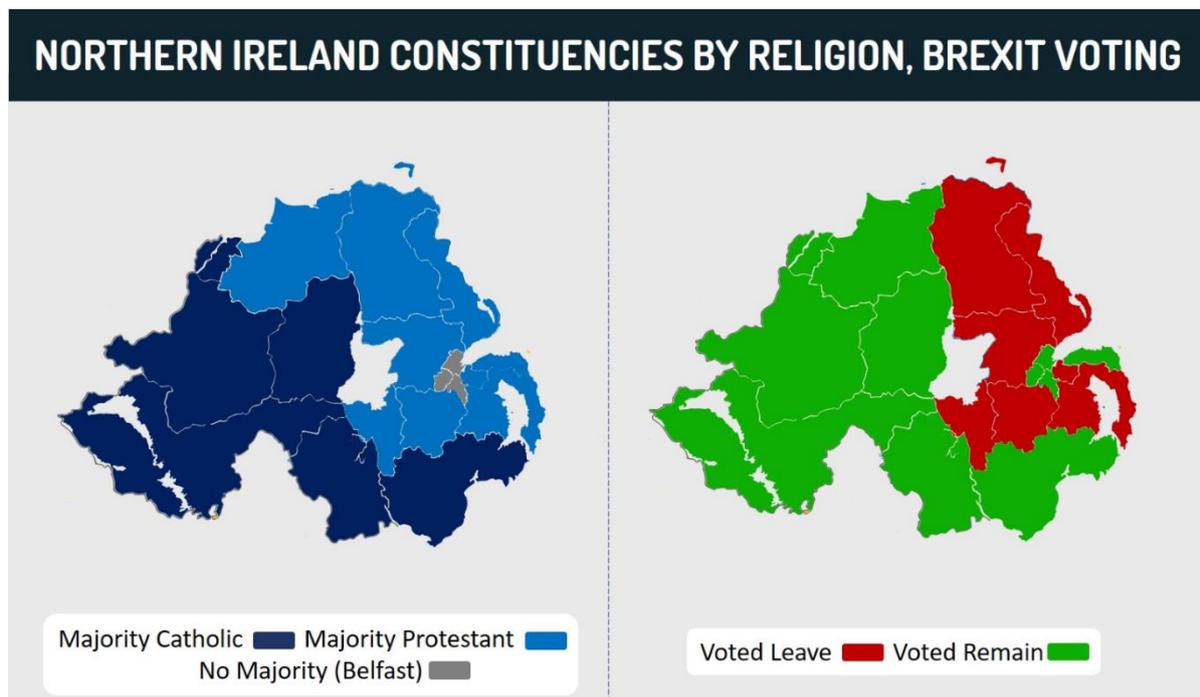


'GET BREXIT DONE' AND THE FRAGILE PEACE:

English Nationalism, the Identity Politics of Brexit and the impact on Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland.

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(Fig.1) [Max-Security.com](https://www.max-security.com)

Abstract:

100 years on from the partition of the island of Ireland in 1921 and the 'Irish Question' is just as contentious as ever. The Good Friday Agreement in 1998 put an end to violence that plagued the British enclave of Northern Ireland, seemingly settling tensions by creating structures for parity of recognition and cooperation. Yet, Brexit has brought these tensions back to the fore of British, and even European politics. Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson, perhaps unwittingly, have pushed a project that is threatening not just peace and security in Northern Ireland, but the structural integrity of the United Kingdom as a whole, with nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales gaining increased popularity. This series of events has led to more questions than answers.

This thesis aims to address the particular character of identity politics that has been developing for decades in Britain, specifically 'English Nationalism'. This trend, responsible for the popularity of Farage and Johnson, can be seen as the manufacturer of Brexit. English Nationalism has both directly and indirectly had adverse side effects on Northern Ireland's system of transitional justice between the Brexit vote in 2016 and the UK's official withdrawal in January 2021. I will seek to define the ways in which this happened by firstly defining English Nationalism in its complexities and investigating how this has affected the Peace Process both through and beyond Brexit.

Key words: English Nationalism, Brexit, Identity Politics, Transitional Justice, Northern Ireland

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INTRODUCTION:

This year marks the centenary since the partition of the island of Ireland into a sovereign nation in the south and a northern region retaining membership of the United Kingdom. Between 1969 and 1998 Northern Ireland became a by-word for violence and conflict on the world stage. The core of the crisis boils down to a difference of identity and culture between, broadly speaking, a Catholic population that perceives itself as culturally Irish and a Protestant population that maintains a valued British heritage. Identity and perceptions of heritage and belonging were strongly linked to the concept of claims to territorial sovereignty and national allegiance in Northern Ireland.¹ In short, Catholics in Northern Ireland generally support the Nationalist movement to form a United Ireland with the Republic of Ireland to the south. Similarly, Protestants tend to support the status quo union with Great Britain.

The tensions manifested on a difference in rights between these two groups, Catholics being systemically subject to fewer civil liberties than the *de facto* ruling Protestant class. This divergence resulted in a Civil War ('The Troubles') that lasted nearly three decades. The violence between Republican (Nationalist) and Loyalist (Unionist) paramilitary forces was ended with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which started the Peace Process based on transitional justice theory. The Peace Process sought to guarantee the prevention of re-emergence of violence by devising the power-sharing institutions, which were based on mutual respect and parity or esteem. However, confrontational identities and identity politics has not become a rarer phenomenon since the establishment of the Good Friday Agreement, in fact narratives of identity have become the driving factor of many of the major international political changes in the 21st Century, most recently the surprise election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and Brexit.²

In 2019 in a speech to Dáil Éireann (The Irish Parliament), Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, made it clear that both Democrats and Republicans across the Atlantic

¹ Connolly and Doyle, "Brexit and the Changing International and Domestic Perspectives of Sovereignty over Northern Ireland."

² Fukuyama, *Identity*.

were committed to defending the integrity of the Good Friday Agreement against potentially disastrous Brexit implications. In introducing Pelosi, Ceann Comhairle (Speaker of Dáil Éireann) Sean Ó'Feargháil described the historic commitment of the US to the establishment of 'the fragile peace' in Northern Ireland.³ When she spoke, Pelosi reaffirmed this commitment stating: 'let me be clear. If the Brexit deal undermines the Good Friday Accords, there will be no chance of a US-UK trade agreement.'⁴

In late 2020 Brexit negotiations ended with an eleventh-hour deal finalised on Christmas Eve, just days before the UK's official withdrawal from the EU. The deal saw Northern Ireland *de facto* remain in the EU customs area, technically placing a border down the Irish Sea rather than on the island of Ireland. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson had fulfilled his election promise to 'Get Brexit Done'. But, this measure, known as the Northern Irish Protocol, almost immediately drew controversy and condemnation from Unionists.

This thesis seeks to link identity in the politics of Brexit and Northern Ireland, before the EU referendum up until and including the official exit of the UK in 2021. In short, I will ask what was the character of identity politics that led to the Brexit movement becoming central to British politics? How did this nationalism change over the period of the Brexit negotiations? And how has this change in nationalism, both through Brexit and other events, impacted on the transitional justice processes in Northern Ireland?

³ *Speech by Nancy Pelosi.*

⁴ *Ibid*

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND ACADEMIC DEBATE:

This thesis focuses on identity politics, specifically English Nationalism, Brexit and Transitional Justice. These topics are each constantly developing fields of study and subject to intense academic debate.

Identity politics

Academics highlight the latter half of the 20th century as a high point of Identity Politics, personified in the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the rise in Feminism globally.⁵ It is generally agreed that since this period, politics has been influenced primarily by the practice of a person's identity. Marxist scholars such as Eric Hobsbawm have criticised identity politics as Bourgeois Nationalism, by seeking to deliberately divide the people among constructed lines, weakening the strength of the working-class proletariat. He advocates that only one form of identity politics is actually viable, which he calls 'citizen nationalism'.⁶ Despite this criticism there are many who see identity as central to the democratic system, as groups struggle to achieve recognition of their particular 'superiority'.⁷

Nationalism

Nationalism is a particular form of identity politics that includes geographic and cultural elements to define the self. Virtually every element of the study of nations and nationalism is contentious among historians, from origins to definitions and structure. Some argue whether nations and national identity can be objectively analysed or are these inherently subjective topics and questions.⁸ Others argue about the construction of national identities, are composed of specific 'ethnic patterns and symbols' or more generally, as Stuart Hall proposes, part of "the story we tell about the self".⁹ This thesis will study the composition of the form of nationalism that has developed

⁵ Heyes, "Identity Politics."

⁶ Hobsbawm, "Identity Politics and the Left."

⁷ Fukuyama, *Identity*. xv-xvi

⁸ Lawrence, *Nationalism*. P.6

⁹ Ibid P.7

in Britain up to and during the Brexit process, offering a unique chance to understand how this nationalism can be understood as a form of identity politics.

Brexit

Firstly, if as I will suggest the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union can be considered a product of a growing nationalism within that country then it contributes to a wider narrative of the resurgence of the nation-state and national sovereignty. This thesis will focus on the arguments surrounding sovereignty during the Brexit debate to highlight how nationalism understands sovereignty as related to cultural boundaries and how Brexit is an expression of this.

Secondly, while Brexit was originally seen as a working-class revolt, the role played by the middle class has often been overlooked in literature on the topic of Brexit.¹⁰ Thus, in seeking to define the character of nationalism that led to Brexit I will also include an in-depth discussion of how class may have played a role.

Finally, the few academic works that have examined the effect of Brexit on Northern Ireland's peace process have regarded the process as strictly legal, neglecting its origins in nationalism and effect that wider nationalism as a whole is having on transitional justice.¹¹ This thesis will show how nationalism including through, but not limited to, Brexit has impacted transitional justice in Northern Ireland.

Transitional Justice

The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) defines transitional justice as 'the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression and address large-scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response.'¹² The field has been growing since the 1980's and

¹⁰ Antonucci, Horvath, and Krouwel, "Brexit Was Not the Voice of the Working Class nor of the Uneducated – It Was of the Squeezed Middle."

¹¹ See for example, Teague, "Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland."

¹² "What Is Transitional Justice?"

1990's as a tool to facilitate the increased trend of democratisation seen around the world, but has advanced more rapidly in recent years.

The debate around transitional justice in Northern Ireland largely emerges from scholarship from the Transitional Justice Institute in Ulster University and academics in the School of Law in Queen's University Belfast. Publications have focused on all areas of the transition including victims and victimhood, policing and responses to paramilitary policing, judicial measures and the question of truth recovery. The particular character of Northern Ireland's Peace Process has been the focus of much of the historiography. The *Good Friday Agreement*, as a work of transitional justice, was limited and specific in its scope. The Peace Process has therefore been a largely bottom-up approach, carried out by grassroots organisations. In some cases, former prisoners and ex-combatants led these organisations to ensure trust from communities.

The role of identity politics in transitional justice has long been recognized, but little truly understood.¹³ I will elaborate more on this connection and how this thesis aims to address this gap in describing below the analytic concept used to give social psychology its due regard in transitional justice.

ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS /THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Identity Politics

The core theory at the centre of this thesis is the concept of Identity Politics. In contemporary society, identity politics can be based on issues of race, gender, sex, religion, language or economic status. It can also be left-wing or right-wing, right-wing examples include Islamist and Christian Identity movements, and examples of left-wing being queer nationalism and black nationalism. The conflict in Northern Ireland was a clear result of this identity politics. Scholars recognise identity as the driving force in modern day politics.¹⁴ This can manifest in the form of the

¹³ Arthur, *Identities in Transition : Challenges for Transitional Justice in Divided Societies*. P.1-8

¹⁴ Fukuyama, *Identity*.

rising wave of nationalism in Europe, separatist movements in Catalonia (Spain), Scotland (UK), Tibet and Taiwan (China) and Puerto Rico (United States), or increased populist narratives of ‘The People’ against a political ‘elite’. In each case the group constructs an identity for themselves in opposition to that of an ‘Other’.

Nationalism

Nationalism is a form of identity politics. Fukuyama gives a very broad definition of Nationalism as ‘a doctrine that political borders ought to correspond to cultural communities, with culture defined largely by a shared language.’¹⁵ This definition resembles that of Anthony D. Smith and the centrality of ethnic symbols and is made specifically in the context of modern market economies, rather than the feudal and class structures of Early Modern Europe.¹⁶ Because of its relative simplicity and its focus on borders, culture and language, this is the definition that I will use for this study. However, as previously mentioned, where applicable meaningful consideration will be given to the role played by class and populism in collective identity.

A Social Psychological Model of Transitional Justice

The link between the social psychology of collective identity and conflict has long been understood, yet there have been few attempts to design a framework for understanding transition justice that recognises this link.¹⁷ Nevin T. Aiken, an associate professor at the University of Wyoming’s School of Politics, Public Affairs and International Studies developed a model to address this gap. This framework puts social psychology teachings at its centre, specifically the Social Identity Theory (SIT).¹⁸ The SIT approach studies “the group in the individual” and understands collective identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of the group’s membership.”¹⁹ SIT recognises the role of the individual in the collective identity as Stuart Hall suggests, while also leaving room for Fukuyama’s

¹⁵ Fukuyama, *Identity*. p. 62

¹⁶ *Ibid* p. 62

¹⁷ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*.p.19

¹⁸ *Ibid* P.31

¹⁹ *Ibid*. P.31

definition which relies on identifiable community traits. These identities are as much exclusive as inclusive and therefore make it harder for the individual to empathise or associate meaningfully with the 'Other'.²⁰ This impasse often results in conflict, specifically ethno-nationalist conflict like in Northern Ireland.²¹

Therefore, in order to rectify the issue of opposing collective identities and overcome this stalemate, Aiken argues that transitional justice must foster identity negotiation, or 'social learning', to achieve reconciliation.²² Aiken identifies three forms of social learning necessary for this process, Instrumental, socioemotional and distributive. Instrumental learning refers to interventions that focus on 'rebuilding relationships and perceptions between previously divided groups'.²³ Socioemotional learning centres on 'reducing grievances, anger and negative beliefs between groups tied to past violence with the aim of providing both 'justice' and 'truth'.²⁴ Finally, distributive learning is designed to 'ameliorate structural and material inequalities that may continue to exist between divided groups in post-conflict societies.'²⁵

STRUCTURE/METHODOLOGY:

Considering transitional justice in the framework outlined above, I propose to examine the elements of identity politics present in the Brexit debate in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Through a critical discourse analysis, I will assess the ideas, actors and events relevant to the process of Brexit to draw conclusions on the character of collective identity politics that drove the UK's withdrawal from the EU. As mentioned above, nationalism will be understood in line with Fukuyama's definition, but class and populism will also be considered in this analysis. I will then

²⁰ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.34

²¹ Ibid. P.19

²² Ibid. P.20-21

²³ Ibid. P.21

²⁴ Ibid. P.22

²⁵ Ibid. P.22

apply these conclusions to Aiken's framework to consider how the particular aspects of this nationalism has impacted the process of transitional justice in Northern Ireland.

This study will be divided into three chapters. The first two will cover two separate time periods and be divided geographically. The third chapter will take the conclusions from chapters one and two and apply them in an analysis of the impacts on the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, as defined by Aiken's framework.

In the first section I will examine the collective identities present during the debate around the 2015 Referendum on the UK's exit from the EU. This will be divided into an examination within Great Britain, and then within Northern Ireland. The chapter will seek to define the character of nationalism that led to the referendum being passed, and then compare this to the existing ethno-sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland.

The second section will cover the period after the referendum to the United Kingdom's eventual withdrawal in January 2021. Like Chapter One it will examine Northern Ireland separately to the remainder of the UK. The chapter will focus on questions of boundaries and sovereignty as well as rights and equalities to compare the positions of collective identities.

The third section will be structured along the lines of Aiken's framework to observe the impact of the identity politics of Brexit on the transition justice of Northern Ireland.

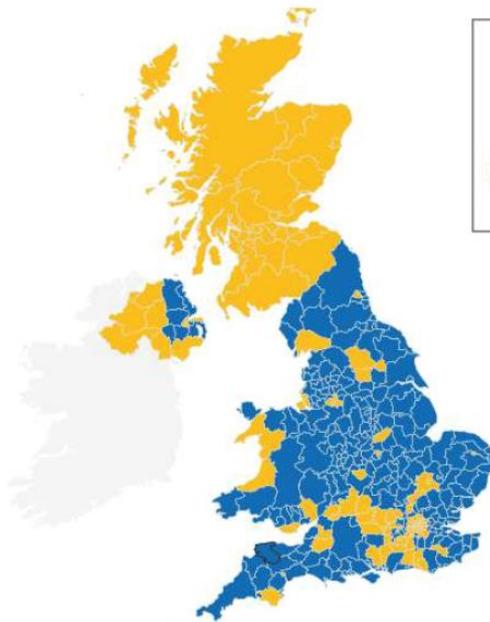
Finally, the conclusion will draw together the findings of each of these sections to portray a narrative of the Brexit process, its complex interactions of collective identities and the effect this has had, or has the potential to have, on the Peace Process in Northern Ireland.

Chapter One:

Identity politics in Great Britain and Northern Ireland during the 2016 Referendum

1.1 To what extent was the Brexit Referendum vote the result of Identity Politics?

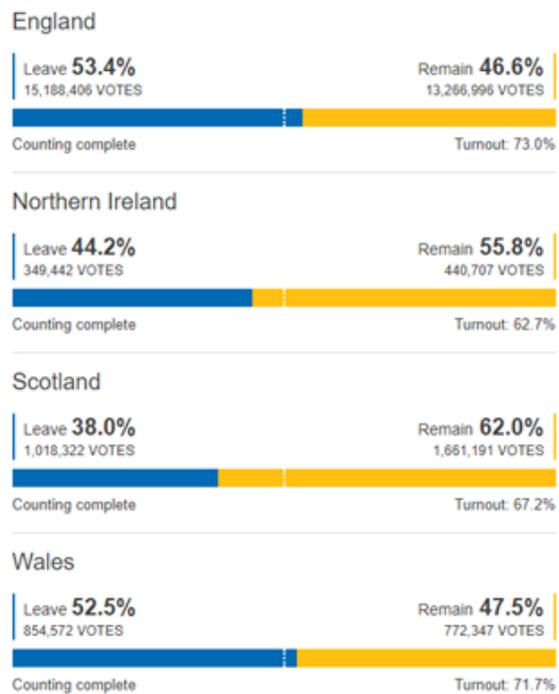
Voting patterns



(Fig. 1) BBC.co.uk EU Referendum

A cursory look at the results of the regional breakdown of the Brexit vote in the UK as a whole reveals a trend where rural England effectively carried the vote for leave in addition to some districts in Northern Ireland and Wales. Despite this Northern Ireland voted overall to remain, while not a single constituency in Scotland voted Leave. The largest Remain vote came from Gibraltar, the district most removed from the metropolitan centre of the UK, where just 4.1% voted leave.²⁶

The average vote in the UK overall was 51.9% Leave to 48.1% Remain, this rises to 53.4% Leave and 46.6% Remain in England. In Northern Ireland the Leave vote drops to 44.2% and drops further again in Scotland to 38%. The Wales vote mirrored England at 52.5%. These analyses show that Brexit was far more supported In England and Wales than in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland was more inclined towards Leave than Scotland, but less than Wales.



(Fig. 2) BBC.co.uk EU Referendum Results

²⁶ "EU Referendum Results - BBC News."

Moreover, the narrative of the percentages is reinforced by an evaluation of the number of voters. In England 15,188,406 individuals voted to Leave. In Scotland 1,661,191 votes were cast for Remain, and 440,707 in Northern Ireland. Therefore, the English Leave voters outnumbered the combined Remain voters in Scotland and Northern Ireland by approximately 7.5:1. This clearly shows that the Brexit movement was clearly a measure that appealed to people in England more than anywhere else in the UK, and that this cohort of voters were the main driving force behind the Leave result.

English Nationalism

While the United Kingdom is a cohesive collection of four nations under one crown, it is nonetheless markedly clear that there are different cultures, attitudes and issues in each of these countries. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have not only political parties in the form of the Scottish National Party, Sinn Féin and Plaid Cymru, respectively, through which to express their national identity, but since the late 1990's also have devolved national assemblies in which these expressions can take place. No such venue or vehicle exists in England. Some writers have argued that the denial of political allowances for the expression of an English national identity in an English national assembly at the same time as deeper and wider integration was taking place between the UK and the EU 'promoted the rise of English nationalism in this period.'²⁷ Francis Fukuyama defines nationalism as 'a doctrine that political borders ought to correspond to cultural communities'.²⁸ Furthermore, English Nationalism 'must be viewed as a typology of nationalism against British, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish nationalism.'²⁹

²⁷ Harry Brown, 'Post-Brexit Britain: Thinking about "English Nationalism" as a Factor in the EU Referendum.', *International Politics Review* 5 (May 2017): 3

²⁸ Fukuyama, *Identity*.p.62

²⁹ Harry Brown, 'Post-Brexit Britain: Thinking about "English Nationalism" as a Factor in the EU Referendum.', *International Politics Review* 5 (May 2017): 3

In particular, the rhetoric and driving arguments behind the Leave campaign demonstrate a populist strain of nationalism existing in those who supported for Brexit. Despite the fact that there has been no enduring vehicle for political English Nationalism, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) headed by the charismatic leadership of Nigel Farage emerged as a critical force in pushing the English nationalist agenda toward an EU Referendum, before the party fizzled out into irrelevance after the vote. Populism underscores and influences the character of the English Nationalism of Brexit, to the extent that three main narratives emerge from the Brexit rhetoric: Inequality, Identity and Immigration.

Inequality

The perceptions of an unbalanced social system are the most fundamental characteristic of English Nationalism, sitting at the core of why those voters are motivated. Populism is the political movement of ‘a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites or dangerous others who are together depicted as depriving the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperities, identity and voices.’³⁰ An analysis of the voting patterns in the referendum shows that Brexit was not a working class undertaking as initially thought, instead 59% of Brexit supporters were employed in middle class jobs – A, B and C1 on the National Readership Survey Classification.³¹ The high rural England Leave vote (55%-45%) can be explained by the appeal of both Farage’s portrayal of a national identity rooted in imagery of rural England and the ‘ethnic populism’ of Leave.³² Fukuyama notes that rural people are the ‘backbone’ of populism as ‘they often believe that their traditional values are under severe threat from cosmopolitan city-based elites.’³³ For example, one UKIP official attacked “the deracinated political elite of parasites, the bureaucrats, the Eurocrats, the

³⁰ Elsayed, “Make Great Britain Great Again: Populism and Nationalism in Brexit.” p.97

³¹ Mintchev and Moore, “Brexit’s Identity Politics and the Question of Subjectivity.”

³² Brooks, “Brexit and the Politics of the Rural.”

³³ Fukuyama, *Identity*.p.120

quangocrats, the expenses-fiddlers, the assorted chancers, living it up at taxpayers' expense". It was UKIP's role "to sweep them all away", he said.³⁴

This mentality was reinforced by the fact that during the referendum only London and the South East region of the UK had fully recovered from the 2008 financial crisis, highlighting the very different experiences of rural people and the urban 'elite'.³⁵ As a result, only one in five British people consider the workings of economy to be 'fair'.³⁶ The response to this perception of imbalance was a large-scale feeling of resentment among the middle class, which manifested not in countering the inequality with wealth redistribution, but by targeting a scapegoat and an attempt to 'take back control'. This resentment is directed on a vertical axis, both downward to the lower classes who they see as undeserving and being unfairly favoured and upward to those urban elites who they feel are ignoring them.³⁷ This explains the voting pattern highlighted earlier which saw 'Middle England' as the principle stronghold for the Leave vote.

Identity.

In defining 'the people' in opposition to 'the elites' by whom they were being taking advantage, Brexiteers relied heavily on constructing a collective identity, an essential component of all forms of nationalism. Following Fukuyama's definition, nationalism works on a horizontal axis using collective identity to distinguish one natural political community as separate to another. Culture and identity are central to the formation of a community. Ernest Gellner writes "modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture".³⁸ During the Brexit debate there were many assertions of pride of culture by the pro-Brexit campaigners. Whether he was breaking protocol by waving Union Flags in the European Parliament or lamenting the decline of the English language within Britain, Nigel Farage was presenting a straightforward view of a 'British' culture

³⁴ Sparrow, "Nigel Farage: Parts of Britain Are 'like a Foreign Land.'"

³⁵ Elsayed, "Make Great Britain Great Again: Populism and Nationalism in Brexit." p.97

³⁶ Ibid p.98

³⁷ Fukuyama, *Identity*.p.88

³⁸ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* in Fukuyama *Identity* p.63

based on a British nation-state. For Nigel Farage, '*the Brit*' was an English-speaking, Anglican Protestant, in 'Middle England'.³⁹ This is the core contradiction of British/English Nationalism. British identity has been 'hollowed out' since the mid-20th century, by the emergence of Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalisms, and then devolution.⁴⁰ This led to the emergence of an English Nationalism that sought to resist changes to "Britishness".⁴¹ Therefore the ideology that seeks to place British sovereignty over British territory is essentially English Nationalism, based on entirely English characteristics, and it excludes those in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales that do not also identify with those things or identify more with their national identity. For example, the Scottish, Welsh and Irish languages are valued as culturally significant to people in those regions, but do not fit into the "British" identity Farage and others have constructed where English is central.⁴²

British or English exceptionalism has its roots in the English Reformation and Henry VIII's spilt from the Church of Rome in 1534, in some ways Brexit reflects this phenomenon. Therefore, the culture and heritage of Christianity, particularly Anglicanism and the belief that the UK is 'fundamentally a Christian nation' is central to English Nationalism.⁴³ This is expressed by UKIP in certain Christian conservative policies such as religious education in schools, opposition to same-sex marriage legislation and a VAT cut for church repairs.⁴⁴

Language is also a key determining characteristic of the English Nationalist identity. In a 2014 conference speech Farage retold his experience on a London rush-hour train. "It was a stopper going out and we stopped at London Bridge, New Cross, Hither Green, it was not until we got past Grove Park that I could hear English being audibly spoken in the carriage Does that make me feel slightly awkward? Yes it does." When asked to justify his singling out of the language issue he replied: "I don't understand them ... I don't feel very comfortable in that situation and I don't think the majority

³⁹ "Nigel Farage's British Identity."

⁴⁰ Graham Taylor, *Understanding Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union*. p.50

⁴¹ Ibid. p 51

⁴² Ibid. p.49

⁴³ UKIP, "Valuing Our Christian Heritage."

⁴⁴ Ibid

of British people do."⁴⁵ In this case Farage pits the community of "the majority of British people" opposite languages other than English.

In this way the pride in "British" culture becomes both a definition of a national identity and a rationalization for the nationalist argument of British sovereignty over British territory and the need to 'take back control' from the elites in London and Brussels.

Immigration

Closely linked to the narrative of inequality expressed in the Brexit debate was that of immigration. English nationalists portrayed the political elites as allowing a flood of immigrants into the UK, where some parts began to resemble 'a foreign land'. Farage painted a picture of a dystopian England, its services stretched to its limits and ruined by mass immigration:

"In scores of our cities and market towns, this country in a short space of time has frankly become unrecognisable ... Whether it is the impact on local schools and hospitals, whether it is the fact in many parts of England you don't hear English spoken any more. This is not the kind of community we want to leave to our children and grandchildren."⁴⁶

Capitalising on people's concerns and feelings of discomfort, Farage normalised the politics of fear in the Brexit campaign. The narrative of immigration was often linked to that of inequality. Fukuyama writes:

'the nationalist can translate loss of relative economic position into loss of identity and status; you have always been a core member of our great nation but foreigners immigrants and your own elite compatriots have been conspiring to hold you down; your country is no longer your own and you are not respected in your own land.'

Thus, those who felt 'left behind' were pitted against elites and immigrants who did not fit into the perceived view of "British" identity.

⁴⁵ Sparrow, "Nigel Farage: Parts of Britain Are 'like a Foreign Land.'"

⁴⁶ Ibid

Conclusion

In line with Fukuyama's definition Nigel Farage can be characterised as an English Nationalist. Farage defined 'Britishness' through English culture and tradition, with a heavy reliance on a common English language, yet this identity was distinct from that of Scottish, Welsh and Irish culture. Therefore, British nationalism is a shadow, a non-existent zeitgeist, a projection of English Nationalism ideals of rural England, English language and Anglican values onto the United Kingdom as a whole that excludes large populations of the other three nations.

When class is examined alongside this trend, we can also identify an element of populism, garnering support from the 'Left Behind' who had not felt the recovery since the financial crash and who had not benefited from globalisation and the technological revolution to the same extent as those in the urban areas. Farage's very English 'British' Nationalism appealed almost exclusively to the rural middle class in England, which increased the vote share received by the Leave campaign. These tangible characteristics that could easily be placed in opposition to the immigrants they saw settling around them, making immigration a core argument of the Brexit debate. Farage argued that these immigrants were the result of an elite in London and Brussels who did not share the "British" values and his solution was to 'take back control' of sovereignty of the UK and place it in the hands of 'British' people. In line with Social Identity Theory, this gave Brexit supporters a clearly defined collective identity group that they could feel they belonged to and value membership. The Brexiteers' incarnation of populist nationalism appealed especially to older people, with 61% of over 65's voting Leave, as opposed to 75% of under 30's voting Remain.⁴⁷ In short, the Brexit vote to be compiled of "white faces, blue collars and grey hair".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Elsayed, "Make Great Britain Great Again: Populism and Nationalism in Brexit."

⁴⁸ Ibid

1.2 To what extent was the Brexit Referendum debate in Northern Ireland reflective of ethno-nationalist divisions?

Party Positions

The political parties in Northern Ireland are divided principally into those who support continued membership of the United Kingdom, Unionists, and those who advocate political unity with Republic of Ireland to the south, Nationalists. Both these groups fit into Fukuyama's definition of Nationalism because of their political aspirations, and also Social Identity Theory as individuals are extremely conscious, proud and defensive of their collective identity group. It is generally accepted that Catholics and those raised culturally Catholic vote for Nationalist parties, and Protestants and those raised culturally Protestant vote to retain the Union with Great Britain. Unionists claim British heritage, despite not being located on the island of Great Britain and Nationalists claim Irish heritage despite living within the United Kingdom. Essentially, 'Unionists', like English Nationalists, project their English language and Protestant faith and values onto the United Kingdom as a whole, adding to the mirage of British Nationalism.

In the led up to the Brexit vote Sinn Féin, the largest Nationalist party, and soft-nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) campaigned for Remain. They were joined by the cross-community Alliance and Green parties that advocate for politics beyond the Nationalist-Unionist divide. On the Unionist side, the largest Unionist party - the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - was joined by the cross-community socialist party People Before Profit (PBP) and the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) in supporting Leave. TUV are a hard-Eurosceptic and ultra-Unionist party that oppose the Power-Sharing system established under the Good Friday Agreement. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) officially campaigned for Remain, however this position was undermined by high-level members publicly advocating for Brexit.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The Newsroom, "EU Referendum: More UUP Councillors Backing Brexit."

This breakdown broadly shows that the nationalist parties supported Remain and the Unionists supported Leave. This division down ethno-nationalist lines shows the extent of the problem highlighted by Aiken and how collective identity dominates politics in Northern Ireland and polarisation of transitional society based on the collective identities of the past.

Unionists For Brexit

DUP leader and Northern Ireland First Minister Arlene Foster became the most prominent pro-Brexit voice in Northern Ireland during the referendum debate. She, like her English counterparts, focused on one major motivation – the need to ‘take back control’.⁵⁰ The central argument focused on the need to protect British sovereignty over the United Kingdom and prevent deeper or wider European Integration. For Unionists, ‘there is no concept of a shared identity tying Northern Ireland — or at least the unionist Northern Ireland — to the European mainland if not via the UK.’⁵¹

The argument of sovereignty and the need to ‘take back control’ appealed to the Unionists as it corresponded to and validated their British identity. The English Nationalist movement prior to Brexit created an identity that resembled that of Northern Irish Unionists. They have for the better part of a century felt as though their British culture has been under threat, first from the movement towards Irish independence in the early 1900’s and subsequently in the form of Irish Nationalists within Northern Ireland. This siege mentality facilitated the cultivation of a definite British identity in opposition to the Irish culture of nationalists.⁵²

The first central tenant of this Northern Irish Unionist incarnation of British identity is their Protestant faith, similar to that of English Nationalism. It was no coincidence that the ultra-fundamentalist Reverend Ian Paisley, founder of the Free Presbyterian Church, was the founder of

⁵⁰ The Newsroom, “WHY I BACK LEAVE: Arlene Foster.”

⁵¹ Walsh and Lucas, “Northern Ireland Is Vital for the Remain Campaign.”

⁵² McVeigh, “‘The Siege Mentality’ by Joe McVeigh.”

the DUP and his fire and brimstone rhetoric served as the voice of Unionism during the Troubles. However, in Northern Ireland this was characterised by a stark opposition to Roman Catholicism, then a defining feature of the Irish identity. Paisley famously said of Catholics that "They breed like rabbits and multiply like vermin". He described Pope John Paul II "The scarlet woman of Rome" and when addressing him in the European Parliament in 1988 proclaim: "I denounce you, Antichrist! I refuse you as Christ's enemy and Antichrist with all your false doctrine".⁵³ This vehement opposition of Unionist Protestants to Catholicism and Irishness went as far back as the previous century when the Irish independence movement sought Home Rule, or devolution, for the island of Ireland within the UK in 1885. Irish Unionists responded with the slogan 'Home Rule, is Rome Rule'. Despite initial concerns in the party that Arlene Foster's Church of Ireland background, although reflective of the English Nationalist "British" identity, would not be enough to satisfy the hard-core Free Presbyterians in the DUP, she has taken occasion to display her orthodox views.⁵⁴ She even went as far to declare that people are 'not really Protestants' if they don't go to church, however she included the caveat that even in the mind of Ian Paisley "the DUP is not a church, it is a political party, the two were separate and distinct".⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Protestantism and devotion to Christian values remain central to Unionist politics, including opposition to gay marriage and abortion legislation.⁵⁶ This position makes them naturally 'wary of the EU's liberal approach to LGBT rights' and other policies that shirk 'traditional' values.

Another defining feature of the Northern Irish Unionist British identity is the centrality of the English language. However, the particularity of the Northern Irish Unionist British identity is the dichotomy between the English language of the Protestant British and the Gaelic language of the Irish Catholics. Constitutional recognition of the Irish Language has been a sore topic in Northern Ireland with Nationalists seeking protections similar to that of the Welsh language in Wales.

⁵³ "Ian Paisley's Most Notable Quotes."

⁵⁴ McKay, "Arlene Foster: Effective Politician, but with a Fierce Temper."

⁵⁵ Scott, "Arlene Foster Says People 'Aren't Really Protestants' If They Don't Go to Church."

⁵⁶ Hayes and Nagle, "Ethnonationalism and Attitudes towards Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion in Northern Ireland."

However the Unionist have opposed this, commentators note that this is due to fact that ‘Ulster Protestantism associates Gaelic with republicanism, which we oppose, and our cultural insecurity has informed the DUP’s rejection of an Irish Language Act’.⁵⁷ To Unionists, Gaeilge ‘was never a real language — rather, it was a treachery, a plot, and a Machiavellian political scheme of the disloyal and the dangerous.’⁵⁸ This aspect of the siege mentality was represented best when Arlene Foster opposed the Irish Language act by warning that ‘If you feed a crocodile it will keep coming back for more’.⁵⁹

There was, however, an economic motivator to the Brexit vote in Northern Ireland, as was the case in England. Ian Paisley jnr, who today holds the Westminster seat of his father, said ‘60 per cent of the reason people voted leave was economic and about 40 per cent of it was emotional.’⁶⁰ He highlighted local opposition to the EU Common Agricultural Policy. One North Antrim farmer said Brussels autocracy and Eurocrats were making farming harder with endless red tape and that farmers would be ‘would be better off doing without the hoops’ to jump through.⁶¹ This fits into the DUP’s Euroscepticism which presents the EU as ‘Bureaucratic and interfering ... an obstacle to British “common sense”’.⁶² North Antrim has also lost out in the pre-Brexit era to factories moving location to Eastern Europe where operation cost were cheaper, leading to the loss of thousands of jobs.⁶³

⁵⁷ Irvine, “We Protestants Fear Gaelic, and We Were Raised to Mock It.”

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Aodha, “Arlene Foster on Sinn Féin.”

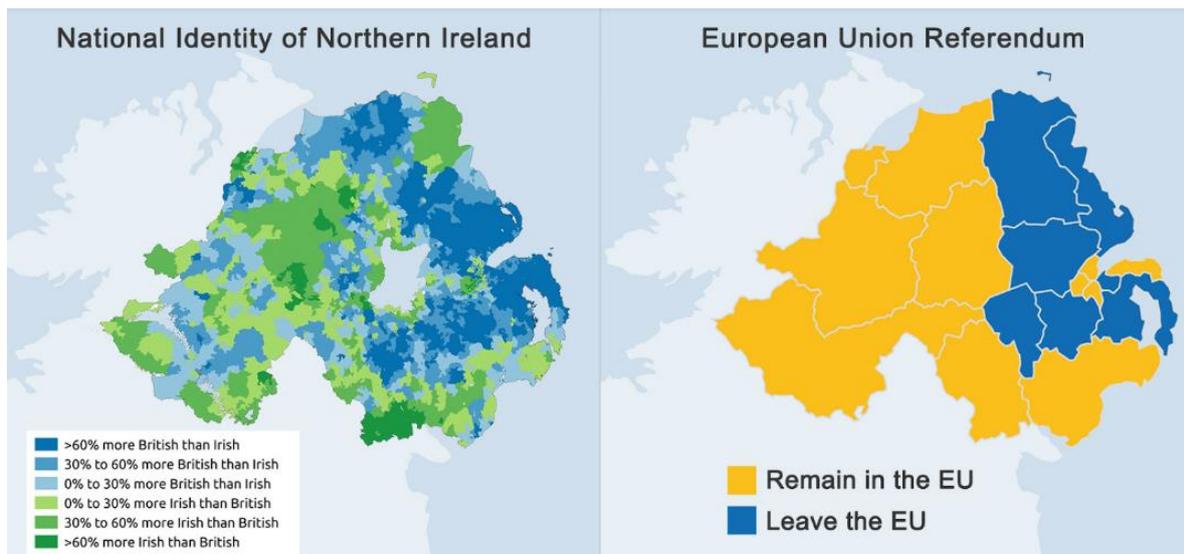
⁶⁰ Winters, “Why North Antrim Voters Show the Highest Support for Brexit in the North.”

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Walsh and Lucas, “Northern Ireland Is Vital for the Remain Campaign.”

⁶³ Winters, “Why North Antrim Voters Show the Highest Support for Brexit in the North.”

Voting patterns



(Fig. 3) karlwhelan.com

Examining the patterns of voting that emerged within Northern Ireland reveals a trend that the vote of the EU Referendum was largely broken down along Nationalist and Unionist lines, with the constituencies with the highest Unionist majority voting Leave. Northern Ireland politics has continued to traditionally be dominated by a discordance of political belief correspondent to religious faith since the end of 'The Troubles', despite a growing centre ground that aims to transcend this divide. An analysis of the voting patterns shows a strong ethno-national basis to the vote with 88% of nationalists supporting Remain, compared to only 34% of unionists.⁶⁴

The North Antrim constituency demonstrated the highest Leave vote in Northern Ireland, at 62.2%, compared to the 44.2% national average. North Antrim has always been a Unionist district, it currently provides the hard-line Unionist TUV with its only seat in the Northern Ireland Assembly and has been represented in Westminster exclusively by members of the Paisley family since 1970. Ian Paisley once referred to the EU as a "beast ridden by the harlot Catholic Church", and some claim that mix of politics and religion is still present in opposition to the EU.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ O'Leary, Coakley, and Garry, "How Northern Ireland Voted in the EU Referendum – and What It Means for Border Talks."

⁶⁵ Winters, "Why North Antrim Voters Show the Highest Support for Brexit in the North."

The largest Remain vote came from the small constituency of Foyle, with 78.3% remain, high above the national average of 55.8%.⁶⁶ The district of Foyle contains the city of (London)Derry is a nationalist stronghold and was a centre of the conflict during the Troubles. Commenting on the Nationalist motivations for supporting the Remain movement, Sinn Féin MEP Martina Anderson said: “For us this was about staying in Ireland, as Ireland, staying as one, not having one part in Europe and the other part of it outside of Europe.”⁶⁷ The Remain campaign focused on the financial benefits of EU membership for Northern Ireland.⁶⁸ Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny highlighted the potential issue for the border and the *Good Friday Agreement*, however these arguments were largely ‘drowned out’ by the other arguments and after the referendum ‘some leave voters admitted they did not realise the consequences of what it could mean for Northern Ireland.’⁶⁹ Unionists countered this argument by claiming the *Good Friday Agreement* had established a peace that was resilient enough to survive EU withdrawal.⁷⁰ Nationalists were undivided in their opposition to Brexit, whereas the Unionist electorate was more divided.

⁶⁶ “EU Referendum Results - BBC News.”

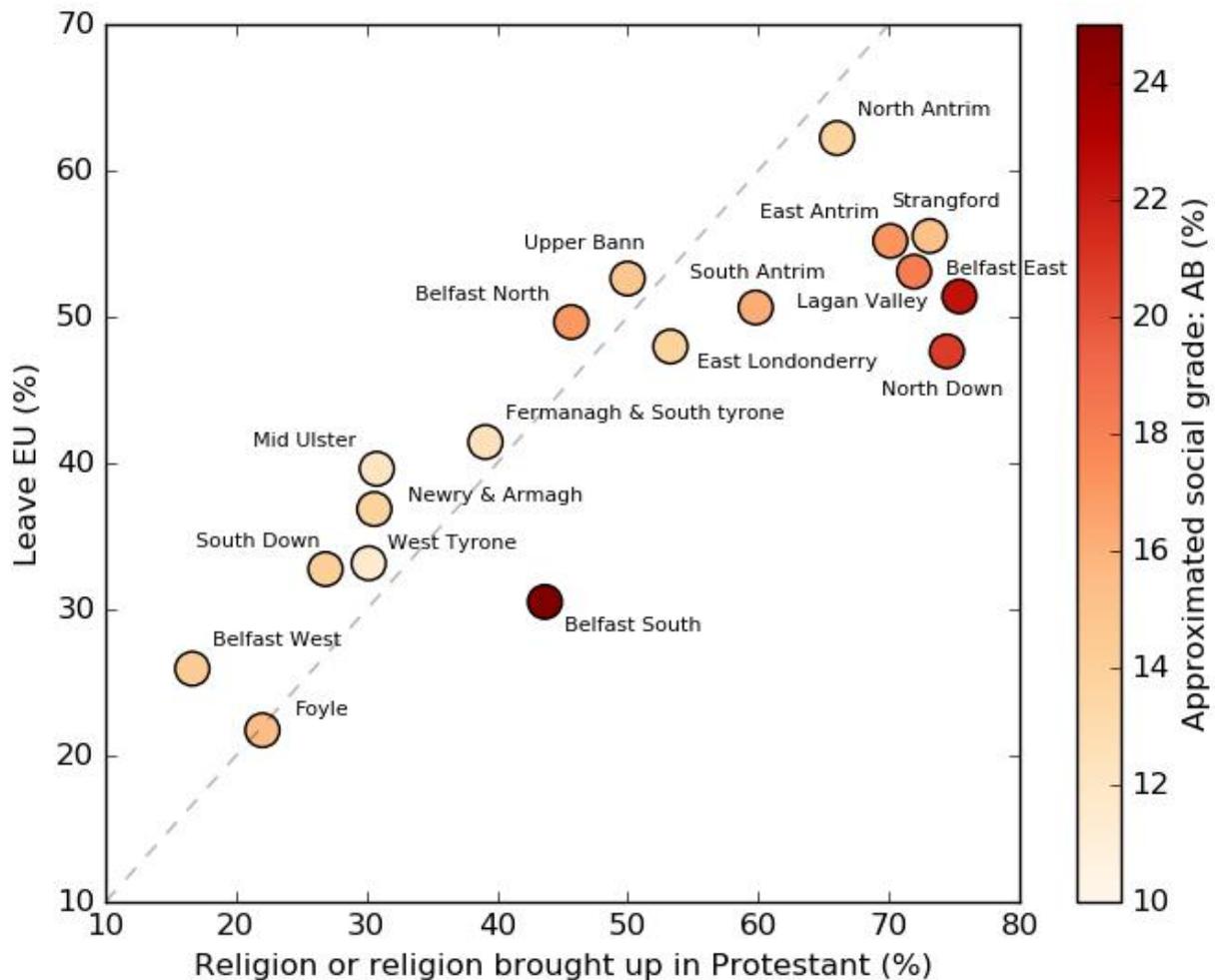
⁶⁷ Amanda Ferguson, “Brexit: Northern Ireland Votes to Remain in the EU.”

⁶⁸ Walsh and Lucas, “Northern Ireland Is Vital for the Remain Campaign.”

⁶⁹ McCormack, “Brexit: How the Irish Border Issue Was Viewed during Campaigning.”

⁷⁰ Ibid, The Newsroom, “WHY I BACK LEAVE: Arlene Foster.”, Stourton, “Brexit Worries on Both Sides of the Irish Border.”

When applying the lens of social class discovered within the English Nationalist support for Brexit, to the split in the Unionist vote for Brexit a similar trend emerges. This analysis shows that “higher-skilled and educated Protestants were much more likely than lower-skilled, lower-educated Protestants to vote Remain.”⁷¹



(Fig. 4) Graph by data analyst Matt Doherty, included on thedetail.tv

This graph reveals the role played by social class in the Protestant/Unionist vote during the Brexit Referendum. The example shown before of North Antrim is clearly seen as that with the highest percentage Leave vote. However, Belfast East, North Down, East Antrim and Lagan Valley have a higher percentage population of Protestants. A simple ethno-national narrative would expect

⁷¹ O’Leary, Coakley, and Garry, “How Northern Ireland Voted in the EU Referendum – and What It Means for Border Talks.”

that these areas would therefore have higher Leave votes, however clearly this is not the case. What the inclusion of social class reveals is that middle class status, unlike in Middle England (AB) diluted the Leave vote. In fact, North Down despite having over 70% Protestants, actually voted to Remain, in line with its higher level of middle-class individuals. Therefore, the Unionist vote was split between the working and middle classes, with the middle classes more likely to vote Remain. This reflects the argument made by some political analysts that the Power-Sharing arrangement in Northern Ireland has resulted in ethno-nationalism becoming less important in general vote choice among Protestants, but not Catholics.⁷²

This trend shows that while at first glance the Brexit results in Northern Ireland can seem like a sectarian headcount of Catholics voting Remain versus Unionists voting Leave, the reality is much more nuanced. The diametrical opposition of established collective identities was reinforced by the Brexit debate, as parties took positions that most aligned with their particular nationalism. The middle class, which was the backbone of the Brexit vote in England was not convinced by the arguments made by the pro-Brexit Unionists, and Protestant middle-classes shirked their parties' positions and voted Remain. Working class protestants were the most consolidated group of Leave voters, the highest leave vote coming from the rural constituency of North Antrim which was experiencing the worst effects of globalisation and found the EU an easy target for their woes.

⁷² Tilley, Garry, and Matthews, "The Evolution of Party Policy and Cleavage Voting under Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland."

1.1 Conclusion

This examination of the major players, motivations and discussions around Brexit in Britain and Northern Ireland has uncovered many parallels and nuances. English Nationalism as well as Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism fit squarely into Fukuyama's definition of Nationalism of sovereignty based on shared culture. During the EU Referendum in 2016 England and the east of Northern Ireland clearly emerged as the most consolidated Leave regions. In these areas there exists a sense of pride in "British" culture based on a number of English features including, but not limited to, Anglican values and the English language projected to represent the whole of the UK, while most people in the three other nations did not recognise themselves in that identity. The development of a siege mentality, a fear that this culture is under threat and the perception of a loss of sovereignty can be seen in both Ulster Unionist and English Nationalist communities, leading to the drive to 'take back control'.

In England, the Nationalist message of Nigel Farage and UKIP appealed most to the middle-class voters who sensed a loss of status and affluence. In Northern Ireland there was a clear divide along Nationalist and Unionist lines, reflective of the ethno-national divide that dominates politics there and highlighting the extent to which Social Identity Theory is applicable in the region. In addition, the debate and results show how Ulster Unionism appeared to be a natural ally of English Nationalism because of a convergence of identity traits. However, there was also a failure of the Leave campaign to capture the attention of the middle-class voters on both sides of that divide. On voting day both Catholic and Protestant middle classes voted Remain. Brexit was more successful in England as the idea of English Nationalism based on imagery of rural England and populism appealed to the middle class there, whereas that message failed to capture the middle class *en masse* in Northern Ireland. The middle-class Protestant Remain vote diluted the Leave vote in majority Protestant areas, in some cases swinging the result to Remain. Therefore, the Brexit referendum was not the

straightforward sectarian headcount it first appears, and the Leave vote was dependant mostly on the Protestant working class, leading to Brexit being defeated in Northern Ireland.

Despite the failure to capture the middle-class vote, it is clear that the message of Brexit in England and Northern Ireland were similar. The narrative produced by both Nigel Farage and Arlene Foster was one of a need to 'take back control' from an external force that was weakening British sovereignty over British territory. Therefore, while the populist message of Farage was clearly more effective in England, the nationalist message for a nation-state for the Brits which was also central to Brexit was an essential part of the DUP's campaign for Leave in Northern Ireland. The Protestant middle class anomaly breaks the strict sectarian division and backs up studies that show that Unionists are less likely to vote along rigid ethno-nationalist lines⁷³ This perhaps shows some thaw in the collective identity stalemate mentioned by Aiken. This shows some success in the transitional justice program in Northern Ireland.

⁷³ Tilley, Garry, and Matthews, "The Evolution of Party Policy and Cleavage Voting under Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland."

Chapter Two:

Identity Politics and the Brexit negotiation process in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

2.1 – To what extent were specific areas of negotiation the result of English Nationalism?

The Changing of the Guard.

Nigel Farage's United Kingdom Independence Party gained rapid success in the 2010's. They won 163 council seats and 24 MEPs in the 2014 elections. That same year they gained their first MPs as two Conservative MPs defected to UKIP. The 2016 EU Referendum was an attempt by David Cameron to head off the meteoric rise in popularity of UKIP and to halt their erosion of the Conservative party by appealing to their base. The referendum result achieved UKIP's *raison d'être* and pushed the party to obscurity and oblivion. Farage resigned as party leader less than two weeks after the vote. In the 2017 local elections UKIP lost all 145 seats they were defending and a further 124 in 2018. In 2018 Farage returned to politics by founding the Brexit Party, which won 29 MEPs in 2019, becoming the largest single party in the European Parliament. Farage left that party in March 2016 after the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

This slow decline of Nigel Farage as the front man of English Nationalism between 2016 and 2021 was due to the same Conservative strategy employed by Cameron in calling the referendum. The Tories simply moved to appease their right-wing base and deny Farage oxygen. Theresa May succeeded David Cameron as leader of the Conservative Party in 2016, following Cameron's post-referendum resignation. As was convention, she called a general election to seek a new mandate. The subsequent loss of the Conservative parliamentary majority forced May to enter a confidence and supply arrangement with Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party. Brexiteer leaders like Farage had built up the expectations of voters during the Referendum, the Conservatives now had to meet these aspirations. In drafting a Withdrawal Deal, May faced a 'Brexit Trilemma of three competing objectives: no hard border on the island; no customs border in the Irish Sea; and no British participation in the European Single Market and the European Union Customs Union. It

became clear to May that was not possible to have all three'.⁷⁴ The fact that May was dependent on the DUP's support to keep her government in power gave the Unionists a disproportional voice on matters of Brexit and formally binding May to resist calls for a referendum on Northern Ireland leaving the UK and a commitment to maintain the integrity of the Union.⁷⁵ May was eventually pushed from office by the more extreme members of the Conservative Party and replaced by Boris Johnson, who would become the new beacon of English Nationalism.⁷⁶ This section asks how similar or different is Johnson's English Nationalism compared to that of Farage seen in Chapter One.

The Rise of Boris Johnson : A Very English Nationalism.

Johnson began his career in Journalism at *The Times*, but later moved to the *Daily Telegraph* where his writing became known for his appeal to middle class, 'Middle England'.⁷⁷ In 1989, he moved to Brussels where he became the newspaper's reporter on the European Commission. He quickly became one of the city's most prominent Eurosceptic journalists, of which there were few.⁷⁸ His writings were popular with the newly emerging UKIP and moved the Eurosceptic cause from its traditionally left-wing base to the right of the spectrum, building division in the Conservative Party.⁷⁹

After the turn of the millennium Johnson entered electoral politics, first as an MP and then as Mayor of London. He re-entered Westminster in 2015, campaigned for the UK to leave the EU during the referendum and as Theresa May's Foreign Secretary he led the charge to push her from power. The transition from May to Johnson had a positive impact on the performance of the

⁷⁴ Springford, "Theresa May's Irish Trilemma."

⁷⁵ "Agreement Between the Conservative and Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party on Support For The Government in Parliament."

⁷⁶ "Boris Johnson Wins Race to Be Tory Leader and PM."

⁷⁷ Purnell, *Just Boris: Boris Johnson: The Irresistible Rise of a Political Celebrity*. P.108

⁷⁸ Ibid p115-116

⁷⁹ Ibid P.115

Conservative Party⁸⁰. Johnson's appeal as a Eurosceptic and a 'Man of the People' appealed to those voters who had previously voted for UKIP and Nigel Farage. The Conservative's election performance and voter satisfaction skyrocketed as Johnson reduced voter confusion on the issue of Brexit.⁸¹ In 2019, Johnson led the Conservative Party to a majority of 80, the largest since Margaret Thatcher, having secured 44% of the vote. The party also capitalized on Brexit supporters on the mantra to 'Get Brexit Done', increasing its vote share in regions that had voted over 60% Leave by an average of 6%.⁸² This new movement to push Brexit across the line was more urgent than the 'Take Back Control' message of Farage.

The movement of the Conservatives to the centre of the Brexit movement under Johnson reshaped the character of English Nationalism. Following the election, the Tories could govern without the support of the DUP. This allowed Johnson to advance Brexit as a true product of English Nationalism unconstrained by the obstacles faced by May. In order to understand the extent to which the pro-Brexit Conservatives were motivated by a sense of English Nationalism it is essential to note that 59% of party members would prioritize Brexit 'even if it meant Northern Ireland breaking away from the rest of the UK.'⁸³ Furthermore, over half believed that the destruction of the Conservative Party itself would be a price well paid for the UK's withdrawal from the EU.⁸⁴ Thus, the Conservative English Nationalism, of which Johnson's premiership is part and parcel, does not see Northern Ireland as essential to the United Kingdom or to Brexit, and proponents are willing to sacrifice their Unionist principles and those of the party to 'Get Brexit Done'.

⁸⁰ Heppell and McMeeking, "The Conservative Party Leadership Transition From Theresa May to Boris Johnson: Party Popularity and Leadership Satisfaction."

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Curtice, "General Election 2019."

⁸³ Crines, "Boris Johnson and the Future of British Conservatism."

⁸⁴ Schwarz, "Boris Johnson's Conservatism."

Johnson : 'The Champion of the People'

Like Farage, Johnson portrays an image of a 'man of the people', one of 'us', someone you could see yourself have a pint with at the local pub. He is bumbling, self-deprecating and humorous.⁸⁵ He is prone to "laddish banter and crude sexual references".⁸⁶ Yet this public image hides a ruthless and ambitious politician who understands that 'humour is a utensil that you can use to sugar the pill and to get important points across.'⁸⁷ Educated at the elite boarding school of Eton and a graduate of Oxford, where he studied Classics, he is far from middle class. Following the 2019 General Election Johnson announced the formation of what he labelled a 'new One Nation Conservative Government, a people's government.'⁸⁸ Despite this, nearly two-thirds of his cabinet went to fee-paying schools, compared to 6.5% of the population and almost half had attended Oxford or Cambridge, compared to just 1%.⁸⁹

The term One Nation Conservatism refers to an approach that aims to minimize the gap between the rich and the poor and build a society that cares for the vulnerable. Both Cameron and May displayed attempts to achieve this goal.⁹⁰ During the 2019 Election Johnson's conservative manifesto noted that there were 'parts of our country that feel left behind', because opportunity was not 'uniformly distributed throughout the country'.⁹¹ In doing this he again appealed to those who had previously voted for Nigel Farage, those who felt 'left behind' by progress. Some academics argue that his One Nation Conservatism 'probably amounts more to a little rhetorical discourse with little underlying substance the aim of which was to capture blue-collar support for the 2019

⁸⁵ Purnell, *Just Boris: Boris Johnson: The Irresistible Rise of a Political Celebrity*. P.26

⁸⁶ Ibid. P.37

⁸⁷ Ibid. P.3

⁸⁸ Kilty, "What Does It Mean to Be Leader of a 'One Nation Conservative Government'? The Case of Boris Johnson." p.1

⁸⁹ Hills and Rodgers, "Prime Minister Boris Johnson."

⁹⁰ Kilty, "What Does It Mean to Be Leader of a 'One Nation Conservative Government'? The Case of Boris Johnson." p.2

⁹¹ Ibid

election.⁹² Johnson used the label of One Nation Conservatism to create a sense of unity at a time when Britain seemed more divided than ever. Brexit had created tensions both between English people and between England and other parts of the UK. Johnson portrayed a consolidated block of 'the people', which extended beyond the Conservative's traditional base, catapulting him into a strong majority in Westminster.

Johnson had, by the time of the election, already displayed his *bonne fides* as the champion of the will of the people and his unyielding commitment to secure Brexit with or without a deal in his attempt to prorogue (suspend) parliament, thereby denying the House of Commons the opportunity to block a no-deal Brexit. His subsequent battle with the opposition and the judiciary, who eventually called the move unlawful, demonstrated how Johnson was willing to fight the 'elites', who were attempting to circumvent the will of the people, and to make good on the referendum result by getting Brexit done.

Therefore, like Farage, Johnson constructed a dichotomy of 'The People' versus 'The Elites', diametrically opposed in their interests. He appealed to traditional Conservative voters and those who had supported UKIP, consolidating the Brexit vote behind his own leadership. However, the enthusiasm for Brexit in this new English Nationalism produced a destructive ambition that was willing to sacrifice the place of Northern Ireland within the UK. Boris Johnson took the mantle of English Nationalism after the Referendum. While the key ethno-populist message remained the same, this new English Nationalism had more of a sense of urgency about it and in response was willing to sacrifice the place of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom to 'Get Brexit Done'.

⁹² Kilty, "What Does It Mean to Be Leader of a 'One Nation Conservative Government'? The Case of Boris Johnson." p.2

On Borders and Backstops

Theresa May's Withdrawal Deal was shot down by members of her own party due to the controversial 'Backstop'. This measure stated that in the case that a deal on the future relationship between the UK and EU could not be reached then the UK would remain in the Customs Union with the EU and Northern Ireland would remain in some aspects of the Single Market.⁹³ The goal was to prevent a border being erected between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for fears of dissident republican violence. Arguments against the Backstop in the House of Commons included that a requirement for Northern Ireland to adhere to European standards post-Brexit amounted to 'Regulation without Representation' (The DUP raised 48% of these comments) and that the backstop was a threat to the union. This debate included 71 mentions of the 'Conservative and Unionist Party', the full name of the usually shortened Tory party, and self-assertions as a 'unionist' and 40 claims that the backstop would lead to the breakup of the Union.⁹⁴ Additionally, 76% of the objections to May's Backstop came from Conservatives and her government partners, the DUP.⁹⁵

Despite the protestations of the backbench Conservatives who tanked May's premiership and installed Johnson instead, the new PM negotiated a similar mechanism named the Northern Ireland Protocol. Without the need to satisfy the DUP Johnson was free of constraints to 'Get Brexit Done'. Following the debate over the controversial Internal Markets Bill, he essentially followed the same line as Theresa May's Backstop to solve the Brexit Trilemma by placing a customs border down the Irish Sea, separating Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, even if only in technical terms. Under Johnson's NI Protocol the whole UK would exit the customs union, but there would be no tariffs on trade in and out of Northern Ireland. There would however be checks in Northern Irish ports on goods entering from the UK to check that these met with EU standards, as Single Market regulations would still apply in Northern Ireland as an entry point to the EU Customs Territory. The

⁹³ "Irish Backstop."

⁹⁴ Cowell-Meyers and Gallaher, "Parsing the Backstop."

⁹⁵ Ibid

result is a *de jure* customs border on the island of Ireland, but a *de facto* border down the Irish Sea.⁹⁶

The deal also includes a provision for the Northern Ireland assembly to vote every four years to extend the new arrangements.

Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement demonstrates that despite his unionist rhetoric in the past, he chose to prioritize Brexit over the internal integrity of the United Kingdom. For the PM and his pro-Brexit Conservatives a UK outside of the EU's Customs Union and Single Market, without Northern Ireland was more acceptable than the UK whole, but within those systems. This is a very tangible demonstration of how the English Nationalist project of Brexit has split the United Kingdom in two, justifying fears that it could lead to the breakup of the Union.

Rights and Equality

Following the Brexit vote in 2016 there were fears among Nationalists and Catholics of a loss of equal rights protections.⁹⁷ This concern arose from the fact that the guarantee of equality of Catholics and Protestants made under the *Good Friday Agreement* was made in the context of all parties being committed to the *European Convention on Human Rights* (ECHR), and hard Brexiteer Conservatives had made several assertions of their desire to withdraw from participation of the ECHR.⁹⁸ In 2017 Theresa May's Conservative Party manifesto pledged to not alter the ECHR issue during the 'next parliament', but left the question open for after Brexit.⁹⁹ Johnson's 2019 manifesto did not mention the Human Rights issue, and the final UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement in 2020 saw the UK remain part of the ECHR, however in subsequent meetings with EU officials he has expressed a desire for the UK to withdraw.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Smith, "Brexit: EU and UK Reach Deal but DUP Refuses Support."

⁹⁷ Harvey, "Brexit and Human Rights in Northern Ireland."

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ "Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future."

¹⁰⁰ Stone, "Boris Johnson Refuses to Commit to Keeping UK in Human Rights Convention."

The worries of the loss of the ECHR and what it might mean for the rights issue in Northern Ireland led to a resurgence in calls for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, something codifying these equal rights in domestic law.¹⁰¹ This measure had been called for since the *Good Friday Agreement* yet, despite consultation and research, had never been actively pursued. In 2020, following the restoration of the Northern Ireland assembly after three years of collapse, the parties of Northern Ireland signed the *New Decade, New Approach* (NDNA) agreement. NDNA reformed certain aspects of the Stormont Assembly to mitigate some of the issues that caused the collapse of the institutions. It also made provisions for an Irish Language Act to be passed to protect the language rights of Gaelic speakers in Northern Ireland. Importantly, the NDNA also committed to a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.¹⁰² However, the UK government under Boris Johnson has failed to meet the commitments it signed up to under the NDNA and has even expressed a desire to change the direction of progress on the project, a position Sinn Fein President Mary Lou McDonald has called 'wrong' and 'disrespectful'.¹⁰³ Therefore, the UK Government's commitment on this issue does not mean the problem is solved.

There is also a broader EU citizenship rights issue. The GFA gave the people of Northern Ireland the option to choose Irish, British or both citizenships. Irish and British citizens living in Northern Ireland previous had the right to vote in European Parliament elections, and were represented in European Institutions. Brexit would change this which is arguably a violation of the rights of those who chose Irish citizenship as EU citizens. Human Rights experts warned in 2018 that this violation is also in breach of the *Good Friday Agreement*.¹⁰⁴ Although agreeing that "the people of Northern Ireland who are Irish citizens will continue to enjoy rights as EU citizens, including where

¹⁰¹ Kramer, "Brexit, the Withdrawal Agreement, and a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland."

¹⁰² "New Decade, New Approach."

¹⁰³ McDonald, "New Decade, New Approach Agreement: Statements – Dáil Éireann (33rd Dáil) – Wednesday, 24 Feb 2021 – Houses of the Oireachtas."

¹⁰⁴ Carswell, "Northern Irish Should Be Entitled to EU Citizenship Post-Brexit - Report."

they reside in Northern Ireland”, the UK government later rolled back on this commitment as Theresa May struggled to get a workable deal through the House of Commons.¹⁰⁵

The ambivalence of the Johnson government to the rights concerns of a large part of the population of Northern Ireland highlights a larger trend of how those who had become the drivers of Brexit and English Nationalism were deaf to the issues it created. Their zealotry to ‘Get Brexit Done’ meant that all costs were acceptable, including backsliding in Northern Ireland. In Social Identity Theory terms, the collective identity of Johnson’s English Nationalism did not necessarily extend to include Northern Ireland.

¹⁰⁵ Emerson, “Rights of Irish Citizens in North a Thorny Post-Brexit Problem.”

2.2 – To what extent was the Northern Irish support/opposition to the specific areas of negotiation drawn from their sectarian/ethnic identity?

The Marriage of Convenience : The Democratic Unionist Party and Theresa May

Unionists in Northern Ireland have a passionate commitment to the United Kingdom which they see as the basis of their heritage and culture. This makes them an ideological partner of the Conservatives and Unionist party, which has traditionally been the advocate of the United Kingdom and even opposed devolution in the 1990's. The traditional party of the Conservatives in Northern Ireland was the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), rather than the DUP. David Cameron attempted to rekindle this alliance during his time as Prime Minister, however the low electoral performance of the 'New Force' spelled the end of the pact.¹⁰⁶

The Confidence and Supply agreement between The Conservative and the DUP during the May government was beneficial to the DUP as it made them indispensable to the survival of the government and gave their MPs an over-sized role to play in the formation of a Brexit deal.¹⁰⁷ Fears also circulated that the deal jeopardized the role of the UK government as a neutral arbitrator under the *Good Friday Agreement*, ensuring 'parity of esteem' between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland, by giving the party skin in the game and an incentive to keep the DUP in power.¹⁰⁸ In return for their support, the May government pledged a further £1 billion in funding for Northern Ireland, a measure Welsh Nationalists described as a 'bribe'.¹⁰⁹ Even within the Conservative Party there were those who publicly voiced concerns about the DUP's sectarian and ultra-conservative social stances, including on the LGBT and abortion rights issues. The Conservative leader in Scotland

¹⁰⁶ Walker, "Can Rebranded Northern Ireland Conservatives Deliver?"

¹⁰⁷ Trumbore and Owsiak, "Brexit, the Border, and Political Conflict Narratives in Northern Ireland." p 198

¹⁰⁸ Syal and Walker, "John Major: Tory-DUP Deal Risks Jeopardising Northern Ireland Peace."

¹⁰⁹ Servini, "Tory/DUP Deal an Outrageous Straight Bung, Carwyn Jones Says."

Ruth Davidson, herself a gay Protestant woman engaged to an Irish Catholic woman, distanced herself from the partnership with the DUP.¹¹⁰

When the DUP eventually failed to support May's Brexit proposal due to objections to the Backstop, they broke the Confidence and Supply agreement in which they agreed to support all UK Government legislation pertaining to the UK's exit from the EU. During that debate the 10 DUP MPs were the most united group opposed to the measure, essentially holding the House of Commons hostage and obstructing the business of Parliament. The Independent Unionist MP Lady Sylvia Hermon noted that the DUP had campaigned to leave the EU, while the people of Northern Ireland had overwhelmingly voted to Remain. Therefore, she affirmed that the DUP did not speak for the majority of people in Northern Ireland.¹¹¹ In the debate, DUP members referenced peace and conflict in Northern Ireland only seven times.¹¹²

In public the DUP were scornful of concerns of the return of violence post-Brexit. When then Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar expressed such fears, veteran DUP MP Sammy Wilson said Varadkar was scraping the bottom of a 'very deep barrel of threats, deception and rhetoric', calling his actions 'despicable, low and rotten'.¹¹³ Throughout the entire Brexit negotiation process DUP Arlene Foster warned that such claims may themselves result in violence and derided Dublin and Brussels for their 'careless' use of Northern Ireland as a 'bargaining chip' to achieve their own objectives.¹¹⁴

In terms of the rights and equality issue, the DUP had previously advocated replacing the Human Rights Act (1998), which is based on the ECHR.¹¹⁵ During the 2017 campaign they made a similar pledge to the Conservatives, but it not outside the bounds of possibility that they would

¹¹⁰ Cramb, "Ruth Davidson Distances Herself from DUP Deal by Tweeting a Link to Her Gay Pride Lecture."

¹¹¹ Cowell-Meyers and Gallaher, "Parsing the Backstop."

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ "DUP Hits out at Taoiseach's 'Despicable, Low and Rotten' Brexit Comments."

¹¹⁴ O'Carroll and Syal, "DUP Hits out at Brussels and Dublin over Brexit 'Blackmail.'", Heffer, "Arlene Foster Says Fears of N Ireland Violence Being Used as Brexit 'Bargaining Chip.'" and "Arlene Foster Claims Warning Hard Border Will Wreck Peace Process Gives 'succour to Men of Violence'."

¹¹⁵ Bradley, "Human Rights after the Election: Theresa May, the DUP, and the Good Friday Agreement."

support repealing the HRA in the future, an action that could further destabilise the situation in Northern Ireland.¹¹⁶

Irish Nationalists during the Brexit negotiations

The Irish Nationalist policy was to oppose a border on the island of Ireland that would separate those Irish in Northern Ireland from fellow citizens, and family, in the Republic. This is not surprising given their identity is based on their connections with the South, and a move farther away is perceived as an attack on that identity. The role of the Irish Nationalists during the Brexit negotiations is notable mostly for its absence. Sinn Féin's long-term policy of abstentionism meant that the party contested Westminster elections in Northern Ireland, and yet refused to take their seats in London. This stems from their claim to not recognize the sovereignty of Westminster over the affairs of Northern Ireland and their refusal to swear an oath to the British monarch.¹¹⁷ This is in contrast to Scottish and Welsh Nationalist parties which seek to reform the system from the inside. The other Irish Nationalist party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) which advocates a soft nationalism, lost all three MPs in the 2017 Election to Sinn Féin. This meant that between 2017 when Theresa May lost the Conservative parliamentary majority and 2019 when Boris Johnson stormed to victory, there were zero Irish Nationalist voices in Westminster.

This absence of perspectives led to the under representation of concerns, such as the point that the *Good Friday Agreement* requires the consent of the people of Northern Ireland to any constitutional changes. In the case of Brexit, Northern Ireland was to be removed from the EU, while the express result of the referendum in Northern Ireland was opposed to Brexit.¹¹⁸ The GFA makes eight references to consent in constitutional issues. In contrast, the consent of the people of Northern Ireland was raised seven times out of 800 comments in the House of Commons debate

¹¹⁶ Bradley, "Human Rights after the Election: Theresa May, the DUP, and the Good Friday Agreement."

¹¹⁷ Maskey, "I'm a Sinn Féin MP. This Is Why I Won't Go to Westminster, Even over Brexit."

¹¹⁸ Cowell-Meyers and Gallaher, "Parsing the Backstop."

over May's Withdrawal Bill.¹¹⁹ In simpler numbers, 37 comments were made on the need for an open north-south border, while 54 (1.5 times more) were made on concerns about the backstop separating Northern Ireland from Great Britain.¹²⁰

Outside Parliament, Irish Nationalists warned of a resurgence in violence if any attempt was made to force a deal on Northern Ireland that separated them from the Republic. Concerns stem from the belief that dissident republicans would lose faith in the Good Friday institutions that had not brought them any closer to a United Ireland than they were in 1998. The approach of Sinn Fein and the political path then risked being abandoned.¹²¹ The fears of dissidents rejecting the political path in favour of a return to violence were well founded.¹²² This was echoed in reports of increased numbers in joining the ranks of IRA groups.¹²³ The same group was suspected to be uncovering hidden weapons caches stored along the border following the Good Friday ceasefire.¹²⁴ These actions set the backdrop for increased calls from Sinn Fein for a border poll referendum to take Northern Ireland out of the UK, as mandated by the *Good Friday Agreement*.¹²⁵ The hope for nationalists was that the referendum would create a United Ireland and mitigate the Irish question by pushing the Irish border into the Irish Sea. Failing that, Sinn Fein called for a 'Designated Special Status' for Northern Ireland to somehow remain in the EU after Brexit.¹²⁶ In terms of the rights issue, this Special Status would maintain Northern Ireland's adherence to the *European Convention on Human Rights*. This arrangement would also guarantee EU citizenship rights to Irish citizens in Northern Ireland, including Free Movement of People and access to customs union and single market.¹²⁷

¹¹⁹ Cowell-Meyers and Gallaher, "Parsing the Backstop."

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Trumbore and Owsiak, "Brexit, the Border, and Political Conflict Narratives in Northern Ireland."

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Snaith, "New IRA Says Brexit Helps Its Cause and Draws in Young Recruits."

¹²⁴ Sommerlad, "New IRA 'digging up Old Weapons' - Suspects 'Spotted at Arms Dumps.'"

¹²⁵ McDonald, "Northern Ireland Secretary Rejects Sinn Féin Call for Border Poll."

¹²⁶ "Securing Designated Special Status for the North within the EU."

¹²⁷ Trumbore and Owsiak, "Brexit, the Border, and Political Conflict Narratives in Northern Ireland."

Ironically, this is not dissimilar to the NI Protocol passed by Boris Johnson's Conservative government. A customs border down the Irish Sea, with Northern Ireland both in and out of the EU.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that in some ways, due to the similarity of their identities, Ulster Unionism is a natural ally of English Nationalism, both seek to preserve the Union and defend it against external threats, in this case the European Union. This contrasts with Welsh, Scottish or Irish nationalism which advocate a close alignment with the EU and the breakup of the United Kingdom. However, as English Nationalism transformed and developed under Boris Johnson and the Conservative Brexiteers Northern Ireland came to be seen as an obstacle to 'Get Brexit Done'. Johnson's English Nationalism still fits Fukuyama's definition of Nationalism, but differs from Farage's in that it does not necessarily extend to Northern Ireland. In Social Identity Theory terms, the Ulster Unionists saw themselves within a valued British Nationalist umbrella, but the new English Nationalism movement under Johnson and the Conservatives did not agree.

Therefore, after the election, once the UK government was no longer tied to the DUP, Johnson essentially sold them down the river by placing a customs border down the Irish Sea, something he had previously vowed against.¹²⁸ The conservative backbenchers had previously argued against in the House of Commons, yet Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement passed by a majority of 124.¹²⁹ This deal was opposed by the DUP as it damaged the Unionists sense of being an equal part of the United Kingdom.

On the issue of borders and backstops the DUP were left up the proverbial creek without a paddle, no longer in confidence and supply they could not stop the Northern Ireland Protocol entering Johnson's Withdrawal Agreement. The debate around May's backstop had been heavily

¹²⁸ Quinn, "Watch Boris Johnson Tell the DUP in 2018 He Would Never Put Border in the Irish Sea - Today He Put a Border in the Irish Sea."

¹²⁹ Stewart, "Brexit: MPs Pass Withdrawal Agreement Bill by 124 Majority."

skewed towards unionism, yet that had not prevented the eventual separation of Northern Ireland from Great Britain, even if only by perception, under Johnson.

DUP had constantly downplayed the threat of violence resulting from any separation of North-South ties on the island of Ireland and a move farther away from the South signified the defeat of political nationalism, while this concern was emphasized by nationalists whose identity was centred on this connection. Proposals from Sinn Fein to solve the Irish Question by cementing closer North-South ties were part of the Irish Nationalist solution to English Nationalist problem.

The UK government under Boris Johnson has also shown neglect of the issues of rights and equality by suggesting creating a Human Rights vacuum by withdrawing from the ECHR. Some rights issues such as the fact that Irish citizens in Northern Ireland cannot vote in European Elections and are not represented in European Institutions are as of yet unresolved. This justifies the objections raised by some Conservatives to the May proposal of 'regulation without representation', yet in line with the type of English Nationalism Johnson represents this was the price to be paid to 'Get Brexit Done'.

Chapter Three:

Identity Politics, Brexit and the Peace Process

3. How has the English Nationalism of Brexit altered the Peace Process in Northern Ireland?

The United Kingdom as a signatory of the *Good Friday Agreement* has an integral role to play in guaranteeing peace in Northern Ireland. The position of the British government as a neutral arbitrator in a two-sided conflict has been undermined by new English Nationalism and its exclusion of Northern Ireland. Some of the most obvious side effects of this English Nationalism are a direct result of Brexit. However, the English Nationalist ideology has itself effected the peace process in other ways. Additionally, these effects can be direct impacts from Brexit or English Nationalism more generally, or they can be more indirect.

Aiken's framework aims to guide transitional justice through interactions to promote 'Social Learning' and identity negotiation between diametrically opposed collective identities in a post-conflict setting, based on Social Identity Theory. This chapter uses this framework to explain how English Nationalism has damaged that process between Ulster Unionists and Irish Nationalists in Northern Ireland.

3.1 Instrumental Learning

Instrumental reconciliation refers to 'social and cognitive processes of identity negotiation necessary to reconciliation that are derived from engaging former antagonists in sustained cooperative interaction.'¹³⁰ This is based on the social psychological theory of 'contact hypothesis' where interpersonal contact between groups is proposed as a method to reduce prejudice.¹³¹ It is also important that the context and content of these interactions are substantial enough to 'transform the rigidified and hostile perceptions of the Other.'¹³²

¹³⁰ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice.*, p.93

¹³¹ Ibid P.93

¹³² Ibid P.93

One of the most evident indicators of the long-term effects of The Troubles is the continued segregation of communities and the lack of cross-community contact. Each community tends to use flags, banners and murals as territorial demarcation of their loyalty either to the Irish Republic or the United Kingdom. In Northern Ireland about 80 'Peace Walls' divide Catholic and Protestant communities from each other, the vast majority in Belfast City. A commitment from the Northern Ireland government to remove the Peace Walls by 2023 can, at first glance, be seen as an indicator of improving relations between the communities. However, research from 2020 shows that a large portion of the population of Northern Ireland support the presence of the Peace Walls. When asked whether 'the government are right to remove walls', 50% of Catholics either Agreed or Strongly Agreed with statement, with 24% either Disagreeing or Strongly Disagreeing with this statement. Correspondingly, 39% of Protestants either Agreed or Strongly Agreed with this statement, with 28% either Disagreeing or Strongly Disagreeing.¹³³ This research also shows that four in ten residents have never interacted with neighbours on the other side of the Peace Wall.¹³⁴ However, the Housing Executive has had some success. Three years of 'negotiations between residents in Catholic Ardoyne and Protestant Woodvale, "until residents felt comfortable taking down this physical and mental barrier", led to the Housing Executive's first removal of a peace wall in 2016.'¹³⁵ This shows that through sustained interactions and discussions, community-led projects can build trust and respect across the divide and can lead to better inter-group relations by breaking down the stereotypes and prejudices of the Other.

¹³³ Dixon et al., "When the Walls Come Tumbling Down." p.933

¹³⁴ Ibid p.925

¹³⁵ Belfast, "Why Belfast Residents Want to Keep Their Peace Walls."

Segregation can also be seen in Northern Irish schools, where 93% over children attend schools that educate students that come overwhelming from one denomination or the other.¹³⁶ Grassroots efforts, such as those by the Integrated Educational Fund, to transform segregated schools into integrated ones have had some success, however it has been a slow process. Progressing from 28 children in one integrated school in 1981 to over 24,000 children in 65 schools at nursery, primary and second level in 2020.¹³⁷

The European Union has been critical in funding the grassroots projects that have facilitated the cross-community interactions to develop positive contacts. This began with the PEACE I project which ran between 1995 and 1999 and was extended through PEACE II (1999-2006) and PEACE III (2007-2013). During this period the fund contributed €1.3 billion to cross-community projects.¹³⁸ The latest of these funding programmes, PEACE IV, ran from 2014-2020 and specifically focused on integration. The €269 million programme aimed to support projects promoting integrated education, shared community spaces and services and ‘building positive relations at a local level’ with the ultimate goal of ‘reconciling communities and contributing to peace.’¹³⁹ Post-Brexit, there were fears expressed by the European Parliament that the EU funding was in jeopardy, however the European Commission put forward the idea of continuing the initiative under the title PEACE PLUS.¹⁴⁰ The programme will run from 2021-2027. However, the Special European Union Programs Body (SEUPB) which runs the program has highlighted its concerns about how the UK’s exit from the EU might threaten PEACE PLUS. The report highlighted the following potential

Brexit-related implications:

¹³⁶ McGibbon, “Northern Ireland’s Schools Still Aren’t Integrated.”

¹³⁷ “What’s Been Achieved?”

¹³⁸ Kolodziejki, “Northern Ireland PEACE Programme | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament.”

¹³⁹ Ibid

¹⁴⁰ Ibid

- a. 'Social challenges such as the impact on community relations and disruption to community and social cohesion;
- b. Economic challenges including for example, the impact on productivity and trade, the prices of goods and services and freedom of movement;
- c. Political challenges including the potential for destabilisation of the peace process, compromised good relations within Northern Ireland and between the two regions, greater polarisation on national identity issues, and potential for increased paramilitary and dissident activity; and
- d. Challenges such as the fear of the return of a hard border and legislative complexities around changing governance.'¹⁴¹

This highlights a critical impact of Brexit on Instrumental Learning in Northern Ireland. Brexit has the potential to increase the polarisation of nationalist and unionist identities by reinforcing the stereotypes of the Other, and thereby increasing antagonism between the two communities. This shift throws up obstacles to attempts at peace and reconciliation by building positive contacts. It also has the potential effect of reducing the effectiveness of the EU PEACE program, despite commitments to its continuation. This continuation itself however is far from guaranteed, with no commitment to funding beyond 2027 and no requirement to do so. New English Nationalism and its exuberance to 'Get Brexit Done' is endangering the current and future attempts to promote cross-community reconciliation.

¹⁴¹ "PEACE PLUS Programme European Territorial Co-Operation 2021 - 2027." p.21

3.2 Socioemotional Learning

Socioemotional Learning involves interventions to 'confront the emotional and perceptual legacies of past conflict in order to break down potential obstacles to reconciliation caused by existing feelings of victimisation, guilt, distrust and fear between groups.'¹⁴² This involves two pillars, the provision of justice for past injustices and historical inquiries to establish 'truth.'¹⁴³ Aiken defines truth in this instance as 'a mutually accepted, or at least mutually tolerable, shared understanding' of the past.¹⁴⁴

During the negotiations of the *Good Friday Agreement*, it was decided to focus on ending the violence, rather than the added difficulty of the legacy of human rights violations, truth and retributive justice. The choice for the *Good Friday Agreement* to be 'fault-neutral' effectively ruled out the inclusion of a formal transitional justice institution such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.¹⁴⁵ Narratives of the conflict differ between the nationalist and unionist communities in Northern Ireland. Nationalists see the conflict as a legitimate struggle against a repressive regime and seek 'truth' about the extent of the role of the British State in the suppression and murder of catholic civilians and 'justice' for those 'victims'.¹⁴⁶ Unionists on the other hand see themselves as the victims of the violence of seditious republican terrorists and that the actions of these bombers and gunmen justify the actions taken by the authorities. This Double-victimhood is accompanied by a zero-sum attitude, ensuring that any attempt to satisfy one narrative is perceived as being at the expense of the other community.¹⁴⁷ The

¹⁴² Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.129

¹⁴³ Ibid

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Aiken, "Learning to Live Together."p.170

¹⁴⁶ Trumbore and Owsiak, "Brexit, the Border, and Political Conflict Narratives in Northern Ireland."

¹⁴⁷ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.130

British government has traditionally portrayed itself as having been impartial during the conflict and having played the role of mediator.¹⁴⁸

Historical inquiries into the atrocities of The Troubles have inflamed these emotional responses. Since the end of the conflict, the transitional justice process has produced a small number of limited and specific legal investigations into the past. The first of these was the Cory Collusion Inquiry which investigated six deaths during The Troubles for signs of collusion between the British authorities and Loyalist paramilitaries. The inquiry found 'credible evidence of collusion by the security forces' in the facilitating the killing of Patrick Finucane.¹⁴⁹ Investigators in the inquiry reported British government resistance to his investigation and efforts to suppress the truth, including a suspicious fire at the team's office.¹⁵⁰ In the aftermath of the embarrassment of the Cory Inquiry, the British government passed legislation to restrict the role of similar independent inquiries by ceding responsibility to Westminster.¹⁵¹

The Saville Report was an inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972. The Report found that the actions of British paratroopers of opening fire on civilians 'caused the deaths of 13 people and injury to a similar number, none of whom was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury.'¹⁵² The report was welcomed by the families of the victims as recognising the wrong done against them in one of the most tragic and politically symbolic events of the troubles. However, it was criticised as many unionists believed that the Saville

¹⁴⁸ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.130

¹⁴⁹ Flaherty, "Making Hope and History Rhyme: The Cory Inquiry and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland." p.238

¹⁵⁰ Ibid p.240

¹⁵¹ Ibid p.242

¹⁵² 'The Overall Assessment - Chapter 5 - Volume I - Bloody Sunday Inquiry Report', National Archives, accessed 21 May 2021, <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20101017064040/http://report.bloody-sunday-inquiry.org/volume01/chapter005/>.

Inquiry 'represented a massively costly investment in the creation of a hierarchy of victims' at the expense of those who died by the hands of the nationalist paramilitaries.¹⁵³ In the aftermath of the investigation David Cameron, then Prime Minister, made a full and unreserved apology. The Prime Minister's apology helped promote socioemotional learning by addressing past injustices and offering culpability.¹⁵⁴ In the House of Commons, and simultaneously broadcast to a massive screen in Derry where the families of victims and supporters were gathered, Cameron stated:

'the support company reacted by losing their self-control, forgetting or ignoring their instructions and training and with a serious and widespread loss of fire discipline.... The government is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces and for that, on behalf of the government, indeed, on behalf of our country, I am deeply sorry.'¹⁵⁵

Perhaps the most significant step forward in Socioemotional Learning came from the measures introduced under the *Stormont House Agreement* in 2014 aimed at addressing legacy issues. The agreement provides for a Historical Investigations Unit (HIU) to investigate and prosecute Troubles-related deaths, an Oral History Archive to gather people's experiences and narratives of the Troubles, an Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR) to make enquiries, on request from victims and loved-ones, on truth recovery in relation to troubles-related deaths, where the information gathered cannot be used in criminal trials. The idea behind this is to offer closure to victims' families and allow former paramilitaries to offer information without fear of criminal proceedings.¹⁵⁶ The final mechanism is the Implementation and Reconciliation Group (IRG). Comprised of politicians and academics, the IRG would report on the themes and information recovered

¹⁵³ Patterson, "For Many, the Bloody Sunday Saville Report Has Fallen Short."

¹⁵⁴ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.141

¹⁵⁵ "Bloody Sunday."

¹⁵⁶ McGrattan, "The Stormont House Agreement and the New Politics of Storytelling in Northern Ireland."

by the other programmes and promote reconciliation.¹⁵⁷ The deal was a significant step in the transitional justice process in Northern Ireland, however for a long period of time it failed to be implemented.¹⁵⁸

In 2020, the *New Decade, New Approach* deal contained an agreement from the UK government to introduce legislation within the first 100 days to meet the commitments it made six years earlier under the *Stormont House Agreement*. Soon after, the British government announced a new approach to Northern Ireland that 'seeks to put victims first with information recovery and reconciliation as the overarching goal.'¹⁵⁹ However, in March 2020, the Johnson administration changed its tune. The Conservatives introduced *The Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill* (HC Bill 117) proposing that a statute of limitations be added to exclude these veterans from investigation after five years and exclude them from the ECHR. The government cited fears of a 'witch-hunt' against members of the armed forces serving in Northern Ireland during The Troubles, likely in view of the fallout from the Bloody Sunday inquiry.¹⁶⁰ Later that year a group of experts from Queen's University Belfast stated that this argument was 'neither factually nor legally accurate and lacks intellectual credibility ... We stress again our position that the implementation of the [Stormont] House Agreement as agreed in 2014 offers the best way forward.'¹⁶¹

Johnson received further criticism in his response to the publication of a report stating ten people killed by British Soldiers in Ballymurphy in August 1971 were 'entirely

¹⁵⁷ 'Stormont House Agreement' (2014)

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390672/Stormont_House_Agreement.pdf

¹⁵⁸ McEvoy et al., "Prosecutions, Imprisonment and the Stormont House Agreement."

¹⁵⁹ "UK Government Sets out Way Forward on the Legacy of the Past in Northern Ireland."

¹⁶⁰ McEvoy et al., "Prosecutions, Imprisonment and the Stormont House Agreement." p.5

¹⁶¹ Ibid

innocent'. Johnson responded firstly by issuing an apology to Northern Ireland's First and Deputy First Ministers over a phone call, although the Sinn Fein leader claims this apology never took place.¹⁶² Following widespread criticism, including from the families of victims, Johnson was forced to issue an apology in the House of Commons.¹⁶³ However, this apology has been rejected by the families as insincere.¹⁶⁴ Instead, they continued calls for the government to oppose amnesties for UK soldiers under the *Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill*.¹⁶⁵

These developments underscore the complexities of reconciliation in Northern Ireland and how English Nationalism has affected the Peace Process, outside the impacts of Brexit. Unlike David Cameron, Johnson appeared reluctant to publicly acknowledge and apologise for the actions of British Soldiers at Ballymurphy. Simultaneously Johnson has attempted to actively protect veterans from prosecution and avoided fulfilling commitments to foster reconciliation under the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement. Although the British government had previously made attempts to impede investigations and protect the narrative as a neutral actor, Johnson's deliberate actions to were considered beyond the pale. This undermines the UK government's traditional position as a neutral arbitrator. These actions are contrary to the nationalist desire to see 'truth' about the extent of the role of the British state in the conflict and rather supports the narrative of British repression.

¹⁶² Halpin, "McDonald Claims Johnson Did Not Apologise over Ballymurphy Killings during Call Yesterday."

¹⁶³ Murray, "Boris Johnson Issues Apology to Families of Victims of Ballymurphy Massacre in the House of Commons."

¹⁶⁴ Kearney, "Relatives of Ballymurphy Victims Reject Johnson Apology."

¹⁶⁵ "Ballymurphy Families Press Government to Oppose Amnesty for UK Soldiers."

3.3 Distributive Learning

Aiken identifies Distributive Learning interventions as ‘real and tangible changes in the socio-economic conditions of former antagonists.’¹⁶⁶ This includes redressing both material and structural inequality and inequitable power relations.¹⁶⁷

Given the nature of human rights violations committed before and during the conflict, restoration of equal rights was the main goal of the *Good Friday Agreement*, which committed to ‘the mutual respect, the civil rights and the religious liberties of everyone in the community.’¹⁶⁸ The centrepiece of this agreement was the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive at Stormont. The Northern Ireland Executive, or government, is based on a system of power-sharing where allocations of Committee Chairs, Ministers and Committee membership are made ‘in proportion to party strengths’, meaning that both nationalist and unionist political parties are represented in the government and cabinet.¹⁶⁹ Since its establishment in 2010 the role of Minister for Justice has traditionally been taken up by the Alliance party, which does not align itself to either the nationalist or the unionist cause.¹⁷⁰ The system requires cross-community support for major issues such as budget approval.¹⁷¹ The power-sharing system of government is successful in ensuring proportional community representation in government. However, the system is fragile and has regularly collapsed and resulted in direct rule from Westminster for long periods. Direct rule was imposed in 2017 as Sinn Fein refused to participate in the Executive without a promise to establish an Irish Language Act. This imposition lasted until 2020. The tendency

¹⁶⁶ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.179

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ ‘The Good Friday Agreement’ (1998) p.20

¹⁶⁹ Ibid p.7

¹⁷⁰ The Assembly - Official Report 12 April 2010’, 29 August 2011,

¹⁷¹ ‘The Good Friday Agreement’ (1998) p.8

of the Stormont Executive to collapse during the last two decades highlights the fragile nature, not just of the mechanisms of power, but the power-relationship between nationalists and unionists and the transitional justice process itself.

In addition to the rights and equality issues that were discussed in the last chapter, Johnson's English Nationalism also negatively impacts the power relations in Northern Ireland. This power relationship and the transitional justice process itself has been undermined by new attempts by Boris Johnson to centralise power in Westminster and unravel devolution within the UK.¹⁷² He even sparked controversy for calling devolution in Scotland 'a disaster'.¹⁷³ Equally the *Internal Markets Bill*, a Conservative response to unsatisfactory Brexit trade negotiations, was criticised by Nicola Sturgeon as "a full-frontal assault on devolution".¹⁷⁴ The criticism came from the argument that the devolved nations should take over previously EU competences such as food safety, minimum pricing, environmental policy, and animal health and welfare.¹⁷⁵ In undermining the system of devolved governance established by the *Good Friday Agreement* Johnson's English Nationalism is jeopardizing the transitional justice process in the region.

Johnson has also directly impacted some of the structures that ensure equality of power relations through Brexit. During The Troubles there was distrust towards the policing mechanisms in both nationalist and unionist communities, leading to a system of self-policing by paramilitary groups.¹⁷⁶ Paramilitary organisations did not believe that the police service represented their respective interests, and this form of alternative justice became a

¹⁷² Morphet, "Any More Re-Centralising Actions Taken by Boris Johnson in Response to the 2021 Elections May Be the Seeds of His Downfall."

¹⁷³ Kuenssberg, "Boris Johnson 'Called Scottish Devolution Disaster.'"

¹⁷⁴ Waugh, "Boris Johnson Backs Down Over Brexit Bill's Devolution 'Power Grab.'"

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Anna Eriksson, 'A Bottom-Up Approach to Transformative Justice in Northern Ireland', *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3, no. 3 (1 November 2009): p.302

challenge to the legitimacy of the state.¹⁷⁷ These groups established infrastructure and systems for paramilitary personnel to ‘hear complaints, investigate, make recommendations and carry out punishment attacks’.¹⁷⁸ The community support for these informal forms of justice can be expressed best by stories of ‘victims or their families arranging to arrive at agreed destinations to be punished.’¹⁷⁹ Since the end of the conflict, projects such as Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) in nationalist areas and Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA) in unionist areas have sought to restore trust and rebuild a positive relationship with the police service (PSNI). Staffed by former political prisoners and ex-combatants, these organisations act as a mediator between individuals and the police service by finding agreement in cases where possible and passing on cases to the PSNI when required. The aim is to ensure justice and mitigate the underlying causes of violence by building positive contracts. As noted by Eriksson, those involved in these projects understand ‘that there is little point in restoring people to the situations and the relationships they were in before, since it was precisely these situations which gave rise to conflict in the first place.’¹⁸⁰ To this end, most practitioners see their work in a wider context or aim for transitional justice ‘as opposed to ‘merely’ restorative justice’.¹⁸¹

The EU’s PEACE program has traditionally been the main source of funding for ex-combatant transitional funding programs in Northern Ireland.¹⁸² Under PEACE I (1995-2003) such projects received over £9.2 million. The involvement of former prisoners was critical to

¹⁷⁷ Kieran McEvoy and Harry Mika, ‘Punishment, Policing and Praxis: Restorative Justice and Non-violent Alternatives to Paramilitary Punishments in Northern Ireland’, *Policing and Society* 11, no. 3–4 (1 September 2001): p.361

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Eriksson, “A Bottom-Up Approach to Transformative Justice in Northern Ireland.” p.318

¹⁸¹ Ibid

¹⁸² Rios, “EU Is a Driving Force in Supporting Peace in Northern Ireland.”

‘selling’ the *Good Friday Agreement* and the continuation of peace to communities.¹⁸³

Funding has continued for projects aimed at prisoner reintegration and prisoner led community restorative justice programs in subsequent PEACE programs.¹⁸⁴ However, as with instrumental learning initiatives under the PEACE PLUS program. The process of Brexit under an English Nationalism that prioritises the need to ‘Get Brexit Done’ over Northern Ireland has threatened the effectiveness of this program. Furthermore, the willingness of the European Union and European Parliament to continue to support such projects once Northern Ireland is no longer within the EU is questionable.

Conclusion

Boris Johnsons Brexit and new English Nationalism in general have impacted both directly and indirectly negatively on the transitional justice process in Northern Ireland.

Firstly, Brexit directly impacted the certainty of the continuation of the PEACE programs in Northern Ireland, putting the Instrumental Learning mechanisms of cross-community reconciliation and segregation projects at risk. Brexit also indirectly effected transitional justice in Northern Ireland and Instrumental Learning by reinforcing stereotypes of the Other and repolarising communities, increasing antagonism.

Secondly, English Nationalism in general has directly affected Socioemotional Learning efforts to rectify past injustices and reconcile legacy issues of the conflict. Boris Johnson’s perceived reluctance to recognise the extent of the role of the British forces during The Troubles coupled with his attempt to shield veterans from prosecution for fears

¹⁸³ Aiken, *Identity, Reconciliation and Transitional Justice*. P.135

¹⁸⁴ Rios, “EU Is a Driving Force in Supporting Peace in Northern Ireland.”

of a 'witch-hunt' and cementing a hierarchy of victims has been damaging. These actions undermine the traditional position of the UK Government as a neutral arbitrator and reinforces the nationalist narrative of victimhood.

Thirdly, the examination of the direct impacts of the English Nationalist position on rights and equality has shown an ambivalence on the part of the British government under Johnson to concerns of the cost of the drive to 'Get Brexit Done'. Distributive Learning initiatives aimed at redressing inequitable power-relations, particularly with regard to policing, are further impacted by the new uncertainty and obstacles to the EU's PEACE programs as a result of Brexit.

Conclusion

Theories of nationalism can help us understand the complex interactions of collective identities within the United Kingdom, particularly in Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

English Nationalism in the 21st Century is a complex mixture of culture, language and class. Nigel Farage as leader of UKIP was successful in leveraging a referendum on the UK's place within the European Union. His argument was based on an idealic English national sovereign identity centred on a common language, values and heritage that appealed to the rural English working and middle classes now opposed to cosmopolitan 'elites' and a narrative based on inequality, identity and immigration. This segment of society was enough to carry the Leave vote. After that vote was passed and the UK was committed to leaving the EU, Brexit moved into the realm of mainstream politics. The Conservative party gradually fostered an extreme and urgent pro-Brexit English Nationalism. This new English Nationalism under Prime Minister Boris Johnson shared some key aspects of Farage's ideology, but importantly was significantly willing to sacrifice Northern Ireland to 'Get Brexit Done'.

In Northern Ireland, Ulster Unionism was a natural ally of English Nationalism. The value both placed on a shared history, heritage and culture created ties that justified Unionism's support for Leave. However, those connections did not extend to the Protestant middle class in Northern Ireland, leading to the defeat of Brexit in Northern Ireland. In the years that followed as English Nationalism underwent a profound transformation and hard Brexiteers in the Conservative party became more prominent, the link with Ulster Unionism was broken. This new English Nationalism did not identify with Ulster Unionists to the same extent as the Unionists did with them, leading to Johnson's acceptance of a border down the Irish Sea. The impact of this on the Unionist community has become increasingly apparent throughout 2021 as loyalist paramilitaries have threatened violence over checks in Northern Irish ports, riots have broken out across Northern Ireland with loyalists

blaming the DUP for their support of Brexit and the Conservatives.¹⁸⁵ It was because of this pressure and after abstaining on a vote to ban conversion therapy for LGBT people in Northern Ireland that Arlene Foster was forced to resign as leader of the DUP. The conversion therapy issue shows how deeply the DUP are wedded to the core protestant faith of their identity, as with English Nationalism. The coup justifies fears mentioned in this thesis that Foster's Anglican faith, although akin to English Nationalists', was not enough to satisfy the fundamentalists within her party.

Her successor Edwin Poots, who came from that fundamentalist section said he planned to take legal action regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol.¹⁸⁶ However, Poots himself was pushed from his new position just 21 days after taking office. The extreme wing of the party was this time enraged by his indirect support of an Irish Language Act in return for the establishment of the mechanisms of power in Stormont. This highlights the extreme opposition to increased rights for Gaelic speakers that remains within the DUP and the extent to which collective identities are still in conflict in Northern Ireland. This is of particular interest as July 2021 approaches, this will be the first time since the UK's withdrawal from the EU that Unionists can demonstrate their Protestant pride through 'Marching Season'. These marches often lead to scenes of violence and disorder and given that celebrations were cancelled last year due to Covid-19, the chance of tension is high.

This new form of English Nationalism had profound direct and indirect impacts on the Peace Process in Northern Ireland. The alteration of the traditional position of the UK government as a neutral arbitrator upset the balance and progress that had been maintained since the *Good Friday Agreement*. Brexit was a symptom of this and contributed to a number of the negative impacts. First and foremost, the debate around Brexit effected issues of collective identities in Northern Ireland society by reinforcing their stereotypes of the Other and further dividing the antagonistic communities. Johnson's apparent unwillingness to apologise for the Ballymurphy massacre and

¹⁸⁵ Hirst, "NI Riots: What Is behind the Violence in Northern Ireland?", "Arlene Foster Announces Resignation as DUP Leader and NI First Minister."

¹⁸⁶ "Brexit: Edwin Poots Threatens Legal Action over NI Protocol."

deliberate attempts to actively shield veterans from ‘Witch-Hunt’ prosecutions undermined Socioemotional Learning efforts and hardened the Irish Nationalist narrative of victimhood. The uncertainly Brexit place on the continuation of the previously successful EU PEACE program directly impacted both Instrumental Learning and Distributive Learning initiatives aimed at fostering positive cross-community contacts and constructing equitable power-relations. Furthermore, Johnson’s continued commitment for the UK to withdraw from the ECHR shows English Nationalism’s disregard for rights and equality concerns in Northern Ireland. It remains to be seen how the future relationship between the EU and the UK outside the bloc may further impact transitional justice in Northern Ireland.

In the future, with Sinn Fein getting more popular and closer to leading government both North and South of the border in Ireland, the question of how English Nationalism will respond to a renewed push for Irish Unification will become more pressing.¹⁸⁷ This study adds to this conversation, and many others around the relationship between the complex collective identity groups that share these islands. It also contributes to the burgeoning body of work that examines how identity and transitional justice are linked and other works on the developmental process and impacts of Brexit.

¹⁸⁷ Davis, “Why the next Government in Ireland Could Be Historic.”

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Conclusion

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