

Deliberative democracy and government public relations in a deeply divided society: Exploring the perspectives of Government Information Officers in Northern Ireland

Ian Somerville and Charis Rice

Accepted manuscript PDF deposited in Coventry University's Repository

Original citation:

'Deliberative democracy and government public relations in a deeply divided society: Exploring the perspectives of Government Information Officers in Northern Ireland', in *International Public Relations: Perspectives from deeply divided societies*, ed. by Ian Somerville, Owen Hargie, Maureen Taylor and Margarit Toledano, pub 2016 (ISBN 9781138860131)

Publisher: Routledge

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

Chapter 5: ‘Deliberative democracy and government public relations in a deeply divided society: Exploring the perspectives of Government Information Officers in Northern Ireland.’

Ian Somerville and Charis Rice

Abstract

Northern Ireland since its establishment after the partition of Ireland in 1921 has been a deeply divided society and a region riven by periods of violent conflict, most notably the ‘Troubles’ (1968-1998). In recent years a peace process attempted to reconcile the societal divisions and, in respect to formal politics, the Good Friday Agreement (1998) produced a new constitutional settlement based on consociational governance in Northern Ireland. In Western European states some sort of majoritarian democratic system is the norm and thus most studies of government public relations (PR) and political communication by Western scholars focuses on majoritarian parliamentary or presidential government systems. The role of government communication specialists within mandatory coalitions has received little attention from scholars, despite the fact that consociationalism is increasingly prescribed as a solution to deeply divided conflict ridden societies across the world. Drawing on data from elite interviews this chapter analyses perspectives on government PR from Government Information Officers' (GIO) alongside that of the other key actors with whom they regularly interact in Northern Ireland’s government-media communicative sphere - ministerial Special Advisers (SpAds) and political journalists. The communicative interactions between these groups are discussed within broader debates about government public relations in democratic societies and in particular in relation to theoretical work on communication and deliberative democracy. We also assess how the comparatively unique consociational political system, designed to produce a functioning democratic government in a deeply divided society, impacts on government public relations in Northern Ireland’s public sphere. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on the role government PR could play in deploying ‘bridging rhetoric’ to help Northern Ireland move toward a more authentic deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy, public relations and the ‘public sphere’

Sanders (2009: 268) notes that studies of ‘government communication can hardly avoid discussion of normative issues, nor would it be desirable to do so if our research is to engage with issues that matter not only to the wider scientific community but also to policy makers and our fellow citizens’. Habermas' public sphere model (1962 [trans. 1989]), with

amendments and modifications (Habermas 1984), still serves as a normative vision in much political communication (Davis 2009a), media studies (Lunt and Livingstone 2013) and PR literature (Fairbanks *et al.*, 2007). Although enormously influential, Habermas' original concept was critiqued for several significant failings, notably his 'account of history', his 'simplistic political analysis' and 'his apparent blindness to the many varieties of exclusion (based on gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) endemic to the public discussions he so lauded' (Lunt and Livingstone. 2013: 3). Despite revising the notion of the public sphere in important ways to take account of these criticisms, it is clear that Habermas remains committed to producing a normative democratic theory which stresses transparent government communication as a necessary condition to successfully produce rational, informed and deliberative public discussion of government policies and actions. We agree that this is an important endeavor and concur with Garnham (2007: 203) that the notion of the public sphere remains in many ways a useful 'perspective from which to think about the problem of democracy in the modern world'.

However it is important to point out that we do diverge somewhat from a strict Habermasian approach in relation to democratic theory. Dryzek (2000, p. 1) notes that Habermas was quick to embrace and identify with the 'deliberative turn' in democratic theory which has resulted in the idea that 'the essence of democracy itself is now widely taken to be deliberation, as opposed to voting, interest aggregation, constitutional rights, or even self-government. The deliberative turn represents a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic, and engaged by competent citizens'. However it is also clear that 'deliberation' for Habermas involves imposing narrow limits on democratic discourse which should consist of purely rational exchanges; 'Participants in argumentation have to presuppose in general that the structure of their communication...excludes all force...except the force of the better argument' (Habermas, 1984 p. 25). In contrast, Dryzek (2000, p. 2) favours a position which would allow 'rhetoric', 'humour', 'emotion', and 'testimony or storytelling' as contributions to authentic deliberation insisting only on 'the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion.' Which rules out coercion in the form of 'manipulation', 'indoctrination', 'propaganda', 'deception', 'threats' etc.

While we subscribe to the view that the public sphere concept still 'serves theorists well as an ideal type – that is, as a construct against which different real-world approximations can be

evaluated' (Bennett and Entman 2001: 3) we largely share Dryzek's view that the communicative conditions for deliberative democracy articulated by Habermas and his followers are unnecessarily constraining. The public sphere model is a more fruitful paradigm for democracy if it is much more expansive in the kinds of communication it allows, while still adhering to the important criteria that deliberative discourses must demonstrate that they are concerned with the 'public interest' and that they are 'inclusive and reflexive' (Dryzek, 2000). These conditions are clearly of key importance in what Dryzek (2000) refers to as 'empowered' deliberative spaces such as legislatures. This point has been highlighted by Edwards' (2015) recent work on PR and deliberative democracy which notes that PR is an important and legitimate mechanism for the transmission of positions and preferences between 'empowered spaces' and 'public spaces' (including the media). Edwards (2015: 12) argues that 'In the context of deliberative systems, the effect of public relations on the quality of deliberation is most logically framed in terms of its effects on deliberative capacity', that is to say the degree to which PR can adhere to the conditions of 'generalizable interest' and 'genuine engagement'. The growth of public relations in governmental systems is irreversible and it has become a crucial 'part of the infrastructure of modern political communication' (McNair 2007: 337). It is therefore increasingly important to assess and interrogate its role in fostering or diminishing deliberative democracy.

Government public relations and the media

Relationships between the media and political actors are of central importance in contemporary democracies. Some scholars note that these relationships are characterised by contest and antagonism (see Lee, 1999; Wolfsfeld, 1997) with the media tending to be controlled or at least subordinate to powerful institutions who act as "primary definers" of the news (Hall, et al., 1978: 57). Some commentators emphasise reciprocity between government and media (Negrine, 2008) or note a relationship characterised by exchange and negotiation (Ericson, et al., 1989). Gans suggests a symbiotic relationship but notes; "Although it takes two to tango ... sources do the leading (1979: 116). Others have placed the emphasis more on how politics has become 'mediatized' in the sense that such is the influence of the mass media on political actors and political systems that they have adjusted to the demands of the media (Asp, 2002) or indeed that such is the nature of media saturation that political institutions are inseparable from it (Lilleker, 2008; Mazzoleni and Shulz, 2008). Gelders et al. (2007: 374) argue that political actors rely on the media because: 'the news media are *the* platform where the government establishes or loses its credibility ... the battle for the

public's trust increasingly takes place in the media rather than in the parliament' (italics in original).

Much recent media research has typically argued that the government communication process is affected by micro-level interactions between journalists and their government sources (Davis 2002; Falasca and Nord 2013). Davis (2009b) argues that how communicative power is exercised in contemporary societies is best understood through the concept of 'elite-elite relationships', where government and media elites effectively control and exchange information in a closed circuit. At the same time, and related to this point, research has also demonstrated a general point about all communications/PR work (Sriramesh and Vercic 2009) that relationships between journalists and government communicators may be strongly influenced by their immediate political, cultural and economic context (Laursen and Valentini 2013).

In the UK (and Northern Ireland), two distinct groups of communication professionals coexist, Government Information Officers (GIOs) and Ministerial Special Advisers (SpAds) who are personally appointed by a departmental minister. The role of the GIO is (at least theoretically) designed to be apolitical, in that they assist the government of whichever political persuasion in the areas of information management and media relations in an impartial civil servant capacity. The SpAd is *de facto* a temporary civil servant who is appointed by a government minister to assist him/her in a political capacity. In recent times UK research on government communication has raised concerns about the 'politicization' of the civil service and concomitantly that the neutral GIO is being undermined or supplanted by the partisan SpAd (Gaber, 2004; Negrine, 2008). Fawcett and Gay (2010:49) argue that: 'It's increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to formally divide the 'official' work of civil servants from the 'political' work of special advisers'.

Some scholars strongly link the rise of public relations work in government to the notion of 'spinning' information for political purposes (Andrews 2006; McNair 2007). According to this view government communicators frequently produce: 'information which, far from being rational and motivated by what is in the public interest, is partial, ideologically committed, and at times downright dishonest' (McNair 2007: 97). Gaber (2000) argues that there are essentially two categories of government PR efforts, 'above the line' communication and 'below the line' tactics or 'spin'. The 'above the line' category includes those activities that

would be considered routine, and that ‘would have caused an “old fashioned” civil service press officer no great difficulty’ (Gaber 2000, p. 508). These are: producing press releases; holding press conferences; using Ministerial speeches and answers to Parliamentary questions in the House of Commons to communicate information; and, ‘reacting to breaking news events’ (Gaber 2000, p. 509). ‘Below the line’ or ‘spin’ includes those activities which can at times be ethically questionable and, Gaber (2000, p. 508) suggests, are ‘usually covert and as much about strategy and tactics as about the imparting of information’. Such tactics include; ‘off the record’ briefings to handpicked journalists to set and drive the news agenda (ensuring that government receives coverage on its terms), ‘leaks’ to discredit political rivals inside one’s party or opponents outside it, ‘kite flying’ (to test reactions to a policy before a formal announcement) and ‘fire breaking’, planting a another story to deflect attention from a negative one about the government (Gaber, 2000; Somerville and Ramsey, 2012). Spin at its worst can involve blatant lies and manipulation; at its best it still involves various shades of political propaganda (Heibert, 2003).

Investigating what it is that government and media actors really do in their everyday professional roles is important because it can lead: “...to a necessary demystification on the one hand, while at the same time this might allow a first step towards reducing the much lamented *democratic deficit*” (Wodak 2011:25; italics in original). Davis echoes this noting that ‘to move critical debates about politics, communication and citizenship into new territory... means engaging with “actually existing democracies”, contemporary media environments, political actors and political processes’ (2009a: 294). This research responds to Davis’ call by examining the government-media communicative relationships in Northern Ireland’s developing post-conflict democracy.

Post-conflict Northern Ireland: Devolution and consociational governance

Bloomfield noted between 1969 and 1997, the conflict known as the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland claimed 3,585 lives and that over 50,000 people were injured. He pointed out that:

Some 3,600 deaths may not seem too calamitous when compared with the scale of the Holocaust, with the local fatalities in the First World War, or with the suffering in Bosnia or Rwanda or Cambodia. But all of this has to be considered against the small scale of Northern Ireland. If the UK as a whole with its population of some 58 million people, had experienced death pro rata, as compared with the 1.6 million population of Northern Ireland, there would have been a total of over 130,000 dead (Bloomfield 1998 p. 3).

We can extend this comparison further by noting that the 50,000 injured in Northern Ireland during the sectarian conflict is equivalent to 2 million if applied to the UK as a whole or just over 10 million if applied to the USA. Making such comparisons are only useful up to a point but they do illustrate the impact of the sectarian conflict on many of the citizens of Northern Ireland and the fact that recovery from 30 years of political violence is for many a slow and painful process (for a detailed account see Hargie and Dickson 2003). Stringer *et al* (2009 p. 241) note: ‘As Northern Ireland has moved slowly since the paramilitary ceasefires in 1994 from a conflict to a post-conflict region, the underlying problems of social segregation and political mistrust have left an uneasy peace’. Key reasons for this ‘uneasy peace’ is the fact that Northern Ireland remains a highly segregated society in which most people live, learn and worship, largely within sectarian groupings. In areas like public housing, 90 per cent is segregated along religious lines with the vast majority of Catholics and Protestants living in areas that are dominated by their own identity group (Hargie et al., 2015). Only 6.8 per cent of children attend integrated schools, with the remainder attending Protestant or Catholic schools and therefore have little opportunity to mix outside their ethnic group until they go to university or work (Somerville et al., 2011).

A key outcome of the Good Friday Agreement (10th April 1998), which formally brought to an end the violent conflict known as *The Troubles* in Northern Ireland, was the devolution of powers to a consociational (i.e. mandatory power-sharing) government. This constitutional settlement means that Northern Ireland’s political institutions operate in significantly different ways from the majoritarian electoral systems which characterize most Western democratic societies. Governance is by a broad based, devolved and power-sharing administration, with Executive power shared via party lists on the basis of a complex proportional representation mechanism based on the de Hondt system.ⁱ Between 1998 and 2007 Northern Ireland was characterized by breakdowns in relationships between the political parties in power, leading to a lack of political progress (Gormley-Heenan and Devine, 2010) and difficulties in presenting a centralized and unified position on policy (Fawcett, 2002). However since 2007’s *St Andrew’s Agreement* a complex but functioning consociational administration has governed Northern Ireland. The key tenets of consociational governance are: *grand coalitions* between the key groups are the norm; *mutual veto* is also typical so that a simple majority is never enough in decision making processes; and, *proportionality* is usual with representation based on population guaranteed in political

office, the civil service, the police etc., to ensure widespread confidence in emerging civic institutions (Lijphart 2008).

Consociationalism has been advocated as a democratic arrangement which can help reconcile and rebuild societies fragmented along religious, racial, or linguistic lines, particularly those which have recently experienced violent conflict (Lijphart 2008). It has emerged as a political system in deeply divided societies such as those in Bosnia, Switzerland, India, Macedonia, Lebanon, Belgium and Northern Ireland (Lemarchand 2007; Rice et al., 2015). While studies of government communication in traditional majoritarian political systems expand rapidly there has been limited research into the communicative relationships of government communicators and the groups they interact with in post-conflict, deeply divided and constitutionally complex societies such as Northern Ireland. The present study addresses this research gap.

Method

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to recruit individuals for semi-structured in-depth interviews who could provide data relevant to our research questions (Bryman, 2012; Tansey 2007). Our sample consisted of 9 senior GIOs (69% of the total), and 8 SpAds (42% of the total) and 16 political journalists, 33 interviewees in total. All GIOs interviewed held the rank of *Principal Information Officer* in the civil service and, as with the SpAds who participated, worked across a number of different government departments for all five coalition government partners. The journalists who participated were from the main press and broadcast organizations in Northern Ireland, and all were at section editor or overall editor level. Interview questions focused on probing participants on their daily work routines of producing and disseminating information on government, and their interactions with the other participant groups.

While our research focuses largely on GIO perspectives, our analysis and conclusions benefit from comparison with the thematic findings from all participants groups (Davis, 2009b). GIO responses are denoted by G1, G2, and so on; SpAd responses by S1, S2 and so on; and journalists responses by J1, J2 and so on. In our findings section below representative

quotations are italicised and have been edited (to remove repetitions, stutters and non-verbal sounds) for ease of understanding.

Interviewing elites in divided societies is a complex endeavor (McEvoy, 2006) and where possible questions were framed in a manner which avoided inciting political sensitivities or identity issues. All interviews lasted around sixty minutes, were conducted in the participants' workplaces, were audio recorded and later transcribed in full. Interviews were transcribed for analysis, which, in line with recommended interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) procedures, was inductive in nature with themes emerging from the narratives (Clarke, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). This involved the process of "close reading" wherein a detailed reading and re-reading of the text is conducted (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). The content was then coded to identify and delineate themes. The final thematic structure was agreed following detailed collaboration with the other author, who checked the transcripts to confirm themes and ensure that the selected quotes were reflective of the themes.

Our analysis of interview transcripts employed IPA which gives primacy to the perceptions of respondents, since the objective is to generate knowledge in relation to their lived experience of a phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007). It is a framework which has become a widely employed qualitative analysis system (Walker & Burgess, 2011) and is an approach which is especially relevant for research which focuses upon personal meaning and sense-making in relation to a specific context and with respondents who have similar experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA involves, "a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them" (Smith et al. 2009 p. 3). Through adopting an approach of empathic hermeneutics, the researcher attempts to garner insight into the meanings being communicated by respondents. To move beyond the surface level of respondent accounts, a critical hermeneutic can then be utilized to interpret and make sense of their narratives (Smith et al. 2009). While accepting the individual meanings allocated to events by individuals, IPA enables various perspectives about similar events to be compared. By combining and interpreting narratives, common themes emerge which can inform our overall understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Two broad themes emerged from our interviews with GIOs, SpAds and journalists: *changing communication roles and working relationships* in the new post-conflict political space; and, *the impact of the new devolved, consociational architecture* upon the communication of politics in Northern Ireland. We analyse these key

themes in the next two, strongly empirical, sections and then assess their significance in relation to building deliberative democracy in Northern Ireland's developing public sphere.

Government Information Officers: Changing roles and relationships

When asked about how they perceive their role most GIOs typically emphasised a public service ideal: *"we're here to ensure that people on the ground understand what government's doing...I enjoy working here because it's serving the public"* (G1). However when probed many also characterised the promotional aspect of their role, one noting: *"the role is to promote the department and its minister and the work that they do ...to get as much space for the good news and as little space for the bad news ... part of our job is to promote, you know, that [the government] is working"* (G4). Another emphasised this second point: *"it's part of our job to let it be seen that devolution's working"* (G3). This idea that there are two key promotional tasks is interesting and is what separates GIOs from SpAds who see the promotion of their minister as where their responsibility begins and ends: *"Everything that goes on around here, you know I am looking with one eye to, where does that leave the...minister's profile, where does that fit in with a communication strategy that we will have rolling forward"* (S6). When questioned about the role of the GIO, many journalists cast doubt on GIOs' claim to act in the 'public interest' and in fact generally characterise GIOs as concentrating instead on ministerial or departmental reputation management, one journalist said: *"their outlook has become more like a corporation than a public service, you know it's like they're PR chiefs for Shell Oil, rather than there to provide for us journalists, as representatives of the public...a public service"* (J15). Larsson (2002) in a study of local government in Sweden notes that journalists and political actors generally display a high level of trust towards each other. Journalists in our study accepted they depended on each other but usually emphasised that in their relationships with GIOs: *"I don't entirely trust him and he doesn't entirely trust me"* (J3). The views of GIOs' in our study tended to mirror the mild antagonism that journalists expressed and indeed they frequently complained about the poor standards of journalists. When invited to comment on any positive features of their dealings with journalists they usually framed the relationship in terms of instrumentality and reciprocity. One GIO noted: *"we need them to get our stories across...we need them to understand the issues and they need the hotline to us so that if they get a story at five to five, they want to go on the news at five, they can ring me and ask me X,Y,Z and I give them it"* (G1).

Responses from both GIOs and SpAds build a picture of a gradual reduction in the communication activities of GIOs and increasing control and responsibility being taken by the SpAd. For some GIOs this was a rather suffocating experience: *“now I’m speaking to him more than the wife, like you can’t breathe without [the SpAd], wanting to know what’s going on. So not only do you need to convince the minister, you need to convince the adviser”* (G5). In respect to day-to-day media relations the same GIO stated: *“every media enquiry we receive needs to go through the adviser...Nothing goes out without their approval”*. Another noted: *“Whatever he says goes, simple as that, I can’t over-rule him”* (G3). Some SpAds acknowledged that their role often constrained by GIOs one noting in his government department the GIO: *“may well say that fella tells me what to do, when to do it and how to do it”* (S2). Another SpAd, reflecting on the shift in power, said: *“I think they’re [GIOs] much more aware of the need to get out good messages than what was the case previously, they’re much more accountable obviously now...in the old system they didn’t have to work to advisers. That might be a sore point”* (S6).

Even though the UK’s *Special Adviser Code of Conduct*ⁱⁱ explicitly prohibits them from ‘managing’ or ‘directing’ civil servants (Gay, 2010), it seems that many GIOs have come to accept that there is little they can do to challenge the power of SpAds. Indeed some have attempted to rationalize this new organizational reality, one GIO explained: *“the Special Adviser will have the mind of the minister better than any other civil servant right. So, a Special Adviser can give the press officer like me really good advice and say they’ll run with that, he’ll not go with that”* (G8). It is debateable whether this kind of interaction illustrates ‘advice’, indeed arguably it fits rather well with Mumby’s (1988) analysis of how organizational power works. Mumby notes: *“A particular group’s interests will be best served if those interests become part of the taken-for-granted social reality that structures organizational life. Once these interests become part of the organizational structure, then that structure simultaneously mediates in and reproduces those interests”* (Mumby, 1988:67). Thus despite a strict Code of Conduct governing these relationships the all-pervasive influence of SpAds over communicative activities, by virtue of the associative power which they accrue from their minister (Fawcett and Gay, 2010), means GIOs reluctantly acquiesce to the new reality and/or justify it to themselves in the manner illustrated above.

A number of GIO participants complained that SpAds sometimes liaised ‘off the record’ with journalists, providing exclusive or ‘better’ information to that of the GIO, for party political

gain even when this clashed with departmental priorities. According to GIOs, this means they appear as a less valuable source to journalists which undermines their position. This situation often causes GIOs to feel frustrated and powerless in their role. A GIO articulated a common complaint:

“they would leak an awful lot of stuff that they shouldn’t really leak at all. So, it’s unhelpful when they do speak to journalists because I’m in one room trying to sell something and he’s in a room just over there talking to the same journalist about something else, it makes us look...moronic...but they all do it...it’s just something we’re faced with” (G5).

Some commentators suggest that 'leaking' has become a common means of disseminating information in democratic governments (Flynn, 2006). Indeed interviewees from all three participant groups in this study commented that leaking was a frequent way of disseminating information from the government because it avoided the protracted process of the agreed central government communication mechanism, the Executive Information System (EIS), which requires information to be politically neutral and often to have cross-departmental/party agreement. It is of course a key way of communicating quickly to one’s advantage (which frequently involves undermining rival parties' positions) and belongs in the category which Gaber (2000) defines as ‘below the line’ spin. The GIO perception that SpAds are supplanting them as the primary departmental communicators is recognised by journalists who speak of SpAds as more productive sources than GIOs. Typical comments were: *“when you’re speaking to the Special Adviser you know you’re speaking to the minister...they can be more helpful in sort of steering you...to stories ... they’ll talk to you about what’s really going on” (J11)*. In this sense these findings diverge somewhat from research elsewhere, for example Gaber’s work on the UK Westminster system finds that: “Journalists speak with senior press officers on much the same basis as they speak with special advisers” (2004: 368). A journalist commenting on this situation noted that the Executive Information Service (EIS): *“does the basic press releases and the road safety campaigns ... all that sort of stuff, but, the really big shouts, the really big decisions are invariably taken by the parties [i.e. the SpAd]” (J16)*. This results in SpAds and party press officers increasingly emerging as the preferred point of contact for the media. In this sense our results echo Meyer’s (1999) findings in his study of the European Union’s communication practices which found that a significant problem for that polity’s public communication and media relations was the lack of political cohesion and the inability for communicators to manage competing political agendas.

There seems to be a distinction emerging in government news management in Northern Ireland between important 'political' news and less important 'government' news and all of the actors in this communication environment recognise who is responsible for disseminating the different types of news. One way of thinking about this is to characterise it as SpAds controlling the 'below the line' (Gaber, 2000) communication and the important 'good news' stories, leaving GIOs to engage in the more mundane 'above the line' government communication. It does run the risk of producing a situation where the 'everyday' functioning of government is not actually 'news', with higher news value attached to controversial issues and political conflict, a situation hardly unique to Northern Ireland, but nevertheless clearly problematic for emerging democratic institutions and for the provision of the transparent policy information required for authentic deliberation (Flinders and Kelso, 2011; Wodak, 2011). It can also perhaps be viewed as a reflection of the 'mediatization' of politics in Northern Ireland at least in the partial sense identified by Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) who suggest that: 'political institutions increasingly are dependent on and shaped by mass media but nevertheless remain in control of political processes and functions' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999:247). The concern with media representation by the parties which make up the coalition government is clearly the main reason why SpAds are constantly trying to exert their control over what they, and their ministerial boss, regard as the most important aspects of information and communication management. Several journalists commented on the increasing involvement SpAds have in all aspects of departmental communication and the decline of GIO control in this area. For some journalists this was all part of the deliberate attempts to undermine civil servants by the new political elites, one suggesting that GIOs: "*at the highest level of the government are absolutely undermined...not empowered to tell us what's going on, because they [ministers] use their own press officers to selectively leak to chosen journalists. Very unhealthy situation*" (J14). While it is clear that organisational cultures "do not arise spontaneously and consensually, but are often the product of certain power distributions" (Mumby, 1988: 56), and that this is manifestly the case in Northern Ireland's new political institutions, it is also arguable that difficulties in adapting their professional ideology has played a role in the GIOs' decline as key government sources. The fear of being charged with showing any kind of favouritism to one or other side of the political/cultural/religious divide, is in many ways as significant as the power SpAds hold over GIOs, when it comes to restricting their work as media sources. Many GIOs have interpreted this 'impartial role' to mean that they work within their departmental 'silo'

(Wilford, 2007) and focus on managing it (and the minister's) reputation the best they can within the scope they are allowed by the SpAd.

All this should however not obscure the fact that our research indicates that the first priority of the SpAd and consequently the government department's communication efforts is how the minister will appear to best advantage in the media and just as importantly how to ensure this is to the detriment of rival ministers in the power sharing government. We will explore this further in the next section.

The consociational political architecture and 'government' communication

When asked about working in a power-sharing government administration made up of political parties who were fundamentally opposed to each other across a number of key issues, a typical GIO response was: *"as a civil servant, I am not political and it doesn't matter who my minister is, I'm impartial"* (G1). Journalists we interviewed complained that GIOs tended to be 'overly bureaucratic' and were fond of citing the 'strict guidelines' under which they worked. For journalists this meant that GIOs were viewed as: *"barriers to information flows instead of, helping them"* (J7). GIOs claimed they had to adhere to political neutrality at all times, one noting: *"it's not worth your job to step over it at any point"* (G9). They also frequently raised the point that their job was especially difficult in a five party mandatory coalition government and acknowledged that this may make it appear at times that they are a 'closed' civil service which does not interact enough with journalists. GIOs frequently brought up the dramatic changes that had occurred in governance and government communication since the establishment of a devolved legislature in Northern Ireland. One noted:

"for many years people thought it was the civil service who ran the country and it probably was...because you know, we had direct rule [British government] ministers who literally were only here, maybe a couple of half days a week. So they were relying so much on civil servants to keep them right, that they didn't give full scrutiny to things...there was an amazing difference, going from direct rule ministers, to locally elected ministers who were here, seven days a week, twenty four hours a day, reading the local papers, watching the local news" (G3).

Many journalists also commented on the detrimental impact of Northern Ireland's new institutional structures on the power of GIOs: *"one of the big differences that we've seen with*

devolution, with local parties taking over and because of the nature of the government that we have, is that...this is a politically driven government, where as previously it was, a kind of administration that was largely driven by the civil service" (J7). As noted above, a result of this is that SpAds, with more 'inside' knowledge on political issues, are often journalists' preferred sources.

In respect to the peculiarities which emerge in government administration within the consociational architecture bequeathed by the Good Friday Agreement, GIOs raised a number of issues which explicitly or implicitly relate to this structure. For example many expressed bemusement at the political infighting between Ministers who are supposed to be members of the same government: *"Most of the criticism of government policy ... has come from government ministers...it's very odd...if you're responding to criticism from a government minister you know you're quite often hamstrung in what you can say"* (G1). G1 further noted *"there are arguments in every government, but in most governments they go on behind closed doors. In here, quite often, just because of the nature of it, it will happen in public"*. This participant outlined how he coped with this situation:

"You have to remember that the Government, it may not appear to be a unified body but...I operate as if it's a unified body, the ministers may not, so it can be difficult in that regard...it used to be that we knew who the government was here and who the opposition was, the government was Direct Rule [British Government] and the opposition was the local parties. Now, the government is the opposition" (G1).

Thus traditional ideas about collective government responsibility (including in coalition administrations) for policy decisions do not necessarily apply in Northern Ireland's power-sharing structure which includes parties across the political spectrum. Some GIOs pointed to how other devolved UK administrations have resolved the problem of coalition government while at the same time drawing attention to the limitations combining devolution with consociationalism had produced. One noted:

"the Scottish government, have a central team that look after all the Scottish government. I don't think that would work here...The politics isn't right for that to work here...you could argue that you should have one central press office that looks after all government communications but...it is a cumbersome organisation, but the Assembly is cumbersome, so it's probably a right fit for what it is" (G7)

SpAds also recognized the difficulties which GIOs encountered in presenting any sort of unified government communication. When questioned about the changes in government communication since the establishment of consociational government, one SpAd stated that the new political institutions discourage collective government responsibility and encourage competition between ministers from rival parties. They also acknowledged that this can impact both on the autonomy of GIOs, and their ability to develop a common government information dissemination strategy. One SpAd observed: *"the will of the ministers will always over-rule this central [government communication] mechanism, which means that you could in any one day have a situation where government could be making three or four very important announcements and they all clash...a lot of them [ministers] try and get the best piece of PR for themselves...rather than looking at the Executive as a whole"* (S6). Another SpAd agreed: *"you get this silo mentality where people are doing separate things... it is very difficult because it's almost a replication of the political structure that sits above it...[GIOs] don't at this stage have the power to be able to say to one minister or another no you can't do it, simply because we're built around a coalition government"* (S4).

Interestingly however, SpAds don't seem to recognise the GIO view that the political opposition is actually inside the government, instead, and despite the fact that they are very concerned to court the media they also complain that the media frequently take on the role of political opposition *"the press here, because there's no formal opposition at Stormont probably take the view that, they effectively are the opposition... most of them are just generally hostile here"* (S4). For their part, many journalists regard the current phase in the development of democratic politics in Northern Ireland as at best a necessary stage along the path to a more majoritarian political system. One stated: *"conventional politics is still in a very infant stage here and I would envisage it would change and mature and eventually we will have government and opposition, and that will be the biggest change and the best thing that can happen"* (J11). GIOs expressed the concern that the negative media coverage in respect to politics and politicians was problematic for Northern Ireland's nascent democracy. A typical view was:

"the media, don't seem to take their responsibility in a democratic society seriously...in order for a democracy to work people have to vote, and people have to vote for the people they think are going to represent them as best they can, so they might base that one decision every four years on something that they read, and if they read something that is over-sensationalized, unfair or untrue, that could be the

difference in that person voting for a different party, not placing their vote at all”
(G2).

Interestingly in their book on how journalism has developed in Northern Ireland since the peace process McLaughlin and Baker (2010) argue that journalists, on the whole, are not adhering to their responsibility to be *critical enough* of the political elites.

It could be argued that underpinning the GIO complaint about the media is a restatement of the classic liberal democratic view that devising the right constitutional arrangements will allow open undistorted communication flows and result in rational deliberative democracy.

As Dryzek notes:

“Liberals are keen to devise constitutional and legal arrangements that will counteract distortion: bills of rights, freely-elected legislatures, and so forth... What liberals fail to recognise is that getting constitutions and laws right is only half the battle. They fail to recognise that extra-constitutional agents of distortion that can't easily be counteracted through such means” (Dryzek, 2000, p. 21).

In Northern Ireland these extra-constitutional agents include dominant discourses and ideologies intertwined with structural socio-cultural and ethnic identity forces. This is an issue which we will discuss in more detail below but it is worth noting that in consociational systems government communication is frequently tied to the balancing act that is a feature of decision making in this arrangement. As one journalist succinctly put it: *“in our system of government, quite often decisions will be made not on the basis of policy but probably on the basis of a trade-off between the different power blocs...The job of the department is to try and justify what's happened on the basis of policy”* (J7). One other point should be noted in regard to communication management within Northern Ireland's complex coalition government which is made up of political parties which are ideologically and politically (in respect to constitutional aspirations) opposed to each other. It may be that the consociational architecture in Northern Ireland has opened up a space for the Special Adviser role and reach which is more multifaceted than in other Westminster style polities. As one SpAd interviewee stated: "obviously in a five party coalition, when there's cross-departmental issues, where there's areas of controversy, where there's blockages, special advisers are the people that are sent in to try and resolve those issues" (S4). It must be noted, however, that despite their eagerness to embrace this role, up to now SpAds have had little success in resolving the

major difficulties besetting the governing administration in Northern Ireland. Other studies of coalition government (Connaughton 2010; Fawcett and Gay 2010; Paun, 2011) have identified SpAds playing a highly effective communications role across coalition governments. Eichbaum and Shaw note: “Clearly, in some jurisdictions, the constitutional context, and specifically a transition to multi-party Government, opens up institutional spaces that...political staff in particular, may be required to fill” (2010:199).

Discussion and conclusion: Deliberative democracy in Northern Ireland?

With the establishment of a devolved governing administration in Northern Ireland – and this is true to an extent in the other devolved UK national regions (Scotland and Wales) - significant power has moved from civil servants, to locally elected ministers and their support network (Knox, 2010). One important effect of the devolution in Northern Ireland has been that the pre-devolution ‘dominant coalition’ (Berger, 2009) in respect to government communication, was overturned to the detriment of GIOs. In this respect it is important to recognise that Northern Ireland mirrors other more stable and ‘traditional’ (i.e. majoritarian) democratic societies where the increased power and influence of SpAds has been noted within political systems (Blick, 2004; King, 2003). Indeed our results most certainly also reflect broader changes in the UK political system which has resulted in the curtailing of civil servant autonomy and control over government communication shifting to ministerial SpAds (Winstone, 2003). However, it is also the case that the deeply divided post-conflict context and the relatively unique constitutional political architecture of Northern Ireland’s democratic institutions produce some significant findings which diverge from the work on government communication in ‘traditional’ polities. Northern Ireland has a decentralized governance structure which has rendered attempts to impose any notion of collective cabinet responsibility futile. One result is that there is no recognisable *government* communication strategy. Northern Ireland’s governing coalition is currently made up of what have been described as ‘ethnic tribune parties’ (Mitchell et al. 2009), who prioritise defending group identities, because it is in their electoral self-interest to maintain distinct identity blocs. A key impact of this consociationalism has been to turn government departments into *de facto* party ‘fiefdoms’ (Wilford 2007) ruled by the minister and his/her SpAds. Hayward (2013) notes how the peace agreement and consociational political institutions in Northern Ireland actually did lead to new opportunities for democratic political confrontation and dialogue, but at the same time also consolidated identity cleavages and thus incentivised power politics. She argues:

‘although benefitting from the devolved, stable and carefully balanced governance made possible by consociationalism, Northern Ireland’s peace process is imbued with a sense of underlying lack of resolution. And as a result of this uncertainty, short-term political capital is gained within competing blocs at the expense of long-term social change in the common interest’ (Hayward 2013, p. 11).

So while consociationalism does produce real political power-sharing, as Tonge (2014: 194) observes, the system: ‘when unaccompanied by a longer-term plan for societal integration, does not offer the promise of movement towards reconciliation, instead leading to the restatement of difference’.

There is increasing evidence that the institutionalized antagonism and confrontational communication culture has reduced public faith in political institutions. A recent Public Engagement Survey found that only 22% were ‘satisfied’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ with the Northern Ireland government and 49% felt they had ‘no influence’ on decision making in Northern Ireland, with 40% saying they had ‘very little influence’ (Ipsos MORI, 2010ⁱⁱⁱ). A Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT 2013)^{iv} survey produced almost identical results revealing feelings of pessimism and powerlessness amongst many voters in respect to the influence that they have over decisions that affect them and this sense was particularly acute among young people and among those with no religious denomination. Yet, if measured in terms of voter turnout it would seem that public interest in politics remains relatively high in Northern Ireland compared to elsewhere in the UK and Europe (52% in the May 2014 elections, compared to the EU average of 43% - see Hayward, 2013). However when the reasons for voting are probed more deeply it is clear that many electors cast their vote out of concern that the ‘other side’ may be elected. Hayward (2013) notes that all recent public surveys reveal Northern Ireland to be a society with generally low levels of perceived influence in decision-making at any level and a society in which those who are often identified as holding the key to a more peaceful future – younger people and those who are free from any one religious denomination – are the people who have the strongest feelings of alienation and pessimism. Galtung (1996), the central contemporary scholar of peace studies, makes an important distinction between ‘negative peace’ and ‘positive peace’. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence, for example, when a ceasefire is agreed. It is ‘negative’ because something undesirable has stopped happening, violence has ceased, but this is not the same as positive peace. Positive peace, Galtung notes, involves the restoration

of relationships through forms of reconciliation, the creation of systems that serve the needs of the whole society and the resolution of conflict in a constructive way. Positive peace does not mean the absence of all conflict rather it means the absence of violence or the threat of violence as a means of engaging in conflict. A truly peaceful society exists where people manage their conflict positively, interact non-violently and respect the legitimate needs and interest of all. The main challenge for Northern Ireland's political, media and civil society actors is how to move forward toward a more peaceful society and a more deliberative democracy where confrontation, debate and dialogue are all welcome in both public and empowered (legislative) communicative spaces, but coercion, deception and threat are absent.

Research on government communication, Sanders argues, should be research: 'that translates into policy recommendations about structures, resources, processes and outcomes, not driven by managerial imperatives but by normative concerns about the quality of civic life' (2011: 268). It is clear that developing the concept of democratic deliberation in contexts where political antagonisms have violently shattered the social fabric is a difficult task but it is a task which must be embraced if a more authentic, transparent and accountable democracy is to develop in Northern Ireland. Hayward (2013) argues that institutional reform is required that will allow for a truly deliberative overhaul of the country's political life. This we suggest is partially true but equally important is reform of the communicative culture and key to this, is a transformation in the nature of the political rhetoric in Northern Ireland's public sphere and political institutions. Dryzek (2010) distinguishes between *bonding* and *bridging*^v political rhetoric in societies where deep divisions exist. Bonding rhetoric is often deployed in ethnically divided democracies and has a tendency 'to deepen divisions with outgroups ... to move groups to extremes' (Dryzek 2010: 238). In contrast Dryzek suggests: 'bridging rhetoric takes seriously the outlooks of an intended audience that is different from the speaker – and from the kind of people or discourses the speaker represents' (2010: 328). In order to reach across deep societal divisions, Dryzek (2009: 1391) recommends: 'interactive forums composed of individuals from different blocks, at a distance from contests about the construction of sovereign authority, concerned more with particular needs and concrete problems'. In Northern Ireland such forums do exist, indeed they were a requirement of the devolving of certain powers from the UK government level. Forums such as the *District Policing Partnerships* are required to have cross-community representation in order to agree decisions about local policing policy. They have been an important ground level forum for deliberation and participation where local representatives have been engaged in the hard work

of developing bridging rhetoric to reach across to audiences whose dispositions are different to their own in order to deliver successful community policing.

Northern Ireland's legislature, wherein much of the sovereign power resides, has a great deal to learn from such forums about the kind of communication required to foster a more deliberative democratic approach. Indeed it may be that the political elites are slowly learning such lessons. On 17 November 2015 the political parties came together to announce *A Fresh Start – The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan: An agreement to consolidate the peace, secure stability, enable progress and offer hope*^{vi}. A key clause of the agreement noted:

“It is important that civic voices are heard and civic views are considered in relation to key social, cultural and economic issues. A new engagement model could be achieved, by June 2016, through the establishment of a compact civic advisory panel which would meet regularly to consider key social, cultural and economic issues and to advise the NI Executive.”

This is an encouraging development and perhaps is the beginning of institutional changes which will broaden the deliberative democracy process in Northern Ireland. However, as our study has demonstrated, in common with all contemporary representative democracies, government communication in Northern Ireland: ‘passes through various expert communicators who package exchanges and discussions for audiences who have little opportunity to contribute’ (Bohman, 2012 p. 48). This is inescapable in representative mass democracy, but the question of what the responsibilities of these publically funded ‘expert communicators’ are to the public they serve is also inescapable. Political public relations does not necessarily have to foster the ‘mutual understanding’ and ‘two-way communication’ beloved of some PR models (see Cutlip *et al*, 2000 in the Introductory chapter to this book), but rather it should be committed to the ‘generalizable interest’, to fostering ‘genuine engagement’ and to the recognition that it is legitimate to hold partisan positions while at the same time recognising that opposing voices are treated ‘as adversaries rather than antagonists’ (Edwards, 2015; 13). In our study it is the GIO participants who speak most clearly of a strong sense of responsibility to inform citizens on government matters and even in facilitating a transition to a shared society. At this crucial stage in the development of its democratic institutions, it is imperative that both GIOs and SpAds build productive working relationships with each other (and with the media) in order to facilitate a post-conflict era of

transparent, accountable and participative politics in Northern Ireland. In our view this can only begin to be achieved if these relationships are built on strict adherence to *the Civil Service Code* and Northern Ireland's *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers* (2015)^{vii}, which prohibits SpAd interference in the work of GIOs. A commitment to build an authentic, deliberative and inclusive democracy in Northern Ireland, with bridging communication at the core, will enable the society to continue its path away from the violence and division of the 'Troubles'.

References

Bennett, W.L. and Entman, R.M. (2001) 'Introduction'. In: Bennett, W.L. and Entman, R.M. (eds.) *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, (pp. 1-29). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berger, B.K. (2009) 'Power Over, Power With, and Power to Relations: Critical Reflections on Public Relations, the Dominant Coalition, and Activism.' *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17 (1), 5-28.

Bohman, J. (2012). 'Representation in the deliberative system'. In J. Parkinson & J. Mansbridge (Eds.), *Deliberative systems: Deliberative democracy at the large scale* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press (pp. 72–94).

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: OUP.

Davis, A. (2002) *Public Relations Democracy: Public Relations, Politics and the Mass Media in Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Davis, A. (2009a) 'Evaluating Communication in the British Parliamentary Public Sphere', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 11(2), 280-297.

Davis, A. (2009b) 'Journalist-Source Relations, Mediated Reflexivity and the Politics of Politics', *Journalism Studies*, 10(2), 204-219.

Dryzek, J.S. (2000) *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dryzek, J.S. (2009) 'Democratization as Deliberative Capacity Building' *Comparative Political Studies*, 42 (11), 1379-1402.

Dryzek, J.S. (2010) 'Rhetoric in Democracy: A Systemic Appreciation' *Political Theory*, 38 (3):319 – 339.

Edwards, L. (2015) 'The Role of Public Relations in Deliberative Systems' *Journal of Communication*. First published online 29th December 2015. DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12199

Evans, J. and Tonge, J. (2009) 'Social class and party choice in Northern Ireland's ethnic blocs'. *West European Politics*, 32 (5), 1012-30.

Fairbanks, J., Plowman, K.D. and Rawlins, B.L. (2007) 'Transparency in government communication'. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 7 (1):23-37.

Falasca, K. and Nord, L. (2013) 'Structures, strategies and spin: Government communication in Sweden'. In: Sanders, K. and Canel, M.J. (eds.) *Government Communication: Cases and challenges* (pp.27-44). London: Bloomsbury.

Fawcett, L. (2002) 'Who's Setting the Postdevolution Agenda in Northern Ireland?' *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 7(4), 14-33.

Fawcett, P. and Gay, O. (2010). 'The United Kingdom'. In C. Eichbaum and R. Shaw (Eds.), *Partisan Appointees and Public Servants: An International Analysis of the Role of the Political Adviser* (pp. 24-63). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Flinders, M. and Kelso, A. (2011) 'Mind the Gap: Political Analysis, Public Expectations and the Parliamentary Decline Thesis'. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 13 (2):249-268.

Flynn, K. (2006) 'Covert Disclosures: Unauthorized leaking, public officials and the public sphere', *Journalism Studies*, 7(2), 256-273.

Gaber, I. (2000) 'Government by spin: an analysis of the process'. *Media, Culture & Society*, 22 (4): 507-518.

Gaber, I. (2004) 'Alastair Campbell, exit stage left: Do the 'Phillis' recommendations represent a new chapter in political communications or is it 'business as usual'?' *Journal of Public Affairs*, 4 (4):365-373.

Gans, H.J. (1979) *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Garnham, N. (2007) 'Habermas and the public sphere', *Global Media and Communication*, 3(2):201-214.

Galtung J., (1996) *Peace By Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization*. London: Sage.

Gelders, D., De Cock, R., Neijens, P. and Roe, K. (2007) 'Government communication about policy intentions: Unwanted propaganda or democratic inevitability? Surveys among government communication professionals and journalists in Belgium and the Netherlands', *Communications*, 32 (3), 363-377.

Gormley-Heenan, C. and Devine, P. (2010) 'The "Us" in Trust: Who Trusts Northern Ireland's Political Institutions and Actors?' *Government and Opposition*, 45 (2), 143-165.

Gregory, A. (2012) 'UK Government communications: Full circle in the 21st century?' *Public Relations Review*, 38, 367-375.

Habermas, J. (1962) (1989 trans. Burger, T. and Lawrence, F.) *The structural transformation of the public sphere: an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Hargie, O., and Dickson, D. (eds.) (2003) *Researching the troubles: social science perspectives on the Northern Ireland conflict*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing.

Hargie, O.D.W. Somerville, I. and Mitchell, D. (2015) *Social Exclusion and Sport in Northern Ireland*. Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. University of Ulster.

Hayward, K. (2013) 'Deliberative Democracy in Northern Ireland: Opportunities and Challenges for Consensus in a Consociational System' in *Democratic Deliberation in Deeply Divided Societies: From Conflict to Common Ground*, E. Ugarriza and D, Caluwaerts, D. (Eds.), London: Routledge, pp. 11-34

Hueglin, T. O. (2003). Majoritarianism - Consociationalism. In R. Axtmann, (Ed.) *Understanding Democratic Politics: An Introduction* (pp.61-71). London: Sage Publications Ltd.

King, S. (2003). *Regulating the Behaviour of Ministers, Special Advisers and Civil Servants*. London: The Constitution Unit (UCL). Available from: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/spp/publications/unit-publications/102.pdf> [Accessed 30th January, 2012].

Knox, C. (2010). *Devolution and the governance of Northern Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Langdrige, D. (2007). *Phenomenological psychology: theory, research and method*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Larsson, L.O. (2002) 'Journalists and Politicians: a relationship requiring manoeuvring space', *Journalism Studies*, 3(1), 21-33.

Laursen, B. and Valentini, C. (2013) 'Media relations in the Council of the European Union: insights into the Council press officers professional practices', *Journal of Public Affairs*, 13(3), 230-238.

Lee, M. (1999) 'Reporters and bureaucrats: Public relations counter-strategies by public administrators in an era of media disinterest in government.' *Public Relations Review*, 25 (4): 451-463.

Lemarchand, R., (2007) 'Consociationalism and Power Sharing in Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo'. *African Affairs*, 106 (422): 1-20.

Lijphart, A. (2008). *Thinking About Democracy: Power sharing and majority rule in theory and practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

Lunt, P. and Livingstone, S. (2013) 'Media studies' fascination with the concept of the public sphere: critical reflections and emerging debates', *Media, Culture and Society*, 35(1), 87-96.

McEvoy, J. (2006) 'Elite Interviewing in a Divided Society: Lessons from Northern Ireland'. *Politics*, 26 (3):184-191.

McLaughlin, G. and Baker, S. (2010) *The propaganda of peace: the role of media and culture in the Northern Ireland peace process*. Bristol: Intellect.

McNair, B. (2007). 'Theories of government communication and trends in the UK'. In S. Young (Ed.), *Government Communication In Australia* (pp. 93-109). New York: Cambridge University Press.

McNair, B., (2007) 'PR must die: spin, anti-spin and political public relations in the UK, 1997–2004' *Journalism Studies*

Meyer, C. (1999) 'Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37(4), 617-639.

Mitchell, P. Evans, G. and O'Leary, B. (2009) 'Extremist outbidding in ethnic party systems is not inevitable: tribune parties in Northern Ireland', *Political Studies*, 57 (2): 397-421.

Mumby, D.K. (1988). *Communication And Power In Organizations: Discourse, Ideology And Domination*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Negrine, R. (2008). *The transformation of political communication: continuities and changes in media and politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Phillis Review (2004) Available from: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldselect/ldcomuni/7/704.htm> [Accessed 17th May, 2013].

Rice, C., Somerville, I. and Wilson, J. (2015) 'Democratic Communication and the Role of Special Advisers in Northern Ireland's Consociational Government', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 38(1), 4-14.

Smith J., Flowers P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage.

Somerville, I., Purcell, A. and Morrison, F. (2011) 'Public relations education in a divided society: PR, terrorism and critical pedagogy in post-conflict Northern Ireland', *Public Relations Review*, 37(5), pp. 548-555.

Somerville, I. and Kirby, S. (2012) 'Public relations and the Northern Ireland peace process: Dissemination, reconciliation and the 'Good Friday Agreement' referendum campaign', *Journal of Public Relations Inquiry*, 1(3): 231-255.

Tansey, O. (2007) 'Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-probability Sampling'. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 40 (4):765-772.

Taylor, M. (2000) 'Media Relations in Bosnia: A Role for Public Relations in Building Civil Society', *Public Relations Review*, 26 (1), 1-14.

Tonge, J. (2014) *Comparative Peace Processes*. Cambridge: Polity.

Wilford, R. (2007) 'Inside Stormont: The Assembly and the Executive'. In: P. Carmichael, C. Knox, and R. Osborne (eds.) *Devolution and Constitutional Change in Northern Ireland*, (pp. 167-185) Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Winstone, R. (2003) 'Whither the Civil Service? – *House of Commons* Library research paper 03/49'. Available from: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp2003/rp03-049.pdf> [Accessed 17th May, 2013].

Wodak, R. (2011). *The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

Wolfsfeld, G. (1997). *Media and political conflict: news from the Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ⁱ See <http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/io/summary/d'hondt.htm>. [Accessed 14th June, 2015]

ⁱⁱ Cabinet Office (2015) *Code of Conduct for Special Advisers*. London: Cabinet Office. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/468340/CODE_OF_CONDUCT_FOR_SPECIAL_ADVISERS_-_15_OCTOBER_2015_FINAL.pdf [Accessed 25th July, 2015].

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/Documents/RaISe/Publications/2010/General/15710.pdf> [Accessed 13th December 2015]

^{iv} http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013/Political_Attitudes/index.html [Accessed 13th December 2015]

^v Dryzek adapts Robert Putnam's terminology from his study of social capital.

^{vi} <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/a-fresh-start-stormont-agreement.pdf> [Accessed 8th January]

^{vii} <https://www.dfpni.gov.uk/articles/special-advisers>