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Abstract

The decision of the United Kingdom's to leave the European Union (The Brexit) has also profoundly impacted the political, economic, social and cultural landscape of Ireland. Debates about national and social identity, sovereignty and belonging have resurfaced in this process. This thesis investigates how the Brexit shaped contemporary Irish identity, particularly in relation to the historically contested border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Through ethnographic fieldwork, participatory observation, interviews, discourse analysis and literature work this study examines how individuals navigate their sense of identity amid shifting political uncertainty. This study also highlights the tensions between traditional conceptions of Irishness, post-conflict reconciliation efforts and the emerging identities that are influenced by globalisation and the EU. Furthermore, questions of economic interdependence and the shifting significance of the Irish border and cross border cooperation are discussed. By situating these transformations within a broader anthropological framework, this research aims to contribute to the more inclusive discussions on identity, identity formation, nationalism, post-colonialism and the interplay between politics and socio-cultural belonging in times of geopolitical change.

Kurzfassung

Die Entscheidung des Vereinigten Königreichs, die Europäische Union zu verlassen (der Brexit), hat die politische, wirtschaftliche, soziale und kulturelle Landschaft Irlands tiefgreifend beeinflusst. Debatten über nationale und soziale Identität, Souveränität und Zugehörigkeit sind in diesem Prozess wiederaufgetaucht. Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie der Brexit die gegenwärtige irische Identität geprägt hat, insbesondere in Bezug auf die historisch umkämpfte Grenze zwischen Nordirland und der Republik Irland. Durch ethnographische Feldforschung, teilnehmende Beobachtung, Interviews, Diskursanalyse und Literaturarbeit untersucht diese Studie, wie Individuen ihr Identitätsgefühl inmitten der sich verändernden politischen Unsicherheit navigieren. Diese Studie beleuchtet auch die Spannungen zwischen traditionellen Vorstellungen von Irisch sein, Bemühungen zur Versöhnung nach dem Konflikt und den aufkommenden Identitäten, die von der Globalisierung und der EU beeinflusst werden. Des Weiteren werden Fragen der wirtschaftlichen Interdependenz und der sich verändernden Bedeutung der irischen Grenze sowie der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit diskutiert. Indem diese Transformationen in einen breiteren anthropologischen Rahmen eingebettet werden, zielt diese Forschung darauf ab, zu inklusiveren Diskussionen über Identität, Identitätsbildung, Nationalismus, Postkolonialismus und das Zusammenspiel von Politik und soziokultureller Zugehörigkeit in Zeiten geopolitischer Veränderungen beizutragen.

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Introduction

Ireland and England share a long common history including many conflicts. When both states were members of the European union, disputes could be handled within a framework of common administrative, legal and juridical structures. Since Great Britain left the European community (2020), the relevant procedures had to change. This includes also many practical issues, like customs, taxes and the exchange of labour and goods. A special case in this respect is the relation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, which are (again) separated by an “external” EC border.

Accordingly, disturbance was brought towards a historical conflict zone once again. Some of the conflicts have their roots back in the early Middle Ages, as ethnic, social and religious differences predate the national struggles. However, due to the membership of both states in the EC, the border between the states was formally of little significance (as an internal “Schengen” border). This changed as a consequence of the British decision to leave the European community (Brexit).

This master thesis attempts to explore the perceptions and experiences of the Irish populations in relation to the Brexit-related political changes, particularly in the border regions, on a socio-anthropological basis. Main focus in this respect, is the way how personal everyday life in the border-regions is or could be influenced by a “hard” border demarcation. Beyond such practical implications, the study will delve into the general concepts of self-identification, stereotypes, and the construct of identity. It seeks to unravel the nuances of what constitutes “being Irish” as a self-attribute, as well as differences and convergences in the mindsets in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

In this study, questions are addressed such as what is it that makes an Irish person Irish? What are the differences the similarities between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and their perceived discrepancies? In this context, the role of religion, as well as political affinity, cultural practices, rituals, symbols and practices, *etc.*, will be considered to understand the dynamics of in-group and out-group differentiation. Practices and cultural goods as well as symbols, media or media representation and reports that are either different or show similarities between Ireland and Northern Ireland will be examined. In addition, certain cultural

expressions, e.g., cultural events, music, dance, film, literature, *etc.*) that reflect, shape or produce national and cultural identities within and across the border will be considered.

In this study an attempt is made to investigate the Irish awareness of this old and new situation from the position of an external “neutral” observer. Being rooted in historical struggles, the relation between Ireland, Northern Ireland and consequently the UK is strongly affected by present-day political and administrative conditions. However, the personal concepts of identity, group affiliations and local social relationships are of central importance. These will be the main focus of this study. Thus, also a detailed discourse of the methodology and concepts behind anthropological reasoning is required. Nevertheless, such research may also provide additional insight on the factors that influence conflicts in general.

Method

The data for this study were primarily collected using two distinct methodologies, as summarised below. Firstly, the empirical data collection was carried out during my engaged participatory field research in Ireland in 2020. This part was possible because of an ERASMUS program. These “in-situ” experiences allowed an immersive contact, providing nuanced insights in the cultural dynamics at play. Secondly, a comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature and additional media resources was carried out in order to construct a theoretical framework facilitating a deeper examination of the subject.

In this thesis, I try to analyse what identity is, the creation of its different forms and how they can be interpreted in an anthropological context. I looked for contemporary examples in Ireland and analysed how different forms of identity might have been created over the centuries. I show how such identities are represented today and what had and had not changed over the recent years. From this viewpoint, I attempt to represent the discourse and possible outcomes of the “Brexit”.

The original plan was to conduct field research in the beginning of 2020 as a part of an ERASMUS scholarship. This field research and the data I collected during my stay should then be the foundation of this master thesis. The collected data consist mostly of notes, taken during participatory observation, semi structured interviews, discussions, field trips as well as observations during everyday life. My field research was based on some theoretical background as well, that I collected by literature research.

Significant support in collecting numerous interesting articles came from courses, lectures and seminars offered by Maynooth University as well as the scholars there. Several of these lectures on Ireland-related themes helped me greatly in better understanding Irish contemporary history and in gaining deeper knowledge and improved interpretation of political, social and cultural facts.

In February 2020 after my arrival in Ireland I first stayed in Maynooth near Dublin. This is a small village-like community that is mainly known for its university. The first days of my stay were mainly used to acclimatise myself to the island, the language, culture and the new surrounding as well as to get first contacts to the local community. This includes the university

and its staff, the fellow resident students and those from abroad. I also got access to the well equipped university library and established a connection to key persons for my thesis (*i.e.*, Professors, Lecturers and other students).

I began the participatory observations in Maynooth. In addition to the conversations with lecturers, classes and at gatherings on the campus, I also visited local cafes and pubs, in order to observe the daily lives of the public. After a couple of days, I moved to Dublin to be closer to the “crak” also Craic (/kræk/ *KRAK*) as the locals say (Wikipedia® explains this as: “*a term for news, gossip, fun, entertainment, and enjoyable conversation*“ (see [Url. 4](#))). Also, being closer to the city centre, it became easier to participate various in social, cultural, and political events. With the better connection to the public transport system, it also became easier to move around the island, especially to the north. I travelled to Maynooth campus twice a week to participate in specific lectures and to research in the well-equipped library on campus. In these first couple of weeks, my research was mostly limited to participatory observations and informal conversations as well as attempts to find key informants and to build a trusting relationship with them for further interviews.

My plan was to find such potential interview partners by participating in cultural, political and social events and gatherings. The goal was to get familiar with some locals through small talk and informal conversations. The latter then would be asked to participate in semi-structured interviews or even expert interviews. I also hoped that these interview partners would then point me to other social and cultural “happenings” or (in the best case) even to other potential interview partners, similar to a snowball sampling. This procedure was quite successful, considering the short time I could stay in Ireland. While it was possible to acquire several informants the time was too short for gathering the relevant expert interviews.

By participating in cultural events and social gatherings, I could develop an overview on what the people themselves think about the topic of identity and in particular on Irish identity. Accordingly, I asked questions like for example: What is Irish identity, what does it mean to be Irish or how it comes that somebody feels being Irish? Interestingly, I could observe a differing concept to nationalism, patriotism and ethnocentrism compared to Austria. It seems that nationalism in Austria is frequently connected to the NS regime as well as inhumane right-wing ideologies (compare e.g. DOW 2025, p. 19ff). While in Ireland nationalism is understood more like patriotism and portrays the way to a liberated Ireland.

In the next step, I was trying to connect with people having a personal or business connection to Northern Ireland and therefore could be personally affected by the separation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Raising questions of belonging, the feelings of identity as well as the historical and present turbulences like the Brexit were planned for later.

During my stay, I also screened the articles in several newspapers for pertinent information's on a daily basis. The aim was to develop a better understanding of the political system in Ireland (the general election was held at the same time) and to discern the relevance of the different topics which were reported. Thus, an impression on what would be considered as important to the public opinion could have been deduced. In addition, I tried to obtain current background material by doing a news analysis (where also interesting differences about what and how the news is reported were found, compared to Austria). From these information's, I also obtained the latest news concerning the COVID-19 outbreak and the upcoming social, political and economic changes, e.g., the beginning of lockdowns of entire countries. Such measures were earlier applied in Austria but similar changes in Ireland were soon to follow.

The cancellation of large public events like the St. Patrick day parade came early in the pandemic. Then the Universities closed and soon all social gatherings were discredited and later prohibited. It appeared initially, that I might be able to continue my stay in Ireland, but after all the bad news and according to recommendations of the ERASMUS program coordinators, the universities, the consulate and even friends and family, I reached the conclusion to better return and be under quarantine in Austria. The possibility of doing my field research, namely finding potential interview partners and conducting the interviews, seemed unlikely because of the social and physical distancing that was propagated and the probable start of a quarantine in Ireland. Therefore, after careful consideration of the pandemic situation, I decided to return back home and to pause my field research hoping to be able to continue.

The original plan of going deeper into the "field" by exploring the whole island of Ireland, the north and the republic, cities as well as the countryside and especially the border area and finding informants on the way, was thus interrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak. Accordingly, the focus of this study had to be changed towards theoretical studies. The empirical work had to be restricted to the Irish community in Vienna. I contacted therefore different groups and individuals who share a strong connection with Ireland. These were e.g., members of the Vienna Geals Club – a club committed to Gaelic sports, employees of the Irish Embassy and members of the Irish-Austrian Society. I also got in contact with individuals who share a personal or

professional connection to Ireland. With the latter, I focused mainly on first- or second-generation immigrants from the Island of Ireland and also persons who lived in Ireland over a longer period of time. These individuals were supposed to show a sense of “Irishness”. They were addressed about what it means for them to be Irish, if they identify themselves as Irish and what they think is essential in being Irish. However, the main focus of the research was limited to literature and media analysis according to Covid-related restrictions. Special attention was therefore paid to the historical development of the conflict, the construction of Irish (and Northern-Irish) identity.

When structuring and analysing the information’s gained, several methodological questions connected with the study of social networks arose. These relate mainly to how a researcher can maintain objectivity while participating in social interactions and which type of information (subjective, rather arbitrary impressions *vs.* scientifically valid conclusions) may be deduced from the applied techniques. The answer to these questions still remains open. Nevertheless, I attempted to remain aware of this epidemiologic tension and find pragmatic compromises for this study.

A Short Summary of History and the Conflict

The struggles between militant Irish nationalists and English loyalists between 1960 and 1998 (known as the Troubles) are often highlighted, when discussing Irish issues. Nevertheless, many individuals, aside from the Irish themselves, may not be well-versed in this topic. A short, comprehensive analysis of the historical context of the conflictual relationship with England is necessary to fully understand the political developments. This chapter aims to summarize key historical events in Irish history for a better understanding and a more accurate perception of the topic. This is crucial for the understanding of Ireland, which can broadly be defined also as a national narrative. Like all national identities, it is mainly based on the perception of historical continuity. Additionally, this overview will illustrate the historical developments toward Brexit and the motivations of different actors partaking in the conflict.

Accordingly, this chapter primarily focuses on Irish history, including the island of Ireland as well as some international influences. As Graham (2001) aptly notes, “*Recent theory has simultaneously encouraged a scepticism towards the supposed authenticity of personal or common histories, making identity the site of textualised narrative constructions and reconstructions rather than of transparent record*” (Graham 2001, p. vii). Thus, this chapter will focus on commonly accepted historical records rather than individual narratives, with most historical information drawn from Ferriter (2005), Maurer (1998) and Wende (1995).

The first Celtic settlement in Ireland was around 10 500 BC (see Milligan 2016). The original Neolithic or Bronze Age population seems to have been sparse and little archaeological evidence is preserved. The socio-political organization at that time was likely clan-based. These clans formed relatively independent, often hostile small “kingdoms” (tuaithe). Similar socio-political structures can also be found in Scotland. While associations of these clans for warfare did occur, a unifying structure in the form of provincial and high kings remained less significant than the local rulers (see Koch & Carey 1997).

The Romans occupied southern England from 43 BC. They had trade relations with Ireland (*Hibernia*). Occasional conflicts did not lead to campaigns aimed at conquering Ireland. After the collapse of Roman rule in southern England around 407 AD, Saxon mercenaries were often recruited to protect the local population. This led to settlements by various, mostly German

ethnic groups, such as the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons from around 430. The latter partially displaced the original British population and formed smaller kingdoms in southern and eastern England by 600-700 (see Charles-Edwards 2000, p.145).

The adoption of Christianity brought significant change to the Irish socio-political system. By the early 5th century, it began to permeate the island and influenced the existing clan structures. As an example, Saint Patrick, a figure shrouded in both history and legend, is credited with propagating Christianity across Ireland, transforming pagan sites into Christian places of worship. A cultural shift that is still commemorated today with St. Patrick's Day celebrations on March 17th by traditional Irish people (and others, sympathetic of alcoholic beverages and green clothing). St. Patrick is famous for driving the snakes into the sea – although there never existed any snakes in Ireland even before St. Patrick. This is because of geological and environment reason (see Obst 2003, p.188). This legend may be seen as a metaphor for driving the pagans away. (See Url. 2) The monastic culture that ensued became a cornerstone of Irish society, fostering literacy and learning. Monastic settlements often also acted as centres of governance, supplementing the traditional clan system.

Ethnic Disparities

Although the conflicts in Irish history are not just an ethnic matter, ethnicity plays a great part in their propagation. This can be observed in the field and is often mentioned by the people.

A basic and simplified historical motif of conflict between the Irish and English can therefore already be traced back to the relations between the Celtic population in Ireland (and Wales, Scotland) and the immigrated and ruling Angles and Saxons in England. Even today, this historical fact is sometimes regarded as an origin of the modern conflicts (see Mitchell 2017) and the origin of the colonialization of Ireland. Another important differentiating factor that persists even today is the different languages (Gaelic and English – Fig. 1).

Decline of Ireland's native Irish speakers (1800-2000)

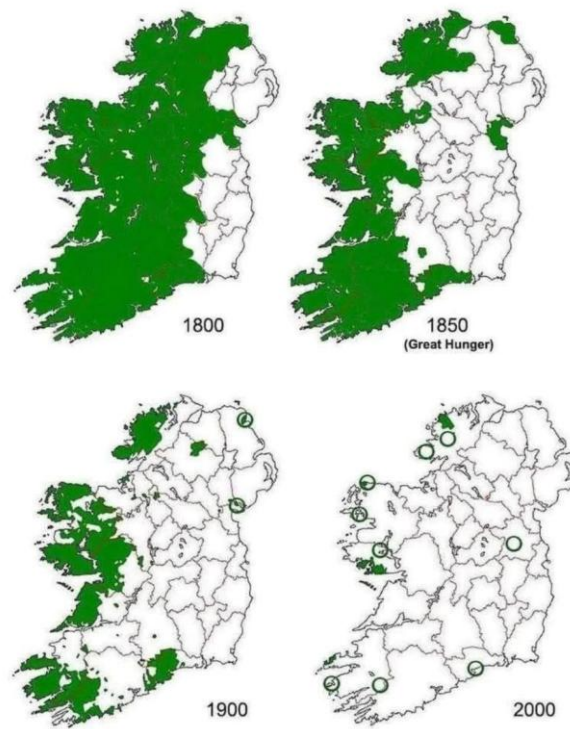


Figure 1: Decline of the Gaelic speaking population in Ireland over last two centuries.

As a result of Christianisation, numerous monasteries were founded, especially on remote islands. Christianity had prevailed by the 12th century (see Maurer 1998). However, certain pre-Christian ideas, customs, and mystical places can still be found even today. For example, there is the high regard for Leprechauns or elves and mystical places like the Hill of Tara or stone circles.

England and much of Europe were subsequently Christianized by Irish monks. Often, the nobility was first persuaded to convert, after which their subjects adopted the new religion more or less voluntarily. This gave ruling families, in Ireland and the rest of Europe alike, an advantage. As Christians they no longer had to derive their privileged position solely from public assemblies (comparable to the “Things” in northern Europe) or from the strength of their troops. Instead, they could invoke the will of God directly and thus, if required, the propaganda of the clergy to support that claim. In the case of an “anointed”, *i.e.*, religiously legitimized ruler, any attempt to change power would automatically imply a violation of God's will,

including the associated consequences. This strengthened both partners, the catholic Church and the legitimization of the secular government. Similar practices can be observed all over Europe in this period.

The proselytizing Irish monks were in Europe often regarded as Scots. An error that resulted for example in the designations of the “Schottenstift” and “Schottenkirche”, *etc.*, in Vienna.

From about 790, raids by Norwegian and Danish Vikings on the coasts of Ireland and England became frequent. Best known in this context is the sack of the monastery of Lindisfarne in 793 (see Martinez 2019). As a result, the Vikings founded bases, similar to the Angles and Saxons in England before, that later enlarged to settlements and cities, like e.g., Dublin, Cork or Limerick. However, efforts to defend against Viking raids had a unifying influence on the local rulers. Thus, Brian Boru (1005) or Alfred the Great (886) in England became nationally recognized great kings.

By the 11th century, a semblance of a national monarchy began to develop. Brian Boru despite being primarily a regional king, is often credited with unifying Irish clans against Norse invaders during the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 (see Casey 2024). As a result, Ireland became a separate, relatively stable kingdom.

Nevertheless, the fusion of Viking and Gaelic culture over time shaped the development of trade and urbanization in Ireland. While initially disruptive, Viking influence eventually led to a more diversified economy and integrated political structures.

In 1066 the Normans, succeeded in taking over the English throne though William the Conqueror (1066). Thus, the rule of Normans largely replaced the local Anglo-Saxon nobility. The results were far-reaching changes in the manorial law system (regulating e.g. land ownership), administration and the high-level language (see Bates 2016).

In 1169 Henry II of England conquered Ireland with Anglo-Norman troops and declared himself ruler, as a consequence of an internal Irish dispute over the throne. This English-Norman invasion of 1169-1171 was invited by a deposed Irish king. The Normans were led by Richard de Clare, 2nd Earl of Pembroke, commonly known as Strongbow. He established a foothold in the south-east, that expanded to control of large swaths of Irish territory. This period marked the beginning of direct English ruling in Ireland, that then had profound and lasting effects on the island's governance, culture, and demographics (see McGreevy 2019).

The subsequent centuries saw intermittent periods of conflict and assimilation. The English crown's attempts to consolidate its power in Ireland was often met with fierce resistance from

the native Irish lords and the Hiberno-Norman aristocracy (“Hiberno” coming from the Latin word for Ireland *Hibernia*, describes those Normans who settled in Ireland). The Tudor conquest of Ireland in the 16th century initiated a more systematic effort to extend English influence and control, laying the groundwork for the complex political dynamics that would unfold in the centuries to follow.

Tudor Conquest and Plantations (16th-17th Century): The Tudor conquest of Ireland, initiated under Henry VIII and continued by Elizabeth I and James I, represented a pivotal point in English attempts to exert control over Ireland. The plantation policy, particularly in Ulster, displaced many native Irish lords and promoted the settlement of English and Scottish Protestants (see Canny 2001). This fundamentally altered the demographic and cultural landscape of the region through the confiscation of Irish owned land and the redistribution among British settlers.

From the Cromwellian Conquest to the Williamite Wars (1649-1691): The Cromwellian conquest of Ireland (1649-1653) further deepened the fissures between the English and Irish. Following the execution of Charles I, Oliver Cromwell's forces brutally suppressed Irish and Royalist resistance. The subsequent redistribution of land disenfranchised large segments of the Catholic population, laying the groundwork for the sectarian tensions that would later erupt during the Williamite wars (see Ó Siochrú 2008).

The Penal Laws and Ascendancy (1691-18th Century): After the Treaty of Limerick (1691), a series of penal laws was enacted to further disenfranchise Catholics and Protestant dissenters, and secure Protestant ascendancy. These laws restricted the rights of the Catholic majority, leading to economic and social degradation. They fostered a sense of injustice and exclusion that simmered for generations (see Maurer 1998).

Nationalism and the Road to Independence (19th-20th Century): Throughout the 19th century, the seeds of Irish nationalism took root amidst the backdrop of the “Great Famine” and agrarian unrest. The “Home Rule” movement sought legislative independence. The conflicts culminated in the Easter Rising of 1916 and the subsequent War of Independence, which led to the formation of the Irish Free State and ultimately the Republic of Ireland.

The “Great Famine” / potato blight (1845-1849) is probably the most traumatic event in the collective memory of the Irish (see below). The results are present still in the Irish as well as in the Irish diaspora in many other states.

Contemporary Ethno-Linguistic Landscape (20th-21st Century): Although the ethnic disparities of the past diminished, they are still part of the collective memory and occasionally flare up in the political discourse. The Republic of Ireland has seen a revival of the Irish language and culture, contrasting with the predominantly English-speaking Northern Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement (1998) has helped to mediate but could not entirely resolve sectarian and ethnic differences (see McGarry and O'Leary 1995 p. 859).

Summarizing, the Irish history, it is marked by a series of invasions, conquests, and social transformations. While ethnicity played a significant role in shaping Ireland's past, the present-day nation reflects a complex interplay of history, culture, and ideology that goes beyond the simplistic dichotomy of Irish and English.

Religious Discord

A significant factor in the differences between Ireland and England, which is still highly important, is based on the foundation of the “Church of England” by Henry VIII (1531). The schism resulted in the separation from the Catholic Church and altered the religious and political landscape of Ireland forever. Henry's separation from the Catholic Church was not just a theological divergence but also a socio-political measure that redefined allegiance and resistance within the British Isles. Catholicism in Ireland became entwined with national ideology and resistance against English rulership, thereby rendering the Irish perpetually suspect in the eyes of the English crown (see Ciaran 1994).

As a consequence, the English royal family became not only politically but also religiously dominant, thus making a religious commitment to Catholicism synonymous with resistance to the crown and government. The Irish who remained predominantly Catholic were thus at least suspected of rebellion. The property of many churches and monasteries in Ireland and England was confiscated and given to the royal family or large landowners.

From 1541 the Kingdom of Ireland was ruled directly by the English king – as a unified kingdom (*i.e.*, including Scotland). The Irish uprisings, which were frequent also before these events, intensified. The English government responded by increasing the numbers of British settlements (often referred to as plantations). Such settlements were mostly in the fertile areas of the island (known now as Northern Ireland).

The daughter and successor of Henry VIII, queen Elizabeth I defeated the remaining Gaelic-Irish nobles (and their Spanish supporters) in the “Nine Years War” (1594-1603). After their defeat, more Anglican and Presbyterian English settlers were brought in, particularly to the north of Ireland (Ulster and neighbourhoods – thus resulting in the name Ulster plantation). In order to create an example and strengthen control, the city of Derry was renamed Londonderry, thus emphasizing English supremacy in 1613 (see Maurer 1998).

By the beginning of the 17th century, the main lines of conflict between Ireland and England were already clearly delineated: foreign rule by an aristocracy that differed in language, ethnicity, and religion. Ireland became an English colony.

However, this period of the English ruling also shows that the aristocratic form of government was just a part of the conflict. In order to fight Irish uprisings that were aiming for independence, the English Chancellor of State Oliver Cromwell led an invasion army (the “New Model Army”) to Ireland in 1649 (see Kenyon and Ohlmeyer 2000). This event was characterized by particularly harsh action against the defeated. Due to financial shortages, the troops were often paid in the form of (Irish) parcels of land, which meant that many occupying soldiers were settling permanently.

The further history shows a series of Irish uprisings and English penal sanctions, only interrupted shortly under the influence of the French Enlightenment (1789).

Accordingly, a number of critical events took place in the 16th to 18th centuries:

Consolidation of English Rulership: With Henry VIII's declaration of the Kingdom of Ireland (1541) that imposed direct ruling by England, there began a relentless sequence of uprisings and suppressions. The Plantations of Ireland, particularly in Ulster, represented a systematic effort by the English to control and Anglicise Ireland by colonizing it with settlers who were loyal to the crown. These settlers were often granted the confiscated estates of the native Catholic nobility, shifting the balance of land ownership and power (see Canny 2001).

The Elizabethan Conquests: Elizabeth I, Henry's daughter, vigorously continued her father's policies, most notably during the Nine Years War. The defeat of the Gaelic-Irish lords and their Spanish allies in this conflict led to the flight of the (Catholic) Earls and the consolidation of English and Scottish Protestant settlement in Ulster, a move that had lasting consequences for Irish society and culture (see Morgan 1999).

The Cromwellian Campaign: Oliver Cromwell's brutal campaign in Ireland (1649-1653) epitomized the harshness of English rule. His New Model Army, notorious for the severity of its actions against Irish Catholics, increased the already deep-seated animosities even further. The subsequent land confiscations and redistribution to soldiers entrenched the Protestant English and Scottish owners, altering Ireland's demographic and political realities for the centuries to come (see Kenyon and Ohlmeyer 2000).

A Cycle of Rebellion and Repression: The subsequent history of Ireland can be described by a cyclical pattern of Irish uprisings and English punitive responses. The influence of the French Enlightenment in 1789 inspired a fight for independence and civil rights, which was met with severe reprisals and a tightening of English control (see Bartlett 2010).

The enduring conflict between Ireland and England throughout the centuries was deeply rooted in colonial ambition and religious discord. As Ireland became an English colony, the disparate elements of language, ethnicity, and religion coalesced into a pronounced struggle for power and identity. Irish resistance against foreign rule and the quest for self-governance continued to shape the island's narrative, sowing the seeds for future movements toward independence and sovereignty.

The Great Famine

A historical highly significant and very dramatic event was the outbreak of the potato famine in 1845 and its socio-political impact. This traumatic event affects Ireland until today. The Great Famine of 1845-1849, also known as the Irish Potato Famine, may be considered as the most tragic event in Irish history. This catastrophe had both immediate and enduring effects on Ireland's demographic, socio-economic, and political landscape (see Maurer 1998).

The potato was (and maybe still is) the primary agricultural product and the nutritional basis for the mostly poor smallholders. Potato blight is a fungus (Late Blight / *Phytophthora*

infestans) that was probably introduced from Mexico. This disease, combined with cold, damp weather, virtually destroyed the crops in 1845, 1846, 1848 and 1849. Of the more than eight million of Irish people at that time, about one million died from starvation, undernourishment and land-related illnesses as well as infectious diseases such as typhoid fever and/or tuberculosis. Many more suffered from the socio-political consequences of the disease. Two million emigrated, mainly to the USA, Canada, and Australia. The Irish population has still not yet reached pre-famine levels.

Concurrently with this natural disaster, socio-political factors enhanced the human suffering. The policies of the landlords and the English government contributed significantly to the disaster. Landlordism (mostly English or English-born) that was prevalent at this time, saw many tenant farmers unable to satisfy their rent demands. This resulted in widespread evictions. Nevertheless, the export of other agricultural products continued unabated, primarily to England, even as the local population starved (Kinealy 2017, p. 90-116).

At this time, the dominant economic ideology within the British government, was laissez-faire capitalism. This concept heavily influenced its response, or lack thereof. This prevailing “laissez-faire” theory was based on the idea that the state should not interfere with economic affairs of the citizens (among other things). Thus, state interventions were discouraged. Accordingly, the destitute Irish received only minimal government aid. Charity from private organizations or individual efforts did not provide sufficient support. Additionally, the views of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834), (old) liberalism and evolutionism, and later social Darwinism and early capitalism, were widespread among the English elite. These theories hindered effective social measures. Apart from the aversion to direct state interventions, some also feared that supporting the impoverished Irish population would lead to (even more) laziness or that the initiative for self-help would be impeded (see Kinealy 2017). Similar views as they are spread by certain interest groups to this day (e.g., by neo-liberalism).

Governmental relief efforts that were implemented, were often punitive and inadequate. Assistance was tied to hard labour in prison-like “workhouses” where hard physical labour was obligatory. Such requirements were often impossible to fulfil for people who were weakened by nutrition deficiency and infectious diseases (see Kinealy 2017 p. 61- 89).

Emigration, primarily to North America and Australia, was seen as a release valve for the population pressure. The situation of emigrants driven by hunger and poverty, was by no means

significantly better. The situation on the emigrant ships is probably aptly described by their designation as “coffin ships”.

The consequences of the Great Famine were and are profound. Its impact is felt not only in Ireland's significantly reduced population, which still has not reclaimed its pre-famine numbers, but also in the collective memory and consciousness of the Irish people and the diaspora. The political repercussions, including heightened animosity toward British rule and a strengthening of Irish nationalism, set the stage for future political developments and strengthened the quest for independence. Or as Kinealy puts it “...*the Famine was a watershed (turning point) in the development of modern Ireland*” (Kinealy 2017, p.2).



Figure 2: World distribution of citizens with Irish ancestry (self declared).

The significance of this event cannot be understated, as it fundamentally reshaped the trajectory of an entire nation. It influenced Ireland's social structure, population distribution, and international relations to this day. The memory of the famine remains a potent symbol in Irish cultural narrative and continues to inform contemporary discourse regarding social justice, government responsibility, and humanitarian aid.

20th Century and Beyond

Towards the end of the 19th century, the Irish quest for autonomy began to gain momentum, with significant strides made in securing legislative power for their own parliament. However, the onset of the First World War delayed the realization of these plans and the beneficial new laws were not implemented. A decisive moment arrived in the aftermath of the war, when a series of confrontations culminated in the (re-)establishment of the Irish Parliament in 1918.

The subsequent Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) was marked by its ferocity and ultimately resulted in the separation of Ireland. Northern Ireland remained under British jurisdiction, while the southern portion emerged as an independent entity that was recognized in 1922 as the Irish Free State (see Ferriter 2005, p. 110-186).

Ireland's stance during World War II was one of neutrality, a policy that continued post-war. The nation faced economic challenges and societal conservatism during this time. In the post-war period, Ireland was economically weak and socially relatively regressive. A wave of modernization took place in the 1960s as in many other countries. This set the stage for Ireland's development towards a more dynamic and prosperous society. The country's accession to the European Community (now European Union) in 1973 marked a turning point, paving the way for economic revitalization through EU structural support and advances in technology and industry. These efforts were not without impediments but ultimately enabled Ireland to enhance the well-being and prosperity of its citizens.

The sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, colloquially known as “The Troubles,” persisted throughout the latter half of the 20th century. A major breakthrough occurred in 1994 when the Irish Republican Army (IRA) declared a ceasefire. This progress was solidified with the signing of the “Good Friday Agreement” in 1998, an accord that acknowledged Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom while laying the groundwork for peaceful coexistence and political collaboration (see Ferriter 2005).

The direct conflict and the contentious issue of Irish unification receded into the background as a consequence of this agreement. However, political and social tensions remained. The delicate balance of power-sharing in Northern Ireland and the broader implications of UK and Irish relations continue to shape the political landscape in the 21st century. The Good Friday Agreement stands as a document of the resilient pursuit of peace and underscores the complexity of national ideology and sovereignty in the region's ongoing narrative. The goal of

the Unionists and the claims to a united Ireland seem dormant, however, the political and social disputes continue.

Contemporary History

The recent history is commonly known, but there are further socio-economic and cultural changes which should also be taken into account more deeply, especially when analysing current concepts like individualism and social identity. Ireland's self-representation and outside perspectives must also be considered in this respect. While Ireland is not homogeneous, particular trends and priorities can be detected. The transformation of Ireland in the later part of the 20th and the 21st century reflects both global trends and unique national characteristics.

The multifaceted nature of modernization in Ireland, the decline of the institutional power of the Catholic Church, the advent of mass media, and changing attitudes towards gender roles each played a part in reshaping Irish society. Nevertheless, similar modernisation developments can also be seen everywhere else. Therefore, the significance of each topic should be analysed in more detail. These shifts are indicators of Ireland's integration into the global economy and its departure from a shared vision of a predominantly Catholic, agrarian, and non-materialistic society.

The dichotomy between the traditional, rural, mystic, non-materialistic Ireland and the modern, industrialized, neo-capitalist and globalized nation is notable. I could observe that tourists, foreigners and outsiders frequently still associate Ireland with its less costly, traditional/old fashioned way of life. Yet, in reality Ireland hosts some of the world's wealthiest companies, particularly in the urban financial hub of Dublin. This juxtaposition is further illustrated by the commodification of Irish culture, where suburban homes and leisure spaces often reflect an idealized rural past.

Foster (Foster 2007) suggests a tension between a progressive, secular and a pluralist society, the older more insular and nationalist Ireland. *“His (Foster) opposition is between a pluralist, outwardlooking, secular society, no longer obsessed by the national question, and the patriarchal, nationalist and anglophobic society which has lost out to it. ... he believes, (Ireland) is in danger of becoming a caricature of itself. The Irish now build their suburban homes from plans whose names conjure an idealised rural past; they spend their leisure time in faux Irish pubs; (being also the biggest export good) they experience their heritage through folk*

parks ... as at the turn of the last century, the task is that of distinguishing what is good in nationalism from what is bad. But the real difficulty seems to lie in distinguishing what is good from what is brand. ... Brand Ireland is a consequence of the global market: the more a country becomes like any other, the more it needs to stamp itself as different. And part of the reason Irish branding has caught hold so quickly is that it has been going on for a long time. A small English speaking country, squeezed between Britain and the United States, Ireland has always had to find ways of establishing its distinctiveness. Catholicism served this purpose for a while, but it won't do any more. What is happening now to Irish culture in Ireland is a version of what happened to that previous incarnation of the global Irish – the diaspora” (Wills 2008 p. 5-8).

Accordingly, the national question that once was central to Irish personality, receded as economic and cultural globalization became dominant. It remains a challenge to differentiate the substantive elements of Irish nationalism and culture from mere branding, a challenge that is exacerbated by the need to assert a unique national identity in a homogenizing global market.

Wills reflections indicate nostalgia for bygone times but also acknowledge the impacts of globalization in a wider, more general sense. However, such considerations pertain not only to Ireland but fit nearly everywhere else as well. Following this thought, the modern cosmopolite and the “less costly standard of living” / traditional lifestyles seem to contradict each other. People on both ends of this spectrum are using the same arguments to glorify the past and build their political agendas around this topic. I would argue therefore, that the coexistence of cosmopolitan and traditional lifestyles does not necessarily conflict but may contribute to the idea of continuity within individuals and society. Establishing a stable national brand, then is not just a commercial imperative but as well a cultural and political one that seems more important than ever.

The transformation of the Irish society became also evident in legislative changes and political milestones. As Wills (2008) states: “..., (I)n 1995 divorce was legalised; in 1998 came the Good Friday Agreement and what looks like peace in Northern Ireland. Though each of these reversals is of a different order, it's hard to deny that economic prosperity has gone hand in hand with sexual tolerance and political progress” (Wills 2008, p. 2).

Such changes indicate a correlation between economic prosperity, social liberalization and political advancement. While the Catholic ethos has historically been more pronounced in Ireland than in many other nations, it is clear that societal shifts accumulate, aligning Ireland more closely with western norms of tolerance and progress. These considerations, while specific to Ireland, also reflect the broader global dynamics, where national identities and the

effects of globalization intersect and interact. However, as countries become more alike, they also emphasize their distinctiveness. Ireland's branding reflects this. Catholicism, that once was a unifying force, no longer serves this purpose. The task of navigating and balancing distinctiveness with global conformity is ongoing. Its understanding is central for interpreting Ireland's current and future trajectory.

The Border Question

The border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is a nexus of historical, ethnic, social, and religious complexities that have reverberated through the region's history. Its inception dates back to the early 20th century, with the "Government of Ireland Act" 1920 and the subsequent establishment of Northern Ireland. The latter was later confirmed with the "Republic of Ireland Act" in 1949 (see URL. 8).

Since then, the border has been a strong motivation for ideological and sometimes also violent conflicts. However, the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 allowed for an open border, fostered peace and mitigated the contentious nature of the divide. The integration within the EU framework further diminished the border's significance, allowing for seamless movement and trade.

Nevertheless, this historical field of conflicts became once again highly relevant regarding the Brexit dispute. Religious, ethnic and social tensions significantly predate the emergence of the national conflict, with historical origins traceable to the early Middle Ages. Nonetheless, the accession of both states to the European Union effectively diminished the functional importance of their shared border, which operated as an internal boundary within the Schengen Area. This status quo was fundamentally altered by the United Kingdom's decision to withdraw from the European Union (Brexit), reintroducing the border as a point of political and legal contention. The Brexit negotiations brought the potential of a "hard border" back into consideration. This stirred fears of renewed violence and forced locals to re-examine their identities amidst a polarized context of British versus Irish allegiance. A typical international "hard" border had to be re-established as a consequence of the recent political development. This caused debates and protests once again. As a result, the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland became a highly discussed issue during the Brexit negotiations. Many people feared that the debates around border subjects might spark a rise in violence, comparable to "The Troubles"

(late 1960s – 1998). Also, the residents were forced to reconsider their identity once again, being pro-British or pro-Irish.

The latter issue is not just limited to the need of establishing an international border on the Irish island. The transformation to an EU external border also results in complex bureaucratic challenges both in a political sense and also in practical terms. Entry, exit, handling of goods, trade, transit, and migration become more complicated and time consuming. A hard border on the Island might also threaten or even break some of the peacekeeping agreements which were established just a couple of years ago. Such challenges could undermine the peace sustained since the Good Friday Agreement.

Aside from political and administrative challenges, the local population's perceptions and lived experiences in relation to the political shifts, particularly in the border regions are a main focus of this study. In addition, the research explores the potential socio-economic and cultural effects of border demarcation on the quotidian existence of populations in the border region (compare e.g. Weert 2023).

The debates and negotiations about Brexit have been going on for several years, from the vote (2016) to leave the EU till the implementation (2020). Therefore, only the negotiations have already shown their effects at the political level as well as on an individual level. It is indicated by many reports that this debates also influence everyday life (e.g., Campbell 2019). Reports in the media from concerned citizens and political parties indicate that Brexit debates and negotiations already had numerous local political and individual consequences. Such effects became evident e.g., in the relocation of companies and especially their logistics beyond the new border in order to remain being stationed in the EU. Shifts in demographics and migrations were even promoted by the Irish government.

Opposing intentions in Northern Ireland, where some advocate a united Ireland while others remain loyal to the UK, became further complicated by Brexit. There are many reasons for both sides reinforcing their relative personal standpoints. However, the fact that the United Kingdom left the EU was certainly adding another problem for the areas in Northern Ireland. New lines of conflicts emerged that need to be taken into account.

There is already a body of literature about migration to and from Ireland (e.g., Mac Éinrí and White 2008; Guinnane 2015; or Delaney 2006). An important question to be asked in this

context is whether and when immigrants are regarded as natives by the locals. It would also be interesting to see how migrants attempt to integrate themselves in Ireland. How do migrants define themselves, *i.e.*, which are the attributes that define them as Irish? Brexit added complexity to this issue. Migration to and from Ireland raises questions about the acceptance of immigrants by the residents as well.

The Brexit

Brexit represents a pivotal moment in contemporary British and European history. It followed a 2016 referendum, where the UK electorate narrowly voted for withdrawal from the European Union. After the referendum, the United Kingdom decided to initiate an exit procedure (a procedure in accordance with Article 49a / 50 of the Lisbon Treaty (1) TEU) from the EU. The background to this vote and its results are rather complex (see URL 6).

Historically, the UK played a distinct role in the formation of European unity. Even in 1957 when the European Economic Community (EEC) that was later converted into the EU was founded, Britain initially went its own way. The UK instead joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA, 1960), together with several other non-EEC states: Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland (see URL 9). After overcoming several previous objections, primarily from France, the UK finally joined the EEC in 1973. A referendum with a relatively high approval rate (67%) confirmed this membership in 1975. However, euro sceptical tendencies increased later, particularly among Conservatives. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher capitalized on this sentiment, successfully negotiating a significant reduction of the UK's financial contributions to the EEC in 1979, known as the "British Rebate" (see D'Alfonso, 2016).

The main points of criticism from the point of view of the United Kingdom government was focused on the EEC's agricultural policy and the perceived erosion of national sovereignty in favour of the common European institutions and political integration. The latter efforts were also expressed in the "Maastricht Agreements" (see URL 10). These were also ratified by the United Kingdom (1992) but nevertheless faced opposition from the "Maastricht Rebels" within the Conservative Party (see Menon 2017). As in some other countries, in the United Kingdom many domestic and political issues were often blamed on the EU, thus raising nationalist and protectionist objections. There were complaints about the generally perceived loss of national control and in particular, about the EU-wide freedom of movement to choose where to live and

work. Due to an already tight labour market, the influx of mostly well-qualified, yet often lower wage workers, especially from the east of the EU and also former colonies was regarded as problematic and seen as exacerbating an already stressed competitive labour market. In addition, there were (sometimes only perceived) problems with the social and pension status of intra-European migrants.

After a tough propagandistic campaign, another referendum on June 23, 2016 decided that Great Britain should leave the EU. The vote to leave was very narrow with 51.9 % approval (see URL 7). The outcome prompted the resignation of the conservative Prime Minister David Cameron, who was succeeded by Theresa May. The subsequent withdrawal negotiations lasted over two and a half years, until the end of 2018. The resolution of the agreement to leave the EU was repeatedly rejected by the English House of Commons, although a withdrawal without an agreement (the "Hard Brexit") was also rejected. This political deadlock led to multiple postponements and extensions of the exit deadlines and ultimately to the resignation of Prime Minister Theresa May. Her successor Boris Johnson, a declared Brexit supporter, succeeded to push through an approval of the exit law in parliament after several failures and a new general election (December 2019). The "European Union Withdrawal Agreement" was then passed in January 2020 and led to the UK's official withdrawal on January 31, 2020 (see URL 11).

Despite the Brexit, some issues like the Northern Ireland-Ireland border question remained unresolved. The Good Friday Agreement (see URL 12) and the Common Travel Area of 1923 (see URL. 13) allowed for continued free movement of citizens between the two states. However, a "no-deal" Brexit would have required stringent controls. In the event of a no-deal Brexit, complete personal checks would become necessary according to the Schengen Agreement, because of Great Britain's status as a non-EU country (see URL. 14).

One goal of the negotiations for a "regulated" Brexit was to ensure the free movement of goods. Negotiations sought to maintain the integrity of goods exchange, initially proposing a "backstop" that would keep the UK aligned with certain EU custom and regulatory standards. In order to avoid the expected negative effects on trade and economy, a "Backstop Agreement" was initially included in the exit laws draft. This would have applied if no other solution for a free trade zone would have been agreed upon. In this case, to avoid the creation of obstacles to cross-border trade, the United Kingdom had to persist in observing the policy standards and tariff structures established by the European Union's internal market. Since these passages

triggered strong resistance in the House of Commons, they were later excluded from the withdrawal agreements. Customs and goods controls are requested since the end of the transition period (December 31, 2020). In order to ensure compliance with EU standards and to handle customs tariffs, the appropriate infrastructure (handling halls, warehouses, *etc.*) and the required personnel are required. However, these were largely lacking. Similar problems applied to the handling of passenger traffic.

An additional problem occurred quite recently. UK's immigration policy, particularly the proposal to deport non-European migrants from Britain (where they would have faced deportation to Rwanda) has also consequences for Ireland. This project poses additional challenges, as migrants who enter the EU via the border through Northern Ireland to Ireland, mostly to Dublin, face a distinct set of bureaucratic hurdles. Once in Ireland these migrants are in the European Union facing different bureaucratic trials (compare URL 1).

National, Individual and Social Identity

Identity is a commonly used term but remains very ill defined. It is used not only in public settings but also often in different academic fields, especially in the humanities. When people are asked to define the term “identity”, the answers may get quite complex. For this study, I tried to challenge the simplistic explanations and draw on historical and philosophical perspectives to deepen the understanding of identity. Let us take a closer look on what identity means. What is social identity? What distinguishes a “self” from an “other”? To answer such particular (philosophical) questions let us define these categories first and look how the concepts of personality are modified.

Identity is deeply rooted in societal and individual existence. The exploration of identity as a “major tool” implicates its importance in the manifold dimensions of human life. It is, as suggested, a cornerstone of self-definition, a base upon which individuals erect their sense of 'self' against the shifting backdrop of societal expectations and historical narratives. (Gaither, 2018)

National Identity

A commonly seen aspect of identity that is especially relevant, when analysing the case study at hand, is the concept of national identity. The latter can of course not be separated from the personal concepts of individual and social identity but is rather a amalgamation of these. The notion of national identity reflects a collective concept of self that emerges within the context of a nation or state. Still, national identity not only encompasses historical and cultural components but also psychological elements that influence how citizens perceive their nation as well as their place within it. The psychological tie to a nation can be as influential as the more tangible aspects of national ideology, such as symbols, anthems, and flags. Such symbols serve as focal points for national pride and are often integral to national ceremonies and public displays of unity. Furthermore, national ideology may also play a significant role in shaping the individual worldview, values, beliefs, and cultural practices.

The discourse surrounding national identity also recognizes the fluidity and hybridity (see Ozkirimli 2023, p.28-33) that characterizes many contemporary societies. Globalization and

migration introduced new challenges to the concept of national identity, as people often navigate multiple identities and allegiances. In such dynamic processes, the concept of a homogeneous national culture becomes increasingly obsolete. This may result in a more pluralistic and inclusive interpretation of the nation. However, also strong (re-)nationalistic emotions and movements gain momentum.

As I observed, national identity can create an individual sense of inclusion and connection to a physical location, region or even a country. It should be noted that the existence of a physical place *per se* does not create an identity nor a national identity. The social associations to a location are the key feature. Therefore, the national ideology is usually linked to cultural heritage, customs, and traditions. National identity is multifaceted, encompassing a shared history, language, religion and political system of a specific geographic location. It can serve as a unifying force, fostering feelings of belonging and help. It can be assumed that this may create a sense of unity and even pride among citizens and can also generate a sense of responsibility towards the country's development and progress.

Nevertheless, the concept of national identity must be approached with sensitiveness, as it is often misinterpreted as a support of right-wing political orientation. In Austria and Germany, the concept of national identity is frequently used as a synonym for right-wing ideologies and therefore often has a negative denotation. However, national identity may also be expressed in a way to promote social cohesion, allowing diverse people to coexist and work towards a common goal. Some of these approaches may also be visible in Ireland as an example. Nevertheless, national pride can also result in exclusion and discrimination against those who differ from the dominant cultural or national heritage. This is a phenomenon that is not unique to any single nation and can be found in varying degrees across different countries.

Meaningful engagement, education and integration are crucial for fostering a positive national identity. For example, programs that facilitate language acquisition, community involvement, and social interaction can help in bridging cultural distances. To ensure that all members of a society have equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services, regardless of their cultural background, ethnicity or religion is a constant challenge. Nevertheless, encouraging integration and interaction between different groups through programs such as language classes, community projects, and social events ensure a better connection between different social groups. This means also encouraging an open and

constructive dialogue between different groups within a society, promoting mutual understanding and respect for differences.

It is relevant in this context to mention the aspect of “invented” traditions (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1992). The concept of “invented tradition” highlights the constructed nature of many customs that are perceived as historical. An illustrative case of ritualized cultural practice in Northern Ireland is the celebration known as ‘Bonfire Night,’ or the ‘Eleventh Night,’ on the evening preceding the Twelfth of July (Orangemen’s Day). This event, marked by ignition of large bonfires, has its historical roots in community commemorations and seasonal festivities once practiced more broadly across the region by various groups, including both unionist and nationalist communities. In the contemporary context, however, the bonfires are strongly associated with unionist and loyalist traditions, serving as potent symbols of political allegiance, collective memory, and group identity (see Smithey 2011, p.93-103). Such practices form not only sites of festivity or social cohesion but also as an historical narrative, reinforcing cultural boundaries and strengthening community ties.

While many social structures formed “naturally” (bottom-up), certain traditions were purposely installed (top-down), usually to strengthen national ideology. In most cases, this is not easy to distinguish the latter from genuine “historic” traditions. At some historical point, every tradition was just an event / action that was later transformed into a tradition by continuity. Although the origin of many traditions is relevant and can vary widely, many of them share a similar meaning. Their common purpose is to engender a sense of community and to reinforce social bonds among the members of the in-group. Invented traditions are often established with the intent to solidify a group's identity, create sense of belonging and to inspire cohesion within the in-group by imbuing actions or events with symbolic historical significance. In other words, invented traditions try to create and improve a specific social message.

A positive national identity can act as a catalyst for social progress. When citizens strongly identify with their nation, they are more likely to support civic activities, volunteer, and contribute to social causes. This collective involvement enhances the social capital of a nation, strengthens communities and improves social welfare, *etc.* However, this may also come at the expense of individual rights and the quest for unity may also suppress diversity.

The challenge for contemporary societies is to forge a national ideology that is wide enough to include all citizens, regardless of their origins or beliefs, yet specific enough to provide a sense of belonging and shared purpose. National identity should not be seen as a static construct but

as a living process that evolves as the nation itself changes (see Ozkirimli 2023). In such ongoing negotiations, every citizen ideally would have the opportunity to contribute to the collective narrative and shape the nation's path forward.

In conclusion, national identity must not merely be a thing from the past, it is also about the present and the future. It can be seen as a living concept that contributes to a nation's unity, hopefully without compromising its diversity.

There are at least two principal ways Ireland as a country (not just the geographical location) is trying to promote itself. Firstly, as a hub of high-tech, globalised, innovative, open market and as a gateway to Europe for multinational (especially US) companies. On the other side, it cherishes and promotes its pastoral aspects, displaying rural, mystic, old (even Pre-Christian) traditions. This duality may appear contradictory, but it also reflects the complexity of Irish society and culture, where modernity struggles to coexists harmonically with tradition.

In this context, the construction of “invented tradition” (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1992) must be considered in more detail. Many practices, customs, and symbols that are perceived as ancient or deeply rooted in history, are in fact products of modern social and political processes – particularly from the 19th and 20th centuries. Such “traditions” were consciously constructed to serve specific purposes, such as consolidating power, fostering national cohesion, or legitimizing colonial or post-colonial authority. Some were strategically designed to create a sense of continuity and social cohesion, despite their often recent origins, thus revealing the dynamic and instrumentality of cultural practices in shaping societies. For example, the British monarchy in the context of the British Empire's height, particularly during the reign of Queen Victoria, began to re-establish and formalize royal pageantry and symbols as a means of consolidating national unity and reinforcing imperial authority. Rituals, such as state ceremonies, coronations, and royal processions, were often portrayed as ancient traditions, even though many were redefined, staged, or revived in the modern era to the needs of that time. One illustrative case is the contemporary revival, or reimagining, of Celtic Neo-paganism, sometimes referred to as “New Age Celtomania.” This phenomenon merges a romanticized commitment with imagined Celtic heritage with strong interests in mysticism and animistic forms of spirituality, drawing upon these as perceived integral components of its cultural framework. (see Pizza and Lewis 2009, p.479 - 480). This trend illustrates how some contemporary identity projects manoeuvre between historical reconstruction, romantic

nationalism, and globalized New Age spiritualities within a late modern framework of cultural hybridisation.

Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992) argue that the invention or reinvention of such traditions served a wider purpose. They create a sense of continuity, stability and authority, especially during times of political and social change, like the industrial revolution or the decline of the British Empire. By framing these rituals as ancient and deeply rooted in history, these helped legitimate modern institutions and structures of power, masking their more recent origins in the process.

Thus, “invented traditions” exemplify how political elites actively construct traditions to reinforce their authority and foster national unity, even though these practices had been deliberately shaped or revived rather than inherited from the past (see Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1992).

In order to improve the in-group cohesion, not only nationally shared habits and beliefs are required but also the existence of an out-group. The demarcation from an out-groups is essential for social identity and in-group coherence. It is therefore necessary to delineate clear borders between these two groups. While physical boarders may be relevant, it needs more mechanisms to create an even clearer demarcation of “us” and “them”. Depersonalization constitutes the fundamental mechanism underpinning various group phenomena, including social stereotyping, group cohesion, ethnocentrism, cooperative and altruistic behaviours, emotional contagion, and collective action, as articulated by Turner and colleagues. Through the process of self-identification with socially constructed categories, individuals enact behaviours that conform to the normative expectations associated with these categories, thereby operating within, referencing and actively reinforcing the prevailing social structure (for revs. see Abrams and Hogg, 1999). This process of “depersonalization” is a key to understanding this social phenomenon. Such processes can be observed in any conflict zone (like e.g., North Ireland), depending on who is asked. By identifying with a group, individuals adopt the group's perspective, thereby reinforcing social structures and delineating the boundaries of belonging. Adding to this aspect are the thoughts of Foucault on “Biopower” (*Biopouvoir*) “... *that the self both exists within society, and is influenced by society, because socially defined shared meanings are incorporated into one's prototype or identity standard. In addition, it would recognize that the self influences society, because individual agents act by changing social arrangements to bring the self into line with the abstract prototype/identity standard*” (Stets

and Burke 2000, p. 232). The ambiguity that the individual is both, influenced by the in-group as well as reproducing socio-cultural norms, emphasizes the complexity of national and social identity. These dual influences indicate the intricate ways in which the self exists within a society, being shaped by differing matrices that align with or challenges socio-cultural norms.

Language

A similar construct as “nation” can be noticed when looking at identity from a linguistic point of view. Accordingly, “self” can profoundly be influenced by language – a perspective that is supported by sociological viewpoints as expressed by Ashmore and Jussim (1997): *“Danziger argues that two classes of societal-level factors, which he terms ‘formative practices,’ are pivotal in constructing the framework of selfhood within which individuals must develop. The first, ‘technologies of self’, he borrows from Foucault (1986, 1988). These are socially accepted, and often institutionally supported, procedures for action that have implicit or explicit implications for the types of selves that individuals can have,...”* and *“Next, Danziger underlines the central role that language plays in delimiting and shaping the selves that individuals can experience and enact”* (Ashmore and Jussim 1997, p. 15). As suggested, societal constructs like “technologies of self”, a concept borrowed from Foucault, shape the possibilities for our identities. These constructs are not only socially accepted, but also institutionally supported, guiding individuals towards certain self-conceptions.

Later, Engelke (2018) reflects on language ideologies and offers insight into our understanding of social hierarchies, values, and even our conception of reality: *“Our language ideologies tell us something about how we understand such concerns as the order of things and the nature of authority, what values are important, and even what we take reality to be”* (Engelke 2018, p.177). Accordingly, language is a powerful tool that can segregate as much as it can unite.

There are many different dialects in Ireland, however the role of these can not be discussed here in detail. Still, the tensions between the use of English and Gaelic indicate such conflicts. Considering that Gaelic is one of the official languages in Ireland, it seems obvious that its use or the avoidance has an impact on the concept of identity. English, however, may be seen as the language of modernity and globalization while Gaelic represents a connection to Ireland's historical and cultural roots. A proportion of the older generation, especially in the rural areas is still using Gaelic while the younger and urban society usually uses English (compare Fig. 1).

Although the use of Gaelic is decreasing, there are still governmental programs to promote this language. One can find Gaelic schools as well as clubs, which are determined to keep the historical traditions alive.

Individual Identity

From a historic perspective, an evolution of the “self” from its medieval underpinnings to the modern-day conceptualizations can be observed. The Enlightenment period, with its focus on reason and individualism, marked a departure from the previous concept of the self. From being merely as a sinful entity, the perception changed towards an understanding that is anchored in personal agency and intellectual autonomy. This philosophy implies the self's journey from the peripheries of moral deficiency to the centre stage of philosophical and empirical inquiry. Thus: *“When the English word ‘self’ first appeared as a noun, around 1300, it has the negative connotations derived from a long tradition of seeing the individual primarily as a sinner...”* (Ashmore and Jussim, 1997, p. 143-144). These negative nuances changed over the years, especially under the influence of the enlightenment. Therefore: *“The self became a term used to describe those observable phenomena that defined an individual's unity and identity. This observation was, however, private and introspective. The self was a private possession that each individual discovered in him or herself, which meant that it could become an object of concern as well as an object of knowledge. ... Individuals learn how important the good opinion of others is to their welfare and therefore seek to influence that opinion by appropriate conduct”* (Ashmore and Jussim 1997, p. 143-144). Ashmore and Jussim underlined the clear distinction between the private self or personality and the public appearance of a person which may or may not differ from this private identity. Therefore, an individual can show multiple identities under different circumstances.

Before getting deeper into the subject, different points of view should be considered. Firstly, some regard an individual's concept of identity as a fixed, internal characteristic that remains unchanged over time. Others see identity as a fluid, dynamic process that is constantly evolving, based on individual experiences and interactions with the world around them. Post-Enlightenment philosophies, particularly in the existentialist and post-structuralist movements,

further influenced our understanding of identity. The individual “self” has been deconstructed and scrutinized through lenses that reveal its contingency upon language, culture, and power dynamics (Gaither 2018). Consequently, identity cannot be static nor singular but is fluid, multifaceted, and often contested. *“Like the Greek god Proteus, one takes on whatever forms and qualities that a particular life situation demands. One juggles multiple roles, tries on different hats, different lives, forging selves whose unity is at best tentative and provisional, selves waiting to be dissolved into new combinations or even discarded for brand new editions when life changes and new challenges arise. The multiplicity of the protean self exists in both a temporal and a spatial sense. Over time, people change, new selves replace or improve upon the old. In a given time period, too, across social space and roles, a person assumes many different personas — “wife,” “mother,” “member of the church council,” “tennis player,” “party girl,” “friend of Louise.” As James foretold, there are perhaps as many potential social selves as there are significant social audiences”* (Ashmore and Jussim 1997, p. 48). Such fluidity is pronounced in the current global culture, being characterized by a constant flow of information, migration, and cultural exchange. The 'self' in the 21st century is a node in an expanding network of identities, each influenced by global events, transnational narratives, and local contexts. The interconnectivity of today's world has brought about a renegotiation of identity, where traditional markers such as nationality, ethnicity, and even gender are reimagined under the pressures of globalization and technological advancement.

In light of these complexities, examining identity through an interdisciplinary lens is not just beneficial, but imperative. Sociology, anthropology, psychology, and cultural studies each contribute essential insights into the formation and expression of a personality. From these contributions, a more holistic vision of what constitutes the “self” can be deduced, one that is diverse, dynamic, and continually changing. The pursuit of understanding identity is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a vital endeavour that mirrors the complex human quest for meaning, belonging, and self-realization in an ever-evolving world.

Consequently, it appears that identity is not a static and unchangeable characteristic – even if some might think or even wish so. Instead, individual as well as social identity are in constant change. Engelke (2018) asserts that *“Identity is relative. Events always matter to the equation of identity. So do circumstance, perspective, and location. Every social scientist who has ever written about identity seems to make this point. Identity is relative. It is calibrated to the other”*

(Engelke 2018, p. 167). This idea indicates that identity is not a stagnant artifact but a living construct, being continuously shaped and reshaped by an array of external and internal forces. The fluctuating nature of identity is emblematic of the human condition, our responses to “events, circumstances, perspectives, and locations” are results of our inherent adaptability to the mutable environments in which we exist.

The notion that an individual personality may transform more rapidly than that of a social collective underscores the individual's ability to pivot quickly in response to changing life circumstances. However, when social collectives evolve at a pace that outstrips the individual's capacity to adapt, a disjunction can occur, potentially leaving individuals feeling alienated or “left behind”. This phenomenon relates to the feeling of accelerating changes in today's society, which is catalysed by technological advancements and shifting cultural landscapes. Such rapid transformations can challenge the individual's sense of belonging and coherence.

As indicated before, the concept of identity also includes the idea of a self-concept, in other words one's individual perception of him or herself. This is shaped by personal experiences, their upbringing, interactions with others, the social surrounding as well as social expectations. The self-concept may be positive or negative, depending on the actual point of view. It directly impacts the self-esteem and sense of self-worth.

Engelke's reflection on the evolving self-concept reinforces the personal dimension of identity. The multitude of experiences, upbringings, interactions, and societal expectations that form our self-concept are the crucibles within which our self-esteem and self-worth are forged “*So that stereotypical teenager's question - Who am I? - is now increasingly complemented by a more open-ended, postmodern question: Who do I want to be?*” (Engelke 2018, p. 168).

Engelke thus raises an important question, which demonstrates the changes of meaning of identity. On one hand, identity can be seen as a result of influences, with the individual similar to a (passive) recipient. On the other hand, the individual plays an active and conscious role in shaping their own identity. However, in my understanding, the truth is, as always, somewhere in between. It seems that the conscious creation of the personal identity requires a rather reflected personality. This kind of people, however is rather scarce. The dichotomy between the passive reception of influences and the active formation of an identity is a pivotal consideration. While some individuals may navigate their identities with conscious intent and reflection, others may find themselves less engaged in the deliberate construction of their self-concept.

Narrative Identity

A different facet of the “self” that has to be considered, is the role of the narrative identity. This identity is constructed from the internalized and evolving history of the self that integrates the (reconstructed) past and (imagined) future in order to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose (compare e.g., McAdams and McLean 2013). Within this narrative framework, individuals script their lives, attributing meaning to experiences and formulate their identities from culture, social interaction and personal discourses. Narrative identity, thus, is the internalized, stored sense of self that each person develops over time. It is how individuals make sense of their lives as a chronological coherent whole. According to McAdams and McLean, people create personal myths or narratives to provide their lives with unity, purpose, and meaning (McAdams and McLean 2013, p. 233).

Such narratives are not static, they evolve as people encounter new experiences and reinterpret old ones. The process of constructing a narrative identity is shaped by cultural norms and values, which provide the scripts, symbols, and stories that people draw upon to understand their place in the world. Narrative identity is also constructed from social interactions, as individuals share their stories with others and negotiate their personal narratives within the broader cultural discourse.

Analysing narrative identity involves examination of themes, imagery and plot lines that individuals use to story their lives. It also entails how these personal narratives incorporate or resist more general cultural narratives. For instance, an individual may adopt a cultural narrative of upward mobility and success by framing the individual life story as a journey of perseverance and achievement. Conversely, a counter-narrative may be constructed that challenge’s dominant cultural themes, perhaps by focusing on motifs of resistance and social justice.

In the context of cultural anthropology, the examination of narrative identities can reveal the intricate ways in which culture, society, and individual psychology intersect. By analysing the stories that people tell about themselves, anthropologists can gain insights about how social structures and cultural expectations shape individual experiences and how individuals, in turn, contribute to the dynamic process of cultural development.

Social Identity

Identity often refers to specific and distinctive characteristics which can define on an individual scale who a person is. As already mentioned, this includes various aspects of an individual's life, including their beliefs, values, experiences, personality traits, interests, habits and social affiliations. Engelke (2018) talks about individuals and identity: *“The fact that we often treat “individual” and “person” as synonymous is proof of how important the person centered associations have become... “* (Engelke 2018, p. 163-164). This interpretation underscores the significance of the individual within a cultural milieu, suggesting that our understanding of “personality” is deeply entwined with the sociocultural constructs that embed us.

Engelke refers to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), as published by the United Nation in 1948 and how the UDHR defines a very specific vision of humanity that is centred on the individual. Accordingly, the individual functions form the most fundamental unit within a cultural context. However, some would argue that it is not desirable or even possible to exist outside of a cultural context. Rather the specific cultural context facilitates the definition of an “individual” or “personality”. Accordingly, our identities would invariably be linked to the cultural and social frameworks that shape our existence. Ashmore and Jussim (1997) echo this sentiment by highlighting the versatility of the self, that is capable of adapting to the demands of various situations: *“The self is infinitely flexible, he (the self) asserts, able to transform itself into almost any form that the situation demands”* (Ashmore and Jussim 1997, p. 47). Such an adaptability suggests a form of plasticity of the individual, where the self may be seen as a chameleon that can alter its hues in response to the (social) environment.

Following the arguments of social constructivism, one could reason that the discussed attributes of the individual are conditioned by the social identity as well. The latter could be seen as a sense of self that is derived from participation in a particular social group or social context. The characteristics that define us, as in our values, beliefs and attitudes, would therefore be inextricably tied to our social identity. Social identity would therefore be shaped by various factors like shared interests, education, social class, ethnicity, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation. All these factors may influence individual values, beliefs, attitudes and consequently behaviours. They do not just influence our sense of self, they actively shape it.

Such factors would be instrumental to mould our perceptions, guide our behaviour and foster our sense of belonging. Thus, the interrelation between the individual and the social net is a dynamic one. While we may perceive ourselves as distinct entities, our sense of self is constantly being negotiated within the collective sphere. The social groups to which we belong then serve as reference points for our personality, providing the backdrop against which our personal narratives unfold. Within the interplay of these social dimensions, our individual identities are both constructed and expressed. Consequently, in my opinion, an identity might not just be a reflection of personal attributes but also a product of the social fabric.

When analysing identity at the individual level, the main subject is the concept of “self” or self awareness. *“Self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications This process is called self-categorization in social identity theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987); in identity theory it is called identification (McCall and Simmons 1978)”* (in Stets and Burke 2000, p. 224).

Following these thoughts, the self cannot exist in a social or cultural vacuum. The “self” needs an opposite, other individuals or “categories” to identify the self. The “others” can be classified roughly into two main groups. The in-group, where the individual feels to be a part of and the out-group as an opposite. The *“in-group identification leads to greater commitment to the group and to less desire to leave the group, even when the group's status is relatively low (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1997). Social identification is one of the prime bases for participation in social movements (Simon, Loewy, Stuermer, Weber, Freytag, Habig, Kampmeier, and Spahlinger 1998)”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 226).

This perspective is not solely rooted in avoidance of fear or social ostracism. Rather, it is based on the intrinsic human tendency to form cohesive groups, which in turn confer benefits to their members. Colloquially said, humans are gregarious and peer pressure should not be belittled. The often unconscious fear of losing one’s peer group and/or social status is a strong force that may be determining for the actions of an individual. However, unconscious fear is not the primary driving reason why individuals form groups. Nevertheless, it is favourable to be surrounded by like minded people and a strong in-group is beneficial for its members. Based on these functions, a general social identity is developed were the individuals follow a consensus of behavioural norms as well as a belief system that is collectively endorsed.

The social group or in-group consists of individuals who are united by a common social identification or a feeling of belonging to the same category. Within this framework, a collective self-esteem is bolstered by positively contrasting the in-group against the out-group. *“... is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. This accentuation occurs (ideally) for all the attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, styles of speech, and other properties that are believed to be correlated with the relevant intergroup categorization. Specifically, one's self-esteem is enhanced by evaluating the in-group and the out-group on dimensions that lead the in-group to be judged positively and the out-group to be judged negatively”* (Stets & Burke 2000, p. 225-227). As these authors point out, the in-group shares numerous attributes, while the main belief system remains more or less coherent.

In more detailed analyses of an “individual” position, additional small divergences become noticeable. This holds especially true in hierarchically structured social groups. Nevertheless, the system of shared beliefs overrules these nuances, thus the in-group is judged positively and as superior to the out-group. In many cases, that may even lead to the feeling of moral superiority, where the out-group can be dehumanised to create an image of an enemy. Stets and Burke (2000) continue arguing that the unique combination of social categories to which a person belongs shapes their identity or self-concept: *“Once in society, people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong. Each person, however, over the course of his or her personal history, is a member of a unique combination of social categories; therefore the set of social identities making up that person's self-concept is unique”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 225-227). Although this statement seems logical, one could argue that the “unique” concept of self might also be strongly affected by a shared history. For example, experiences like “the troubles” in Ireland may play a significant role in the history of an individual and therefore in the concept of one's self.

The model of intersectionality may explain why this “personal self concept” can be seen as unique. However, on a wider spectrum, there are many individuals and social groups who experienced similar or even the same events and therefore have more or less the same historical, cultural and social background. Therefore, when social identities are shared, maybe their concept of self is not entirely exclusive. This indicates the complexity of intersectionality; the self-concept, while inherently personal, is inextricably linked to broader social narratives.

In defining the concept of “self”, the personal history is of course the most important aspect. Ashmore and Jussim (1997) discuss different elements which should be considered when analysing identity. They refer especially to the life history story construct that is built on the self-consistency motive and aims to harmonize the past, present, and anticipated future selves: *“... predicated on a form of the self-consistency motive: the desire to integrate one's past and present with anticipated future selves. A key element of social identity theory, as described by Peggy A. Thoits and Lauren K. Virshup, is that people choose particular intergroup comparison dimensions in order to maintain the most positive self-esteem possible ... As Thoits and Virshup note, a particularly important source of self-definition is social-group membership, including roles ("I am a father") and demographic categories ...”* (Ashmore and Jussim, 1997, p. 7). These multiple self-definitions coalesce into structures that are represented by various models that illustrate how personal and social identities interact to form our complex self-systems.

Role identity is a central concept in identity theory. The role(s) that a subject plays in the own life story is a key component of identity. *“In identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance (Burke and Tully 1977; Thoits 1986)”* (Stets and Burke, 2000 p. 225-227). The role that an individual takes should certainly feel like being unique. This uniqueness of one's role is integral to a sense of indispensability and contributes to the commitment to a community and overall mental health. If that would not be the case, one might feel exchangeable and that might have a negative impact to the individual's dedication to the community. *“Much of the meaningful activity within a role that is governed by an identity revolves around the control of resources (Burke 1997); this feature as much as anything, defines social structure ... Individuals do not view them-selves as similar to the others with whom they interact, but as different, with their own interests, duties, and resources. Each role is related to, but set apart from, counter roles; often the interests compete, so that proper role performance can be achieved only through negotiation”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 225-227). Of course, such negotiations can take place in different ways, especially also in relation to “resources” which are obtainable.

In a more complex setting, the social identity theories become implemented. *“Social identity theorists regard the group as a collective of similar persons all of whom identify with each*

other, see them-selves and each other in similar ways, and hold similar views, all in contrast to members of outgroups. Identity theorists regard the group as a set of interrelated individuals, each of whom performs unique but integrated activities, sees things from his or her own perspective, and negotiates the terms of interaction. ... A full understanding of society must incorporate both the organic/group and the mechanical/role form because each is only one aspect of society that links to individual identities in separate but related ways. ... Not only can we not easily disentangle group identities from role identities; we also cannot easily separate the group and role identity from the person idea” (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 228). A comprehensive understanding of society thus requires consideration of both, group dynamics and individual role performance, as they are inherently intertwined with personal identity.

While the interpretation of Stets and Burke (2000) on role identity is probably correct, they propose a theoretical separability of group and role identities. However, it may be questionable if group and role identity can (or even should) be separated as they are rather interdependent. For the individual, even if the group and role identity are not coherent, they at least condition each other. If the group identity shifts, so does the role – and if the personally identity/role changes, the group changes as well, may be transformed or even switched. *“Overall, people need to balance the demands of role identities with the demands of person identities. (Stets 1995)”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 229). Balancing the demands of these aspects of the identities is essential for maintaining harmony within the self and the social structure.

Social identity theory posits that identities are organized hierarchically and become active depending on situational stimuli and the salience of self-categorization. *“...identities also are considered in a relative way because different identities are organized in a hierarchy of inclusiveness. Three levels are generically involved: a superordinate level such as "human," an intermediate level (e.g., Irish) and a subordinate level (e.g., Unionist or Republican). Different identities become active as the situation changes and as relevant stimuli for self-categorization change. ... Identity theory focuses on social structural arrangements and the link between persons; social identity theory focuses on characteristics of situations in which the identity may be activated; both the theories acknowledge the importance of the individual's goals and purposes. Thus an understanding of the conditions for the probability of and the actual activation of an identity can be found. Both theories agree that an identity has no effect without activation”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 231). So, infrastructure and the social situation determine

the identity, which is used in the actual social setting, however, not only to reach individual goals but also to fill to the appropriate role for the in-group.

The cultural influence on the concepts of self and identity must not be overlooked. Generally, a differentiation between a “Western” autonomous self concept and a non-Western, predominantly socially defined self can be observed. *“Shweder and Bourne (1984), summarizing a large amount of cross-cultural literature, identify two ideal types of self: the Western concept of person that is autonomous, acontextual, abstract, and independent opposed to a non-Western self that is context dependent, concrete, and socially denned”* (Ashmore and Jussim 2000, p. 165). Although this argument could be seen as oversimplification and culturally biased, this could also indicate that the concepts of self and identity might also differ in different cultures and societies. Accordingly, in a general sense, two culturally different concepts can be identified, *i.e.*, the “egocentric contractual” and the “socio-centric organic”. Ashmore and Jussim (2000) comment on Alfred Irving Hallowell: *“... self-awareness and self-reflexivity were universal, species-given characteristics ... yet at the same time he argued that many seemingly natural aspects of the self are, in fact, culturally shaped to the extent that they cannot be universally interpreted”* (Ashmore and Jussim, 2000, p. 165). This somehow contradictory statement shows that although self-awareness and self-reflection might be universal, the degree in which they are practised in everyday life is strongly shaped by the surrounding. Thus, although self-awareness and self-reflexivity are universal, their expression and application are culturally contingent. This underscores the profound impact of the cultural context and the influence of the in-group on identity formation. *“Clearly a person’s social position—defined by gender, race, class, and any other social division that is structurally significant—potentially affects one’s perspective on cultural institutions and the ardours of one’s subscription to the values and interpretations that are promoted in rituals and other socially produced cultural forms”* (Ashmore and Jussim 2000, p. 168). This statement highlights the multifaceted nature of a personality, being not only psychologically and socially but also culturally dependent. This concept also emphasizes the dynamic nature of identity that is shaped by a confluence of role expectations, group affiliations, and cultural frameworks.

Ashmore and Jussim (1997) address such different but equally important aspects when analysing identity. There are *“two critical contrasts (multiplicity vs. unity, personal vs. social) and three crucial contexts (history, culture, and society) for understanding self and identity”*

(Ashmore and Jussim 1997, p. 3-5). They continue by highlighting the relativity of this concept of identity and show in which light that concept of identity can be seen “*we have not imposed specific meanings on the terms self and identity. These words point to large, amorphous, and changing phenomena that defy hard and fast definitions*” (Ashmore and Jussim, 1997, p. 3-5). Their resistance to impose rigid definitions on “self” and “identity” underscores the recognition that these constructs are vast and subject of continual reinterpretation. Such acknowledgment indicates the importance of maintaining an open and flexible approach when examining identity.

In synthesizing the perspectives mentioned above, it becomes apparent that identity is a result of the interplay between the unique characteristics of the individual and the social affiliations. Thus, the personal beliefs, behaviours, and sense of self are not just expressed but also continually negotiated. The tension between being a rather passive product of influence and an active architect of the own personality requires ongoing negotiation between the inner world of the self and the outer world of the collective. It is therefore essential to consider social connections in delineating the concepts of Irish self-image.

Accordingly, the structure of the self within the contemporary discourse is multifaceted. It may be seen as both, a product of and an actor within the cultural sphere. Society's discourses and practices act as tools that can either suppress or liberate, thus shaping the self in profound ways. “*For the socially constructed self, in contrast, discourses and practices are tools, and the self an object of such tools. In the new debates, in other words, socially empowered discourses and practices of the self appear in a different light. They are tools of construction—perhaps tools of oppression, perhaps tools of liberation*” (Ashmore and Jussim 2000, p. 171-172). This nuanced understanding of the self recognizes the impact of power relations and institutional infrastructures. The authors suggest that the self is not only moulded by these forces but also serves as an active tool that can modify and reinterpret them. The plurality of self/identity/personality is another critical aspect, which recognizes the self as a site of multiple, overlapping identities. So Ashmore and Justin (2000) conclude: “... *we can discern at least three interrelated components of a theoretical refiguring of the relationship between culture and self. First, culturally and socially constructed discourses and practices of the self, differentiated by relations of power and the institutional infrastructure associated with them, are recognized by latter-day research as living tools of the self—as media that figure the self constitutively, in open-ended ways. Second, the self is treated as process. Third, sites of self are*

recognized as plural” (Ashmore and Jussim 2000, p. 171-172). As a consequence, each individual embodies a collection of roles and affiliations, each with an own script and set of expectations. These various “sites of self” contribute to the rich diversity of personal identities and underscore the impossibility of reducing the self to a single dimension.

Ashmore and Jussim (1997) also bring up the work of other postmodernists who view the self as a malleable narrative being shaped by social discourse. *“Self and identity are necessary to the study of group and intergroup processes and relations...(because) self and identity figure in the production and reproduction of societies and cultures”* (Ashmore and Jussim 1997, p. 12). In other words: Our identities are not fixed but are continuously rewritten as we navigate different social contexts. This narrative fluidity is reflected in the diverse life stories that individuals construct, influenced by their gender, class, and the broader socio-political landscape. Ashmore and Jussim also comment: *“Sampson (1989a, 1989b), and other postmodern scholars view the self as an indeterminate “text” that is continually created and recreated through social discourse”* (Ashmore and Jussim, 1977, p. 49). Following this postmodern concept and including this view in the concept of “life story” it is particularly important in which social context the individual participates. This emphasizes the flexible individual character of the concept of self/identity/personality and shows its social and individual interdependence. By recognizing this fluidity, we can better appreciate the interplay between individual self-concepts and wider social identities. The personal image intersects with the prevailing cultural narratives, creating a complex tapestry of identity that is unique and yet interconnected with the social network of society.

How do groups and individuals use the concept of identity to mobilize for social change or to solidify power structures? This discussion might explore identity politics, the role of ideology in social movements and the state's interests in shaping national or cultural identities. Engelke (2008) states: *“Identity is a major tool of self- definition, of political mobilization and action, of governance, and of course, as the moody teenager knows, philosophical reflection.”* He continues: *“if (identity) speaks to something that we often think is deep and abiding within us, even if circumstances or the forces of history try to keep it down or erase it”* (Engelke, 2018, p. 161-162). Following this description, it seems that identity is embedded in every individual, as a tool of self-definition and empowerment. However, I would argue it is not quite that simple.

The impact of personal identity on role and group identities can be profound. However, as these social identities solidify, they may in turn shape personal identities. This indicates a complex interplay between the personal and the social self. *“For example, person identities may influence role and group identities when they are first taken on. Once a role or group identity becomes established, however, person identities may have little impact. A salient social identity was ‘one which is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one’s membership in that group on perception and behaviour’ (Oakes 1987:118). In identity theory, salience has been understood as the probability that an identity will be activated in a situation (Stryker 1980)”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 229). Thus, identity theory posits that the likelihood of an identity being invoked, its salience, is distinct from its actual enactment in any given situation its activation. Social identity theory, however, often conflates these two concepts, treating them as one and the same. *“Employing this view, identity theorists distinguish between the probability that an identity will be activated (salience) and that an identity actually will be played out in a situation (activation). In contrast, social identity theorists have tended to merge the concepts of activation and salience, and to equate them”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 230). Stets and Burke (2000) further conclude: *“We argue that identities referring to groups or roles are motivated by self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-consistency, and self-regulation”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 233). That argument can be confirmed by everyday observations. Such motivations resonate with the common observations, that individuals seek roles and group affiliations that validate their self-concept and facilitate their goals. Accordingly, Engelke seems to focus more on individual components while Stets and Burke emphasize the social factors that influence the development of identity.

Stets and Burke (2000) summarise and synthesize the distinctions between identity theory and social identity theory, noting that the former emphasizes roles as the foundation of identity, while the latter focuses on group affiliation as the primary determinant: *“For the most part, the differences originated in a view of the group as the basis for identity (who one is) held by social identity theory and in a view of the role as a basis for identity (what one does) held by identity theory (Thoits and Virshup 1997)”* (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 234). This conceptual division highlights the different dimensions through which individuals define themselves and are perceived by others. An example for such a division would be the divergent opinions of Unionist and Loyalists.

In conclusion, identity is a multifaceted construct that is influenced by various factors, including group affiliations and roles. This is both, a personal and a social phenomenon, continuously shaped by interactions with another and the broader cultural context. This complex portrait of identity underlines the significance of understanding individual internal dynamics and external societal forces. In the case of Ireland, such considerations shed light on the subtle balance between the individual and the collective image. Irish society, with its dual aspirations to both, global modernity and cherished tradition, stands as an example of how identities are negotiated and expressed on a national stage.

Globalization and the Individual: The Multiplicity of Self

Globalization facilitated the creation of an interconnected world where traditional boundaries are increasingly blurred, leading to the emergence of even more complex identity dynamics. At the heart of these dynamics lies the tension between the personal self and social identity.

Inventing Tradition and Facing History

In the context of globalization, traditions may become both invented and re-invented to serve contemporary needs, often as a response to homogenizing pressures of global culture. This phenomenon can preserve certain aspects of cultural heritage while simultaneously adapting to modern narratives. An example might be the St. Patrick's day celebrations around the Globe, with events like the dyeing of rivers in New York or Chicago. It allows individuals to connect with a collective history that is both imagined and real, thus shaping their social identities in relation to a shared, even fictional past.

Online platforms expanded the arena wherein identities are constructed. The digital age is giving rise to "online identities" that individuals curate, reflecting an amalgam of their personal self and how they wish to be perceived socially. The ability to mould one's digital personality has profound implications on the self-concept and expression of identity roles within virtual spaces.

Personal Self Versus Social Identity

The interplay between the personal self and social identity is complex. Ashmore and Jussim (1997) suggest that the social self is multifaceted, with a spectrum of selves corresponding to the significant others in an individual's life. They state: “*The social self, in particular, had as many selves as there were important others in the person's life*” (compare also Mead 1934). In this light, encountering a new person could potentially give rise to a new self, one that evolves as the new social bond is constructed and solidified.

This multiplicity of the self is not limited to face-to-face interactions any more. Social media and online networks have exponentially multiplied the number of “important others”, thus expanding the potential selves one may display. The question if each new online connection contributes to a new persona becomes increasingly relevant in the digital age.

Anticipating this sentiment, William James (1890) already points out the fluidity and diversity of social selves, emphasizing that an individual “... *has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him*” (James 1890, p. 294). Thus, the variability of the social roles is not a modern development but a longstanding aspect of the human condition, which is now amplified by the reach and immediacy of global connectivity.

In conclusion, it may be stated that identity is a dynamic process rather than a fixed state. The “journey of the self” is an interplay of cultural imposition and personal action. Thus, the self is not merely planted in a cultural and social context, it is also an active creator of that context.

Irish Identity

As noted, the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, within Ireland and abroad, may serve as a pertinent example of how traditions can embody both, the ancient and the contemporary. This holiday evolved from its religious origins and became a global celebration of Irishness, complete with mythological and historical connotations. Yet, it is also a day that showcases Ireland's modern face, with parades featuring cutting-edge technology and a celebration of contemporary Irish culture. Accordingly, considering such duality of Ireland's self-promotion,

it is clear that “Irish” identity is a dynamic construct. It is a living dialogue between the past and the present, the personal and the social, the global and the local.

Nevertheless, as already indicated, Irish “self” can not be understood without considering historical as well as many recent traumatization’s of the collective (and many individuals) mind. So aside Irish stereotypes like e.g., music, poetry or a disposition for quarrelling, that may also represent significant behavioural traits, it is important to consider some of the experiences that shaped the political, social and individual realities.

Social Movement and Protest in Ireland

Ireland is a nation that is continuously wrestling with its identity through social movements and protests. From historical conflicts to contemporary issues, the Irish experience of protest is both a reflection of and a response to the changing trends of social and political life. As the world becomes more interconnected, the Irish developments provide a lens through which the universal phenomena of social movements and the quest for identity and change can be observed.

As mentioned before, consequences of the British occupation, or arguably colonialism, were the Irish revolution, also known as the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) as well as “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland. The latter involved the deployment of British Troops (1969) until the Good Friday Agreement (1998). The St. Andrews Agreement (2006) can be regarded as a prominent step in a long line of continuous struggling. Throughout these periods, the objectives of the various interest groups evolved, reflecting the changing nature of Irish (and English) social and political life. However, it must also be considered that the commonly agreed goals changed during that time, depending on which interest group is analysed.

The history of Ireland can be understood as a story of protests, demonstrations, rebellions, uprisings, and violence. Protest were a common practice, especially for farmers. *“Protest was often traditionalist rather than political radical and usually targeted at innovation and interruption to what were perceived to be traditional forms of rural life”* (Paseta 2003, p. 7). While these movements had a traditionalist bent, they also aimed to address threats to survival and the fulfilment of basic human needs.

Nearly all traditional history is clearly dominated by topics like protest, war and revolutions. Nevertheless, different practices of less violent social resistance, as experienced and performed by different actors, represent a long, even ongoing, conflict as well.

The principal actors in Ireland's history of conflict are diverse, like the Irish Republican Army (IRA) as well as other political actors on the Irish side and British forces, their army, police and also Unionist groups as opponents. Naturally, these parties are inhomogeneous entities, being

conglomerations of different individuals and political characteristics with a wide array of political beliefs, methods, and objectives.

This chapter can not delve into the specific political agendas but will instead highlight the actions of the various parties, their methods of protest and their societal impacts. Therefore, the focus lies not entirely on the times of war (before the Good Friday Agreement in 1998). It might also be particularly interesting to examine the influence of such protests in the light of contemporary events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when protests around the world shaped the public discourse. Accordingly, it is attempted here to show how different types of protest had and still have an impact on today's society.

When this paragraph was written in the COVID-19 pandemic, the media were mainly dominated by numbers of infected people and socio-political actions. Governmental and private organisations were trying to prevent these numbers from rising and also to deal with the numerous protests that were challenging the dominant narrative.

While investigating on this topic, it became clear that large number of papers, articles and an even bigger number of online postings deal with some sort of social movement. Widespread demonstrations against COVID-19 measures occurred worldwide. These were called COVID protests but should better have been termed Anti-COVID restrictions protests. It can be argued if these protests went past their immediate causes, serving as outlets to disclose other more general systemic problems and to show a broader set of frustrations. Also in Austria, in cities like Vienna or even in smaller towns, protests took place that mirrored the global pattern of unwillingness.

What may such transnational protests have in common? The perception of protests and social resistance by larger media outlets (*i.e.*, those with a bigger market share) often presents a simplified narrative, depicting these as well organized and homogeneous entities. They were frequently displayed as having right political undertones or at least as sharing a common political agenda. However, particularly in the case of the protests against COVID-19 restrictions, personal observations revealed a much more heterogeneous picture. The protests showed a conglomeration consisting of many different ideologies. Accordingly, the protests against some COVID-19 measures may serve as a general model for social effects of protesting.

Protesters are creating and using such events with widely different motivations and goals. Within all protests, there are also some who use the platform for self-promotion or to pursue individualistic objectives. Others align with more collective or community-oriented targets. The demand of some sort of change (whether realistic or not doesn't matter at this point) is often articulated. Nevertheless, many participants just express their personal fears and emotions. The calls for change, irrespective of their feasibility, serve as a common base that unites the participants. Thus, protests typically bring together a diverse array of social groups and individuals, each with distinct motivations and ideologies. This diversity is characterized by a spectrum of individual tendencies that manifest in various ways. Such gatherings therefore may become melting pots of differing motivations, means, reasons, and goals. In addition, they form or improve social bonds by participating in a common social event.

In the context of the COVID-19 protests, a remarkable wide ideological and social range of participants was present. From personal observations, it became evident that some participants were certainly right winged. However, on a more theoretical level, the term "right" might not perfectly fit because they were advocating for less political control and state involvement. Some were conspirators, some were just unhappy with their current situation, some just portrayed as "right" by the media and others might even have been curious spectators.

A similar scenario can generally be observed in many of the Ireland-specific conflicts as well. Social movements are far from uniform, showing various factions, groups, and individuals who present a wide array of demands and aspirations. A common feature among protests in Ireland (and worldwide) is the convergence of different voices seeking to express their discontent and aspirations. Protests become stages where personal and collective narratives intersect and the interplay of individual identities and social dynamics unfolds in public view. As in Ireland's past and present, these movements serve as catalysts for discourse and change, reflecting the multifaceted nature of human societies.

In the long history of protest and civil war in Ireland, that legacy of protest and civil unrest extends well beyond the commonly perceived end of hostilities in the 1990s. Incidents of violence have sporadically occurred, punctuating the uneasy peace. Although the intensity of the conflict known as "The Troubles" significantly diminished, isolated episodes of violence emerged in the subsequent decades.

Some still feel uneasy about the status quo and possible future developments. The anxiety surrounding the Brexit negotiations exacerbated the latent hostility with fears that violence might re-emerge if the delicate balance achieved by the Good Friday Agreement is disturbed.

Such fears were still present even after the Brexit was executed. Despite the relative calmness, protests still continue in Ireland, sparked by diverse issues and taking various forms. During the COVID-19 infestation, there were anti-lockdown demonstrations on several occasions like in many other cities all over the world. For instance, the anti-lockdown demonstration on February 27th, 2021 resulted in violent clashes with the Garda (see Feehan 2021). These protests were not solely triggered by pandemic-related restrictions but can also be interpreted as response to broader changes that disrupt what is perceived as 'normal' life.

However, not only the pandemic and governmental restrictions on the “normal” everyday life brings people to the streets (or their social medium of choice). Also historically, authority imposed changes have often initiated protests, some more successful than others.

When the long discussed Brexit finally took place, this left Ireland and especially Northern Ireland in an interesting and peculiar predicament. Currently, there are no border checkpoints between Ireland and Northern Ireland (and according to public announcements there will not be any). The effective UK-EU border is placed in the Irish Sea, thus trying to align with both, the Good Friday Agreement and the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. This new arrangement, while averting a “hard” land border, introduces its own set of logistical challenges (see also Morchid and O’Mahony 2019).

Boarder inspections now take place on the British island, depending on the origin of the transported goods and their designation. Still, as this agreement might only be temporary, as this is not the end of the controversy. Instead, it fuels ongoing disputes and uncertainties, particularly regarding the status of Northern Ireland. Old protests and political discourses continue with additional broader questions of ideology and sovereignty. Furthermore, other British territories are promoting their independence, like e.g., Scotland.

Accordingly, the Irish situation is complicated by historical grievances, Brexit's aftermath, and current global tensions. The interplay between past agreements, present adjustments, and future

aspirations keeps the island at the heart of debates about governance, identity, and the rights of communities as well as the relations between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

The resulting information gap may be illustrated by the frequency of some of the pertinent Google® information requests:

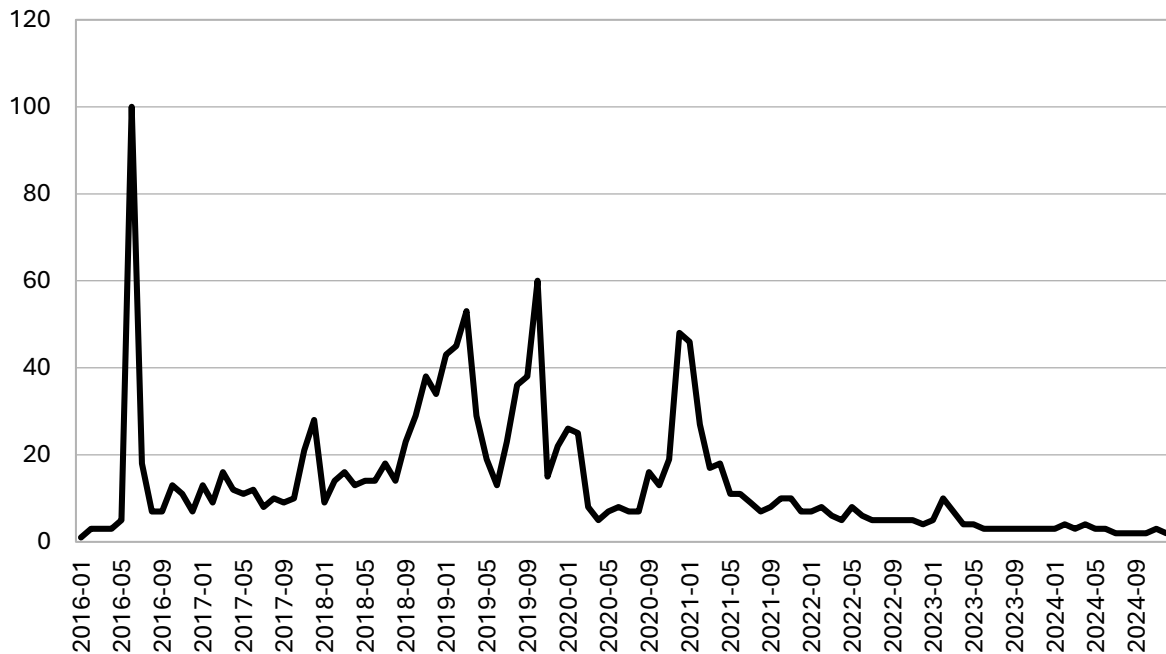


Figure 3a: Google Trends - information requests; Keywords: Brexit, Ireland;

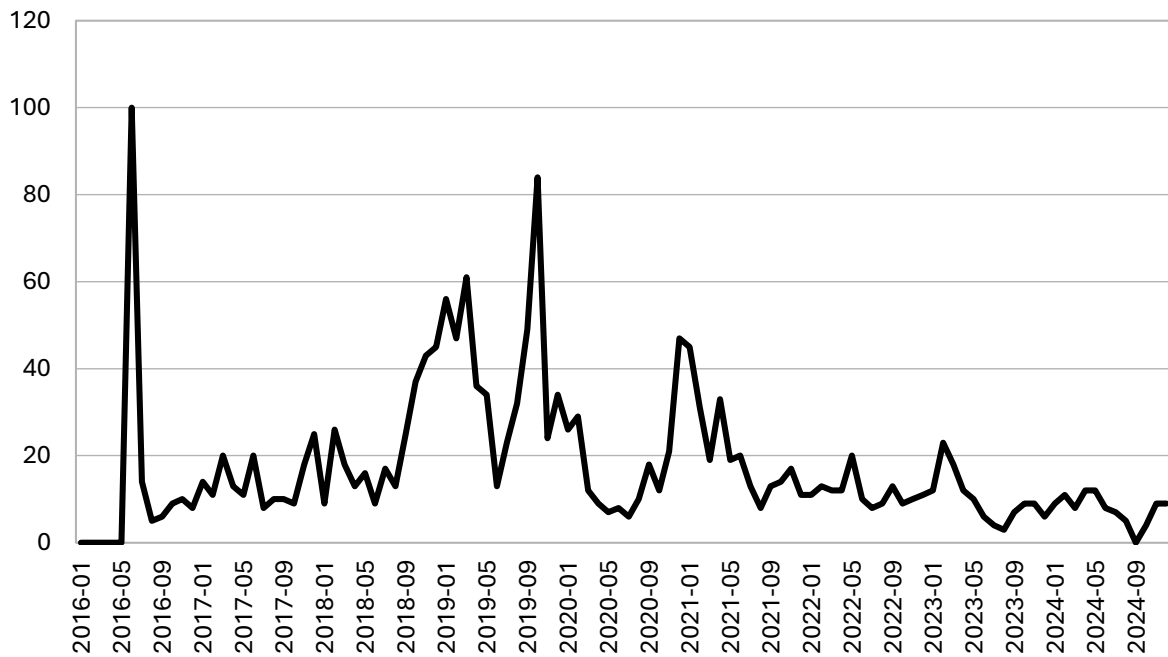


Figure 3b: Google Trends - information requests; Keywords: Brexit, Northern Ireland;

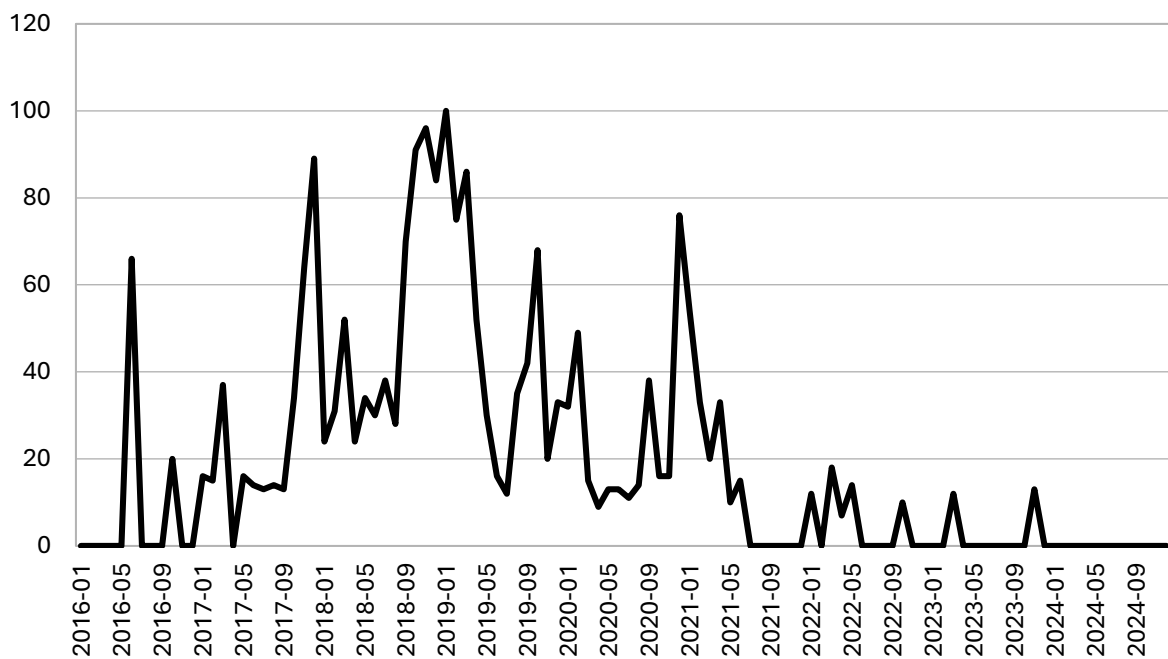


Figure 3c: Google Trends - information requests: Keywords: Brexit, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Border;

These data indicate that the public request for information's on Ireland – Northern Ireland border issues showed a marked increase from 2006 onwards and was probably highest in 2018

– 2020. Interpretation of this observation is difficult due to the numerous variables that take effect. Nevertheless, the trends may be taken as an indication for a strong growth in interest in the bilateral relations.

Some of the more violent protests were covered by BBC reports. Anonymous threats directed at ports and their staff in Northern Ireland are documented, where customs officers and cargo to and from the UK were targeted. This intimidation was expressed through graffiti, posters and on social media platforms (see [Url. 2](#)). They may be linked to other threats from Unionists about similar issues concerning some post-Brexit arrangements. Such actions represent a form of regional protests against the new border and the custom checkpoints at the harbour in Northern Ireland. Such protests are often referred to as "weapons of the weak", as they require only minimal resources but may gain significant attention. It takes not much effort to spray a graffiti or stick a poster, but nevertheless people will take notice of the problem and reflect on the topic. These methods might also evoke memories of Ireland's troubled past and prompt public discourse. The media's role in amplifying such protests ensures that local troubles gain an international platform and a wider audience.

Interestingly, in the recent years before Brexit, most reported protests (one might even call it aggressions) in Northern Ireland were attributed to the republican side, according to media consensus. However, in post-Brexit times, the emphasis has shifted, as Unionists are now voicing their fears through protests. They are concerned about the weakening of ties with Britain and the potential erosion of their British identity.

Today's protests, particularly those stemming from Unionists, underscore the deep-seated anxieties about identity and affiliation, especially in the aftermath of Brexit. Many acts of protest resonate with historical tensions and have a potential to sway public opinion and policy through the popularity generated by media coverage.

As already mentioned, the quest for an independent and united Ireland dates back several hundred years. Considering this historical context, conflict, protests or political movements for an independent and united Ireland already started already long before the Irish War of Independence in 1919. They are a constant factor in Irish history and were not officially concluded until 1998 (Good Friday Agreement). Although, as mentioned, most protest and

political movements might never be completely settled, the pursuit of societal melioration is an ongoing process.

The division between Irish nationalists and English aristocracy has historical roots stretching back to the 17th century. Ireland was practically a British colony with frontlines along already established lingual, ethnic and religious boundaries. Despite the peace process resulting in the “Good Friday Agreement”, signs of unrest and the shadow of paramilitarism remained. Until today, there are attacks or protest in Northern Ireland. The fear of paramilitarism is still present (see Preston 2020). “The Troubles” which refers to the Northern Ireland conflict from the 1960s to the late 1990s, was the peak of a long ongoing political, ethno-national and partly religious conflict. As McGarry and O’Leary (1997) emphasize, this conflict should not be seen solely through the lens of nationalism but also be acknowledged as socio-psychological problem, driven by historically entrenched collective identities and the desire for self-rule and security. *“In Northern Ireland, religious affiliation, ethnic identity, national identity, and territorial allegiance are all intertwined in a complex way. It is these interlocking facets that not only provide the ethno-nationalistic basis of the conflict but also give rise to its reinforcing and recurring nature”* (O’Leary and McAllister 1999, in McGrattan 2010, p. 185).

These problems can also be seen at an individual level, considering the different forms of personal and social identity mentioned before. Although the main Irish conflicts are often described as ethnic and national conflicts, several scholars agree that they should not be restricted to that. *“Such conflicts are better understood as socio-psychological, rooted in historically established collective identities and motivated by the desire to be governed by one’s co-nationals, both for security and collective freedom”* (McGarry and O’Leary, 1995, in McGrattan 2010, p. 185). Of course, this statement refers to both parties in the conflict. However, the same paradigms can probably be translated to most other conflicts around the world as well.

Considering the complexity and the historical circumstances of this conflict, it becomes clear that the concept of identity must also be reviewed in a multifaceted way. This also illustrates that the structures and methods of protest and social movements should be analysed including their historical, social, economic and cultural aspects.

Simplistic binaries such as national identities Irish vs. British or religious identities Catholic vs. Protestant, and political identities like unionists and nationalists, the social structure or even coloniser and colonised are useful but fail to grasp the complete picture of the conflict. Many collective identities collide with one another and individuals usually do not fit in just only one of these categories but should be understood as multi layered entities. Therefore, the concept of intersectionality is crucial to understand how collective identities can overlap.

Also, some of these categories are still under discussion. In contemporary Ireland, the legacy of "The Troubles" remains present, still shaping the socio-political environment. While open hostility between the Irish and the British practically vanished, nuances of the historical tensions persist. This can also be seen in the everyday interactions between locals and tourists, where humour often masks deeper sentiments.

I could observe this facet first hand, during my field studies in Ireland. Most of the people there personally witnessed "The Troubles". While not all of them participated in an equal way, the conflict significantly shaped the socio-political climate in Ireland. Even the generation that followed after "The Troubles" have first hand information's as well as access to a multitude of data on that time. Consequently, most inhabitants have a clear perception about what happened and how it shaped the countries in which they are living today.

Currently, it appears that the British enjoy a rather good general image in Ireland. Nevertheless, although I did not observe immanent aggression between Irish and British, it was easy to witness some kind of jokes on each other (maybe even in a friendly way). As observed, it was not difficult to spot English tourists, especially in Dublin. They could be discerned not just by their rather loud behaviour but also because most of them wore the Union Jack, the flag of Great Britain, as an accessory. Ireland was symbolised by a harp in the centre of the flag until 1801, when it was replaced by the red St. Andrew's cross. Although such symbols not always evoke a strong emotional response, they do reflect the complex layers of ideology and historical memory that characterize Irish-British relations. Even though some may feel "triggered" when members of a colonial empire are still using a commandeered part of a flag. However, the situations that I observed were comparable to the mostly friendly mockery e.g., between Austrians and Germans, which can commonly be observed in Austria.

The Permanence of Irish Independence in Public Consciousness

Field observations reveal that the topic of Irish independence is not only historically significant but also a vital component of the contemporary dialogue. This topic was extended beyond academic and political discussions into public forums and day-to-day conversations. Discussions in public places, were often about these or related topics. (As already mentioned, they might have possibly been amplified by the political climate at the time. The 2020 general election, which was taking place during my studies, was surely shaping the public debates.)

The topic of the troubled past and the peace treaty is also present in popular art, like theatre, movies, books and TV programs. Comparable to Germany's frequent media reflections on World War II, Ireland's troubled past and the peace process are recurrent themes in popular media. It leaves the impression that there is always a program on air that is covering some related topics. This pervasive cultural engagement with history suggests a collective process of remembering and restoration, which may be central to Irish policy and societal healing. The observed examples certainly play a big role in the restoration process. Considering the relatively short time without any “official” conflicts between Ireland and England, it seems understandable to have such news-coverings as means of rehabilitation.

The historical struggle for a free Ireland and the ongoing debates about Northern Ireland are still relevant, especially in Dublin. The significance of these discussions may partly be attributed to the political context, *i.e.*, the election at the time of observation and the victory of Sinn Féin. The latter is the political party that is associated with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and stands for a united Ireland. As far as I could observe, the topic of a united Ireland keeps reoccurring at many different occasions. Memorial plates for fallen soldiers or people who fought in the independence war and tributes to influential figures in Ireland's struggle for independence are a common sight in urban areas. They can be seen on many street corners, squares and buildings offering a form of historical education when navigating the city. It is possible to develop an understanding of the local history just by reading the displayed insignias while strolling through the urban environment. This public display of history seems more pronounced in Ireland than in many other European countries, indicating a strong commitment to preserving and honouring the nation's past.

The intertwining of historical awareness with everyday life not only serves as a form of social recollection and reinforcement of cultural identity, but also helps to maintain the topic's relevance in the political and societal discourse. Ireland's approach to commemorating its past demonstrates the enduring impact of historical struggles on the present and future of its national identity.

The Cultural Significance of Irish Folk Music

The Irish folk music, including its folk-rock variant, is an important aspect of Irish culture. It is essential in the social lives of the Irish people and also a major industry, especially for international markets. Live music is an integral part of Irish gastronomy. While most pubs have at least one guitar player covering well known songs, many pubs even feature concerts and performances on a regular basis. This underlines the importance of live music in Irish societal contexts.

When analysing the lyrics of Irish folk music, it becomes clear that they frequently encapsulates narratives of historical, social, and civil protests or struggles. The songs often tell stories of individual or collective experiences, portraying the pursuit of higher intentions through suffering and resilience. (Disregarding the all-time favourite topics, of love and broken hearts.) The collective performance of such songs can often be encountered in the densely packed establishments that are referred to as “pubs” by the locals. The shared experience of performing and listening to these songs reinforces a community spirit and the connection to Irish history. (Internationally, the term “Irish pub” is often used to describe a specific type of pub, including a particular interior, style and setting. In Ireland nearly all pubs could fall into the latter categorisation, therefore the local term “pub” seems sufficient.) Pubs in Ireland, beyond serving food and drinks, therefore act as cultural hubs where music and sociability coalesce.

There are numerous folk songs about different events in Irish history, however the most known, or commercially successful, is probably the pop song “Sunday Bloody Sunday” by the Irish band U2 (released in 1982). The song addresses the tragic events of the 1972 “Bloody Sunday” in Derry. In a mass shooting in Derry, British soldiers shot 26 civilians at a “peaceful” protest march. Historically, the public display of songs and music can, on one hand, be seen as a form

of entertainment but more importantly also as medium to bring up specific issues and propagate as well as commemorate important news and events. Such music functions as a medium for raising awareness and as an oral tradition that strengthens a certain social identity. It may also create sentimental feelings, even to the point where it glorifies the historical struggle. Music, *i.e.*, the lyrics, also represents oral tradition. Thus, it can play a big part in the shaping of social identity.

The previously mentioned jokes (about e.g., the British) as well as collectively known and performed songs and other cultural expressions may also act as examples of “everyday resistance”, particularly in Northern Ireland. This concept posits that resistance to political systems or prevailing norms can be manifested in ordinary interactions. This subtly conveys individual or collective dissent. Thus, resistance against e.g., a political system or the *status quo* can not only be shown by demonstrations, aggression and display of power, but also through ordinary everyday interactions.

The persistent visibility and discussions of the collective conflictual past demonstrate the crucial role historical consciousness plays in shaping a common Irish narrative, both personal and collective. Despite the Good Friday Agreement (1997), the historical dissent remains vivid in the collective memory. It seems therefore, that this “history” is rather present. The blend of cultural expressions, from music to humour, reflects a society being deeply engaged with its past using these narratives as a tool for community cohesion and sustaining of a shared identity.

Gender Dynamics in Social Movements

When considering social movements, protests and wars, it is important to consider that also gender issues reflect participation in and forms of resistance. This is discussed in numerous studies (e.g., Dowler, 1998). Gender and the individual self are immanent topics that influence social movements, protests and even war. Man and woman often take very different positions in wars, fights or protests.

Historically, most women showed their protest primarily in the form of their engagement in civil resistance and daily acts of defiance. Many examples show women aiding/supplying other fighters, joining protest marches or refusing to cooperate with authorities. In some cases, especially in Northern Ireland, women picked up arms too and participated actively in attacks and other acts of violence. Dowler (1998) gives one of the reasons why women joined the protests or fights. He deconstructs the private and public space to explore the gender roles within these spheres: *“For this reason the deconstruction of public and private space in West Belfast points to a fabricated political solidarity whereby both men and women are equally joined together in this resistance. Therefore the more impenetrable the line of demarcation between the public and private arena, the more potent the image of women and men in solidarity becomes. However, deconstruction of the interdependent nature of public and private space can invert patriarchal power structures in this conflict, thereby ‘opening up’ public space for women to be both mothers and warriors”* (Dowler 1998, p 173). This blurring of boundaries between public and private areas fosters political solidarity by uniting men and women in resistance. This construction can alter patriarchal power structures, thus enabling women to adopt roles as both caregivers and combatants. It seems coherent that when there is no private space to retire as a refuge, the public space becomes a battlefield for man and woman alike. While most conflict scenarios would benefit from a detachment of private and public space, it seems that this differentiation happened only seldom. However, Dowler (1998) also gives contrary evidence in an interview where the position of a woman was clearly with her family. *“Now don’t get me wrong, he did the right thing by joining the Ra (IRA). I would have too if I could have but I was so busy seeing to the daily things. It’s hard to keep the family going when half of it has been taken away”* (in Dowler 1998 p. 173). Accordingly, some women prioritized family responsibilities over direct combat involvement, which also may have resulted in role conflicts. Besides direct fighting, also the struggle and risks of resisting can have severe consequences in the personal life. The motivation to e.g., resist or even fight seems equally strong for man and woman alike. It may be motivated by the urge for freedom, patriotism or for glory, however, the most important reason is to fight is for a better fate for future generations.

Nevertheless, despite the conflicting demands of familial duties and resistance, many women stepped into the forefront of opposition and joined the radical resistance. This happened maybe even more in recent conflicts than in the past. A well known example is Mairéad Farrell (1957-1988) who became an iconic figure in the IRA. She was a member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army also known as IRA, a paramilitary organisation considered as terroristic by

the British. Farrell was imprisoned where she took part in a so called “Dirty Protest”, similar to Bobby Sands (1954-1981). They were using their bodies as means of protesting in the limited confines of prison. This type of protest can be considered as a “weapon of the weak” as described by James C. Scott (see Scott, 1985). As mentioned before, the available means of protesting in confinement are rather limited to one’s own body. This resulted e.g., in hunger strikes (that Bobby Sands continued to his death). The term “Dirty Protest” refers to contaminating the prison cells, e.g., by smearing menstrual material and excrements on the walls of the cells. A practice that often was accompanying hunger strikes. While access to resources was strictly limited for imprisoned activists, such forms of protest were examples of the few ways of protest they could fall back upon. Nevertheless, these actions served as potent symbols and acts of resistance. Especially the intense media coverage and the backing up from loyal supporters and affiliates made the dirty protests a commonly discussed topic and contributed to their effectiveness.

The participation of women in the Irish conflict demonstrates a complex interplay of gender dynamics. The traditional delineation of public and private roles can be disrupted in the face of shared political objectives. Women's involvement ranged from indirect support of protesters to direct action in combat, with some, like Mairéad Farrell, becoming emblematic of the struggle. The "Dirty Protest" and hunger strikes highlight the extremity of the confinement situation. These acts, while based in desperation, contributed to the broader narrative of defiance and left a lasting imprint on the collective memory of the conflict.

Dirty Protest and IRA

A most notable case in this conflict is the one of Bobby Sands. He was elected as a member of parliament during his imprisonment and his hunger strike (1981). However, he never could fulfil this function, as he died shortly after. Instead, charismatic leaders like Bobby Sands and Mairéad Farrell, gained the focused attention from supporters and international media through their acts of martyrdom and leadership in protests and hunger strikes. Thereby they could broadcast their issues worldwide. This resulted in additional support as well as international solidarity and an even higher pressure on the opponents by international attention both on a political/economical but also at a civil/social level.

It is notable, that the IRA, was originally founded as a response – six months after British troops had been sent to Northern Ireland in 1969. Their arrival and the following practices of the soldiers, who tried to stop the civil unrest, made it compelling for people to support the ongoing protests or even join the IRA. The IRA was formed predominantly from nationalists who aimed for equal human and civil rights for catholic Northern Irish. They also fought for a reunion with Ireland. The group's longevity and effectiveness against trained professional forces owed much to guerrilla tactics and community support. An important factor was the substantial aid from the global Irish diaspora and sympathetic international entities.

In 1972, the culmination of the resulting civil war against the British army and (special) police forces, resulted in nearly 500 casualties, about half of them civilians. One reason why the IRA could endure so long and continue fighting against trained soldiers is due to their guerrilla tactics. Support from local communities is of course essential for the success of such tactics. Strong additional support came also from the international community, especially exiled Irish activists in the USA and Australia. It must be remembered that there is a bigger Irish diaspora than Irish living in Ireland today (compare Figure 2). These migrated Irish sent money and goods (e.g., weapons and ammunition) to support their former home country.

In addition, other political institutions were using this civil war and the revolting Irish to weaken the British government. This happened according to the rule that the enemy of my enemy should be my ally. While the brutality of the IRA's methods was often not endorsed, the lack of trust in (British) authorities led to tacit support. *“Largely because of the complicit support the IRA received from the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, in the Irish republic and even, for a time, in the United States. These people did not support the brutal means employed by the IRA but they did not trust or respect the authorities enough to help them”* (see Richardson 2007). Richardson highlights the international support that boosted support of the local communities. This support network was mainly supplied from emigrated Irish, but also by militant liberation groups, like for example the ETA and persons like Muammar Gaddafi (see also Boyne 2006).

Protests are context-dependent, with violence sometimes emerging as a response to perceived powerlessness and injustice. Furthermore, there are various different types of protest. It seems that different communities also differ in means and customs of protest, mostly because the intended results are different. On an individual level, many types of behaviour can be interpreted as a protest in one way or another. However, when confronted with this topic, most

people have a clear opinion about what classifies as a protest and what not. Although it seems obvious that protests do not have to be violent by nature, certain circumstances can provoke or endure this kind of behaviour. This is especially so when people feel powerless and see no other solution. Immediate action in a form of violence is then often the last remedy of individual power. It became clear in conversations, that some people fear that violent protests might reoccur as a consequence of the Brexit and the newly established border between the UK and Ireland.

Today, when walking through Ireland and especially Northern Ireland, murals and graffiti covering whole house fronts can be seen, that serve as historical testimonies. These murals describe specific events and are often used as memorials for fallen fighters or bystanders. (see e.g., Documentary 1) The Troubles are a well documented period in which many journalists collected first hand material – pictures, films and interviews. Martin Nagle, a photographer, documented the decay of the cities during the fights and stated that he saw: “*Streets that had to be documented, Streets that say something about the effects of “the trouble” on the people and social fabric*” (see Documentary 2). His pictures were intended to show the horrors of bombing and fighting which in the end should scare people from joining the fight. However, the pictures were also used by the paramilitary forces to recruit new members. Pictures and media in general were used by both sides, but it seems that the Republicans used them better. In this period of time, like in any other conflict, there was not only a battle of force but also a battle of narratives, where the control of information and propaganda plays a significant role. Message control and misinformation were used by all parties involved in the troubles. As usually, the first casualty of war was the truth.

Incidents like the Branden Burns and Brendan Moley funerals in 1988 demonstrate how also a funeral can serve as a public or even political event. During both, the memorial services and the funeral march, a big crowd assembled and was met by police and military force. These events thus transformed into political statements, with figures like the former IRA leader Martin McGuinness, who symbolized the intersection of activism, militancy and politics.

The intersection of leadership, media, and community support in the context of the Irish conflict underscores an inherent complexity of resistance movements. Charismatic figures like Bobby Sands became symbols of defiance and media played an essential role in shaping public perception and narrative. The murals and documented histories of "The Troubles" provide

enduring reminders of the conflict and its consequences, thus reflecting the power struggles and the instrumentality of cultural symbols for political targets. The fear of renewed violence post-Brexit highlights the lasting sensitivities and unresolved tensions that continue to influence this region.

Cultural Shifts and the Future of Irish Identity

Shirlow (2003) suggested a reasonable transition in Ireland towards more inclusive forms of cultural identity: *“It is contended that there is an ongoing and positive transition towards new modes and definitions of cultural belonging that in themselves reject the logic and validity of ethnocentrism. The Europeanisation of political and financial power, the influx of foreign capital, political morphology in Northern Ireland and the growth in consumption have all been identified as sociopolitical forces that have advanced more heterogeneous senses of identity and belonging”* (Shirlow 2003 in Coulter and Coleman 2003, p. 192). This suggests a tendency of moving away from ethnic motivations and opening to European political dynamics, foreign investment, and consumerism. This shift towards “Eurocentrism”, would replace traditional nationalistic sentiments by wider, Europe-orientated identities. However, considering the current global situation, one might disagree on a dominating trend towards the “positive transition” and when doing so, one could easily find lot of examples of flourishing ethnocentrism and nationalistic movements in many political systems.

The concept of events like the Brexit speaks against the idea of a Eurocentric identity. The Brexit phenomenon indicates persistent nationalistic and ethnocentric tendencies within the UK and raises questions about British self-perception as a distinct ethnicity. Of course, this follows the premise, that the British identify as a common ethnicity. Therefore, it seems likely that many other questions need to be dealt with, e.g., the status of the Scots and the implications for regional identities.

Nevertheless, it is possible that we will see a different development in the case of Northern Ireland and Ireland. Shirlow (2003) comments on the topic of a united Ireland: *“The desire for unification may not be the most visible part of public discourse in the Irish Republic but it is, nonetheless, an important emotional demand. However, if unification ever becomes a serious*

proposition, then it is possible that nationalist agendas would come to the fore” (Shirlow in Coulter and Coleman 2003, p. 205). Accordingly, the desire for a unified Ireland may not dominate public discourse but remains being a significant emotional and political aspiration. Should unification ever become a tangible possibility, it could reignite nationalist agendas and reshape political landscapes.

Today, the desire for unification or at least the discussions on this topic, are clearly more lively than in 2003 and, as I tried to show, also highly emotional. Based on several of my communications, I would argue that the mentioned Eurocentrism as well as the “nationalist agendas” might be a basis of discussions and have to be seriously considered.

As already mentioned previously, it is very important to consider that the status of the Irish / Northern Ireland boundary is formally an EU-external border. Thus, numerous differing customs, migratory, health and sanitation regulations apply, together with the connected bureaucratic processes. The practical consequences for the people living on both sides of this border, regarding for example work, shopping, transit, *etc.*, seem not yet fully grasped. Several provisional solutions were applied that were “last minute” appointments in order to avoid the most severe restraints of a hard Brexit. Still, only time will show if these statutes can be maintained, are sufficient or have to be altered. However, even the best particular regulations inevitably result in winners and losers in one way or another. Accordingly, some forms of social discourse or protest, hopefully peaceful, can be expected for the future development of the Irish-Northern Ireland relationship.

According to Shirlow (2003), the evolving Irish identity reflects an interplay between traditional nationalistic views and emerging post-national perspectives. (in Coulter and Coleman, 2003) Brexit added further layers of complexity, challenging the notion of eurocentrism and potentially catalysing nationalist sentiments. The practical and administrative challenges from Brexit underscore the delicate balance between the EU's collective framework and the specific needs of border regions. As Ireland and Northern Ireland navigate these transformations, the potential for civil discourse and protests remain, underscoring the need for thoughtful policy and involvement of the diverging perspectives. The hope is that future adaptations will be peaceful, constructive and address the evolving relationship between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Methodological Considerations

The term “empirical” is derived from the Greek word “*empeiria*” and refers not only to the philosophical concept of empiricism but also to the specific approach and methods of scientific data collection and analysis. Schensul (2008) describes these concept as follows: “*The term methods refers to the ways in which qualitative researchers collect data to build their argument. All forms of qualitative research including ethnography are most noted for their commitment to learning about and understanding the perspectives of others rather than imposing the researcher’s own views, biases, and theories in explaining differences across populations or communities in beliefs and behaviours*” (Schensul 2008, p. 521 ff).

Qualitative inquiring is primarily used in the present study. Freikamp *et al.* (2008) writes on the particular status of qualitative methods and methodologies. They trace the roots to the aspiration of theory generation via inductive orientation. “*The specific understanding of qualitative methods and methodology has its origins in the goal of theory building by means of inductivistic orientation and discovery by means of abductive attitude. This aims to achieve a goal that is opposed to the deductive approach. According to Popper (1994), the deductive procedure starts with an already existing statement or theory*” (Freikamp *et al.* 2008, p.216).

Nevertheless, the term “methods” encompasses not just qualitative research. This methodology contrasts with deductive procedures where, as Popper posited, the analytical process starts with pre-established theories or statements (hypotheses). Nonetheless, I argue that qualitative methodologies are not intrinsically contradicting deductive approaches. Indeed, a synergistic integration of both concepts can generate a more profound comprehension of reality.

Freikamp *et al.* (2008) further state that theory generation must always integrate qualitative research as well. This implies that linguistic expressions, actions, and their meanings, are integrated within a context and must also be understood and interpreted. “*For qualitative researchers, theory building can only take place in consideration of the context, i. H. that linguistic statements, actions and their meaning embedded in the (social, biographical, interactional) context are to be understood and interpreted. Here, the researchers orientate themselves i. i.e. R. in the everyday events and/or everyday knowledge of the examined... The principle of openness is intended to ensure that the everyday relevance settings and meaning*

attributions of the examined are brought into experience and are not prematurely subsumed under known knowledge in the course of the examination” (Freikamp *et al*, 2008, p.216). The “known knowledge” may often contain important data. These can easily be overlooked but may be even crucial to establish a better understanding of the subject.

Researchers are thus at least partially included within the quotidian events and/or conventional knowledge of the observed. However, the principle of openness is vital. It ensures that researchers also capture the subjects of everyday significance, settings and meanings without precipitously categorizing them in a framework of pre-existing knowledge, as that might obscure vital data otherwise. Such easily neglected details might be pivotal in generating a comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. Accordingly, *e.g.*, case analyses are conducted to study contexts, focus on everyday events and try to maintain openness in qualitative research. The interpretation of what constitutes a “case” is predicated upon explicit, individual case reconstructions, like the typologies delineated by Weber and the “Objective Hermeneutics” of Oevermann. These cases range from singular studies to comparative analyses that are foundational to theory generation as exemplified by “Grounded Theory” of Strauss. *“In order to do justice to the contextuality, the orientation to everyday events and the openness in qualitative research, cases are analyzed, whereby the understanding of what a case is depends on explicit individual case reconstruction, e.g. B. in the formation of types according to Weber (1920) and the objective hermeneutics according to Oevermann (1974), to analyzes in theory formation that are comparative from the beginning, for which Grounded Theory (Strauss 1991), for example, stands”* (Freikamp *et al*. 2008, p. 216). Consequently, the methodical approach in this study can be considered as methodologically sound. It ensures that the empirical findings are interpreted within a framework that is both contextually anchored and theoretically informed.

In empirical science and also within cultural anthropology, it is the responsibility of the researcher to align with the axiom that their presence should only minimally disrupt the natural cadence of the environment they are studying. This principle is central, irrespective whether typologies as proposed by Weber are formulated, engaging in objective hermeneutics (Oevermann) or applying grounded theory (Strauss). All these methodologies require meticulous observation of the subject's daily endeavours, striving to capture the undisturbed authentic essence of their actions. The daily activities of a subject of study should be considered as precisely as possible (see also Freikamp *et al.*, 2008; Girtler, 1984).

Observation, participation and first hand experiences play the most important role in this approach. The essence of the methodological approaches is intertwining of observation, active participation, and first-hand experiences. However, the delineation between what is considered as “normal” everyday experience and scientific observation is frequently unsharp and requires systematic and critical analysis to ensure objectivity. Like Kromrey (2000) emphatically asserts: *“Empirical science should not strengthen ones belief but rather it should describe and explain the world as it is, it should open ones eyes for a critical few and reality”* (Kromrey 2000, p. 15).

Participatory observation is a legacy of the Austro-Hungarian (now Poland) anthropologist Bronisław Malinowsk (1884-1942). It remains being a central pillar of ethnographic methodology despite burgeoning scepticism. It is a classical ethnological process in which the scientist lives within the group he is studying for a longer period and takes part in the activities of this group. Characteristic to this ethnological approach is the immersive integration of the researcher within the group, in the best case living by with them for an extended period (see Spittler 2001, p. 1-2).

As already mentioned, an important part of this kind of study is to generate as little disturbance as possible. The value of participatory observation and fieldwork is profound due to the depth of insight it provides. Gay y Belasco and De la Cruz (2012) highlight this approach, stating: *“... because fieldwork is what brings us into deep contact with people, with their daily miseries and joys, their fears and their hopes. And it is during fieldwork that we anthropologists open ourselves up to others”* (Gay y Belasco and De la Cruz 2012, p. 14). By forging such intimate connections, the complexities of the subject's lives can be illuminated, thus enriching the collected data and enhancing our understanding of the broader research topic. Kuper and Kuper (1996) further explain: *“Living among the people under study, ethnographers use observation and description of the settings in which people live, participant-observation in social activities, various forms of interviewing, and focus groups. Participant-observation is cultural anthropology's central contribution to the methodology of social science.”* (Kuper and Kuper, 1996, p. 963).

I could notice during my fieldwork that it is not just the anthropologist who becomes receptive, but instead a rather reciprocal interaction takes place. Thus, a symmetrical dialogue between observer and the participant may develop. Obviously, a spirit of openness is the basis for conducting this type of field research. Thereby, the researchers can integrate into the social

fabric and find meaningful relationships with individuals. Such an approach is not just instrumental but also empathetic. This signals a commitment to understand and coalesce with the observed community. However, this also reflects an important problem, namely how to integrate into a group or community while still remaining objective.

That open approach proved to be most relevant in my fieldwork. It produced a feeling of personal connection and supported a sense of personal rapport. As a result, subjects were more inclined to share their genuine thoughts and beliefs. This relational depth is instrumental for an anthropologist to partake authentically in group activities and individual lives. *“Ethnographic fieldwork is an in-depth localized research process aimed at the description and analysis of cultural systems. Both scientific and artistic in perspective and approach, ethnographic fieldwork is characteristic of the work of cultural anthropologists who seek explanation and/or interpretation of human behavior, practices, ideas, and values”* (Kuper and Kuper 1996, p. 968). This intensive research method reflects the dual roles of the anthropologist as both observer and participant.

Nevertheless, this role requires a delicate balance of objectivity and personal engagement. In synthesizing these antagonistic perspectives, this study attempts a holistic approach to participant observation. It underscores the delicate balance required between scientific rigour and the empathetic connections. A commitment to non-disturbance, provides the foundation for a contextual analysis that respects the integrity of the cultural milieu being studied.

The latter problem is a fundamental challenge that requires careful methodological and ethical guidance. This refers to the commitment of non-disturbance by ensuring that cultural integrity remains intact while enabling a meaningful analysis. It also involves reflexivity by acknowledging and critically assessing own biases, assumptions, and the social position in relation to the community. The technique of “deep listening” allows cultural insiders to guide discussions and to define the terms of engagement. Researchers thus can minimize their interference and prioritize community-defined perspectives by involving community members in (co-)creating knowledge rather than by imposing an external interpretative framework. At the same time, scientific rigor has to be combined with empathetic connection, maintaining critical distance without detaching from human experience. Achieving this balance involves integrating academic and ethical perspectives in order to frame cultural practices within their inherent logic and historical context. By combining rigor with empathy, ethnographic research

can be both methodologically sound and ethically engaged, thus ensuring that the human essence of cultural life is neither distorted by excessive abstraction nor lost in sentiments.

Interview methodologies and techniques are paramount for the success of fieldwork, complementing participatory observations with the collection of specific data. Among these, the narrative interview technique is probably the most frequently used form. This method prompts the informant to recount specific events, occurrences or experiences in their own vernacular. It encourages a comprehensive and detailed narrative to be described in the own words of the interviewed. The intent is to create a storytelling environment where the informant is guided to articulate the full scope of an event with all its intricacies and complexities. After the informant finishes his or her story, the interviewer can inquire more deeply, seeking narrative details and invite the informant to reflect on the dialogue (see Hermanns 1995, p. 183). Obviously, the establishment of mutual trust is especially important for such narrative interviews.

In the early stages of field engagement, I discerned that informal interviews are probably the optimal strategy to build initial connections and gather preliminary data. Authenticity and honesty in such dialogues is most important. Kuper and Kuper (1996) underscore this point, stating: “... *these methods include two-way communication and allow the deepest possible exchange of information on mental states between two minds. In other words, direct communication is a subject-subject rather than a subject-object means of encounter*” (Kuper and Kuper 1996, p. 965). Both formal and informal conversations in the presence of the researcher can be construed as pathways to authenticity (see Froschauer and Lueger 2003, p. 51). Nevertheless, while structured and expert interviews certainly have their merits, my observations suggested that most of my potential interviewees exhibited reluctance when approached with such formats. Many of them stated that they do not feel like experts on the matter. A self-assessed lack of expertise or fear of providing incorrect information was frequently expressed. Nevertheless, this resistance often diminished during informal and narrative interviews, thus yielding results that were unforeseen and surprising.

Informal communications promote a more equal situation between researcher and the researched, thus enhancing the quality of the data. In addition, I found that semi-structured interviews carry their own inherent benefits, particularly in maintaining the focus of the conversation. This is particularly effective when interviewees are prone to digressions and are

easily distracted. Under such circumstances, a semi-structured interview can deliver information that is pertinent to the research topic.

The different ethnographic interview techniques allow exploration of the lived experiences of the individuals which is critical for gaining a comprehensive picture of the cultural paradigms.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis may provide a useful method for enhancing data collection and deepening the understanding of complex social dynamics within the field of anthropology. To illustrate this, Ullrich (2008) refers to Musolff, highlighting a significant point regarding the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Red Army Faction (RAF): *“Both the IRA and the RAF (according to his examples) emerged from an unarmed, mostly non-violent protest movement that was accused by politicians and the media of being prone to violence. Only this stigmatization led to the armed struggle and to a quasi-war dynamic between ‘the terrorists’ and the state, which no longer allowed nuances, understanding and compromise, according to Musolff (ibid.: 297)”* (Ullrich 2008, p. 27). This indicates that while stigmatization is probably not the single cause for an escalation of violence, it invariably exacerbates tensions and generates a more hostile environment. It seems unlikely that just this stigmatization was responsible for the rise of violence in Northern Ireland, but it surely did not help to diminish the tensions. Of course, a closer analysis is necessary, as Ullrich (2008) agrees: *“I take up again the above mentioned example of the discursive production of RAF and IRA. Not only ‘discourse’ was at work in this, but also repression, massive police violence, a student who was shot, unequal power - power to dispose of the discourse, but also over money and repressive organs. Likewise, an analysis that only recognizes material interests and needs as the cause of human action goes wrong”* (Ullrich 2008, p. 28). This statement underscores the need for a multifaceted analysis even more.

Discursive and material conditions must be considered when analysing the dynamics of power and violence in a conflict. By assessing the interplay between discourse and social context, we may achieve a more nuanced understanding of the cultural, social, political and material circumstances.

In the current case study, it became evident that there is not just one single discourse but instead multiple narratives that coexist, each representing varying socio-political perspectives (*i.e.*, those of Unionist/Loyalists and Nationalists). These discourses can sometimes be overlapping or represent different views of reality. Acknowledging the context surrounding such tracks is required for a comprehensive analysis. This factor became even more clear to me during the latest pandemic (COVID-19; 2020-2022). Accordingly, why, by whom and for what purpose something becomes framed as it is, should always be the primary question. This question can also be asked in the Brexit context.

Uncertainties surrounding Brexit implications have been significantly shaped by media narratives, “expert” opinions and political rhetoric, all contributing to the ongoing discourse. Furthermore, general feelings of worry and distrust frequently served as an underlying subtext in various discussions (*e.g.*, unemployment, housing, social welfare, ...). There was often a fear of violence and a new beginning of “The Troubles” being expressed. It seemed less important if such discourses were true or necessary. Nevertheless, a sort of uncertainty and fear in the people involved existed, that might have altered the actions of the individuals (like in the example of the IRA mentioned earlier; compare Musolff in Ullrich, 2008). It seems plausible that the more fear and aggression is in the centre of a discourse the more likely violence may occur.

Interestingly, the interpretations of historical events, particularly in terms of colonial legacies, diverge markedly between different nations. This observation is particularly evident in the relationship between Ireland and England. In Ireland, a prevailing sentiment among those I have talked with, is a shared understanding of the nation having been colonized. However, this perspective is not as unequivocal in England, where interpretations of the historical roles appear more ambiguous. For example, Paseta (2003) writes in this context: “*The application to Ireland of the colonial label is problematic as the shared experiences of religious and political upheaval ensured that the two countries were more closely linked than usual with British dependencies*” (Paseta 2003, p. 5). From a post-colonial standpoint, *i.e.*, from an Irish standpoint, this quote seems rather questionable.

When looking at discourse analysis in general, it should be considered that a discourse is shaped by its history. History is built on facts, but facts are interpreted through the lens of social,

cultural, material and political powers, as well as personal experiences. In other words, history is written by the winners, (Although it is not clear where this quote originates, it seems plausible that more than one individual came to this conclusion).

The adage that “history is written by the winners” captures a profound truth: dominant narratives often overshadow alternative perspectives, thus complicating our understanding of the past and present. This highlights the responsibility historians and of scholars who engage critically with such conflicts. It is necessary to question assumptions and to strive for a more balanced representation of alternative voices within a historical record. Such an approach may enrich our comprehension of the complexities surrounding social conflicts and power relations, thus allowing a more nuanced dialogue within the field of anthropology.

Critique of Methodology

While acknowledging their practical usefulness, the theoretical background of the different sociological methods is not insignificant. However, a detailed discussion of this topic would be outside of the scope of this thesis. Here, I will highlight some alternative approaches and aspects of different concepts.

Freikamp (2008), for example, describes the qualitative methodology as a postulate of constructivism: *"The qualitative methodology emerged from the central epistemological assumption of constructivism. What all the different positions within constructivism have in common is that perception, cognition, and knowledge are constructed. This basic statement is based first on the assumption that the world of our human experience is structured by categories and concepts. Second, it is based on the idea that the world is created (constructed) by human activity. From this, it follows for research that from a constructivist perspective, there is no separation of subject and object of knowledge, of researcher and object of investigation. The question that arises for constructivist social research from these assumptions is: If knowledge and theories are constructed, what can researchers experience or know about reality"* (Freikamp 2008, p. 215)?

While I would partly disagree with the idea that the world we observe is “constructed”, some arguments must be considered in detail. A lot of common perspectives and assumptions are indeed constructed and have therefore to be reflected and analysed as such. However, the world itself, *i.e.*, reality, seems to exist in either way. So, it is up to the investigator to identify the differences between perception (*i.e.*, perceived reality) and reality (*i.e.*, objective reality) in order to describe the latter as independently and unbiased as possible.

Expanding further, the debate between constructivism and realism highlights some significant philosophical underpinnings in anthropology. Constructivist approaches emphasize the active role of human cognition in shaping our understanding of the world. This leads to a focus on subjective experiences and cultural narratives. Realist approaches, in contrast, assume the existence of an external objective reality that can be studied. This emphasizes the collection of empirical data using scientific methodologies. This dichotomy is central to the epistemological debates within anthropology. It influences research designs, data interpretation, and theoretical frameworks.

In the wider context of anthropological research, constructivist methodologies were instrumental in examining cultural systems, social practices, and symbolic meanings. Such methodologies enable researchers to delve into the complexities of human behaviour, the formation of social norms and the processes of cultural transmission. By acknowledging the constructed nature of knowledge, researchers can (and should) critically assess the influence of their own perspectives and biases, thus enhancing the reflexivity and depth of their analyses.

Conversely, empirical realist methodologies provide robust frameworks for investigating more physical aspects of human societies, such as economic systems, demographic trends, and environmental interactions. These methodologies prioritize objective measurements and replicable results, accumulate verifiable data and foster the development of generalizable theories. Therefore, the interplay between constructivist and realist methodologies enriches the field of anthropology and helps in comprehensive understanding of human societies, integrating subjective experiences and empirical realities.

In general, such a critical approach is not always simple but should be applied whenever possible. There are multiple approaches and methods which can be summarized by "critical

science." Ulrich (2008) portrays it as: "*Despite all the contradictions, it is the unifying feature of all methods, which can be epistemologically mapped on a continuum between Marxist-materialist dialectic and post-structuralist constructivism, to show with their means that not everything is as it seems and that not everything is as it must be as it is. Critical science wants to uncover power and domination, violence and oppression, bondage and exclusion, and offers its own methods for this*" (see Ullrich 2008, p. 7).

I attempted in this research to adopt a materialistic post-structural approach, with critical inquiry of the dynamics of hegemonic powers, e.g., the historical dominance of the British over the Irish, and the subsequent power structures. It is therefore important to reflect (and criticize) these schools of thought. In this analytical framework a profound questioning of the established paradigms and ideologies that underpin contemporary societies is necessary as a basis for a critique of the differing schools of thought. As Ullrich (2008) articulates: "*Criticism of society initially means that social realities—however one may define them more precisely—are analysed, questioned, if necessary rejected and described as surmountable. In concrete terms, this can be used to reconstruct*" (Ullrich 2008, p. 12). With this critical position, researchers can deconstruct intricate power structures, recognize the ideologies that facilitate power retention, and expose processes of exclusion and discrimination. The latter include colonial and sexist patterns embedded in societal perception and action *etc.* ... (see Ullrich 2008, p. 12).

The materialistic post-structuralist approach thus seems to provide a deeper understanding of how socio-political and economic forces shape human experiences and cultural practices. By examining the interplay between power dynamics and cultural narratives, this approach sheds light on the mechanisms of domination and resistance and offers a comprehensive framework for analysing social phenomena.

It is also essential to consider how critical science challenges the *status quo* and promotes social justice. By exposing the underlying power structures and advocating for marginalized voices, critical science plays a pivotal role in advancing human rights and equity. This corresponds with a broader goal of anthropology, *i.e.*, fostering a more inclusive and equitable understanding of human societies. The integration of critical science in anthropological research therefore not only enriches theoretical perspectives but also emphasizes the importance of practical implications of the research findings.

Critical science methodologies have been invaluable in deconstructing colonial narratives and in providing a platform for indigenous and subaltern voices. This decolonial perspective is crucial for addressing historical injustice and to create a more differentiated understanding of cultural diversity. By critically examining the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, researchers can contribute to the ongoing efforts to decolonize academia and promote epistemic justice.

Ullrich (2008) also raises a valid point when he not only questions the collected data but also the things left out. *“The concept of discourse includes not only everything that is said and written, but also what is neither desired nor allowed to be said or written, as well as everything that is unthinkable and unspeakable due to non-thematization. The critical potential of discourse analysis lies accordingly in the Relativizing the absoluteness and truth claim of what is often assumed to be “natural”, “normal” or self-evident from the speaker’s own position. Discourse analysis thus examines the necessary limits of our thinking and reasoning”* (Ullrich 2008, p. 22). When following this argumentation, it becomes evident that the analyses of researchers may not only be obscured by personal assumptions and biases, but also by socio-political restrictions.

Nevertheless, in contrast to a purely constructivist stance, I maintain that *“the truth is out there”* (c. f. X-Files; ©20th Century Studios). Therefore, while the quest for clarity may be challenging, the existence of an objective reality merits its investigation.

The pursuit of achieving objectivity remains a paramount goal within all scientific discourses, yet this pursuit is rather complex. The endeavour for objectivity is a commitment that many scholars ardently strive to meet. Notable differences appear between the methodologies that are prevalent in natural sciences and those in the humanities. In the latter, there seems to be a trend of accepting that true objectivity can not be achieved at all. (Nevertheless, one should try the best to get as close as possible.) *“Reliability in the form of traditional reliability values such as retest and parallel test reliability and consistency coefficient developed within the framework of classical test theory is not applicable to qualitative research. The transferability fails in particular due to the need for ex ante definitions of objects of investigation, hypotheses and their operationalization as well as the necessary standardization of the measuring instruments. This is incompatible with the hallmarks of qualitative research”* (Freikamp 2008, p. 218). Freikamp here makes an appropriate point. While it is clear that many techniques from natural

sciences cannot be directly transposed to qualitative research without substantial adaptation, striving for maximal objectivity still remains a fundamental aim. It might be reached through the thoughtful application of appropriate methods and by scholarly rigour.

The pursuit of validity in qualitative research encounters analogous challenges as objectivity. Freikamp (2008) notes: *“The creation of falsifiable statements is difficult in qualitative research because the facts are very complex. From this it must be deduced that operationalizations cannot be carried out in all phases of qualitative research. They contradict the principle of openness, the formation of theories by means of an abductive attitude or inductivistic orientation, reference to everyday life and the development of objects”* (Freikamp 2008, p. 220). Although the construction of falsifiable statements may present significant hurdles, it is crucial to recognize that this task, is not insurmountable. Careful consideration and methodological creativity can help in this endeavour. Employing a more dialectical approach can prove beneficial in handling such complexities.

Qualitative research methods may be conceived as snapshots that capture distinct facets of human experience within their specific temporal, spatial, and social contexts. Depending on the chosen methodologies, such a snapshot can serve as a powerful tool in analysing multifaceted realities. When conducted thoughtfully, data collection can show a momentary glimpse of a complex state.

In conclusion – the theoretical underpinnings of research methodologies in anthropology are crucial for interpretation of the complexities of human societies. By engaging with diverse epistemological perspectives and employing critical science approaches, researchers can uncover deeper insights into cultural phenomena and address pressing social issues. This thesis aims to contribute to this ongoing dialogue by highlighting alternative approaches and critically examining dominant power structures. Through a comprehensive and reflexive engagement with both constructivist and realist methodologies, this research aspires to advance the field of anthropology and contribute to the broader pursuit of knowledge and justice.

Conclusions

After the end of “the Troubles” (1968-1998) economic reconciliation and psychological rehabilitation was necessary (and still is). Although a peace treaty was finally negotiated, obviously many sentiments remained, especially in families who lost members as well as in the generations who grew up in war-like conditions. However, after the smoke settled, the different fronts necessarily became neighbours, in many cases, especially in Northern Ireland even literally. Therefore, a fundamental reconciliation is substantial to prevent any potential troubles in the future. Of course, such reconciliation processes are not easy and are still ongoing. The omnipresence of that topic in public life proves this. Indications of such processes can be observed at different locations, e.g., by memorials or in the media (e.g., books, TV-features, newspapers, ...). Also, many museums show not only the historical facts but also the communal work to overcome the troubled past.

The Brexit in 2000 changed that approach. The seemingly meaningless border between Great Britain and Ireland suddenly became significant once more. Nearly everybody was reminded to the sudden significance of this border. This was especially of import for catholic Republicans, but the idea of a re-established border was also a shock for the protestant Unionists. Nevertheless, everyone with a Eurocentric perspective or people benefiting from the European union in one way or another (e.g., customs, substitutions, ...) became affected.

The disparities that potentially might evolve are probably best represented by a multidimensional matrix. It should be kept in mind, that each opinion is not just the result of a binary yes/no decision. Instead, most standpoints fall in between extremes and may also change over time. Furthermore, the differing positions interact and thus modify another. For example, a loyalist person may still be critical to the pertinent customs regulations for economical reasons.

Nevertheless, the following polarities are probably those most frequently found with regard to the Brexit. The described characterizations were deduced from the general attitude that was observed in the conducted interviews.

Polarities

+) Union of Ireland vs. Northern Ireland

Generally, the citizens of the Republic of Ireland show a tendency towards a united island. However, seemingly more urgent social and political issues like unemployment, housing crises, economy, *etc.*, were prioritized in several interviews. In most cases, the unification is portrayed as something that is going to happen sooner or later even without putting too much emphasis on the subject. The main concern appears to be that the long struggle for peace should be honoured and violent approaches be avoided. Such tendencies shift towards a stronger union with Britain in the northern territories. As already mentioned, the latest aggressions against the border came from Unionists as a response to having an EU border between them and Britain. Recent political changes shape this debate. Northern Ireland was without a functional government from 2022-2024. In 2022, the last general elections were won by the catholic Sinn Fein party for the first time. However, the DUP (the protestant party) blocked the coalition. One of the main reasons for this blockade was the topic that is treated in this thesis, the border issues.

+) EU-positive general attitude vs. EU-critics

It appears that the people in the Republic of Ireland generally have a positive attitude towards the EU as well as to the idea of the EU (which is not always the same). According to recent surveys, 70% of the Irish felt positively “attached” to the EU. (Url. 3). In most cases, people know that Ireland benefited from EU membership, especially during “The Troubles” and the following reparation process. The same is true with multiple financial crises, when EU support was required. As many others, Ireland still benefits from EU programs, both economical and socio-cultural. Ireland and especially Dublin is often portrayed as a gateway for big international companies (mostly from the USA) to enter the European Union. However, critics can also be found, especially in the south, particularly regarding EU sanctioned laws and regulations. It seems not only that Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, left the European Union but that the most recent aggressions regarding the border regulations came from Unionists. Nevertheless, it appears that like in the UK, many people in Northern Ireland who voted for Brexit also changed their mind over time. They claim that the consequences were not clear or clearly communicated and also that the promised benefits did not manifest until this day.

+) Nationalist / Unionist – respectively Pro- / Anti-British in Ireland

In the light of the previously discussed concepts of identity, it seems that strict dichotomies should not be used, because of their simplistic character. Still, it seems pretty clear that Unionists and Loyalists stand on opposite sides to Nationalists and Republicans. Similar to most other conflicts, open communication between these two sides seems like a proper way for peaceful coexistence.

+) higher vs. lower economic / educational status

Educational status seems to be of little importance at the first look. The general education system as well as media use seems to channel the major opinions. The trends in higher education / universities seems to depend on the school's curricula. These are different in catholic and protestant schools, as well as universities. Of course, the respective administrations exert their influence on the approach of the institutions towards the United Kingdom. While some are even founded by the British crown and their associates other institutions share a more sceptic view of the past and its current influence.

+) young vs old

The variance between the older and the younger generation is drastic. It can easily be distinguished between the generations with first hand experience of "The Troubles" and the generations after the peace treaty. While the approach of the older generations seems predominantly to be depending on personal experiences (if and how they were involved), the generations after them reflect the influence of their surroundings. Primarily, the thematization of this topic within family and friends is crucial, but education and media play a significant role as well. While many younger individuals seem to have a clear stance on the border topic, a minority seems to have no knowledge or interest at all. (Unawareness of political events, however, seems to be a cross-cultural phenomenon in younger generations.) The generations, which share a more Eurocentric worldview seem to be even less involved in the domestic debates about Brexit and unification and instead more concerned with topics of general world politics.

+) male / female

As previously discussed, some traditional gender roles loosened in the violent conflicts. This refers mainly to women, who besides their roles in family life and at work also supported fighters with logistic or participated in violent events.

The diminishing role of religion in public life and politics resulted in a development towards a more liberal and secular living style. The latter improved mainly the situation of women, nevertheless such social change also takes some time. Divorce for example, was legalized in 1995, abortion in 2018, after many years of intense discussions and protests. Regarding the Brexit issues, it can be assumed that there are differences in the male and female work situation (like salary, commuting, ...), due to different employment situations (e.g., local vs. trans-border goods exchange, *etc.*).

+) directly affected (commuting, commercially, customs, *etc.*) by the Brexit vs. practically untouched

Obviously, people who are in direct contact with Brexit effects, like the resulting border, had deeper rooted concerns than those with more distant centres of activities. Especially before the result of the Brexit poll became clear and the now active laws became effective, many people who feared to be personally affected strongly opposed Brexit. Businesses were relocated, markets changed, business plans and supply chains had to be adapted. People moved and numerous people applied for an Irish (and therefore European) citizenship. Even governmental advertisements for visa and/or citizenship application were issued. People who perceived themselves as not directly affected feared mostly about keeping peace. They were afraid that violent groups might use the Brexit as an event to create violence. However, possible repercussions were not clear and therefore the resulting uncertainty left room for worries.

From the various concepts of individual and social identity it becomes clear that all these paradigms interact dynamically in forming the personal social-political positioning. The intersectional nature of the individual beliefs should therefore be taken into account.

Consequently, it can be assumed that throughout the Brexit debate a situation of uncertainty persisted.

The Cultural and Social Implications of Brexit on Ireland

The Brexit induced significant cultural and social repercussions on Ireland, particularly in relation to the historically complex and sensitive relationship between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In addition to the historical discord, Northern Ireland remains politically a part of the United Kingdom while sharing a land border with the Republic of Ireland. The latter, however, remains a member of the European Union (EU) and is subject of the Schengen rules. Therefore, the Brexit introduced new challenges for trans-border relations, social cohesion, and cultural identity in the region. These challenges are particularly pronounced in the context of the Good Friday Agreement (1998), which brought relative peace after decades of a conflict known as “The Troubles”. The prospect of a hard border between the two jurisdictions raised concerns about a potential re-emergence of tensions, exacerbating conflicts between nationalist and unionist communities. The social and cultural impact of the Brexit in Ireland can therefore also be described in terms of its effects on identity politics, migration patterns, cross-border cooperation and cultural exchange.

Identity and National Belonging

One of the most significant social consequences of Brexit concerned its effects on identity politics, especially in Northern Ireland. Brexit reinforced pre-existing debates on national belonging within Nationalists communities. These generally identify as Irish and European as well and see the boarder debate as an unwanted imposition. The Unionist communities, who primarily identify as British, tend instead to support the UK’s departure from the EU. The results of the referendum in Northern Ireland underscored these divisions, as 56% voted to remain in the EU. This outcome not only highlights the fragmented nature of political identity in this region but also reignited discussions on Irish unification. Political discourse surrounding the possibility of a united Ireland gained momentum once more. It seems that an enduring EU membership for the entire island would probably best be achieved by unification.

Additionally, the Brexit has several implications for citizenship and mobility rights. The Common Travel Area (CTA) between Ireland and the UK remains intact, ensuring that individuals can move freely between the two jurisdictions. However, the uncertainty over residency rights and the advantages of EU citizenship led to an unprecedented increase in applications for Irish passports, especially among Northern Irish residents. This trend reflects a broader shift in identity considerations, as many individuals sought to maintain access to EU rights and opportunities post Brexit. The growing appeal of Irish citizenship, even among those who traditionally identified as British, suggests a reconsideration of national ideology in response to shifting political landscapes.

Social Cohesion and Cross-Border Relations

Brexit also affected social cohesion and community relations in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol, sought to prevent a hard border on the island by introducing customs checks between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This measure was met with resistance from Unionists, who regarded that as a threat to their British identity. This opposition resulted in periods of unrest, particularly in loyalist areas and highlighted the ongoing fragility of peace in Northern Ireland. The re-emergence of political instability in response to Brexit-related policies underscores the extent to which social relations also remain influenced by historical grievances and territorial affiliations.

Moreover, Brexit introduced additional challenges for cross-border cooperation in topics such as healthcare, education, and economic development. Prior to Brexit, EU programs facilitated collaboration between institutions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, thus strengthening ties in various social and cultural sectors. The loss of direct EU funding for certain initiatives, particularly those aimed at peacebuilding and community development, raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of many cross-border partnerships. Alternative funding sources have been sought, but the uncertainty surrounding future practices created challenges for maintaining established networks of collaboration.

Cultural Exchange and Artistic Collaboration

From a cultural perspective, Brexit had notable implications for artistic and academic exchange between Ireland and the UK. The EU previously provided significant financial support for joint projects in the arts, preservation of heritage and other cultural activities. This fostered deeper connections between Irish and British artists, institutions, and researchers. With the UK's departure from the EU, access to certain funding resources, such as the "Creative Europe" program, became restricted. This resulted in difficulties for organizations that relied on these resources. The reduction of funding opportunities may further limit the scope of collaborations and impact the cultural landscape of both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Additionally, the regulatory divergence results in Brexit raised concerns about the mobility of cultural professionals, e.g., musicians, dancers, writers, and performers. Increased bureaucracy and visa requirements make cross-border contracts more complicated. This could potentially restrict the otherwise intense exchange of cultural practices between Ireland and the UK. Given that such cultural exchange plays a crucial role in fostering mutual understanding and social cohesion, any barriers to these collaborations may have long-term negative implications for the relations between Irish and British cultural communities.

In summary, Brexit has profound cultural and social consequences for Ireland, influencing identity politics, migration patterns, social cohesion, and cultural collaboration. The referendum results deepened already existing divisions in Northern Ireland, prompting renewed discussions on national belonging and the future of Irish reunification. Socially, the Brexit introduced new challenges for cross-border relations, particularly in the context of the Northern Ireland Protocol and the sustainability of cross-border cooperation. Culturally, the departure from the EU has disrupted artistic and academic exchanges and raised concerns about the long-term implications for shared cultural initiatives. While Ireland remains a committed EU member, the Brexit fundamentally altered the socio-political dynamics of the island, with ongoing repercussions for community relations, identity formation, and cultural interaction.

Many consequences of Brexit indicate that while borders may shift, bureaucracy multiplies and identity debates rage on. Nevertheless, the Irish talent for turning political chaos into a good story (and an even better pub conversation and songs) probably remains undefeated.

The ongoing dynamics of Brexit and migration policies continue to shape the relations between UK and EU and have tangible practical effects. Accordingly, this is also an essential area of ongoing research and analysis. Furthermore, future studies might include the engagement of

the Irish diaspora in the generation of Irish narratives, thus adding to the discourse on migration and belonging in contemporary Ireland.

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