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Senior Essay

Brexit and Betrayal

Exploring the Continuity of Insecurities and Development of Identity within the Unionist Community of Northern Ireland

1. Introduction

Over two hundred roads cross from Ireland to the United Kingdom, winding through quaint towns, over gentle hills, past green fields. Passage from the Republic to the North is typically marked only by inconspicuous signs and occasional traffic. And yet behind the seeming serenity of country life lies a careful and often vulnerable balance. The border here holds both a tangible and symbolic importance for Protestants and Catholics, British and Irish, Unionists and Republicans. While Brexit was certainly a profound event for all of Europe, it has no greater relevance, implications, and complications than in Northern Ireland. Standing at the cultural, economic, and political crossroads of Europe and Britain, the region paradoxically embodies both a mixing and competition of identities. Here, conflict and sacrifice lie in memory where they have inflicted trauma from which the community still heals. And while the Good Friday Agreement may have brought relative peace and political stability, the same questions still remain. From the Ulster Plantation to Brexit, the Protestant and Catholic communities have stood opposite each other, often in conflict and rarely in agreement. Brexit represents the latest continuation in this struggle to reconcile these identities. For the Protestant Unionist community, Brexit has reopened serious insecurities surrounding their place within the United Kingdom and presents the latest challenge to their storied bid for the acceptance, recognition, and protection of their Britishness.

Perhaps nowhere else is history more significant or defining than in Northern Ireland. Ideology is "not merely an ephemeral 'sound and fury' disguising the sharp conflict of material interest … [or] a mere residue from an ancient tradition which no longer holds any purchase on the future."[1] Instead, from the Siege of Derry to Boris' Brexit, history provides a progression and

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[1] John D. Cash, "Ideology and Affect: The Case of Northern Ireland," *Political Psychology* 10, No. 4 (Dec. 1989), 704.

connection of still-relevant issues across time. It is this shared history of immigration from Britain and constant struggle to assert and protect British identity that "command[s] such profound emotional legitimacy" as a "distillation of a complex 'crossing' of discrete historical forces."[2] And for Northern Irish Protestants, this "ethnic identity … developed through contact with the Other" in a "continuous dichotomism between members and outsiders" that has consistently consolidated identity and often polarized the political and social environment.[3] Yet despite its shared powerful historical background, "the Unionist community and its Britishness is diverse."[4] Not all Protestants are Unionists and not all Unionists support Brexit. Although it is important to acknowledge the political diversity of this community, the terms 'Unionist' and 'Protestant' are nevertheless important to describe the evolution of Northern Ireland along sectarian lines, particularly when discussing the past and present conservative majority of the Unionist community. In Northern Ireland, heritage is often explicitly and intrinsically tied to ideology as "a highly reductionist recourse to 'the past' in order to legitimate current interests and future aspirations of political actors.[5] 'But just as 'Republicans' and 'Democrats' cannot be solely described by their political affiliations, all Unionists and Republicans are individuals with varying and evolving motivations, ideologies, and perspectives. Neither the characterization of Unionism nor the arguments in this paper reflect the opinions of the four Northern Irish Unionists interviewed and cited for context and perspective. And although significant changes in social attitudes have occurred within the last century, particularly in the wake of the Good Friday

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[2] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 4.

[3] Anna Triandafyllidou, *National Identity Reconsidered: Images of Self and Other in a 'United' Europe* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002), 28; Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1969), 198.

[4] Terry Wright, interview by author, December 2020.

[5] Katharina Schramm, "Heritage, Power, and Ideology," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (Houndsmills; Basingstoke; Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 442.

Agreement, the 'deep hostility between the two main religious communities" in Northern Ireland remains "the basic premise of Northern Ireland's social discourse."[6] So while we must recognize the different perspectives within the Unionist community both historically in terms of class and contemporarily in terms of politics, our discourse will still surround the contention and competition between the two communities. The United Kingdom's role in Northern Ireland has fluidly changed, encompassing roles from provocative instigator to reluctant reformer depending on context and convenience. Despite the Northern Irish Unionist community's cultural affinity and historic alignment with British interests, Ulster Unionists have often perceived betrayal in British policy.

The six counties of Ulster lie across the Irish Sea from Scotland, just twelve miles apart at the North Antrim Coast. But beyond its geographical proximity to Britain, Ulster developed a deeper connection to its powerful neighbor through prolonged settlement and trade. But the region's identity is also complicated by its context within the greater island of Ireland. Mixing identities and clashing loyalties during the prolonged struggle for Irish independence sparked suppression and the fear which solidified its still defining divisions. And while Northern Ireland may be decidedly more "British" than the rest of the island, its affinity has not been mutually recognized or respected by its patron state. The roots of insecurity and lingering suspicion of betrayal within the Protestant community lie in the formation of Unionism itself, established through centuries of interaction between the Ulster territories and British influence in a relationship characterized by cultural, economic, and political dependence. This cultural, economic, and political reliance is now manifested in the failures of Brexit for Northern Irish

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[6] Bernadette C. Hayes and Ian McAllister, *Conflict to Peace: Politics and Society in Northern Ireland over Half a Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 230; Marcus Hunt, review of *Conflict to Peace: Politic and Society in Northern Ireland*, by Hayes and McAllister, *Irish Political Studies* 30, No. 2 (2015), 317.

Unionists, for whom shifting cultural influences, no-deal interstate border controls, and the failures of regional political interests are a continuation of a centuries-long betrayal in their struggle to preserve British identity.

2. Culture

Successive waves of immigration to the Ulster provinces paired with policies of anglicization and forced removal formed a distinct and aggressive culture reliant on British direction and affirmation. By the turn of the 17th century, the native Irish population had been beaten into submission during Tryone's Rebellion and its Gaelic lords driven out with their holdings reappropriated to wealthy allies. The Plantation of Ulster of 1609 began under the direction of King James I, who undertook a "civilising enterprise" of anglicization.[7] Landholders began importing Scottish and English settlers to plant their land and garrison their strongholds. The crown seized Catholic holdings for the Protestant Church of Ireland and forcibly segregated the remaining Irish. Colonists were required to be "English-speaking Protestants" and "Ulster [soon] chose to draw an equivalence between Protestantism, political loyalty, and a tendency to abide by the law."[8] Still, "going to Ireland was looked upon as a miserable mark of a deplorable person." The Metropole, particularly clergy reporting on the state of the plantation, unfairly portrayed Scottish and English immigrants as "the scum of both nations … fleeing from justice" and the judgement of God.[9] Ulster's settlers were, if anything, more respectful of the religious establishment and certainly loyal to the British, although typically following the promise of

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[7] Jonathan Bardon, *The Plantation of Ulster*. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2011) p. 214.

[8] Donald MacRaild; Malcolm Smith (2013). "Chapter 9: Migration and Emigration, 1600–1945," In Liam Kennedy; Philip Ollerenshaw (eds.). *Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 142, 104.

[9] Reverend Andrew Stewart quoted in Henry Jones Ford, "The Scotch Migration to Ulster" in *The Scotch Irish in America* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1915).

greener pastures. Through immigration, English enterprisers created "a lower class divided against itself" and by mobilizing education, "propaganda, media, and ideologies" were able to consistently distract from class issues and preserve control in part through loyalist local militancy.[10] But despite the pervasive institutionalization of their loyalty, the British see Ulster Loyalism as "a tactical alliance designed to maintain colonial privileges rather than a *bona fide* expression of emotional commitment to British culture and values." Genuine, unapologetic, and unwavering Britishness became equated with proper social conduct, best exemplified by the Protestant Telegraph's description of the Ulster Protestant as "a strong, robust character, with a fierce loyalty … [with] no time for shad dealing [or] hypocrisy … [who despises traitors, political puppets, [and] ecumenical jellyfish.[11] Through their reliance on unrequited Britishness to determine identity, Unionists were "trapped within religious and political attitudes [of] the seventeenth century … [in] an arrested development towards modern nationalism."[12]

Aggressive Protestant militancy was ideologically centered on loyalty to crown and country and became an enduring and integral part of Unionist identity. "Burglaries, robberies, and outrages" were common in early Ulster and blamed on bands of dispossessed Irish soldiers who posed a looming threat of violence and rebellion.[13] Lord Deputy Wentworth was "disturbed by the poor military preparedness of the Ulster settlers" upon inspection.[14] Indeed, O'Doherty's Rebellion, the Eleven Years War, the Irish Rebellion of 1641, and the Williamite War proved that the enduring potency of the native Irish population required concerted attention and often

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[10] Alfred McClung Lee, "Imperialism, Class and Northern Ireland's Civil War," *Crime and Social Justice* No. 8 (fall-winter 1977), 47.

[11] Protestant Telegraph, Jan. 16, 1971, quoted in Cash, "Ideology and Affect," 716.

[12] Ian McBride "Ulster and the British Problem," in *Unionism in Modern Ireland: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture*, ed. Richard English and Graham Walker ((Houndsmills; Basingstoke; Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996), 1.

[13] MacRaild, "Chapter 9: Migration and Emigration," 95.

[14] Ed. RJ Hunter "The Summary page of the Ulster muster book of c. 1630" in *PLANTATIONS IN ULSTER, 1600–41* A COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS

external intervention. 19th Century Protestant associations such as the Peep o' Day Boys,

Apprentice Boys, and the Orange Order that targeted or antagonized Catholic communities were

lauded for their defense of British control and became integral parts of Unionist cultural history.

In the last century, paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Defence Association and Ulster

Volunteer Force have sought to evoke similar associations. Modern Protestant militants have "a

high sense of political efficacy and confidence, a firm grounding in such traditional values as

deference to authority and conventional obedience, and a high level of religiosity," much like

their predecessors.[15] Contrary to Richard Rose's assertion that Protestant militancy was

unconnected with class, paramilitary ranks were largely filled with members of the urban

working class who identified heavily with Ian Paisley's populist message. In fact, the UVF was

formed in 1966 primarily as a "warning [to] Protestant elites to drop their policy of

'appeasement' to Catholics."[16] Particularly after the Good Friday Agreement, militant loyalists

have been perceived variously as "scum, white trash, and 'people not like us'" by the mainline

Protestant churches and political establishment. "Failures to ensure Republican disarmament left

traditional Unionist fears intact," particularly in Belfast where violence had been heaviest and

communities live in close proximity.[17] This isolation has only further entrenched a militant self-

image as the true defenders of Unionism, fostering an "introspective, mistrustful, and

[politically] incapable" identity. With centuries of fear and widespread conflict, Northern

Ireland's "defining characteristic was [not] 'Britishness' ... as defined in the rest of Britain … but

the embedded dynamic of insecurity and antagonism."[18] The "'transfer [of] the indigenous

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[15] Ronald J. Terchek, "Conflict and Cleavage in Northern Ireland," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 433, Ethnic Conflict in the World Today (Sept. 1977), 54.
[16] Ibid, 56.
[17] Duncan Morrow, "The Rise (and Fall?) of Reconciliation in Northern Ireland," *Peace Research* 44, No. 1 (2012), 5.
[18] Ibid, 9.

population, the elaboration of an enduring 'pioneer myth,' [and] the insistence on the distinct cultural … character of the settler community" were integral parts of settler colonialism from the United States to Algeria.[19] But with a society whose enforced character was molded to aggression by exclusion and fear, the imported population of Ulster Protestants especially depended on loyalty to Britain for both their cultural identity and the justification for violence targeting the Irish population.

For Northern Irish Unionists, Brexit offered an opportunity to reassert the core of Protestant community identity in Britishness defined through its enemies. Brexit offered Unionists the opportunity to redefine and legitimize their imagined community, as described by Anderson. It sanctioned "official nationalism … [a] self-protective policy, intimately linked to the preservation of imperial-dynastic interests … serving the interests of the state first and foremost."[20] Loyalists capitalized on the opportunity to prove their own willingness and ability to defend 'Britishness' that so defined their history, and therefore their worth and morality as defined through centuries searching for colonial affirmation. The Protestant community holds an "awareness of being embedded in secular, serial time, with all its implications of continuity," remembering, idolizing, and sympathizing with the struggles of their ancestors and "engender[ing] the need for a narrative of 'identity."[21] Brexit became the latest extension of this fighting fealty for the United Kingdom that Unionists were loath to lose, epitomized by heroes immortalized in murals and songs. Brexit is a "nostalgic reflex which betrays an imperial yearning to restore Britain's lost place in the world … the last vestiges of empire."[22] Farage and

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[19] Fiona Barclay, Settler Colonialism and French Algeria 115; Eric W. Marlow, "The Myths and Institutional Structures that Maintain Settler Colonialism in the United States," (University of Oklahoma, 2016).
[20] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 159.
[21] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 205
[22] Mark Boyle, "Introducing 'Brexit Geographies': five provocations," *Space and Polity* 22, No. 2 (2018), 102.

Johnsons' rhetoric of British exceptionalism and the "politics of fear" that point to a looming and abstract threat of 'the other' are truly the "language of Europe's dark past."[23] Protestant loyalists sought to pick up in the 17th century where their nationalism halted its progression, only now Ulster's fear of Catholic France and the Irish has coalesced with an anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic narrative.

Brexit's utilization of rhetoric and suspicion has mobilized loyalist demonization and potential lingering violence towards the imagined external enemies of immigration, moderation, and internationalization eroding their community's 'Britishness.' In Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement, the new generation "lives in a global world … influenced by the transatlantic." Interfaith relationships have become more prevalent, and it is more publicly acceptable to acknowledge the mixture of "British and Irish culture."[24] With "more space from the fear that entrenched," community relations had begun to improve and new generations increasingly saw themselves as "European and global citizens."[25] And as their own cornered base of religious social conservatives and hardline loyalists begins to erode, the DUP has embraced United Kingdom Independence Party and English nationalist characterization of economic migrants as "a growing threat to [the] well-being, security and identity of the British people and Britain as a nation."[26] Immigrants from both European Union countries of Poland and Estonia as well as the Indian subcontinent and Africa are seen as threats to Unionist Britishness, corresponding with a "forty-three percent increase in [reported] racially motivated offenses" in

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[23] Marta Cooper, "The 'Romantic' and 'Distorted' Language of Campaigners who Want Britain to Leave the EU," *Quartz*, June 22, 2016; Guy Verhofstadt quoted in Martin Banks, "Guy Verhofstadt: Boris Johnson's Brexit Rhetoric is 'Language of Europe's Dark Past,"*The Parliament Magazine*, Sept. 6, 2019**.**
[24] Brian Dougherty, interview by author, November 2020.
[25] Interview with Terry Wright; Interview with Brian Dougherty.
[26] Marina Aroshidze, "'Britain is different': Farage's rhetoric in the Brexit referendum debate," *Heteroglossia - Studia kulturoznawczo-filologiczne* 8 (2018), 37.

2014.[27] Immigrants are assaulted in their homes and faced with threats and overt shows of racial antagonism such as Islamophobic sermons and Ku Klux Klan flags. Both immigration and the erosion of Protestant sectarian identity are attributed to the European Union as a Catholic conspiracy, an idea espoused by Ian Paisley. Taken under the Tory mantle by politicians who "failed to condemn [racist abuse] and created and entrenched prejudices," this idea that "a Catholic EU will inevitably result in the subjugation of Britain's Protestant ethos to Roman Catholic social, political and religious teaching" has become a mainstream concern and central theme that unifies the enemies of Unionism under a single conspiracy.[28] This metropolitan anxiety displays a fear that colonizers will become colonized, that the exceptionalism of British culture and history will be subordinated under the yoke of European imperialism.

While fear-mongering of direct threats to the community and British identity have historically preceded the expression of violence, the political stability of the last two decades may prevent widespread escalation. By "raising questions about Northern Ireland's relationship to both Ireland and Britain, Brexit implies a threat to these [mixing and coexistent] identities."[29] Most agree that the greatest chance of violence would stem from Republican groups remobilized by an enforced Irish border. All four of the Northern Irish Unionists whose interviews are cited in this paper expressed doubts of a desire for a return to violence within the Unionist community, referencing the preference "to go down the political route and address issues surrounding the quality of life."[30] And while the general consensus among the Protestant Unionist community

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[27] Douglas Dalby, "In Northern Ireland, a Wave of Immigrants is Met with Fists," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Nov. 28, 2014.
[28] UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, quoted in Cynthia Kroet, "UN Committee: Brexit rhetoric fueled hate crime," *Politico* (Washington, DC), Aug. 26, 2016; Matthew Tempest and Tom Happold, "Catholic church condemns Tory 'conspiracy theorist'," *The Guardian* (London, UK), March 4, 2005.
[29] Bonnie Weir, "Brexit and a Border Town: Troubles Ahead in Northern Ireland?," *The New York Review*, April 11, 2019.
[30] Interview with Terry Wright.

and political establishment is that "there is no place for violence in [Northern Irish] society …

threats from loyalists" warning of intervention by paramilitary groups or the inevitability of

violence in mass protest have drummed up tension for the purposes of political leverage.[31]

Protestant paramilitaries "are beginning to take on a sharper political focus" through "unionist

protest meetings held across the country."[32] But this trend does not necessarily correspond to

instigation of violence. Contrary to analysis from Blazakis and Clarke in *Foreign Policy*, data on

paramilitary violence collected by the PSNI shows that, since Brexit, Protestant paramilitaries

have been attributed a small increase in number of assaults, but Protestant shootings have sharply

decreased to near negligible levels.[33] The real danger of future violence from Brexit lies in the

potential mobilization of the betrayal narrative. A political failure by the DUP in Stormont could

strengthen the victim narrative of fringe elements, imbuing them with a renewed sense of

betrayal that could fully delegitimize the political sovereignty of Northern Ireland and give

credence to now fringe paramilitary elements. Alternatively, paramilitary groups could claim to

represent the people in light of DUP failures and cause further extremist rifts. While the

resolution of Brexit will certainly impact the perceived threat to Britishness and therefore

paramilitary violence, widespread condemnation internally in the community and recently

limited manifestations of violence hopefully indicate that expressions of insecurity and exclusion

will remain political in Brexit's provocation of central identity.

3. **Economy**

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[31] Mark McConville, "Brexit: Unionists condemn threat from loyalist paramilitaries to implement violence," *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast, UK), October 14, 2019.
[32] Jason Blazakis and Colin P. Clarke, "Brexit Could Spark a Return to Violence in Northern Ireland," Foreign Policy, January 22, 2020.
[33] Police Service of Northern Ireland, "2020/21 Security Statistics -- monthly update to 31 October 2020," PSNI.police.uk, Nov. 6 2020.

The industrialization of Ulster tied the region to British markets and economic direction, focusing power in the hands of urban entrepreneurs and elites that actively formulated and promoted Unionism. By the mid-18th century, "the old subsistence economy of South Ulster had given way to a commercial economy."[34] Ulster became involved in England's burgeoning financial and monetary systems, utilizing bills of exchange from London's firms to compensate for a dearth of coinage. And while "the markets of Great Britain [were increasingly] open, and the colonies more extended and more populous," London still retained the prerogative to limit or block Irish exports.[35] Exports to Britain began with beef and live cattle before the growth of the proto-industrial textile industry, which imported British machinery, "enabl[ing] it to cope with British competition."[36] Textile workers turned to brokers in the Orange Order and the Tory municipal party to advocate discrimination in employment, "buttressing [against] Catholic [and] foreign competition."[37] Industrialization was concentrated in Belfast, where "the largest companies were export oriented … includ[ing] the two major Belfast shipyards, which were the largest industrial employers in Ireland."[38] Almost all Belfast industry was dependent on imported raw materials, preventing "the same path to industrialization as Scotland and England."[39] Ulster exported practically all its production, and by 1951 "Britain took more than fifty percent of the total industrial output" compared to sixteen percent sold to all foreign countries.[40] In the post-war period, Britain asserted "a large measure of influence on the industrial structure," replacing

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[34] Economy and Society in South Ulster in the Eighteenth Century by WH Crawford
[35] Ibid,
[36] A. Bielenberg, "What Happened to Irish Industry after the British Industrial Revolution," 829.
[37] Sybil Gribbon, "The Social Origins of Ulster Unionism," *Irish Economic and Social History* 4, No. 1 (1977), 67.
[38] Bielenberg, "What Happened to Irish Industry," 822.
[39] Ibid, 832.
[40] Morgan D. Thomas, "Manufacturing Industry in Belfast, Northern Ireland," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 46, No. 2 (June, 1956), 193

all foreign demand for the linen industry during World War I and prohibiting exports to the Irish Free State during an economic war in the 1930s.[41] London continued to assert economic control over the Ulster provinces and solidify financial dependence on consistent and stable demand.

Trade led to a growing urban population and industrial elite that bolstered Unionism and associated heavily with British conservatives who did not always share their enthusiasm. These new "professional classes needed the goodwill of the Tory corporation," and following the economic panic of the first Home Rule crisis, "swung the remaining liberals into the Conservative party."[42] These elites persuaded the "urban proletariat … that 'social imperialism', the advantages of citizenship within a great empire," and fealty to the Tory party "would protect them from industrial decline." So it was "the urban entrepreneurs … who determined the nature of Ulster unionism," solidifying ties to the British Conservatives and eventually establishing a leadership coalition that incorporated the old aristocracy and Orange Order.[43] Financial arrangements between Belfast and Westminster resulted in Northern Ireland being "treated by the Imperial Exchequer less generously than other depressed areas, and consequently … the Ulster government was perpetually teetering on the edge of financial disaster with little revenue available for positive economic action.[44] And yet despite significant profits made by British and supranational enterprisers, Conservatives almost invariably saw Northern Ireland as a welfare blackhole that sucked irrecoverable prosperity from Britain's purse. In their view, the relationship was based on generosity and not mutual advantage. Ireland was long overdue to

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[41] David S. Johnson, "The Economic History of Ireland between the Wars," *Irish Economic and Social History* 1 (1974), 59.
[42] Gribbon, 67.
[43] Ibid, 68.
[44] David S. Johnson, "The Economic History of Ireland between the Wars," *Irish Economic and Social History* 1 (1974), 59.

"bear her part of the burden."[45] Even after the Good Friday Agreement during the resurgent

economy of the 1990s, "the British army continued to be deployed and the financial cost of

Northern Ireland … remained considerable."[46] The economic dependence of Northern Ireland on

British financial policy and market demand laid the practical foundations for the Unionist

position and coalition but also left the Northern Irish community susceptible to the aptitude and

goodwill of political elites in a relationship devoid of much leverage.

Brexit's frontier in the Irish Sea represents a betrayal of specifically Unionist economic

interests centered around Belfast and the likelihood of future economic drift towards Dublin.

Britain's exit from the Customs Union and Single Market of the European Union will likely be

solved by a border through the Irish Sea that Protestants see as an "arrangement that separates

their territory from the rest of the United Kingdom." Boris Johnson had vowed at the DUP

conference in 2018 specifically not to create any economic barriers in the Irish Sea. And while

Johnson continued to maintain checks on trade would not exist, the EU's chief Brexit negotiator

Michel Barnier indicated they were "indispensable."[47] With such a heavy historical reliance on

demand from Britain, much of Northern Ireland's export economy will be impacted by the

slowing and disruption of commerce. Northern Ireland's export sales amounted to £11.3 billion

in 2017 as compared to only £3.9 billion to the Republic of Ireland. The majority of the

economy's revenue comes from large and medium sized companies concentrated in Unionist

dominated areas near Belfast that disproportionately support the DUP. Unionists also fear Brexit

marks a "step to Irish economic unity" that would both help move towards political unity and

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[45] Theodore Hoppen, "An Incorporating Union? British Politicians and Ireland 1800-1830," *The English Historical Review* 123, No. 501 (2008), 340
[46] Morrow, "The Rise (and Fall?) of Reconciliation," 18.
[47] Simon Carswell, "Loyalists on Brexit: 'A one-way route to an economic united Ireland'," *The Irish Times* (Belfast), Jan. 30, 2020.

also tie them to a "boom and bust economy [that] would not suit them well, as [they] are used to having stability in money matters."[48] The economic implications of Brexit are especially troubling in the context of COVID as measures against the disease have contributed to a fall of 25-30% [output] in a single quarter."[49] Even if the economic impacts of Brexit are not what Unionists fear, the necessary adjustments to a new customs system will only complicate the already spiraling recession. While Brexit will not "be the economic disaster [many] anticipate," its impacts will be "irrelevant for the unemployed" already suffering economic hardship.[50] As the true extent of the recession becomes apparent, the Conservatives betrayal of Brexit and its economic effects could be touted as an underlying impact of economic depravity, entrenching the isolated position of Unionists and distracting from regional political elites' complicity in the formation of the deal.

In the eyes of Britain, Northern Ireland's welfare system provides "a mass of social and economic benefits for people within [the] community."[51] Provisions such as the National Health Services are seen as unique to Britain and crucial to quality of life. Northern Ireland's welfare system "will be the most protective in the UK," affecting "a total of 765,800 households" in a region of less than two million people.[52] In the coming recession and possible resulting political instability, the necessity for increasing welfare provisions and British intervention in management will only increase. British views of Northern Ireland as a burden upon their economy and society will only become further entrenched if Unionist anger is directed towards

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[48] Derek Moore, interview by author, December 2020.
[49] Clodagh Rice, "Coronavirus: Impact of virus 'made NI recession 10 times worse'," BBC News, Sept. 16, 2020.
[50] Interview with Brian Dougherty.
[51] Julia Kee, interviewed by author, December 2020.
[52] "NI welfare system 'most protected in the UK'," *Belfast Telegraph* (Belfast), January 19, 2016.

Westminster's role, perhaps narrowing the calculus on the balance between Northern Ireland's contributions and politicized fiscal costs within the Union.

4. Politics

The British viewed Ireland as a burdensome and violable liability and acted to limit and delegitimize local control, creating political dependence. The 1800 Acts of Union aimed to nullify the threat of Irish political independence and future alignment against Britain in the possibility of Catholic emancipation. The Catholic rebellion of 1798 and attempts at French intervention threatened the security and stability of the British Isles, so Parliament sought to incorporate Ireland's parliament to prevent realignment. The Acts of Union ultimately left the whole 'Irish Government' in a thoroughly "anomalous and unsatisfactory state."[53] Parliament saw all of Ireland as "irredeemably corrupt, preternaturally violent, riven by sectarian frenzies, [and] inhabited [by an] incomprehensible people." While Catholics were "dangerous and disloyal … Protestants were little better." The Irish judiciary and landlords that dominated the Ascendancy were "freaks … exploiters of the poor … different, foreign, strange, and inferior." Both the educated upper class and lower orders were respectively "not fit to govern and … not fit to be trusted with the right to elect."[54] To establish the Union, William Pitt and the Tories promised Catholic emancipation to the outrage of many Protestants but bought key dissenting political elites through extensive and corrupt compensation. "Hostility towards a union far surpassed the meagre support;" one Irish Tory characterized it as "the murder of my country."[55] By selling their seats, Irish elites sold the kingdom's political independence and also scandalized

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[53] Hoppen, "An Incorporating Union?" 339.
[54] Hoppen, "An Incorporating Union," 345-346.
[55] James Kelly, "The Origins of the Act of Union: An Examination of Unionist Opinion in Britain and Ireland," *Irish Historical Studies* 25, No. 99 (1987), 252.

the Union. The contemporary Protestant sentiment was best encapsulated by Henry Grattan

Junior's poem taught in every Irish school:

> How did they pass the Union?
> By perjury and fraud;
> By slaves who sold their land for gold,
> As Judas sold his God[56]

Although Britain and Belfast asserted it was in the "interest and duty" of all to bury religious

animosities in a new kingdom made up of "one people" working towards "tranquility, prosperity,

and security," the Union doomed the Ascendancy with promises of political concessions and

thereby set the stage for reforms.

Reforms to appease the Catholic Irish solidified Protestant political dependence on the

Union for security, and attempts to consolidate remaining institutional advantages within the

Union failed from an inability to influence the progression of Northern Ireland's status within the

United Kingdom. The Union, "though it took time to become popular with Protestants, seemed

to guarantee them … some sort of security" amidst continuing Republican sentiment despite its

failures to maintain the status quo, and so Protestants became its biggest proponents.[57] The

conservative governments of Wellington and Peele sought to appease the Catholic population

and so passed the Unlawful Societies Act to curb Protestant organizations and the Roman

Catholic Relief Act of 1829, which repealed the Test Act of 1672 and remaining Penal laws

preventing Catholics from voting, serving in public office, or holding any real civic

responsibility. The subsequent fracturing of the Conservatives over the issue of Catholic

emancipation led to Whig dominance in the 1830 election and reforms that further mitigated the

institutional influence of the Anglican church. Privileges such as the right to bear arms, parading

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[56] Henry Grattan Junior quoted in Patrick M. Geoghegan, "An Act of Power and Corruption," *History Ireland Magazine* 8, No. 2 (Summer 2000).
[57] Jacqueline Hill, "Irish Identities before and after the Act of Union," *Radharc* 2 (2001), 65.

tradition, and expectation of judicial favoritism "separated the plebeian [Protestant] citizen from Catholic non-citizen." With the disappearance of these rights and reversal of position by Wellington and Peele, "all classes of Protestants now loudly cried betrayal."[58] The Ulster "political classes [were at first] reluctant to sanction large-scale anti-Catholic activity" because they generally "viewed extra-parliamentary agitation as unconstitutional" and also feared the "looming specter of sectarian violence."[59] Many Protestants saw themselves as constitutional defenders, true proponents of liberty and the righteous crown, and so the 19th century reforms exemplified the failures of British conservatism not only to protect their way of life but effectively represent their values.

In the 20th century, momentary Protestant unity was squandered by traitorous and ineffective elites whose continued alignment with apathetic or outright hostile British Conservatives saw little dividend for Northern Ireland. The Home Rule Bills and eventual 1920-23 Partition of Ireland signaled to Ulster Protestants their expendability and isolation with the specter of a United Ireland in which they would be a "submerged and impotent minority" hanging squarely on their shoulders. While Sir Edward Carson "wanted [Protestant] labour to have a permanent voice in Ulster unionist affairs," the support of "immediate Home Rule … by the majority of the Ulster Unionist Council" was seen as a betrayal by landed elites within the Unionist community.[60] The Conservative Party "pledged to safeguard the freedom of choice and security of the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland," reneging on its commitment to the Acts of Union and leaving the door open for the "Free State's attempt to supervise the

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[58] Suzanne T Kingon, "Ulster Opposition to Catholic Emancipation, 1828-9," *Irish Historical Studies* 34, No. 134 (2004), 152.

[59] Kingon, "Ulster Opposition to Catholic Emancipation," 140, 139.

[60] Patrick Buckland, "The Unity of Ulster Unionism, 1886-1939," *History* 60, No. 199 (1975), 220; 214-215.

government of the north."[61] The Ulster Covenant, signed in blood by hundreds-of-thousands,

meant naught. Even nationalist sentiments during World War I and World War II were

squandered as Ulster Volunteers returned from risking their lives in the Ulster Division to find

Lloyd George stripping a third of the Ulster provinces for the Irish Free State:

> When England's shores were threatened by the jackboot of the Hun ...
> It was at a place they called the Somme on the first day of July
> When twenty thousand Ulster men prepared to fight and die ...
> What kind of men are those [the Germans] said that would leave their native land
> Just to die upon this battlefield and what is that strange red hand ...
> Now those who lived came home again what changes did they all find
> Three counties had been sold away by those they fought to save
> Yes, this was England's gratitude for the sacrifice they made
> For they'll never more be led away to fight in foreign land
> Or to die for someone else's cause at an Englishman's command [62]

Although Unionism remained defined by nationalism, Protestants experienced the widespread

erosion of traditional state authority in the wake of World War I, planting the seeds for the rise of

a more popular Unionist strain. Conservatives were now "liable to approach the Union in a

purely administrative and utilitarian manner" devoid of the "sentimental attachment [and]

'mutual interest'" that had previously characterized Unionism's place within British

conservatism.[63] While "conciliation and satisfaction of different local interests" coupled with

sectarian "drum-beating" helped preserve the Unionist coalition, an acute economic downturn in

1958 saw the "Protestant working class support haemorrhage away from the Unionist Party" as

the Unionist government was seen to be yet again "placing its loyalty to the Conservative party

above the interests of the working people" and acting as the Conservative Party lap dogs who

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[61] Jeremy Smith, "'Ever Reliable Friends'?: The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism in the Twentieth Century," *The English Historical Review* 121, No. 490 (Feb. 2006), 75; Buckland, "The Unity of Ulster Unionism," 222.

[62] The Thornlie Boys, "The Englishman's Betrayal," Track 9 on *For God and Ulster*, 2009.

[63] Smith, "'Ever Reliable Friends'?," 83; 74.

saw little in terms of "economic benefit, political influence or long standing support."[64] Despite faithfulness to British Conservatism, Irish Home Rule left a "deep suspicion and resentment of English politicians."[65] The ultimate failure of extensive anti-Home rule campaigning in Scotland that mobilized sectarian fear mongering, arguments of shared "flesh and blood," and religious appeals indicated low appeal of traditional Unionist identity within a national context. The "majority of Scottish electors remained staunchly liberal" after extensive event organization and canvassing of hundreds-of-thousands of voters.[66] "Insignificant events became symbolic of a wider pattern of Conservative disregard if not outright betrayal," and accusations of duplicity ran rampant, leading to the emergence of an ultra-Conservative and hardline Unionism that destabilized the political situation throughout the province.[67]

The Troubles and response to the Good Friday Agreement signified the rise of a new populist Unionist political establishment dominated by reactionary voters. For many aristocrats and the gentry, "the Troubles were an unmistakable sign that their influence had completely evaporated."[68] The Ulster Unionist Party had served as the dominant force in Irish politics since its formation to resist home rule and was very much associated with the traditional Unionism of Sir Edward Carson. It held ties to the UUC and Orange Order, and was led by a combination of the landed gentry and industrial magnates. The "elected political leadership within Unionism was extremely ineffective and did not stick up for Protestant civil rights; … Unionist politician landowners wanted to keep themselves right, not help the Protestant poor."[69] The UUP was

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[64] Buckland, "The Unity of Ulster Unionism," 219; Smith, "'Ever Reliable Friends'?," 95; 97; 100.
[65] Buckland, "The Unity of Ulster Unionism," 219.
[66] Peter Dunn, "Forsaking their 'Own flesh and blood'" Ulster unionism, Scotland and home rule, 1886-1914," *Irish Historical Studies* 37, No. 146 (Nov. 2010), 219; 220.
[67] Smith, "Ever Reliable Friends'?" 89.
[68] Neil C. Fleming, "Aristocratic Rule? Unionism and Northern Ireland," *History Ireland* 15, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2007), 31.
[69] Interview with Brian Dougherty.

essentially an extension of the Conservative Party in Northern Ireland. The profoundly Unionist Thatcher for a time brought the Conservative party back into the full favor of hardline Ulster Protestants with her unwavering rhetoric, famously saying of Republican violence, "Crime is crime is crime. It is not political, it is crime." And yet even Thatcher betrayed the Unionists, negotiating and signing the Anglo-Irish treaty in November 1985 that gave the Republic of Ireland a "consultative role in Northern Ireland in return for greater cross-border cooperation on security."[70] The Unionist community responded with mass resignations and protests. UUP leader James Molyneaux smelled "the stench of hypocrisy, deceit and treachery" and Reverend Ian Paisley likened Thatcher to "Jezebel who sought to destroy Israel in a day."[71] Paisley, the founder of the DUP, was a populist leader whose "religious fundamentalism [and] no-nonsense articulation of working-class unionist concerns" helped drive the party's emergence as "militant, unified, and unequivocal unionist voice."[72] The DUP's left-leaning economic platform also put it at odds with Conservative Party line. While the UUP was vehemently opposed to the Anglo-Irish treaty, it was largely responsible for Unionist participation in the Good Friday Agreement.

For a party defined in public perception by inaction and poor representation of the average citizen, the UUP's rare moment of effectual change was ironically still seen as an act of betrayal. The DUP had established itself on working-class "Protestant perceptions of threat, not just to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, but to the very social, religious, and economic fabric of their Protestant Ulster."[73] David Trimble and Tony Blair had negotiated with

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[70] Nicholas Watt, "Thatcher Suggested 'Cromwell Solution' for Northern Ireland," *The Guardian* (London, UK), June 15, 2001.
[71] Arwel Ellis Owen, *The Anglo-Irish Agreement: A Broadcaster's Experience* (Oxford: Nuffield College Oxford, 1989), 37; 38.
[72] Geoffrey Evans and Mary Duffy, "Beyond the Sectarian Divide: The Social Bases and Political Consequences of Nationalist and Unionist Party Competition in Northern Ireland," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, No. 1 (Jan. 1997), 53.
[73] Evans and Duffy, Ibid, 77.

the enemy and legitimized violent Republicanism within Northern Irish politics. Ulster's fight

amounted to nothing and the path towards an integrally connected and perhaps eventually united

Ireland was enshrined in law. Worse still, "three hundred convicted killers were set free from jail

… [and] handed an immunity letter from future prosecution."[74] The DUP had opposed the

Agreement in referendum as "shrouded in double talk" and refused to be party to negotiations on

the grounds of Sinn Fein's involvement in military activities and the limited accountability for

the newly established executive and interstate bodies.[75] In 2003, the DUP won thirty seats in the

Northern Ireland Assembly election, making it the largest Northern Irish party at Westminster.

And while the DUP has retained its populist, reactionary, and Ulster loyalist identity, its tenure

as the dominant party has fallen short of providing meaningful economic and fiscal policy to

assist working-class communities. The DUP also reversed its criticism of the Conservative Party

under the leadership of Arlene Foster. With the hung parliament following the 2017 United

Kingdom general election, a Conservative-DUP agreement formed a new government. This time,

it seemed DUP party support was not entirely taken for granted as Conservatives discussed a

billion-pound investment in "Ireland's health service and [similar] infrastructure projects."[76]

Included in the deal, the Conservative party promised its commitment to preserving the Union of

Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Despite a mutually advantageous arrangement,

Conservatives held the DUP at arm's length fearing public and political backlash for their

extreme social platform. So while the DUP gained unprecedented recognition and importance on

a national stage, it set itself up with agreements bound by fealty and not law. The DUP, like

other iterations of Northern Irish Protestant Unionism before it, was inevitably aligned with the

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[74] Staff Writer, "The Great Betrayal: Veterans of the Northern Ireland Conflict Betrayed by the Good Friday Agreement -- Veterans Ready to Set the Record Straight," *The Military Times*, Nov. 28, 2017.
[75] Interview with Derek Moore.
[76] "DUP's Sir Jeffrey Donaldson plays down reports of £2bn request to Tories," *BBC News*, June 21, 2017.

Conservative party. Proving to be both regionally ineffectual in Stormont and dependent on the

goodwill of its Conservative patrons, the DUP squandered an opportunity to effectively represent

Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

In order to maintain political viability, the DUP must either distract from or deflect blame

for the failures of Brexit. In the last several years, the DUP has been exposed as severely

dysfunctional by a number of scandals including the "Red Sky debacle, … unresolved National

Asset Management Agency saga" and most recently "the Renewable Heat Incentive inquiry."[77]

From clear financial malpractice to corruption and a general lack of basic competency, the DUP

has been marred in the public eye to such a degree that the Northern Ireland Executive collapsed

around its failure to reform. The DUP has carried on the tradition of failing to represent the

interests of the average citizen by establishing a framework of cronyism perpetuated by the

consociational power-sharing system of the Good Friday Agreement. Party politics have

determined appointments to a great array of positions pertaining to everything from education to

fiscal policy. Brexit represents the DUP's consummate failure, as its rejection of Theresa May's

Brexit backstop and hardline negotiations only resulted in a worse deal for Unionists under the

Johnson government. The DUP is widely recognized as ineffective, but because of the "politics

of fear" and an evangelical base it is able to retain support.[78] In Brexit, where the institutional

stars aligned and the DUP had real power to influence the direction of the Conservative party, its

leaders squandered their limited influence by frustrating negotiations and attempting to align

their identity instead of focusing on the implications of policy. The Unionists' inability "to look

into the future" led them to idealize the past supremacy of British identity without considering

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[77] "A scandal too many for the DUP," *The Irish News* (Belfast), Sept. 17, 2018.
[78] Interview with Julia Kee.

the fragile modern economic and political context of Northern Ireland.[79] Although the DUP may attempt to spin the narrative of betrayal, it unquestionably holds responsibility for its failures in Westminster politics. To distract from its own blunder, the DUP may lay blame at the feet of Conservatives but thereby further jeopardize its legitimacy as the leader of the Unionist bloc. Their situation is now reminiscent of the UUP's early 20th century vacillation between suspicion and fealty to the Tories in which shows of loyalty and support received little reciprocal response. It now remains to be seen whether Unionists judge the DUP for its failure especially faced with the inevitable criticism from the UUP. Voters may misconstrue the DUP's hunger for relevance in Westminster and inability to negotiate as an attempt at genuine advocacy for their identity. While the extremes of identity were Unionism's own worst enemy, the betrayal of Johnson's Conservatives again reinforces the expendability of Ulster within the broader scheme of British interests and politics.

In Brexit, Northern Irish Unionists risk accepting their historical cooptation within the Conservative party and normalizing the DUP's deferential role. As described by Holdo, when cooptation is successful, "those who seek change alter their positions when working with elites, hoping to gain new strategic advantages through compromising, but those advantages do not come," leaving them politically powerless. The legitimacy the DUP can offer to Conservatives is practically nil. In fact, association with the DUP proved complicating and embarrassing in the formation of the 2017 Parliament. For many Unionists, the Conservatives' betrayal was disappointing but not shocking. Some supporters of Brexit want to just "forget the consequences" and support what Brexit stands for regardless.[80] In a region so steeped in history, the historical

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[79] Interview with Derek Moore.
[80] Interview with Brian Dougherty.

betrayals of the Conservative party were not forgotten. The extreme language of the DUP may be alienating centrists who could help prevent a united Ireland through regional politics.

The party must moderate if it wants to be more effective in governing nationally and regionally. In consideration of the future, the DUP must make a calculus on whether its base of evangelicals and Ulster loyalists values the symbolic importance of Brexit over the practical implications of an Irish Sea Border. Even more concerning for the DUP's long-term legitimacy, however, is that through their ultimately subservient and unsuccessful alliance with the Conservative party, they too have betrayed the Unionist cause.

5. Conclusion

To equate Northern Irish Unionism with fealty to Great Britain would be to overlook the complexity of the Unionist British identity, which is characterized by its fragility and by a history of repeated betrayals. The very formation of Unionism was defined by a series of key betrayals throughout the century's long relationship between the Ulster territories and British power. The historical cultural, economic and political dependence of these territories on British authority and leadership left Unionists with little bargaining power, and has resulted in a particularly pronounced exclusion of the Unionist working class and the repeated dismissal of their interests. The historical disaffection of the Ulster working class, who despite their loyalist militancy were looked down upon by both the Ascendancy and British elites, foments a cultural narrative of betrayal and victimization. The concerns of this reviled class of Unionists were repeatedly ignored in the economic realm, as they were ultimately let down by the Conservative promise of economic well-being through the British imperial project. Most Unionists were again betrayed by the willingness of British conservatives to appease the disadvantaged Catholic

population by removing the historical economic advantages that existed for Protestants due to the limitations on the employment of Catholics. The political concerns of Unionism were likewise overlooked and trampled by the priorities of Westminster. The emergence of Unionism itself was a serious blow to the political independence of the Ulster provinces, but one which Protestants eventually welcomed as a safeguard against further encroachments on their traditional privileges. The UUP's involvement in the Good Friday Agreement proved an insurmountable betrayal for many Unionists, which was again dealt by a combination of Northern Irish Protestant elites and British authority.

This disaffected working class now forms the backbone of the DUP and propelled its rise and support for Brexit. Nevertheless, Unionist cultural, economic, and political dependence continues. Increased immigration and integration into the European Union reinforced the perceived fragility of the Unionist community, who identified incoming populations from Catholic European countries, such as Poland, and ethnically different groups, such as immigrants from North Africa, as threats to Unionist identity. Conspiracy theories of a Catholic EU seeking to undermine Unionist culture and traditions furthered the xenophobic feelings that have lent Brexit support within Unionist circles. Yet Brexit has done little to assuage these cultural concerns: the Protestant plurality of Northern Ireland is rapidly evaporating, and the Irish Sea Border threatens to further isolate Northern Ireland from the rest of Britain. The Irish Sea Border presents another significant setback for Northern Irish economic goals, given Northern Ireland's significant dependence on British demand. Perhaps most emblematic of the betrayals of Brexit Johnson's promise to the DUP in 2018 that there would not be a sea border between England and Northern Ireland. Despite being a key member of the last two Conservative government coalitions, the DUP failed to ensure basic Tory promises were kept. Ultimately, much like the

UUP before it, the DUP treats Unionists as a captured constituency, one whose political ambitions can be disregarded because they lack meaningful alternatives for representation. The increasing cooptation of Unionists within the Conservative party render them politically handicapped. The widespread cronyism of the DUP, partly a result of the consociational system of the Good Friday Agreement, leaves working class Unionists without effective representation. Brexit has ultimately been a disappointment for Northern Irish Unionists, but it is simply the latest betrayal in the Unionist struggle to maintain its fragile British identity.

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