Northern Ireland and European Integration: A Historical Analysis of Divergent Nationalist Discourses

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Abstract:

The legacy of colonialism in Northern Ireland has created an ideological divide between Irish nationalism and British unionism through which many questions of political economy are sorted, including questions of conflict, peace and European integration. This paper examines and considers how divergent nationalist discourses surrounding European integration have developed in Northern Ireland throughout history. This divergence can be linked to the fundamentally different and conflicting historical understandings these nationalist projects have of identity, borders and governance.

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1. Introduction

The year 2021 marks the centenary of the partition of Ireland. Throughout the past hundred years, partition has resulted in the division of a society – not only in terms of the actual border, but also in terms of identity and concepts of governance. This division of Ireland has presented a range of complications for peace and stability in the region, including most recently in the form of Brexit. On 1 January 2021 the controversial Northern Ireland Protocol, an agreement between the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK), came into force. The Protocol has already resulted in significant politicization and polarization of identities, borders and governance in the region.

Nearly all aspects of political and economic life in Northern Ireland have been influenced by an ideological divide between Irish nationalism and British unionism since the partition of the island in 1921. The interests, and subsequently the official discourses, of both Irish nationalism and British unionism are shaped by the legacy of colonialism in the region. These divergent interests and discourses can be found throughout topics of political economy in Northern Ireland, including the topic of European integration. These competing nationalisms came to a head with Brexit, and threaten to disrupt the delicate, 'negative' peace[1] that the region has been experiencing since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement[2]. As Murphy writes, "today, Europe and Northern Ireland's future are inextricably linked in utterly unexpected ways" (2018, p.153).

In this context it becomes uniquely pressing to examine and consider how divergent nationalist discourses surrounding European integration have developed in Northern Ireland. This divergence can be linked to the fundamentally different and conflicting historical understandings these nationalist projects have of identity, borders and governance.

The following section will argue that a decolonial framework is essential to understanding the historical and political-economic development of nationalist identities in Ireland. Then, the empirical section of the paper utilizes this framework and a simplification of Hayward's triform model to analyze the divergence of official nationalist discourses on topics of conflict, peace, European integration and Brexit. Finally, the conclusion will discuss the various implications of Brexit for the delicate, 'negative' peace in Northern Ireland.

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[1] Murphy defines a 'negative peace' as a space of "relative peace, but minimal reconciliation. Violence has stopped, but politics remains polarized" (2018, p.23).
[2] The Good Friday Agreement, also known as the Belfast Agreement, was drafted and signed by government officials from the UK and the Republic of Ireland in 1998. The agreement addressed the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and is understood to have ended an era of ethnonational conflict known as 'The Troubles' that impacted the region from the late 1960s to 1998.

2. Theoretical Framework

Decolonial thought facilitates a political-economic and historical analysis of how "the logics, processes and practices put in place during colonialism continue to shape the present and future world" (Meghji 2020, p.4). In this way, the institutions, structures, relationships and dynamics of the colonial past continue to inform the political economy and reality of today (Meghji 2020). A decolonial framework provides a unique lens for examining the conflict in Northern Ireland, the peace process and the diverging understandings of European integration within the region.

It is important to mention that the EU is made up of the world's former colonial powers and continues to exert a neocolonial influence globally (Bhambra 2016). Generally, decolonial thought is utilized to decenter European contexts and understandings (Meghji 2020). However, this paper will be examining the unique situation of Northern Ireland, a region that is geographically European and was previously part of the EU.

A failure to consider Europe's "colonial past and postcolonial present…legitimizes neocolonial policies both within and outwith Europe" (Bhambra 2016, p.190). Given this, it is essential that analysis of European integration interrogates the many colonial histories of Europe; this paper will focus on the intra-European colonial relationship between England and Ireland. Decolonial thought has an explanatory capacity when examining the continued ethnonational divide in Northern Ireland, and it also serves to place the continued conflict regarding borders and sovereignty within a wider scope of anticolonial struggle. It is with this understanding that a decolonial framework is justified and applicable to a situation considering a European region and the context of European integration.

Colonialism and the Development of Identities in the Region

Bhambra argues that colonialism should be understood as a phenomenon that has shaped not only the colonized but also the colonizers (2016). In this way colonialism becomes foundational to the material and conceptual development of identities and relationships. For the region of Northern Ireland, colonialism "explain[s] the structures of animosity between the descendants of settlers and the descendants of natives, manifest in disputes over land rights, religion, citizenship, public and private employment and services, national identity and statehood, and, indeed, appropriate relations with the wider world" (O'Leary 2014, p.151).

Over time, two 'communities' have developed in Northern Ireland along religious, national and constitutional lines – one community, which O'Leary describes as the 'descendants of settlers' can be categorized as Protestant/British/unionist and the other community, 'the descendants of natives' as Catholic/Irish/nationalist (O'Leary 2014). Clearly this is a generalization and oversimplifies the complex identities in the region – many people do not identify exclusively with either of these

communities (Coulter 1999). However, the primary focus of this paper is on the conflict in the region and the subsequent peace process, both of which are inherently concerned with this general division. This division is also evident when investigating attitudes towards the EU and Brexit – which again, points to the continued significance of the colonial history that underpins the relationship between these two communities.

The history of these two communities is marked by a consistent and clear pattern of economic, political and social discrimination of the native community by a colonial power. From the Plantation of Ulster in the early 1600s which dispossessed the native Irish of their land, and the partition of Ireland in 1921 which created a contentious and colonial border separating the North of Ireland from the rest of the island, to the political, economic and social discrimination experienced by the marginalized Irish community in the North and the British state-sanctioned, violent repression of 'The Troubles' – the legacy of colonialism in Ireland is inextricably linked to the development of identity and interest on the island. While the Protestant/British/unionist community historically has had a material incentive to maintain a close relationship with England, the Catholic/Irish/nationalist community has not received similar economic, political or social benefits as a result of this relationship (Miller 1998).

As Martin (1982, p.67) writes, "the Irish social formation, in which nationalist and unionist politics have a firm material base, was a product both of internal conflicts and conflict with Britain." And so, these two communities, with their mutually exclusive interests and understandings of history, frequently find themselves in conflict. These two identities have become a lens through which the rest of political and economic life is filtered, including the topic of European integration.

3. A Historical Analysis of Divergent Nationalist Discourses on European Integration

3.1 Methodology

This section examines how identity and interest in the region developed throughout the Troubles, the peace process and the project of European integration. To that end, the official discourse of nationalist politicians in the region will be analyzed. Both Irish nationalists and British unionists utilize discourse to produce and reproduce unique understandings of identity, the border and sovereignty in the region (Coulter 1999, Hayward 2009). Official discourse is limited to politicians and government officials, and quotes have been pulled from a mix of primary and secondary sources, including official government documents, written texts, speeches, interviews and news articles. These quotes will be analyzed in relation to their historical context beginning in the 1960s and running through to 2021.

Nationalism and European Integration

European integration has presented unique challenges to nationalist discourses throughout the various member states. Hayward (2009, p.38) argues that, due to the intentional ambiguity of European institutional aims and goals, "the impact of the European Union in conceptual and practical ways remains largely mediated through the national institutional, structural and discursive realms." In Northern Ireland, the politicization of European integration has specifically been filtered through a long-standing ethnonational divide; this section will examine the evolution of official nationalist discourses throughout the project of European integration.

Official nationalism is defined as "the ideology of the nation-state defined by the governmental elite" (Hayward 2009, p.20), and while official nationalist discourse is often presented as objective and factual, it is actually deeply normative and ideologically informed.

This section will utilize a simplification of Hayward's triform model to analyze the divergence of nationalist understandings of European integration in relation to Northern Ireland. Hayward's triform model organizes discourses of nation-statehood into three thematic areas: identity, borders and governance. Table 1 visualizes the triform model in terms of traditional official nationalist narratives, and new narratives of the EU. In traditional official nationalist discourse these thematic areas result in a narrative that centers historical culture (Identity), demarcated boundaries (Borders), and self-determination (Governance). The new discourse of the EU conceptualizes this narrative in a way that centers unity in diversity (Identity), overcoming divisions (Borders), and partnership (Governance).

Table 1: Traditional and New Narratives of Identity, Borders and Governance

Discursive Themes	*Identity*	*Borders*	*Governance*
Traditional narrative of nation-state	Historical culture	Demarcated boundaries	Self-determination
New narrative of European Union	Unity in diversity	Overcome divisions	Partnership

Source: Modified table from Hayward 2009, p.227

With this triform model in mind, the following section will analyze the divergent official nationalist discourses surrounding European integration in Northern Ireland. The Irish nationalist discourse will include quotes from a variety of politicians that are affiliated with parties that are considered ideologically nationalist. Parties from both the North and South of Ireland will be included, as well as parties on both the right (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael) and left (Social Democratic Labour Party, Sinn Féin). While these parties are often at odds ideologically (including when it comes to specific EU policy action), this paper will be analyzing a common evolution in the overall Irish nationalist narrative in relation to European integration as a general concept. Unionist discourse will be sourced from

officials from both Northern Ireland and Westminster (including English nationalists). Discourse will also be selected from European level officials when relevant. In this way, the interests of the major parties involved in the conflict, the peace process, European integration and ultimately Brexit, will be considered alongside each other.

3.2 1970s – Joint Membership of the EEC

The UK initially applied to join the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1961, and the Republic of Ireland immediately followed suit. The motivations for application were entirely different – while the UK's attitude was ambivalent and due to their limited options, the Republic of Ireland applied with the understanding that membership would be an opportunity to develop a healthier economy, reduce its chronic dependence on British markets and facilitate a more stable situation in Northern Ireland (Guelke 2017, McCann 2011). And so, as early as 1961 the division in official understandings of Europe between the UK and Ireland was obvious.

Due to the Eurosceptic nature of the UK, and specifically England, their application to join the common market was vetoed by French President de Gaulle. In a speech on 14 January 1963, he expressed concerns about Britain's absolute understanding of sovereignty, and questioned the willingness of the British to "renounce all Commonwealth preferences" and "cease any pretence that her agriculture be privileged." Ultimately his speech concluded that the application would be reconsidered only if England could "manage to transform herself sufficiently…without restriction, without reserve and preference" (de Gaulle 1963). Ireland's EEC application became collateral damage of the veto. The EEC had previously expressed concerns about Ireland's chronic economic underdevelopment, and if Ireland's primary trading partner was "destined to remain outside the EEC there was no point in Ireland going it alone" (Department of Foreign Affairs 2019, p.3). It wasn't until 1973 that the UK and the Republic of Ireland would become members of the EEC (McCann 2011).

This joint membership of the EEC meant that the general relationship between the UK and Ireland began to evolve. Economically, Ireland was able to become less dependent on trade with Britain through increased access to the European market. Politically, Ireland was also elevated to the status of a "virtual equal" to the UK (at least within the EEC) for the first time (Guelke 2017). European meetings also allowed British and Irish politicians to meet in a relatively neutral and removed setting to collaborate and develop connections. However, despite all of these significant changes, the relationship between the UK and Ireland continued to experience challenges, particularly in relation to the intensifying conflict in the North (McEvoy et al. 2020).

Northern Ireland's Stormont Parliament was abolished in 1972, and Direct Rule by Westminster was imposed in the region as the Troubles reached their most violent period. Prior to

1973, the conflict was understood to be an internal problem for the UK to address and there was limited cross-border communication regarding the conflict, resulting in tension and strain between the UK and Ireland (Connolly and Doyle 2019, McEvoy et al. 2020). Northern Ireland was understood as a region under the sovereignty and sole authority of the UK. However, with both the UK and the Republic of Ireland joining the EEC, the conflict in Northern Ireland began to take on a European dimension which enabled a fundamental shift in this understanding, as Irish intervention in the region was legitimized and normalized (Guelke 2017).

Irish Nationalist Discourse

In general, Irish nationalists, in the North and South, were in favor of membership of the EU[3]. In particular, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), a nationalist party in Northern Ireland, was eager and optimistic about what European integration could mean for Irish North/South integration. The SDLP also saw European integration as an opportunity to bring the conflict in Northern Ireland to the international stage (Murphy 2018).

The following quotes are sourced from Irish nationalist politicians throughout the early 1970s, as they considered what European integration would mean for the border and governance in Ireland.

> Apart from the economic reasons for entry, we have a national incentive in believing that entry into Europe will do away with the Border and make the artificial line between North and South of our country meaningless.
>
> *T.J. Fitzpatrick of Fine Gael, 1971*

This quote articulates the Irish nationalist understanding of the border as "artificial" and argues that European integration would render that border "meaningless" – signaling a desire to decrease the significance of partition in the region. This is in line with the new narrative of overcoming divisions associated with European integration. The following quote from another Fine Gael politician, Garrett FitzGerald, also addresses the question of the border.

> Within a vast European Community the two parts of Ireland, sharing common interests in relation to such matters as agriculture and regional policy, must tend to draw together – and the fact that on some of these major issues the North and the Republic will have a common interest, divergent from that of highly developed Britain, cannot be without significance…
>
> *G. FitzGerald of Fine Gael, 1973 (quoted in Hayward 2009, p.181)*

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[3] With the notable exception of the Irish Republican party, Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin initially opposed joining the EEC and continued to campaign against EEC initiatives until the late-1990s/early 2000s when they entered a period of evolution and "critical engagement" in regard to EU policy (Dibble 2020).

FitzGerald outlines the possibility that European integration will allow the economic interests of the North and South of the island to converge. It is important to note that he does not extend that same consideration to Britain, in fact, he argues that the economic interests of Ireland are divergent from the interests of Britain. So, within Irish nationalist discourse it is possible to imagine the role of European integration in removing certain borders, while reinforcing others.

Throughout the early 1970s, Irish nationalist discourse also outlined the capacity of European integration to reinforce and strengthen Irish political sovereignty and economic independence. This rhetoric positions membership of the EEC as compatible with national self-determination, showing an evolution towards a more complex, and multi-level understanding of sovereignty. Irish nationalists utilized rhetoric to position European integration as conducive and even essential to their goal of a united and independent island. European integration became an opportunity, a new platform with which nationalists could derive international support, evolve their long-held principles and actively pursue their ideological goals (Hayward 2009).

Unionist Discourse

As Irish nationalists were developing a symbiotic relationship with the European Community, unionists in Northern Ireland were developing the same Eurosceptic opinions and attitudes as their nationalist counterparts in England (Murphy 2018).

One interesting thread between unionist and English Euroscepticism is a distrust of the EU's "suspiciously Catholic roots" (O'Toole 2018, p.19). Ian Paisley, Founder of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and eventual Member of the European Parliament, famously described the EEC as "a beast ridden by the harlot Catholic Church, conspiring to create a Europe controlled by the Vatican" (Irish Times 2001). This reference was intentionally designed to feed off the sectarian tension in the region and the mistrust of Catholic institutions found in unionist communities. It also shows that unionist discourse surrounding identity was stubbornly fixed to the traditional narrative and was resistant to the new narrative of European integration.

In England, Conservative politician Enoch Powell was also expressing misgivings about the project of European integration. At the time, this position was at odds with the consensus of the Conservative Party. He expressed concern that Britain would be obligated to transfer power to European institutions and opined that the "greatest danger was the EEC and the abdication by the British Parliament which it entails" (Corthorn 2021, p.215). In a speech on the EEC in 1970, he noted that:

> The question of joining the Common Market is the most fundamental of all. It is the question not merely, what sort of a nation are we to be, but what nation are we to be?
> *E. Powell of the Conservative Party, 1970, p.34*

This rhetoric also reflects a traditional understanding of governance, and an active resistance to the new, more collaborative and shared understandings of governance facilitated by European integration.

Powell ultimately left the Conservative Party in 1974 in protest of EEC membership, and later joined the Eurosceptic Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) in Northern Ireland. It is telling that Powell "broadly adumbrated some of the arguments that have underpinned Brexit" (Corthorn 2021, p.214).

Summary
Since 1973 the discourses of these official nationalisms have diverged around competing and mutually exclusive interests in terms of identity, borders and sovereignty. Irish nationalists saw European integration as an opportunity, while unionists saw European integration as a threat to their position in the region (Cauvet 2020).

3.3 1980s – Internationalizing the Conflict
Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s the EEC played a relatively limited role in the political economy of Northern Ireland. Up through 1983 the EEC's role in the region can be summarized as providing a framework for the development of Anglo-Irish relations, and political opinions toward the EEC were split along the traditional community divide. In 1984, the European Parliament (EP) moved past this sort of passive facilitation, and directly addressed the conflict in Northern Ireland with the publication of the Haagerup Report (Hayward 2009).

The publication of the Haagerup Report revealed the continuation of divergent interests in Northern Ireland, as Irish nationalists sought to involve the EP in an effort to internationalize the conflict, while unionists and the British government strongly opposed external intervention in the region (Connolly and Doyle 2019).

Irish Nationalist Discourse
In 1979, SDLP politician and Member of European Parliament (MEP) John Hume published an article drawing parallels between Europe's past of "bloody conflict" with Northern Ireland's conflict, arguing that integration allowed the continent to create a stable peace through acknowledging and supporting "unity in diversity" (1979, p.310). In this same article Hume calls for the European Community to take additional interest in the conflict; he describes this interest as "historically inevitable and legitimate" (1979, p.313). This article foreshadowed Hume's eventual official efforts, and the efforts of other Irish nationalists, to engage the European Community in the political economy and conflict of Northern Ireland.

In a series of motions for a resolution in the EP, Hume and other Irish nationalists engaged in a campaign to bring attention to the Troubles with a call to action centered on European intervention in the region. One motion positioned the conflict in Northern Ireland as an "affront" to the ideals of the European Community (Haagerup 1984, p.85). Another motion argued that a "need to maintain the solidarity of European peoples" combined with the possible "failure to find a peaceful solution to the problems of Northern Ireland [which] is damaging to the image of Europe in the world" mandated an increased European involvement in the conflict (Haagerup, p.84). A third motion called for increased intervention at the European level, to address "the failure of the responsible authorities to restore peaceful conditions conducive to economic and political stability" (Haagerup 1984, p.86). This is a pointed criticism of the British state's management of the conflict, as Irish nationalists began to rhetorically consider alternative approaches to the UK's sovereignty in the region. Indeed, Hayward (2009) notes that this was a successful argument and EU-level action in Northern Ireland has often granted a certain amount of legitimacy to the Irish nationalist understanding of sovereignty in the region. These motions point to the continued evolution in Irish nationalist narratives of governance, as sovereignty and self-determination were viewed as achievable within the collaborative model of European integration.

Each of the motions referenced the connection between political tension, escalating economic deterioration and the continued violence, and called on the European Community to assist in the facilitation of political peace and economic stability (Haagerup 1984, p.85-89).

As a result of this concerted effort, in 1983 the EP's Political Affairs Committee commissioned a report on the conflict in Northern Ireland. The EP appointed Niels Haagerup as rapporteur, and he was tasked with researching and compiling an explanatory and prescriptive report for the EP – commonly called the "Haagerup Report" (Connolly and Doyle 2019).

Unionist Discourse

While Irish nationalists were pushing for increased international and European involvement in Northern Ireland, unionists were resisting any calls for increased international intervention. Hayward (2004) notes that unionist and British opposition to the Haagerup Report is related to the notion that the Troubles were an internal, domestic issue which required increased security measures and the enforcement of law and order.

Ian Paisley, MEP and DUP politician, in a motion issued in response to the previous three motions referenced earlier, noted that "the European Community has no competence to make proposals on the constitutional and political affairs of Northern Ireland". He also included that the motions listed

in the previous section, tabled by Irish nationalists, were "deplore[d] and repudiate[d]" (Haagerup 1984, p.87).

A memo from the Department of the Taoiseach[4] in 1983 (p.1) also mentioned "attempts by British Conservative MEPs to get the Bureau to block the decision of the Parliament's Political Affairs Committee…to draft a report on Northern Ireland." The document later observes that the initial official British reaction to the report was "uniformly hostile" (p.2).

The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is even quoted as expressing anger at the notion that she would meet with Haagerup, remarking that "a meeting would compromise our basic position. I am absolutely against it. Weakness never pays" (Phoenix 2013).

These quotes reveal that unionist officials viewed European-level interest and engagement as a threat to control and the traditional, absolute understanding of British sovereignty in the region.

Summary

Ultimately, the Haagerup Report was published, and the findings did inform Europe's approach to facilitating and encouraging the peace process in Northern Ireland. It found that the root of the conflict can be understood as "historical antagonism between British and Irish nationalisms and identities" (Hayward 2004, p.7). Haagerup's historical outline of the Troubles directly addressed the colonial nature of Northern Ireland's political economy, and plainly stated that "Irish-English history is dominated by Irish rebellions and British suppression" (1984, p.18).

The Haagerup Report also expressed a belief that solutions should be focused on toleration, not transformation, of identities in the region. This toleration is in line with the new narrative of European integration, particularly the concept of unity in diversity. The Report also made it clear just how limited the European Community was in terms of directly intervening in the region. Its role was limited to "providing inspiration", facilitating the continued development of Anglo-Irish relations through joint membership of the EEC, and accepting "a large degree of responsibility for the economic and social development of Northern Ireland" (Haagerup 1984, pp.74-75). Haagerup (1984) also noted that while the economic condition of Northern Ireland was not the primary driver of conflict in the region, it did exacerbate the situation. From this point onward, one of the primary methods of European intervention in the region was structural funding initiatives and programmes.

3.4 1990s – The Peace Process

The 1990s saw the relationship between Northern Ireland and Europe transition from traditionally distant to more appreciative and engaged (Murphy 2018). The Single European Market (SEM)

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[4] The Taoiseach is the head of the government of the Republic of Ireland.

eradicated the trade border on the island which created significant political and physical change. For much of the conflict, the border was a region of violence and danger, a symbolic and literal barrier that produced and reproduced division on the island. The removal of the economic border was accompanied by the gradual removal of the physical border. This meant the removal of security controls which had acted as a reminder of the colonial past and postcolonial present (Murphy 2018).

Throughout the 1990s there was also an influx of financial support from the EU. This came in the form of structural funding and innovative funding programmes which provided tangible economic benefits. Indeed, much of the structural funding had an integrating element with a focus on peace, reconciliation and cross-border cooperation (McCann 2011).

It is in this context that the peace process was officially launched. In 1993, the Downing Street Declaration was issued by British Prime Minister John Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds on behalf of their respective governments. In section three of the Declaration the importance of their European connection is noted:

> The development of Europe will, of itself, require new approaches to serve interests common to both parts of the island of Ireland, and to Ireland and the United Kingdom as partners in the European Union.
>
> *Downing Street Declaration, 1993*

This highlights the importance of the multiple partnerships involved, between the North and South of Ireland, between Ireland and the UK, and between the islands and the EU. It connects the interests of the region with the interests of the EU and references the evolving relationship between the UK and Ireland.

Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland issued a ceasefire in 1994, and the EU, in an "unusual move", committed to a significant increase in funding for the region (Hayward and Murphy 2018, p.279). In 1995 the EU's programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland (PEACE) was established. The PEACE programme's stated goals are: "to support peace and reconciliation and to promote economic and social progress in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland" (European Parliament 2020, p.1).

The peace process reached its pinnacle in 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement was signed by the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In the first all-Ireland poll since 1918, "94.4 per cent of the Southern electorate and 71.1 per cent of the Northern electorate voted for the Agreement's implementation" (McCann 2011, p.184).

The understanding of sovereignty that underpins the Good Friday Agreement is modelled after EU governance structures (O'Brennan 2019), and reflects the framework for peace, reconciliation and power sharing suggested in the Haagerup Report from 1984. Language in the Agreement draws

inspiration from the European framework, with a focus on "partnership", "equality" and "mutual respect" (Good Friday Agreement 1998). It also acknowledges that the relationship between the UK and Ireland is growing closer as a result of cooperation and partnership in the EU.

The Agreement acknowledges and, in some ways, solidifies and enshrines the division of the two communities by recognizing the unionist and nationalist divide. Again, drawing on the Haagerup Report, the peace process was not focused on transforming or overcoming identity in the region – but instead was focused on tolerating different identities and creating a space of unity in diversity.

The Agreement is a document of negotiation and compromise, and ultimately established a concept of shared sovereignty. In terms of sovereignty, individuals *and* states can be "both/and" rather than "either/or", which created a "complementary rather than threatening" view of national sovereignties (O'Brennan 2019, p.163). The document also includes language that sovereignty is subject to change – with a clause referencing the legitimacy of any official border poll in which the "majority of the people of Northern Ireland" votes for the reunification of Ireland (Good Friday Agreement 1998).

And so, while the EU was not a main player in this particular agreement, it did play a role in providing the framework and model for the Agreement. Nagle writes, "the architects of the peace process clearly viewed the Good Friday Agreement's architecture as profoundly facilitated by EU integration" (2017, p.399). The role that the EU did play has become much clearer and more politicized recently as a result of Brexit, which will be discussed later in this section.

In total, the Agreement is a complex document that redefined sovereignty in the region, while maintaining and preserving the conflicting identities, an arrangement that only makes sense in the context of the "supportive, integrative environment of the European Union" (Hayward 2019, p.275).

Irish Nationalist Discourse

Nationalists welcomed the increased funding and celebrated the gradual removal of the border. The relationship between Irish nationalists and the EU continued to develop alongside the drafting and implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, David Andrews, articulated the relevance of European integration to the developing relationship between Britain and Ireland:

> [The Agreement] represents an opportunity for a new beginning – in relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South on the island and between Britain and Ireland. All of this, of course, is taking place in the context of our shared membership of the EU.
>
> *D. Andrews of Fianna Fáil, 1998 (quoted in Hayward 2009, p.185)*

SDLP leader John Hume also noted the unique opportunities that European integration could offer Northern Ireland in the 1990s, specifically in the realm of sovereignty. He explained:

> Common membership in a new Europe moving towards unity has provided a new and positive context for the discussion and exercise of sovereignty in these islands…the new European scene offers a psychological framework in which such issues can no longer be pushed in absolutist terms.
>
> *J. Hume of SDLP, 1993, p.229-230*

Throughout this period, Irish nationalism was able to move away from traditional, 'absolutist' notions of governance and embrace the new narrative of cooperation and partnership. Andrews later highlighted the significance of the EU to the peace process in a speech on the Treaty of Amsterdam at an Irish Congress of Trade Unions conference:

> The complex web of relationships which lies at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement is set in the creative context of our shared membership of the European Union. The Union, which brings together 'peoples long divided by bloody conflicts', illustrates the possibilities for reconciling ancient differences. The Union's institutional arrangements help to provide the model for blending different histories into a shared future.
>
> *D. Andrews of Fianna Fáil, 1998 (quoted in Hayward 2009, p.145)*

This quote reveals an evolution in Irish nationalist identity and a move toward the concept of unity in diversity. It also shows a shift in understandings of sovereignty, with references to a 'shared' future.

By the 1990s Irish nationalism had embraced new, European understandings of identity with a focus on unity in diversity. Similarly, Irish nationalists welcomed the removal of the economic and physical border that shared membership of the EU made possible. And importantly, the Good Friday Agreement fundamentally altered the understanding of sovereignty in the region by utilizing a European framework of shared authority.

Unionist Discourse

Overall, the Good Friday Agreement was widely celebrated throughout the governments of the UK and Ireland as a triumph. However, while the vast majority of the Irish nationalist community in Northern Ireland voted in favor of the Good Friday Agreement, only a narrow majority of unionists also voted in favor (Coulter and Murray 2008).

The strong divide in the attitudes and interests of unionists could be ascribed to several factors including the clear impact of Irish nationalists' input throughout the document, unionists' material interest in the continuation of the conflict economy and the perceived threats posed by the diminishing border. Because of their previous position of institutional power and privilege, some unionists viewed the equalizing aspects of the agreement as disadvantageous, and the solution of shared sovereignty threatening (Coulter and Murray 2008). Essentially, while nationalists stood only to gain from the

peace process, some unionists felt they only had power to lose. While the narrow majority of unionists did support the Agreement, there were a handful that expressed frustration and contempt for the peace process.

The DUP, led by Ian Paisley, stayed remarkably resistant to the peace process in Northern Ireland, as they understood that "the union with Britain is seen as the only guarantee of the liberty of Protestants in Northern Ireland, and the peace process threatens its destruction" (McSweeney 1998, p.97).

The consistent fear of the erosion of British sovereignty continued to underpin more traditional unionist discourses. British Conservative politician Michael Gove argued that the Good Friday Agreement's "genesis, framing, selling and implementation all have profound ramifications for the rest of the United Kingdom" (Gove 2000, p.3). Gove's pamphlet continues to outline concerns about the implementation of redistributive 'positive' social and economic rights, the demilitarization of Northern Ireland's police force, and the implementation of human rights for a marginalized community at the "expense of the democratic majority" (2000, p.4). He specifically noted that the Good Friday Agreement "demeans traditional expressions of British national identity. And it privileges those who wish to refashion or deconstruct that identity" (2000, p.4).

As Ireland and Northern Ireland were experiencing massive adjustments and evolutions in their respective political economies as a result of European integration, most of the UK was continuing to foster a distant and hesitant approach to integration. The UK opted out of several significant moments of integration including: the single currency, the Schengen Area, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and various Justice and Home Affairs Issues (Murphy 2018). The notion of shared sovereignty that shaped the peace process in Northern Ireland was not spilling over to the rest of the UK's political imagination.

Summary

Perhaps the most significant development in nationalist discourses during this period was in relation to the theme of sovereignty. The Good Friday Agreement fundamentally reshaped sovereignty in the region, creating a multilevel and shared understanding of authority. This was a welcome development for Irish nationalists who sought to increase their scope of action in the North but was less welcomed by unionists concerned with the ever-encroaching EU. Ireland and Irish nationalists used enthusiastic rhetoric surrounding the peace process, centered on cooperation and shared power. Unionists, on the other hand, had a more complicated relationship with Europe at times. Some official unionist discourse positioned the peace process and the continued European and Irish intervention in Northern Ireland as a threat to traditional narratives of identity, borders and governance.

3.5 2000s – A 'Negative Peace'

The Good Friday Agreement created a situation of 'negative peace' defined as "relative peace, but minimal reconciliation. Violence has stopped, but politics remains polarized" (Murphy 2018, p.23). The conflict transitioned from "a violent conflict of subordination to an identity conflict through defining the conflicting parties in terms of the dual divide over the border" (Hayward 2004, p.10).

McEvoy et al. (2020, p.634) argue that the EU, "mindful of the political sensitivities involved in being seen to 'interfere'", has focused its supportive efforts on structural funding. Between 1995 and 2020 there have been 4 iterations of the PEACE programme, with the aim of supporting "cohesion between communities involved in the conflict…and economic and social stability" (European Parliament 2020, p.1). Between 1995 and 2020 total funding for the PEACE programmes equaled €1.57 billion.

As a physical peace settled in the region, a crisis of identity and increased ontological insecurity was proliferating in the unionist community (Donnan 2010). In the years following the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland was experiencing an "internal postcolonising process in which many of the inequalities and perverse effects of the colonial past [were] slowly and unevenly being addressed and undone, at least to a significant extent" (Cash 2017, p.387).

Irish Nationalist Discourse

European financial support was appreciated and welcomed in Irish nationalist circles. Previously, external funding in the region came exclusively from a begrudging British state and was often channeled into the oppressive security forces in the region. EU funds, in contrast, were intended to develop community initiatives and support marginalized communities and local businesses (McCann 2011). The cross-border focus of the funding initiatives and the peace process in general was also celebrated by Irish nationalists as the island of Ireland became more integrated. To Irish nationalists, the border was artificial, divisive and a space of oppressive control, so any weakening of the border was significant. And, importantly, the shared sovereignty in Northern Ireland was accommodated by Irish nationalism as complex understandings of citizenship and multilevel governance were put in place (Hayward 2009).

Throughout this period, Irish politicians continued to reference the influential nature of the EU in the region. In a May 2011 speech in honor of the Queen's first ever visit to Ireland, Irish President Mary McAleese detailed the complex and turbulent colonial history of England and Ireland. She positioned European integration as a catalyst in the development of a healthier and more collaborative relationship between the two governments:

The collegial and cooperative relationship between the British and Irish Governments was crucial to the success of the Peace Process and we can thank the deepening engagement between us as equal partners in the European Union for the growth of friendship and trust.

Former President McAleese, 2011

Unionist Discourse

Unlike Irish nationalist communities, unionist comfort and well-being has historically been tied to the maintenance of the border, the continued connection to the British state, and the economic benefits of a security sector propped up by sustained conflict. To unionists, the border was protective and defensive, they reflected on the hard border with nostalgia and "wistfully remember[ed] its militarization as providing not just a safeguard from violence but a protective skin that helped to maintain and secure their status as Northern Ireland's dominant and ruling majority" (Donnan 2010, p.255). Anything understood as weakening the border, or making the border invisible, was a threat to their identity and desired sovereignty (Donnan 2010).

It is also useful to acknowledge that while the inequalities between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland had largely been addressed, it was not necessarily the result of inclusion and upgrading. Indeed, Smyth and Cebulla (2008, p.186) argue that the socioeconomic conditions in the region in the 2000s were moving towards an "equality of misery" with a more noticeable movement into poverty for the Protestant working class.

The region suffered from neoliberal policymaking that resulted in socioeconomic marginalization for the working-class contingents of both communities. The importance of this economic context should not be underestimated: historically, conflict has been exacerbated throughout periods of economic contraction and has disproportionately impacted working-class communities. Indeed, Coulter and Murray suggested in 2008 (p.18) that the "mood of sullen disaffection that has descended upon working-class unionist districts constitutes the single most significant threat to the entire peace process."

Summary

In general, government officials in Northern Ireland were receptive to EU funding and the Irish and British governments also appreciated the economic support for peacebuilding in the region. The border had slowly become less obstructive and thus less visible and politicized. This development, alongside the concept of shared sovereignty, allowed the constitutional question to fade as an immediate concern for nationalists and unionists alike (Murphy 2018).

The structural flaws of the economy and the uptick in neoliberal economic policy were not generally linked directly to European integration by government officials or the public. The 2000s saw

"goodwill flourish" between the EU and the Northern Ireland executive, and the development of stronger North-South relationships (Hayward and Murphy 2018, p.280).

And so, for nearly 20 years following the Good Friday Agreement, the people of Northern Ireland experienced a delicate and 'negative' peace because the root cause of the conflict, the legacy of colonialism in the region, had not truly been addressed. In 1999, Coulter (p.255) made the interesting prediction that "the cultural turn that the Belfast Agreement proposes for Northern Ireland is likely to signal not an end to the conflict but rather a period of interregnum." This foresight proved to be prescient, as the 2016 UK Referendum on membership of the EU refocused the mutually exclusive interests underpinning the conflict and posed the first real challenge to the peace created by the Good Friday Agreement.

3.6. 2016 – Brexit

Throughout the process of European integration, Ireland intentionally moved from the periphery of the EU to the mainstream. The UK took the opposite approach, most notably following the Conservatives' rise to power in 2010 (O'Brennan 2019). In Northern Ireland, despite differing perspectives on European integration in a general sense, nationalists and unionists were both able to appreciate the transactional and functional benefits of EU membership throughout the 2000s (Murphy 2018). The result of the 2016 Brexit referendum disrupted the depoliticized nature of the EU in the region.

On 23 June 2016, the people of the UK voted to leave the EU with a narrow majority of votes (51.9 percent). The Northern Ireland electorate, however, voted to remain in the EU, with 55.8 percent of voters opting to remain (McEvoy et al. 2020, Murphy 2018).

The referendum vote showed a very clear and obvious continuation of an ethnonational divide in the North. Figure 1 shows data collected from a representative survey of voters in Northern Ireland. Garry (2016) found that the Catholic/Irish/nationalist community unequivocally voted to Remain in the EU, while the Protestant/British/unionist community was much less unified and ultimately voted to Leave the EU.

Figure 1: EU Referendum Vote in Northern Ireland, by Identity
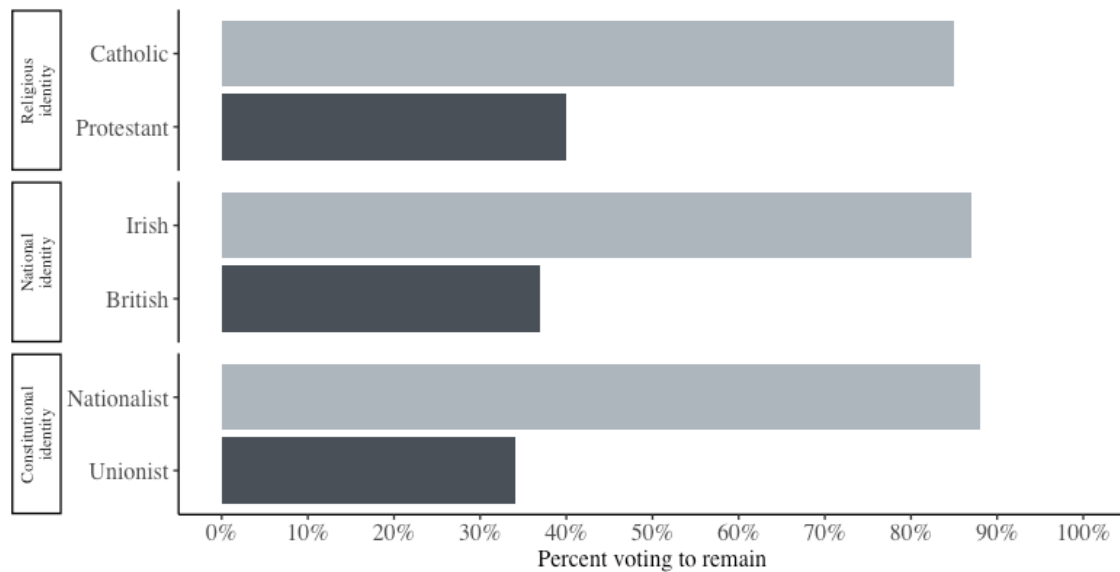
Source: Garry 2016, p. 2

The official discourse of the competing nationalisms in Northern Ireland deeply informed voters' understandings and decisions in the referendum. As noted in the previous parts of this section, these official discourses have been evolving to different degrees as European integration has progressed. However, the initial aftermath of the referendum was the first moment that these diverging nationalist discourses were highly politicized and centered in the region (Murphy 2018).

Irish Nationalist Discourse

Irish nationalists in the North and South of Ireland were uniformly committed to ensuring that Northern Ireland remained in the EU. The discursive strategies of Irish nationalists accessed a renewed interest in and focus on the significance of European integration to the peace process. Shared membership of the EU became rhetorically positioned as essential to the sustained peace in Northern Ireland, and Brexit was positioned as a threat to that peace (Murphy 2018).

Then Taoiseach of Ireland, Enda Kenny, acknowledged that while the people of the Republic of Ireland were obviously not voting in the referendum, they still had opinions and concerns related to Brexit – especially in relation to the peace process. In a speech in Northern Ireland just 10 days before the referendum he argued:

> Ireland has a unique perspective on the outcome of the referendum given the close and multi-layered nature of our relationship with the UK… The peace process was built by the people of this island coming together… But also vital, and quite often underestimated, was the international support for the process, not least that of the European Union…The EU itself has played a very constructive role in fostering that

peace and has provided a framework for cooperation – whether between North and South, East and West or between unionists and nationalists…

Former Taoiseach Kenny of Fine Gael, 2016

This quote shows how Irish nationalists discursively centered EU membership as vital to the peace process throughout the referendum campaigns. The Taoiseach specifically positioned the EU as constructive in the creation of the cooperative understanding of sovereignty in the region. He later argued that stability and peace in the region is linked to the EU and he emphasized the beneficial effect that the EU had in the "virtual elimination" of the border.

Additionally, Daniel Mulhall, Ireland's Ambassador in London prior to the referendum, detailed the symbiotic relationship that Ireland had developed with the EU and other member states in terms of governance. He wrote in a letter expressing concerns about the referendum:

As far as sovereignty is concerned, our view is that effective sovereignty is enhanced by being pooled at EU level. We have always been comfortable with the concept of pooled sovereignty, which, it seems to me, is more valid than ever in a world where so many issues are clearly best dealt with by means of concerted action.

Ambassador Mulhall 2016

Nationalists in Northern Ireland were equally as concerned about what the Brexit referendum would mean for their community and made it clear that the constitutional question had only been shelved within the context of the EU. Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin argued in March 2016 that "if Britain votes to leave the European Union then that could have huge implications for the entire island of Ireland and, given all the predictions, would run counter to the democratic wishes of the Irish people" and given this, it would be a "democratic imperative" to implement a border poll on the reunification of Ireland (Reuters 2016). And immediately following the referendum, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood was quoted as saying "the SDLP, as a party, continues to believe that the reunification of Ireland is the biggest and the best idea around" (O'Connor 2016).

Irish nationalist discourse on Brexit often referenced concerns with postcolonial dimensions. For example, they were concerned about the reimposition of a hard border because of the violent and divisive colonial history of the border. They were also concerned that Brexit would revert the economy of Northern Ireland to its once fully dependent position with Britain, disrupt cross-border integration, diminish protections for marginalized communities and threaten EU structural funding. It is also useful to consider the forced and colonial nature of this exit – Northern Ireland voted to remain. But because England voted to leave, Northern Ireland must too. This lack of self-determination and sovereignty reignited and politicized official nationalist discourse (Kearns 2018, Murphy 2018).

Unionist and English Nationalist Discourse

While the Northern Ireland unionist Leave campaign was rooted in British nationalism, the English Leave campaign had its roots in English nationalism. At points, the divergence of interests between English and British nationalism has created tension for unionists. Regardless, the connection between the English Brexiteers and Northern Ireland's Brexiteers is the selective nostalgia for a colonial empire, and the "strange sense of imaginary oppression that underlies Brexit" (O'Toole 2018, p.18).

While English nationalists expressed little to no concern for Northern Ireland throughout the referendum campaign, many unionists were accessing British nationalism to encourage their members to vote Leave. O'Toole (2018, p.229) writes that it is in this way that the contradictions of Brexit become clear, "it is driven by a force – English nationalism – that its leaders still refuse to articulate. It draws on English disengagement from the Union but wraps itself in a brashly reasserted Unionism."

Unionist and English nationalist discourse surrounding Brexit accessed three colonial narratives in relation to the Irish peace process. One was the capacity of the Leave campaign to overlook the peace process entirely. The second is the outright appropriation of colonized experiences by the Leave campaign. And the third was a focus on absolute sovereignty and "taking back control" (McEvoy et al. 2020).

In England, throughout the Leave campaign, there was a lack of serious discussion surrounding Ireland and the peace process (O'Toole 2018). In fact, when the question of the Irish border arose, Nigel Lawson, chairman of the Leave campaign, quipped: "I would be very happy if the Republic of Ireland – I don't think it's going to happen – were to say we made a mistake in getting independence in 1922, and come back within the United Kingdom. That would be great" (BBC News 2016). This statement is representative of the dismissive and carefree attitude that Brexiteers applied to the question of the Irish border. Ultimately, it revealed a lack of consideration for how Brexit might impact the relationship between the two islands (McEvoy et al. 2020).

One consistent discursive technique utilized by Brexiteers was the appropriation of the colonized experience by English and British nationalists, a type of "mimicry", as Brexiteers borrowed rhetoric from anticolonial movements (McEvoy et al. 2020). In March 2016, Boris Johnson argued that "we are seeing a slow and invisible process of legal colonisation, as the EU infiltrates just about every area of public policy". The discursive and rhetorical strategies used by the Leave campaign positioned the UK as a once great empire, now suffering as a colony of the EU. This understanding of EU membership is the result of the limited capacity for colonial actors to process the world outside of the limited scope of "colonizer/colonized" (Koegler et al. 2020). In reality, Britain had simply transitioned from being an imperial power to being a "reasonably ordinary but privileged Western European country" (O'Toole 2018, p.107).

The Leave campaign's slogan, "Take Back Control", reflects a form of "British postcolonial melancholia" (Meghji 2020, p.9), and exposes the incompatibility between official English and British nationalisms with the new framework of the EU in terms of discourse surrounding sovereignty (Koegler et al. 2020). Leading Brexiteers consistently referenced this imperial history in the months leading up to the referendum. For example, Boris Johnson reflected positively on the imperial past often positioning Britain as "[running] the biggest empire the world has ever seen" (McEvoy et al. 2020, p.616). This focus on Britain's historical absolute control, and present lack of control, references an "imagined national history" and reveals that the resiliency of British and English understandings of self-determination and sovereignty are inextricably connected to their colonial past (Meghji 2020, p.9).

Summary

While Brexit has served to repoliticize the border in Ireland and the constitutional question, it does not represent the root of the conflict. Instead, the root of the conflict is the colonial legacy of partition and the border itself. Traditionally, the competing nationalisms that dominate Northern Ireland's society have articulated mutually exclusive interests and demands in relation to the border and governance. European integration offered a unique opportunity to depoliticize these interests creatively and cooperatively, as shared membership of the EU "enabled Irish and British nationalisms to be entangled without either one being eroded" (Hayward and Murphy 2018, p.277). Brexit disrupted this entanglement and exposed the continued rift in the two communities of Northern Ireland. Now, Brexit has highlighted the border and constitutional question – which could threaten the region's 'negative' peace (McEvoy et al. 2020).

3.7. 2016-2021 – Brexit Negotiations

The fallout from Brexit would bring discourses of identity, borders and governance to a level of engagement unseen since the Troubles (Murphy 2018). The negotiations produced feelings of uncertainty and tension, as questions were raised about what "leave" meant for the region (Murphy 2018). Ultimately, Brexit would result in several years of tense negotiations between the UK and the EU. The Republic of Ireland also became a major actor in the negotiations, acting within its role as a member state of the EU to strategize and apply pressure in the discussions (O'Brennan 2019).

The Irish government took Brexit as an opportunity to engage in a deeper level of cooperation with the EU. As a result, "this commitment was reciprocated by the member states and EU institutions with an unprecedented level of solidarity shown to Ireland" (O'Brennan 2019, p.169). This development would result in a reversal of the historical asymmetry that had defined Anglo-Irish relations for centuries. For hundreds of years, the UK represented an imperial power that exerted

political and economic control over Ireland. Now, Ireland was in a more powerful position to negotiate, with the full power and support of the EU behind it (O'Brennan 2019).

The conflicting discourses and understandings surrounding sovereignty in Northern Ireland made Brexit negotiations difficult. UK territorial sovereignty positions the UK government as the sole sovereign power in Northern Ireland. Throughout the negotiations, the Irish government and the EU both accessed their claim to (shared) sovereignty in the region through the Good Friday Agreement. Connolly and Doyle (2019) argue that this complex shift in understanding of sovereignty in the region was not deeply understood by the UK's negotiators, resulting in surprise, confusion, and ultimately the underestimation of the commitment of the EU to Ireland.

The EU also held a much better position for negotiating than the UK. The UK needed to establish a trade deal with the EU; in 2015 exports to the EU totaled 44 percent of UK exports, while exports to the UK only accounted for 7 percent of the EU's exports. The EU, acting in the interests of the Irish government, made a trade deal contingent on the preservation of the Good Friday Agreement (Schuette 2021). As Hayward and Murphy note, "the process of making the EU a protector of the Agreement is a fascinating one – and one that was surely not envisioned when the referendum on the UK's withdrawal from the EU was first posited" (Hayward and Murphy 2018, p.277).

To the surprise of the British elite, the question of the Irish border and the protection of the peace process would become the most contentious and complicated issue of the Brexit negotiations. The border in Ireland is not solely economic in nature. It is deeply political and fundamentally controversial. This means that the technical, economic approach that the UK took throughout the negotiations displayed a certain level of ignorance to the significance of the border and had limited capacity to address the actual concerns of the region (Schuette 2021).

Brexit would require the creation of a border, either North/South or East/West. Naturally, Irish nationalists viewed a North/South border as unacceptable, and the Republic of Ireland, through its relationship with the EU, argued this point. Unionists, on the other hand, expressed fears that an East/West border would threaten the relationship between the North and Britain (Connolly and Doyle 2019).

Irish Nationalist Discourse

Brexit reenergized and reorganized Irish nationalist discourse around questions of the border, sovereignty and the protection of the peace process (McEvoy et al. 2020). In 2017 the Irish government expressed concerns to the EU about the threat Brexit posed to the peace process in Northern Ireland. They argued that:

> The preservation of the gains of peace over the past 20 years must be a priority for the EU in the upcoming negotiations with the UK and we must ensure that there is no disruption to the integrity of the peace settlement achieved through the Good Friday Agreement
>
> *(quoted in Murphy 2018, p.93)*

The 2019 Sinn Féin European Election Manifesto (p.5) also outlined the threat Brexit and the re-imposition of "borders of the past" poses to the political economy of the island and advocated for an increased role for the EU in the project of Irish reunification.

Within Northern Ireland, nationalists were considering these same questions of borders and governance. In 2016, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood stated that:

> This is a huge constitutional change that is happening without our consent. For us, the Good Friday Agreement was about breaking down borders, further integrating across the island and working democratically in the absence of violence or intimidation towards our political aspirations. To take that away – to take the common EU membership we had with the South of Ireland away – has a tremendous destabilizing effect on the Northern nationalist psyche…this shakes Northern Nationalism to the core.
>
> *C. Eastwood of SDLP, 2016 (quoted in Murphy 2018, p.86)*

Between June 2017 and March 2018, Irish and EU officials participated in more than 400 meetings about the threats Brexit posed for Ireland (O'Brennan 2019). In the process, Irish nationalists continued to develop a symbiotic understanding of their interests and Europe's interests, and Ireland became more integrated and central to the European project. This is reflected in quotes from EU officials related to Brexit negotiations.

In an EU Negotiation Directive from 2017, the EU made a commitment to preserve the wholeness of the Good Friday Agreement and: "avoid the creation of a hard border on the island of Ireland" (quoted in Connolly and Doyle 2019, p.225).

Donald Tusk, then President of the European Council, also made the strategic partnership between the EU and Ireland obvious:

> Let me say very clearly if the UK offer is unacceptable for Ireland, it will also be unacceptable for the EU... the EU is fully behind you and your request that there should be no hard border on the Island of Ireland after Brexit.
>
> *D. Tusk (quoted in Irish Examiner 2017)*

The European Council also announced that a united Ireland would automatically result in Northern Ireland being welcomed back into the EU. This consistent support for Irish nationalist goals surrounding the border and governance of Northern Ireland is striking – previously, the EU maintained a certain level of distance from these highly sensitive and politically charged discussions. This level

of commitment and cohesion between the EU and the Irish surprised the UK negotiating officials (Connolly and Doyle 2019).

Unionist and English Nationalist Discourse

English nationalists took a narrow approach to Brexit negotiations, and they were supported by a significant portion of Northern Ireland's unionists (Connolly and Doyle 2019). At times, the contradictions between Northern Ireland unionism and English nationalism have created tension, as unionists felt Westminster was prioritizing other concerns over the question of Northern Ireland in the negotiations (Yeginsu 2019).

English nationalist discourse has consistently neglected and underestimated the question of Northern Ireland throughout the Brexit referendum campaigns and negotiations. In 2018, Boris Johnson, then British Foreign Secretary, expressed frustration with the complications surrounding Northern Ireland in the negotiations:

> It's so small and there are so few firms that actually use that border regularly, it's just beyond belief that we're allowing the tail to wag the dog in this way. We're allowing the whole of our agenda to be dictated by this folly.
> *B. Johnson of the Conservative Party, 2018 (quoted in Kearns 2018, p.276)*

This disregard, the notion that questions of the Irish border are a "folly", is colonial in nature. The intense difficulty surrounding Irish border negotiations frustrated the self-confident Brexiteers, as they were "being thwarted by the real-world complexities of unpicking multi-tiered legal, economic, financial, institutional and diplomatic relationships developed over more than four decades" (McEvoy et al. 2020, p.620).

The negotiations also saw the continued appropriation of colonized discourse by Brexiteers. Conservative government officials such as Daniel Hannan and Owen Paterson would appropriate and mimic the calls for freedom issued by Irish Republicans in the 1920s. Paterson, in a speech about Brexit negotiations, explained "it is worth looking at the example of the Republic of Ireland as it emerged from the Irish Free State... this Bill begins the process of establishing our full freedom" (McGreevy 2019).

This was paired with consistent attempts to discursively position the UK as oppressed or victimized throughout the negotiations, with several newspapers and government officials using language like "EU is demanding 'unconditional surrender'" (O'Toole 2018). Conservative MP Ann Widdecombe proudly placed Brexit as an emancipatory event:

> There is a pattern consistent throughout history of oppressed people turning on their oppressors, slaves against their owners, the peasantry against the feudal barons, colonies against empires, and that is why Britain is leaving…
> *A. Widdecombe of the Conservative Party, 2019 (Boffey 2019)*

The logic underpinning this mimicry and appropriation of decolonial action is fundamentally flawed – Britain was not colonized by the European Union (O'Toole 2018). The discourse of unionists and English nationalists throughout the negotiations continued to focus on an ideal of colonial control and absolute sovereignty, as the UK even labelled their post-EU economic plans as "Empire 2.0" (Meghji 2020). Inherent to the nostalgic discussion of free trade underpinning Brexit discourse is a "historical forgetfulness" – the British empire did not engage in free trade with its colonies, rather, it exerted colonial force in a type of "open season over their resources" (Meghji 2020, p.11).

Summary

The negotiations concluded with the creation and implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The Protocol establishes an economic border down the Irish Sea. This reveals the reversal of power relations in the region as Irish nationalists, the Irish government and the EU managed to secure their main objective in relation to Northern Ireland in the agreement (Schuette 2021).

Interestingly, Prime Minister Johnson once postured that "no 'British government could or should' sign off on a plan that divided Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom" (Yeginsu 2019). Because of this, unionists describe the Protocol as a "betrayal", as Northern Ireland has become symbolically separated from the rest of the UK (Yeginsu 2019, McEvoy et al. 2020). The fear outlined by many unionists is one of a slippery slope – although the Irish Sea border may appear to be a minor bureaucratic inconvenience now, over time the hardness of that border may increase as interests in Britain (and specifically England) diverge from the interests of Northern Ireland (Hayward 2019).

4. Discussion

The colonial legacy that historically underpins Northern Ireland's political economy and institutions has deeply shaped both Irish nationalist and unionist understandings of identities, borders and governance in the region. Because of this, these competing nationalisms experienced and discussed European integration in different ways. Official Irish nationalism evolved its understandings and discourses symbiotically with the project of European integration. At the same time, unionism developed a hesitant, awkward and often antagonistic relationship with the project of European integration. Ultimately, the competing nationalisms in Northern Ireland have revealed how official discourses can develop completely divergent understandings of European integration (Hayward and Murphy 2018).

Official Irish Nationalism

The new official discourse of Irish nationalism has been deeply influenced by European integration. This paper has argued that the interests of Irish nationalists are often rooted in a colonial past of

dependence, force, oppression and conflict – the EU offered a route towards independence, cooperation, support and peace. As Hayward explains, "the ardour of Ireland's marriage with Europe has been due to the potency of Irish official nationalism – itself a consequence of the historical constraints faced by Irish sovereignty, not least of which were economic underdevelopment and partition" (Hayward 2009, p.237).

By applying a decolonial framework to the discourse of Irish nationalists throughout the overlapping projects of peace and European integration, one can see how Irish nationalists positioned this new European Union as a space of cooperation and the recognition of national identity and culture. In this way, Irish nationalism was able to develop a symbiotic relationship with European integration, especially when compared against the union with Britain, which for the Irish entailed a forced, colonial experience of suppressed national identity and culture.

When considering Hayward's triform model it becomes clear that Irish nationalist discourse has evolved in the context of European integration, especially with regards to Northern Ireland and the peace process. In terms of identity, the EU provided a framework for a more inclusive understanding of identity and facilitated the narrative of "diversity in unity". In terms of borders, the violent tension in the region related to partition decreased as the border took on less significance. Irish nationalist discourse praised the EU as a model for cross-border cooperation and utilized the notion of the Irish border as a bridge, not a barrier. In terms of governance, Irish nationalism evolved to value the concepts of shared sovereignty, partnership and collaboration (Hayward 2009).

Official Unionism and English Nationalism
Historically, discourse in the UK surrounding European integration has been popularly described as "uneasy and uncomfortable" (Maccaferri 2019, p.2), and British policymaking regarding Europe has often been based on "hesitation, alienation, incomprehension" (British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2000, quoted in Murphy 2018, p.19). Brexit can be understood as a continuation of this legacy, as it "[revived] those remains of empire's narcissistic nationalism that now militate against the very idea of Europe" (Koegler et al. 2020, p.588).

When considered in the context of Hayward's triform model, it becomes clear that unionist and English nationalist official discourse did not evolve and adapt its understandings of identity, borders and governance throughout the project of European integration. Instead, these discourses remained predominantly Eurosceptic and concerned about issues of sovereignty throughout the entire project (Cauvet 2020).

In terms of identity, unionists have consistently prioritized their Britishness. And English nationalists have been identifying as specifically English – not British – in growing numbers

(Maccaferri 2019). Both unionists and English nationalists have resisted the idea of a European identity or the value of unity in diversity. Indeed, much of the Brexit discourse was dominated by xenophobia and the rhetoric of "us versus them" (Meghji 2020).

In terms of the border, as mentioned in section 3.5., many unionists perceived the decreasing obviousness of the Irish border as a threat, instead of a bridge. Historically, the clearly demarcated boundary between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was viewed in a positive light by many unionists (Donnan 2010). Now, the new Irish Sea Border imposed by the Northern Ireland Protocol has become an urgent concern for unionists. In early February 2021, DUP MP Sir Jeffrey Donaldson argued, "I wish someone could show me any other example in the world where you have this kind of border right down the middle of a country, an internal border within a country that separates one part of the country from the other" (BBC Sounds 2021). This quote shows a continuation of deliberate historical forgetfulness, as the colonial legacy of partition continues to divide Ireland.

It is in terms of sovereignty that the most glaring contradictions arose between unionism/English nationalism and the project of European integration. While the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 may have signaled some development in the British understanding of sovereignty, it was limited and did not spill over to its general "conception of State Sovereignty to make it fully compatible with EU integration" (Cauvet 2020). This is because the British state has understood the peace process in relation to its own interests: "when it is convenient, it takes joint responsibility. When it is a nuisance, it is downgraded and neglected" (McEvoy et al. 2020, p.631). This gesture toward shared sovereignty was not fully understood, embraced or appreciated by unionists and English nationalists (McEvoy et al. 2020).

In general, the rhetoric of the Leave campaign has been dominated by nostalgia for imperial sovereignty as historically, unionist and English nationalist Euroscepticism finds its ideological roots in British imperialism (McEvoy et al. 2020, Maccaferri 2019, Koegler et al. 2020).

5. Conclusion

Through a discursive and historical analysis, this paper has argued that the legacy of colonialism in Northern Ireland has created a divide through which all questions of political economy are sorted, including the questions of conflict, peace and European integration. In this way, colonialism has outlived its immediate form and continues to impact the institutions, structures and individuals of the region. Brexit is an iteration of this colonial legacy and disrupts the economic, political and constitutional stability of the region. Indeed, many argue that the tension, uncertainty and instability surrounding Brexit may act as a catalyst for a united Ireland (McEvoy et al. 2020). The reunification

of Ireland would be a necessary first step to moving past the constitutional question and on to interrogating other areas of Irish and European policymaking – for example, the region's reliance on and support of neoliberal and neocolonial institutions.

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