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Our Friends Across the Water:

Northern Ireland Media Coverage of the Scottish Independence Referendum

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Background

The resonance of the referendum for the people of Northern Ireland

Galung and Ruge¹ talk of news values that tend to construct the news, and one of these is 'proximity'. Events tend to be more likely to make the news if they are geographically close, so it is no surprise that we saw significant coverage of the Scottish independence referendum in Northern Ireland. Perhaps more importantly, however, 'proximity' refers also to political closeness, and there is no doubt that this aspect made the referendum all the more newsworthy for the Northern Irish media, to differing extents for different media providers.

Independence, nationhood, self-determination and identity are highly resonant and contested concepts for the people of Northern Ireland. There are few incidences these days of these issues being contested by violent means, which was the lens through which the world's media largely knew and understood us in the past. The issues might be more symbolic now, but they are based on very real shifts in power over the years. The potential for another shift in power, albeit one that would affect us indirectly rather than directly, took these issues beyond the symbolic realm for a time, and legitimised explicit discussion of potential changes in our own situation, which unsurprisingly were welcomed and scorned, depending on who you were speaking to, or what you were reading or watching.

Given the extent of the coverage, choices of focus have been necessary. This chapter will discuss in detail the press coverage of the referendum, and provide a broad outline of the tone of broadcast coverage, along with responses to the result from key Northern Ireland politicians.

Some historical and political context

The Irish Republic secured its independence from Britain in 1921 after a bloody conflict. The six counties in the north remained part of the UK, but opinion was divided on whether this was an acceptable settlement, and some

continued the struggle for the 'six counties' to reunite with the Irish Republic. It is widely accepted that Catholics were discriminated against under the devolved Parliament of Northern Ireland in terms of both representation and parliamentary practices. In the 1960s a civil rights movement (of both Catholics and Protestants) formed which fashioned itself on the US civil rights movement. There was disagreement about how to resolve the situation, however, and the Irish Republican movement moved to armed conflict in an attempt to achieve a United Ireland.

'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland saw paramilitary activity from both republicans and loyalists. In 1972 the Parliament of Northern Ireland was suspended, and Direct Rule from Westminster was re-established. The Troubles continued until 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement effectively symbolised their end. The agreement recognised that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland wished to remain part of the UK and that a significant minority of the people of Northern Ireland, and a majority of the people on the island of Ireland as a whole wished there to be a United Ireland. It stated that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom until majorities in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland wished it to become part of a United Ireland, but that if this happened the two governments must grant it. The agreement also recognised the right of the citizens of Northern Ireland to categorise themselves as Irish, or British, or both.

Furthermore, it set up a new 'power sharing' devolved assembly in Northern Ireland in which the positions of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister must be from each of the two political persuasions, unionist and nationalist, the executive (cabinet) must be balanced, and agreements on bills must gain not just an overall majority, but a proportion of both unionist and nationalist support. The two biggest parties in the Stormont Assembly are currently the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which is strongly unionist, and Sinn Féin (translates into English as 'We Ourselves'), which is strongly republican. The three other main parties are the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), which is moderately unionist, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which is moderately nationalist, and the Alliance Party, which is now neutral on the union.

The media context

The main press titles in Northern Ireland are as follows: the *Belfast Telegraph* is a compact daily owned by the Dublin-based Independent News and Media with a circulation of 48,014.² It claims to have a neutral editorial stance, and has a cross-community readership, though it is generally considered to lean towards unionism. The *Irish News* is a compact daily independently owned by the locally based Fitzpatrick family with a circulation of 39,935.³ Its editorial stance is broadly nationalist. The *News Letter* is a compact daily owned by the Scottish Johnston Press, with a circulation of 19,314.⁴ Its editorial stance is unionist. The broadcasters in Northern Ireland are BBC Northern Ireland, one of the national regions of the BBC, and UTV (Ulster Television), then an independent

company but part of the ITV network. Both BBC and UTV have radio stations (BBC Radio Ulster and U105, respectively), and a number of commercial radio stations also broadcast.

Key Methods and Concepts for Analysis

Content analysis³ was carried out on the press coverage. This method of analysis codes texts and quantifies patterns and trends, which is useful when considering similarities and differences between coverage in different titles.

Fairclough⁶ points out that absence can be as significant as presence in texts; it is important to consider what is not included and why, in addition to analysing what is included.

Several theoretical concepts are drawn on in the following analysis of both the press and broadcast coverage. 'Framing'⁷ considers which aspects of an individual, group or event are drawn out and highlighted, which is by extension at the expense of other aspects. A simple way to think about this is the question of whether a glass is half full or half empty; in one case the situation is framed positively and in the other it is framed negatively.

'Discourses'⁸ are the different ways we talk (or write) about the same thing. For example, asylum can be talked about with a discourse of threat ('they're taking our jobs') or a discourse of humanitarianism ('we should welcome people fleeing persecution').⁹

'Intertextuality'¹⁰ refers to the ways in which one text can, explicitly or implicitly, draw on other texts to tell its story. This can be an economical way to make a point because with an echo or image from another time or place can come ready-made connotations. Intertextuality, then, is often emotive or ideological in nature.

Press Coverage

What are we looking at? Data

Searches were carried out of the online archives of the *Belfast Telegraph*, the *Irish News* and the *News Letter* using the keywords 'Scottish Independence'. Each piece was coded in several ways. First, the pieces were categorised according to when they appeared, by year until 2012–14, by month in 2014, and by date in September. Second, they were categorised by type, for example news, feature, opinion, reader's letter. Third, they were categorised according to where the main focus of the piece lay, whether on Scotland, on Northern Ireland, on the United Kingdom, on the Republic of Ireland or beyond. Fourth, they were categorised with regard to whether they appeared to be pro-Scottish independence, anti-Scottish independence or neutral. This categorisation is of course sometimes rather more nuanced than a blatant pro or anti stance, and aspects of this will be discussed more fully. Finally, a key theme of each piece was identified. There were significant differences between the three titles in all of these aspects.

How much? Volume of coverage

By far the highest volume of coverage appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph*, which ran 284 pieces in total. The *News Letter* ran 89 pieces, and the *Irish News* ran just 40. This would suggest that the outcome was considered to have significantly less impact on those of a nationalist political persuasion than those of a unionist political persuasion. Some 67 per cent of the pieces in the *News Letter* and 60 per cent of the pieces in the *Irish News* appeared in September 2014, suggesting a relatively focused approach, with not much broader discussion preceding or following the referendum. The proportion of the *Belfast Telegraph's* coverage that ran in September 2014 was around half that of the other titles, at 33 per cent, which suggests a broader and more lengthy discussion.

There was also a clear peak in the *News Letter's* coverage in 2012, when 23 per cent of the coverage appeared, and a smaller, but still notable, peak in the *Belfast Telegraph*, at 14 per cent. The centenary of the Ulster Covenant, which half a million unionists signed in 1912 to protest about the then British government's Irish home rule proposals, occurred in this year and, whilst only a minority of the 2012 pieces have that explicit theme, it is clear that this event encouraged increased focus on the Ulster Scots identity and the historical relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland.

Fact or opinion? Type of article

The breakdown of coverage by type of article is very similar in the *Belfast Telegraph* and the *News Letter*. Both were heavily weighted towards news pieces (74 per cent and 73 per cent respectively). There was a notable trend in *News Letter* news pieces towards starting from the comments of politicians (overwhelmingly unionist) as well as news events per se, so it is clear that the unionist parties were proactively producing press releases about the referendum, and referring to it in speeches at party conferences and other events. Such pieces somewhat blur the boundary between fact and opinion.

In the *Irish News* the majority of the pieces (55 per cent) were also news pieces. It is notable in this title, however, that the total of opinion pieces (30 per cent) and readers' letters (12.5 per cent) is almost 80 per cent of the total of news pieces. This suggests that, whilst the referendum gained a lot less coverage in the *Irish News* than in the other two titles, in this title it was treated as an area for civic discussion and reflection, more so than in the other titles.

Who are we talking about? Focus

All three titles had around a quarter of pieces focused on Northern Ireland (25 per cent in the *Irish News* and the *Belfast Telegraph* and 23 per cent in the *News Letter*). A significant majority (57.5 per cent) of the pieces in the *Irish News* were focused on Scotland itself, with just 12.5 per cent focusing on the UK. The *Belfast Telegraph* also had Scotland as the main focus, though less significantly (46 per cent), and its focus on the UK (27 per cent) was on a par with its focus on

Northern Ireland. The *News Letter* placed similar focus on the UK (40 per cent) and Scotland (37 per cent). The Republic of Ireland was the focus of 5 per cent of the *Irish News* coverage, 3 per cent of the *Belfast Telegraph*, and did not feature in the *News Letter*. If we consider the NI focused pieces and the UK focused pieces together, it is fair to say that the *News Letter* constructed the referendum as a UK issue, the *Irish News* constructed it as a Scottish issue, and the *Belfast Telegraph* gave equal weight to both.

What do we think about it? Position

In terms of the extent to which the coverage was for or against Scottish independence, unsurprisingly none of the titles had a majority of supportive coverage, but the *Irish News* had 20 per cent supportive coverage which, considered along with its neutral coverage (75 per cent), shows very little negativity. There were only two negative pieces, one of which was a reader's letter, which would seem to display the paper's openness to giving voice to diverse opinion in its civic discussion, and one was an opinion piece about the economy that was written very much from a UK business perspective.

The *Belfast Telegraph*, like the *Irish News*, was overwhelmingly neutral (78 per cent). It is important to point out, however, that, whilst these pieces were balanced in terms of quotes and so on, the overall topic of the pieces and/or the way in which they were headlined was overwhelmingly negative rather than supportive, so this 'neutrality' is nuanced; indeed, the paper did at various points in its editorials state that it was of the opinion that remaining in the union was the preferable outcome of the referendum, albeit it respected that this was a matter for the people of Scotland. The positive and negative proportions of the *Belfast Telegraph* were opposite to those of the *Irish News*. The *Belfast Telegraph* had 18 per cent negative pieces and just 4 per cent supportive pieces. The supportive pieces, similarly to the *Irish News*'s negative ones, suggest a degree of openness to presenting a rounded debate: four were readers' letters, two were invited pieces by Scottish supporters of the Yes campaign, one journalist and one celebrity, and one was an invited piece from the Sinn Féin chair.

The *News Letter* took a much more explicit position than the other two titles. Whilst it had 55 per cent neutral coverage, 40 per cent of its coverage was negative, and only four pieces (5 per cent) were supportive. One of these was a reader's letter, suggesting that this title too has a commitment, at least in its letters page, to diversity of opinion.

What are we talking about? Themes

In keeping with its weight of focus on Scotland, the most popular theme for pieces in the *Irish News* was the referendum itself (23 per cent). And in keeping with its weight of focus on the UK, the most popular theme for pieces in the *News Letter* was maintenance of the union (20 per cent). In both titles, the four most popular themes together made up 70 per cent of the coverage, and there was, perhaps surprisingly, some overlap between these. In the *Irish News* the next most

popular themes were the democratic and participatory nature of Scottish politics (18 per cent), devolved powers (15 per cent) and the economy (15 per cent). In the *News Letter* the next most popular themes were devolved powers (20 per cent), the referendum itself (16 per cent) and the democratic and participatory nature of Scottish politics (8 per cent). Like the *Irish News*, the *Belfast Telegraph* had the referendum itself as its most popular theme; at 29 per cent it was by far the most popular. The economy was next at a much lower 17 per cent. Thereafter, there was a cluster of six minor themes with around 5 per cent coverage each: celebrity opinion, maintenance of the union, devolved powers, corporation tax, a potential border poll and more general impact on Northern Ireland.

It is notable that the theme of 'the democratic and participatory nature of Scotland's politics' appeared significantly in both the *Irish News* and the *News Letter*; we might not expect that in the latter, given its anti-Scottish independence stance and its proactive focus on the maintenance of the UK. (This theme appeared in the *Belfast Telegraph* as well, but only amounted to 2 per cent of the coverage so is not worthy of discussion in relation to this title.) To a greater or lesser extent, both the *Irish News* and the *News Letter* recognised Scotland as a country whose politics are more developed, more fluid, more nuanced and, perhaps most significantly, as having dealt with perceived disempowerment by Westminster by non-violent means, hugely more successfully than Northern Ireland ever did. Employment of this theme, however, was as much about reinforcing the editorial/party political position of these titles as it was about speaking highly of Scotland. It sets the *News Letter* explicitly, and the *Irish News* implicitly, against Sinn Féin and their history of support for armed struggle in Northern Ireland.

The Sinn Féin factor can also account for a significant absence in the press coverage. Only 5 per cent of pieces in each of the *News Letter* and the *Irish News* had the theme of a potential border poll. This might seem surprising because there was significant political debate about this, some of which was covered in broadcast news, news review and political debate programmes. There are two points to make here, however. First, whilst the *Irish News* has a nationalist position, it is more akin to the politics of the SDLP than those of Sinn Féin, and it is the latter who are largely calling for a border poll. Second, whilst one might expect negative coverage of a potential border poll in the *News Letter*, it seems the title (or perhaps more specifically the unionist parties' press offices, given the proportion of its news pieces that appear to arise from parties' press releases) decided that an absence of this aspect was more empowering to their position than reactive coverage of it.

What else are we talking about? Echoes of other events and texts

THE TROUBLES

The spike in coverage in the *News Letter* and the *Belfast Telegraph* in 2012 contained several explicit comparisons between the potential fallout from an independent Scotland and the Troubles in Northern Ireland. It is important to

say that all of these references drew on direct quotes from unionist politicians and were not positions explicitly taken by the papers. In a couple of cases the comparison was blatant and negative: 'Mr Elliott accused SNP leader Alex Salmond of appearing to pose "a greater threat to the Union than the violence of the IRA"' (*Belfast Telegraph*); 'Empey: Scottish split "may reignite Troubles"' (*News Letter*).

In other cases the link was more implicit, whilst still clearly drawing intertextually on stories about the Troubles. For example, in the following quote the 'violence' is symbolic: 'Lord Trimble said that every Scot had a "British component" in their national identity, and that to "separate that is to do violence to people's own sense of identity"' (*Belfast Telegraph*). Peter Robinson took a different, and somewhat contradictory, approach: an opinion piece in the *News Letter* discussed the First Minister, suggesting Alex Salmond 'puts a new twist on the republican slogan "Armalite and the ballot box" when he said Scottish Independence "can be defeated with a Saltire in one hand and a Union Flag in the other"'. This piece, unlike the preceding ones, appeared not to liken Scottish Nationalists to Irish Republicans, but to compare the former favourably to the latter.

In January 2014 the blatant approach from some unionists was still in evidence: 'Take Ian Paisley Jnr's comments this week. "A Yes vote in Scotland would, the North Antrim MP said, be a spur for dissident republican violence, destabilising Northern Ireland and unravelling the gains of the Good Friday Agreement"' (*Belfast Telegraph*). This came from an opinion piece which saw the paper explicitly criticise Paisley's approach, something that was not seen in the 2012 coverage:

It is unclear how a democratic referendum in another part of the United Kingdom could give succour to gunmen who have minimal support even within their own communities. If anything, the SNP's success proves beyond a reasonable doubt the supremacy of constitutional means. Regardless of the result in September, Alex Salmond and his party have shown that it is the ballot box – not the Armalite – that works.

Whilst the force of these references varied, they served a common purpose of implicitly critiquing Irish republicanism in general and Sinn Féin in particular, for inferring that a Yes vote would lead to calls for a border poll in Ireland which would lead to unrest, and of highlighting the failure of the relatively recent (republican) violence.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The *News Letter* also used some war terminology, for example 'D Day for Union as polls open in Scotland for referendum vote' and 'BREAKING NEWS: A VICTORY FOR NO IN SCOTLAND' [my emphasis].

The discourse of war is rather common in news reporting of anything that can be constructed as having two 'sides'. Its use constructs the conflict element as relatively more extreme. In this case, however, the use of *D Day* echoes the Second World War, probably the most key point in history for the notion of

the unity of nations being a strength. It thus provides an emotional appeal to maintain the union. Indeed, a proactive emotional appeal (without the battle metaphors) appeared in an opinion piece on the same day: 'Vote No, Scotland, and stay with your friends in the UK'.

SCOTTISH AND IRISH LITERATURE

The *Irish News* provided a couple of pertinent nods to literature that painted a rich picture of the approach of the journalists (both are opinion pieces).

The following is an extract from 'Milage in vision of a distinctive Scotland', which appeared in December 2013:

Even with repeated contemplation of the alternatives, where independence brings insoluble problems and little compensation, it is *no mean prospect* to see a people weighing their chances in a future they have changed for themselves. There is clearly mileage in the vision of a socially progressive, distinctive Scotland, clear and free from the assaults of a welfare-bashing Tory-led coalition... [my emphasis]

The use of the words 'no mean prospect' are unlikely to be a coincidence here, and they echo the title of the 1935 book *No Mean City*, about life in the Gorbals area of Glasgow, co-written by a journalist and an unemployed worker.¹¹ The book provides an account of life from the perspective of the working class, a perspective rarely taken in literature of the time, so it would seem there is a point being made here about the fact that the referendum, and the discussion and debate around it, have been a truly participatory process for all sections of the community, something this writer, and the *Irish News* in general, praised.

A piece entitled '*Changed utterly* – no matter the result' [my emphasis] appeared on 13 September 2014. The following is an extract:

DEAR People of Scotland, Congratulations. Whatever the outcome of Thursday's referendum, you will have significantly changed the structures and systems of the United Kingdom for the first time since Irish partition. Most importantly, you will have achieved it without as much as having thrown a stone. (We killed over 3,600 people in the past half-century and are bound within the UK by an international treaty, while governed by an Assembly which does not work.)

After all, what have the Scots ever done for us? Oh all right, they invented porridge, haggis and deep-fried Mars bars (I think). But apart from that, what have they ever done for us?

Well, they avoided sectarian politics. In doing so, they challenged the concept of unionism, not through the intellectual laziness of branding unionists as British, but by accepting them as Scottish and debating social, economic, cultural and constitutional issues with them along non-sectarian lines.

That's what the Scots did for us. For that, they deserve our thanks and our envy.

The first part of the headline, 'Changed utterly', is, again, no coincidence, and this is further supported by the reference to the partition of Ireland. Intertextually, it echoes W. B. Yeats's poem 'Easter, 1916' about the Easter Rising in Ireland, in particular the line 'All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born'. Yeats, who previously had been disengaged from politics, was inspired by the events of the Easter Rising, but also of course devastated by the loss of life that followed it. This piece, then, recognises the huge significance of the independence referendum, and the surrounding history of politics in Scotland, as the disempowered challenging the empowered, but doing it through reasoned argument rather than the violence that occurred in Ireland in 1916 and in Northern Ireland during the Troubles of the latter part of the twentieth century. It also references the often stereotypical way in which Scotland is represented and dismisses it, replacing it with a respectful construction that recognises Scotland as a politically developed nation.

Broadcast News

What are we looking at? Data

There was much of interest in the political comment included in Northern Ireland broadcast news coverage of the Scottish independence referendum. Given space limitations, however, this chapter will consider the reactions to the result from the leaders of the main parties and other key politicians during the Stormont Assembly business, which were picked out by both BBC and UTV News as representative of the parties' positions, and contributed to the overall 'framing' of the result in terms of how news programmes/pieces are introduced.

What are they saying? Key NI politicians' reactions

Mike Nesbitt, UUP party leader: 'Obviously as unionists we rejoice and are delighted with the result. The case for Scottish independence was never made, and common sense has prevailed.' Political commentators picked up on the use of the word 'rejoice' by Nesbitt and previously by the DUP's Ian Paisley Jnr. There are two significant aspects to this. First, the word echoes Margaret Thatcher's reaction to the UK's victory in the Falklands War, so using it in the context of the Scottish independence referendum is a significant claim of power and position by unionists. Second, the word draws on Christian discourse and as such makes a claim that the result is inherently right. This inherent rightness is supported by the claim that 'the case for Scottish independence was never made'.

Sammy Wilson, DUP: 'I congratulate the people of Scotland in recognising the benefits of the union despite the tarran terror tactics of the SNP during what was a very contentious referendum campaign.' The word 'recognise' is referred to linguistically as a 'factive verb', in other words one that suggests that what follows is fact. Politicians often use these to present opinion as fact, and in this sense Sammy Wilson adopted a similar stance to Mike Nesbitt in presenting the result as inherently right. In addition, the use of 'congratulate' is somewhat patronising;

the result was the right thing, but the people of Scotland came to this 'recognition' after the rest of the UK. The words of strongest import in Sammy Wilson's contribution are 'tarran terror tactics'. 'Tarran' paints the Scottish in a stereotypical and objectified light. 'Terror tactics' is another example of the ongoing equating by some unionists of the SNP and the IRA.

Daihi McKay, Sinn Féin:

We should have the same debate. It was a healthy exercise in Scotland, there has been some scaremongering about that but I think that across the world Scotland has been held up as a shining light of how to hold a mature debate about its future governance.

Unsurprisingly, Daihi McKay's contribution opposes Sammy Wilson's by constructing the negative 'scaremongering' as being on the side of the unionists. Given the result, the focus is on the health of the debate and the potential for other countries to follow suit. Whilst Daihi McKay does hold Scotland up as 'a shining light', a somewhat mythical, perhaps almost religious image (with a rather different force than Mike Nesbitt's), he also said 'we should have the same debate', which constructs Northern Ireland as being ready and able to do so (in relation to a border poll about a potential United Ireland), something that would be contested even by the nationalist SDLP.

Alex Attwood, SDLP: 'The people of Scotland demonstrated the power of the democratic approach, what Alex Salmond referred to as the democratic and consent process.' This contribution is short but it does three key things. It constructs the Scottish debate and political process as positive, though rather less dramatically than Daihi McKay's contribution. It could also be interpreted as differentiating between 'the democratic process' in Scotland and the violent process in Northern Ireland, though unlike Sammy Wilson's contribution, this could only be interpreted from Attwood's comment by inference. Finally, by absence rather than presence, it makes no suggestion that Northern Ireland is ready to embark on a similar process, so, again, by inference, implies that it is not.

David Ford, Alliance Party: 'We are currently running through a crisis because of our inabilities and our immaturities, so how could we possibly make a case for suggesting that we should be looking for additional powers until we seek to resolve those problems?' This contribution states clearly what Alex Attwood's implies. Using the metaphor of maturity to differentiate between Scotland and Northern Ireland, it places Northern Ireland even further away from being able to have the same debate as Scotland by claiming we should not even have 'additional powers' (further devolution), never mind any larger constitutional change.

How is it framed? Reporting the result

There was significant contrast between how the referendum result was 'framed' by BBC News and UTV News. The BBC's coverage highlighted the maintenance of

the status quo, whereas UTV's coverage highlighted the significance of the Yes vote and the changes that would come as a consequence.

Some quotes from BBC news bulletins on 19 September: 'Scotland has rejected independence'; 'The SNP has accepted defeat in the referendum on Scotland's independence'; 'speaking at Downing Street the prime minister David Cameron said the debate had been settled for a generation'; 'Scotland's first minister Alex Salmond thanked those who had voted for independence. He said the campaign had touched sections of the community who had never before been touched by politics.'

The word 'rejected', whilst it is a point of fact, constructs the result as rather more clear-cut than the figures imply, and suggests the country deciding as one. 'Accepted defeat' has echoes of war reporting and perhaps suggests that the result was clear some time before it was accepted, which is at best arguable. The selected quote from David Cameron reinforces the status quo, and the selected quote from Alex Salmond highlights the emotive impact rather than recognising the level of political impact.

Some quotes from UTV news bulletins on 18 and 19 September: 'The polls have closed, with millions of voters having their say on the nation's continued membership of the UK'; 'A staggering 97 per cent of people have registered to vote. 4.2 million people will put their mark on a referendum paper today, making it potentially the biggest turnout the UK has ever seen'; 'Whatever the outcome Scottish politics has been galvanised. This is history in the making, and people know it'; 'Reaction is still coming in tonight after Scotland's first minister Alex Salmond became the first casualty of the referendum result. The Prime Minister says more powers could now be devolved to politicians in Northern Ireland, England and Wales.'

Whilst the first quote focuses on the potential maintenance of the status quo with 'membership of the UK', it refers to Scotland as a 'nation'. Furthermore, the quotes that follow highlight the political impact of the process, regardless of the result, and the selected material from David Cameron's input highlights the potential for increased devolved powers. Alex Salmond's stepping down is arguably constructed sympathetically by the word 'casualty', and this use of the discourse of war seems dynamic in comparison to the BBC's focus on the status quo.

Conclusions

The Scottish independence referendum proved significant for the media in Northern Ireland. It was variously framed as a Scottish concern by the nationalist leaning press and as a concern for the union by the unionist leaning press. Unionist politicians took an 'agenda setting' approach to the referendum from years before in an attempt to maintain the union and their position within it, and the unionist leaning press gave voice to this. The nationalist leaning press was more time limited but also more discursive in its approach. Notably, whilst the voice of Sinn Féin was key (along with that of the DUP) in broadcast coverage, it

was very much backgrounded by the press coverage, unsurprising given the party political leanings of the press titles.

The *News Letter* constructed the potential for Scottish independence negatively, and the *Irish News* constructed it neutrally to positively. The *Belfast Telegraph* was balanced, but with much more space given to critical voices. The referendum was viewed through the lens of Northern Irish history a significant minority of the time, and a minor but significant trend overall was to pay respect to the people of Scotland for the democratic and participatory nature of the process and to compare that favourably to paramilitary activity during the Troubles.

The broadcast coverage gave voice to all Northern Ireland parties. The framing of the BBC and UTV coverage differed significantly, with the maintenance of the status quo and strength of the union highlighted by the BBC and the extent of the shift and gains of the independence movement highlighted by UTV. Whilst space restraints did not allow for analysis of it here, this trend was replicated in news review and political debate programmes across the two channels, something well worthy of further examination.

Notes

1. Galtung and Ruge, 'The structure of foreign news'.
2. ABC Island of Ireland Report January – June 2014.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. See, for example, Riffe and Lacy, *Analyzing Media Messages*.
6. Fairclough, *Analyzing Discourse*.
7. See, for example, Goffman, *Frame Analysis*; Lakoff, *The All New Don't Think of an Elephant!*.
8. See, for example, Mills, *Discourse*.
9. Irwin, 'Race and ethnicity in the media'.
10. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*.
11. McArthur and Kingsley-Long, *No Mean City*.

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PART THREE

International Perspectives