British nationalism was increasingly stigmatized in Scotland, with Bruce commenting: *I'm proud to be Scottish and I'm proud to be British but it's like you're no allowed to be proud to be British.* A few Rangers supporters suggested that anti-Englishness was normalized, discouraging them from supporting the national side. John suggested that while expressions of Scottish and Irish national identities were accepted unproblematically in Scotland (the latter point at odds with the perspectives of many Celtic-supporting participants), Englishness was not:

[It's] almost like you're looked upon as ... I dare to say, a bigot, for celebrating St George's day or whatever. Whereas if it was St Patrick's day, St Andrew's day, all the rest of it, it's perfectly acceptable.

Participants who felt strongly attached to a British-unionist identity were highly critical of the expression of anti-British sentiment in Irish nationalist songs. In a focus group discussion where comparisons were being made between British and Irish nationalism, Frank questioned: *How could you be offended by singing the British [national] anthem? How can you be offended by singing against Bobby Sands¹⁰ or people that are bringing hurt to Britain?* Here, Britishness is considered the legitimate national identity and expressing others – Irishness in this case – is criticized.

In this section, the lens of football has highlighted the complex interplay between Scottish, British, and Irish national identities, with historical tensions influencing how people negotiate competing identities. The next section explores how this plays out in Scottish politics.

National identities, religion, and the constitutional question

Scottish nationalism and support for independence

As interviews took place in the context of the 2014 independence referendum and the SNP's unprecedented landslide in the 2015 UK General Election, participants reflected on how their political attitudes were shaped by complex and sometimes competing aspects of their identities. Some interviewees suggested that politics and football are inseparable, and there was a clear relationship between football team allegiance and attitudes towards independence. The three Partick Thistle supporters interviewed were pro-independence. Mark spoke of actively campaigning for the SNP: *If anybody knows my politics, I'm just Scotland in the head.* Eric explained that during the campaign there was visible support for independence at matches and added: *I don't know any Thistle fan that voted No.* As Partick Thistle has historically distanced itself from "sectarian" rivalries in Glasgow, it is perhaps unsurprising that its support reflected Glasgow's pro-independence tendency.

Most Celtic supporters interviewed were pro-independence, however several noted that this was a significant shift for them personally because of the historical dominance of Labour in the working-class communities in Glasgow in which they grew up. Sharon suggested that sections of the Celtic support remained opposed to independence for that reason:

... an awful lot of Labour-supporting Celtic fans, they didn't want to do the breakaway thing, it was 'we're Labour, we've always been Labour, our whole family's Labour, it's always been like this'.

Some participants reflected on a time when Catholic support for the SNP would have been unthinkable due to anti-Catholic bigotry within the party. Stephen recounted connections that his family had to the Labour party,

and said they strongly opposed the SNP: *Without a shadow of a doubt, if you look back on SNP history, they were vehemently anti-Catholic.* Stephen explained that despite this background, he voted for independence, and felt that the SNP had largely eradicated anti-Catholicism within the party:

Do I think they could still do more? Yes. Do I think there is still an element within some people, some individuals, within the SNP, who I would consider to be anti-Catholic? Yes, but certainly nowhere near the extent that it was in the past.

Lisa, a Celtic supporter who was a passionate supporter of Scottish independence as well as openly expressing an Irish Republican affinity, reflected on her father's initial reaction to the prospect of independence: *My dad said if there was independence "the Protestants will take over".* Lisa explained that, in time, her parents came to support independence, but their initial reluctance was partly shaped by fears around sectarianism. Indeed, during the referendum campaign such fears were exploited (relatively unsuccessfully) by figures such as former Labour MP George Galloway, who argued that the SNP threatened the existence of Catholic schools (Gibbon 2014). The increasing tendency for Catholics to support independence and the SNP denotes a significant shift in social relations. However, Lisa's account highlights the legacy of historical discrimination when claiming national and political identities, especially when this involves a break from traditional patterns of allegiance.

Further, some Celtic supporters' political allegiances were complicated by their belief that the OBTC Act represented an attack on the expression of Irish identities. Connor described this as "double standards": *You can sing about Scottish nationalism, in fact that's encouraged, but if you sing about Irish you can end up in a prison cell.* Connor explained that although he was pro-independence, he could not support the SNP due to the legislation but was limited in his choice of political options because voting Labour would be construed as *siding with unionists.*

Scottish nationalism and British unionism

Several Rangers-supporting participants strongly opposed the idea of Scottish independence. Donald explained: *I've voted Conservative every time in my life except [the 2015 UK GE] when I voted Labour. Why did I vote Labour? To keep them [The SNP] out.* Donald explained that his antipathy towards the "nationalists" was influenced by his opposition to the OBTC Act, but his unionist principles were clearly decisive, as he broke his lifelong tradition of voting Conservative – the explicitly unionist party – in the hope of saving the union. This sentiment was echoed in a focus group with Rangers supporters held shortly after the election. Though the focus group was held to discuss fans' experiences of the OBTC Act, participants reflected on the SNP's

increasing dominance of Scottish politics. Bruce stated: *I'll probably vote Labour the next time for the first time in my life, just to get rid of these nationalist cranks.* For these participants, politics and national identity were very much bound up in their identities as Rangers supporters, the club which most strongly symbolizes British-unionism. Importantly, those who support independence are constructed as "nationalists" whereas support for British nationalism is not described as such, in line with Billig's (1995) theory that "nationalism" is used frequently to describe secessionist movements but rarely to describe powers that seek to preserve the national status quo.

Although an anti-independence sentiment was powerful for some Rangers supporters, one participant, Kenny, suggested that many people would have quietly deviated from the "dominant" message of their fellow supporters:

If I asked 50 people from the pubs I drink in, what did you vote, I'd guarantee half of them voted Yes but would never admit that in front of anyone else. Cause there's still that kind of, we're a union [...] god save the queen and all that. It would take a brave man to walk into a Rangers pub and start shouting down the union.

For Kenny, the "performance" of being a Rangers supporter involves being pro-union, and although some might have a strong attachment to that identity, for others it would not influence their decision on Scotland's constitutional future. Joe similarly commented that few people on his Celtic supporters' bus would have admitted voting "No", given that resistance to Britishness is, for many, an important aspect of Celtic's identity. These accounts remind us that identities are performed in particular contexts, and that the boundaries created are often not reflective of reality.

Two pro-independence participants reflected on feeling disengaged from their identities as Rangers supporters during the referendum. Neil explained that his pro-independence and left-wing leanings caused him internal conflict given the anti-independence and sometimes right-wing rhetoric of the more vocal Rangers support: *I think I would still call myself a Rangers supporter. I didn't for a while because obviously ... I think the referendum did change a lot of things, for me.* Charlene recounted a similar feeling of "outsiderness" when hearing anti-independence songs:

[They think] because you support Rangers who are a British club, you should be voting No. But because I was a Yes voter, I think I kind of felt as if they're attacking my political opinion.

Although Charlene was accustomed to negotiating multiple aspects of her identity on account of being a Catholic Rangers supporter, this was intensified during the referendum debate. In these examples, the "collective" identity of the Rangers support is at odds with participants' political preferences, revealing how the politicization of everyday activities can result in a sense of isolation.

Discussion

This article examined the ways in which sectarianism and nationalism interact and intersect in Scotland, both at the level of everyday cultural activities and on political allegiances and behaviours. Findings largely support existing research which highlights the increasingly positive identification with Scottish national identity amongst Catholics of Irish descent (Healy 2020). Some participants embraced a dual identity, in line with May's (2013) suggestion that Scottish and Irish national identities are now more aligned, often sharing an opposition to British unionism. By analysing "from below" and exploring how people engage with nationalism in their everyday lives (Bechhofer and McCrone 2010), we can see that decline of sectarianism has facilitated the "claiming" of the Scottish national identity by a minority group which historically experienced marginalization.

However, this study has shown that negotiating such shifts can cause internal conflict, and for some, a residual sense of marginalization remains. Claims to "Scottishness" are complicated by the salience of social identities and relationships formed in the past. The meanings that people craft from their everyday lives are shaped by their personal, family and group histories, and in some cases by the "bitter memories" (Rosie 2008) of discrimination and inequality. Understanding sectarianism as a modality of racism, which as Miles and Brown (2003) argue is inextricably bound up with nationalism, emphasizes the need to consider the impact of historical colonial relations between Britain and Ireland. Gilroy (2004) argues that "white Britain" struggles with the legacy of the British Empire in relation to immigrant populations, including for later generation migrants. Given Britain's colonial domination of Ireland, and subsequent migration experiences, there are similar processes whereby those who retain an Irish Catholic identity are considered, or consider themselves to be, "outsiders" (see Davidson et al. 2018).

Further, findings suggest that the sense of outsidership previously experienced by Irish Catholics (Bradley 2006), and by minorities more generally (Liinpää 2020), is something that citizens in Scotland with a strong British national identity increasingly must contend with. Though many people continue to feel a sense of pride in being British (Bechhofer and McCrone 2014), those "residual traits" (Williams 1977) associated with British-unionist identity are now largely limited to the cultural sphere, symbolized by a section of the Rangers support (May 2013). As this "hardline" form of British nationalism is extremely hostile to the notion of Scottish independence, pro-independence Rangers supporters in this study experienced a sense of isolation from the club's collective identity. For other participants, however, who felt alienated from Scottish nationalism, Rangers represented a space to celebrate identities which are increasingly marginalized in mainstream political life. Indeed, May (2013) argues that Rangers supporters' aggressive stance towards both

Scottish and Irish nationalism needs to be seen in the context of the declining status of unionism in Scotland. Linkon's (2018) concept of the "half-life" of deindustrialization, which posits that individuals and communities have experienced the derision of their identities as well as the devaluing of their labour, is also relevant. A loss of "establishment" status, and the dismantling of privilege has negatively impacted the Protestant, Unionist working-class habitus (Law 2016). While not representing the majority of Protestants and Unionists in Scotland, for some a sense of embattlement seems to be increasing rather than abating, and its expression is rooted in hostility to both Scottish and Irish nationalism, as well as anti-Catholicism.

Findings indicate that these identity struggles have ongoing implications for Scottish politics and the future of the union. Participants' accounts echoed findings from other research on the continuing decline in traditional ties between Labour and the Catholic community (Walker 2016). Despite anger towards the SNP regarding the OBTC Act, other perceived policy failures, and historical associations with anti-Catholicism and anti-Irishness, the perception that voting Labour represents "siding with unionists" has helped the SNP consolidate its dominance of Scottish politics. Meanwhile, some of the Rangers-supporting participants considered themselves alienated from mainstream Scottish political life and reflected on changing lifelong voting behaviours in the hope of saving the union. Though it was previously assumed that devolution had sustained Britishness in Scotland, support for independence has accelerated over the last decade, and a second referendum on Scottish independence is likely. Given the binary nature of referendums, however a future vote goes will leave a sizeable section of the Scottish population feeling marginalized. The interplay of nationalism and sectarianism which has dominated the Irish border question in Brexit debates is likely to be pertinent in Scotland and will require political attention. Managing the legacy of historical sectarianism will continue to be an important part of the developing Scottish national identity.

Finally, the arguments presented in this article have relevance beyond Scotland. Taking a bottom-up approach to the study of how nationalism is encountered and experienced by later generation migrants enhances our understanding the longer-term impact of racism and exclusionary nationalism. When assimilation into the majority culture is more or less assumed, the legacy of historical injustices can be occluded. This is particularly pertinent for those racialised minorities who are overlooked in scholarly work on race and racism which focuses predominately on skin colour. This limits our understanding of how the histories of colonialism or different forms of racism (or "sectarianism" in Scotland which, similarly to Northern Ireland, should be understood as a form of racism) are sustained over time through identities, and how these vary in different contexts. Privileging people's everyday experiences and the ways in which "collective memory" (Conway 2003) shapes the extent to

which people claim national identities will contribute to literature on both nationalism and racism/sectarianism.

Notes

1. "Sectarianism" is a contested concept (see McBride 2018). The term is used in this article because of its prevalence in academic work, political and media discourse.
2. The Orange Order is a Protestant fraternal institution formed in 1795 in Northern Ireland, with lodges in other parts of the UK and further afield. Its roots can be traced back to the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over Catholic King James in 1690, and it is considered to be rooted in opposition to Catholicism and strongly linked to British unionism. In Northern Ireland and Scotland, Orange processions frequently feature on city streets, and have been increasing in numbers since the beginning of the 21st century, with Glasgow hosting more than Belfast and Derry combined (*The Herald*, 21 August 2009).
3. The Programme for Government 2021 commits to securing an independence referendum before the end of 2023: <https://www.snp.org/programme-for-government-2021-22/>.
4. "Unionist" was dropped from the party title in 1964.
5. Devine (2008) estimates that between one fifth and one quarter of Irish migrants to Scotland were Protestant.
6. Legislation introduced as part of the SNP's anti-sectarianism agenda. The Act was widely opposed and eventually repealed in 2018.
7. Ethical approval for the research was granted by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow.
8. The author was a researcher on the Evaluation of the OBTC Act (see Hamilton-Smith et al. 2015) holding focus groups with football supporters to explore their experiences of the Act. One focus group with Rangers supporters included discussion of contested national identities in Scotland, which is relevant for the purposes of this paper.
9. A predominately affluent area of Glasgow.
10. Bobby Sands was one of the Hunger Strikers who died during the "Troubles" in 1981.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Research participants

Pseudonym	Team	Gender	Age	Occupation	Religious background	Interview or focus group
Connor	Celtic	Male	18	Student	None	Interview
Thomas	Celtic	Male	20s	Not disclosed	Catholic	Interview
Lisa	Celtic	Female	20s	Admin	Catholic	Interview
Joe	Celtic	Male	20s	Taxi Driver	Catholic	Interview
Barry	Celtic	Male	20s	Student	Catholic	Interview
Glen	Celtic	Male	30s	Retail	Catholic	Interview
Peter	Celtic	Male	40s	Third sector	Catholic	Interview
Sharon	Celtic	Female	40s	Bank worker	Catholic	Interview
Laura	Celtic	Female	40s	Customer Service	Protestant	Interview
Matthew	Celtic	Male	40s	Civil Servant	Catholic & Jewish	Interview
Stephen	Celtic	Male	40s	Primary Teacher	Catholic	Interview

(Continued)

Continued.

Pseudonym	Team	Gender	Age	Occupation	Religious background	Interview or focus group
Kathleen	Celtic	Female	50s	Admin Worker	Catholic	Interview
David	Celtic	Male	50s	Security	Catholic	Interview
James	Celtic	Male	70s	Retired	Catholic	Interview
Adam	Partick	Male	20s	Student	Not disclosed	Interview
Mark	Partick	Male	20s	Youth Worker	Catholic	Interview
Eric	Partick	Male	50s	Not disclosed	Not disclosed	Interview
Charlene	Rangers	Female	20s	Student	Catholic	Interview
Sam	Rangers	Male	20s	Retail	Catholic	Interview
Craig	Rangers	Male	20s	Accountant	Protestant	Interview
Lewis	Rangers	Male	30s	Police Officer	Protestant	Interview
Greg	Rangers	Male	30s	Not disclosed	Protestant	Interview
Grant	Rangers	Male	30s	Banking	Protestant	Interview
Neil	Rangers	Male	30s	Teacher	Protestant	Interview
Keith	Rangers	Male	40s	Teacher	Protestant	Interview
Kenny	Rangers	Male	40s	Social Worker	Protestant	Interview
Eddie	Rangers	Male	50s	Tradesman	Protestant	Interview
Stevie	Rangers	Male	50s	Tradesman	Protestant	Interview
Donald	Rangers	Male	60s	Businessman	Protestant	Interview
John	Rangers	Male	60s	Tradesman	Protestant	Interview
Frank	Rangers	Male	50s	Businessman	Protestant	Focus group
Bruce	Rangers	Male	50s	Not disclosed	Protestant	Focus group
Gary	Rangers	Male	20s	Not disclosed	Protestant	Focus group

Appendix 2. interview guide

Topic	Questions
Identity as a football supporter	How did you begin to support/follow X? Influences – family, friends, schooling? How has this changed over time? How big a part of your life does being a supporter of X play? How do you think gender affects identity as a supporter of X?
Matchday experience	What type of games do you attend / how often / who with? Describe a typical day attending a football game (activities before and after) What creates an atmosphere at football?
Relations with other supporters	What are relations with supporters of different teams like? Are there particular groups of supporters who can be challenging? In what ways?
Offensive Behaviour at Football legislation	What is your knowledge of the legislation? Describe policing / security at matches before and after Act's introduction What is the effect on matchday experience?
Sectarianism and other wider social issues	What does sectarianism mean? What types of behaviours do you consider to be sectarian? Where is it prevalent? Also, ask about racism, homophobia, sexism as above.
Nationalism and national identity	Do you support the Scottish national side? Which is more important, your club or national team allegiance? Do you consider yourself to have a nationality? If so what is it? Are there relationships between football club allegiance and wider political, national or religious identity? Examples.