

the day'. What is the positive style of loyalism which the trouble makers within and those hostile without were trying to frustrate?

The book identifies the prophylactic role of ex-prisoners especially, the engagement to deter young males in working class Protestant communities from becoming involved in violence. This is put by some as preventing the recruitment of a 'fifth generation' (p. 137) of volunteers. The evidence that such youth may be tempted has been demonstrated in 2012–13 by public disruptions which resulted from the dispute over flying the Union flag at Belfast City Hall. Once the genie is let out of the bottle, it is easy for a particular grievance to transform itself into an undifferentiated rage against the system. Indeed other research has revealed a feeling amongst some youths that they missed out on the Troubles and the supposed excitement and purpose of the old days. A more positive complement to that preventative role is the commitment to build social capacity in Protestant districts as an alternative to the lure of drug dealing or petty criminality (though Shirlow points out that crime rates in loyalist areas are often lower than elsewhere). Moreover, there has been an effort, publicly funded, to 're-image' loyalist areas, replacing sectarian murals with ones promoting positive community identity. If that sounds a bit like a loyalist version of David Cameron's 'big society' why has there been so little evidence, historically or presently, of the ability to mobilise electoral support for an alternative to mainstream unionist politics? The leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, Billy Hutchinson, once claimed that the mandate for political loyalism was the silence of the guns. At important moments in the history of the last fifteen years that mandate was critical. The book points out the significance of loyalist leaders in maintaining that silence, despite provocation by dissident republicans; their influential role in the multi-party talks process; and their crucial defence of the Belfast Agreement against considerable unionist opposition to it. However, that mandate could only deliver diminishing returns especially when silence of the guns became taken for granted as the peace process endured. To blame others for an inability to give popular voice to a constituency and to develop a persuasive political platform, as many respondents do, is surely naive. The final chapter sets out a programme for change and makes an appeal for transformation. Shirlow believes (p. 206) that we are not witnessing the end of Ulster loyalism but its leading figures need to address 'de-stabilising elements and actions within'. Only then can one envisage the possibility of a new beginning. This seems as far off as it ever did.

This book certainly succeeds in challenging much of the received wisdom about its subject without ignoring its pathological characteristics. As the fruit of years of research, Shirlow's book will become a major source of scholarly reference. It provides not only a rich source of empirical material for those studying Ulster loyalism but also a pioneering framework of analysis.

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A POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE TWO IRELANDS: FROM PARTITION TO PEACE. By Brian M. Walker. Pp xiv, 254. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2012. No price given.

For many years Brian Walker has been a sane, fair-minded and humane advocate of political accommodation, respect for cultural differences and an acceptance of plural identities, within Northern Ireland and in the wider archipelago. He is also an impressively productive historian and political scientist, whose main publications, over more than three decades, have ranged from the compilation of data on Irish parliamentary elections during the union era, Ulster politics during the period 1868–86, and identity politics and public history in both parts of Ireland in the twentieth century.

The book under review revisits and, in parts, expands on several of the themes that have preoccupied Dr Walker in his most recent publications: cultural and political identities, the use and abuse of history in the construction and assertion of official 'national' identities in modern Ireland, the role of commemorations, rituals (state and communal) and myth-making in affirming such identities. Indeed, readers of Walker's earlier collections of essays, notably, *Dancing to history's tune* (1996) and *Past and present: history, identity and politics in Ireland* (2000), will be familiar with some of the central themes explored in this latest book. Here, however, commemorations, history and myth, and identity-construction (and deconstruction) are considered within the more ambitious framework of a commentary on the parallel and interlocking political histories of the two parts of Ireland since 1921.

The central thesis of the book is that with the partition settlement of 1921 two totalising, mutually exclusive and confrontational narratives of identity became established by majoritarian democrats in both jurisdictions – Catholic/nationalist in the Free State, Protestant/unionist in Northern Ireland. How the minority in each state reacted to, coped with or simply suffered the effective denial of legitimacy to their own historical traditions, symbols and cultural identity is carefully chronicled in separate chapters.

These 'identities', essentially ethno-religious constructs, served to provide ideological and political cohesion for the dominant majority in each of the two states, and reinforced each other's exclusivist claims. The first half of the book takes the story to 1960. By the 1960s, the author tells us, 'we can now see the beginning of change' (p. 110). The vital signs of change – of attitude and rhetoric – Walker locates in the statements of key political and community leaders, rather than in underlying economic or social forces. The challenges to the identity monoliths in both parts of Ireland would, of course, lead to the fracture of those monoliths, to protracted conflict and bloodshed in Northern Ireland and, eventually, to the new dispensation – more pluralist and accommodating versions of identity, reflected in a politics of shared responsibility for institutions of government within the north, with government and popular endorsement in Ireland and Britain.

The sustained comparison between north and south yields many sharp insights. For example, the decline of the Protestant population in the southern state still awaits a sustained historical investigation (going beyond current controversies on the turbulent 1919–23 period); and there is real value in Walker's careful comments, in several chapters, on the relative importance of '*Ne temere*' and of broader issues of cultural alienation in this particular story. The author firmly rejects any notion of Irish 'exceptionalism', and the commentary is punctuated by references to the European experience of majority/minority issues in national state-formation in the aftermath of the First World War. On the other hand, the comparative approach seems so intent on finding parallels that it occasionally strains interpretative plausibility: for example, the curious comparison (p. 57) between the prospects for government of the Nationalist party in Northern Ireland in the 1920s and of Fianna Fáil in the 1930s.

Moreover, the author might have explored further some important differences and contrasts between both states after 1921. The very different constitutional status and competences of the two states needed closer attention. Likewise, underlying patterns of economic and social change (changes in the structure of the economy and of employment, in education, social mobility, urbanisation and regional distinctions) within both parts of Ireland are generally accorded brief, if frequently perceptive, passing notice, where more systematic analysis might have enhanced the author's explanations for both the solidarity of majority identity politics in the decades to 1960 and the complex, but inexorable, process of fracture and dissolution of such essentialist moulds in more recent decades. Again, the ways in which different identities were constructed and expressed in popular culture receive relatively little attention (apart from a brief consideration of sport).

A reasonable rejoinder to these criticisms might be that were the author to have addressed socio-economic forces and issues of popular culture in detail, this would have been a different and longer book. Within its own terms of reference and its declared

objectives, this commentary, marked as it is by an admirable empathy with a range of historical traditions and political positions, makes a valuable contribution to the study of identity politics in twentieth-century Ireland.

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