IMAGINARY BORDERS AND BORDERED IMAGINARIES

BREXIT, NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE, AND REBORDERING PROCESSES IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S BORDER REGION

Béibhin Gallagher

6072291

Utrecht University

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Dr Jolle Demmers

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ABSTRACT

This thesis outlines how the Brexit referendum in the UK has brought a new political uncertainty to Northern Ireland, that is impacting how communities relate to each other and how identity itself is perceived. This early-stage analysis is empirically significant given the ongoing crisis in the Brexit negotiations, and though it is not attempting to hypothesise for an as yet undefined future, this thesis lays out how Brexit related uncertainty is affecting shifts in community relations and perceptions of identity right now, specifically in the post-conflict border region of Northern Ireland. Through incorporating ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Northern Ireland and using an analytical frame devised from the school of border studies, alongside Schröder and Schmidt's conceptualisation of violent imaginaries, this thesis engages with how processes of rebordering that have been set into motion by Brexit, on both the physical and social-identity level, must be taken alongside the historical narratives that perpetuate, and are perpetuated by, them, in order to be understood properly. This thesis goes on to conclude how, through these narratives, rebordering processes have catalysed what can already be seen as a shift in how the two traditional communities in Northern Ireland relate to each other and how notions of identity of the self, and other, are perceived.

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On that note – final thank you to Niall for always making me feel at home, across borders and boundaries alike.

Human beings suffer

They torture one another,

They get hurt and get hard.

No poem or play or song

Can fully right a wrong

Inflicted and endured.

The innocent in *gaols*

Beat on their bars together.

A hunger-striker's father

Stands in the graveyard dumb.

The police widow in veils

Faints at the funeral home.

History says, "*Don't hope*
On this side of the grave…"

But then, once in a lifetime

The longed-for tidal wave

Of justice can rise up,

And hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change

On the far side of revenge.

Believe that a further shore

Is reachable from here.

Believe in miracles

And cures and healing wells.

-

Call miracle self-healing:

The utter, self-revealing

Double-take of feeling.

If there's fire on the mountain

Or lightning and storm

And a god speaks from the sky

That means someone is hearing

The outcry and the birth-cry

Of new life at its term.

- Seamus Heaney. "The Cure of Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes", 1991.

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1. INTRODUCTION

15 March 2018

I took my first spin around true unionist land the other day. It was more or less an accident, and I'd actually been there before. Just had not really put two and two together in my head. I was dropping Niall to Johno's house and he informed me that in the summer, during the marching season, *the whole area would be fully decked out with flags and bunting. I peered out my fogged up windscreen and, lo and behold, there was evidence of it already. Faded kerbstones painted in Union Jacks, tattered, ratty flags hanging from lamp-posts, dripping from the rain. This was somewhat uncharted territory for me in Armagh. Me, who had, somewhat naively, last week noted that there was not so much a visibility of identity here in Armagh, not like in big, divided Belfast. I was just not really using my eyes. I also had not been in any estates yet.*

But, like I said, when I had been in Johno's house before, we had walked another way and the signs and signifiers of unionism were not so obvious on that side of the hill. To be honest I had not really thought about the fact that Johno himself was probably Protestant. But as we drove back to a house that I had already been in, to a family that had been nothing but exceptionally welcoming to me, I was shocked at how I felt myself tensing slightly, now that I was fully in the know about where I was. *In that weird, sectarian way that seems to only apply up here, suddenly I* felt *Catholic. I would never describe myself as Catholic anywhere else. But here, in the land of binaries, I might be an atheist but all of a sudden, I am, at least culturally, a *Catholic* atheist. Was I safe here? What about my car with its southern registration plates?*

But I caught myself. How ridiculous. It was like judging a book by its cover - but after you had already read the book - and enjoyed it.

'It's not that I *am prejudiced', I told myself, as I drove away, foot jammed on the accelerator, 'but that I am scared that* they *are prejudiced about* me*.'*

But isn't that just the same thing?

I drove away from Barrick Hill, and the dawning of my own prejudices, onto the safety of the A28/Newry Road to Dublin. I was uncomfortable. In the South we are quick to shake our heads at the sectarianism that undeniably is present in parts of Northern Ireland and its society. But what does it say about me - the Southerner - if I am the only one who finds this situation uncomfortable?

This very personal anecdote from my field notes, in which I was forced to confront my own biases, encapsulates what is essentially at the heart of this research. The visibility of identity in Northern Ireland means that physical borders and social-identity boundaries are locked together in a mutual bordering process unique to the post-conflict setting. And this interplay between the boundaries we carry with us in our minds, and the borders of where we feel safe and comfortable, is prompted and made sense of through how we narrate society and how the past is imagined, informing how we make sense of the uncertainty of the present and future.

1.1 WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH REALLY ABOUT?

On the 23rd of June 2016, the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. The 'Brexit' project, as it had been dubbed by an initially sceptical media, had succeeded and the tremors of this political earthquake are still being felt, both in the UK and further afield alike. From the outset, it is important to note that within the four nations of the UK, England and Wales voted to Leave, while Scotland and Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly to Remain (Hobolt, 2016: 1273).

This thesis will outline how, in the specific empirical case of Northern Ireland's border region with the Republic of Ireland, this referendum vote has set off a multitude of rebordering processes, through the perpetuation of narratives of past violence, that are influencing community relations and perceptions of identity, of both the self and the other.

In terms of existing knowledge on this subject, it is widely academically positioned that Northern Ireland is extremely vulnerable to the consequences of Brexit from all angles; politically, economically, and societally (Soares, 2016; Tonge, 2016; Burke, 2016; McCall, 2016; Connolly, 2017). Katy Hayward has recently carried out extensive qualitative research in the border region, concluding that there is significant concern among border residents regarding the above issues, but also the legacy of violent conflict and the effect of this on community relations (2017: 74). This thesis does not look to hypothesise for an unknown future, rather it is attempting to outline the connection between the potential hardening of the physical border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, as a result of Brexit, impacts how the two traditional communities in Northern Ireland, Catholic/nationalists and Protestant/unionists, relate to each other. David Newman asked: "What happens to the residents of the borderland when the boundary is removed?" (2003: 21), I am attempting to understand what it is that happens to residents of the borderland when faced with the possibility of its potential resurrection. This empirical complication led me developing the following research puzzle: 'How have shifts in bordering processes since the Brexit vote, through being both perpetuated by, and perpetuating narratives of how violence is imagined, catalysed changes in community relations and manifestations of identity in the border region of Northern Ireland in 2018?'

1.2 ACADEMIC RELEVANCE

The main aim of this research is to gain a better understanding of the relationship that exists between shifts in community relations in the border region of Northern Ireland and the possibility of a 'harder' Irish border as a result of Brexit, using a theoretical framework mostly devised from the interdisciplinary school of border studies.

The end of the 20th, and the beginning of the 21st, century was heralded as the beginning of an era of deterritorialisation, with a softening of inter-state borders and an upward take in migration as globalisation took hold, at least throughout Europe. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the establishment of the Schengen Zone in 1995 marked the beginning of a real-life shift that was paralleled in the academic debate on the study of borders and boundaries. The field of border studies witnessed a post-structuralist turn that looked to Foucault and more cognitive forms of boundary-making and the onset of borders being understood, not just as physical, political constructions, but as processes, practices and discourses (Newman and Paasi, 1998; Paasi, 1999; Newman, 2003; van Houtum et al., 2005). Occurring alongside this trend was the passing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, with its post-national style, and a soft, inter-state border commitment at its core. It was essential to the Agreement's success, and even for its creation, that the removal of the visible physical border happened essentially concurrently with its signing.

However, contemporarily, the world seems to be moving back the other way again. Walls and borders have come back *en vogue* throughout Europe, as the globalisation project seems to be stuttering to a halt. And so this era of so-called "reterritorialisation" (Johnson et al., 2011: 61) has prompted, again, an academic shift, not necessarily away from this Foucauldian view of boundaries and borders, but towards incorporating these ideas in coordination with the more traditional approaches to understanding borders and boundaries, through the territorial, physical and the political (Parker and Vaughn-Williams, 2009; Brambilla, 2015; van Houtum, Laine and Scott, 2016; Laine, 2016). Brexit is a clear manifestation of this discourse of reterritorialisation in the United Kingdom, most clearly illustrated through the central campaign premise of "taking back control" of the UK's borders and migration. As Donnan and Wilson write: "reterritorialisation means a great deal of rebordering" (2010: 6) and it is this rebordering that this thesis deals with. Though the risk of returning to violence

of the scale seen in the past is unlikely, Brexit rebordering risks a far more insidious effect of disrupting the delicate process of integrating a largely still divided society (Hayward, Teuwen and Campbell, 2017).

Before conducting a brief review of the literature, I will first define my main concepts. As van Houtum (2005: 672) relates, there is an oft confusing interchangeability of the terms boundary and border in the border studies literature. For clarity's sake, I will follow the approach of the more anthropologically-based scholars and use *border* in reference to a political, spatial demarcation and *boundary* when referring to the more Barthian understanding of figurative, social identity divisions, except when using the specific concept of "the border in the mind" (Gormley-Heenan and Aughey, 2017: 497).

Ethnic boundary-making in social science is descended from the pioneering work of Frederik Barth (1969). The very notion of constructivist understandings of identity can be said to have stemmed from Barth's work on boundaries. Going further in this tradition, and critical to understanding boundary-making in social sciences, and in conflict situations specifically, is Andreas Wimmer's theory on the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries. Wimmer writes that:

> A boundary displays both a categorical and a social or behavioural dimension. The former refers to acts of social classification and collective representation; the latter to everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and distancing (2009: 975).

We can understand these social-identity boundaries as having distinct indicators which reveal the in and out group. Borrowed from Barth, these are a correlation between religious identity/background and political affiliation; divisions in communities based on traditionally religious/political affiliation, education, sports, music; overt signals and signs that communities use to express identity, such as flags, graffiti or language (1969: 14). Though he differs from Barth in that, while Barth's famous claim is that it is not the "cultural stuff" that matters but the boundary that encloses it, Wimmer asserts that perhaps the "cultural stuff" does matter; that perhaps the "stuff" and the boundary

coincide and so reinforce each other in a mutual process (2008: 982-983). This thesis, then, looks to understand the interaction between rebordering of physical borders and the hardening of these ethnic, or social-identity, boundaries as per Wimmer's updated definition of Barth's conceptualisation of ethnic boundary-making.

In doing this, this research is attempting to add new insight into the empirical pool of border studies, through following a very contemporary, and ongoing, debate on the Irish border throughout the Brexit negotiations; while also trying to build a conceptual framework for understanding these bordering processes. This is done through synthesising the Foucauldian, post-structuralist turn with the re-emphasis on why territorial borders are still important, particularly in a post-conflict area. For the purposes of this research, processes of bordering are essentially how both physical borders and social boundaries are continuously formed and reproduced in and by society. The existence of political borders, in the Westphalian system, allows us to define both the in and out group, creating order "through the construction of difference" (Newman, 2003: 15). The concept of borderscapes allows us to form the synthesis between this more metaphysical area of border studies, while still reemphasising territorial and political borders:

> [Borderscapes are] a way of approaching bordering processes in specific geographical and social contexts, both in borderlands but also wherever a specific border has impacts, is represented, negotiated or displaced. Borderscapes are understood here to be local configurations of bordering processes connecting different communities, case-specific relations of how notions of border and perceptions of identity are conditioned by the interplay of historical, socio-cultural, geographic and political narratives as well as the experience of living at and with borders. (Brambilla et al., 2015: xvii)

In this way, the borderscape concept attempts to combine the geopolitical presence of the physical border with the continuous, processual nature of the symbolic importance of that border and the social-identity, community boundaries that exist alongside it.

Understanding borders in this way also forms the basis for making a link to another analytic frame that is useful for unpacking the ongoing border issue in Northern Ireland. Schröder and Schmidt conceptualise violent imaginaries or the "emphasis of the historicity of present day confrontations", as

a distinction to violent practices, and detail how this is done through "narratives, performances and inscriptions" (2001: 9-10). They put forward the idea that violence must be imagined before it can be carried out (ibid: 9) and highlight the specific role that memory plays in conflict, and post-conflict settings. This research deals primarily with narratives, defined in the literature as how a group endeavours to: "Keep the memory of former conflicts and past violence alive in stories, either by glorifying one's own group's achievements and benefits or by the perceived injustices, losses or suffering incurred by one's own group" (ibid: 10).

Bringing in elements of Schröder and Schmidt's framework helps us to understand how the new uncertainty in the process of the physical border, in relation to other processes of bordering, brings out uncertainty narratives, and triggers older fears, as people slot into their historical roles. Similarly to the reference to "historic" and "socio-cultural" narratives present within the borderscapes concept (Brambilla et al., 2015: xvii), Schröder and Schmidt maintain that violence stems from a specific "cultural grammar" that gives a more permanent meaning to violent confrontation (2001: 5).

Taking violent imaginaries alongside the concept of borderscapes allows us to see processes of bordering as ongoing, local systems with specific links to identity and historical context; and this forms the backbone of how borders and boundaries are understood in this thesis. Using the borderscapes idea as a grounding concept, we can put forward the idea of mutual bordering processes, with the physical border itself being seen as interrelated with processes of figurative or social identity boundaries informed by identity and the conflict.

This thesis will seek to understand how these mutual bordering processes have been set into flux by Brexit related uncertainty, perpetuated by how violence and peace continue to be imagined and narrated. Donnan and Wilson, referencing Appadurai on locality (1995: 206), write that the conflict "did not just shape the Irish border but symbolically constructed it as a particular 'locality' and 'structure of feeling'" (2010: 89). In this way, this thesis will make clear that we must look back to the borderscapes concept to understand how the border and narratives of conflict, peace and identity are sewn together in a tight and dynamic process of local complexities and historicities. So, the idea of mutual bordering processes, evolved from this, fits the Northern Ireland context; in that it is only when we understand how intrinsically related the post-Good Friday Agreement peace and the current

soft border are perceived to be in the minds of its residents, can we understand why the Brexit vote has been so destabilising to the border region.

1.3 CONTEXT

First, a brief word on the Brexit talks and what is known and what is not. At the time of conducting my research, and still of writing, the type of arrangement that will define the UK's future relationship with the EU following Brexit Day, March 29th 2019, remains unclear. Brexit negotiations have largely been paralysed by internal conflict in the Conservative Party and, as is the remit of this thesis, the debate over Northern Ireland and the Irish border and how this is to be organised in a future where the UK has left the EU, and Ireland remains.

As alluded to above, the 500 km border with over 300 crossing points, between Northern Ireland, within the UK, and the Republic of Ireland has been effectively invisible since the early 2000s, and customs controls vanished in 1993 with the establishment of the EU Single Market. The Common Travel Area, an open borders agreement, has existed between the UK and Ireland in some effect since Irish independence in 1923, and continued as both countries joined the (then) European Economic Community in 1973 (Connolly, 2017: 40). The UK's imminent departure from the EU is casting doubt on how these arrangements, which allow for such a porous border regime, can continue.

This thesis, as will be explained, hinges on the theme of uncertainty. The UK and the EU are both adamant that no 'hard' border will be imposed between Northern Ireland and Ireland, what remains to be seen is how this will achieved, with the UK negotiating position being that there is no need for a hard border but the country will leave the Customs Union and the Single Market. These circumstances, the EU and most experts say, require some sort of border, as the Irish border will become an external EU border (Gilmore, 2016). The EU, on the contrary, has advocated that the UK as a whole leaves the EU, but remains in the Customs Union and the Single Market, which has become colloquially known as a 'soft' Brexit, necessitating no harder a border on the island of Ireland. In December 2017, the UK agreed to EU draft proposals that, in the event that no other arrangement for frictionless trade is found, a 'backstop' option should apply that would see either the whole of the UK, or just Northern Ireland, remaining in the Customs Union and Single Market, allowing the Irish border to remain as it is (Morris, 2018). However, this has since been deemed

‘unacceptable’ by the UK government, as it would the Northern Ireland only solution would effectively move the customs border into the Irish Sea and create a division between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK (Morris, 2018). The struggle to square this circle continues to hang over the negotiations and the prospect of a ‘no deal’ Brexit is possible and looks perhaps even likely. This would mean that, with the UK then having to fall back under World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules, dubbed the “hardest of hard-Brexit scenarios” (Connolly, 2017: 337), a ‘hard’ border between the UK and the EU would be necessary to guarantee the integrity of EU trade, products and services within the Single Market and Customs Union. This conundrum over how to solve the Irish border issue, before time runs out and results in a no-deal scenario, is the root of the uncertainty that this thesis deals with.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH

As stated, the research question I have developed is: ‘How have shifts in bordering processes since the Brexit vote, through being both perpetuated by, and perpetuating narratives of how violence is imagined, catalysed changes in community relations and manifestations of identity in the border region of Northern Ireland in 2018?’ This question is academically significant in that it calls for an approach that allows us to question and understand both 1) how mutual bordering processes of physical borders and social-identity boundaries interact and shape each other 2) how the historicity of these bordering processes, as is emphasised in the borderscapes concept from which this frame is built, is perpetuated by imaginaries of peace and violence. In doing this, I argue that I am pushing forward with theorising how bordering processes should be understood as related to the narratives and imaginaries that exist alongside them.

In terms of empirical significance, this question is the biggest issue within British, and Irish, foreign policy since the 2016 referendum. I went to Northern Ireland to try and understand the connection between the potentially harder physical border between Ireland and the UK, as a result of Brexit, and how the two traditional communities in Northern Ireland relate to each other. The guts of the research I have carried out turned up a complex and dynamic situation with regards to community relations and identity issues in Northern Ireland. The data I gathered paints a preliminary picture of the multitude of factors that are contributing to the, generally acknowledged, shifts that have been taking place since

the EU referendum. In many ways, Brexit seems to be the catalyst still threatening to tip an already fragile situation in Northern Ireland into the political abyss. The process of a country leaving the EU is unprecedented, an empirical research gap in itself. But, besides this, the fact that the UK contains a post-conflict area with a unique border arrangement with an EU member state simply adds to the complexity of the issue. An early-stage analysis of shifting intercommunal relations, in a region where these have traditionally been so fraught, is therefore, both academically and socially, highly significant and relevant.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

This thesis will be structured with the theoretical framework integrated throughout each of the three analysis chapters. This was done intentionally in order to present my research in the most natural and fluid manner possible. Following this introduction, I will discuss my research methods and ethical considerations. The first of the content chapters, on Brexit related uncertainty will follow. This chapter will answer the sub-question, which help to unpack the main research question:

1. How has the Brexit vote created a climate of uncertainty in Northern Ireland?

This will be done through including a detailed explanation of the inherent link between the border and peace in Northern Ireland and how the Brexit vote has catalysed an uncertainty that is predominantly a result of the lack of clarity on the future status of the border.

Then, I will move on to discuss the narratives of violence that are perpetuating and being perpetuated by this uncertainty. This chapter will answer two sub-questions:

2. How is this uncertainty perpetuating, and being perpetuated by, narratives of violence in the borderlands?

In order to do this, this chapter Schroder and Schmidt's frame of violent imaginaries uses as its primary frame in order to make sense of the historicity of these narratives.

3. How are these narratives particularly relevant in specific context of the borderlands?

Then, this chapter will theorise further on the specific character of the borderlands, and how these narratives are at play, through engaging with the various paradoxes that make up Northern Ireland's border region unique.

The last chapter on identity fluidity will use the borderscape concept, and how these mutual bordering processes interact, in order to analyse the link between how physical border and social-identity boundaries function in Northern Ireland. This chapter will answer the following sub-questions:

4. How do inscriptions of identity influence social-identity boundaries?

First, I will discuss peace in Northern Ireland and how the Good Friday Agreement has influenced identity and social boundaries, followed by a description of how Northern Ireland remains, to a large extent, divided. Then I will set out the context for the interplay between inscriptions of violent imaginaries and spatial borders in Northern Ireland.

5. How do spatial borders and social-identity boundaries interact?

Then, I will detail how these social-identity boundaries, influenced by inscriptions, affect where people travel and feel safe; relating how physical borders and social-identity boundaries interact in a mutual bordering process.

6. How has Brexit related physical rebordering catalysed a rebordering of social-identity boundaries?

Subsequently, this chapter will answer, through the last sub-question, what is questioned in the research puzzle, building what has been set out, by discussing how Brexit related rebordering of figurative divisions, in relation to the physical border, is playing into changes in how people relate to their identity themselves and to the "other" and contributing to a shift in social identity boundaries. This will be followed by a short analysis of the rise of counter-narratives, in the face of these shifts, and on the potential for a positive transformation in Northern Ireland

There will then be a short conclusion, reflecting on what has been discussed through a discussion of the theoretical and empirical findings of this thesis, followed by a reflection on the very real potential for future research on this topic.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 POSITIONING MY RESEARCH

As previously discussed, this research uses an analytic frame primarily lifted from the field of border studies, which has seen a significant shift towards incorporating Foucauldian, or post-structuralist, ideas. Of this shift, van Houtum relates one of the "key merits" as being the widening of both the ontological and epistemological scope of border studies (2006: 673). The consequences of this, he writes, have meant that the "difference between the ontology of borders, the study of what borders are, and the epistemology of borders, the study of what and how we know what borders are, has decreased if not disappeared" (ibid: 674).

Despite this, for the purpose of clarity, this research can be said to be essentially ontologically post-structural in the sense that it emphasises the constructivist nature of borders and borders, that come into being through discourses, practices and institutions of being. Following on from this, it is also epistemologically interpretative, in that attempts to "understand", rather than "explain" (Demmers, 2017: 17), the empirical complication in question. This stance has meant that I encountered the "double hermeneutic" (ibid: 17), or how I, as a researcher, had to navigate through my respondents' perceptions and interpretations of the world, alongside how I myself perceived these interpretations through an informed, academic lens, while being conscious of, as alluded to in my introduction, managing any subconscious bias of my own. In this way, it should be stated that this thesis cannot claim to speak for all residents of the border region in Northern Ireland, nor do I wish to make a grand explanation for the evidence presented in this thesis. Rather, I hope to understand these interpretations "from within" (ibid: 17) using the narratives and stories shared with me, and experiences that I myself had as a participant-observer researcher.

So, as my thesis takes an interpretivist epistemological stance, it was quite clear from the outset that this research would be best carried out using qualitative methods. The post-structural ontological perspective of my research also lends itself to this form of inquiry. These positions are manifested in the creation of my analytic frame, which is the theoretical backbone of this thesis, and therefore I sought to design my research in a way that was similar to pre-existing literature on this topic and

others like it. Indeed, as border studies, the field from which my bulk of my analytic frame has been drawn, is multi-disciplinary, this left me with rather a lot of room for creativity. I chose to follow an ethnographic approach to gathering data, emphasising the more anthropological side of the border studies discipline. Ritchie and Lewis define an ethnographic approach to research as: "Understanding the social world of people being studied through immersion in their community to produce detailed description of people, their culture and beliefs" (2003: 12). This also was consistent with the anthropological approach at the root of Schröder and Schmidt's violent imaginaries concept. Similarly, as my research deals predominantly with narratives, in Schröder and Schmidt's sense, of how border communities relate the impact of Brexit on inter-communal relations and identity issues, an ethnography was the research method that allowed me to most thoroughly develop an understanding of how these issues are perceived and interpreted by the research population. I was interested in fleshing out how people understand, interpret and act out these changes. I found that this was best uncovered through a preliminary, thorough data analysis, followed by in-depth interviews, backed up by participant-observation in the field more generally. The subheading below will outline my research method in more detail.

2.2 RESEARCH METHOD

I spent almost four months in Northern Ireland, based in the borderland city of Armagh. I completed a research internship at the Centre for Cross Border Studies which supported me in carrying out my qualitative research. My placement at the Centre was helpful in giving me somewhere to start, as well as some legitimacy in the field. I used contacts at the Centre to network and to find initial starting points for interview candidates. I realised quickly that gaining access to everyday people to interview would be difficult. Due to Northern Ireland being so late stage in the post-conflict process, there is a lot of research fatigue among the local population for speaking about the past violence. Because of this, I switched my focus to purposively sampling for organisations who work in peacebuilding and cross-border work. I used the Special European Union Programmes Body website to find what organisations were currently receiving EU funding for their work in Northern Ireland as a place to start, and following these initial contacts, I used a snowball approach to continue from there.

I used the knowledge gained and tasks carried out in my internship, alongside the emerging academic literature, policy reports and local media to conduct document-analysis that set out the initial themes for my research. The ever changing nature of Brexit debate and the empirical context made this document analysis an important part of my research.

Following this, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews, seven in total, varying in length between 45 minutes and two and a half hours. Each interview was conducted using an interview guide with general questions that I asked everybody, as well as more specific questions tailored to each respondent. These interviews were predominantly done with individuals who work in peacebuilding/ cross-border cooperation and borderland residents, with respondents usually doubling as both. Although these respondents were largely speaking in a professional capacity about their work on these issues (identity, community relations, Brexit), most were happy to speak about their personal experiences and opinions on these issues as well, so long as they were not attributed to their organisation.

I also conducted two group interviews, with six participants and eleven participants, respectively. My group interviews with specifically targeted at young people specifically about identity and community relations/ division rather than borderland issues. The location of these interviews as in Belfast, rather than Armagh where I was predominantly based, is mainly due to convenience for those I was interviewing who lived in the city, rather than necessarily being from there. Responses from those who were not from the border region were used, then, to illustrate issues pertaining to social-identity bordering processes.

Finally, I engaged in participant-observation and kept a diary of field notes and observations, I built up relationships and had many informal conversations with locals about my research which contributed to my ability to pick out themes that were already evident in the literature and informed what I was able to engage with during my interviews. I made an effort to travel to different areas of the region, paying attention particularly to the visibility of identity and how violence is inscribed in the landscape of Northern Ireland and the border region. I also lived, for 14 weeks, as a borderlander myself. I crossed the border at least twice a week and became accustomed to the unique way in which locals relate to it, how it is definitive in its presence and yet invisible, all at once. This first-hand

participation in borderland life really shaped my understanding of the area. This personal experience was used in conjunction with the data that I collected. The back and forth between what was seen in my initial document-based analysis, and what became more evident as I conducted my interviews and participant-observation, made up a detailed, layered pool of evidence that allowed me to further triangulate my findings.

Based on these findings then, I systematically coded my data based on what narratives emerged as the major, consistent themes. Based on the coded data, I then attempted to illuminate these themes with the voices that came out of my interviews, forming what became my different chapters. My argumentation in this thesis is formulated with my interview respondents providing an illustration of my more literature or document based analysis.

2.3 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Ideally, I would have sought out solely everyday border respondents to speak to, in order to better build a picture of the everyday lived experiences of borderlanders. However, gaining access in a post-conflict society, was quite difficult. As mentioned previously, there is research fatigue in Northern Ireland and it can be difficult to engage with everyday people for research purposes.

Another challenge was not being completely seen as an outsider due my background. In terms of cultural context: I am Irish and was two hours from home, in a lot of ways the setting was very familiar to me and I felt very comfortable culturally. But there are cultural differences between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and particularly in some areas, these became more pronounced. In some ways, this was also advantageous to an extent in gaining access. Related to this, I was constantly conscious of the my background as an Irish person and how this may be perceived in a certain way.

The focus on narratives in this thesis was also flagged as a potential limitation due to the weight attached to my respondents' interpretation and perception. I chose to hone in on how people narrate the conflict and the border rather than other forms of evidence. In Chapter 5, I do reference the presence of performance and inscriptions of how violence and the past are imagined, but the level of detail is more superficial as the bulk of my data comes from my interviews and the personal stories that were shared with me. There are a number of voices that stand out as the main characters, so to

speak, of my thesis. The style of my thesis is informed by these choices, emphasising the importance of the individual human voice and stories in presenting the lived experience of a population.

2.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As previously mentioned, I was conscious of my background as an Irish person. I am aware there is no such thing as truly impartial research, but I have done my best not to let any subconscious bias as a result of my background leak into how I carried out my research or to how I present it in this thesis.

In order to be sensitive to the aforementioned research fatigue in the area and the possibility that some respondents would discuss topics that may be difficult or uncomfortable, before every interview respondents were informed they could stop at any time and that it would be recorded. The recording of each interview was then subsequently transcribed by me for my own record. All names have been changed in order to preserve anonymity.

As some of my respondents in the group interviews were under 18, these sessions were conducted only in the presence of their teachers and group leaders and at no point was I left alone with the respondents.

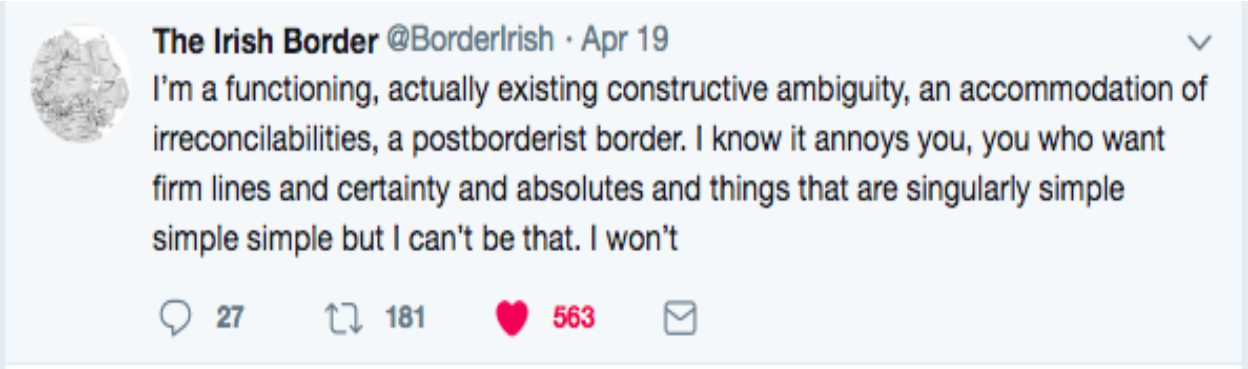
2.5 DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

In this thesis, the two "traditional" communities of Northern Ireland are frequently referenced:

> One community, the Irish nationalists of Northern Ireland, is a subset of a wider ethnic community, the 'native' Irish of Ireland, whose ancestors once spoke Gaelic. Irish nationalists are usually but not invariably Roman Catholic in religion, but not all Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland are nationalist in their politics and those who are vary considerably in the intensity of their nationalist convictions. The other community, that of Ulster Protestants, is usually religiously labelled even though by no means all of its members are religious. This community mostly comprises of the descendants of Scottish and English settlers in Ireland. Ulster Protestants see themselves as a sub-set of the multi-ethnic UK polity, even if their membership of that polity is not invariably recognised by other the members. Extremely few Ulster Protestants are Irish nationalists. They now regard themselves as British, but they remain divided over the precise nature of their ethnic identity (O'Leary and McGarry, 2016: 3-4).

The terms Catholic and nationalist, as with Protestant and unionist, are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. This is purposely done to reflect the colloquial way that the terms are traded in Northern Ireland, as in my interviews, despite an often lack of religious practice or belief. Irish and British are used less frequently, in order to avoid confusion with Ireland and Britain proper. With regards to the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement of 1998. I use the Good Friday Agreement here, as it is most frequently referred to on the island of Ireland and thus in my interviews, rather than the Belfast Agreement, as is its official name. This is not a political choice, but rather one of familiarity and an attempt to be consistent with common parlance.

3. UNCERTAINTY: AN UNSTABLE CORNER OF A CHANGING ISLAND



[1]

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to set out to answer the first sub-question: How has the Brexit vote created a climate of uncertainty in Northern Ireland?

Uncertainty been widely theorised throughout various fields in the social sciences. Bauman's liquidity modernity (2000) deals specifically with the how the precarity of the modern world is creating a more fleeting nature of identity and relationships. This relates to Appadurai who writes about dangers of the "anxiety of incompleteness and unacceptable levels of uncertainty" (2006: 8), although this thesis does not anticipate the "large scale ethnocidal mobilisation" that he predicts (ibid: 9), his references to Michael Ignatieff's analysis of Freud's "narcissism of minor differences" (ibid: 82) are relevant to the Northern Irish context.. In social psychology, Hogg and Adelman's take on uncertainty-identity theory to detail how high levels of group uncertainty "through social identity and self-categorization processes" may lead to "group and societal extremism" (2013: 436), though this thesis does not take a social-psychological approach, these theorisations are important to place this theme of uncertainty in the wider academic sub debate, particularly given that this uncertainty takes place in a post-conflict setting in Northern Ireland. Building on these foundations, then, we can use the borderscape and violent imaginaries theoretical framework discussed in the introduction to understand how Brexit has caused, at the very least, huge political instability in Northern Ireland.

[1] Figure 3: Tweet from the parody account @BorderIrish that commentates on the Brexit negotiations

3.2 REBORDERING AS A CATALYST FOR UNCERTAINTY

That the Brexit vote is creating a climate of uncertainty was the most definitive consensus throughout all of my interviews. When asked for one word or sentence to describe Brexit, the responses were almost unanimous: 'Well...it's a conundrum,'[2] 'It's total limbo, do you know what I mean? That is the feeling at the moment. You can't even put in place contingency plans because no one knows. All we've heard is hard or soft border, that's it,'[3] 'Uncertainty. Somebody said that to me at one of the conferences: "The only thing we can be certain about is that we're not certain."'[4] 'Organisations are destabilised; the economy, the voluntary sector. In terms of how we engage in community relations, Brexit can be a big distraction. The uncertainty is problematic.'[5]'Uncertainty in that sort of environment is always difficult, and Brexit would have been a tricky issue, even on fair days, and this isn't one of them. So it's just a very, very unfortunate alignment.'[6] 'Are we going to be back into the position of having checks and what is it going to mean? And what are we going to lose? I think that has sent fear.'[7] These responses illuminate the perceived lack of clarity over the current political situation and what this means both constitutionally and practically for residents of Northern Ireland, particularly those in the border region. Finally, one respondent answered: 'Brexit is just a whole additional, unsettling, destabilising thing, in a situation which isn't great to begin with.'[8]

As discussed, this uncertainty stems mostly from the precarity of the terms 'hard' and 'soft' border, and the subjectivity of how these terms, and what they might entail, play out in the minds of border residents in Northern Ireland. This research, as a whole, attempts to demonstrate how the hardening of political borders and shifts in social identity boundary-making processes must be seen as interlinked, with Brexit in the borderlands of Northern Ireland as the empirical setting. As Cathy Gormley-Heenan succinctly put it: "The EU took the border out of Irish politics, but the Brexit referendum has put it back" (in The Economist, 2017). This chapter, moreover this thesis, begins, and ends, with the border; as it these processes of Brexit related rebordering that are creating a climate of political and societal

[2] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[3] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[4] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[5] Author interview with Linda, 27/03/18, Armagh
[6] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[7] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh
[8] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast

uncertainty through a reawakening of how the violence of the recent past, and the more recent peace, is imagined through narratives, inscriptions and performances (Schröder and Schmidt, 2001: 10).

3.3 THE BORDER AND PEACE

The Economist writes: "Britain's bloodiest battlefield of the past half-century was not in the Middle East, the Balkans or the South Atlantic. It was on home turf. A thousand British soldiers and police officers were killed in Northern Ireland during three decades of the 'Troubles', twice the number who died in Iraq and Afghanistan combined" (2018). Throughout this period known as the Troubles (1968-1998), during which some 3,000 people lost their lives and 100,000s were injured in Northern Ireland, the Irish border became steadily more fortified. With the onset of peace in the 1990s came the process of transition, beginning with the removal of the watchtowers in 2005 (Donnan, 2010: 256). The shift from what was once the most militarised border in Europe (Donnan and Wilson, 2010: 83) to a border you have to be looking to spot (Komarova, 2017: 11), is perceived by border residents to have been of paramount importance to the progress that has been made in the peace process (Hayward, 2017: 44-45).

This thesis is looking to understand how processes of bordering, physical and social, interact and what result this interaction is having on how communities relate to each other. In doing this, we must first ask how the ongoing physical border question, as a result of the Brexit vote, is seen as intrinsically related to peace and the state of community relations in Northern Ireland. As mentioned previously in the review of the literature, the era of the Good Friday Agreement and its post-national ilk, is being left behind and the turn away from softening interstate borders in Europe is creating a large vacuum of uncertainty in post-conflict Northern Ireland and how peace, as well as the former violence, has come to be understood in the 20 years since the signing of the Agreement.

Indeed, the link between peace and the "invisible" border in Northern Ireland is such that it could be, and has been (McCall, 2016), argued that the peace process itself is contingent on its remaining so. The sentiment that peace and the border have 'everything to do with each other'[9] was evident, and often emotive, throughout the narratives that came through in my interviews:

[9] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin

> I think that the opening up of the border facilitated the peace. It really did. Maybe more so from the nationalist side, obviously, because it allows that freedom of movement. Without that, whether it's real or perceived, there was that oppression that was felt when you crossed the border... I definitely think the opening up of the border was a big, big part of why peace was, maybe not why it's been a success, relatively, but why it was allowed to be possible. It was one of the starting points. It was a trigger for it. It allowed it to be discussed.[10]

This interview excerpt exemplifies how, particularly for nationalists, the opening up of the border was related to peace as it allowed that 'freedom of movement' and rid border communities of that whether 'real or perceived oppression' that came with living alongside military bases and soldiers. Donnan and Wilson specifically detail the lived experience of border Protestants in Northern Ireland and their relationship with the border throughout the conflict as something of a buttress between them and the South (2010: 84), this will be further expanded on later. This said, the progress that has been made in reconciling this unease throughout the last 20 years is evident through the following response from John, a border region unionist:

> Cross-border activity, and all those sorts of things all became possible because of the peace and because of the Good Friday Agreement, and because of the ease of operation at the border…people knowing people from the other side, people doing business with people from the other side. And what's more; that I know someone I can go to and do trade with, through my horse connections, that I know people I can trust. I know people I can't trust! But the point is the relationship overcomes the stereotype.[11]

These responses, from both side of the community divide, indicate just how much the onset of peace and the invisible border are perceived to be linked in the minds of those who live along the border. In this way, conversely, the potential hardening of the border has brought a real sense of fear. This is further backed up by a June 2018 poll that found that "nearly two thirds of voters in Northern Ireland (including nine out of ten nationalists, four in ten unionists and three in ten Leave voters) agreed that a hard border would be 'likely to create division, provoke paramilitary activity and threaten peace and security'"(Lord Ashcroft Poll, 2018: 18). One respondent summarised this nervousness as:

[10] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[11] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh

> The fear of going backwards, and the fear of militarised borders and what it implies, and God forbid, the idea that if you start militarising that border it allows people to justify violence against whoever is responsible for guarding it: whether they're *gardaí*[12], PSNI, British troops. We would fear it could very easily drag us into a - if not a return to the past - a reactivation of violent conflict.[13]

It is useful here to recall Schröder and Schmidt's concept of violent imaginaries and how the past is imagined; through narratives, performances and inscriptions of violence, as well as peace, in order to make sense of contemporary issues. These violent imaginaries perpetuate a deeply polarised structure within society, an us .v. them mentality, particularly in times of uncertainty and difficulty (2001: 10-11). This can be used to understand how the uncertainty around the border immediately feeds into the fear about the 'slippery slope'[14] of a harder border and a possible descent into 'tit for tat violence'[15], should the border become militarised. The same respondent as the above except went on to describe an 'armed presence' as 'problematic', stating that 'people just don't want to live in a militarised context.'[16] Relating to this, something that was mentioned in interviews was how border region young people, who had never directly experienced the violence of the past, still 'worried that it [violence] was likely and some of them said they had heard talk within their communities of paramilitaries becoming more active again,'[17] should the border become harder. The existence of these fears, despite their never having experienced violence, evokes how paramilitary violence is imagined in relation to the border.

Finally, then, Schröder and Schmidt's conceptualisation of violent imaginaries can clarify how the mutual bordering processes in flux as a result of the Brexit vote cannot be feasibly separated from peace and good relations in Northern Ireland. The uncertainty that Brexit rebordering has set off is fertile ground for the reactivation of violent imaginaries that harden community divides and perpetuate tensions along identity lines.

[12] An Garda Síochána is the Irish police force, which translates into English as the "Guardians of the Peace". They are usually referred to in the Irish, even in spoken English, with the singular being one "garda" and the plural "gardaí."
[13] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[14] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast
[15] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[16] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[17] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast

3.4 NARRATIVES OF UNCERTAINTY BEING USED TO STOKE FEAR

So it is precisely this border related ambiguity that creates the unease in which these violent imaginaries can resurface and figurative boundaries harden. As discussed above, it was generally agreed that there is an uncertainty caused by Brexit and that it has the potential to be dangerous. However, as one respondent pointed out, it is unsound to attribute the entirety of the current political uncertainty and impasse in Northern Ireland to the Brexit vote: 'One thing I will say is there are other reasons why there is some uncertainty and tension in the system. And I think that has allowed the Brexit issue, then, to fan those flames.'[18]

But Northern Irish politics does tend to run in binaries, or 'in orange and green,'[19] and Brexit is slotting into the existing divide. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), it should be said, took a nominally pro-Remain stance throughout the referendum campaign and so prevented its running wholly on traditional community lines (Soares, 2016: 836). But this was abandoned officially in May 2017 in order for the party to stand alongside the larger Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) as pro-Brexit throughout the negotiations; but as one commentator pointed out at the time, the debate was already becoming polarised as early as April 2016 as there were "few unionist representatives willing to make the case for the EU" (Burke, 2016: 6), leaving unionist voters with seemingly little room to politically manoeuver with regards to Brexit. This movement of the UUP away from its initial stance, in the now almost two years since the vote, indicates that, at least in the political sphere, there is a polarisation along sectarian grounds. This is reflected generally through how the two communities voted in the referendum. The demographic divide is stark: "85% of Catholics voted Remain, compared to only 40% of Protestants," aligning, as expected, with the fact that for nationalists "88% voted Remain, compared to only 34% of those who described themselves as unionists," and "87% of 'Irish' respondents voted Remain compared to only 37% of 'British' respondents" (Garry, O'Leary and Coakley, 2017). This political split along traditional lines with regards to Brexit has resulted in a stasis of political progress in the region since 2016 and the assertion that the two main parties on both sides (the DUP and Sinn Féin) are using the crisis for their own gain.

[18] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[19] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast

The vehicles through which Schröder and Schmidt's violent imaginaries are reproduced, narratives, performances and inscriptions, have remained active and volatile throughout the peace process. The rebordering processes catalysed by Brexit should be seen as a problematizing factor in the further reassertion of these violent imaginaries, rather than their sole cause. Indeed, several respondents shared their opinion that the Brexit related uncertainty was being used for political advantage and to create a climate of fear. For Schröder and Schmidt, this is the "principle of totality" (2001: 11) in the dichotomous environment of a post-conflict peace process, with each side manipulating their community into action through the 'notion of fear, threat or simply a head count,'[20] in a setting in which any movement in a "confrontational relationship is taken to be an aggressive act that calls for defensive action" (Schröder and Schmidt, 2001: 10). This perception carried through from both sides of the divide, with one nationalist respondent, Seán, commenting on the 'scaremongering,'[21] and that 'both parties are kind of jockeying for position…to see how far they can go.'[22] Sarah, who preferred not to state her background, put it: 'You could overthink it too much, if you let it. It probably won't be as bad. You know, you tend to make things sound worse than they are in your head. I really think that.'[23] But as Lord Ashcroft's Poll makes clear, this belief is notably stronger among unionists, with more than nine out of 10 unionists in Northern Ireland, and three out of four Conservatives in Britain, agreeing that the Border issue is being "deliberately exaggerated by politicians and others to suit their own political agenda" (Lord Ashcroft Poll, 2018: 6).

The political astuteness of my respondents to recognise that there absolutely is a certain amount of political manipulation at play is an important nuance. However, while agreeing with this, one respondent pointed out that it is 'not just fear' but a 'very real possibility'[24] that these fears may very well materialise, and so should not be entirely discounted simply because politicians are using them for partisan purposes:

> I'm sure you've read the papers. There's been an assessment done of the different technologies that could be used [for the border]. But the time taken to set something like that up? It's not something you decide today and do

[20] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[21] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[22] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[23] Author interview with Sarah, 01/05/18, Dungannon
[24] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast

> tomorrow. It'd require a lot of resources, a lot of infrastructure. A lot of working that out. So I don't think people have confidence. Because it still hasn't been agreed what the system is going to be. Plan A, Plan B, backstop option? There's still so much relying on the decisions around the customs union and the single market and what that will all mean.[25]

This lack of clarity over what the border may look like is causing real worry and creating genuine concerns for border residents for the future. This uncertainty driven by the potential resurrection of the physical border and what the consequences of this might be for the border region and the peace process is further complicated, then, by widespread vague terminology.

3.5 "WHAT DOES A HARD BORDER LOOK LIKE TO YOU?"

As alluded to in the above quote from Kate, who works in peacebuilding and youth development, essentially what is causing this uncertainty is that the go-to buzzwords of the last two years, *soft border* and *hard border*, are not legal terms. There is no definite consensus over what either of these options will look like in the future, as one exasperated respondent put it to me: 'I have no idea what they [hard border/soft border terms] mean. It's jibber-jabber. We must find ways to understand what they mean. I just want some civic and community, elected representative leadership. Let's hear some clarity.'[26]

Cambridge English Dictionary defines a hard border as: "A border between two countries that is strongly controlled and protected by officials, police or soldiers; rather than one where people are allowed to pass through easily with few controls" (2018). For the borderlanders, this is as ambiguous as it is unsavoury. Moreover, the steps from "officials", to "police", to "soldiers" are extremely significant in the context of an ongoing peace process and each of these scenarios would mean extremely different practical circumstances for people in the border region, with the problems surrounding militarisation already alluded to in this chapter. The issue of personnel was specifically referenced as problematic by one respondent:

[25] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast
[26] Author interview with Linda, 27/03/18, Armagh

> The original border didn't start as a heavily militarised border. It started as customs checkpoints and then the police had to come in to protect the customs officers, and then the army had to come in to protect the police *and* the customs officers. And then it became heavily fortified. There was never any intention for it to be like that…We can't sleepwalk into this militarised border.[27]

The above quote, similarly to what is also seen in Hayward (2017: 45), makes clear that, due to historical precedent, any potential border infrastructure is imagined in the context of the recent past. The historicity of the border narratives can be seen as influencing how border residents make sense of this uncertainty over the future of the border. This also comes through in an answer from Seán, who acknowledges how, especially for the nationalist community, the legacy of the former border is informing how its potential return is being imagined:

> I think the problem, well not the problem, but the issue here is with the hard border phrase. I suppose when you hear "hard border", or you think about a border, you should be thinking logically it's probably going to look more like a toll. I've worked in Belgium and France and things, when you cross that border, it's just like crossing a toll bridge, and that's probably what a hard border will look like. But, for us, because of what we've been through before; the minute they say 'hard border,' you think: 'Army and guns', and that'll never happen…but that's what people think. Especially people from the nationalist community, cos that's what comes into your head. There's going to be army, guns and Landrovers and all of this type of stuff, and I think that's why it's such an issue in the psyche.[28]

There are, of course, errors in the comparison drawn to Belgium and France in this response, not least due to the legal differences between the French-Belgian border and the Irish-UK border which will likely become an external EU border. However, the general feeling underscoring this response is interesting. Understanding the rebordering process using violent imaginaries, the border infrastructure plays the part of an inscription here; a piece of the cultural landscape that perpetuates the violent imaginary of the past (Schröder and Schmidt, 2001: 10). Northern Ireland is well-documented for its multitude of inscriptions, be they murals or flags, the spatiality of which will be discussed in more

[27] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast
[28] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon

detail in Chapter 5. But understanding the visibility of the border itself as an inscription of violent imaginaries is perhaps less theoretically explored. Donnan touches on this, writing that "the border landscape functions as a perpetual reminder of South Armagh's violent past" (2010: 261). In the wake of the Brexit uncertainty though, and seeing the border itself as an inscription of past violence, we can recognise that for the nationalist community, the resurrection of the militarised border of the past would be particularly traumatic; largely due to the view among nationalists that the Irish border was the materialisation of the colonial origins of the Northern Irish state (Sidaway in van Houtum et al., 2005: 197, Hayward, Teuwen and Campbell, 2017: 72). This draws on Ferguson and Gupta's concept of post-coloniality and how legacies of colonialism problematize the relationship between space and culture (1992: 8, in van Houtum et al., 2005: 197). The tearing down of the British watchtowers along the border was seen by the nationalist community as a symbolic victory, a removal of the physical manifestation of a repressive regime (Donnan and Wilson, 2010: 88). This is apparent in Hayward, Teuwen and Campbell who provide an excellent snapshot of nationalist border communities' responses to the possible reinstitution of the border, as a sort of "colonial imposition" (2017: 71-72), echoing Tonge's detailing of the widespread feeling of the lack of consent in Northern Ireland for withdrawal from the EU, given Northern Ireland's vote to Remain (2016: 338).

In practical terms, then, when Gormley-Heenan and Aughey write that the question of "what sort of border?" involves a "simple" option: a "hard" border or a "soft" border (2017: 498), there is some specification missing. The asserted simplicity of this choice must be called into question. This is not a binaried choice; the as of yet proposed options for the border show that there appears to be a sort of spectrum of hardness, this dismisses the possibility of an either/or situation and allows for a dizzying amount of possibilities and questions about the future, especially for those who live on the border. When asked: 'What would a hard border look like to you?', a question put deliberately vaguely, in order to draw attention to the subjectivity, misinformation and speculation that stems from such an imprecise term being consistently used in the media, and by politicians and EU officials alike, Pauline, whose work depends on cross-border mobility, replied: 'Any sort of a border is going to, straight away *be* a border. It doesn't matter, even a soft border to me is a hard border, if that makes sense. I suppose the way to look at the border is putting up barriers. How soft or hard, barriers are

going up, and that's the thing.'[29] The idea of what exactly constitutes 'hardness', whether this is immediately synonymous with visibility or something more psychological, is an aspect of the debate that seems to be lost in the UK. Corresponding with the above response, Tony put it simply, that a hard border, for him, would be: '[Any] harder a border than what we have now.'[30] From here, having made clear how Brexit has caused uncertainty in Northern Ireland's border region, we can move on to explore how this rebordering uncertainty is perpetuating, and being perpetuated by, narratives of how the past is imagined.

[29] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[30] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin

4. BORDERLAND NARRATIVES OF THE PAST: ABANDOMENT AND MISUNDERSTANDING

[31]

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to answer the following two sub-questions: How is this uncertainty perpetuating, and being perpetuated by, narratives of violence in the borderlands? How are these narratives particularly relevant in specific context of the borderlands?

In order to do this, it will be shown how Brexit related uncertainty, as described in the last chapter, is both perpetuating, and being perpetuated by, continuing narratives of how violence is imagined. In doing this, I will engage more heavily with Schröder and Schmidt's conceptualisation of how violence is imagined through narratives. This chapter first lays out the historicity of two main narratives of Northern Ireland, that of abandonment and that of being misunderstood. Then, I will move on to analyse how these narratives are particularly fertile in the border region, due to what will be explained as the 'paradox of the borderlands.'

[31] Figure 4: IRA sniper at work sign in South Armagh. Accessed at http://www.irishhistorylinks.net/pages/Troubles_Images.html

4.2 ABANDONMENT: FROM THE UK/ IRELAND:

The narrative of abandonment that runs through both the unionist, particularly, and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland is well documented ((Douglas and Shirlow, 1998: 126; Fraser, 2000; Finlay, 2001; McGladdery, 2002). Only by understanding the historical precedent for this narrative, can we move to examine how Brexit, and the processes of rebordering that are following in its wake, is exacerbating this long-standing feeling that people in Northern Ireland have been abandoned by the UK, for unionists, and by Ireland, for nationalists.

The concept of a sort of "siege mentality"[32] is well-established in the literature on Northern Ireland and the Ulster Protestant psyche. The Siege of Derry of 1689 was the first major battle of the Williamite Wars in Ireland between King James II and William of Orange. The siege of majority Protestant Derry at the hands of James' Catholic army lasted 105 days and numbered 10,000 deaths as a result of starvation, disease and bombardment. (McBride, 1997: 18). It plays an important role in the cultural memory of Northern Irish Protestants and is remembered annually by the Apprentice Boys of Derry, a Protestant fraternal organisation similar to the larger Orange Order. John, a unionist, referenced this historical origin of the term and attempted to explain why it is so important to how the past, and the potential future, is imagined for unionists:

> Why is the Siege of Derry so important in the unionist psyche? Because what did Mountjoy do? What did the English do? But sit in that boat and wait. And let them starve. It [the boat] didn't come in. There was no attempt to land a force and to actually take on James' army. They sat and waited, and it was left to the Protestants inside Derry to fight the battle on their own. And that is very strong inside. There is that continuous feeling that actually their loyalty is to themselves and, despite their statements of how much they are loved, they recognise that they're not, and that they are outside.[33]

Recalling Appadurai on the anxiety between majority and minority group dynamics (2006: 49), Northern Ireland has been referred to as a "double majority" conflict (MacGinty et al., 2007: 5), with both sides seeing themselves as the legitimate majority, dependent on recognition of the border. The

[32] "Siege mentality" is defined by McGladdery as: "historically [having] enjoyed a position of absolute power and privilege, despite their settler status and the presence of a subordinate community's accounting for a significant proportion of the population. The dominant community's perception of their subordinates is a threat to their survival or indeed their identity" (2002: 268).
[33] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh

quote above references how the insecurity of the traditionally dominant group, the majority in Northern Ireland but an overwhelming minority in a historically hostile island, forms one essential part of the narrative of how unionism imagines violence. On the other hand then, there is a stringent assertion of pride and patriotism, parades held to recall the victory of Protestant William of Orange over Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne remain a fixture of Northern Irish society today. We can see these parades as performances, in Schröder and Schmidt's sense, and as evidence of how history is memorialised and used to anchor and promote the Protestant identity in Northern Ireland, enabling the past to be mobilised to fit a modern means. In this vein, then, Hastings Donnan writes that "Northern Ireland Protestants are characterised by an apparently paradoxical mix of complacency and unease, confidence and insecurity, and pushy pride and vulnerability" (2005: 72). The same respondent summarised this 'dilemma' as 'shouting your love to someone who isn't interested. And the problem is, you know they aren't interested. And your history tells you they're not interested.'[34] This lack of interest, from the UK towards Northern Irish unionists, is reflected in the larger data collected on attitudes towards Brexit in the UK, even among Conservative and Leave voters, generally assumed the most supportive of protecting Northern Ireland's union with Great Britain, it was found that, if it came down to it: "British Leave voters were more likely to choose Northern Ireland leaving the UK and joining the Republic of Ireland (14%) than keeping the whole UK in the EU customs union" (Lord Ashcroft Poll, 2018: 21). The uncertainty, discussed in previous chapter, as a result of Brexit brings a new urgency to the sense of precarity in their place in the union, and the fear of being abandoned by the British, so fundamental to the unionist psyche is being further triggered by Brexit.

On the other hand, the nationalist sense of abandonment is less pronounced, and the "sense of isolation" is less explored in the literature (Fraser, 2000: 2). Murray writes about the narrative that border nationalists had been "abandoned to their fate" by the Irish Free State government and how this paved the way for the next phase in the long tradition of Irish republican political violence (2004: 187), the irredentism of the post-partition IRA can be seen as testament to how this abandonment complex manifests in nationalism north of the border. A feeling came across through my interviews

[34] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh

that there is a lack of understanding in Dublin and the rest of Ireland for quite how deep the collective trauma over the imposition of the physical border between Northern nationalists community and the rest of Ireland runs:

> I think the longer it goes on without unification, the more even the people on the street in the South don't really care about the North. You know, you've this saying of "the black North." They don't care what's going on in the North, and that's understandable. My own personal opinion is that no one wants Northern Ireland. It's too much hassle. I think in a utopian world the South would take Northern Ireland in a heartbeat, but in the real world I don't think they can afford the North.[35]

Mairéad noted that she felt this distance from Ireland had, in fact, grown since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and that the 'care and maintenance'[36] enshrined in Strands 2 and 3 of the Agreement[37] had been neglected by Dublin as a result of a sort of complacency since the end of the violence.

Hastings Donnan, who specialises in narratives of border region unionists (2005, 2010), writes about "the passage from a personalised, individuated biographical suffering to an iconic suffering that is accepted as standing for the whole group" (2005: 97), this relates back to violent imaginaries (Schröder and Schmidt, 2001: 10-11) and how narratives of past violence are imagined from the personal into the collective memory. Donnan was referencing the experiences of border Protestants, however his insights can be applied more broadly to both of the main communities in Northern Ireland. This narrative of abandonment is an old one with a lot of salience in Northern Ireland. Brexit related uncertainty is both feeding into how the past has long been imagined and perpetuating the application of this old narrative of abandonment to the imagining of the hypothetical future. Finlay contends that, in relation to the unionist identity, a "core Protestant mentality was encoded and fixed

[35] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[36] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[37] The Good Friday Agreement is a three stand peace agreement. Strand 1 consolidates the internal, power-sharing institutions, Assembly and Executive, of Northern Ireland. Strand 2 encompasses the Irish dimension, importantly for nationalists and established cross-border bodies, the North–South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and the North–South Implementation Bodies to promote cooperation. Strand 3 particularly emphasises the Anglo-Irish, or East-West, aspect of the Agreement to foster good relations between the UK and Ireland: (http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post_16/snapshots_of_devolution/gfa/the_three_strands).

in the seventeenth century, lies dormant, and mysteriously reasserts its self in times of crisis" (2001: 10), this can be applied to the ongoing Brexit negotiations and the reassertion of these narratives of abandonment in the wake of political uncertainty.

4.3 NORTHERN IRELAND AS MISUNDERSTOOD

Northern Ireland, despite repeated calls from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) for "no special status" (Soares, 2016: 837; The Guardian, 2017), is not and should not be understood as equivalent to the rest of the UK. Academic Duncan Morrow put it plainly: "Whether Northern Ireland is treated as 'special' or 'unique' is a matter for the British government. But either way, Northern Ireland will be 'special', because it is, in the way that special education has to attend to special needs. If it is not treated specially, it will react specially" (2017: 11). This "special" reaction and the wider political realities of Northern Ireland as a post-conflict society are little understood outside of the six counties. In relation to this abandonment complex, there came a general feeling through interviews that those in Britain and to a lesser extent, Ireland, simply do not understand Northern Ireland. Empirical literature, such as Donnan's work on border Protestants in South Armagh (2010: 256), and the general lack of quality in the British media coverage, indicate this to be true. This has been the case for its entire history, and this feeling of being the misunderstood, difficult child of separation between the UK and Ireland is not necessarily new. But Brexit has thrown it into a particularly sharp light, proven in the lack of consideration that was afforded the region in the campaign to leave the EU. Similarly, but to a lesser extent, it became evident through my interviews that it is felt there is a lack of understanding in Ireland for the complexities of the political situation north of the border.

Kate recalled how visiting British civil servants failed to fully understand the border, even during a recent trip to the region: 'They really hadn't had an understanding of what people's lives were like, what the border meant.'[38] There was a failure to grasp, she noted, that it was the mundane physical un-remarkability of the border that made it remarkable. Indeed, in the words of Paul Nolan, though he was referring to the North-South Ministerial Council, the same logic applies: "It is a success, in other words, because it is taken for granted" (Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, 2014: 149). Kate put it to me: 'They were driving over the border and the bus guy goes: "There's the border!" and they

[38] Author interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast

kind of go [imitates shrugging]. But that's not the way it used to be. It used to be heavily fortified, people lived in the shadow of the border and it hugely impacted their lives and we really can't move back there.'[39] In a similar way, John put this British struggle to understand Northern Irish idiosyncrasies, and the aforementioned psychological weight of the border, down to a sort of island mentality: 'England has never had a border! Britain has not had a land border. And therefore they have no concept of what it is like. Europeans understand the issue of land borders because there's land borders all over the bloody place!'[40] He went on to say that this 'understanding of Ireland [the whole island] within Europe,'[41]is lacking in the current political establishment in the UK. While also conceding that in Ireland [the Republic] there was also a lack of understanding around the border and Northern Ireland:

> One thing that came across very strongly, particularly from the Guards[42] who had been posted to the border, and we did a whole series of interviews with Guards that had been posted from West Cork, they hadn't a clue where the border was! Let alone what it was. So that was one of the things that struck me. I mean, as someone who was brought up here, and has always known what the border was, right? But that in the Republic, you didn't have to go that far away from it before it became quite an essentialist view.[43]

The feeling that Northern Ireland is misunderstood is directly related to the narrative of abandonment that is being exacerbated and highlighted by Brexit uncertainty.

4.4 THE PARADOX OF THE BORDERLANDS

> People live on these borders, but they're not the people who create them. They're created somewhere else, often at a distance, and the people who create them don't have much understanding of what life on those borders is all about. They don't live there.[44]

We must clarify some key assumptions and terms. This thesis speaks often about borderlands and border people. But what does it mean to be a border person? What is a border community? Who are these people who live on these borders? And what is the "particular character" of life in the

[39] Author interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast
[40] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh
[41] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh
[42] "Guards" is a shorthand, anglicised word for the plural of "garda" (the Irish for policeman) in the Republic of Ireland. This is a colloquial expression.
[43] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh
[44] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin

borderlands? (Donnan and Wilson, 2010: 8). Donnan and Wilson go into some detail on how the "frontier effect" (ibid: 8) informs life in the borderlands. Border residents approach, interact with and shape the border at various frontiers, "those within each country, and those which all but ignore the borderline itself. Borderlands are inhabited by local people who trade, work, socialise and marry as if the line between countries was not there. But this is not universally so," because, seemingly contradictorily, "many borderland people are there precisely because of that border, in their efforts to demarcate and defend that border against outsiders" (ibid: 9). This last point of the "defence of the border" is directly fed by and feeds into the notion of abandonment seen in unionism. This is the paradox of the borderlands, while they are the very limits of the state, usually as far as possible from central state power, they are also the delineations of the state, a separation from what makes the other, so essentially what makes the state.

This paradox forms the major theoretical lynchpin of this chapter, and sets the tone for the seemingly contradictory reality that was evidenced in my interviews. Further still, this theoretical paradox links with another seeming contradiction of borderland life, uniquely Northern Irish, given the current invisibility of the border. The very specific way that "the border is not there if your identity prefers it absent. On the other hand, if your identity depends on the border, then it is there for you" (Carr, 2018). Going further and conceptualising the link between these two paradoxes is important in that it effectively captures the, very different, ways that both communities relate to the border in Northern Ireland.

In that Northern Irish nationalists along the border can look to its physical invisibility, and their location at the distant margins of the state, as an affirmation of their own identity which requires it to be gone. I found that its physical "invisibility" very much informed how nationalist border residents relate to, and narrate the border. As Seán said to me: 'I remember the border vaguely, checkpoints and all that kind of stuff, but in my psyche it's not really ever been a thing. Obviously I'm from a nationalist community, as well, so I didn't recognise the border anyway, not that I'm supposed to say or admit to that.'[45] This was further evidenced by another respondent from a similar background: 'I obviously work on a cross-border basis but, to me, the border was just invisible. It didn't matter. If I

[45] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon

had a meeting in Meath, I was going to a meeting in Meath. Or in Louth. Or in Bangor. It didn't matter to me where it was, so the border didn't even exist in that sense…To us, you're just so integrated, you never even thought that you were over the border.'[46]

While unionists in the border region relate to these bordering processes altogether differently. The border is very much there as the line which separates Northern Ireland as a distinct entity from Ireland, despite its invisibility and their distance from centralised state institutions, the border is real in its delineative power. It constitutes the state and defines the in-group. Donnan writes in significant detail about how the previously discussed narrative of abandonment is particularly potent for unionists who live on the border. He asks: "In what ways do members of a majority maintain and express their identity? And what effect does the border have on this?" (2005: 72). It is true that the removal of the physical border was not the same liberation for unionists that it was for nationalists. The militarisation of the pre-1998 border has been written as being essential to unionist identity, fortressing their group as something distinct to that of the Republic. Donnan and Wilson then go further, writing that the "anxiety" of the Protestant community, a wider pandemic of the frontier effect, is implicit to their cultural identity, as if unionist Northern Ireland as a whole is a sort of frontier for the United Kingdom(2010: 77). However, John put it more positively, reflecting on the pre-Troubles border:

> My memory as a child. I mean, I remember the car being stamped. Because we crossed the border regularly. If Mummy and Daddy were taking us out for a meal, for a family event, we went to the Ballymac hotel, right? And I can remember that, and we went down to Dublin. Right, so in other words, yes the border was there but people crossed it. This wasn't a family that didn't cross the border.[47]

However, despite this seemingly out of sight, out of mind attitude, there was also a lingering awareness that this invisibility is not something to be taken for granted, this is explained by Donnan and Wilson's point that "in borderlands, international borders and important matters of everyday concern, yet they are also and simultaneously both accepted and unproblematic," (2010: 10), a paradox also broached by Hayward (2017: 50), and related to the previously discussed link between

[46] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[47] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh

the border and peace. Indeed, as one respondent noted, the extent that even young people, who had never lived with a 'hard' border, were still 'very aware, very passionate' [48] of protecting the status quo and the awake to the implications should this be changed. In this way, these paradoxes are indicative of the "particular character" of the borderlands (Donnan and Wilson, 2010: 8) how the border is imagined feeds into how its reality is practiced and perceived by its residents.

In the more everyday sense, the borderlanders discussed how the border is crossed 'for work,'[49] 'going for a day out,'[50] 'for socialising, for sporting activities, for going out for a meal or whatever,'[51] 'for school,'[52] for 'cheaper diesel,'[53]even for a trip to the 'local shop to get a loaf of bread.'[54] There was a real sense of normality about this crossing, despite the fact that crossing would have been done in an entirely different environment, just over 20 years ago. One respondent recalled the story of Aidan McAnespie's murder[55] as:

> …such a story of its time. You know, the guy crosses the border every day and develops a very bad relationship with the soldiers who pick on him on a daily basis, and then at one point his father is actually told: 'We have a special bullet for your son.' Then one day he's coming back from a football match and he gets shot.[56]

For this respondent, this is a prime example of a 'border story,' with Tony maintaining that people who continue to live on the border 'don't need to be reminded' about the violence of the past.[57] The present reality, then, with the ease of crossing and its physical invisibility is, in contrast, striking: with everyday border crossing 'just what you do'[58], or what I came to understand as a quintessential border-ism: 'You have your euros and your sterling. You keep your purse for each. And that's just the

[48] Author interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast
[49] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[50] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[51] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[52] Author interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast
[53] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[54] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[55] Aidan McAnespie, 23, was hit by one of three bullets fired from a machine gun in Aughnacloy, County Tyrone, as he walked through the army checkpoint on his way to a Gaelic football match in 1988. McAnespie's family claimed he had been the victim of harassment from soldiers at the checkpoint prior to his death. The solider responsible was initially charged with manslaughter but the charges were dropped in 1990. However, this year the Public Prosecution Service in the UK reviewed the case and he has been charged with manslaughter by gross negligence ((BBC News, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-44532887).
[56] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[57] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[58] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon

way it's been. Everybody in this area is just like that.'[59] This contrast exemplifies the progress made in normalising the formerly unique dangers of border life since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

Pauline, though, juxtaposed her lived experience of the border to that of someone from Belfast: 'They may cross the border, maybe, twice a year? To go to Dublin airport or something like that. They don't live and breathe and cross the border the way we do, it's part of our daily lives.'[60] This feeling of distance from the central state power, even within Northern Ireland, builds on the idea of the paradox of the borderlands and feeds into what is discussed under the next subheading, that there is a significant feeling of being removed from the political process with relation to Brexit, particularly for border residents.

4.5 SENSE OF REMOVAL FROM THE POLITICAL PROCESS

In the wake of all this Brexit uncertainty that stems from the disputes around the border, there was a sense of a sort of impotence with regards to the negotiations that came across very strongly through my interviews. For the borderlanders, there was an acute feeling of being removed from the political process, building on what David Newman refers to as the "double peripherality" (2006: 179-180) of borderland life. This builds further on the paradox of the borderlands that was introduced earlier, the border is currently shaping the Brexit debate but yet the negotiations are mostly out of the reach for those who live on it.

Relating to this conceptualisation of the paradox of living on the border, through my interviews it became clear that it was felt there is a chasm, between those making the decisions about issues that will affect the border region and those who actually live there, fitting in with how Donnan phrased a classic borderland trope: "In a very real sense it is *their* border and yet they feel they have little control over it" (2005: 73). There are a multitude of politicians and officials – in London, Dublin, Belfast, Brussels - with some sort of stake in the how the Irish border issue plays out, but in talking to border residents it was clear that they do not feel like they have the opportunity to have their voices heard. One respondent stated:

[59] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[60] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh

> We're kind of feeling that the local voice is not really being heard. [The] really frustrating thing is you have the people in London, and probably in the EU as well, just looking at the big picture, looking at the big companies. They're not thinking about the small companies in the border region. They are the ones going to be impacted most by this, and nobody's even talking to them.[61]

This chapter has already discussed how both a narrative of abandonment and of being misunderstood permeates both communities in Northern Ireland. These narratives, it became seen through interviews, are particularly potent in the borderlands, can be argued as being exacerbated exponentially by Brexit.

Indeed even the term Brexit, as Kate, laughingly, pointed out to me, does not even include Northern Ireland, despite the irony that it is Northern Ireland that threatens derail the whole process. It is telling, she commented, that it was not considered what the 'inflection' would be in Northern Ireland as a result of 'the fact that we weren't even included in the term Brexit.'[62] She contended further, that in a very real sense, Brexit has been a British, if not English, project, without much of a sense of the wider UK context: 'It just didn't seem to be debating Northern Ireland, whenever you heard about it, it was about the NHS[63], and about money, and about tides of people with brown skin coming to invade England. It wasn't really relevant to Northern Ireland politics.'[64] The lack of time afforded Northern Ireland, let alone specifically its border region, in the Brexit debate was flagged as problematic by academics and commentators, such as Edmund Burke and Cathal McCall (both 2016) as early as April of that year, but the debate continued to "ignore" the region (Burke, 2016: 4).

During interviews, it became clear that it was generally felt that border residents had more of an ear with the Irish government and, as a result, the EU negotiation team. Whether this is a result of genuine concern or understanding for Northern Ireland and its residents, or purely economic motives, was questioned: 'I think the Irish government are more attuned to it, because they are going to be the EU member state that are most affected by it. So I think they have a very difficult situation because they're basically the dogs that the EU are using to attack Britain over Brexit.'[65] Regardless, the

[61] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[62] Author Interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast
[63] The NHS is a colloquial abbreviation for the National Health System in the UK. An increase in NHS funding was one of the main promises made by the Leave campaign.
[64] Author Interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast
[65] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon

perception that the Irish government, at least in comparison to their British counterparts, is awake to the dangers of Brexit for the border region and Northern Ireland more broadly was consolidated through the data. Pauline, who works directly in supporting the economic and infrastructural development of and investment in the border region, spoke about this at length with me:

> I have to say, the support we're getting from the Republic of Ireland government has been fantastic, and I suppose it's safe to say we're preaching to the converted when we're talking to them because they agree… I think the Irish government are much more aware, and are maybe listening more to the people and the businesses in the border, because it equally affects their companies as well. But no, there definitely is a vacuum there and there's no doubt about it. But it's who do you talk to that actually will listen?[66]

Importantly, John, a unionist respondent asserted this too, acknowledging the significance of this change: 'When it comes to things like, you know, negotiations and etc., you know, I remember sitting thinking: "Thank God for [Leo] Varadkar and Simon Coveney."[67] I would have more trust in the Irish government in terms of, what in the name of God happens with the Irish border, than I do in anything that is coming out of Westminster, and that is a big psychological shift.'[68]

Overall though, respondents noted the particular difficulty that the lack of a functioning executive or devolved government in Belfast poses. Kate reflected on this point, explaining: 'I think our biggest challenge is not having politicians to talk to. Our role is to advise government, and we've nobody to advise. And nobody to make decisions. One of the things that's very frustrating is that if we had a normal government in place, they would be arguing for us to stay in the single market or the customs union. I think if we had politicians really representing our best interests they'd be arguing for that.'[69] This thought was reiterated by another respondent: 'What's been slightly more difficult is trying to get the voice heard in Northern Ireland, then, because obviously we don't have a government at the minute.'[70] The Stormont executive collapsed in January 2017 when Sinn Féin walked out of the power-sharing agreement over the Renewable Heat Incentive scandal. The snap elections that followed provided an unexpected boost to Sinn Féin, with unionism losing its overall majority for the

[66] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[67] Leo Varadkar is Irish *Taoiseach*, or Prime Minister, and Simon Coveney is the Minister for Foreign Affairs.
[68] Author interview with John on 26/04/18, Armagh
[69] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[70] Author interview with Kate on 15/05/18, Belfast

first time since the establishment of Good Friday Agreement institutions. This unprecedented shift saw Sinn Féin emboldened under new leader Michelle O'Neill, refusing to return to a power-sharing agreement until the inquiry into DUP leader's Arlene Foster's involvement with the scandal had concluded. However, talks have further stagnated over, nominally, several long-standing 'red-line' issues from both sides, a stand-alone Irish Language Act and the introduction of same-sex marriage, both of which are refused by the DUP. This stalemate, on top of the Brexit uncertainty in Britain and the DUP's position of supporting the Conservative government in Westminster, has meant that the restoration of the executive is extremely unlikely in the near future.

From here, having made clear the many ways in which Brexit is causing an uncertainty in Northern Ireland's border region, and how this is both affected by and affecting traditional narratives of the past and how these narratives are particularly impactful in the borderlands, we can move on to explore how this rebordering uncertainty and imaginaries of violence are causing shifts in social identity boundary processes and community relations.

5. FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY: "SPACE MAKES A DIFFERENCE" (PAASI, 1998: 676)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters have outlined how Brexit is seen as bringing an uncertainty to the border region and as reinforcing traditional narratives of how violence is imagined. This chapter will draw on the borderscapes concept and further develop the idea of mutual rebordering processes that are influenced by this Brexit related uncertainty and the narratives of the how the past is imagined. This will be done through answering the following sub-questions: How do inscriptions of identity influence social-identity boundaries? How do spatial borders and social-identity boundaries interact? How has Brexit related physical rebordering catalysed a rebordering of social-identity boundaries?

First, it will outline how peace has come to be understood in Northern Ireland and how this is tied up inextricably with the new understanding of identity, as something fluid and non-binaried, that the Good Friday Agreement set out. Then, I will outline the ways in which Northern Ireland remains divided with identity feeding into spatial designation, and how this is perpetuated by and perpetuates visible inscriptions of identity. This will highlight the fact that the link between physical bordering processes and social identity boundaries is already a feature of Northern Irish society. Relating to this

then, this chapter finishes by setting out the way in which the rebordering of these social identity boundaries, prompted by the uncertainty regarding the physical border, is prompting a shift in community relations and manifestations of identity and reflect on how the general perception is this shift will be detrimental to the peace made, that there is also perhaps space for a transformation of the post-conflict process.

5.2 "IS THERE PEACE IN NORTHERN IRELAND?"

To set the scene for how identity and community relations are undergoing a rebordering process of their own as borders and boundaries shift, it is important first to understand how all matters of identity and community relations in Northern Ireland are perceived as taking place in the shadow of the Good Friday Agreement.

First and foremost, the Agreement was predicated on, and has largely maintained, the cessation of violence beginning with the ceasefires of the 1990s. This, then, facilitated the decommissioning of the paramilitaries throughout the early 2000s (MacGinty et al., 2007: 6-7) and the withdrawal of the British Army in 2007. The achievement of a negative peace, in Galtung's sense (1964), is progress made as a result of the Agreement that, as many informants claimed, should not be underestimated, or taken for granted. As Kate said: 'I think that we've certainly seen a lot of improvement. And that's the thing, that it's good to mark the Good Friday Agreement and that sort of thing, because we don't grow up hearing about deaths on the TV every night.'[71] When asked about peace, most respondents were largely positive: 'There is peace in Northern Ireland. I see it from a very personal point of view because the village I'm from was very badly affected by the Troubles, in one incident with my family in particular. So to go from where we were to 25 years ago to where we are now, there's a huge difference…Definitely it's not a perfect peace but it's definitely peaceful times compared to what we had before.'[72] These two responses stood out to me as important. Indeed, when assessing peace in a post-conflict setting, it is natural to draw a comparison with the violence of the past. However, we should question whether this really encapsulates what it means to live in a peaceful society or it is just

[71] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast
[72] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon

an improvement on how 'horrific' and 'really divided'[73] the past was. Peace is usually referred to in Northern Ireland as the peace process, and this is helpful as it is instils in the general population that peace is something ongoing, with Tony remarking that peace is 'not a destination. It's the train. It's a dynamic thing, and it's a process.'[74]

But it is in terms of creating a positive peace, or the true "integration of human society" (Galtung, 1964: 2), that the Good Friday Agreement had its real potential, and this is what is most relevant to this thesis. The option for all in Northern Ireland to be British, Irish or both was the Agreement's caveat for attempting to go beyond the binary of orange and green and, alongside the more practical elements of establishing the power-sharing institutions and how the devolved government will function, its real importance was in the fluidity it allowed for how people can choose to identify, as one respondent put it for me:

> What the European Union did for us, in conjunction with the Good Friday Agreement, was create and help to sustain this notion that we could have an identity that's set beyond the boundary notion of being British or Irish. Or allowed you to be one or the other if you wanted. So you could be British, you could be Irish. You could be a little bit of both, or none of the above. That room to breathe, in respect of your sense of national identity, has been a very important as a creative space. Certainly from our point of view, it allowed people to, at least for the moment, set aside the constitutional question and live out other areas of their identity.[75]

The interview excerpt given above highlights how the 1998 framework is credited with having created the circumstances for previously conflictual binaries of identity, British and Irish, to be reconciled. The Agreement was deliberately constructed to break down that dichotomy, which until that point had dominated Northern Irish society since the creation of the state in 1922. Its three strand structure emphasised cross-border cooperation and the softening of social-identity boundaries both within Northern Ireland and across the border into Ireland through a common overarching EU context. The exact wording of this stipulation is as follows:

> [The two governments] recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern

[73] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[74] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[75] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast

> Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose, and accordingly confirm that their right to hold both British and Irish citizenship is accepted by both Governments and would not be affected by any future change in the status of Northern Ireland (The Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and the Government of Ireland, 1998. Article 2 vi).

In this way, the Agreement created the framework for the onset of a positive peace in Northern Ireland, but in many ways it has failed to live up to its potential, largely due to a lack of political will. Society has remained largely polarised along traditional, community lines. As Mairéad put it, rather gloomily: 'Our politicians went out all over the world to talk about our agreement. But as time has gone on, I find myself wondering if they really understood it in the first place.'[76]

5.3 NORTHERN IRELAND REMAINS DIVIDED

The conflict lives on, then, in the way in which society continues to function and how violence is imagined. Nagle and Clancy detailed that in 2010, still only 5 per cent of Northern Ireland's children attended integrated schooling (2010:7). The divided nature of society has remained largely in place, with independent researcher Paul Nolan writing that "parties in the assembly have to designate themselves as either nationalist or unionist…the assumption being that these two identities will remain the organising categories for politics in the long term" (The Irish Times, 2017). The manner in which political parties continue to mobilise along ethno-national lines and how, particularly in the cities, the existence of separate housing, socialising, and sporting affiliations, means that communities remain essentially segregated. In this way, the consociational nature of the Good Friday Agreement can be said to have prevented a relapse to violence, but in a sense it has frozen these divisions and the binaried divisions of the past continue to be relevant at the highest level, as well in everyday life. The institutions put in place as per the Agreement bolster the continuation of the two traditional, mutually exclusive, nationalisms in Northern Ireland (MacGinty et al., 2007: 8) and do not provide a mechanism in which the post-nationalist ideal that formed the core of the Agreement can be really put into practice.

[76] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast

This is evidenced through how the 20 years of 'peace' in Northern Ireland have unfolded. Going back to Schröder and Schmidt, then, we previously discussed how societies that exhibit imaginaries of violence are characteristically organised in a divided political landscape, with the mentality permeating at the political and the societal level (2001: 8). Violence in Northern Ireland, for the most part, has ceased, but the narratives, performances and inscriptions that perpetuate its imagination have not. This creates an atmosphere in which violence seems close at hand. Tony, reflecting on his over 20 years' experience working in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, commented: 'Sectarianism remains, certainly in our view, an ongoing reality. We see it as a certain kind of management of the conflict, whereby behaviour has been changed, modified, become significantly less violent. [But] where the deep changes that lead to transformation haven't been made.'[77]

These violent imaginaries are reproduced through previously discussed narratives, alongside the visibility of identity, or performances and inscriptions to use Schröder and Schmidt's language. As Robin Wilson put it: "Northern Ireland's culture wars are fought out in physical space: parades, flags, murals" (Community Relations Council Peace Report, 2016: 122). Identity is acted out in the context of the past, and social-identity boundaries are reproduced and continuously maintained by how violence and peace are imagined. One young respondent's answer particularly illustrates how identity is something visible and inherently performed. Liam engaged with this idea, questioning the extent to which peace has really reached the communities that are the most deprived, which also generally correlate with the areas that experienced 'the worst excesses of the conflict,'[78] despite the rhetoric of politicians:

> We should all do a test, in all fairness, to actually show you. We should all go march down Shankill with an Irish flag, and then march down the Ardoyne with a Union Jack.[79] I'd happily enough march down Shankill. Because if we go to parliament and they tell us this is a safe city? Then would they deal with us? If someone could promise me that this city is safe, then I'd do it. Ask them to walk down Shankill with an Irish flag and they'll

[77] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[78] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast
[79] Unlike more segregated areas of the city, West Belfast is an interface area where the community changes depending on the street. Shankill Road is unionist and backs onto the nationalist Falls Road and the Ardoyne area.

> see how safe it is. I'd walk down the Shankill in a Celtic top[80], and I wouldn't do anything wrong, I'd be a normal civilian. And I'd get my head kicked in![81]

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive recognised that there is a "chill factor" (Community Relations Council Peace Report, 2016: 118) created by the visibility of identity in certain areas, with some murals bordering on the overtly sectarian. Indeed there was a concerted effort for the worst of these murals to be either taken down or altered for the purposes of inclusivity and to promote tourism (Rolston, 2010: 286-287). However, there is still a visibility of identity unique to Northern Ireland as a post-conflict society that brings us then to the notion of how social-identity boundaries feed into physical space, and vice versa.

5.4 MIND-BORDERS AND SPATIALITY: 'PEOPLE DO HAVE MIND-MAPS ABOUT WHERE THEY TRAVEL.'[82]

The realities of this ongoing division, and what it means practically, was put most explicitly by the same young respondent: 'Peace is a daytime thing. I'd happily go anywhere in the daytime and I think it would be peaceful. In the night-time, peace sort of goes out the window. I'd walk through the Shankill in the daytime, but I wouldn't walk through the Shankill at night. No chance. I think, in Belfast anyway, that's the norm. It's sectarian.'[83] This quote highlights how identity dictates where Liam, as a nationalist, feels safe to travel. This feeling, it should be noted though, was reiterated by other respondents of a similar age, also from Belfast but on the other side of the divide, with one young unionist, Stuart, saying to another during a group interview: 'White City?! How do you even live there? You're surrounded. You're a wee Protestant estate surrounded by Catholics! Turn left, you're into Catholics. Turn right, you're into Catholics. Go straight, you're into Catholics.'[84] This notion of being 'surrounded' recalls the narrative of unionism's siege mentality, building on Donnan's referencing of the continuing existence of "no-go areas" for unionists in South Armagh (2010: 260). John, told me a similar story of how identity informs spatiality:

> I was going to Dungannon, and I automatically started to turn right to head down Barrack Street and then down the west of the Mall, which was a traffic

[80] Celtic Football club are a Glaswegian team that have a traditionally Catholic following, in comparison to Rangers football club whose fan base would be traditionally considered Protestant.
[81] Author Interview with Liam, 01/05/18, Belfast
[82] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh
[83] Author Interview with Liam, 01/05/18, Belfast
[84] Author Interview with Stuart, 01/05/18, Newtonabbey

> jam. I didn't think of turning left and going up round the back of Irish Street because, in my sectarian map, I didn't think. Being a member of the UDR, you didn't drive through Catholic Armagh. Now that was 2000 and something or other, I left the UDR in 1975! Now what I actually did was I said: 'Shit! Why am I turning right?!' and I went and turned left. But psychologically it's there, and if that was inside my head…how much is it inside other people's heads too?[85]

This, in his words, is evidence of the everyday 'sectarian' nature of habit, as well as where people simply do and do not feel welcome, or at least comfortable. This is linked specifically to how narratives and performances of violence are related to the interplay between mental, social identity boundaries and physical, spatial borders between areas.

Relating to this, Gormley-Heenan and Aughey offer up the concept of the "border in the mind" (2017: 497), or mind-borders, when discussing social identity boundaries in Northern Ireland. Understanding the quotes given above, these mind-borders can be said to be both influenced by and an influence on the physical borders by which communities live in Northern Ireland. Be it the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland, or areas within Northern Ireland itself. One respondent encapsulated this nicely: '[There are] different manifestations of these borders, in terms of how they play out in both the consciousness of people who live near them, or around them in the metaphysical way.'[86] The historicity of these bordering practices was explained to me by John, who was born in South Armagh[87]:

> The border wasn't between Dundalk and Newry, the border was somewhere just North of Drogheda, in people's minds. They just didn't come here. There was just this swathe of Ireland during the Troubles which was just *verboten* territory. I lived in Belfast from the early 1970s through to when I

[85] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh
[86] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[87] South Armagh, nicknamed "bandit country" by the British media, (The Telegraph, 2006, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1410040/This-is-IRA-bandit-country.html) with its proximity to the border with Monaghan is traditionally seen as a republican stronghold with a large IRA presence. Throughout the Troubles it was home to the "busiest heliport in Europe, operated by the British army. The local roads were so dangerous that it had to fly men and supplies around the 18 nearby watchtowers" (The Economist, 2018, https://www.economist.com/briefing/2018/03/31/twenty-years-after-a-peace-deal-the-mood-is-sour-in-northern-ireland). During the conflict, 124 British soldiers and 54 police officers were killed by the Provisional IRA in South Armagh alone, the highest level of violence outside Belfast (Donnan, 2005: 91).

> moved back here in 1995. And I remember I talked about how I was going to move back here and everybody said: 'What! You're going where?!'[88]

The lingering memory of how an area might build up a 'bad reputation'[89] was pinned down as a narrative of the past conflict: 'Dundalk was really bad news in this [Protestant] part of the world. Newry was similarly bad news.'[90] But, evidencing how the violence of the past continues to be imagined in the present, these mind-borders were name-checked in interviews as still being present today: 'The big issue is that people have borders in their heads. There'll be people who are from the next village to me who won't come through my village because it's seen as a nationalist village…while there's a border between North and South, there's borders between communities and areas anyway.'[91] This description of Derry and how identity boundaries interact with spatiality, with both the Irish border and borders within the city itself is further evidenced in the literature: "Since the Troubles [the political and sectarian violence] began, the existence of these borders has been signalled in every conceivable way by flags, murals, graffiti, painted kerbstones...Derry is a border town with internal borders that make themselves manifest even in the slash mark between the names Derry/Londonderry; in the sectarian housing estates; in the old walled architecture of the town and in the competing histories of its development" (Campbell, 1999: 29 quoted by Sidaway in van Houtum et al., 2005: 197).

Indeed, another example of how these mind-borders came through during my interviews is an interaction during a group interview with young respondents from a unionist area just outside Belfast. 15 year old Darryl was telling a story: '…say the Catholics seen us walking down the street...', to which I questioned him: 'But how do they know your Protestant?', and received the response: 'Cos they just go: "We know you're from Monkstown."'[92] The automatic assumption of identity based on where a person is from is also directly linked to how these mind-borders form and are formed by how the violence of the past is imagined and carried into the present, even among young people born after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Bauman reflects on this, remarking how "the maps that

[88] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh
[89] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[90] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh
[91] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[92] Author interview with Darryl, 01/05/18, Newtonabbey

guide the movements of various categories of inhabitants do not overlap, but for any map to 'make sense', some areas of the city must be left out as senseless" (2000: 104).

This background of understanding that there was already a congruence between these mind-borders and physical borders before Brexit, is important in order to recognise the potential consequences of Brexit going forward. Recalling the concept of borderscapes allows us to understand how the social and historical context of a border influences the identity of the communities that live on it, and that any renegotiation of the physical border must be seen as impactful on social boundaries between those communities (Brambilla et al., 2015: xvi). The fact Brexit has set off the most large scale process of rebordering of the Irish border since 1998 means it can be theorised that there will inevitably be some sort of rebordering of mind-borders. So, essentially, mind-borders are at risk of being hardened as a result of the potential hardening of the Irish border.

5.5 SHIFTS IN IDENTITY AS A RESULT OF THE BREXIT VOTE

Gormley-Heenan and Aughey put forward the following thought on Brexit's "border in the mind," claiming that it prompts "shifts in self-understanding, individually and collectively, attendant upon the referendum" (2017: 497). The reality of this came very strongly through my interviews, as put rather less delicately by Liam: 'I think everything is going to change. Every fucking thing.'[93]

Going back to the beginning of this chapter and the central role that the Good Friday Agreement plays in this story, it has been written that its "spirit" is being "slowly undermined" in the wake of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union (Soares, 2016: 839). Essentially what this means is that the Brexit referendum has changed the playing field for how identity has been allowed to be understood in Northern Ireland since 1998. Although we have seen that the potential for blurring the identity binary in Northern Ireland was not fully achieved post-1998 and sectarianism remains an ongoing issue, European Union membership and the post-nationalist spirit of the Good Friday framework did provide, at least, the legal opportunity for Northern Ireland's residents to move past singularity of being either British or Irish. Brexit threatens to remove the ambiguity that made this possible. Psychologically, there is a very real sense of Northern Ireland being pulled further away

[93] Author Interview with Liam, 01/05/18, Belfast

from Ireland and Europe and further into the UK, something that is particularly disturbing to nationalists: 'It would take the freedom away. That's what it is. This was all Irish land from the very start.'[94] The sort of legal haziness that allowed an Irish nationalist to comfortably live in Northern Ireland and still feel like they are on 'Irish land' is what is at risk. In terms of a hardening of the community divide, one respondent commented:

> It's starting to happen, I think. I haven't experienced it on a day to day, or a work related thing yet. But if you watch the political shows, especially those which civilians get involved in, then you'll definitely see that it is starting to now…at the start, was very much a political thing and it was political parties, but as happens, in Northern Ireland especially, it very quickly filters down to the party supporters. And so it will almost become just another definition: You're either Protestant/Catholic, you're nationalist/unionist or you're hard border/ soft border, or whatever. Brexit/non-Brexit. It's definitely going to cause issues, yeah.[95]

In this way, Brexit can be said to carry the risk of each community in Northern Ireland retreating into itself, making use of traditional narratives of the conflict that places each in direct opposition to each to other. A most illustrative example of this re-emergence of past imaginaries being used to envision the future came during one of my group interview from a young Protestant who admitted not to knowing much about Brexit, but offered up a thought on the changes he perceived in his community as a result: 'Everyone's starting to hate Catholics so much more now because they're talking about that united Ireland stuff again.'[96]

There is also the potential for a shift in identity boundaries based on what Brexit means in relation to the physical border. This is the interplay of mutual rebordering processes, in how the border itself is influential on social-identity. This relationship was most demonstrably evidenced in a somewhat emotional response from John, as an older unionist who lives in the direct shadow of the border:

> A hard border would mean that my lifestyle, my way of feeling, all those sorts of things would have changed. That how I; as someone who originally held a British passport, solely a British passport, but now holds both a British

[94] Author Interview with Liam, 01/05/18, Belfast
[95] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[96] Author Interview with Chris, 01/05/18, Newtonabbey

> passport and an Irish passport, who felt that prior to the Good Friday Agreement, the definition of being Irish didn't include me, but now does include me. Who very much believes John Hewitt's description, you know: 'If asked what I am? I am an Ulsterman, I am...'[97] and you go through that big list, and if you leave one of them out, that's not me, and I'm sorry it's so complicated. That I would find that that part of my Irishness has been taken away. And actually, that's one of the things that, and I don't know how many other Protestants coming from my sort of background would feel this, but I can understand nationalists in Northern Ireland feeling this, that that would take away from my feeling of Irishness.[98]

This response, more than anything yet presented in this research, encapsulates the very real, while still rather metaphysical, threat that Brexit poses to the progress made in peace in Northern Ireland. John, who had served in the British Army during the Troubles, directly addresses how the Good Friday Agreement and the soft border allowed him to develop a sense of Irishness that was unable to exist during the conflict, and so is now being threatened by the potential resurrection of the physical border, this should be seen as an indication of how these different forms of rebordering interact in a mutual process.

John's description of how Brexit is forcing a reconsideration of identity vividly highlights the sense that Brexit is prompting a shift within unionism more generally. This idea of an 'existential crisis of loyalism'[99], that was not entirely prompted, but is certainly not helped, by Brexit and that draws on the aforementioned narratives of abandonment and uncertainty was mentioned in interviews. Tony described the idea of a 'notion of loss within it all. We've lost our police force, we've lost our majority, we're losing rights, we're losing our flag. And again, that notion of, if not a united Ireland, but a border poll and people talking about the changing status of the border and the whole Brexit conversation comes along all at the same time.'[100]Indeed the, rather ironic, fear that Brexit, a most latent exhibition of British nationalism, could be the straw that breaks the camel's back for the union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has catalysed this 'crisis' of unionism. The Lord Ashcroft survey found "42% of respondents – including 17% of Unionists and nearly a quarter of those who

[97] The respondent is paraphrasing Hewitt's famous quote: "I am an Ulsterman, I am British, I am Irish and I am European. Anyone who demeans any one part of me demeans me as a person."
[98] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh
[99]Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin
[100] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin

voted for the Ulster Unionist Party – [generally seen as the party moderate unionism] saying they felt less close to the rest of the UK than they did five years ago" (2018: 31). This indicates the growing awareness in Northern Ireland, at least among moderate unionists, that unionism needs to adjust or, potentially, die:

> Unionism needs to recognise that in order for it to preserve the union, it has to persuade 'small u unionists' and 'small n nationalists' that they need to vote for the maintenance of the union. Up until now, that has been easy. Because of the National Health Service and all those various things. And because of the accommodation that existed under the Good Friday Agreement. But that has been changed by Brexit. And the difficulty is that, while in 1912, the argument was the Home Rule is Rome Rule, that is no longer the case. The position now is actually that Northern Ireland rule is Martyr's Memorial Rule[101]. And, in other words, those of us who believe in liberal social values, feel very much that indeed what we're looking at is a mature liberal democracy south of the border.[102]

Related to this, there was an avalanche of coverage on a changing of the tide on identity issues that was peppered, in a somewhat sensationalist fashion, throughout both British and Irish media in the immediate wake of the referendum. The Belfast Telegraph reported former UUP leader Mike Nesbitt as saying: "I have been struck by the number of [Irish] nationalists who were previously content to hold Irish unity as a distant aspiration but for whom Brexit changes everything" (28 June 2016). This contention was backed up by another political figure, Green Party leader Steve Agnew, who is also originally from a unionist background, commenting: "People are saying for the first time in their life that they would vote for a united Ireland, having never contemplated it before" (The Independent, 5 July 2016).

The idea that Irish unity is being hurried along by Brexit is perhaps a far-fetched assertion, although polling has returned rather contrasting results. But either way this is important, as it does indicate a shift. A Queens University Belfast survey maintained that support for a united Ireland has not changed much since pre-Brexit levels, with 21 per cent of the entire population responding that they "would vote in favour of a united Ireland in a referendum, and 50 per cent would vote to Remain in

[101] Martyr's Memorial is a free Presbyterian church in Belfast founded by the late Revered Ian Paisley in 1969, associated with the evangelisation of Protestant opinion and identity in Northern Ireland and popular within the DUP.
[102] Author interview with John, 26/04/18, Armagh

the UK' with the rest as 'don't knows' or 'would not vote" (Garry et al., 2018: 10). More unexpectedly, a recent survey commissioned for the BBC found the results much closer, at unprecedented levels of support, with 42.1 per cent in support of reunification, versus 45 per cent in favour of remaining within the UK (Bill White, 2018: 133). The latter poll would suggest that the winning over of moderate nationalists, who up to now had seen the pragmatic benefits of remaining in the UK as more beneficial than the ideological allure of a united Ireland, was happening in the wake of Brexit. A rebordering of social identity boundaries set into process by the uncertainty and commotion of the referendum vote.

Based on this, we can question how much this upheaval of the status quo is actually motivating people to move past the stasis of the current post-confliction situation, rejecting the binaried nature of how the past has been imagined and how the future is foreshadowed. The assertion that mind-borders are hardening and community relations are receding back into an either/or situation, as a result of the uncertainty over the hardening of the physical border, then, feeds onto the final, concluding point regarding the potential for transformation that exists within the Brexit related uncertainty.

5.6 THE NEXT "GOOD FRIDAY MOMENT?"

The previous chapters have discussed how the Brexit vote and rebordering processes have catalysed a reversion to narratives of the conflict whereby both communities fall into their old antagonistic roles. However, in the face of this, there is also the potential for conflict transformation, as came across in several counter-narratives. Whereby some respondents outlined how there is also an opportunity for Brexit, if nothing else, to bring new a dynamic to a situation of, often sectarian, stasis: 'A lot of these situations of crisis, they throw up possible huge consequences, but if that opportunity isn't going to be taken [then] I think we could be heading for something not so good.'[103] Three main counter-narratives emerged from within my interviews: The economic argument, the youth perspective and the idea of a Good Friday 2.0.

The potential of the Brexit 'crisis' to bring an opportunity for a new pragmatism to Northern Ireland in which the economic or practical argument finally trumps arguments of old narratives and social-identity boundaries was cited by two border region respondents: 'I do think there is definitely an

[103] Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin

opportunity there, and they are recognising that this border is really like an economic zone on its own…We need to stay together and we need to make our case now as an economic unit. I think that can be done in a non-political way. I think it's starting to happen.'[104] Similarly, this was asserted as already being underway in the borderlands: 'I think you're seeing that already because you're seeing groups being set up in border regions, and all that type of thing. If you drive, almost every major border point you pass there's some kind of sign about Brexit,'[105] but there was still an element of doubt that harkens back to the uncertainty narratives highlighted in the previous chapter on uncertainty: 'Even if they're looking at it very positively, the bottom line is if there's a big massive border in the middle and it takes ten, twenty minutes to cross every time, it's just going to blow that all apart.'[106]

Another theme that emerged from this idea of Brexit providing the opportunity for a sort of transformation of the post-conflict setting was based around the interviews I specifically carried out with young people and with those involved in youth-work in the region. Age was an important cleavage in the Brexit vote in the UK in general[107] and similarly so in Northern Ireland specifically[108]. Young people certainly 'have a bigger stake in the future than everybody else does,'[109] and Kate told me she believed that Brexit has 'at least made them realise that they have to wake up and get involved and get active.'[110] I spoke with several young people about the pressure that is often put on them to provide the change within society, to move the peace process along where their parents could not, and the importance of young people standing up for the hard-won peace in the face of Brexit's uncertainty was highlighted, with Liam stating: 'No chance the older generation are changing this place. Young people are making peace. That's where the peace comes in.'[111] Another respondent in this same group but of a unionist background, agreed: 'The older people saw the Troubles. None of us here have seen

[104] Author interview with Pauline, 20/03/18, Armagh
[105] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18, Dungannon
[106] Author interview with Seán, 07/03/18
[107] Under 25s were more than twice as likely to vote Remain (71%) than Leave (29%), while among over 65s the picture was the exact opposite, as 64% voted to Leave compared to 36% Remain (YouGov: https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/06/27/how-britain-voted/).
[108]Similarly to the UK trend as a whole, 18-24 year olds in Northern Ireland were most likely to vote to Remain at 77% (Gormley-Heenan, Aughey and Devine, 2017).
[109] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[110] Author interview with Kate, 15/05/18, Belfast
[111] Author Interview with Liam, 01/05/18, Belfast

a bomb go off. Or seen anybody killed. If we did, there would be bitterness.'[112] The determination of these young people to remain committed to the peace process, in the face of the narrative of violence and evident hardening of community relations as prompted by Brexit related uncertainty, was striking and sobering for me as a researcher.

With regards to the real transformative potential of Brexit, Mairéad's assertion that Brexit is another 'Good Friday moment on a much larger stage,'[113] and her call to 'apply some of that thinking to this moment,'[114] struck me as particularly indicative of how some border region residents are consciously deciding to view the difficulties of Brexit, and the shifts in bordering processes that have been catalysed, as another opportunity for conflict transformation in Northern Ireland, taking on board the lessons of what has worked, and failed, in the past. The emergence of these counter-narratives in response to the reassertion of narratives of the conflict and the potential hardening divide between communities and social-identity boundaries provide some nuance in the story of my research and an optimistic take on the potential for the transformation within the so-called crisis.

These counter-narratives form the final dimension of my analysis in how Brexit related rebordering is prompting shifts in community relations and identity manifestations. To summarise, the bulk of this chapter has made clear how these rebordering processes, in flux as a result of the Brexit uncertainty, are causing shifts in how communities relate and how identity is perceived and manifested, emphasising the rather superficial level of the peace and how spatiality and social-identity boundaries interact. Analysis of the information provided in this chapter indicates that these shifts are, in general, potentially detrimental to peace in the border region. However, these counter-narratives allow us to understand that there is a transformative potential at play within the Brexit uncertainty, if the opportunity is allowed to be taken.

[112] Author Interview with Andrew, 01/05/18, Belfast
[113] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast
[114] Author interview with Mairéad, 11/04/18, Belfast

6. CONCLUSION: A TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL?

6.1 SUMMARY

This thesis set out to answer the following research puzzle: 'How have shifts in bordering processes since the Brexit vote, through being both perpetuated by, and perpetuating narratives of how violence is imagined, catalysed changes in community relations and manifestations of identity in the border region of Northern Ireland in 2018?'

Chapter 3 laid out the theme of uncertainty, which preludes any further analysis in this thesis. This chapter discussed the borderland narrative of the link between peace and the invisible border since the onset of the peace process in 1998. This stated, I then went on to set out how uncertainty in the wake of the Brexit vote, as well as other political issues in Northern Ireland, is contributing to the perpetuation of past narratives of how violence is imagined. The uncertainty, it was noted, is mostly stemming from the ambiguity surround the hard border and soft border terms. There was a concern in the border region that the psychological significance that the re-imposition of a harder border would have for peace in the region.

Chapter 4 set out to more thoroughly engage with Schröder and Schmidt's conceptualisation of violent narratives, with an emphasis on the precariat of post-conflict border regions full of violent imaginaries. The chapter details the historical narratives of abandonment that run through both communities and feed into contemporary feelings that Northern Ireland, and particularly the border region, are essentially misunderstood and removed from the political process. It was acknowledged that these narratives could yet shift to violent practices, but this has not yet happened. Following on from this, then, we discussed how these narratives are particularly prominent in the border region, due to the "particular character" of borderland life (Donnan and Wilson, 2010: 8). The everyday realities of living on the border were detailed. This chapter contained the theorisation of the paradox of the borderlands, the idea that these rural areas along the border are simultaneously both the distant margin, as well as the essence, of what makes the nation-state and how this links in with the paradox of how the border is imagined, practiced and perceived with regards to its visibility is theoretically significant. The conceptualisation of this borderland paradox helps us to go further in understanding

how borderlands in post-conflict or contested territories have particular narratives that perpetuate and are perpetuate by bordering processes.

Chapter 5 went further in theorising the dialectics between spatial or physical borders and social boundaries, or how these mutual bordering processes interact, building on the historic narratives discussed in the previous chapters. Firstly, I set out how essential the Good Friday Agreement has been in establishing and fomenting peace in Northern Ireland. The emphasis on moving past identity binaries and the softening of social-identity boundaries formed the core of the Agreement's most innovative ideals. This said, however, it was then discussed how, despite its post-national rhetoric and important legal stipulations for identity fluidity, the Agreement has largely failed to live up to its potential. Northern Ireland remains largely divided along conflict lines. The link between how these social-identity boundaries and spatial borders interact through the visibility of identity, or performances and inscriptions of how violence is imagined, was detailed. This was important to make clear, as it set out that there is, in fact, an established precedent in Northern Ireland for how physical borders and social-identity boundaries play into each other in a mutual rebordering process.

Finally, Chapter 5, building on what had been established up to that point, went on to answer the core of the research question. The relationship between how uncertainty over physical rebordering processes, as a result of the Brexit vote and the rebordering of social-identity boundaries, has catalysed shifts in community relations and perceptions of identity, was given and analysed. Through my interviews and document analysis alike, there was evidence of the rise of these antagonistic narratives of identity and the retreat of each community into traditional sides of the conflict. Alongside this, though, there was evidence of the rise of some counter-narratives in reaction to these shifts.

6.2 FINAL THOUGHTS

As stated in my introduction, my research question is academically significant in that it invited an approach that allowed us to understand both 1) how mutual bordering processes of physical borders and social-identity boundaries interact and shape each other 2) how the historicity of these bordering processes, as is emphasised in the borderscapes concept from which this frame is built, is perpetuated by imaginaries of peace and violence. In doing this, I argue that I have pushed forward with theorising

how bordering processes should be understood as related to the narratives and imaginaries that exist alongside them. This thesis has shown, while still at an early stage analysis, that the uncertainty catalysed by Brexit related rebordering of the physical border between Ireland and Northern Ireland is having some effect on how communities relate to each other and identity is manifested in the border region, through the perpetuation of violent imaginaries.

Further still, the most significant value of this thesis is its empirical significance, given the extremely current nature of its subject matter. For the most part, I have argued that this uncertainty poses the risk for the shifts in rebordering to cause a hardening in social-identity boundaries, akin to the potential hardening of the border. However, the last chapter discussed the uncertainty creates the potential for regression, it could also pose the chance for progress. Brexit provides the catalyst for a rebordering of identity boundaries, in relation to the physical border, that is prompting, as we have seen, some sort of change. Reflecting on this, Tony hypothesised the transformative potential of this uncertainty, determined to take an optimistic approach: 'Our position in relation to this is very much that the peace process needs to go on. We would use words like, it needs to be re-energised, revitalised, reborn even. And the whole thing of maybe looking at, if not Good Friday Agreement 2.0, then something that would reinvigorate that or just move us forward.'[115]

This thesis is rooted in uncertainty, the ambiguous, the undefined. It is unclear, even now, what the practical implications of Brexit will be for Northern Ireland. I have detailed how Brexit rebordering is causing a shift in how communities related and how identity is perceived. Without trying to hypothesise for an uncertain future, I have further attempted to make clear, through local narratives, and this framework of mutual bordering processes that account for the historicity of these narratives, how future physical rebordering along the Irish border is inherently linked to processes of rebordering in social identity boundary-making between and within communities. The majority of the evidence given in this thesis indicates that these shifts, due to the perpetuation of old narratives of the violent past, may be damaging to the peace made in the last 20 years; however, the rise of the counter-narratives in the face of the Brexit crisis should be noted as carrying the transformative potential for moving past the identity binary and prompting real change within the peace process.

[115]Author interview with Tony, 26/02/18, Dublin

6.3 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research, as discussed, was based on the current Brexit related uncertainty and how this was contributing to the perpetuation of violent imaginaries and a shift in identity boundaries. When the terms, and practical consequences, of the UK's Brexit deal become clearer over the next few months, this uncertainty will be diminished as the future of the UK's relationship with the EU, and so Ireland, becomes more defined.

If, as this research suggests, the Brexit negotiations result in any sort of border infrastructure being set up, there is an opportunity to follow up this research with a similar ethnography on how this more definite physical rebordering is contributing to social identity rebordering and shifts in identity and community relations. The framework used in this research; incorporating mutual rebordering processes and narratives of violence, can be applied to the new empirical context when the Brexit uncertainty is removed.

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8. RESPONDENT APPENDIX

8.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS:

#	**Respondent name**[116]	**Date of interview:**	**Location of interview:**	**Profession/ status of respondent:**
1.	Tony	26/02/18	Dublin	Works in cross-border peacebuilding
2.	Seán	07/03/18	Dungannon	Works in cross-border peacebuilding
3.	Pauline	20/03/18	Armagh	Works in border region development
4.	Linda	27/03/18	Armagh	Works in conflict research
5.	Mairéad	11/04/18	Belfast	Works in cross-community peacebuilding
6.	John	26/04/18	Armagh	Works in cross-border peacebuilding
7.	Kate	15/05/18	Belfast	Works in youth development

[116] As previously explained, all names have been changed to preserve anonymity of respondents.

8.2 GROUP INTERVIEWS:

#	**Respondent name**[117]	**Date of interview:**	**Location of interview:**	**Profession/ status of respondent:**
1.	Sarah	01/05/18	Belfast (Ardoyne group)	Young person
2.	Liam	01/05/18	Belfast (Ardoyne group)	Young person
3.	Patrick	01/05/18	Belfast (Ardoyne group)	Young person
4.	James	01/05/18	Belfast (Ardoyne group)	Young person
5.	Conor	01/05/18	Belfast (Ardoyne group)	Young person
6.	Simon	01/05/18	Belfast (Ardoyne group)	Young person
7.	Chris	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
8.	Darryl	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
9.	Stuart	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person

[117] As previously explained, all names have been changed to preserve anonymity of respondents.

10.	Craig	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
11.	Sam	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
12.	Jack	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
13.	Dylan	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
14.	Jamie	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
15.	Matthew	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
16.	Josh	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person
17.	Tom	01/05/2018	Belfast (Newtonabbey group)	Young person