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Non-Unionist Protestants in the Northern Irish Conflict:

Ideology, Identity, Class and the British
Approach to Conflict

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northern Ireland was stage of an armed conflict known as the “Troubles” which lasted three decades until the Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement in 1998. This agreement, the peace process which preceded it as well as the institutional design put in place afterwards followed a consociational approach and Northern Ireland has emerged as one of this approach’s success stories. The great decrease in violence and the fact that former enemies could work together in government were undoubtedly great progresses but the consociational model does little to deal with the fact that Northern Irish society is divided in two communities defined by religion, and nationality. The consociational model through the Two Traditions paradigm, on the contrary, reinforces and legitimises the division and excludes several individuals and social groups that don’t belong to either of the two major communities or deviate from the norm of correspondence between religious background and constitutional preference/nationality.

In this research we have focused on one of this excluded groups, namely individuals with a Protestant background that would have opposing views to those of Unionism (and the related Loyalism). Rather than an oddity, these non-unionist progressive Protestants have their roots on a progressive tradition among Dissenters which was most visible in the 1798 United Irishmen rebellion and the labour struggles in the XIX and XX centuries. They represent only a small minority of Protestants and the present constitutional arrangement works against the change of this reality. In the Two Traditions model Protestant culture is equated with Orangeism and Unionism and the position of non-unionist Protestants is then problematic in terms of identity and political ideology and the connection between these two dimensions.

The Northern Irish conflict also clearly shows a class dimension since paramilitary groups from both sides were usually connected to working class communities. It is among the working classes that the religious/national division is starker and it is in working class neighbourhoods that the physical and architectural aspect of the division is more evident. This reality is connected to the effort of the British government of contention of the conflict to working class areas and also reflects the degradation of life conditions for the working classes (and especially the Protestant working class) since the decline of the shipbuilding industry. Since the 1990’s the Peace Process has been accompanied by economic policies which have increased the schism between the upper and lower ends of the social pyramid. Among the Protestant working classes frustration is combined with a “siege mentality” in relation to the Catholic population which tends to be channelled through Loyalism, an intransigent and, in most cases, sectarian ideology. Loyalism has also frequently been an obstacle in the evolution of the peace process but since the Two Traditions model recognises Unionism as Protestants’ ideology conditions remain for the former ideology to remain successful. It could then be particularly hard for individuals with a working class background to oppose Unionism and for significant progressive political change to take place among the Protestant working classes.

The research demanded a qualitative approach to understand how non-unionist Protestants de-constructed the connection between religious background and political ideology and how they would place themselves in the division between communities. It was also clear that the ideal way to collect this information was directly from a sample of non-unionist Protestant individuals. The interviews were semi-structured in order to let subjects to articulate their views over relevant issues at their will and allowing the discourse to flow and connections between issues to be made by subjects themselves. Due to constraints one of the subjects was

interviewed through a list of questions via internet. Even if the ideal sample was deemed to be 10 individuals, only 5 were actually interviewed. The sample also showed lack of variation in gender and age, with all subjects being males born between 1946 and 1962. Separately and before the analysis of the interviews we have analysed and summarised information gathered in the non-academic book "Further Afield, Journeys from a Protestant past" (1996) by Marilyn Hyndman, a collection of 40 first person life stories of non-unionist Protestants which are then not systematically analysed, as this was not the pretention. This information was helpful to understand some experiences which couldn't be found among the interviewed subjects, namely that of women, of nationalist/republican Protestants and younger people, even if not necessarily young people of the present given the publishing date. The absence of the experience of young people who have little or no memory of the "Troubles" is clearly a shortcoming of this research.

The categories of analysis of the interviews were background, identity, ideology and relation to the Protestant working class. The background category focused on understanding the subject's origins, including class origins and identity and political influences while growing up and possible change in personal beliefs. In the Identity category subjects were asked how they articulated their own identity in the context of the division and their attachment to particular identity labels. The ideology category included the political opinions of the subjects including the view on the major ideologies of Unionism/Loyalism and Irish Nationalism/Republicanism, the "Troubles", the constitutional issue, the British government, paramilitary violence and the evolution of the peace process and its model. Finally the relation with the Protestant working class category deals with the views of this communities present situation socially, economically and politically, opinion of the progressive current of Unionism/Loyalism, and their personal connection with the Protestant working classes, which for some subjects can include the relation with their own origins.

The analysis has showed firstly that Unionism and Orange culture have never had the monopoly over Protestants in (Northern) Ireland and that their influence and Loyalism's particular influence have changed over time depending on the political and social context. At certain times other influences were important for a significant number of Protestants and some subjects grew up almost uninfluenced by Unionism and sectarianism. The 1960's is also a period where younger Protestants were influenced by progressive politics and contact between communities was increasing but this was reversed by the eruption of the "Troubles" and growth of loyalist influence.

The growth of Loyalism was particularly intense in Protestant working class communities and it became increasingly difficult and dangerous to hold different, non-unionist views. Most subjects with working class origins have practically cut ties with their origins. There is an engagement with Protestant working class communities on the part of some of the subjects but where they were they seem to be outsiders, friends of the community but not members, which can sometimes lead to an uneasy relationship. Respondents agreed that progressive political change among the community seemed very unlikely.

The analysis has also shown that non-unionist are not a coherent group in terms of identity and political ideology. There is variation among three dimensions: the radicalism of ideology, view on Irish Nationalism/Republicanism and importance of Protestant identity. We can roughly identify four ideal-types of non-unionist Protestant in their relation to the sectarian division and constitutional dispute in Northern Ireland. Two of ideal-types represent a middle ground between the two communities of the divide, refusing to take sides and mostly cosmopolitan in their views. They are separated by the radicalism of ideology with one ideal-

type espousing moderate social-democratic or liberal views while the other closer to socialist and libertarian stances. The third ideal-type is represented by those for whom Protestant identity is still fundamental personally and even politically. This ideal-type stresses the progressive tradition among Irish Protestants and attempts to contest the view of Protestants as irredeemably unionists from within the community. The last ideal-type represents the Protestant nationalists and republicans. This ideal-type couldn't be clearly identified among the interviewed subjects but there have always been Nationalist Protestants in small numbers and even among republican paramilitaries and some examples could be found in the "Further Afield" sample. Nationalist Protestants can have an important role in influencing this ideology and contribute for it to be more progressive and less Catholic-defined.

Even if each of the ideal-types of non-unionist Protestants could have a beneficial effect in deconstructing Northern Irish identity politics and the sectarian division since non-unionist Protestants are a small minority of the Protestant population the fact that they're not a coherent group undermines their ability to influence. The consociational approach and the Two Traditions model is also an obstacle for Protestants, but of course also Catholics, to more freely define their identity and politics. The Protestant working class in particular seems unlikely to be a source of positive and pro-active change in this conflict. Policies in the province should deal more with socio-economic issues to improve conditions among deprived communities and favour a gradual transformation of institutional design to reward alternatives to the two traditions rather than preventing them.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The armed conflict in Northern Ireland known as the 'Troubles' was brought to an end through a peace process in the 90's which culminated in the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement in 1998. With the exception of a few dissident groups, the actors in the conflict have agreed to lay down their weapons and engage in constitutional politics. That is not to say that conflict ended or that the Agreement has settled the long standing disputes in Northern Irish society over constitutional issues. Division remains the norm and tensions are still very clear after more than a decade. It is not surprisingly so. The conflict was long and bitter and only reinforced older antagonisms but it also stems from the paradigm with which the British government, with support from the EU and the USA, has dealt with the conflict.

This paradigm, much informed by neo-liberal values is based on the idea of power-sharing between the province's two communities or 'Two Traditions'. Unnamed these communities can be religious: Protestant and Catholic; political: unionist and nationalist or ethno-national: British and Irish. It seems for many they might be just treated as the same thing for simplicity sake: all Protestants are unionists and feel British; all Catholics are nationalists and see themselves as Irish. In spite of the reductionism the approach is not uncommon for many in Northern Irish politics and those more involved in striking an agreement. The idea that the conflict is a two-sided affair plays into the British government's notion of being an arbiter of the dispute, a neutral part in an archaic conflict between two irrational peoples. The settlement of the conflict was less informed by an attempt to create the conditions for lasting peace than to create the conditions for a modern liberal economy to operate smoothly. Rather than dealing with the structural division of the society there was an explicit recognition of that division grafting it into the procedures of constitutional politics which can only reinforce it.

Much of this approach then lies in the belief that two separate and uniform groups of people exist in Northern Ireland. While there are clearly many aspects of social life that bound many people together and in opposition with other people and that some categories overlap, that vision is far too simple. Not only can the clear separation between the two groups be ambiguous and possible to cross but the internal diversity within these communities is clearly overshadowed. It treats each community monolithically and doesn't acknowledge the internal conflicts and power struggles within those communities which may be related to issues of class, gender or other fissures.

Such diversity and contradictions within communities can clearly be found on both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the Protestant community seems particularly rich in those aspects. As there is no 'Protestant religion' it is *a priori* divided into denominations. It is also more socially diverse in that its social range includes both the dominating classes and a big working class, including of course a sizeable middle class. Class tensions should be higher than those within the Catholic community that until recently had a much smaller middle class and virtually no big industrialists or businessmen. Most Catholic workers would be dealing with Protestant or foreign employers.

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The Protestant community tends also to be understudied or at least portrayed in a more stereotypical fashion. That stereotype is hardly sympathetic and is usually connected to the discriminating regime of Stormont, loyalist violence and Orange culture. Presently Protestant votes go overwhelmingly to unionist parties, either the former ruling party that promoted discriminatory practices against the Catholic population or more extreme and uncompromising versions closer to loyalist views. Nevertheless there are many historical examples of progressive politics among Protestants in Ireland including radical democratic views during Reformation, the United Irishmen period and labour struggles in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Large numbers of Protestants don't see themselves as unionist but in many cases there may be a divorce from politics altogether. Still there is a minority of Protestants that has very different opinions from their co-religionists and actively opposes Unionism as an ideology. The existence of non-unionist Protestants is not facilitated by centuries of division, years of conflict and the British-sponsored approach to deal with that conflict. Identity politics seems to dominate Northern Ireland but both identity and politics are very personal and subjective affairs. It is always possible to go against the norm and subvert the binary division in Northern Irish society and the correspondence between religious affiliation and politics.

While class was always an important issue in the Northern Irish conflict (and the older and related British-Irish conflict) the military and economic responses to this conflict have given new salience to class differences in Northern Ireland. The identity politics of the 'Two Traditions' and the naturalisation of Unionism among Protestants mean that its working class frustrations continuously feed into Loyalism. This ideology is traditionally uncompromising and has frequently been an obstacle to peace agreements in Northern Ireland making the Protestant working class a key collective actor in the conflict and its resolution. Nevertheless the support for Northern Ireland Labour Party until the 1960's and the more recent development of a progressive strand of Loyalism dispels any simplistic view of the Protestant working class as irredeemably sectarian and conservative and incapable of developing class politics.

The purpose of this research is then to help to characterise the population of non-unionist Protestants focusing on their problematic position in the binary division and conflict in Northern Ireland and also on class, as a central aspect of that conflict and division.

We will analyse the background of non-unionist Protestants in terms of political and identity influences growing up and how they might have changed during their lives. This can clarify whether most non-unionist Protestants have been brought up in a family or community where other political influences were dominant or if some sort of political and identity change has taken place that has perhaps estranged individuals from their old ties.

Their present day identity will also be subject of analysis particularly their attachment to a 'Protestant' label and its meaning. The meaning of Protestant identity can be disputed and different 'traditions' can emerge as an alternative to Unionism and Orange culture based of moments in History where Protestants engaged in progressive and radical politics. This could put into question the 'Two Traditions' model applied to Northern Ireland. This paradigm would exclude those that have a Protestant identity different from Unionism (and Catholics that are not Nationalists) as well as those that reject this binary division altogether.

The third segment of the analysis will deal with non-unionist Protestants political expressions, in particular if having a Protestant identity matters for their politics. This can help to determine if there is a particular progressive Protestant political stance and what are the prospects of progressive ideologies among Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Finally we will analyse the relation of non-unionist Protestants with the Protestant working class. It could be that non-unionist Protestants are an integral part of the Protestant working class (and thus that some working class Protestants are non-unionist) or that these two groups could be largely separate and rejecting Unionism means one no longer is seen as part of the community. While easier in the former case, even in the latter there could be a possibility that non-unionist Protestants develop a role in promoting progressive ideologies and a different Protestant tradition among the Protestant working class. They can have a foot in the Protestant side, especially if they have a strong sense of being Protestant and still relate to Catholics.

Before the analysis we will review the literature about Northern Ireland to contextualise the position of non-unionist Protestants in the conflict. The first section deals with the History of the conflict and in particular the 'Protestant people' and its working class. It intends to understand the historical role of the Protestant working class in the conflict and clarify their present situation. The second section deals with British intervention in Northern Ireland. The British government has always played an important role in Ireland but in recent History this is especially true since the beginning of the Troubles and Direct Rule in Northern Ireland. The development of the conflict from then onwards is intimately connected to British policies and its approach is determinant for political, identity and class issues in which this work is based. Lastly we will deal with identity issues and sectarianism, the particular division of Northern Irish society based on religious affiliation. This division is not simply religious though and it has informed the political division between Unionism and Nationalism. Even if identity and politics are intimately related in Northern Ireland, identity is a very personal subject and the existence of non-unionists Protestants contests the view of Protestants as inevitably unionists.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT AND THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS

The conflict in Ireland and its successor in Northern Ireland is a colonial legacy. That is not to say that this is a sufficient explanation or that it is still today a colonial conflict. Rather it established the basis under which the conflict developed: English presence and intervention, introduction of a new economic system disrupting previous economic and social patterns and arrival of new populations that were integrated into this system thus having an advantage while keeping separate¹. Even if intermarriage, conversion and blurring had occurred from the very beginning of settlement it was essentially the colonial pattern of relations between the populations and the English government that solidified the difference and established a pattern of inequality related to cultural difference. This introduction of new population meant there was a difference between natives and settlers. Furthermore from the beginning of the 16th century the Penal Laws were put into place discriminating against Protestant non-conformists (Dissenters) but especially against Catholics. This meant that difference of religion was enshrined in the law. Within the settler population there were also important internal differences. This group had diverse national origins, mainly Scottish and English; belonged to different denominations within Protestantism, with different privileges and carried out the plantation or settling process in different ways, since settlers in Counties Antrim and Down settled autonomously and not through the crown-sponsored 'Plantations'.

The late 16th and 17th centuries were also a period when England was moving towards capitalism². Not only were Irish resources a good reason to seek control of the island but the new towns build and occupied mostly by Protestant settlers were the heart of trade and small industry. From the beginning the English (and later British) government was instrumental in the development of capitalism in Ireland through colonialism. This involved not only introducing new populations but to transform property and other economic relations³. The Protestant population was from the beginning intimately connected to this developing capitalism and able to secure a more prominent position in the economic structure.

The internal differences within the Protestant settler population were evident during the period of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms and the Commonwealth, where Protestants split in support of King or Parliament. This period would see a development of radical ideologies concerning religion and government and the emergence of several groups like the Levellers, the Ranters and the Diggers which were proponents of republican and democratic ideas⁴. During the Williamite Wars of the 17th century differences between different Protestant denominations

¹ Miller (1998): 6.

² Clayton (1998): 45.

³ Smyth (1980): 40, 41.

⁴ Whelan (2010): 24-28.

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eased remarkably in face of the Catholic-supported Jacobite threat⁵. This would establish something of a pattern in the way Protestants would deal simultaneously with their internal differences and their relation to Catholics, seen as an outside menace and their defining 'Other'. Whenever that menace was stronger Protestants united but when it eased dissent became more common. For Protestants the succession war and the Battle of the Boyne specifically represent not only victory over the Catholics but their own internal union and cohesion as a group.

The 18th century would be marked by stability as Ireland deepened its colonial relation to (by now) Britain. Known as the Protestant Ascendancy this period was marked by a political and economic domination of a minority landed elite composed entirely of members of the Established Church. In the second half of the 18th century radicalism flourished in Ireland. The Ascendancy and the colonial relationship with Britain was creating antagonism from a large part of the population. Not only Catholics but also the Dissenters were disadvantaged and this affected both the common people as some elites.

Political developments elsewhere were also of great importance. It was not a one way influence though. The developments in the American colonies not only contributed to further radicalism including revolutionary activity in Ireland but were also influenced by Irish people and ideas. Due to legal disadvantage and a poor economic situation at the time huge numbers of Ulster Presbyterians and other Irish Dissenters left for the much freer environment of the colonies where there was a greater degree of self-rule but also a more democratic polity among the settlers contrasting to the rigid Anglican-dominated hierarchy in Ireland⁶. The American colonies shared a similar relation to the British metropolis. Their revolution and independence was widely supported in Ireland and together with the French Revolution served as inspiration for those who wanted to redefine the colonial relation with Britain and the monopoly of power of the Ascendancy.

The 1798 rebellion by the United Irishmen was stronger in rural areas where Catholics were a majority but it was largely led by Presbyterians and some Anglicans both in Dublin and Belfast. The Orange Order had been founded in 1795 in Armagh in the midst of land disputes between Catholic and Anglican tenants. The Order was connected to the Anglican landlords and was used to fight the rebellion⁷. The rebellion was crushed with brutality but after the rebellion repression wasn't the only British answer. In 1800 the Act of Union made the Kingdom of Ireland part of the United Kingdom and dissolved the Irish Parliament creating Irish MP's at Westminster instead. This brought Ireland into closer integration with Britain, starting to undermine the old Ascendancy. From this time on there was a gradual repeal of the Penal Laws.

The 19th century was of extreme importance in the development of the conflict. In the background massive economic changes were taking place in parts of Western Europe, but especially in Britain. The industrial revolution was the result of developing capitalist practices and their connection to the expansion of European empires around the world. The growing resources obtained through exploitation of the colonies provided the conditions for the development of mass production aided by new technologies. The influence of modern

⁵ Whelan (2010): 114.

⁶ Whelan (2010): 116, 117.

⁷ Anderson (1980): 45-46.

Imperialism is ambiguous in Ireland. On the one hand, Ireland was Britain's oldest colony and certainly there had been an economic relation of unequal exchange between the two islands that was still in place at this time. But Ireland had also been integrated into the United Kingdom and that was quite advantageous for the local economic elites as they could now take advantage of British markets and the British Empire⁸.

The conditions in the northeast of Ireland were more favourable to the development of industrialisation. The advantageous social position of the settlers had led to a development of a domestic linen production in eastern Ulster that evolved into a more commercially-run enterprise⁹. For many non-conformists, especially Presbyterians the repeal of the Penal Laws and the economically liberal climate meant they could fully develop their business capacities unrestrained by disadvantage and the colonial relation. The close sea connection to Liverpool and Glasgow also meant that investment in the Belfast region was more profitable to British industrialists, taking advantage of the island's general underdevelopment¹⁰.

As a result the eastern parts of Ulster, especially the region around Belfast and the Lagan valley saw a rapid industrialisation and urbanisation. Migrants flooded from the countryside and Belfast overtook Dublin as the biggest city on the back of textile industry and later also shipbuilding. The new social conditions brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation meant that a new class of industry workers was being formed out of masses of peasants. As most migrants came from the rest of Ulster they were both Protestant and Catholic and the rural areas of this province had seen skirmishes because of land rivalries between informal armed groups largely defined by their religion. That only reinforced the division and antagonism between the two populations coming from the 17th century wars. In the new urban context that antagonism was fuelled by competition for jobs and the territorial patterns that developed meant that religious segregation became the rule in the growing city's neighbourhoods¹¹.

The socio-economic patterns of colonialism were coupled with the economic conditions of the 19th century so that in the northeast the new class relations were simultaneously sectarian relations¹². The old aristocratic elites and the new economic bourgeoisies were exclusively Protestant as were the better paid skilled members of the working class. For the unskilled there was competition between Protestants and Catholics but the former had some chance to move towards the skilled jobs. This exclusivity would be defended by skilled workers and would mean that Catholic workers would be again disadvantaged in comparison with Protestants and occupy a subordinate place in the social hierarchy even after the repeal of the Penal Laws¹³.

The 19th century also gave rise to emerging ideologies centred on concepts of Empire and Nation. There is more complexity to this relation than a simple opposition between Imperialism and Nationalism. British intervention and rule in Ireland was fundamental for the

⁸ McLaughlin (1980): 16, 17; Miller (1998): 6.

⁹ McLaughlin (1980): 16.

¹⁰ Hewitt (1993): 5.

¹¹ McLaughlin (1980): 20; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 7, McAuley, McCormack (1991): 120.

¹² O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 24, 25; McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 197,198.

¹³ Shirlow (1997): 96.

development of an ideology that opposed it. Unionism, the specific ideology in reaction to Nationalism was very informed by British Imperialist ideology. But Imperialism and constitutional Nationalism were not necessarily opposed¹⁴. For many constitutional nationalists the objective was a degree of self-rule within the mighty British Empire rather than a separation from it. For the Catholic elites and even some Dublin Protestant elites Home Rule would allow prominence in the Irish economy that was slipping to the northeast.

Home Rule and Nationalism were opposed from the start by the elites of the industrial northeast. Even if this was the richest area of the island these industrialists would be dominated by the more numerous Catholic elites from the rest of Ireland. Furthermore their economic destinies were intimately linked to the British industrial heartland and were indeed a part of it. Any degree of separation from Britain would harm their economic interests. These north-eastern elites adopted a 'pure' form of imperialism by seeing themselves and Ireland as an integral part of the imperial core. This Irish Unionism was also adopted by many Protestants descendants of the former Ascendancy in Dublin¹⁵.

Nevertheless there was a need to counter Irish Nationalism with a more mass-based movement. This could only happen in Ulster where there was a Protestant majority that had fewer grievances towards the British and indeed a historical connection¹⁶. To unite with the masses Unionism appealed to the Orange Order which had evolved in urban context to a more popular and labour-based association promoting exclusivist employment practices¹⁷. Unionism gradually morphed into a more nationalist ideology, even if never questioning the British link, based around an Ulster identity which essentially meant a Protestant one¹⁸.

The beginning of the 19th century saw the gradual shift by Protestant Dissenters and especially Ulster Presbyterians away from radical and republican politics and towards an alliance with the members of the Established Church, its Ascendancy, the Crown and the adoption of a more conservative outlook. Nevertheless this wasn't a sudden change. Not only not all Dissenters or Presbyterians were radicals and supported the 1798 rebellion and there was always a conservative element among them but this shift was also never complete and radical ideas continued to exist in Protestant communities afterwards. Nevertheless by the time of the Home Rule dispute the vast majority of Protestants in the northeast were unionists and were developing an Ulster identity increasingly separate from the rest of Ireland.

The shift by Dissenters and Presbyterians was complex and had several contributing factors. First of all there was a general incorporation of this segment of population into the rest of the Protestant mainstream dominated by Anglicans. The gradual repeal of the Penal Laws meant legal that disadvantage ended earlier for non-conformists than it did for Catholics and the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland (Anglican) meant that there was no more need to conform. There had been growing accommodation of Presbyterians and other Protestants into the higher spheres of politics, business and military and closer integration into the imperial

¹⁴ Anderson, O'Dowd (2007): 940.

¹⁵ McLaughlin (1980): 21.

¹⁶ McLaughlin (1980): 17.

¹⁷ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 15; McLaughlin (1980): 23.

¹⁸ Finlayson (1997): 79, 80.

centre since the Act of Union¹⁹. As the industrial revolution developed around Belfast their material interests became more dependent on the British connection and could see little advantage in a separate or self-governing Ireland where they would be dominated by Dublin and agrarian interests²⁰.

The incorporation into the mainstream was also sought by government and the Protestant elites. The promotion of the Orange Order and its later opening up to non-Anglican Protestants did much at grassroots level to attract Presbyterians. The rise of evangelicalism and the action of ministers like Henry Cook also resurrected the old anti-papery campaigns and prejudices and provoked a conservative turn in the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster and this combined with rising tension due to rapid urbanisation and social changes led to the first sectarian riot in Belfast in 1835²¹.

The change among Presbyterians towards a more conservative and pro-British stance was also aided by a developing Nationalism which many Protestants felt excluded them. Daniel O'Connell and his Catholic Association and the later Repeal Association did much to merge Nationalism with Catholicism so that it would have little appeal to Protestants, especially in Ulster. This was the beginning of a nationalist movement that would try to reform Ireland within the Empire and constitutional politics seeking Catholic Emancipation, repeal of the Union, land reform and abolition of the tithes that every Irish had to pay to sustain the Established Church. This was a much more moderate movement than the one initiated by the United Irishmen and had a very different ideology.

Nevertheless so too did the more violent-prone version of Nationalism, Irish Republicanism became more associated to the Catholic population and to ideals of 'Irishness' that bore little resemblance to the 1790's movement. For the United Irishmen separation from Britain was contingent to the reality of colonial domination by the state and the disabilities that made a mockery of the word democracy. Inspired by the Enlightenment and the French revolutionary ideals these men and women fought for the universal values of a true democratic and equalitarian polity. They were imbued of patriotic ideals but didn't necessarily espouse the idea of Irish independence and nationhood as a principle. In the 19th century both Nationalism and Republicanism were informed more by romantic ideals than democratic principles. The difference between the two was quantitative and not qualitative and their distinction unclear. Democracy became a 'lost world' in Irish politics helped also by the emergence of Unionism²².

As Nationalism and Catholicism increasingly informed each other so too did Unionism become the main ideology of most Protestants but this picture would be riddled with exceptions, especially of Protestant Nationalists like Charles Stewart Parnell and Isaac Butt.

The development of Nationalism and Unionism in the 19th centuries was accompanied by the emergence of the modern Labour movements in which Protestants played a great role. As the industrial development of this period was concentrated in Belfast and surroundings it was also there that the working class had its biggest numbers. As we have shown this working class

¹⁹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland (1974): 5; Bambery (1986): 15.

²⁰ McLaughlin (1980): 26.

²¹ Presbyterian Church in Ireland (1976): 6, Anderson (1980): 46.

²² Morgan (1980): 195-197; Purdie (1980): 80.

was divided along sectarian lines and both nationalist and unionist ideologies could be combined with labour politics. As in other developing industrial regions in the 19th century, working class politics was initially exclusivist and protected the interests of those sections with long established guilds and skilled workers. With industrial growth a large number of industrial jobs were unskilled and performed by the newly arrived. In the context of Greater Belfast and Ulster the religious division reinforced these internal divisions of the working class so that the better-paid and skilled jobs were an almost monopoly of Protestants. Eventually trade unions were extended to include unskilled workers and to build a more mass-movement connected to socialist ideals²³. The first decades of the 19th century saw an early period of working class unrest in Antrim and Down with strikes in the period of 1815-1818²⁴. Most Trade Union leaders in the early phases of the Labour movement would be Protestant but later many Catholics, including the British-born James Larkin and James Connolly would also rise to prominence and would be followed by many Protestant socialists. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries there was a surge of working class struggle which was connected to events in Britain and elsewhere.

The union between Protestant and Catholic workers was fragile as the Labour movement was influenced by Nationalism and Unionism and the sectarian division. It was dependent on developments around the National question and the Home Rule movement. The Labour movement and Marxism would end up reproducing the sectarian division and this was nowhere clearer than in the Connolly-Walker debate around 1912²⁵. Connolly became increasingly associated to Irish Republicanism seeing that it influenced large numbers of workers particularly Catholics in Dublin. He sought to infuse that ideology with socialism and Marxism. He arguably became progressively entangled with 'green socialism' and might have adopted some of the romanticism of Nationalism and Republicanism²⁶. William Walker similarly felt he could rally Belfast's Protestant workers if he would adopt an 'orange socialist' position defending the integration of the Irish working class in the British one. This division within labour and socialism wouldn't be healed and was reinforced by Partition. Thereafter any attempt to unite both working classes would be based on an apolitical approach and an appeal to the lowest common denominator among workers²⁷

Within the Protestant working class there was an evident tension between Labour and socialist politics on one side and Unionism, particularly its loyalist shade, on the other²⁸. The former would stress class, workers' union and anti-sectarian beliefs while the latter would appeal to religious, national and ethnic identities and stress the union of Protestants regardless of class or social condition. While many would be clearly with one camp or the other probably the majority of Protestant workers would be able to combine both ideologies and would stress one or the other depending on the context²⁹. When the Home Rule and independence struggle

²³ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 71, 72.

²⁴ Bambery (1986): 23.

²⁵ Morgan (1980): 188; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 75.

²⁶ Morgan (1980): 179.

²⁷ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 73.

²⁸ Edwards (2007b): 29.

²⁹ Purdie (1990): 66.

reached its climax from 1916 to 1922 the loyalist tendency was apparently successful due to the climate but that predominance was never complete.

By the end of the 19th century the Home Rule question dominated political life both in Ireland and in Britain. Adapting to and taking advantage of extended franchises Nationalism and Unionism mobilised their constituencies by appealing to their religion, building on an old pattern of division. That division was now being brought to the centre of the political stage and solidly linking constitutional issues with the sectarian divide³⁰. Nevertheless there were not two sides to this conflict, as the 'external' British factor was always fundamental. Both Irish Nationalism and Unionism were shaped by British Imperialism and the internal power struggle within the British Parliament and government was still to be decisive for the future of Ireland.

There was a complex relation of forces behind the Partition of Ireland. It divided within rather than between islands with nationalists allying with the Liberal Party in Britain and the unionists with the conservatives³¹. Partition ended up being a compromise between these forces and not a result sought by any part until prospects of full victory were dashed by the reality on the ground³². Most of all it was a solution to a British political problem³³. The antagonisms and agitation in Ireland had long been a focus of instability in the British Parliament. With Partition and the creation of two parliaments on the island, Irish conflicts and problems were to be insulated from British politics. The different balance of power between nationalists, unionists and the British government lead to a 'solution' that morphed the minority problem from a Protestant minority in the island as a whole to a significant Catholic minority in the new Northern Irish state. The unseen result was that Partition actually contained the Irish conflict and reduced it to Northern Ireland³⁴. The Free State saw a violent civil war immediately after Partition but thereafter the sectarian division ceased to be a major issue and conflicts, sectarian or not, were dealt with more peacefully.

In Northern Ireland Partition brought some change but it reinforced rather than smoothed the conditions for old patterns of conflict to persist, including British sovereignty and presence. Partition gave credit to the idea of Irish Catholics and Protestants being two different people and in Northern Ireland only the latter group was thought to be loyal to the new state. The Stormont regime was backed by a highly de-centralised patronage system built around the Orange Order and a vigorous security system which included the former Ulster Volunteer Force³⁵. This was coupled with the abolition of proportional representation and gerrymandering to assure a complete hegemony of unionist rule. As already stated Britain gave self-government to Northern Ireland in the hope of insulating the Irish question from British politics. The Stormont parliament was subordinate to British one but in practice there was a policy of not discussing Northern Irish issues in Westminster and inevitably a tacit consent to the unionist regime³⁶. From early on Stormont was dependent on British subvention, but that was the price

³⁰ Todd (2009): 3, 4.

³¹ Morgan (1980): 203.

³² Cork Worker's Club (1975): 10, 11.

³³ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 8.

³⁴ Coakley, O'Dowd (2007): 878.

³⁵ Bew, Gibbon, Patterson (2002): 19, 64; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 14, 20.

³⁶ Bell (1976): 23, 24.

for Britain to pay not to be involved³⁷. Unionist elites in control would be connected to the heavy industry and business at state level which would favour a laissez faire economic policy and at local level to relatively autonomous small business and middle classes organised in the Orange Lodges and local chapters of the party³⁸.

To set up the unionist state the political and economic elites were also dependent on the support of the Protestant working class. Even if the latter were already advantaged when compared to Catholic workers, the new state ensured permanent discrimination and privileges to Protestant workers³⁹. By ensuring that, the unionist elite could prevent working class unity by diminishing its appeal to Protestant workers and count on their support to the state and maintain a unionist class alliance⁴⁰. By combining a labour and an exclusivist approach to the class struggles the Protestant working class was able to gain concessions and maintain a form of ascendancy within the general working class. The privileges it had in the Stormont regime were the result of these struggles and not simple offerings from the unionist elites⁴¹. The sectarian aspect of the state is explained not just by fear of Catholic rebellion but also by the fear of losing the Protestant working class to Socialism thus ensuring their permanent advantage⁴². This was a continuation of the exclusivist practices of the largely Protestant skilled workers that reproduced the sectarian division in class relations. While the result of class struggle, due to its exclusivist nature these privileges couldn't sit well with a true socialist perspective. During the Stormont regime class was constructed through sectarian practices and discrimination of Catholics was a necessity for the existence of that regime⁴³.

Nevertheless the unionist class alliance was fragile as class issues couldn't be side-lined and tensions within this bloc would re-surface occasionally, whenever the threat of a United Ireland was feeble or the economic interests of the Protestant working class would be endangered. The Great Depression in the 1930's saw a huge rise in unemployment. Dissatisfaction was generally dealt with in populist fashion with appeals to exclusivist and sectarian practices by members of the Unionist Party or the Orange Order. By then the large shipbuilding and textile industries were in steady decline due to low productivity, detachment from southern economy and the decline of the British Empire⁴⁴. This was challenging the material bases of the unionist class alliance. The year of 1932 saw the Outdoor Relief strike where Catholic and Protestant workers rioted together against the police and later in that decade the Republican Congress was formed. This group had a significant presence of Protestants and there was a famous incident in Bodenstown involving the Shankill branch of the Congress and the IRA.⁴⁵

After World War II the Labour Party won the elections in Britain and a welfare programme was put into place. This introduction of welfare steadily guided Northern Ireland in

³⁷ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 189.

³⁸ Bew, Gibbons, Patterson (2002): 57; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 15.

³⁹ Shirlow (1997): 96.

⁴⁰ Bell (1976): 23.

⁴¹ McLaughlin (1980): 24.

⁴² McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 182; Patterson (1995): 160.

⁴³ Shirlow (1997): 96.

⁴⁴ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 183.

⁴⁵ Hewitt (1993): 20, 21, 22; Bambery (1986): 55, 56.

a process of de-insulation from Britain at the same time as the state started to reform to cope with its severe economic situation. These reforms included an economic policy of attracting mobile foreign investment and increased government centralisation and planning which seriously threatened the position of the small businessmen and many within the local patronage system⁴⁶. Similarly dissatisfaction grew among the Protestant working class as de-industrialisation became more acute, especially in the late 50's and early 60's⁴⁷. For the Stormont regime it was now difficult to keep the unionist alliance intact.

The post-war period was also one of the most successful periods not only of the Northern Ireland Labour Party but also the Communist Party. The NILP never seriously threatened unionist rule but it did achieve some significant percentages and established a base of support mainly among the Protestant working class⁴⁸. The NILP nevertheless was always dependent on the prominence of the National question and it had to manage the sectarian differences among the workforce. This meant that it would tactically avoid any issue related to the National question and that it adapted itself to the unionist regime, never becoming a real threat nor questioning the fundamental aspects of the state like the legitimacy of its existence and structural sectarianism⁴⁹. The Trade Union movement faced similar problems to those of the NILP. Formed in 1889 the movement split in 1943 and merged back forming the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in 1959, giving a great degree of autonomy to the Northern Ireland Committee. Most Northern Irish trade unionists are even to this day affiliated to sections of British Unions while many northern Catholic workers are affiliated to Irish ones. Unity in the Trade Union movement exists only at institutional level and keeping that unity at an all-island level seems an achievement in itself. Just like the NILP the price of maintaining this unity is an historical inability to deal with the sectarian division and keeping the lowest common denominator among workers⁵⁰.

The late 1960's and early 1970's brought about the collapse of the unionist regime and the Stormont parliament but the process that led to its fall was connected to the economic changes that brought de-industrialisation and the response to those changes by the unionist government. As unemployment raised sharply the material basis of the unionist class alliance were endangered. The unionist elites could no longer guarantee the economic interests of the Protestant Working class of which it was dependent. Discontent was reflected in the rise of the NILP and apparently the alternative to unionist government was seen to be to the Left. But in Northern Ireland the Protestant working class was not the only discontented social group. For obvious reasons the Catholic population as a whole was also unhappy and were able to build a mass movement demanding reform. The demands of these two different groups rather than being united into a reformist and anti-unionist movement became largely incompatible as one side demanded a complete change in the working of the state so it would include the Catholic population and the other side demanded state intervention to essentially keep things as they traditionally were before de-industrialisation which meant a privileged position to the Protestant working class. The discontent felt by this section of the working class was channelled

⁴⁶ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 17-19.

⁴⁷ Bew, Gibbon, Patterson (2002): 119, 120.

⁴⁸ Bew, Gibbon, Patterson (2002): 120.

⁴⁹ Purdie (1990): 65, 66.

⁵⁰ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 71, 73-77; Bell (1976): 90, 91.

to the NILP insofar as there was no 'Catholic menace'. With the rise of Catholic mobilisation old patterns emerged and there was a drift towards Loyalism. The collapse of the unionist regime was connected to pressure from both sides of the divide. The demands of each side were impossible to be met simultaneously and knowing this the unionist government tried to play a double game that it hoped would accommodate both sides but that which up not satisfying any⁵¹.

The beginning of the 'Troubles' also saw the disintegration of the Unionist Party. For decades this party managed to successfully accommodate all factions of Unionism despite political and class tensions. By the late 1960's though this unity was no longer possible and several other parties with a mainly loyalist ideology started to challenge the Unionist Party's hegemony as it couldn't maintain the privileges of the Protestant working class and deal with nationalist contestation and republican violence. Parties like the Democratic Unionist Party and Ulster Vanguard adopted a hard-line Unionism that was backed indirectly by the emerging loyalist paramilitary groups, the Ulster Defence Association and the (new) UVF⁵². With increasing polarisation large sections of the Protestant working class abandoned the official Unionist Party and even the NILP to turn to these more extreme parties. As we have seen the unionist class alliance was always fragile and the unity between the economic and political elites on one side and the working class on the other an uneasy one. The working class was always prone to dissent and to support alternatives to the Unionist Party either with a labour ideology, a loyalist outlook or a mix of both.

Loyalism had been an ambiguous and confused ideology based on loyalty to Ulster and its (Protestant) people more than Britain itself or the monarchy. Loyalty to the latter was conditional and dependent on the upholding of the traditional advantage of Protestants as a reward for their commitment to the Union and their blood sacrifice. In the event of a perceived British betrayal that loyalty could be discarded⁵³. British intervention and Direct Rule in the 1970's was by many loyalist considered such a betrayal just as the attempt by some moderate unionists to accommodate the Catholic minority. Direct Rule also had the effect of easing the challenge to the Unionist Party⁵⁴. Before that any such challenge would disrupt the class alliance and (at least in minds of the possible challengers) would play into nationalist and republican plans to overthrow the state. With Britain in control there was no such danger and dissidence was allowed to develop among unionist ranks. Politicians like Ian Paisley and Billy Craig were by now harshly criticising official Unionism and denouncing the Civil Rights movement as papist plot. Even if carefully detaching themselves of any paramilitary group or violent action their inflamed words contributed for a loyalist backlash against the Civil Rights movement and violence against Catholics in general in the form of sectarian assassinations. Those violent actions were generally undertaken by marginalised members of the working class that would take 'counter-terrorism' in their own hands while they would be abhorred by the middle classes and their political leaders including Paisley and Craig⁵⁵.

⁵¹ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 185-188.

⁵² Bell (1976): 136, 140.

⁵³ Bell (1984): 72, 73; Finlayson (1997): 82, 83.

⁵⁴ Nelson (1984): 143, 145.

⁵⁵ Nelson (1984): 131, 135.

As McGovern and Shirlow argue the unionist regime was unable to create a socio-regulatory format that would transform the society it created through sectarian practices, leading the Protestant working class to act as defenders of the Mode of Social Regulation that prevailed in the first decades of Stormont⁵⁶. But due to the economic changes and de-industrialisation there was no longer the material basis for the unionist class alliance and they couldn't challenge class tensions anymore⁵⁷. There was increasing deprivation and marginalisation of the working class and the minor privileges that the Protestant working class could get were diminishing and weren't enough in face of armed rebellion. Both loyalist and republican paramilitaries were closely bound with the working class communities from which they sprung. Economic disadvantaged as we have seen was intimately bounded with the sectarian division. Class relations were reproduced not only economically but also culturally and politically so that class relations were simultaneously sectarian relations⁵⁸.

Loyalism just like Irish Republicanism among Catholics had a clear class aspect but was ideologically fragile. It was based on ethno-religious identity and many of its leaders would not belong to the working class⁵⁹. It would hardly speak of oppression, disadvantage or inequality and would fight for a distorted idea of liberty and freedom that didn't include the 'disloyal' Catholics. Nevertheless as the 'Troubles' progressed there was an emergence of some sort of class consciousness among loyalist working class Protestants⁶⁰. This class consciousness wasn't a complete novelty as many working class Protestants connected to paramilitary organisations would have been members of the NILP and other left parties before the 'Troubles'⁶¹.

One of the first places where loyalists developed class consciousness and more progressive politics was in Long Kesh prison, later known as the Maze. There the first generation of UVF prisoners led by Gusty Spence was trying to come to terms with the sectarianism that divided society and its working class and their own role in it. Spence was increasingly disillusioned with the UVF and loyalist paramilitary actions and taking advantage of time in prison sought to educate himself and follow inmates. In Long Kesh loyalists also started to engage with the 'Official' IRA, by now a communist organisation opposed to the 'Provisional' IRA⁶². Outside prison loyalist organisations linked with the paramilitaries were starting to engage in political action. In 1973 the Loyalist Association of Workers called a strike against the internment of Protestants that finished in violence, something which destroyed this association's credibility⁶³. The next year the Sunningdale Agreement was followed by a strike called by LAW's successor, the Ulster Workers' Council. This strike was a major turning point for the loyalist-inspired working class. It paralysed Northern Ireland for two weeks and brought down the executive⁶⁴. The reasons for the strike were not progressive and unlike most strikes it was not made by and for the workers in general but for one section of workers to maintain

⁵⁶ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 188.

⁵⁷ Price (1995): 64.

⁵⁸ Shirlow (1997): 91; McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 198; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 25.

⁵⁹ Nelson (1984): 129; 138.

⁶⁰ Nelson (1984): 128.

⁶¹ Edwards (2007b): 29; Bell (1976): 137.

⁶² Nelson (1984): 172.

⁶³ Nelson (1984): 131.

⁶⁴ Nelson (1984): 155, 156.

advantage over the other⁶⁵. Nevertheless the success of the strike showed the power that ordinary loyalist workers had in dealing with political elites and influencing politics⁶⁶.

By now some in the UVF were favouring a more political approach and the formation of a party. The Volunteer Political Party was formed later in 1974 but was disbanded after disastrous results. It seemed clear that even in working class constituencies there was much doubt about making politicians out of illegal paramilitaries⁶⁷. For many in the VPP and those involved in the strike there was a growing involvement in community work. Due to the residential segregation of Belfast coupled with violence and the containment of conflict the local community was extremely bounded and formed a small social world for many people for whom even the city centre was distant⁶⁸. As these communities were plagued with unemployment and disadvantage and there were few channels to intervene politically many activists became speakers for their communities. Many, but by no means all, had connections with paramilitary groups while politically a part was decisively moving towards progressive politics and reassessing traditional loyalist beliefs⁶⁹.

In 1977 the Progressive Unionist Party was founded and while it was again connected to the UVF it wasn't exactly a political wing of that organisation. At best it represented a faction that co-habited with virulent sectarianism and most UVF men would not vote for it⁷⁰. It had an important role in the Belfast Agreement along with the UDA-aligned Ulster Democratic Party in securing paramilitary acquiescence and has developed a distinct voice within Unionism⁷¹. Its stress in the areas of education, health, welfare, and housing approximate it to a socialist ideology. Nevertheless there is no consistent criticism of the economic system and it speaks only for a section of the working class rather than for the whole. It is therefore concerned more with the interests of the community than the interests of class and can be described as a community-based party⁷². There was some level of success for the PUP but time and again its connection with the UVF has hampered their prospects⁷³. The party suffered from the death of many of its key people within a short period of time and it is now left without representatives in Stormont and struggling not to suffer the same fate as the UDP which ceased to be a political party.

2.2. THE POLICIES OF THE BRITISH STATE AND NEO-LIBERALISM

After World War II as Britain became more involved in Northern Irish affairs through welfare and other programmes it still needed to keep it at arm's length. For most of the British

⁶⁵ Bell (1976): 11.

⁶⁶ Bell (1976): 139.

⁶⁷ Nelson (1984): 183, 187.

⁶⁸ McAuley, McCormack (1991): 120, Hall (2008): 6.

⁶⁹ Nelson (1984): 193.

⁷⁰ Edwards (2010): 599, 600.

⁷¹ Edwards (2010): 608, 609.

⁷² Heffernan (1995): 59.

⁷³ Edwards (2010): 599.

public and maybe even some in the British government apparatus the insulation of Northern Ireland had created an illusion that the state was removed from the conflict and was somehow a 'neutral' part to the conflict. This has been the insinuation of the British government's discourse about Northern Ireland. This internal approach to the conflict explains it as rooted in unredeemable sectarianism and hatred on the part of two different peoples constantly at odds with each other. Any British wrongdoing is deeply buried in the past as ancient History and its present role is one of an honest broker bringing some rationality to this abnormal situation⁷⁴.

The strategy of the British government to deal with the conflict in Northern Ireland from the late 1960's combined repression and reform⁷⁵. These are not incompatible and had some precedent in the way Britain dealt with Ireland as evident in the repression of the United Irishmen rebellion in 1798 and the following Act of Union in 1800. The British response had to deeply reform the state and bring it in line with the demands of advanced capitalism on one hand and to respond to the challenge to the legitimacy of the state posed by the IRA on the other.⁷⁶ This was pursued by a policy of 'normalisation' of the situation by containing the conflict and providing new socio-regulatory mechanisms and class structures that could transcend sectarian hostilities⁷⁷.

The containment of conflict would be achieved by limiting it to Northern Ireland and more particularly a few areas like West Belfast, Derry's Bogside or South Armagh. These territories were largely urban areas inhabited by the working classes⁷⁸. This policy of containment has meant that violent conflict was generally circumscribed to these working class areas which were already a cauldron of marginalisation. Through the construction of 'peace walls' the sectarian territoriality of the city was hardened to a point of no physical contact between neighbouring communities creating a few interfaces that quickly became the centre of disturbances rather than a point of (positive) contact. Walls and checkpoints were also built around the centre of Belfast as response to the IRA campaign against the commercial centres of towns. Upper and middle class areas like South Belfast were also generally removed from the conflict and people removed themselves by fleeing to the suburbs around the Belfast Lough.

The full impact of the security forces including the British army and of security measures like internment was felt only in the working class areas. This was especially true in Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry, even if the relations between security forces and Protestant working class communities haven't ceased to deteriorate from the 1960's to this day⁷⁹. But Republicanism and the IRA were a much bigger threat to the sheer existence of the state.

Britain wished to contain the conflict also ideologically and Republicanism was to be destroyed in the political field⁸⁰. The British state had hardly any interest in maintaining Catholic discrimination since Partition except for keeping Northern Ireland stable and far enough from British politics. With Direct Rule there were few reasons to maintain such an acute level of

⁷⁴ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 1, 4, 19; McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 191; Smyth (1980): 38.

⁷⁵ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 20.

⁷⁶ Smyth (1980): 48.

⁷⁷ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 190, Shirlow (1997): 99; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 20.

⁷⁸ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 20; McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 191.

⁷⁹ Hall (1994): 17, 18.

⁸⁰ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 190, 191.

discriminatory practices. Not only was the Labour Party generally sympathetic to nationalist claims but it was clear that these discriminatory practices were fuelling Catholic alienation and republican violence. The British strategy to deal with Republicanism was to isolate it and that meant accommodating some form of moderate Nationalism and building a common middle ground⁸¹.

The most important part of the British policy of reform from the 1970's was centred on bringing a peace solution to the conflict involving that middle ground of made up of nationalist and unionist moderates. The first attempts by the British government to break a solution were soon after the beginning of Direct Rule with the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973. From the beginning the British solution involved power-sharing between unionists and nationalists as it sought to find a solution to reform a majority government where the minority was disadvantaged and oppressed⁸². The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement signed in 1998 involved years of talks, including secret talks with the IRA and was preceded by a cease-fire from this organisation and loyalist paramilitaries.

The Consociational model developed by Lijphart to divided societies was the theoretical basis of the Belfast Agreement. It involves power-sharing between communities and a grand coalition, proportionality in government and public sectors, community self-government and equality in cultural life and a veto for minorities. In Northern Ireland it meant that unionists and nationalists would have to share power and right to veto in divisive issues but also that every elected member of the Northern Ireland Assembly would have to designate itself as 'Unionist', 'Nationalist' or 'Other'. It also recognises that there are two different communities in Northern Ireland, with two different traditions and allegiances and both have Parity of Esteem in the eyes of the state⁸³. Many aspects of the Agreement were notoriously ambiguous and this resulted from a pragmatic need to include several political groups with not only different but opposing claims⁸⁴. This allowed for various interpretations of the Agreement and contributed for the process of actually constituting the Northern Ireland Assembly to take another nine years of negotiations to be complete.

The adoption of a Consociational model to Northern Ireland has meant that sectarianism and the fundamental division of people between two groups have become institutionalised. It is done in a more 'benign' form in that it establishes equality between the two groups and is accompanied by a vocabulary of 'tolerance', 'reconciliation', and 'understanding'. There is certainly nothing wrong with tolerance and reconciliation but it reflects a view that the violence and conflict is explained by the existence of two different peoples in Northern Ireland rather than by the unequal relations that were established between different groups in Ireland and in Britain involving difference, privilege and discrimination⁸⁵. Rather than acknowledging and tackling the ways sectarianism is institutionalised, the Agreement reproduces and accommodates the sectarian division in the political institutions justifying it and

⁸¹ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 192.

⁸² Byrne (2001): 328.

⁸³ Byrne (2001): 333; Little (2004): 21, 22; Graham, Nash (2006):257.

⁸⁴ Little (2004):31; Graham, Nash (2006): 261.

⁸⁵ Jenkins (2006): 403; Finlayson (1997): 76; Rolston (1998): 265, Little (2004): 28.

legitimising it. This entrenches ethno-national identity and the equality that is achieved is a form of balanced sectarianism or living together but separately⁸⁶.

The neo-liberal ideology largely espoused by the British government in Northern Ireland is reflected in the approach to culture by multiculturalist theories. Multiculturalism is essentially concerned with the politics of difference and how that difference can be accommodated in a liberal society. The difference it refers to is a cultural one related to ethnic and religious affiliation and identity⁸⁷. Multiculturalism is a prime example of the 'culturalist turn' that marked academia since the 1970's and the later emergence of ethnicity as a fundamental concept and the framing of almost every conflict in the 1990's as ethnic conflicts⁸⁸. Cultural difference is seen in essentialist fashion and class and gender are side-lined. Multiculturalism surfaced in the USA as a response to racial tensions emerging in the 1960's. It was a reform to be combined with the repressive response of the state in dealing with black ghettos and social agitation. It stressed the need for improved race relations and education and its final objective was to allow assimilation of groups marked by difference and disadvantage⁸⁹.

Multiculturalism is related to Consociationalism and the neo-liberal approach to the conflict. The Agreement deals with procedures for institutions and structures to be implemented and is formal and bureaucratic in nature. Multiculturalism as a neo-liberal ideology informed the Agreement and much of institutionalisation of the sectarian division is related to the need for politics of recognition and concepts of power-sharing and Parity of Esteem. But multiculturalism is also related to more informal cultural policies to be implemented by agencies connected not only to the government but to civil society. As an ideology it is not only favoured by the state but also by many politicians, academics, community workers, the media and business⁹⁰.

The 'Two Traditions' concept is much related to this multiculturalist and neo-liberal coalition and its working in civil society. It helps to connect an abstract definition of two groups in official documents to the reality and materiality of sectarian division. It reinforces the interpretation and framing of the conflict as predictable since there are two different groups and grounds the sectarian division on culture alone. Multiculturalism and the 'Two Traditions' paradigm reproduce the sectarian divisions by acknowledging and working with those divisions. The focus is again on the benign words of 'tolerance' and 'reconciliation' between the unquestioned two traditions and not on a challenge of the sectarian division or its structural deconstruction.

For multiculturalists sectarianism and racism is about ignorance and lack of engagement between groups, not oppression and exploitation⁹¹. There is no attention to structures or power relations but just individual beliefs. History is depoliticised and expunged of its divisiveness to become acceptable to both sides in reconciliation⁹². Multiculturalism is not an

⁸⁶ Graham, Nash (2006): 256; Rolston (1998): 272.

⁸⁷ Little (2004): 57.

⁸⁸ Rolston (1998): 260.

⁸⁹ Rolston (1998): 257, 258.

⁹⁰ Rolston (1998): 264, 265.

⁹¹ Rolston (1998): 258.

⁹² Rolston (1998): 264, 266.

attack on inequality but a justification for it⁹³. Its prioritisation and essentialisation of culture owes more to a trend in academic studies than rigorous analysis of social relations. Again the lack of attention to structural aspects and power relations takes culture and identity as a given fact, unchangeable, monolithic and prone to causing conflict when different cultures meet. Any other fundamental division is eschewed and by framing everything in terms of culture and ethnicity politics adapts the language of culture so that politics is seen as culture⁹⁴.

The political beliefs in the Union with Great Britain or a United Ireland became 'traditions', proper 'cultures' with a right to be preserved and recognised by the state. The hope is that Unionism and Nationalism (but especially the related Loyalism and Republicanism) cease to be political ideologies opposed to each other and became cultural traditions with mutual tolerance and recognition. These ideologies may become less antagonistic but at the same time their recognition engraves them in culture in such a way to blur any difference between being Protestant, unionist or British and between being Catholic, nationalist or Irish. For a Protestant, Unionism becomes its culture rather than a political choice heavily conditioned by social structures that reproduce the fact that most Protestants are unionist. This culturalisation and de-politicisation was intimately connected to the British government's wish to destroy Republicanism and the IRA politically⁹⁵.

The issue of equality as present in the concept of Parity of Esteem is also problematic as it masks that the reproduction of the two communities was rooted in the oppression and disadvantage of one of the sides. The 'equality' takes as reference both communities so again there is a balance so that each side has the same. Therefore equality is perceived in a sectarianised way and not based on actual need⁹⁶. Furthermore this equality is meant to refer only to that between nationalist and unionist communities. Again the sectarian division is put before anything else, as if all inequality in Northern Ireland came from religious affiliation or view of the Union. Inequality based on gender, class or other aspects is seen neither as a contributing factor to the conflict nor worth serious consideration⁹⁷.

The exclusion of the lower strata of society from direct engagement in the peace process is evident from the elitist nature of that process and the Agreement. It is inherent to the Consociational model by elevating the ethnic elites to the role of leaders of their community and giving space and electoral reward for maintaining the union of that constituency⁹⁸. The elitist nature of the Agreement only reinforced the already elitist nature of Northern Irish (and previously Irish) politics⁹⁹. This elitism is certainly an older pattern owing from the 18th century Ascendancy but it was more marked and recent during the rule of Stormont. Single-party rule and the patronage system involving election seats, favours and jobs sponsored by the Unionist Party and the Orange Order established a clear hierarchy. This elitist nature of N-Irish politics is intimately connected to an historical lack of true democracy in Northern Ireland. Unionist rule

⁹³ Rolston (1998): 259.

⁹⁴ Graham, Nash (2006): 258.

⁹⁵ Rolston (1998): 273.

⁹⁶ Rolston (1998):270; O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 173.

⁹⁷ Little (2004): 29; Graham, Nash (2006): 276; Hall (1995): 20.

⁹⁸ Little (2004): 29.

⁹⁹ Little (2004): 87.

during 1921-1972 was hardly democratic and subsequent Direct Rule removed local control of politics altogether. This means that democratic procedures and habits are very recent in Northern Ireland even if the institutions and organising structure associated with democracy were already in place. Significantly, nowadays the grand coalition model which attributes places in the executive to every party above a certain threshold means that once again there is no opposition to the government in Stormont. It means not only that agreement within government is difficult and slow to achieve, especially since the biggest parties are the more extreme DUP and SF, but also that there is little incentive for accountability and the development of political alternatives.

The still heterogeneous middle ground that Britain wanted to promote found some social space to develop as the economic changes brought by de-industrialisation provoked a restructuring of the economy and patterns of employment. As industrial employment dropped significantly there was increased intervention of the state in the economy dating from post-World War II. To provide more employment and to increase the security net of welfare the public sector in Northern Ireland grew spectacularly during Direct Rule. This growth of public employment significantly benefited also the Catholic population that increasingly saw education and a state job as one of their few possibilities of social ascension. It also increasingly created religiously integrated workplaces in government services that had moved away from Stormont's practices¹⁰⁰.

But as a failed state immersed in economic recession and war, from the Thatcher years Northern Ireland was to be transformed by the British state informed by neo-liberal values. The priority was for this territory to become fully integrated into international economy. That integration would pull Northern Ireland out of the crisis and sectarianism would be solved by appealing to the individualistic pursue of economic interests¹⁰¹. The USA and the European Union, the greatest promoters of neo-liberalism as well as the Republic of Ireland were also partners with the British government in sponsoring the peace process. For pure capitalist interests the conflict and sectarian division were not advantageous and undermined its growth. Nevertheless sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland proved too ingrained and complex to deconstruct. Eventually neo-liberal policies in Northern Ireland have hybridised with the local divisions and accommodated those divisions to run more smoothly¹⁰².

The neo-liberal paradigm seems to permeate the whole approach to Northern Ireland by the British government. Intimately connected to economic globalisation in the last decades neo-liberalism emerged as the new consensus of the political class in developed countries and started to reverse many social-democratic policies in favour of privatisation, de-regulation and competition¹⁰³. There has been for years a policy of attracting mobile foreign investment including redevelopment of areas of Belfast¹⁰⁴. Promoted through public-private partnerships, tax breaks and direct investment this type of economic policies stimulates private sector employment in the managerial and professional sections of the work force connected to

¹⁰⁰ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 188, 189.

¹⁰¹ Graham, Nash (2006): 272.

¹⁰² Graham, Nash (2006): 272; Nagle (2009): 188.

¹⁰³ Nagle (2009): 175.

¹⁰⁴ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 19.

financial and business sectors¹⁰⁵. The new international division of labour means that developed countries saw the emergence of a service and retail-based economy that led to an increasing duality in employment: on one side growth of well-paid white-collar employment that has benefited the upper and middle classes as we have seen and on the other a rise in low-income employment, underemployment and chronic unemployment¹⁰⁶.

The rise of employment in the public sector and the 'new economy' has essentially created a sizeable and representative middle-class where it was smaller, almost exclusively Protestant and small business-related. These middle classes are also generally spared to deal with the conflict directly and try to distance themselves from it and sectarianism. This has made the middle classes, Catholic, Protestant or other to increasingly share similar lifestyles and socio-economic pursuits and become less antagonistic¹⁰⁷. The middle ground that the British government has tried to build hasn't been a purely political one which included the moderates of both sides. It is essentially a middle class that has been promoted and subsidised by intervention in the economy and which has been protected from the ugly and violent face of the conflict¹⁰⁸. It is a middle class that has much in common with middle classes in general particularly in the Western world in that it is well integrated into the world economy.

Britain has used the sectarian division and its interrelated class division to ensure some degree of political stability in Northern Ireland¹⁰⁹. This means that the working classes and the middle and upper classes experience the realities of sectarianised space in different ways and of course that they experience the violent conflict also in different ways¹¹⁰. This has led to the working classes being blamed for the continuation of conflict which plays into the idea of British neutrality and rationality. This reduces the 'abnormality' of sectarianism and the conflict from the Irish and Northern Irish in general just to its working classes and eludes the responsibility of the strategy of containment of the conflict to working class areas¹¹¹.

British attempts to reform have generally been tried while maintaining the social structures that allow antagonism to reproduce¹¹². During Direct Rule the sectarian and class relations were reconstituted within the state apparatus that governed Northern Ireland and later they would be again reconstituted in the peace agreement¹¹³. For the strategists of the British government and neo-liberal ideologues sectarianism is an abnormality and lies on backwardness and individual beliefs and is manifested with violence or intolerance. Their inscription in institutions, procedures and structures in general is overseen as is the connection of sectarianism to inequality and disadvantage. Sectarianism as seen by neo-liberals is no more than its most blatant and violent forms¹¹⁴. To counter sectarianism there should be economic development and more tolerance to create a 'normal' society. This 'normalisation' is supposed

¹⁰⁵ Nagle (2009): 176-178.

¹⁰⁶ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 189.

¹⁰⁷ Shirlow (1997): 99.

¹⁰⁸ Nagle (2009): 188.

¹⁰⁹ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 27.

¹¹⁰ Shirlow (1997): 102.

¹¹¹ Graham, Nash (2006): 267, Shirlow (1997): 100.

¹¹² Todd (2009): 6.

¹¹³ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 207.

¹¹⁴ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 24, 177.

to be a neo-liberal and capitalist one where sectarian difference would be replaced by class difference like in the rest of 'normal' societies¹¹⁵.

The different policies adopted by the government towards the middle and upper classes on one side and the working classes on the other has contributed to a major schism in Northern Irish society, one that is recurrent in other developed countries. Structural economic conditions in the last decades have been unfavourable to the working classes in these countries which saw an enormous reduction of industrial employment. The attack on the welfare state has further increased insecurity among the disadvantaged classes. The general trends of growth of very well-paid and low-paid jobs in developed countries have been stimulated by the British government. Middle-class consensus is promoted while the working classes face increasing exclusion due to lack of opportunities and disadvantage in education¹¹⁶. Equality is only relevant when it concerns the sectarian divide and class inequality is normalised.

The effect of marginalisation of the working classes is magnified by their relation with conflict during the last decades. It has been affected disproportionately and their neighbourhoods were enclosed and cut out from each other in a deliberate policy of containing the conflict to those areas. While the middle-classes have been more or less enthusiastically adopting individualist, consumerist and post-sectarian neo-liberal values and started to distance themselves from the conflict this doesn't mean that there is no sectarianism in middle and upper classes but it tends to be outside the reduced neo-liberal interpretation of sectarianism. This type of sectarianism is associated with paramilitaries, marches and sports and thus much more related to the working classes. These classes have been excluded and demoralised by economic and political developments, their traditional social worlds have changed or disappeared and identity and tradition may be a refuge. Many have hardened their identities as a result of experience of the conflict while others used that experience to go through change and questioning. Nevertheless the connection of working classes to conflict is a direct consequence of the different attitude of government and security forces towards these classes that made them experience the conflict in a much different way from the middle and upper classes.

2.3. SECTARIAN DIVISION AND IDENTITY

We have seen as the British government has managed the conflict by using the sectarian and class divisions within Northern Irish society. The overarching division based on religious affiliation is a peculiarity of Northern Ireland. Even though the British and previously English governments had an important role in the establishment of that division, before Direct Rule the British government had been insulated from Northern Irish politics for decades. The priority was to pacify and facilitate integration into the world economy of international capitalism and not maintain sectarian rule. The recognition of the existence of two different groups of people was a pragmatic decision by the part of the British government. To challenge

¹¹⁵ Graham, Nash (2006): 272, 275.

¹¹⁶ McGovern, Shirlow (1997): 192, 194, 195.

comprehensibly the sectarian division would demand a massive investment of money, time and effort and it would involve necessarily disrupting class relations connected to the capitalist mode of production which would be an anathema for a liberal state¹¹⁷. To adapt to them greatly facilitated the incorporation of the moderates and helped to appease some of the radicals on both sides.

The British government took the existence of the two separate groups for granted and that recognition does have some basis on reality. The matter of the fact is that in Northern Ireland there is a constant reproduction of two groups of people that share much in common and oppose the other. This is not an abstract division but it is grounded on material reality and is aided by discourse¹¹⁸. Both communities are product of imagination but they are not imaginary¹¹⁹. Identities are social constructs and product of shared imagining by their members but these imaginings have real consequence as those members can act according to it¹²⁰. These groups however are not homogenous, bounded or clearly differentiated from other groups¹²¹. Individual identification is not fixed but a process that involves internal self-definition and external categorisation and individual and collective processes of identification¹²². An individual has a great degree of choice in the matter of identity but he will probably be ascribed categories from birth, be socialised into those categories growing up and face reprehension or punishment if he rejects them. An individual is generally not completely free to choose identities but is conditioned by external influences both material and discursive.

In Northern Ireland religious affiliation has the prominence of being the decisive category in which the division is founded. Nevertheless religion is clearly a social marker for the differentiation of two groups rather than being a significant cause for antagonism¹²³. The religious distinction is connected to the colonial relation between settlers and natives during the 17th and 18th centuries. As religion was an unambiguous, frequently registered and observable affiliation it became a legal category serving as a basis for the colonial society even though it differentiated between more than just two groups. During the 19th century modern nationalist and imperialist ideologies emerged and religion was used to rally support. The importance of religion as a marker survived the secularisation tendencies in the western world maintaining high levels of church attendance and is evident in the close identification to the Protestant label by non-practicing and non-believers¹²⁴. In Northern Ireland is possible to be a 'Catholic atheist' or a 'Protestant atheist'. Religious affiliation doesn't stand by itself though. It interplays and reinforces a division with colonial origins which became increasingly political and connected to ethno-national identity.

Protestants in the whole of Ireland were divided by affiliation and by their relation with old patterns of sectarian domination. A part was intimately connected to the old Ascendancy and was scattered all over Ireland but in Ulster there were significant Protestant popular classes

¹¹⁷ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 24.

¹¹⁸ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 25-27; Finlayson (1997): 93.

¹¹⁹ Jenkins (2006): 400.

¹²⁰ Jenkins (2006): 393, 394.

¹²¹ Jenkins (2006): 390, 399.

¹²² Jenkins (2006): 395.

¹²³ Clayton (1998): 43, 44.

¹²⁴ Clayton (1998): 41.

of farmers and workers. The initial unionist opposition to Home Rule was based on Irish Unionism and appealed mostly to Anglicans but its lack of resonance in the island in general and the economic changes of the industrial revolution made it evolve to a closer identification with Ulster and its Protestant character as different from Ireland¹²⁵. From this period there was an appeal to Protestantism as including any of the reformed denominations and not just Anglicanism. As Presbyterians increasingly integrated into the Protestant mainstream, Unionism could also build a mass movement in Ulster.

Identity groups are constructed through discourses which interpellate individuals as part of the in-group and excluding an adversarial 'Other'¹²⁶. The two communities in Northern Ireland have constructed their identity in opposition to each other and are interdependent and largely equivalent¹²⁷. Nevertheless nationalist Catholics have a negative identity as non-British, an identity seen as external even if present in Ireland, but seldom as non-Protestants¹²⁸. On the other hand unionist Protestants' identity is frequently defined as non-Irish and non-Catholic, which is a much closer and internal definition of 'Other'¹²⁹. Nationalist Catholics also tend to be more positive and certain about their Irish identity than Protestants about their British identity. There is also a great ambiguity in the relation between Britain and Ulster with many unionist (and especially loyalist) Protestants identifying primarily with the latter¹³⁰. Protestants seem to have then an unagreed representation of place and tend to be more certain of what they are not than what they are¹³¹. Notwithstanding the fact that identities are flexible and that the meaning of an identity is never fixed but always disputed by members of the group, the uncertainty of the meaning of Protestant identity makes it more open for discussion and dispute.

Both communities have a great deal of control over the reproduction of social order¹³². On one side the Catholic Church is a highly organised and centralised institution which has had an enormous importance in the social life of its affiliates and in keeping a distinct Irish identity. Before the birth of the Irish state it organised the reproduction of the nationalist class alliance while after it gained recognition from the state and informed its policy. The Protestant community has no such equivalent but in a way both the Protestant-dominated state and the Orange Order with its patronage system served the same purpose¹³³. Each community created its own segregated social world involving separate education, leisure and sport activities, festivities and newspapers and even in the workplace sectarian discrimination and employment patterns segregated workers.

Territorial segregation was also present from the start of Belfast's urban expansion and reflected some rural patterns. Local disputes of territory become entangled in the overarching conflict and interpreted as fundamental in building defence. Walls and fences reinforce the territorial patterns so that areas become stably within one camp. All other

¹²⁵ Anderson (1980): 47.

¹²⁶ Finlayson (1997): 76, 77, 79, 80.

¹²⁷ Finlayson (1997): 74, 75.

¹²⁸ Finlayson (1997): 75.

¹²⁹ Graham (1997): 199, Finlayson (1997): 79, 80.

¹³⁰ Graham (1997): 205, 207, 208; Finlayson (1997): 73, 81, 82.

¹³¹ Graham (1997): 199- 201; Hall (1994): 7, 8.

¹³² McAuley, McCormack (1989): 33.

¹³³ O'Dowd, Rolston, Tomlinson (1980): 15.

territorial markers as murals, painted kerbstones and flags are a remainder of the borders between the groups¹³⁴. They exhibit pride in belonging to the group and warn the 'Other' not to cross them. The issue of Orange and loyalist marching is also intimately connected with the struggles for territorial control. It was traditionally a reassertion of power by unionists over the disadvantaged minority but as the state became less 'Protestant' it became more of a symbolic form of resistance to the loss of their dominance¹³⁵.

Both communities rely in a particular discourse to maintain coherence and unity. These discourses are intimately connected to nationalist and unionist ideologies and are largely reflected and reproduced in the segregated school systems. Both make use of a selective use of History to construct national narratives even though in this they are not different from other nationalist ideologies¹³⁶. Special dates like victories in battles are celebrated and massacres are highlighted to establish a connection between past and present and relating historical wrongs and victories to the present incarnation of conflict¹³⁷. Many single events are interpreted in clearly opposing ways to support different views of justice¹³⁸. More so there is a clear lack of local Irish and Ulster History in the curriculum of many state schools¹³⁹.

The discourse of division is also clearly reproduced in the political arena from the parties in the Assembly to local issues. As mentioned before the language of culture now permeates political discourse so that Unionism and Nationalism become cultures and with the Consociational peace agreement and political structures those cultures are recognised and protected. Every local dispute is even if inadvertently permeated by the division so that it is framed by the language of the larger conflict and by its cultural undertones¹⁴⁰.

Nevertheless to maintain the two separate communities demands constant reproducing. It is in a degree self-sustaining but it is also challengeable. There are many possibilities to subvert the division and blur it. Inter-mixing, inter-marriage, religious conversion, dual identity and other factors among what is in fact a quite similar population could risk the long-term stability of the division. There is then a constant magnifying of small differences between communities and similarities are seen as threatening¹⁴¹. Difference within communities are minimised though. There is great social pressure for keeping unity at the cost of 'losing' to the other community. Internal diversity and social difference are seen as weaknesses and a threat to that unity¹⁴².

But that internal diversity is a fundamental aspect of any given group. Even large coherent groups based on cultural definitions like nationality are a recollection of smaller diverse groups. They are composed of different social classes, different locations, urban or rural,

¹³⁴ McAuley, McCormack (1991): 120.

¹³⁵ Cohen (2007): 964.

¹³⁶ Graham (1997): 202, 203.

¹³⁷ Nic Craith (2002): 29-32.

¹³⁸ Little (2004): 180.

¹³⁹ Hall (2008): 7; Hall (1998): 10.

¹⁴⁰ Jenkins (2006): 398.

¹⁴¹ Nic Craith (2000): 186, 191; McKay (2000): 368.

¹⁴² Douglas, Shirlow (1998): 127.

and different organisations and allegiances¹⁴³. The Protestant community in Northern Ireland largely adheres to Unionism. Nevertheless there are different types of Unionism that stress different reasons for the maintenance of the Union¹⁴⁴. These strands reflect the different social composition of Unionism and the general Protestant community. There are versions of Unionism that tend to be dominant and almost hegemonic at certain times like during Stormont rule. These moments of unity are related to a successful management of differences and social tensions within the unionist camp by their elites. In other periods though there are no such conditions and the tensions lead to breakup of electoral coalitions and unity¹⁴⁵.

Unionism is then a diverse ideology but there is also the case of those Protestants that are not unionist altogether. Such 'non-conformity' has also several varieties from those that, especially in the middle classes, are generally apolitical and distance themselves from the conflict to those that defend radical ideologies or even those that, in a simplistic description, 'cross sides' and become nationalists. There was always a strong presence among those that are now seen as the Protestant people of radical and dissenting ideologies that were proudly independent in thought. We shouldn't also forget that the eventual formation of a Protestant identity, specifically in Ulster involved a long process and that it merged or incorporated groups of people that previously had distinct identities.

In Northern Ireland historically religion became the symbol of an overarching division connected to economic and political structures. It is then connected to class difference and political ideologies. Identity in Northern Ireland is multidimensional and overlapping¹⁴⁶. Categories are interrelated and can reinforce themselves. They are inscribed in structural factors and are given meaning in the socio-political context of everyday reality. But since individual identity is composed of multiple intersecting differences and a range of sources of the self there is always space for those different categories not to overlap completely and there is always a space for intentionality and choice on the part of the individual in his particular identity formation¹⁴⁷.

There is also the possibility of adopting several identity-labels and use them at different times. Identity is context-dependent and the aspect of identity to be highlighted is related to the social group with which one is interacting and the location¹⁴⁸. If relating with someone from the same religious community class can be highlighted or alternatively gender, disability or sexual preference can become the stressed categories. The move away from Northern Ireland and removal from the context of conflict also may alter the use of identity labels or their strength¹⁴⁹. The emigration of Protestants, particularly to Britain, can have significant effects on individual identity. They are generally seen as Irish by the British and not as part of their people. Those immigrants too may find that Great Britain is a 'strange' and different place for them and allow for a greater identification with an Irish or Northern Irish

¹⁴³ Jenkins (2006): 398.

¹⁴⁴ Graham (1997): 201- 203; Clayton (1998): 43.

¹⁴⁵ McAuley, McCormack (1991): 121; Millar (1998): 9, 10; Bell (1976): 66.

¹⁴⁶ Edwards (2007a): 143.

¹⁴⁷ Fraser (1997) *in* Little (2004): 5; Edwards (2007a): 143.

¹⁴⁸ Graham (1998): 134; Coakley (2007): 584.

¹⁴⁹ Coakley (2007): 584, 585.

identity. It is easier abroad to socialise with northerner Catholics and also southern Irish and integrate into their immigration networks¹⁵⁰.

The boundaries between the two communities are not rigid and permanent but rather permeable and changeable. There is a tendency working towards segregation and separation as much as one towards blurring and integration. Historically the former has been dominant but not evenly throughout time. The history of the relations between Catholics and Protestants in Ulster and the rest of Ireland is not just one of war and violent conflict. It's also one of tolerance of difference, friendly relations and cooperation¹⁵¹. But there has always been in a smaller or bigger degree cases where people and groups would be in neither side of the divide or where the traditional divisions were subverted and challenged. The before mentioned intermarriage and conversion to a different religion are quite 'easy' ways to cross the divide and to blur the division creating mixed identities. Hyphenised identities, hybridisation and creolisation describe processes where the mixing of the two sides and other distinct identities creates ambiguity and uneasiness with the stark division¹⁵².

The presence of immigrants in Northern Irish society should also remind us that many don't fit altogether in the 'Two Traditions' paradigm and their identities have very different inputs from those socialised into one of the sides. Irish Travellers were always differentiated from the rest of the population and just like Roma and Jewish people have maintained a different identity. Nowadays Northern Irish society is composed of Chinese, Pakistani, Polish and many other communities¹⁵³.

The diverse processes of hybridisation and mixing, immigration, emigration and the interplay of several identities contribute to the opening of some social space where the traditional sectarian division can be loosened or overcome. It may not impact in a decisive way on society as a whole and transform sectarianism but allows for individuals to connect and establish alternatives to traditional divisions and have some sort of collective expression. In this social space it is possible for many individuals to defy probabilities and have quite different identities from the majority. This change in identity is very often very personal and may be connected to individual experience¹⁵⁴. It can be facilitated by experiences like emigration, as seen before, imprisonment or religious awakening¹⁵⁵. To change an identity is a complex process and in the context of Northern Ireland and its conflict it is not facilitated by the social environment¹⁵⁶. Only a minority of people in such conditions of social pressure and violence actually change their identities. The adherence of labels is quite strong and difficult to overcome. It is then more common for individuals to change the content of their identities¹⁵⁷. They can keep the labels 'Protestant' or 'unionist' but change any anti-Catholic or anti-Irish content that those labels might have had.

¹⁵⁰ Trew (2007): 30.

¹⁵¹ Hall (2008): 9, 15; Douglas (1997): 161.

¹⁵² Nic Craith (2002): 196.

¹⁵³ Nic Craith (2002): 20.

¹⁵⁴ Nelson (1984): 178.

¹⁵⁵ Mitchell (2010): 64.

¹⁵⁶ Edwards (2007a): 142.

¹⁵⁷ Todd, O'Keefe, Rougier, Bottos (2006): 334.

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The research population for this study was defined as: individuals with a Protestant background that would not be unionist and would have a critical opinion of it, excluding those which were indifferent to Unionism or politics altogether. Throughout this research subjects are referred to as “non-unionist Protestants” for lack of a better term. A more precise definition would be longer and not practical to be used repeatedly. It is important to stress that many of the subjects may not admit a Protestant identity and reject the label altogether. This definition should be understood then not as a self-definition of subjects but rather as their background. We recognise that this can be problematic as it may seem that we take the two religiously-defined communities in Northern Ireland for granted and contribute to make these labels harder to escape from.

The objective of this research was to ‘discover’ and characterise the apparently small population of non-unionist Protestants in Northern Ireland and focus on their position in conflict and class. In order to gather the necessary data it was fundamental to search for these individuals and engage directly with them and for that it was necessary to go to Northern Ireland to conduct field research. As part of Radboud’s Human Geography Master excursion I had been in the province twice before in February 2010 and March 2011 and in both occasions contacts were made that allowed for a longer stay in the months of June and July of 2011 as a research associate at Queen’s University.

The short stay of two months was nevertheless rich in events in the province. It coincided with the troubled period of marching season so it was perhaps not surprisingly so. Nevertheless in the first weeks of my stay ‘unexpected’ riots broke out in East Belfast allegedly connected to UVF members. Dissident republicans had also recently murdered a Catholic policeman. With the nearing of the Twelfth of July commemorations these events contributed to a semi-tense atmosphere and promoted discussion in the media around dissidence from the peace process and particularly discontent among the Protestant working class. Some people advised me to be wary when going to some places especially during that period of the year. I observed a march in East Belfast commemorating the Battle of the Somme where residents of the Short Strand were peacefully protesting, a bonfire on southeast Belfast on the Eleventh night and the main parade on the Twelfth. In every occasion there was little tension and I was never under threat. There were riots on the Twelfth though in northwest Belfast between residents of the Ardoyne and the police. Through one of the interviewees I took part in a small lecture on Protestant culture including 12th bonfires, parading bands and Lambeg drums and on a tour of the Shankill road and another in central Belfast sites related to the 1798 rebellion. This programme was organised by Dublin’s Trinity University but most students taking part were foreign. I also attended a lecture at Shankill public library on the Irish participation in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War.

The fact that the researched population contradicted the stereotype of Northern Irish Protestants and was apparently very small predicted that few people could be reached. This was also aggravated by the inexperience of the researcher and lack of contacts among this

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population before the start of the research. The fact that Northern Ireland is a society coming from a decade-long conflict also doesn't facilitate the openness and availability for interviews especially about conflict-related matters¹⁵⁸. Even if there are much lower levels of violence the situation can be compared to 'negative' or 'cold' peace where conditions for conflict are still present and a return to war is possible¹⁵⁹. The perspective of a small number of subjects favoured a qualitative approach to the research but this choice was also determined by the purpose of that research. The focus on the intermediate position of non-unionist Protestants in the conflict as individuals and as a group and the relation to the Protestant working class demanded a depth in the information to be collected so that the analysis of this group would be relevant.

The method selected to gather the data for this research were semi-structured interviews. The interviews with the researched population were semi-structured given that the qualitative approach demands some degree of flexibility and openness to the respondents¹⁶⁰. This type of interview is organised around open-ended questions that allow for respondents to be able to articulate their discourse and to stress those elements they feel are more important and also allow new questions to emerge¹⁶¹. But while the researcher shouldn't dominate the interview and imposes responses he should be able to steer the conversation and focus on which information needs to be gathered.

A number of open-ended questions were prepared that would address the aspects of personal experience and opinion selected as relevant for the analysis. The categories were coded as Background, Identity, Ideology and Relation to the Protestant working class. In the beginning of the interview the respondent would be invited to describe his personal story starting by his origins and upbringing and continue throughout his life. The open-ended questions were introduced if the interviewee wouldn't refer to it himself while in the middle of his discourse and new themes could be developed if relevant.

The life history type of interview was used but only partially, inasmuch as related to the conflict and division; and related essentially to the Background category and the at an exploratory level to help characterise the understudied researched population. The articulation of a personal path and the relation of that path to the history of the N-Irish conflict and its events should give us a better comprehension of an individual's beliefs and opinions about other groups that take part in the conflict¹⁶². The question whether the respondents had undergone through identity or ideology change and why this would be pertinent is related to the possibility that, confirming the stereotype, many respondents could have had typical unionist upbringings. In alternative it may be possible that some didn't go through significant or radical change due to a non-unionist upbringing.

The type of sampling used for the selection of the respondents was purposeful sampling where respondents are selected according to certain categories and for being

¹⁵⁸ Cohen, Arieli (2011): 424-426.

¹⁵⁹ Cohen, Arieli (2011): 425.

¹⁶⁰ Marshall, Rossman (1999): 38.

¹⁶¹ Di Ciocco-Bloom, Crabtree (2006): 315.

¹⁶² Atkinson in Gubrium, Holstein (2002): 129.

particularly information-rich cases¹⁶³. Qualitative research is usually more flexible than quantitative research in its sampling process and purposeful sampling is quite common¹⁶⁴. To some all sampling is purposeful in qualitative research¹⁶⁵. Respondents were to be selected according to the profile defined and could include members of parties and associations as well as independent and unaffiliated people. The definition of the researched population narrowed the universe to a relatively small number of people that are not necessarily exposed as such and therefore there was an attempt to contact the greatest number of people that would fit the profile but also that showed some variation within that profile.

Snowball sampling was a strategy to make initial contacts given the small and somehow 'hidden' research population¹⁶⁶. The interviews were preceded by an informal contact with academics from Queen's University and other researchers for exploratory purposes including suggestion of names of possible respondents and organisations where such individuals could be found. To those that would respond positively it would be asked if any among his circle of contacts would be available for a similar interview. Nevertheless the sole reliance on this kind of sampling could affect the representativeness as diversity among the universe could be overshadowed and efforts would be made to select respondents from several backgrounds¹⁶⁷.

Although allowing for flexibility the number of interviews deemed ideal was around 10 in order to have a minimum of data but not to overwhelm the single researcher with too much information¹⁶⁸. Several organisations were contacted namely the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers' Party, the People Before Profit Alliance, the United Left Alliance, the Communist Party, the Labour Party in Northern Ireland – Federation of Labour groups, the Workers' Party, Irish Labour Party, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, the Green Party, Workers' Solidarity Movement, Organise!, the New Ireland Group, Ulster People's College, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions – Northern Ireland Committee as well as a couple of individuals not part of any particular association. The contact was made through e-mail and in some cases by looking for an address and going there in person.

The number of responses was well below the intended number. Five people gave a positive response via e-mail and through further contact by phone interviews were scheduled. Four of those interviews took place while the other scheduled interview didn't materialise due to health issues on the part of the possible respondent. At a later stage after leaving Ireland a fifth interview was conducted through e-mail. This last interview consisted of ten previously prepared questions and it was necessarily more structured than those made in person. It also didn't allow for the same interaction and depth in obtaining information that the others interviews permitted. The small number of interviews can be explained by several factors. The small universe of possible respondents was combined with the limited time available for the field study and the period of the year around the summer holidays and the marching season where many choose to leave Belfast and Northern Ireland. To that we must add again the

¹⁶³ Coyne (1997): 624.

¹⁶⁴ Coyne (1997): 623.

¹⁶⁵ Coyne (1997): 627.

¹⁶⁶ Cohen, Arieli (2011): 427.

¹⁶⁷ Cohen, Arieli (2011): 428.

¹⁶⁸ Morse (2000): 3.

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inexperience as a researcher of the author. The proposed number of interviews and limiting factors would demand an optimisation of the time available for field work for which experience is extremely important.

The small number of interviews was aggravated by the fact that there was an obvious lack of variation among the respondents in key aspects as gender and age group. All interviewees were male and were born between 1946 and 1962 and the clear lack of women and younger people in the sample limited the possible analysis. There was also an over-representation of members of the New Ireland Group with two members among the five respondents (also the possible sixth respondent was a member). This is not necessarily due to the snowball sampling method directly but to the internal forwarding of the mail sent to the defunct NIG to several former members.

The location of the interviews made in person was left for the respondents to select and took place in Belfast and its surroundings at respondents' homes in two cases, workplace and at a cafe. The length of the interviews varied between 35 minutes and almost two hours depending on the interviewee's availability, objectivity and introduction of new themes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed within some days and were later analysed according to the relevant categories. The collected data was coded and re-arranged to analyse each category one by one.

After the first contacts were made to arrange interviews and shortly before the first one I got hold of a copy of the book "Further Afield, Journeys from a Protestant past" by journalist Marilyn Hyndman. Published in 1996 it was a recollection of stories of individuals from a Protestant background who were selected according to the same criteria as this research. The testimonies were presented in life story form and in that way much of the respondents' political views and evolution were explained through their paths in life. The book had a more journalistic approach and, apart from the editing denoted by the fact that the stories are presented almost as monologues and not as interviews, the information in this book was almost raw and little analysis of the information was presented. Given this fact and since there is so little research about non-unionist Protestants and the sample of interviewees presented problems in terms of number and diversity we decided to analyse the data in this book. We will summarize that data focusing on the categories selected for the interviews as a prelude to the analysis of those interviews. This information will later be taken in account and compared to the interviews in the Discussion sections of each category of the Analysis chapter.

Two of the respondents interviewed for this research were also among the subjects of the book. In both cases there was some knowledge of their life story before the interview took place and questions about their background were unnecessary. Therefore the data from these two respondents about this category of analysis was collected from "Further Afield" but it was analysed together with the other three interviewees in the main section of analysis. The data for these two respondents was consequently not taken into account in the "Further Afield" summary. Another respondent provided me during the interview with a copy of his published recollections with data which complemented that from his interview. For reference the five subjects interviewed personally for this research are identified as interviewees A, B, C, D and E.

In the summary of "Further Afield" respondents are identified numerically as subjects 1 to 40 following the book itself, excluding subjects 21 and 40, those who were later interviewed.

4. SUMMARY OF “FURTHER AFIELD”

4.1. BACKGROUND

In terms of gender there were 25 male and 15 female. The book was published in 1996 but even with this in mind there was an under-representation of young people and an over-representation of people born between 1946 and 1960. The bulk of the cases was constituted then by a generation that experienced the 1960's and subsequently the beginning of the 'Troubles' as a teenager or a young man. Most respondents referred specifically to their class origins. A majority had a working class background, particularly those born before 1960. The middle class background was more common for those born after that date. There was some class mobility for some of the respondents during their lives and in fifteen cases with a working class background there was an upward social movement. At the time of the interviews most respondents would belong to the middle classes.

There were among many respondents clear political and identity influences in their upbringing by their parents or relatives and these are also frequently specifically stated. The influence of unionist ideology and Orange traditions was not as widespread as one might imagine from the usual depiction of Protestants. Class was an important factor on the type of political upbringing. Both the middle and working classes had a unionist influence but a specifically loyalist and Orange influence was more common among the working class. There was also a very significant labour and socialist influence among this class, in some cases directly opposed to Unionism. On the other hand liberal and conservative upbringings were more common for those with a middle-class background. Many had no significant political influence in their upbringing but some of these cases were distinctive either for a strong religious observance or a clear non-sectarian attitude. This apolitical upbringing was present among all classes but the religious and non-sectarian types were more common among the middle class. This class had some difficulty in dealing with the 'Troubles' and its most violent and sectarian aspects and attempted to remove themselves from conflict, taking refuge in either a mixed environment where religious and political division was downplayed or by adopting a puritan religious lifestyle de-voided of politics.

Many respondents were influenced by Loyalism through friends and the community where they grew up even if this contradicted their upbringing¹⁶⁹. In two cases there was a temporary involvement in loyalist paramilitaries¹⁷⁰. Almost all of those influenced by Loyalism had a working class background and grew up in what they described as loyalist areas. Loyalist influence was less intense with the older subjects and areas were classified specifically as loyalist and not just Protestant only by people born after 1946. There were also two cases of estates that were considered “respectable” working class and Protestant but that “had become” loyalist

¹⁶⁹ Subjects 24 and 27 *in* Hyndman (1996): 182, 183 and 200.

¹⁷⁰ Subjects 15 and 26 *in* Hyndman (1996): 115, 116, 117 and 195.

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a few years after the start of the ‘Troubles’, frequently expelling its Catholic residents¹⁷¹. Loyalist ideology became dominant in many Protestant working class areas and even in the cases where the upbringing was not clearly loyalist or unionist, growing up in these areas surrounded by friends with these ideas, there was some permeability to them. Some had examples on how comments and opinions in class met with disapproval and hostility by the more loyalist-minded schoolmates¹⁷². In some cases loyalist ideas were actively challenged at home by parents and a few respondents weren’t allowed to join parading bands¹⁷³. There was then some kind of resistance to outside loyalist ideals and Orangeism by some parents that could have been decisive for some subjects not to be involved with Loyalism.

Not all influences were necessarily loyalist though. The ‘baby boom’ generation seems to have enjoyed a childhood in a less divisive period before the ‘Troubles’ broke out in 1968. There are many evidences to say that the period of the 1960’s before the ‘Troubles’ there was increasing contact between Protestants and Catholics¹⁷⁴. Some respondents mentioned the 1960’s particularly as a period of attraction to alternative music and culture of the hippy movement and the “leftish liberal” politics of the era with events taking place in Paris, USA or Czechoslovakia¹⁷⁵. This period was then an important factor for some respondents, particularly those with unionist backgrounds to experience more or less radical changes in terms of their political views and their identities¹⁷⁶. Another determining factor for change was going abroad to study or work. In particular many subjects mention the experience of being seen and treated as Irish in England¹⁷⁷. One subject referred positively to this “discovery” of an Irish identity but for others being seen as Irish reinforced unionist beliefs, at least initially¹⁷⁸. Nevertheless for others the change they experienced by going abroad was essentially a political one rather than identity-related¹⁷⁹. Other respondents mention events like the hunger strikes, attending University, the punk movement and increasing contact with Catholics as significant for change in ideology or identity¹⁸⁰. For one respondent, even if the importance of youth subcultures like the hippy and punk movements can be exaggerated as sectarianism is contextual, they are nevertheless an important non-sectarian space for young people to access different ideas and people¹⁸¹.

Most among the respondents had some contact with sectarian violence including violence connected to the ‘Troubles’ but there were several degrees of violence and exposure to it though. Two respondents in particular had particularly violent experiences, a former IRA operative and the wife of notorious INLA operative Ronald Bunting¹⁸². Most of the violence and

¹⁷¹ Subjects 6, 11, 15, 24 and 28 *in* Hyndman (1996): 49, 79, 80, 114, 182 and 210.

¹⁷² Subjects 6, 18, 22 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 47, 141, 169 and 292.

¹⁷³ Subjects 1, 18, 24, 29 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 4, and 5, 140, 182, 217 and 292.

¹⁷⁴ Subjects 5, 12, 15, 17, 23 and 32 *in* Hyndman (1996): 32, 93, 113, 114, 129, 177 and 241.

¹⁷⁵ Subjects 6, 7 and 36 *in* Hyndman (1996): 46, 53 and 270.

¹⁷⁶ Subjects 12, 23 and 27 *in* Hyndman (1996): 92, 93, 178 and 201.

¹⁷⁷ Subjects 7, 27 and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 53, 54, 201 and 289.

¹⁷⁸ Subject 4 *in* Hyndman (1996): 25; subjects 30 and 37 *in* Hyndman (1996): 224 and 277.

¹⁷⁹ Subjects 14, 15, 19 and 37 *in* Hyndman (1996): 109, 117, 149 and 278

¹⁸⁰ Subjects 3, 8 and 30 *in* Hyndman (1996): 16, 62 and 22; subjects 11 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 81, 293 and 294; subjects 13, 34 *in* Hyndman (1996): 101 and 259; subjects 7, 24 and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 54, 55, 183 and 288.

¹⁸¹ Subject 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 296.

¹⁸² Subjects 17 and 28 *in* Hyndman (1996): 130, 134, 135, 211-214.

intimidation committed against the respondents was perpetrated by loyalists and in many cases intended to prevent and punish dissent like relations with Catholics¹⁸³. Republicans were also responsible for some incidents as well as the security forces including the British Army, in this latter case especially in Catholic/nationalist areas¹⁸⁴. Violence was more frequent from 1968 onwards and class was an important factor for the experience of violence. A vast majority of those with a working class background had experienced violence or intimidation during their lives while still only a minority of those with middle class backgrounds had that experience.

4.2. IDENTITY

A great number of respondents had some sort of Irish identity and a few identified with the nationalist community¹⁸⁵. Some had an Irish identity from early years as their parents or family also had such an identity¹⁸⁶. Many respondents didn't have a 'simple' and unproblematic Irish identity though. There were some subjects, particularly those with republican beliefs, who lived in Catholic/nationalist areas but even among this group there were some that didn't integrate completely in the nationalist community, feeling different and still outsiders¹⁸⁷.

Some respondents felt they didn't fit in a society where the connection between identity and politics is so strong stating they felt outsiders in Northern Irish society¹⁸⁸. One respondent had an Irish and a British identity recognising both influences in his life¹⁸⁹. Others identified strongly with the north of the island some times as opposed to feeling Protestant¹⁹⁰. Two other respondents identified with the North as part of a continuum of identities including an Irish one¹⁹¹. For some of those that refused to take side politically there was also an adoption of an internationalist or alternative identities¹⁹².

There were different relations to Protestant identity among respondents. Some subjects rejected this identity and adopted a northern identity as we have just seen but there were other respondents that also didn't see themselves as Protestant¹⁹³. Some had a complicated relation with Protestant identity either for having been rejected by their

¹⁸³ Subjects 8, 17, 24 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 61, 134, 186 and 295; subjects 6 and 29 *in* Hyndman (1996): 48 and 216.

¹⁸⁴ Subjects 5, 9 and 20 *in* Hyndman (1996): 37, 67 and 156; subjects 5, 12, 14, 17 and 29 *in* Hyndman (1996): 39, 96, 110, 132, 133, 135, 136, 218 and 219.

¹⁸⁵ Subjects 27 and 29 *in* Hyndman (1996): 205 and 219.

¹⁸⁶ Subjects 1, 10 and 18 *in* Hyndman (1996): 5, 75 and 141.

¹⁸⁷ Subjects 7, 22 and 30 *in* Hyndman (1996): 55, 56, 174 and 230.

¹⁸⁸ Subjects 2, 23, 31, 36, and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 14, 180, 238, 270, 273, 289 and 290.

¹⁸⁹ Subject 31 *in* Hyndman (1996): 238 and 239.

¹⁹⁰ Subjects 28 and 34 *in* Hyndman (1996): 215 and 260.

¹⁹¹ Subjects 4 and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 25 and 290.

¹⁹² Subjects 12 and 13 *in* Hyndman (1996): 96, 104 and 105.

¹⁹³ Subjects 4 and 17 *in* Hyndman (1996): 30 and 137.

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community as a traitor or for having had feelings of guilt and shame about being Protestant¹⁹⁴. One respondent living in a Catholic area mentions how the label Protestant was hard to escape and always present¹⁹⁵. Several respondents did have a Protestant identity and in most cases it combined with an Irish identity¹⁹⁶. Protestant identity was particularly relevant for some of the respondents which felt part of the Protestant people but stressed how Protestantism was not equivalent to Unionism and there were alternative traditions¹⁹⁷. The importance of the heritage of the United Irishmen was prominent for many respondents and for some its ‘discovery’ was a fulfilling moment and a turning point¹⁹⁸. One respondent mentioned how this history and tradition seemed of particular importance to offer a viable alternative to Unionism within the Protestant community¹⁹⁹. Other respondents referred especially to the heritage of labour struggles and socialism among the Protestant community and two subjects explicitly referred to a labour or socialist tradition in Northern Ireland²⁰⁰. Even though there are alternative traditions to Unionism among Protestants there is in this community a lack of exploration of these alternatives and one respondent mentions that they have been obliterated²⁰¹.

4.3. IDEOLOGY

Frequently respondents had some kind of radical ideology like Socialism, Feminism, Communism, Irish Republicanism and Anarchism but many had more moderate or centrist views including most of those that didn’t explicitly refer to political ideology. Some were members of political parties like the Communist Party, Sinn Féin, Militant (nowadays the Socialist Party) and the Alliance Party.

The vast majority of respondents had a negative opinion of Unionism or Loyalism but a few subjects had some understanding or openness to this ideology even if they didn’t see themselves as unionists²⁰². Many of the respondents didn’t express an opinion about the British government or the state but those who did tended to be critical²⁰³. Some of the respondents moved to Catholic areas during their life and some pointed to the much higher level of repression in these areas than in their original communities²⁰⁴. Nevertheless one respondent mentioned how the Catholic middle classes had benefited from British intervention²⁰⁵. Some of

¹⁹⁴ Subjects 3, 9 and 35 *in* Hyndman (1996): 17, 70 and 265.

¹⁹⁵ Subject 22 *in* Hyndman (1996): 174.

¹⁹⁶ Subjects 6, 8, 30 *in* Hyndman (1996): 51, 61, 63, 229 and 230.

¹⁹⁷ Subjects 18, 30, 33 and 37 *in* Hyndman (1996): 145, 229, 252-254, 281 and 282.

¹⁹⁸ Subjects 9, 10, 29 and 31 *in* Hyndman (1996): 71, 78, 221 and 233.

¹⁹⁹ Subject 10 *in* Hyndman (1996): 78.

²⁰⁰ Subjects 9, 10, 15, 20, 24 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 66, 72, 114, 155, 181, 182, 187 and 292.

²⁰¹ Subject 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 292.

²⁰² Subjects 5, 7, 11, 14 and 27 *in* Hyndman (1996): 42, 43, 58, 82, 111 and 206; subjects 3 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 20 and 297.

²⁰³ Subjects 3, 5, 22 and 10 *in* Hyndman (1996): 17, 44, 77 and 171.

²⁰⁴ Subjects 12, 28 and 29 *in* Hyndman (1996): 96, 212 and 218.

²⁰⁵ Subject 11 *in* Hyndman (1996): 86.

the respondents had a very critical opinion about institutions and programmes created by Britain during Direct Rule, including the Fair Employment Agency and community relations which were inefficient and created sectarian blocs in terms of cultural expression²⁰⁶. For these respondents the British approach had been not about challenging sectarianism but managing it by achieving some sort of balance between the two sides. Other respondents also mentioned how sectarianism and discrimination were more of structural problems than individual bigotry²⁰⁷.

Not every respondent stated its views about the constitutional issue but most who did supported the unification of the island either for ideological or practical reasons²⁰⁸. Others preferred links to both the South and Britain in the context of Europe or were indifferent to the constitutional issue believing that notions of sovereignty were outdated or seeing a united Ireland as just one of multiple answers²⁰⁹. Even for many of those that favoured a united Ireland there was no desire to live in an expanded Republic of Ireland stressing that this 'new' Ireland should be a secular state²¹⁰. Others also pointed to the fact that the Republic of Ireland was a capitalist state just like the U.K.²¹¹. Also pointed by some respondents was the attitude of southerners to the North and the northerners²¹². Still some subjects mentioned changes happening south of the border and even that the Republic of Ireland seemed a more attractive society than Britain²¹³. Some of the subjects were Irish nationalists but they were a small minority and essentially made up of the few republican subjects²¹⁴. Even if some respondents felt closer to the nationalist side or were more sympathetic to the nationalist cause this was not a clear or unconditional support²¹⁵. Nevertheless there were many more respondents who couldn't identify with Irish Nationalism, sometimes seeing it as an equivalent to Unionism²¹⁶. For two respondents it wasn't possible to be neither a socialist unionist nor a socialist nationalist²¹⁷. Other subjects mentioned how they had some difficulty connecting to the nationalist struggle, not identifying with it or feeling only half in²¹⁸.

Many of the respondents, disappointed by how events turned out during the 'Troubles', distanced themselves from politics²¹⁹. Some of those that ignored Northern Irish politics had very political opinions but couldn't relate those views with the local situation,

²⁰⁶ Subjects 8, 11 and 12 *in* Hyndman (1996): 63, 82, 83, 85, 86 and 97.

²⁰⁷ Subjects 7, 18 and 37 *in* Hyndman (1996): 57, 145, 280 and 281.

²⁰⁸ Subjects 4, 5, 7, 18 and 30 *in* Hyndman (1996): 30, 45, 57, 146 and 226.

²⁰⁹ Subjects 2, 32, 36, 37 and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 14, 246, 273, 279, 280 and 291.

²¹⁰ Subjects 17 and 18 *in* Hyndman (1996): 138 and 145.

²¹¹ Subjects 13 and 19 *in* Hyndman (1996): 102 and 153

²¹² Subjects 4 and 17 *in* Hyndman (1996): 29 and 133.

²¹³ Subjects 4, 5 and 7 *in* Hyndman (1996): 29, 44 and 57.

²¹⁴ Subject 28 *in* Hyndman (1996): 215.

²¹⁵ Subjects 3, 7, 14 and 25 *in* Hyndman (1996): 17, 57, 111 and 193.

²¹⁶ Subjects 5, 23 and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 35, 180 and 289.

²¹⁷ Subjects 24 and 26 *in* Hyndman (1996): 187 and 198.

²¹⁸ Subjects 38 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 288 and 295.

²¹⁹ Subjects 7, 10 and 32 *in* Hyndman (1996): 55, 78, 242 and 243.

separating personal politics from the conflict²²⁰. But for other respondents the way to distance themselves from the reality of sectarianism and violence was to physically leave the province²²¹.

4.4. RELATION TO THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS

Many of those that lived or worked in Protestant working class areas agreed that there was a lack of discussion and debate within that community and that views different from loyalist or unionist ones could difficultly be expressed, the alternative being leaving²²². Many respondents mentioned that those who left were not only the progressives and those that thought differently from Loyalism but also frequently those more talented and capable which meant an extra loss for the Protestant working class community²²³. Other respondent referred how the middle classes were embarrassed of Loyalism²²⁴. Some also mentioned how working class Protestants had been failed by Unionism, an ideology they had invested so much in²²⁵. There was a feeling of betrayal and resentment towards the middle classes and official Unionism but there was also an uneasy relation to Britain and the British government²²⁶.

There was also mention to the already discussed tension between class and ethnic identity and between Loyalism and Labourism or Socialism within the Protestant working class²²⁷. The emergence of parties like the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party gave hope to some respondents but they embody this identity/class tension. Most didn't believe that change could come from within Loyalism mainly because of the connection to paramilitary organisations²²⁸.

Many of the respondents had working class backgrounds and some were still part of the working class. Nevertheless most of the respondents didn't live in their old communities or in other Protestant working class areas. Some subjects experienced a return to their old communities after a period abroad which might have changed their views and found difficult to be comfortable there²²⁹. Other subjects also mentioned how their friends and parents had stronger unionist views after the beginning of the 'Troubles'²³⁰. As the 1970's progressed Loyalism became increasingly the ideology of Protestant working class estates and the space for having different opinions narrowed. Violence became a daily reality and some respondents mentioned being afraid to go to loyalist areas even if some had grown up in this type of

²²⁰ Subjects 5, 9, 16, 22, 23 and 31 *in* Hyndman (1996): 36, 37, 67, 124, 170, 178 and 232.

²²¹ Subjects 1, 5, 7 and 30 *in* Hyndman (1996): 7, 36, 53, 54 and 227.

²²² Subjects 18, 23, 24, 26 and 27 *in* Hyndman (1996): 145, 179, 180, 184, 185, 198 and 202.

²²³ Subjects 5, 12, 30 and 39 *in* Hyndman (1996): 42, 92, 95, 96, 227 and 297.

²²⁴ Subject 7 *in* Hyndman (1996): 57.

²²⁵ Subjects 10 and 11 *in* Hyndman (1996): 73 and 86.

²²⁶ Subjects 5, 18, 30 and 35 *in* Hyndman (1996): 42, 143, 228 and 266.

²²⁷ Subjects 10, 11 and 24 *in* Hyndman (1996): 74, 86, 181 and 182.

²²⁸ Subjects 5 and 15 *in* Hyndman (1996): 43 and 117.

²²⁹ Subjects 11, 23, 24 and 27 *in* Hyndman (1996): 82, 179, 184, 201 and 202.

²³⁰ Subjects 5, 7 and 14 *in* Hyndman (1996): 38, 54 and 108.

communities²³¹. Some were threatened or intimidated out of loyalist areas due to their political beliefs or their Catholic connections²³². Many more respondents also moved voluntarily to other areas where they would feel more comfortable²³³. Some subjects had at the time of the interview little or no ties with their old communities and even contact with relatives was tenuous²³⁴. For most of the respondents with working class backgrounds the departure from unionist or loyalist ideologies also meant a distancing towards the Protestant working class in general. Nevertheless there were two subjects who took a particular interest in the Protestant working class and their situation and started to engage or re-engage with them²³⁵. One respondent worked at community level with women centres and her job was related to promoting discussion among women about issues like abortion, lesbianism and the Northern Irish conflict²³⁶. The other respondent made films about the Protestant working class and Loyalism and he believed that there was a role for Protestants like him in relating to this community but this relation was sometimes uneasy as he mentioned the need to hide political beliefs in order to engage with that community²³⁷. There was clearly sympathy among these subjects towards the Protestant working class but there was a tension with the ideology that many in these communities shared²³⁸.

²³¹ Subjects 6 and 38 *in* Hyndman (1996): 51 and 290.

²³² Subjects 9, 17, 24 and 28 *in* Hyndman (1996): 69, 70, 130, 186, 211 and 212.

²³³ Subjects 1, 22, 23 and 27 *in* Hyndman (1996): 8, 172, 180 and 203.

²³⁴ Subjects 17, 22, 28 and 30 *in* Hyndman (1996): 137, 172, 214 and 229.

²³⁵ Subjects 5 and 18 *in* Hyndman (1996): 40, 41 and 143.

²³⁶ Subject 18 *in* Hyndman (1996): 145.

²³⁷ Subject 5 *in* Hyndman (1996): 42, 43 and 45.

²³⁸ Subjects 5 and 18 *in* Hyndman (1996): 41, 42, 44, 45, 143 and 145.

5. ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS

5.1. BACKGROUND

The sample of five individuals was not only small but it also showed a clear lack of variation in terms of gender and age. All five respondents were male and were born in a sixteen-year period between 1946 and 1962. Two of the respondents, interviewees C and D would be young adults in 1968 during the start of the 'Troubles', interviewee A was a teenager and the other two respondents, interviewees B and E were children. These seem to be the generations best represented in the sample of the book "Further Afield" and two of those interviewed were indeed part of the testimonies collected in this book (interviewees D and E). There aren't then respondents from a younger, post-Good Friday Agreement generation and it is not possible to analyse the changes brought by this more peaceful period in the formative period of life.

Interviewees B, C and D had working class origins, growing up in the Shankill, East Belfast and Old Lodge respectively²³⁹. The two other respondents, interviewees A and E grew up in the countryside in counties Down and Tyrone and had a middle class background²⁴⁰.

There was also much diversity among respondents in terms of their political influences growing up including their upbringing. Two respondents in particular grew up largely outside Orange culture and with little unionist or loyalist influence.

For interviewee C, with a working class background, there was a strong influence from communist family members, even if other relatives were part of the Orange Order. He had no religious upbringing and states that he has no memory of the Twelfth of July growing up. Even more significantly he wasn't even aware of a divide between Protestants and Catholics and grew up removed from sectarianism²⁴¹. Although he spent his first years living in East Belfast he would later move with his family to a mixed area in South Belfast and had Irish dancing classes where he met Catholics and was for the first time confronted with the religious divide²⁴². The protection from the sectarian divide in his youth years caused this respondent, which was involved in People's Democracy, to be caught by surprise by the beginning of the 'Troubles' and unprepared to deal with the sectarian nature of Northern Irish society²⁴³.

Interviewee A was son of a cleric and grew up in a peaceful countryside environment. He was influenced in his youth years by his late grandfather's ideas, who disapproved of the partition of Ireland and he was from a very early age conscious of being Irish. This was coupled

²³⁹ B: xiv; C: xviii; D *in* Hyndman (1996): 160.

²⁴⁰ A: i; E: *in* Hyndman (1996): 298.

²⁴¹ C: xviii.

²⁴² C: xviii and *in* Hall (2006): 4.

²⁴³ C: xviii, xix and *in* Hall (2006): 6, 7.

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with interest in British History and culture but going to university in England highlighted his Irish identity²⁴⁴.

The other three respondents were more influenced by Unionism and Orange culture. Interviewee E, who also grew up in the countryside, had progressive and non-sectarian parents who were unionists in that they were favourable to the Union. His extended family was more strongly unionist and had some sectarian attitudes²⁴⁵. He states he was inculcated into a loyalist identity in small but continuous ways through rituals as flying the Union Jack on the Twelfth with his grandparents and going through a segregated school system that reproduces a sectarian informal culture²⁴⁶. Later in life the involvement in punk culture and going to England to study were decisive factors that led him to reassess his beliefs and oppose sectarianism and Unionism²⁴⁷.

Interviewee B's parents were both members of the Orange Order and would vote for the Northern Ireland Labour Party. For this respondent the Order was at the time of his childhood more of a social organisation and the Twelfth would be more colourful and "Irish" and not so militaristic as today. The influence of the Orange Order was never very significant and his parents didn't display sectarian attitudes and would have an Irish identity²⁴⁸. He classified Northern Ireland at the time as an apartheid society and didn't meet a Catholic until he was 12 even although his aunt married a Catholic and converted to Catholicism and still got along with the rest of the family²⁴⁹. In his late teens he considered joining the Royal Ulster Constabulary, since at the time he didn't think this was a repressive organisation, but wasn't accepted. He also moved to England to study Theology and this was also a period where his Irish identity was highlighted, something which he saw as liberation²⁵⁰.

The last respondent, interviewee D was the one most influenced by Orange culture and unionist ideology growing up. His father was a unionist and a member of the Order but later abandon it. He was a member of the junior Orange lodge and other Protestant youth organisations²⁵¹. He started to work at an early age when he was took to the yard by his neighbour and he is conscious that he got many jobs because he was Protestant²⁵². He left to work in England where he and his mates were seen as 'Paddies', something which they resisted²⁵³. His turning point was visiting South Africa and being shocked by the apartheid system. This was also the first time he declared himself as Irish²⁵⁴. Later he would get involved in the trade union movement and eventually reject Loyalism²⁵⁵.

²⁴⁴ A: i, ii.

²⁴⁵ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 298.

²⁴⁶ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 298, 299.

²⁴⁷ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 300-302.

²⁴⁸ B: xiv.

²⁴⁹ B: xiv.

²⁵⁰ B: xiv.

²⁵¹ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 158.

²⁵² D *in* Hyndman (1996): 159, 160, 163.

²⁵³ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 160.

²⁵⁴ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 161.

²⁵⁵ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 162, 163.

Background – Discussion

It is clear from the testimonies of the five interviewees but also from the “Further Afield” sample that unionist (and loyalist) influence among Protestants seems to be overestimated. There is a wide variety of political choices among Protestants and many among both sets of respondents had limited or no influence from Unionism growing up. It is also clear that the level of politicisation among Protestants is not necessarily high and in many cases there were no strong political influence from parents or close family. There is also variation among those with working class origins. As a version of Unionism, Loyalism is stronger among the working classes but in these communities there is also a strong influence of left-wing politics reflected in support for labour and communist ideologies. These left-wing politics could be strongly anti-sectarian and anti-unionist but also be combined with some unionist or Orange elements which highlights the tension mentioned in earlier chapters between identity and class politics in this community.

It can't be overlooked the fact that in terms of age both the sample of five interviewees and the testimonies from the book “Further Afield” have a clear preponderance of the ‘baby-boom’ generation of the post-WW II who lived its youth years and young adulthood during the 1960's, a period of revolution in customs in the western world. It seems that this was a period where diverging from unionist beliefs was easier than before but also afterwards. Some older subjects in the book sample noted how the period from the end of the war to the beginning of the ‘Troubles’ was bringing in more integration in social life, being easier to mix with individuals from a different religious background. While still a sectarian state and a divided society there was hope that the future would bring a new era where these defining elements of Northern Ireland could be challenged. This generation was being influenced by outside events and ideas at least as much as the local traditional ideologies of Unionism and Nationalism. As a result a significant portion of Protestant young people took part in or would have sympathy for the civil rights movement which contributed for this movement to be less defined by Nationalism and Irish Republicanism. As confirmed by interviewee E, which is himself younger, it is among this generation that the largest number of Protestants that dissent from Unionism can be found²⁵⁶.

The late 1960's and early 1970's clearly changed this picture. The spiralling of violence gave origin to a permanent state of low-intensity warfare that created a much different context for those born in a later period. Unionism become fragmented and Loyalism, Unionism's more extreme version, gained new vigour among the Protestant population from then on and this was felt in a particularly intense way in working class areas, something that was mirrored by republican influence in Catholic working class areas. The long period of conflict helped loyalist and republican groups to establish a powerbase and, in some cases, control working class areas and to engrave these ideologies in working class cultures. Nevertheless this is not to say that only the working classes would have sectarian ideas and attitudes. Not only can middle and upper classes be supportive of Loyalism and Republicanism, usually seen as working class

²⁵⁶ E: xxxi.

movements, but also the more institutionalised and traditional Unionism and Nationalism can be as sectarian as the former ideologies.

The transformation in the conflict brought by the Good Friday Agreement and the peace process meant a new change in political and social context that could have represented a decline in the relative strength of Unionism and Loyalism among Protestants. Nevertheless the underrepresentation of younger people in both sets of respondents, particularly of those interviewed prevents a conclusive analysis. The fact that during this research it was difficult to find younger non-unionist Protestants may indicate that newer generations are less prone to oppose Unionism. That's not to say that this latter ideology is growing stronger. The modern tendency is probably a general decrease of interest in politics altogether.

5.2. IDENTITY

As we have seen interviewee C grew up largely outside of the sectarian divide and never had a Protestant identity²⁵⁷. He always refused to take sides, something which became particularly complicated after the beginning of the 'Troubles'²⁵⁸. It took some effort to understand how sectarian division and identity were so fundamental in Northern Irish society, clearly something he couldn't relate to. This respondent is a strong internationalist and he always found more inspiration around the world than in Irish politics and history²⁵⁹.

The other four respondents all seem to have had some kind of Protestant identity growing up. Interviewee D grew up as a Protestant and a loyalist. While working in England his group found odd that the English didn't stand for the Queen or sing the National Anthem²⁶⁰. He rejected religion from an early age but he struggled with his Loyalism for a period²⁶¹. His change described by him as a metamorphosis was progressive and based on a change of political ideals²⁶². He became more involved in working class and left-wing politics and started to question sectarianism and Loyalism's identity politics. The 'Troubles' forced hard choices to be made for fear of breaking lines²⁶³. Eventually his rejection of Loyalism meant that, to his sadness, he couldn't relate with his own community anymore²⁶⁴. His identity is above all internationalist, inspired by working class movements and Communism but he also draws inspiration from the United Irishmen movement and the richness in 'Irishness' within Protestantism of that period so there is a degree of identification with Ireland and with the Protestant community where he came from²⁶⁵. This respondent is also interested in History shared between both communities

²⁵⁷ C: xviii.

²⁵⁸ C: xix.

²⁵⁹ C: xviii, xxiv.

²⁶⁰ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 160.

²⁶¹ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 159, 160.

²⁶² D *in* Hyndman (1996): 163.

²⁶³ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 162.

²⁶⁴ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 163.

²⁶⁵ D: xxv and *in* Hyndman (1996): 163, 164.

and his job involves training in this area attempting to create less divisiveness in the workplace²⁶⁶.

As we have seen interviewee E referred he was inculcated into a loyalist identity and even if his parents were not sectarian he mentions the implicit belief on the superiority of Protestant churches over Catholicism²⁶⁷. The involvement in punk culture meant a refusal of sectarianism and identity labels but this was in origin a British movement and there was acknowledgement of this connection to Britain²⁶⁸. Nevertheless the experience of studying in England made him realise that northern Protestants weren't seen and accepted as British by the English but rather as Irish, with all the racist discrimination which that involved in the period of the 'Troubles'²⁶⁹. This Irish label was progressively accepted and seen ultimately as liberating²⁷⁰. Nevertheless the involvement with Irish networks in England made him realise that his Irish identity wasn't quite the same as that from Southern Irish or northern Catholics. For them 'Irishness' was unproblematically informed by Catholicism and the Gaelic aspect while for this respondent being Protestant was still very important²⁷¹. He believes that the difference between Protestants and Catholics is real and significant²⁷². He assumes a particularly Protestant Irish identity, with its own culture and history which can't be reduced to the unionist view of the Protestant community²⁷³. This respondent also stresses how identities can't be reduced to the division between Protestants and Catholics. Other identities like gender, class or sexual orientation can be as much or more important for individuals to define themselves and can help to resist and fracture the binary division²⁷⁴.

Interviewee B had an Irish identity from a young age but he also felt Protestant. He mentions that during his childhood years Orangeism had an Irish feel to it, so both identities were in no way contradictory²⁷⁵. As we have seen during his period in college the importance of Irish identity became more significant²⁷⁶. On the other hand he presently claims no attachment to a Protestant community which he can't define and whose existence he doubts²⁷⁷. Even if he doesn't identify as Protestant interviewee B laments that he is often placed in that category by other people²⁷⁸.

Interviewee A had an Irish identity growing up but also a great interest in British history and culture²⁷⁹. Just like interviewee B the former identity became more prominent during his period of university in England²⁸⁰. But, while having an Irish identity, this respondent was clear

²⁶⁶ D: xxv.

²⁶⁷ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 298.

²⁶⁸ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 301.

²⁶⁹ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 302.

²⁷⁰ E *in* Hyndman (1996):301, 302.

²⁷¹ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 302.

²⁷² E *in* Hyndman (1996): 303.

²⁷³ E: xxx and *in* Hyndman (1996): 302, 303.

²⁷⁴ E: xxxi.

²⁷⁵ B: xiv.

²⁷⁶ B: xiv.

²⁷⁷ B: xiv, xvi.

²⁷⁸ B: xvi.

²⁷⁹ A: i.

²⁸⁰ A: i.

in saying that his 'Irishness' wasn't fulfilled by the more conservative aspects of the Republic of Ireland²⁸¹. For him the idea of 'Irishness' created in the 19th century around the Celtic Revival had little to offer to northern Protestants which felt much closer to Scotland²⁸². Instead the "discovery" of the United Irishmen and the democratic ideals of 18th century Presbyterians were fundamental for this respondent to make sense of his Irish identity²⁸³. We would be progressively involved in the research of this period of Irish History but has recently changed some of his views. While still identifying as Irish he also has a degree of Britishness, influenced by the History, culture and politics of the UK. This respondent has nevertheless de-voided his Irish and British identities from its political connections. He is now more aware of the divisiveness of identity and political labels in Northern Ireland and strives to stand in the middle ground²⁸⁴.

Again all respondents except for interviewee C mention the historical period of the United Irishmen as an important inspiration for their political views but also their identity. The importance of the Protestant contribution to this movement, the union it forged between people of different confessions and the struggle for a democratic Ireland mirrors their modern view of politics better than the two prevailing ideologies in Northern Ireland. It proves that Irish and Protestant identities are not contradictory and that the unionist view of the History of Protestants in Ireland is extremely narrow. This has meant that Unionism has strived to downplay this and other episodes of Irish Protestant History to keep the coherence of its discourse. For interviewee A this dissenting history was somehow buried by unionist rule²⁸⁵. For some of the respondents reading about the United Irishmen was a true discovery, an aspect of their history they had never heard about and which contradicted the official unionist view of history²⁸⁶.

Interviewee D states that the United Irishmen made him realise where he fitted in Northern Irish politics while for interviewee B that movement validates his republican (not Irish republican though) views and shows how unionists are out of step²⁸⁷. For interviewee E the United Irishmen are central for progressive Protestants as this is their own history and not someone else's²⁸⁸. For him the United Irishmen were remarkable for theorising the relationship between colonisers and colonised, something not achieved by the American revolutionaries²⁸⁹. He also believes that the Protestant contribution helped to make Irish Nationalism a more progressive and less sectarian ideology as otherwise it would be more cleric-based and fundamentalist²⁹⁰. But the United Irishmen are but one of the periods where

²⁸¹ A: ii.

²⁸² A: iii.

²⁸³ A: ii.

²⁸⁴ A: iv, v, xi.

²⁸⁵ A: ii.

²⁸⁶ A: ii; D *in* Hyndman (1996): 163.

²⁸⁷ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 164; B: xvii.

²⁸⁸ E: xxx.

²⁸⁹ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 303.

²⁹⁰ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 304.

Protestants engaged in progressive politics, something that was never interrupted and this respondent argues that being progressive is actually a facet of Protestant identity itself²⁹¹.

Interviewee A through his work is intimately connected to History and he is particularly interested in radical periods, not just the United Irishmen. The Reformation and development of radical theologies with strong democratic character were for him decisive in the formation of Irish Republicanism and the radical democratic thought continued in the 19th century through the formation of the labour movement²⁹². This respondent has been actively involved in researching and teaching this radical history and hopes this can in some way challenge the binary division of society and be a seed to promote change. For him there is a desperate need for new thinking in Northern Ireland and to re-write History in a more affirmative way²⁹³.

Interviewee C didn't mention the United Irishmen as a particular inspiration for him and he's rather more interested in international History²⁹⁴. Irish History is more interesting for him if it is a shared history, not only between Protestants and Catholics but also between the islands of Ireland and Great Britain²⁹⁵. Also mentioned by this respondent is the long tradition of left politics in Belfast and among Protestants, of which some of his family members were part²⁹⁶. Both he and Interviewee D also stress the importance that the Communist Party in East Belfast until the 1960's with the near-election of some Assembly members in the 1940's²⁹⁷.

Identity – Discussion

In Northern Ireland identity has long been an important aspect of local politics and the division of the population in two generally opposing groups. Non-unionist Protestants challenge this dichotomy and present different identities and combinations of identities. In a general way there is some acceptance of an Irish dimension to their identity and in that they differentiate themselves from a majority of unionists and a large section of Protestants. While some have undergone a period of change in identity to embrace their 'Irishness' some have had such an identity from a young age influenced by friends and family. Again this seems to be connected to the generation of the respondents as it was more common for Protestants, even if unionist, to feel Irish before the start of the 'Troubles'. From then on there was a rejection of this identity by a majority of Protestants who tend to identify as British or Ulstermen. Not all non-unionist Protestants see themselves as Irish though. Some subjects like interviewee C reject the traditional dichotomies altogether and don't identify with any of the common labels in the Province, having an identity influenced more by international factors. Some others have a neutral stance but rather than rejecting the labels are able to adopt and combine several identities which could be considered as contradictory by many in Northern Ireland. So some feel

²⁹¹ E: xxxii and *in* Hyndman (1996): 303.

²⁹² A: ii, viii, xi.

²⁹³ A: v, vi, xi.

²⁹⁴ C: xviii, xxiv.

²⁹⁵ C: xxiv and *in* Hall (2006): 19.

²⁹⁶ C: xviii, xxii and *in* Hall (2006): 4, 5, 21.

²⁹⁷ C: xxii; D: xxvi.

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both Irish and British or identify essentially with the North of the island but not necessarily its supposed 'Protestant character'.

Even if there is an acceptance of an Irish identity by many of the respondents this is for some a particular type of 'Irishness' which can be distinguished from the version of that identity as defined in the South or among Catholics of the North. There is an effort by many respondents to reject a vision of 'Irishness' connected to the Catholic Church and sometimes also the Gaelic element. Among those interviewed there are no Irish republicans or nationalists but in the "Further Afield" sample some adopted these ideologies and lived among the nationalist community. They may feel integrated and welcomed in these communities but among some this integration is not complete and there is still a feeling of difference because of their different background. The uneasiness with 'southern' 'Irishness' seems to be felt particularly by those that don't give up and highlight their Protestant identity.

For the respondents the Protestant identity seems to be particularly troubled and there is a wide range of relations to it. On one side there are some that tend to reject their Protestant background and don't feel part of this community like interviewees B and D. The former respondent even questions the existence of this community as a coherent group. Those that tend to reject a Protestant identity have clear anti-sectarian beliefs and strive to end the hurtful division between Protestants and Catholics. Given the power relations between these two groups it's also perhaps troubling for them to assume a Protestant identity which was connoted with government, the British and the imposition of sectarian practices. For some the rejection of Protestant identity was also helped by feeling themselves rejected by their original communities. In some cases, and only found in the "Further Afield" sample, this abandonment of the Protestant community is coupled with an integration in the nationalist community even if, as mentioned before, this may not be a complete integration. Other respondents also reject a Protestant identity but don't 'merge' with the nationalist community even if they can easily mix and socialise with Catholics. Nevertheless for these respondents religious background is downplayed and don't feel part of any of the two religious-defined communities.

On the other extreme some respondent have a particularly salient Protestant identity. These respondents re-define what it means to be a Protestant among other ways by connecting it to an Irish identity. Although the re-definition of Protestant identity can take several forms it is easily grounded on the history of Protestants in Ireland and more particularly in the period of the United Irishmen. The Protestant input in this movement is significant even for those that reject their Protestant identity as some of them also highlight this period of Irish History which may mean that there is still some residual identification with their community of origin.

The identity of Protestants in general in the North is particularly uncertain as was seen in earlier chapters. While many Protestants identify with Ulster and Britain, they may stress more one or the other. Yet others identify essentially religiously as Protestants even if there are numerous denominations, sometimes with a history of troubled relations. For many Protestants their identity is then essentially negative as it is easier to define what they aren't than what they are. This uncertainty of what it means to be Protestant means that there is some space for non-unionist Protestants to bring forward their alternative views and be able to dispute the meaning of Protestant identity among the general Protestant population in the North. The capacity of

non-unionist Protestants to dispute this meaning and operate any change among Protestants is connected to their ability to form a coherent group though. As we have seen some of the respondents reject a Protestant identity and don't feel part of a Protestant community and it would be difficult then to contribute to a change in Protestant identity. Those that still feel part of the Protestant community are then much more able to dispute the meaning of Protestant identity.

5.3. IDEOLOGY

All respondents have been in some point or other involved in political organisations but none was involved in one of Northern Ireland's major parties nor can be assigned to either the unionist or nationalist camps. They have more or less radical ideologies but all share a strong anti-sectarian view of politics.

Interviewee B reveals that in his youth years he began to believe that the working class was being divided to be easily controlled²⁹⁸. For him it was easier for people with a Protestant background to dissent from Unionism before the start of the republican campaign in the 1960's. It polarised attitudes and entrenched sectarian politics in both communities, something that has continued to the present²⁹⁹. He would join the Communist Party in his years in England but he later left for this party's support of the IRA struggle. Although he recognised the grievances, for him it didn't justify an armed struggle³⁰⁰. He defines himself as leftist and internationalist and has distaste for all the extremist unionist and nationalist parties, voting along moderate lines³⁰¹. He doesn't necessarily support a united Ireland but rather small steps at a time to deal with the conflict and division³⁰². Although agreeing the situation is much better since the peace agreement he is quite critical of how that agreement's institutions work. The solutions put forward by the agreement, for him, should have been temporary ones but have institutionalised sectarianism in aspects like the designation as 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' in the Assembly. This management of sectarianism has allowed sectarianism to be still rife and this respondent is quite pessimistic and fearful of a resurgence of higher-intensity violence in the near future³⁰³.

This latter respondent, like interviewee A, was a member of the New Ireland Group, an organisation founded by former Republic of Ireland senator John Robb that included people from several areas but never had more than 100 members. This group was founded in the early 1980's and was composed mainly by people from a Protestant background. It favoured an end to partition and an accommodation of all traditions in an all-Ireland context. In that it was an inheritor of the ideals of the United Irishmen of uniting Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters. It

²⁹⁸ B: xiv.

²⁹⁹ B: xvii.

³⁰⁰ B: xiv, xv.

³⁰¹ B: xv, xvi.

³⁰² B: xv.

³⁰³ B: xv, xvii.

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had good relations with the British Labour Party but it has been inactive since the Good Friday Agreement³⁰⁴.

Interviewee A, the other member of the New Ireland Group saw himself for a period of his life as “green” but, again, wasn’t a member of any nationalist party and would oppose the IRA struggle which killed two people he knew³⁰⁵. He would also be critical of southern Nationalism and the reality of the Republic of Ireland wouldn’t attract him³⁰⁶. As we have seen he refuses to choose labels or sides now. He sees himself as left from centre and after being member of the New Ireland Group he stood for a non-sectarian party in elections³⁰⁷. A new Labour party in Northern Ireland wouldn’t be for him the most progressive way to go, as Labour in Britain has undergone some changes in the last decades and became more liberal³⁰⁸. He sees class as the fundamental issue to be tackled and any progressive solution must deal with that³⁰⁹. As part of his repositioning he has come to understand some points made by Unionism. Nevertheless there is no attraction to an ideology that he believes should be radically re-made³¹⁰.

As we have seen the Protestant identity is particularly important for interviewee E but in opposition to Unionism. He sees this ideology as inherently reactionary as it is connected to colonialism and imperialism³¹¹. For him it is unacceptable that unionists may speak in the name of all Protestants given the long tradition of progressive politics among Protestants and he uses this tradition to contest unionist politics³¹². This subject argues that the Protestant community must recognise its minority status in Ireland and, while accepting an end to partition, lead the struggle for minority rights in Ireland as a whole³¹³. While Unionism is for this respondent inevitably a reactionary ideology, Nationalism tended to have a more progressive character which appealed to an anti-sectarian sentiment. Fundamental for this character were the contributions Protestants made to Nationalism preventing an even stronger clericalism and even religious fundamentalism³¹⁴. Nevertheless for this respondent Nationalism is not necessarily progressive and in recent years it has become less so, becoming less attractive to Protestants. A reason for this is that since the peace agreement Nationalism has been part of government and contributed to the institutionalisation of sectarianism. Even if peace has made easier for Protestants to have a voice outside of Unionism this institutionalisation of sectarianism is for this respondent a clear negative aspect of the present³¹⁵.

This last respondent was one of the core members of the Irish Protestant Education and Action Group, an organisation which had a strong Protestant and progressive character but never had a formal existence. It had around 20 or 30 members and it was for them a way to

³⁰⁴ A: v, xi; B: xv.

³⁰⁵ A: iv, v, ix

³⁰⁶ A: i, ii.

³⁰⁷ A: i, xi.

³⁰⁸ A: ix.

³⁰⁹ A: xii.

³¹⁰ A: iv.

³¹¹ E: xxxi.

³¹² E: xxx, xxxii and *in* Hyndman (1996): 302, 303.

³¹³ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 304.

³¹⁴ E *in* Hyndman (1996): 304.

³¹⁵ E: xxxi.

make sense of their role as Protestants in the context of war. Like the New Ireland Group it is no longer active since the beginning of the peace process. It was formed as a response to the war and with the change of context its members contributed to peace in other ways. It looked for a specific 'Protestant' intervention and focused on issues like abortion, where it opposed the churches of both sides and the progressive Irish Protestant tradition which was central for this respondent's identity³¹⁶. The IPEAG was fundamental for interviewee E as a way to keep the continuity of that progressive tradition and to remind that politics is not a genetic imperative but a choice. Protestants don't have to be necessarily unionists and there are many that reject this ideology and are anti-racist, anti-imperialist and anti-sectarian³¹⁷. Nevertheless the IPEAG, as a specifically Protestant organisation, seems to be a rarity and, as this respondent points, although there are many progressive people from a Protestant background they are usually progressive *despite* being Protestant and not progressive *as* Protestants³¹⁸.

Interviewee D is a trade unionist and also a member of the Communist Party of Ireland to which he belongs since the early 1980's³¹⁹. He grew up as a loyalist but ended up rejecting this ideology and adopted a strong anti-sectarian and leftist ideology centred on worker's rights. He found the CPI to be a refuge for anti-sectarian politics and became a supporter of the reunification of the island³²⁰. He clarifies that he advocates a united Ireland for practical reasons and that this view doesn't come from any anti-British beliefs that militaristic republicans might have³²¹. His involvement in the CPI wasn't well accepted by many more loyalist-minded workmates. He was accused of being a "rotten prod" and a traitor but he argues that some of those that might have thought that would have come looking for him when they had trouble in the workplace³²². This respondent is conscious that the trade union movement in Northern Ireland is only formally united and that in practice it is much affected by the binary division of Northern Ireland, something which affects its power and effectiveness³²³. In this, the trade union movement is a reflection of Northern Irish society. Still he argues the trade union movement was strong enough to avoid the repetition of the loyalist Ulster Worker's Council strike in 1977³²⁴. This respondent is also critical of the present political situation and how it deals with sectarianism. For him the situation is much better now in terms of violence but Northern Irish have only agreed to disagree and he fears a resurgence of violence like interviewee B³²⁵. He argues sectarianism can't be defeated unless social issues like poverty, unemployment and education are addressed. For him sectarianism is not a card to be played by politicians, it is always there as everyone has a sectarian mind-set and nothing is being done to change that³²⁶.

Interviewee C had a strong communist influence in his youth years from some family members. Nevertheless he became increasingly disillusioned with communism and after the

³¹⁶ E: xxx.

³¹⁷ E: xxxii, xxxiii.

³¹⁸ E: xxx.

³¹⁹ D: xxvi.

³²⁰ D: xxvi.

³²¹ D: xxvi.

³²² D: xxvi.

³²³ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 163, 165.

³²⁴ D: xxvi.

³²⁵ D: xxvii.

³²⁶ D: xxviii, xxix.

soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia his politics became closer to libertarian socialism and anarchism³²⁷. For this respondent throughout History revolutions have been hijacked by revolutionary elites which work against the real revolution made by the common people. He points to the Russian Revolution and the II Spanish Republic where Bolsheviks and communists took control of the revolution while suppressing opposition from the left. He is inspired by what he refers to as undercurrents of popular revolution and the debates that would occur among the people in vehicles like pamphlets and open discussions³²⁸.

During the 1960's his attention would lie in international events in places as Vietnam, Prague or Paris and he was a member of the Belfast Anarchist Group but as the civil rights movement unfolded he was also involved in the founding of People's Democracy. This was originally a more open and mixed organisation that according to him included even some unionists³²⁹. The evolution of events after the civil rights movement as we have seen surprised this subject and he was attacked in the Burntollet ambush³³⁰. People's Democracy would go to support the IRA struggle, something this respondent strongly opposed, which led to his eventual expulsion. In face of sectarian warfare he refused to take sides in any way and instead formed with a few other people the Belfast Libertarian Group. It criticised both the unionist government and the IRA which earned him threats from both loyalists and republicans³³¹.

The threats and the violence in Northern Ireland lead him to leave the province for some years but eventually he would return to become a social worker³³². Inspired by his political beliefs and the historical popular undercurrents mentioned above he developed a community-oriented approach to social work. Believing that there was in working class communities an untapped mine of resources and skills he started to build links with community activists in Belfast³³³. These connections would eventually lead him to promote debates and conferences in working class communities of the province and also editing those discussions into pamphlets published by him. These pamphlets cover a whole range of topics and even facilitated some cross-community contacts and discussions to take place which gave voice to people that were not considered by the media and allowed to paint a much better picture of the diversity of opinions in working class communities. Not only that, and given the climate of war at the time that limited the freedom of speech, it became a forum where new ideas could be developed³³⁴.

Ideology – Discussion

We have seen before that non-unionist Protestants have different types of attachment to Protestant identity and that some even refuse that label altogether thus not forming a coherent group in terms of identity. Given the close connection between identity and politics in

³²⁷ C: xviii.

³²⁸ C: xx.

³²⁹ C: xviii and *in* Hall (2006): 6.

³³⁰ C *in* Hall (2006): 7.

³³¹ C: xix and *in* Hall (2006): 12.

³³² C: xix and *in* Hall (2006): 13, 16.

³³³ C: xix, xx and *in* Hall (2006): 16, 17.

³³⁴ C: xx, xxi and *in* Hall (2006): 22, 23.

Northern Ireland this reality has some reflection on their political attitudes. There are many that are more sympathetic to Nationalism feeling that this ideology and Irish Republicanism tend to be more progressive than Unionism but still only a small minority of respondents is actually supportive of the former ideologies. The respondents that supported Nationalism or Republicanism were found only in the "Further Afield" sample. These respondents are generally integrated in Catholic communities where Nationalism and Republicanism are the main ideologies even if, as we have seen earlier, that integration may not be complete. Among these respondents there is a strong Irish identity while there's little connection to their original community and Protestant identity is rejected or of little importance. Nevertheless according to interviewee E their contribution to Nationalism as Protestants is fundamental for this ideology to maintain a more progressive character when compared with Unionism. As we have seen before the beginning of the 'Troubles' meant a decisive change in context which affected people's identities and ideologies. In particular the IRA campaign from the 1970's deepened the division between the communities and diminished the appeal of Nationalism and Republicanism to Protestants. From that period on the number of Protestant nationalists or republicans was greatly reduced.

The vast majority sits in the middle ground not supporting any side of the (political) divide and are generally cosmopolite in their political views and ideology. Their political references are less the ones that seem to dominate Northern Ireland, with a very particular kind of politics revolving around the confessional division, and more the ones that establish the cleavages between Left and Right in Western Europe. They not only identify with international political movements but are also more prone to leave Northern Ireland and go abroad because of a sense of not fitting in a sectarian society. Some of the ones that remain in the province simply don't participate and avoid local politics, rejecting it and separating it from personal politics. These respondents may have an Irish, a Protestant or other identities but reject identity politics and these identities don't influence their politics in a decisive way.

As we have seen in the earlier chapter on identity some respondents have a strong Protestant identity and feel part of the Protestant community. They dispute the meaning of Protestant identity from within this community but this is also a very political action since they contest that politics can be defined genetically or ethnically and that Protestants need to be unionists. Those with a Protestant background that reject both Unionism and their Protestant identity almost seem to confirm this idea that one needs to be unionist to be a 'real' Protestant. It is then up to those that refuse Unionism but not their Protestant identity to contribute to change in politics from within Protestant communities. But only a minority of the respondents seems to have a strong Protestant identity which defines their political choices. So, as stated before, only a small number is progressive *as* Protestant and that is reflected in their political action which is incipient. There isn't in Northern Ireland any political party that draws its membership mainly from the Protestant community and that is contrary to Unionism. Even if there is no party this latter definition could be applied to some groups that existed in the pre-Good Friday Agreement, in particular the New Ireland Group and the Irish Protestant Education and Action Group. These seem to be the best examples of specifically Protestant and non-unionist political groups in recent years but both had a small membership and represented only a minority of non-unionist Protestants. In both cases there was a stress on the heritage of the United Irishmen and on the progressive aspects of Protestantism. They seemed to be focused in

bringing an end to the war and work for a peace agreement. Since the Good Friday Agreement these groups became moribund and even if peace has created a less strained atmosphere that might make easier for Protestants to explore political options different from Unionism there doesn't seem to be any non-unionist Protestant group at the moment.

The Good Friday Agreement and the relative peace that followed were welcomed by all respondents. This was certainly an evolution from the period of the 'Troubles' and its violence. Nevertheless many of the respondents have a critical view of the way this agreement was brokered and how was put into practice. For them the Agreement made possible for unionists and nationalists to share power but has done little to tackle sectarianism. Since the beginning of the 'Troubles' but particularly after the peace agreement there is a different power balance between unionists and nationalists. Nowadays the state is no longer unionist-dominated and nationalists and Catholics aren't completely excluded from it. Nevertheless this hasn't meant an end to sectarianism and the division of the population in two groups defined by their religious background remains the rule. Nowadays even if there are still economic, social and political inequalities between Protestant and Catholic populations sectarianism has a more 'balanced' character where both sides of the divide should have the same stake but this means that sectarianism and the idea of the existence of two separate peoples in the province has been recognised by the state thus becoming institutionalised. This institutionalisation then helps to reinforce Unionism as the ideology of Protestants and Nationalism as the ideology of Catholics. Even if one might think that there were better conditions since the peace agreement for Protestants to dissent from Unionism this isn't necessarily the case and it might help to explain why there isn't any non-unionist Protestant group at the moment.

5.4. RELATION TO THE PROTESTANT WORKING CLASS

Interviewee B has a working class background, being raised in the Shankill area of West Belfast. His upbringing was influenced by strong elements of Protestant working class culture of the pre-'Troubles' period of the 1950's and 1960's like the Orange Order and the Northern Ireland Labour Party³³⁵. He started to work in printing at an early age, even though later he would attend college in England, and his politics were class-based, joining the Communist Party³³⁶. He would leave the Shankill and move to a middle class mixed area in the 1970's and he has progressively distanced himself from the area he grew up in and its community. His friends nowadays are mostly Catholics or non-unionist Protestants³³⁷. For a period we would go to the Shankill to visit his family but in the present he has no longer any connections in the area³³⁸. When he did go to his old community he would be careful expressing himself. He wouldn't think of 'preaching' to people there and only with his closest old friends he would try to encourage looking at things differently but he was never successful in changing their unionist

³³⁵ B: xiv.

³³⁶ B: xiv.

³³⁷ B: xvi.

³³⁸ B: xv, xvi.

views³³⁹. He nowadays sees the area where he grew up as depressed community clinging to the past that looks poverty-stricken when compared to the nearby Falls area. Unlike this latter area, where those that rise socially move up the road, the Shankill isn't capable of keeping its middle class and those that move socially also move geographically³⁴⁰. He is aware that not everyone in Protestant working class communities supports Loyalism or the Orange Order but he his critical of many that despite their disagreement do nothing to object to loyalist murders or the Orange parades³⁴¹. He sees no articulate voice in Loyalism and believes they had an opportunity to present a political alternative in election but just couldn't achieve any success. For him loyalists are viscerally anti-Catholic and anti-republican and he declares that he simply doesn't engage with them³⁴².

Interviewee D also was born and raised in a West Belfast Protestant community in an Orange and loyalist environment. He remembers how some Catholic families were expelled or pressured to leave the area after the 'Troubles'³⁴³. He also started to work from an early age and has kept his links with the working class until the present. But his progressive rejection of Loyalism made him became increasingly estranged from his original community. Just like interviewee B he would also go occasionally to his West Belfast to visit his family but has no more connections to the area³⁴⁴. He has continued to work in the trade union movement but would relate nowadays mostly with Catholics and non-unionist Protestants³⁴⁵. He feels he is no longer part of the Protestant working class culture. He sees these communities as having no prospects and still attached to all the values of Loyalism he rejected, where everything is secondary to the maintenance of the Union³⁴⁶. He thinks many in these communities have a narrow vision of the world and no aspiration for change³⁴⁷. For this respondent those that think differently from Loyalism are forced to leave Protestant working class communities³⁴⁸. He is aware that many people have more progressive views but they can only go so far without challenging the state³⁴⁹. He notes the contradictions in this community where many disliked the B-specials or the British establishment but would riot if these institutions were touched³⁵⁰. For this respondent the attachment of loyalists to all things British is not reciprocated by those in Great Britain which are, on the contrary, embarrassed of Loyalism and Orange culture³⁵¹.

The third respondent with a working class background, Interviewee C, unlike the previous two respondents grew up outside Orange culture and Loyalism and didn't have a Protestant identity. Nevertheless he grew up in the midst of a strong working class culture, mentioning how both sides of the family were proud of their working class roots that included

³³⁹ B: xv, xvi.

³⁴⁰ B: xvi.

³⁴¹ B: xv.

³⁴² B: xv.

³⁴³ D: xxvii.

³⁴⁴ D: xxvii.

³⁴⁵ D *in* Hyndman (1996): 163.

³⁴⁶ D: xxviii.

³⁴⁷ D: xxvii.

³⁴⁸ D: xxvii.

³⁴⁹ D: xxviii.

³⁵⁰ D: xxviii.

³⁵¹ D: xxviii.

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some prominent ancestors³⁵². His politics were also from an early age class-based and strongly anti-sectarian. Even though he never had a Protestant identity his politics increasingly distanced him from the Protestant working class communities where Loyalism began to dominate after the beginning of the 'Troubles'³⁵³. Through his job as a social worker he would later connect with working class communities and their activists, either Protestant or Catholic. By contacting with people in the ground he was quite aware how there was a whole range of opinions in these communities about the then ongoing sectarian violence and that they weren't reflected in the media or by the paramilitary organisations³⁵⁴. At a later stage he also started to engage directly with the leaders and representatives of those paramilitary organisations including the loyalist ones. Even though he deals with communities from both sides of the divide, he felt the need to engage with loyalist paramilitaries at the point he realised that even if he had come from a Protestant working class community he hadn't been in East Belfast in years. It had become alien territory for him and he had no sense of it anymore. Even if the actions of this groups were absolutely contrary to his ideals he attempted to influence these organisations to accommodate and end a conflict that was dividing and destroying the working class. Not to his surprise he found some individuals in these groups did in fact desire to find a solution to the conflict and could articulate progressive ideals³⁵⁵.

Through the contact with Protestant working class communities and the loyalist paramilitaries this respondent could identify some tensions and contradictions in their political thought, in particular the before-mentioned tension between class and identity. There were many people that admitted a socialist outlook but that would be part of the Orange Order or support it³⁵⁶. And even if Loyalism had a strong presence in Protestant working class communities there was also a long tradition in these communities of labour and socialist politics of which this respondent was an inheritor. He cited moments like the Outdoor Relief strike and the Republican Congress in the 1930's and the strength of the NILP and CPI in the 1950's that had their stronghold on East Belfast's "red streets"³⁵⁷. There are also tensions with the British establishment as many individuals, while seeing themselves as British, fought any impositions from the British government and mistrust it. This leads many in these communities to be unsure about their identity³⁵⁸. This respondent also believes that Unionism and Loyalism is not necessarily as widely supported as believed. Even if unionist parties like the DUP have a majority of votes in Protestant working class constituencies, abstention seems to be a more significant political stance³⁵⁹.

Interviewee E came from a middle-class background in the country. He got involved in punk and through it he contacted with working class Catholics from a neighbouring town but only when he moved to Belfast and worked in a warehouse for a while did he have significant contact with Protestant working class communities. His impression then was that young working

³⁵² C in Hall (2006): 4.

³⁵³ C: xx

³⁵⁴ C: xx.

³⁵⁵ C: xx and in Hall (2006): 18.

³⁵⁶ C: xxi, xxii.

³⁵⁷ C: xxii

³⁵⁸ C: xxiii, xxiv.

³⁵⁹ C: xxiii.

class Protestants had a limited world view and that they measured their success by Catholic failure, something which was destructive for them. In spite of poor working conditions, education and social prospects there was more attention to what Catholics were doing than to struggle for better conditions³⁶⁰. Nevertheless this respondent agrees with interviewee C in that Unionism and Loyalism are not as widespread among working class Protestants as apathy and unease with politics³⁶¹. For him it's necessarily among the working classes that working class manifestations of Unionism like the recent flag protest are to be found. But that doesn't mean that Protestant middle and upper classes aren't just as sectarian an exclusionary³⁶².

For this respondent the Protestant working class and Protestants in general have been failed by Unionism and Orange culture that have been imposed on them³⁶³. He also experienced personally how Protestants and loyalists in particular are excluded and seen as an embarrassment by the English middle classes³⁶⁴. This difficult relation between Britain and working class Protestant is clear in the political changes since the end of unionist rule. The state formation of the period between 1921 and 1972 which demanded a unionist class alliance came to an end with Direct Rule and for Britain the Northern Irish Protestant working class voting bloc is close to irrelevant in the context of British elections³⁶⁵. Rejected by Britain, this respondent then stresses the need for Irish Protestants to accommodate with the rest of the population of the island as a minority³⁶⁶. He sees working class Protestants as his brothers and sisters, politically and genetically, and absolutely central to any change among the Protestant population towards more progressive politics³⁶⁷. He sees the future as uncertain since the prospects for progressive politics don't seem positive even internationally. Additionally the prospects for Unionism seem no better as the structural context works against it. This respondent points that if Scotland becomes independent or if Catholics become a majority in the province this latter ideology will implode. Unionism inevitably needs to change to survive but this seems more likely to be a change forced by external circumstances than a proactive one. The uncertainty of the future of Unionism means it is essential to find alternatives to this ideology if a Protestant identity is to survive³⁶⁸.

The last respondent, interviewee A also came from a rural middle class background. In his politics the working class and the labour movement was always central. But as we have seen before he would see himself as "green" for a long period. This has changed in recent times and he adopted a more 'neutral' stance in the binary division of Northern Irish society. One of the more important reasons for this was closely related to the Protestant working class in that he became increasingly aware of their disadvantage³⁶⁹. For this respondent a socio-economic gulf has opened between these communities and the Protestant middle classes reflecting the structural changes since Direct Rule which made the unionist class alliance collapse. These

³⁶⁰ E in Hyndman (1996): 300, 301.

³⁶¹ E: xxxi.

³⁶² E: xxxi, xxxii.

³⁶³ E in Hyndman (1996): 301.

³⁶⁴ E in Hyndman (1996): 302.

³⁶⁵ E in Hyndman (1996): 304.

³⁶⁶ E in Hyndman (1996): 304.

³⁶⁷ E: xxxii.

³⁶⁸ E: xxxii.

³⁶⁹ A: iv.

communities were for centuries the holders of the stockade of the British Empire in Ireland. As the British Empire crumbled they were no longer 'necessary' and were left with what this respondent calls the "detritus of Empire", that is, the imperial frames of mind which contribute to a past-looking culture³⁷⁰. The abandonment of the British government was coupled with the loss of the traditional source of employment of working class Protestants in the shipyards due to de-industrialisation and the end of the unionist regime to create a feeling of defeat and depression in these communities that don't look forward to the future. For this respondent there is a lack of aspiration in working class communities reflected in poor education levels and the uncompromising nature of Loyalism³⁷¹. Interviewee A feels this community found itself in the wrong side of History and sympathises with their present situation recognising that his own middle class background has spared him to deal so closely with violence and deprivation³⁷².

Because of this sympathy towards the Protestant working class this respondent has in the last couple of years started to engage directly with these communities teaching History and organising tours with adults. He focuses on radical history from the 17th century dissenters to the United Irishmen. Even though this is their own history as Protestants it's virtually unknown because of its occlusion and the identification of the history of Protestants in Ireland with unionist History. He hopes to enrich this community's view of politics and hopefully be a seed for some change³⁷³. He states that he wishes he would be seen as a friend by Protestant working class communities but there is some uneasiness in this relation³⁷⁴. He is careful when expressing himself in these communities as there is little openness to different views from Unionism and Loyalism and he identifies some "inverted snobbery" against people with a middle class background³⁷⁵. And even if he is more capable of understanding some of the views of working class Unionism he is still troubled with the more sectarian aspects of this ideology³⁷⁶. Through his connections in Protestant working class communities he can also identify the tensions between class and identity politics mentioned before. He knows examples of progressive individuals with some inner conflicts but he sees little chance of a more significant political change to occur in these communities. It is difficult for these individuals to openly reject Loyalism and, if they do, it's more likely that they will leave the community altogether rather than being able to change their environment³⁷⁷.

Relation to the Protestant working class – Discussion

As we have seen in the Background section earlier as the Northern Irish conflict evolved and changed so too did the political choices of the Protestant community. The beginning of the 'Troubles' marked a turning point where Loyalism became increasingly important, particularly among working class Protestants. Nevertheless this ideology was never completely

³⁷⁰ A: iv, xiii.

³⁷¹ A: iv.

³⁷² A: xiii.

³⁷³ A: vi, xi.

³⁷⁴ A: xi.

³⁷⁵ A: iv, x.

³⁷⁶ A: iv, xiii.

³⁷⁷ A: viii.

dominant in working class communities not only during and after the 'Troubles' but especially before this phase of the conflict. There was always a strong presence among working class Protestants of left-wing ideologies coming from the 19th century. The decades that preceded the beginning of the 'Troubles' saw the consolidation of the NILP among these communities and there were even some branches of Republican Congress in Protestant working class areas during the 1930's. This was favoured by a decreasing importance of the constitutional question in Northern Irish politics during that period. But supporting the NILP didn't necessarily mean that one wasn't sectarian or unionist in its widest sense, as this party struggled with the constitutional question and division between Catholics and Protestants within it. The same way, as Loyalism grew in Protestant working class areas during the 'Troubles' some of those associated with it had labour credentials which demonstrates that there was some sort of class consciousness in that ideology. It is evident that it is possible to combine left-wing and some sort of unionist ideology.

Political developments within the Protestant working class and Loyalism have seen the emergence of parties that attempt to combine leftist social values and a loyalist/unionist stance. The connection to paramilitary organisations has damaged the chances of these parties among their electorate and their continuing unionist stance doesn't convince most respondents that it may be a 'solution' to Loyalism. The emergence of these parties nevertheless highlights the tensions within the Protestant working class between class and ethnic identity, one that was also visible among respondents in their upbringings and influence from relatives or friends. The continual existence of a strand of thinking among the Protestant working class informed by labour and socialist ideals provides some space for the development of progressive politics though.

A majority of respondents, particularly among the "Further Afield" sample, had a Protestant working class background nevertheless most also have distanced themselves from that community, politically and socially. Since the beginning of the 'Troubles' in the late 1960's these communities have increasingly identify with Loyalism even if the strength of this ideology is overstated and a great number of members of this community are simply divorced from politics. Most agree there is little debate among this community and little tolerance to non-unionists. For those that reject this ideology keeping silent about personal political views seem to be the only alternative to leaving the community and Northern Ireland. Most of the respondents with working class backgrounds have indeed moved from their original communities and have little ties left. This flight of the most progressive elements of the Protestant working class community diminishes the chances of a more general change among this class towards more progressive politics. The immiseration of Protestant working class communities and estates means that not only the progressives but also those with more capacities and better jobs leave these communities further condemning them to marginalisation. The growing distance to the Protestant middle and upper classes but also towards official Unionism and British institutions is also translated in a feeling of betrayal and alienation from N-Irish politics.

Not all respondents did cut their ties with the Protestant working class. At least four respondents, two interviewees and two from the "Further Afield" sample, have become more aware of the situation of the Protestant working class and have developed much work among

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these communities. They are generally concerned with opening more space for debate and, being educated and trained, contributing with skills and knowledge to a community desperately lacking them. There is a feeling that as non-unionists these Protestants can have a role in bringing something new to this community but this seems more of an outside influence than any change from within. Some of these respondents have a middle class background and the reason to engage with working class communities is related to some sort of sympathy for their present situation of economic and social depression. Others did have a working class background but they have usually been disconnected from the community for some time and have similar feelings of sympathy for the present disadvantage of the Protestant working class. There seem to be few cases of people that rejected Loyalism and Unionism while continuously living among these communities.

This re-approximation to the Protestant working class is nevertheless rare and as was said before most don't engage with this community. There seems to be little coincidence between the Protestant working class on one side and non-unionist Protestants on the other. It seems that to reject Loyalism and Unionism one must abandon the working class community of origin either for being pressured to do so or by not feeling comfortable in those communities. The chances of non-unionist Protestants connecting or reconnecting with the Protestant working class and promoting any general change among the latter seem slim. As interviewee E pointed out Unionism (and particularly its loyalist version) is an ideology which is particularly intransigent and resistant to change. This change is nevertheless inevitable as circumstances also change but this tends to be an adaptation forced upon Unionism by those same circumstances and rarely a positive and progressive change by its own initiative.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This research has focused on the position of non-unionist Protestants in the context of the binary division of Northern Irish society and the conflict associated to it. This position is conditioned by the British approach towards that conflict which relies on the Consociational model that promotes the simplistic idea of two traditions in the province. That model excludes all those that don't identify with either Unionism or Nationalism as it takes no consideration of the diversity which can be found within each of the two religiously-defined communities exemplified by the subjects of this research. Nevertheless that diversity is fundamental to understand and deal with the conflict.

Among the Protestant population this diversity can be found on several levels in terms of class, gender, denomination and religiosity. Nevertheless by selecting non-unionist Protestants as the subjects of this research we have focused on the political diversity of Protestants. This political diversity is found on the general Protestant population as well as in any subgroup of Protestants. Non-unionist Protestants can be found in both genders and in any denomination and class. Even if Unionism is dominant among Protestants this ideology isn't and never was the only political influence among this community and it is abusive to think that all Protestants are unionist. One needs then to take into account that other ideologies were always present and could dispute the political field among Protestants.

The balance of forces between political ideologies is not static though and it is fundamental to also take into account the temporal factor. In any given period of History there is always a political context in which the political disputes take place and that context is always subject to change. There are particular moments then which create a new context and force some change in the balance of forces between political ideologies and, of course, the eruption of the 'Troubles' in the late 1960's was one of such moments. It interrupted the progressive integration between Protestants and Catholics that had been taking place since the end of World War II and brought the constitutional question again to the centre of political debate. Even if the 1950's and 1960's saw some integration there was still a clear discrimination of Catholics in this period which eventually led to mobilization around the civil rights movement. This movement had some support from Protestants but the resurgence of the IRA and its armed struggle did much to increase the division between communities. From then on it became increasingly rare for Protestants to support Nationalism or to have some kind of Irish identity, something which wouldn't be uncommon before the 'Troubles'.

Similarly within the Protestant working class there is also diversity in terms of political opinions and changes reflecting the historical context. This community was always more prone to dissent from the Official Unionist Party during Stormont rule through independent Unionism and left-wing parties. The NILP in particular saw a period of expansion after World War II which menaced unionist dominance in Protestant working class constituencies. The 'Troubles' saw the downfall of the NILP as identity politics clearly overcame ideologies that were focused on socio-economic matters, helped by a context of sectarian war and division between communities. The 'Troubles' and prominence of identity politics also fuelled increased rebellion towards official

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Unionism which disintegrated and allowed for an emergence of Loyalism through more extremist or intransigent unionist parties and paramilitary groups. Nevertheless there was always a class aspect to Loyalism and a tension between class politics and identity. This context lasted until the peace agreement of 1998 but this new change in context hasn't necessarily made Loyalism and identity politics less influent nor favoured progressive ideologies among the Protestant working class. The attempt by the PUP and UDP to create a progressive working class Unionism hasn't been successful nor have non-sectarian parties been able to gain significant support. Unionism is a particularly intransigent ideology and any changes from within seem unlikely. Only through the pressure of a changing context can Unionism be expected to change but this change is unlikely to be a progressive one. The biggest rival of traditional Unionism and Loyalism in Protestant working class communities is political apathy.

As for the position of non-unionist Protestants in the conflict they aren't a coherent group in terms of identity and ideology. This stems from the fact that they are defined negatively as non-unionists just as Protestants tend to be defined negatively as non-Catholics and non-Irish. Their position differs along three dimensions represented as a continuum: radicalism of ideology, attitude towards Nationalism and importance of Protestant identity. In terms of radicalism their political views range from moderate to radical and revolutionary ideologies. In terms of attitude towards Nationalism some are full supporters of this ideology while others are very critical of it and see it as equivalent to Unionism in terms of sectarianism. Supporters of Nationalism may have a moderate ideology or more radical republican beliefs. Finally non-unionist Protestants can attribute great significance to this latter identity or reject it altogether. With these three dimensions in mind there are several possible combinations but we can identify four main options for non-unionist Protestants to position themselves in the binary division of society and N-Irish politics. More than actual bounded groups these are rather ideal-types and individuals may not fit neatly into one of the profiles.

Most non-unionist Protestants care little about identity and have cosmopolitan politics less connected to the particular Northern Irish identity politics and closer to a Right-Left division found in the rest of Europe. They may reject a Protestant identity altogether and sometimes also an Irish identity but, even if they don't, these identities are de-politicised and don't define their political options. Frequently they regard Unionism and Nationalism as two sides of the same coin, opposing both ideologies. They lie in a middle ground in the divided Northern Irish political context, not identifying with either of the sides defined by the 'Two Traditions' model and effectively being excluded by that model. They are subdivided into two groups, one with radical ideologies and another with more moderate views.

The latter group is essentially composed of centrist liberals and social-democrats critical of sectarianism and the peace agreement which institutionalised the division between the two communities in the structures of the state. Their identity is cosmopolitan and diverse sometimes rejecting all labels while in other cases combining several identities. Frequently they have international identities, particularly a European one. Some suggest that sovereignty of the province should be diluted in the context of a European integration in the EU as an alternative to exclusive sovereignty by Britain or a United Ireland. They support a liberalisation effort to diminish the importance of identity in politics but also to reform Northern Ireland's economy to bring it in line with modern western economies

Radicals usually espouse some form of socialism but are sometimes specifically anarchist, communist, radical feminist or ecologist. They frequently have an internationalist identity and draw inspiration from class struggles around the world. This group is highly critical of sectarianism and its institutionalisation at the highest level but it's also critical of structures of government and capitalism. For this group class inequality is as much of a problem in N-Irish society as sectarianism and achieving working class unity between both sections of the working class is their greatest objective.

Two other minority options can be identified. On one side some non-unionist Protestants clearly take a pro-nationalist or pro-republican stance merging or becoming part of the nationalist community. They have a strong Irish identity and frequently reject a Protestant identity, having little ties with the community from which they come. Nevertheless even if not rejected by the rest of the nationalist community, they are frequently seen and treated as different by this community and they may not reject a Protestant identity completely.

The fourth group can be defined by having a strong Protestant identity, seeing no reason or not being able to renege their origins and the community where they came from. They nevertheless reject Unionism and stress how this ideology is not the only political option for Protestants. Within the Protestant community they feel like true dissenters and frequently recall the values of freedom of thinking and radical democracy present in the origins of Protestantism to criticise Unionism. This strong Protestant identity can frequently be combined with an Irish one but this is usually a particular kind of Protestant 'Irishness' differentiated from the nationalist and southern versions.

As stated before, these profiles are not meant to define with precision any of the individual subjects but rather to characterise roughly some of the different ways non-unionist Protestants position themselves in the Northern Irish conflict. These are also not static and individuals could have evolved in their views through time. Most of the interviewed subjects can be identified with the middle ground radical profile but this is particularly the case for interviewee C. This respondent never identified as Protestant and is as much opposed to Nationalism as Unionism. Interviewee D is also closer to the middle ground radical profile but is in some ways more sympathetic towards Nationalism. On the other hand interviewee E seems closer to the strong Protestant identity profile. The other two respondents, interviewees A and B stand in the middle ground and their politics also centre on class issues but their views are more moderate than those of interviewees C and D. Nevertheless while interviewee B refuses a Protestant identity this is not the case of Interviewee A. This respondent evolved from a more pro-nationalist stance to a more neutral one but his relatively recent interest and feeling of fraternity towards the Protestant working class suggests that his Protestant identity is significant, and perhaps increasingly so. None of the five interviewed subjects is closer to the nationalist or moderate middle ground profiles but among the "Further Afield" sample some clearly were. Nevertheless most of his book's subjects were again closer to the radical middle ground profile with all other profiles being in minority.

Insomuch as the four ideal-type profiles can translate to more real social groups each one of them is significant and can make an important contribution to Northern Irish society and politics. Protestant nationalists are fundamental since, as was pointed out by one of the

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interviewees, they contribute to make this ideology more progressive. From its beginning Nationalism always counted with the support of at least some Protestants which made this ideology potentially less sectarian. The more Nationalism is an exclusively Catholic-supported ideology, the more conservative and exclusionary it becomes which in turn makes it less appealing to Protestants. The Consociational model opened up institutions and access to power to nationalists and this institutionalisation combined with an increased exclusionary character means that Nationalism becomes closer to Unionism and no longer potentially more progressive. Protestant nationalists can try to influence the definition of this ideology and make it again more inclusive of non-Catholics. Of course this capacity is also dependent on numbers and the fact that this group is a minority even among non-unionist Protestants hinders their ability to influence Nationalism.

Both the radicals and the moderates in the middle ground are important to make the binary division in Northern Ireland less central. Allied with Catholics they can challenge the essentialist nature of Northern Irish politics based on identity and bring alternatives from both sides of the political spectrum (or rather from the Left and from the Centre). Nevertheless it is fundamental that both radical and moderate ideologies don't incorporate sectarianism if the objective is to tackle it. Throughout recent History both the Labour movement and Liberalism were plagued by the sectarian division which contradicts their ideologies, as was clear in the division between 'green' and 'orange' socialism. More recently, the British Consociational approach to the conflict was presented in liberal terms but it incorporated and institutionalised the sectarian division.

The moderate middle ground position is essentially represented by the Alliance Party and of all four groups this is the one which is better represented in constitutional politics and the most institutionalised. This party has had some relative success over the years and even though it may not deal satisfactorily with the issues of class and socio-economic inequalities it has represented an important non-sectarian alternative voice in Northern Irish politics.

The middle ground radicals represent the truly progressive alternative in Northern Ireland since they oppose not only sectarianism but also class inequalities. Class issues were always secondary to identity politics in the province and even within the working class itself. The Northern Irish working class has suffered from historical disunity based on the sectarian division and this disunity has clearly made it weaker. It is fundamental that the divided Northern Irish working class can find a common ground and reduce antagonism not only to gain more strength and improve their present socio-economic situation but also to bring better perspectives for the Northern Irish conflict. Middle ground radicals are at the forefront of the creation of a non-sectarian space for the working class to unite and engage in progressive politics as one. Even if those in the middle ground tend to downplay their identities, those with a Protestant background could establish links with progressive elements of the Protestant working class. This is the case of interviewee C which has always adopted a strict neutral stance in terms of the binary division but has built important links with Protestant working class community activists and paramilitary leaders which contributed to a widening of political discussion in that community.

The overall importance for Northern Irish society of the fourth group, those with a strong Protestant identity, is linked to their contestation of Unionism and Orange culture from within Protestantism. They challenge the close identification between these categories and look for alternatives in History and Protestant values to dispute the meaning of Protestant identity in Ireland. Some of these alternative elements that could challenge the view of Protestants as inevitably unionists were found in the Protestant working class. The attempt to redefine Protestant identity could then be anchored in the Protestant working class and this would give non-unionists with a Protestant identity an important role in connecting to with progressive elements of the Protestant working class. Both interviews A and E have a sentiment of fraternity towards the Protestant working class and work towards a better appreciation of the history of Protestants in Ireland among this community but also Northern Irish society in general. It is nevertheless difficult for this group to redefine the meaning of Protestant identity in general since those that still have a strong Protestant identity are a minority even within non-unionist Protestants, themselves a minority of Protestants. Non-unionist Protestants are not a coherent group in terms of identity and ideology and many distance themselves from the Protestant community and even leave the Province. Given their small numbers it would also be difficult for those with a strong Protestant identity to develop a specifically progressive Protestant organisation or ideology that would become significant in Northern Irish politics.

Even if some respondents had in the present connections with Protestant working class communities and their members a significant number of those with working class origins didn't. As Loyalism's influence grew in Protestant working class areas during the 'Troubles' the abandonment of unionist ideals by the part of some working class respondents has frequently meant a distance towards their original community. Many have not only left their former neighbourhoods where it is difficult to have different opinions but also feel they have little in common with this community or the Protestant community in general. The respondents which felt a need to re-engage with the Protestant working class did so conscious that this is a community in great need and that, whichever privileges it might have had in the past, they were lost. This is an uneasy relation though since these communities support very different ideologies and these respondents are not necessarily integral members of a Protestant working class community. Even if their origins were working class Protestant these respondents have clearly different experiences from living in other types of communities, in Northern Ireland and abroad and their influence is in many ways external to the community. It seems particularly difficult for someone to live in a Protestant working class community among a loyalist culture and reject Unionism altogether, even if there are of course many working class Protestants with progressive views and a Unionist ideology.

There is very little chance that the Protestant working class community as a whole could re-think its connection with Loyalism. Non-unionist Protestant could have a role in that change as was suggested but a majority of them, even those with working class backgrounds, demonstrates little interest or ability in engaging with the Protestant working class. Those who do can make an important but only localised contribution to that change among certain people in certain areas. There are always possibilities for individual change and for that the existence of non-sectarian space is fundamental. This space can be found for example in youth subcultures, in certain geographical areas like South Belfast, in University and also in integrated education which ideally would be greatly expanded and eventually replace the separate school

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system. The small non-sectarian social space that exists is a guarantee that the individual cases of change will continue and there will always be a dissonance between being Protestant and unionist.

Promoting progressive non-unionist ideologies among the Protestant working class is not an effort facilitated by the reality of division on the ground or the British approach to the conflict. The priority of integrating Northern Ireland in the world economy has meant that conditions for conflict remain in place and to a degree sectarianism has been accommodated in institutions. There is increasing inequality and deprivation of the lower strata in Northern Irish society and therefore there are reasons for discontent among the working classes but their frustrations are channelled through identity-based ideologies as they are recognised and endorsed by government and institutions. As long as the 'Two Traditions' model remains the paradigm in the institutions of power there is little space for non-unionist Protestants to contest the correspondence between religious background and political choices.

This research questions the legitimacy of the 'Two Traditions' paradigm and the Consociational approach to the Northern Irish conflict since it excludes many individuals and groups in the province that don't identify with neither Unionism nor Nationalism. There is a need for policies to become more inclusive of these groups and even to promote alternatives to the binary division in Northern Irish society. Also, even if there is a strong class element in this conflict, the Consociational approach also eludes class issues. It promotes the dominance of identity issues in politics and policy while not addressing the fundamental social and economic issues that feed dissatisfaction and violence and prevent the complete settlement of the conflict. This could be only achieved by policies that address economic inequality and social disadvantage.

It would also be desirable for non-unionist Protestants, particularly those with working class origins to attempt a rapprochement with their origins where they could make an important contribution to communities facing increasing marginalisation. There shouldn't be a need to leave Protestant working class communities if one has views that are opposed to Loyalism. Progressive changes should come from within those communities and for that it is important for those with diverse views to keep ties with their original communities.

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