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Culture and Government in a Land of Conflict: An Analysis of Northern Ireland

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Honors Thesis

Abstract

The following thesis is an analysis of the rich and complex history of the state of Northern Ireland and its subsequent effects on government policy, cultural identification, and public opinion concerning the use of violence. I examined the historical precedents set into place which could explain the continued violence, political party orientation, and cultural evolution which is, even now, taking place as a result of the involvement of two very different populations. I provided evidence concerning current public opinion regarding the sectarian and paramilitary violence which plagued the state for hundreds of years and continues to occur, although much less frequently than in years past.

Utilizing scholarly essays and reputable new sources, I have laid the foundation for a general analysis of the past few decades in the hopes of shedding more light on the currently shrouded present situation. It is my belief that, as a result of governmental cooperation, noteworthy but slight changes in cultural identification, and citizens who do not condone past, present, or future violence, there may well be a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

Introduction

Background Information

Conflict between the Irish and the British is a central theme in the embattled history of the Emerald Isle. Since the early 1100s, British monarchies have endeavored to gain political and governmental total control over the whole of the Irish nation. However, early British invasions usually maintained control over relatively small portions of the country rather than over the entire republic. Beginning with the Norman Invasion in 1170, the British facilitated the adoption of “English administrative practices and the English language,” forcing British tradition and leadership onto the native rivaling clans which inhabited the island (Darby). By the 1600s, British forces had gained control over all of Ireland, except the northernmost Ulster. Pulling together to create one cohesive force, the people of Ulster were able to adequately protect their province, if only for a time. Unfortunately, British control became inevitable as British forces claimed Ulster, seized Irish land, and created a plantation which would be open for British, Scottish, and Welsh colonization. This was an attempt by the British to “transplant a society to Ireland” (Darby). Over time, the native Irish were essentially exiled from their places of residence and forced to witness this “introduction of a foreign community,” composed of people who had infringed upon their territory, spoke a different language and practiced a different religion, several facts which were not without their consequences (Darby). Over time, those inhabiting the island could be separated into “two hostile groups:” “one believing the land had been usurped and the other believing that their tenure was constantly under threat of rebellion” (Darby).

The next few centuries solidified an overwhelming sense of British control. The ruling body in Dublin, an “Irish monarchy, parliament and government, reflecting those in Britain”, created regulations which persecuted practicing Catholics (Darby). Eventually, even the British imposed Irish government was abolished as tensions rose. The 1800s saw several examples of backlash with the creation of movements which sought to end British rule. Some of these movements were based on regulatory injustice and fought on a parliamentary scale. However, some were executed with the “use of physical force” in an attempt at “overthrowing the union” (Darby). In 1916, an uprising occurred in Dublin, a consequence of which was the execution of the leaders of the uprising. Despite the horrific exchange, an added bonus was the “wave of sympathy” which had been created for Irish forces (Darby). This allowed for the establishment of an Irish government and eventually, due to discontent from British supporters who believed that they were at risk of “Home Rule arrangements”, the partition of the island in 1921 (Darby).

The ensuing ordeal as a result of the partition was a civil war between “the southern 26 counties, between those willing to accept the settlement and those who believed it was a betrayal” (Darby). The consequence was the creation of Northern Ireland, composed of six counties, which was believed to be “the largest area which could be comfortably held with a majority in favor of the union with Britain” (Darby). Northern Ireland thus received its own government, an institution controlled and influenced by the British parliament, as well as “a number of devolved powers, including policing, education, local government and social services (Darby). It was in this way that British control integrated quite nicely with everyday life in Northern Ireland. Sadly, though, the British discriminated heavily against the Catholic population in Northern Ireland, a fact evidenced by “a police force and police reserve [...]

which was almost exclusively Protestant,” incessant gerrymandering in favor of Protestant dominated voting, and the implementation of “a system of economic discrimination” imposed on Northern Irish Catholics (Darby). These policies and institutions enforced by the British led to a new source of outcry for the populous of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland alike. Discrimination of Catholic populations led to citizens who no longer pushed as diligently for “a united Ireland” but rather Catholic “equality within Northern Ireland” (Darby). In 1967, the newly founded Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) pushed for the following in response to their complaints: “liberal reforms,” “the removal of discrimination in the allocation of jobs and houses,” and “permanent emergency legislation” in response to “electoral abuses” (Darby). This civil rights movement, which was heavily influenced by the movement in the United States, utilized “protests, marches, sit-ins, and the use of media to publicize minority grievances” (Darby). True to form, “civil disorder” ensued, a fact which caused the British government much concern (Darby). As such, the British parliament, acting through their post within the Northern Irish parliament, decided to re-establish order by deploying troops. Soon after their deployment, the Irish, both from the Republic and from Northern Ireland, reacted violently, an issue which provoked the heavily British involved Northern Irish government to “introduce[...] internment in 1971 as a last attempt to impose control” (Darby). The Northern Irish government was soon after suspended and “replaced [...] with direct rule from Westminster” (Darby). Direct rule represented Northern Irish politics until the 1990s.

My interest, as someone with ancestors living in both the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, lies in examining the consequences of the political and cultural events of the last thirty or so years in regards to the current cultural identity of Northern Ireland, the

policies and regulations which have been implemented in an attempt to maintain peace between these two bodies, and those missteps and ideologies behind them which slow down the overall process.

Identification of Unknown Aspects

In response to the history of Ireland proper, the unknowns are almost overwhelming. What's going on now between both political bodies who inhabit the island? In my case, the aspects which are unknown and of interest are those issues (both cultural and governmental) which pepper the late 1990s continuing with those extending into the twenty-first century. The sheer history of the entire island pushes one to examine the cultural backlash, the current cultural identity of those individuals raised on an isle at war, and the subsequent public opinion of those who live in Northern Ireland. I am interested in the identity of the Northern Irish population because, because of the pull that England had and has over the Republic of Ireland, the province of Ulster and the surrounding affected areas must identify in an incredibly different way due to their unbelievably entangled relationship with the British.

Governmentally, I am interested to see how the entities of Northern Ireland and of the Republic of Ireland are interacting on a political scale, in response to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the subsequent Good Friday Agreement, and home-grown terrorist activity and disarmament. To further shine light on the current relationship between the two, I will be examining the militaristic examples of backlash which pepper the last thirty years in response to British involvement and influence and how these events shape the cultural identities and public opinion of both groups of people. The events of the past few decades

have been integral in molding both the political standing and the cultural identity of Northern Ireland.

Research Questions

To better respond and add singularity to the issues at hand, I have developed several research questions which will aid me in the consideration of the culture, government, and identity of Northern Ireland.

First, I plan to explore the political happenings of the past thirty years to provide causation to the present standing. What caused the cooperation of the English (and thus the nation of Northern Ireland) and Ireland and how did public opinion during this time period shift? What are the causes and effects of the actions of paramilitary organizations in response to several peace agreements during this period and why historically were these accords met with shows of force and violence? I plan to examine how the current system of government evolved from its predecessor.

Second, I want to look critically at the cultural identities of the citizens of Northern Ireland, both Catholic and Protestant. What does it mean, culturally, to identify as one or the other? How has significant British influence molded the cultural identity of Northern Ireland? It is important to examine, moreover, the current state of Protestant and Catholic relations in Northern Ireland. Do tensions still run high and, if so, what are the reasons and why are they significant? How has governmental action furthered the divide between the cultural identities of those citizens within Northern Ireland?

Third, I plan to examine the public opinion concerning the ever present violence associated with the search for peace within Northern Ireland. How have violent backlashes

by terrorist organizations against men, women, and children been made possible by political party participation? Is there a peaceful route to peace, if one exists? What evidence is there of cultural and governmental backlash in regards to these shows of violence? How do these violent occurrences relate to religion and how, historically, can this be explained or examined? What is the current state of affairs in terms of Northern Ireland's dealings with the government and how does the culture represent this shift?

The questions I have posed are questions with answers deeply rooted in Ireland's history, one of usurpation, violent uprising, nationalism, and a rich culture. I believe that the events of the past few decades can be examined through a historical lens in the hopes of determining why the current system of government is as it is today as well as how Irish culture in terms of cultural identity and sense of self all reflect political change. I hope to shed light on the relationship between the government, culture, and violence found in Northern Ireland.

Means of Investigation

The following research analysis was conducted by way of gathering information from predominantly scholarly essays and news sources regarding the subject matter which renders detail to the time period which is of interest to me. This was done in order to explore the connection between British influence in the Emerald Isle, government policy, cultural identity and public opinion. The aforementioned sources are those which allowed me to shed more light on the current state of affairs between Northern Ireland, England, and the Republic of Ireland.

Examining Northern Ireland

Introductory Section

Northern Ireland's history is heavily peppered with sectarian violence, segregation based on ethnicity, religion, and political orientation, and a seemingly never-ending back and forth between the governments and paramilitary forces of the Northern Irish and British states. Both historically and from a media standpoint, the two populations of individuals living within the territory's borders are classified using a system of binaries: Catholic or Protestant, Nationalist or Loyalist, Irish or British. Nationalist citizens tend to be Catholic and are working towards the goal of a unified Ireland whereas Loyalists/Unionists tend to be Protestant and are working to uphold the link between Britain and Northern Ireland, maintaining Northern Ireland's place within the constitutional United Kingdom. Moreover, hundreds of years of usurpation and religious conflict have set the stage for great division. However, there is hope.

Governmental action between the warring bodies has facilitated devolution of the previously directly ruled government. A new identity has emerged in the face of the peace process which speckled the 1990s and currently represents a place of moderation, an identity that many can share in the hopes of shortening the distance between binary views and thus shortening the distance of division. Furthermore, despite the underlying support and threat of future violence concerning both Loyalist and Nationalist paramilitary forces, the current state of affairs points towards a lessening of sectarian violence in the face of a more moderate identity which can be shared by both Nationalists and Unionists, Catholics and Protestants, and, most significantly of all, any and all citizens of Northern Ireland. Peace is possible, although difficult. Northern Ireland and Britain have come a long way in the

process of political stability and disarmament and will continue on in the hopes of perpetuating peace.

Research Analyses

Politics and Violent Backlash

Over the past four decades, the governments of Britain, Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland have been working together, not altogether peacefully, to pave the way for a transition from direct rule to a system of devolved government. In the former system, the British were solely responsible governmentally, politically, and militarily for the state of Northern Ireland whereas the latter allowed for Northern Ireland, England, and the Republic of Ireland to work together to affect any and all necessary political change. This transition occurred as a result of several governmental milestones, the first of which was the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA). The AIA was signed into effect by the British and Northern Ireland in 1985 and represented “a reorientation of the state, a change in the governing assumption that normal British practices of governance were appropriate in Northern Ireland” (Todd). Furthermore, the agreement “paved the way for a long and arduous talks process between [...] the British and Irish governments” concerning paramilitary disarmament and peace (Hughes & Donnelly). The second major political milestone came in the form of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (AKA the Belfast Agreement). Essentially, the agreement “provides for a 108-member Northern Ireland elected assembly” facilitated by a system in “which unionists and nationalists would share responsibility for governing” (Coleman). Significantly, the agreement allowed for “cross-border cooperation with Ireland” and the implementation of a system which would be conducive to the “rights of all” via the application of parity of esteem (Coleman). There was also a revisiting of the original 1998

agreement in 2006, known as the St. Andrews agreement, which effectively solidified the “commitment to devolution” (Coleman). These three agreements were met with varying degrees of acceptance and outright disdain on both sides of the party lines. However, these political occurrences, in spite of segregation, paramilitary violence, and massive differentiations between identities, made possible the relationship between the three governmental bodies at work in the region and have allowed for a relatively stable devolved government within Northern Ireland.

The causes of this cooperation between the British and Northern Ireland are engrained in the history of the relations between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (known infamously as the “Provisionals”) and the British (Tonge). The IRA, a nationalist, republican, predominantly Catholic, paramilitary organization, presented a major obstacle in the 1990s during the political discussions of peace due to its repeated failures to fully decommission its arms, a fact which pushed loyalist paramilitaries to remain armed as well. The cause of this continued violence, while historic in nature, can be pinpointed to 1975 wherein the IRA publically posited for a cease fire in the midst of “short bursts of direct negotiation [...] separated by long periods of tacit bargaining,” all dominated by paramilitary violence involving civilians (Dochartaigh). Calls for a ceasefire by the Republicans were significant in that they were representative of the imperative need to “achiev[e] a peaceful settlement” as well as the fact that they “were willing to make major compromises to that end” (Dochartaigh). However, the British, who were previously quite interested in this particular form of bargaining, failed to engage with the Republicans, noting that “it did not make sense for the British government to incur the costs involved in negotiating a settlement with [the Republicans]” and thus Northern Ireland (Dochartaigh). However, this set an

unfortunate precedent. The unwillingness of the British to cooperate in the face of “strong Provisional willingness to end violence had the perverse effect of providing incentives for the British government to minimise [sic] movement towards the Republican position” (Dochartaigh). As such, the IRA geared up for a “Long Term Armed Struggle,” finding that “there was little to be gained politically from moderating their bargaining position in the absence of any possibility of engagement” (Dochartaigh). The IRA saw no point in making concessions to the British if the British were not willing to cooperate. Thus, the IRA, historically finding major political support in the Republican arena by Sinn Fein, a liberal nationalist political party, continued to engage in paramilitary violence against the Protestant population in Northern Ireland as well by coordinating bombings in London (Tonge). During the 1990s, as Sinn Fein slowly “abandon[ed] its military adjunct role,” the “legitimacy of the IRA’s actions was articulated in terms of the historic right of the Irish people to resist ‘British oppres-ion’” (Tonge). In this way, sectarian and paramilitary violence continued long into the 1990s and early 2000s. However, coordinated acts of violence were no longer politically supported and occurred much less frequently.

The persistence of the IRA during the 1980s sent a pointed message to the British government: there is no political agreement without the support of the IRA, Sinn Fein, and the nationalist population in Northern Ireland. The IRA essentially forced itself into future political negotiations in the use of its militaristic persistence, “becom[ing] part of the ultimate political solution when the time came” (Dochartaigh). However, despite the support that the IRA found in politics, the general public found little to no “sympathy for ‘armed struggled,’” yet many did feel “sympathy for the reasons behind dissident

republican violence” (Tonge). Even former IRA members “see their actions as regrettable, but necessary” (Burgess et al.).

Public opinion differs between Unionists and Nationalists. Unionists found that both the AIA and the Good Friday Agreement were not “an historic compromise between unionists/loyalists and nationalists/republicans;” rather, “it was fundamentally a protracted negotiation between the British state and the Provisional IRA to end IRA violence and reduce radically direct British involvement in Northern Ireland” (Patterson). The unionists felt that they “stood in an unbalanced and asymmetrical relationship with nationalists” who were receiving concessions from the British government (Aughey & Gormley-Heenan). Unionists feared the agreements would “destabilize the constitutional status of Northern Ireland” (Ruohomäki). Nationalists/republicans, on the other hand, found that they were getting the governmental recognition they deserved following a period of approximately 50 years in which “the rights of the Irish nationalist Roman Catholic minority” were “excluded” (Ruohomäki). This recognition, however, failed to convince republicans “that violence was ineffective” (Aughey & Gormley-Heenan).

The Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, and the St. Andrews Agreement provided the basis for great political change while simultaneously positing nationalists and unionists against each other in the political and public realm, a fact which elicited sectarian and paramilitary violence. Unfortunately, violence is a tactic which has found historical legitimacy and efficacy and, therefore, it is still used as a strategy to affect change. However, there is little public or political support for such strategies. Significantly, these agreements provide a precedent for the British and Irish governments coming together to facilitate peace in the territory of Northern Ireland.

Culture in a Land of Conflict

As in any community, there are several identities that individuals can utilize to better express themselves. In Northern Ireland, those identities include but are not limited to the following: Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist, Unionist, Irish, British, and Northern Irish. Unfortunately, the historical tendency in response to conflict seems to point to a very important shift: “groups shift to the point where membership in one group means taking on an attitude of hating the other group” (Hancock). This is evident in both religious and political arenas. Frequently, the ideology behind these types of conflict is one of “zero sum calculations (what one “side” gets or is conceded, the “other side” loses)” (McGrattan).

In the case of Northern Ireland, many believe that the addition of “parity of esteem” in regards to the Good Friday Agreement has allowed further division in the cultural sphere (Ruohomäki). Parity of esteem essentially means that “the validity of [each] tradition receiv[es] unqualified recognition” (Ruohomäki). Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists tend to find that such open recognition is not possible and provides fuel to the fire in terms of strengthening the ever present divide. Politically, despite the agreement following an extended period of British citizens claiming majority status, Unionists found that “the application of parity of esteem would destabilize the constitutional status of Northern Ireland [...] while strengthening the political project of the Northern Irish nationalists” (Ruohomäki). Unionists saw such equality as a threat to their political position. They believed that the British government would be that much more willing to facilitate the shift from the United Kingdom to a united Ireland.

Moreover, there existed cultural implications within the realm of parity of esteem. Many Protestant Unionists felt that their own cultural traditions were at risk. This included the infamous “Orange Order parades” as well as “symbols, language, art, education, lei-

sure, sport, community relations, economic development” and other aspect of everyday life (BBC; Hancock). Threats to cultural traditions and political standing “may well be considered a threat to the survival of the collective identity itself” (Hancock). As Catholic Nationalists gained political and cultural legitimacy, Unionists felt threatened. It is highly significant to note that the uncertainty felt by many Unionists in response to their cultural and ethnic identity came following a period in which “symbols and rituals of Irish nationalism were restricted to very specific areas through the use of policing and emergency legislation” (Bryan). “Britishness” became the target in response to nationalist cultural expansion and “assertions of Irishness” (Bryan; McGlynn et al.). However, both cultural traditions have legitimacy. It is simply the task of finding a means of legitimacy for both traditions within the same cultural sphere and making certain that each cultural tradition is adequately and equally represented.

Conflict in Northern Ireland is very deeply rooted in cultural identity concerning religion and political standing. As such, one can historically see that the divide has manifested into the following: “British/Protestants who wish Northern Ireland to re-main part of the United Kingdom, and Irish/Catholics who wish for reunification with the Republic of Ireland” (McKeown). This generalization, while simplistic, is in actuality quite complicated. However, in recent years, a new identity has emerged: “Northern Irish” (McKeown). Many argue that this seemingly new identity is a “Protestant endeavor,” created in an attempt to feel more culturally grounded in a space which previously was not their own (McKeown). In this case, Protestantism and Catholicism are what psychologists call “subordinate” or “subgroup” identities while the newly adhered to “Northern Irish” identity is considered a “superordinate identity” (McKeown). In the case of Northern

Ireland, these subordinate identities are deeply important to the Catholic population, historically the political minority (McKeown). Because of deeply rooted historical conflict, “minorities are likely to resist assimilation into a superordinate category dominated by a majority outgroup” (McKeown). Any division in identity is important and must be examined more critically. For instance, “those who define themselves as British or Irish” tend to adhere more strongly to their “subgroup” identity and believe that “identity is regarded as important” (Hayes & McAllister). On the contrary, “those who reject these dominant identities by seeing themselves as Northern Irish” tend to find that identity is not quite as important and do not cling as strongly to their “subgroup” identities (Hayes & McAllister).

The following information was synthesized in response to a 2006 survey which included questions concerning political and cultural identification: “78% of Catholics described themselves as Irish and 51% of Protestants described themselves as British” (McKeown). Catholics were more likely to believe that the aforementioned political agreements (the AIA and the Belfast Agreement) had benefited them in some fashion and that “relations had improved” between Catholics and Protestants (Hughes & Donnelly). Catholics are also more likely to believe that, in the political arena, their opinions will be recognized and that their “cultural traditions will be protected” (Hughes and Donnelly). In general, “Catholics seem more amenable to efforts to promote cross-community contact” in terms of integrated school systems, work places and living spaces (Hughes and Donnelly). The same is true in terms of “intermarriage” in the “younger, better educated” and “middle-class” populations (Hayes & McAllister, Lloyd & Robinson). Protestants were less “integrationist” across the board (Hayes & McAllister). Such “increasing polarisation and sectarian tension can be attributed to a growing sense of alienation within the Protestant

community” (Hughes & Donnelly). The “sense of Protestant insecurity” is no doubt enhanced by “increasing Catholic confidence in macro-developments” with respect to some aspects of everyday life (Hughes & Donnelly).

Polarization is also a consequence of highly divided politics. Political party participation tends to adhere to a type of “ethnic tribune appeal” and “ethnic ‘outbidding’” (McGlynn et al.). Politicians gain leverage by “maintaining divisions between groups, thereby ensuring the power base of voters is maintained” (Burgess et al.). Political division tends to facilitate division and “segregation” in other walks of life (Burgess et al.). It is, unfortunately, a system which is supported by politicians and which facilitates a kind of positive feedback loop. The more politicians focus on differentiating identities, the more segregated neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools become and the more identity is defended using sectarian violence. Ergo, the cycle continues. As such, “segregation, sectarianism, and fear of the “other” community has increased” in terms of integration of public spaces (Burgess et al.) However, this discontent is a murmur rather than a roar as it was in the 1980s.

In the years following the Anglo-Irish agreement and the Belfast Agreement, identity has shifted a great deal. This shift is significant because it represents “a more neutral or an intermediate position” in a culture dominated by “identities [...] polariz[ed] into powerful camps of “us” and “them”” (Hayes & McAllister, Hancock). Significantly, “17% of Catholics and 33% of Protestants described themselves as Northern Irish” (McKeown). Those who identify as Northern Irish are the most willing to integrate public spaces, intermarry, and facilitate contact between communities (McKeown). The Northern Irish identity represents an opportunity to lessen the gap of separation between cultural identification.

Public Opinion and Violence

Public opinion is very rarely overwhelmingly positive concerning violence. The same is true amongst the peoples of Northern Ireland, who experience “a subjective sense of collective victimhood,” a fact which “can impede reconciliation” (Cohrs et al.). This does not explain, however, the continued fighting over the last few decades. During the 1980s and for a good portion of the 1990s, the Provisional IRA and loyalist paramilitary groups continued fighting for several reasons despite the fact that “violence had no formal mandate” (Tonge). Violent outburst occurred in spite of “mobilis[ation] against the Provisional IRA’s campaign in demonstrations” and “peace rallies” of great size (Tonge). Violence persisted in the face of “apparent demonstrations of popular will” (Tonge). So why the continuation of violence? Unfortunately, violence has persisted because it remains effective both politically and culturally. During the 1980s, violence, for the most part, was a political strategy. Knowing that any kind of peace process “would require a kind of partnership” with the British government, the IRA continued its violent campaign in the hopes of forcing political “engagement with the British government” (Dochartaigh). Violence and mainly a failure to fully decommission available weaponry continued well into the 1990s as a result of failed negotiations, a fact which furthered sectarian and paramilitary violence on both sides of the party lines. In actuality, full commitment to disarmament didn’t occur until 2005 when “the IRA announced that it would become committed to politics and end its armed aggression” (Healy). Sinn Fein’s political success is “built upon a fusion of new moderation with continuing episodic ethnic militancy” simply due to its association with the IRA (McGlynn et al.). However, in the 1980s, the growth of the Sinn Fein political party, a highly nationalist republican party, “convert[ed] the IRA’s support into a political form” (Dochartaigh). The IRA, for a time, “could claim the political support of a significant body of public opinion in

Northern Ireland and did develop a credible political strategy to operate alongside their terrorist campaign” (Tonge). As such, political party participation legitimized this violence on a national scale. In this way, it was able to continue with a well-supported political platform. Up until this point, sectarian violence and specifically paramilitary violence was legitimized politically and culturally; after the early 2000s, violence was only legitimized culturally (Tonge).

From a religious standpoint, there is historical precedent for sectarian violence. In the late 1600s, the Protestant William of Orange “seized the throne[] of Catholic King James II” and eventually killed him, “secur[ing] the Protestant ascendancy in Ireland” (Who are the Orangemen?). Since then, Orange Order parades have occurred “commemorate[ing] William’s victory” with routes that cut directly through predominantly Catholic sections of town (Who are the Orangemen?). Protestants, who fear for their own cultural traditions, fight for these parade routes on a political and cultural platform despite religious implications and possible hard feelings felt by Catholics. They show outright “unwillingness to separate cul-tural and political practice” (Ruohomäki). Religious violence occurs relatively frequently and is based on hundreds of years of conflict as well as political party participation. Violence, in its efficacy, occurs due to the ever pervasive mentality of us versus them.

Significantly, though, there is never “unreserved support for war anywhere in the world” (Tonge). Normally, there is distinct sympathy regarding the ideals of the violent but never outright support for the violence. Currently, any violence is backed almost completely by a cultural sense of having been wronged by the British and/or having been wronged by the Irish. People participate in sectarian violence as a result of “family involvement,”

“constant reminder[s] of the previous violent conflict,” and the hopes of “upholding the tradition of the violent conflict” (Burgess et al.). Violence, or even the underlying possibility of future violence, is representative of political parties “continu[ing] to emphasize differences between groups and to celebrate distinguishing characteristics of Catholics and Protestants” (Burgess et al.). Even today, there exists “moral, financial, and ideological support” of the violent past and the violent present (Burgess et al.). Tension, “smoldering” in the wake of the Troubles of earlier decades, persists due to increased “segregation in [...] social” situations (Burgess et al.; Lloyd & Robinson). Moreover, representation in the media has contributed to underlying societal tensions; “the rest of the world, through news reporting, defines the region and defines the people in terms of conflict” (Burgess et al.). Despite bringing the governments of Northern Ireland, England, and the Republic of Ireland together, there have been significant divisions culturally and societally which merit the need of a prevailing identity: Northern Irish.

At present, there exists a culture of fear, segregation, and tension. However, this is really nothing new. The issue is that it exists following years of governmental relations between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and England in an attempt to create a devolved government in which everyone is equally represented, in spite of religious or ethnic orientation. Violence persists in response to its own efficacy and cultural and political divisions. So maybe, there is no peaceful route to peace, especially not in a place where “the conflict itself has become a notable part of the identity of” the people living there (Burgess et al.). In truth, “forceful defiance became the primary route for opposition to external forces” (Burgess et al.). The culture represents this division in the uncertainty of the Protestants and the confidence of the Catholics. However, the agreements of the past four

decades have led to a devolved government, although at times a rocky one. At present, there is still sectarian violence in Northern Ireland (resulting from which flag is flying to who happens to be walking through your neighborhood) and a need for better “trust” between Nationalists and Unionists, Catholics and Protestants, the Irish and the British (McDonald). More significantly, there will be no revisiting of a “Troubles-style conflict” as a “vast majority of people in both communities are totally opposed to any return to full-scale violence” (McDonald). A new identity has arisen which has the potential to unite people on both sides of the party lines and to facilitate more easily negotiated discussions about what is best for the people of Northern Ireland.

Concluding Section

Introductory Section

Overall, the intent of this analysis is meant to shed some light on the current situation in Northern Ireland in a very general sense concerning the government, culture, and the public face of the state. The aforementioned is simply a synthesis of the literature which I had the luck to find and is by no means representative of my personal views on the subject but a careful combination of the sources included therein. However, as someone with a deeply rooted sense of Irish heritage, it was definitely an interesting task. To say that the state of Northern Ireland is complex is the understatement of the century. However, this thesis aims to garner a better understanding of the current political and cultural situation and to gain insight into the historical precedent shrouding the last few decades.

Summary of Findings

The past four decades gave rise to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement, and the St. Andrews Agreement, all of which were aimed at different degrees of devolution within the government of Northern Ireland. The agreements were met with both disdain and acceptance, albeit both with some trepidation. While these political milestones did great things in terms of bringing three different governmental bodies together to affect political change, they pushed apart the already divided binaries, giving rise to fear of great change and of the possibility that strongly upheld cultural traditions could not be maintained in the face of other traditions. The “us” versus “them” mentality was widened as a result of the agreements despite their political successes. Moreover, one can see the political precedent foregoing paramilitary violence and its strategic political uses within Northern Irish politics.

The agreements pushed for equal recognition for all traditions, a fact which worried Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and Nationalists alike. Catholics and Protestants (who are in a highly generalist sense synonymous with Irish and British, Nationalist and Unionist respectively) view integration within the state much differently; whereby Catholics, who arguably gained more by the previous agreements, are more open to integration while Protestants are less likely to agree with integrationist practices. These differences point to a definite gap between the subgroup identities, a gap which exists as a result of a religious and political conflict of interests as well as political party participation. There exists additionally the formation of a potential superordinate identity in the face of subgroup identities which may prove to bring high levels of integration, intermarriage, and an easier discussion towards a committed peace.

Finally, public opinion, in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, is very rarely geared at armed struggle in an attempt to solve its grievances. While it is often the path most taken as a result of its efficacy, the people of Northern Ireland have utilized violence as a political strategy, as a means of protecting cultural traditions, and because it has become a pervasive part of their identity, whether nationalist or loyal. The current status of the state is, not surprisingly, a little shaky wherein government officials require greater levels of trust to fully commit to what devolution could be and whereby the general public feels the underlying tension of the historic divide. However, several political agreements, the creation of a newfound superordinate identity, and a populace which does not condone violence all point towards the possibility of a peaceful future.

In Closing

The information I have gathered concerning any facet of Northern Ireland is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. I have examined a very small portion of the state's history and cannot claim any form of expertise concerning the subject. However, utilizing a historical lens as a means of inspection can allow for a comprehensive interpretation. History encompasses culture, government, politics, sociology, group psychology, and an assortment of other influences. It is the primary means by which we explain the past because it offers the broadest possible explanation for understanding. This is especially true in areas of intense conflict and, as such, Northern Ireland.

Writing this thesis has provided me access to a vast oasis of information concerning the country of my ancestors. I have a better understanding of the current situation based on historical precedent and a wide-ranging fear that the cultural traditions of each sect will be unrecognized and eventually disregarded as a whole, despite governmental gains

concerning the matter. More importantly, however, the writing of this thesis has provided me with hope that, with time, the people of Northern Ireland can achieve lasting peace.

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