

# Postcolonialism in Northern Ireland

Examining the history of Northern Ireland and Sinn Féin's abstention policy through a postcolonial lens



(ap photo)

**Steen Daniel Hunter**

European Studies

Student Number: 20180650

Key strokes: 95281

Supervisor: Laura Landorff

June 2021

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.1 Literature review</b>	<b>6</b>
1.2 Research Question	8
<b>2. Methods</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Methodological considerations	11
2.2 Delimitations	12
<b>3. Theory</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Introduction to the theory chapter	13
3.2 Introduction to post-colonial theory	13
3.3 Homi K. Bhabha: Ambivalence, Hybridity and Sly Civility	13
3.4 Theoretical framework	15
<b>4. Analysis</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 Part 1: Power relations between Westminster and Stormont	17
4.1 Part 2: Public opinions and perceptions of the political landscape	24
4.2 Sinn Féin's abstention policy	30
<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>6. Conclusions</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>7. Bibliography</b>	<b>39</b>

## Abstract

This project's analysis firstly examines the way in which the political relationships between Stormont and Westminster are conducted, and what they historically are predicated upon. Next, it undertakes a brief inspection of the contemporary sentiments regarding Northern Irish politicians, and the influence afforded by them. Following this, a greater discourse analysis of the history and current application of Sinn Féin's policy of abstention.

The project employs an interpretivist approach to the aforementioned issues, making use of postcolonial theory for its tools to interpret and subsequently understand said history and issues, and what these are predicated upon. The theoretical concepts used are derived from Homi K. Bhabha, and include 'ambivalence', 'mimicry' and 'sly civility'.

The project concludes that postcolonial theory can afford a different way in which to perceive and understand the policy of abstention in a few different ways. Most significant of these is Bhabha's concept of 'sly civility', and how it highlights how subjects of colonialism can oppose this rule in favor of their own goals, by using the legitimized channels afforded to them by their status as being included in a colonial relationship.

With this being said, however, it is the thesis' contention that, specifically the concepts of Bhabha, are much more suited for study of culture and literature. Instead, critical theorists such as Foucault and Gramsci serve a better and more direct use case.

Furthermore, on the basis of three scenarios for the future, it is also the thesis' contention, that the key to improving relations between the UK and Northern Ireland could arise through greater influence in the UK parliament.

Key words: Northern Ireland, UK, Stormont, Northern Irish Executive, UK parliament, Westminster, Representation, Post-colonialism, Post-colonial theory, DUP, Sinn Féin, Abstention, Interpretivism, Mixed Methods, Polls, Desk Research, Document Analysis, Ambivalence, Hybridity, Sly Civility

# 1. Introduction

As of June 2016 the United Kingdom agreed, by majority, to leave the European Union. This came to fruition on the 31st of January 2020, starting the transition period, which gives the politicians at Westminster until the end of 2020 to negotiate all relevant deals to the ongoing function of the UK. The British withdrawal from the European Union (Brexit) was in many ways a result of various problems within England, that the English blamed on their involvement with the EU (Mckenzie, 2019). Whether or not the decision to leave was correct, and regardless of how Brexit is going to take shape, the exit from the European Union has acted as a catalyst for concerns within the entirety of the UK.

Among these issues is the relationships between the British parliament at Westminster, and the devolved governments that exist within the kingdom, especially those who had majority votes in favor of remaining within the EU. Many of these issues seem to stem from the manner in which the English government historically has dealt, and continues to deal, with incorporating and encouraging these devolved governments into decision making processes. As it stands, the government in London decides on laws that pertain to issues of national importance, of which foreign policy is one, whereas the devolved governments are in charge of dealing with most issues related to internal policies.

This attitude is even more so present in the devolved constituencies that voted to remain in the EU. Here, it seemingly gives rise to dissatisfaction, not solely due to the result, but also how their devolved status has not offered much in the way of autonomy, on an issue as large as Brexit, with their remain majorities effectively being void. Here, it is not a surprise that they may feel slighted by how the government at Westminster has made Brexit nation-wide, when some parts of the UK are more dependent on EU membership, relatively speaking, than others. Particularly, Northern Ireland enjoyed various economic and social aids from the EU, such as the farming subsidiary from the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP) and the EU's cross border program INTERREG IV. Many of the issues that have caused friction between the devolved government of Northern Ireland, in Stormont, and the English government, at Westminster, stems from disagreement regarding the amount of autonomy Northern Ireland should have in their 'own' matters, and to a large extent the history of sectarian conflict within Northern Ireland, and how the UK has dealt with this (Landlow and Sergie, 2020). As an example, in 2008 the UK parliament passed a vote to lower the age of sexual consent in Northern Ireland from 17 to 16 (The Christian Institute, 2008), despite a reported polling suggesting that 73% of Northern Irish would rather it remained at 17 (ibid.). During 2017 and 2020 where devolved governance and power sharing in Northern Ireland was dysfunctional due to a breakdown of Stormont, the UK parliament changed the Northern Irish abortion laws to allow abortion within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy (BBC, 2020a).

I definitely do not argue that these changes are morally wrong in their essence, as these changes, respectively, allow persecution of child predators earlier, and a more

progressive abortion policy allows for greater female autonomy of their own body, etc. The problem arises from the fact that the changes happened irrespective of Northern Irish opinion, and in the case of the abortion policy, without Northern Irish representation in the UK parliament. The problem is exacerbated when taking into consideration that Northern Ireland has a large population of republican nationalist catholic Sinn Féin voters. Sinn Féin has historically been the largest to second largest political party in Northern Ireland, together with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), their cultural and political opposition. It is for this reason that many consider Northern Ireland to be a modern day colony of the UK: Throughout Northern Irish history, the continual oppression and disregard for the country's republican population has resulted in much internal turmoil, at times spilling over into mainland Britain. Most notably amongst these are "The Troubles", which took place from the 1960s until devolution was granted as part of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The Northern Irish path to devolution was long and hard fought, with internal strife also being a large part of the problem. Even today, in Northern Ireland, the effects of that struggle are still felt, with its constituents to a large degree being split between the aforementioned republicanism/nationalism/catholicism or unionism/protestantism.

Brexit, although not integral to this thesis, presents a unique reminder that, constitutionally, not much has changed, particularly in the case of Northern Ireland. Their devolved status offers them little leverage on controversial issues such as Brexit, which they are ultimately subject to, despite an, albeit slim, majority remain vote. Additionally, this status quo also bears resemblance to what one could understand as colonialism. Ultimately, the British government has the last say, and should Northern Ireland for any reason descend too far into a direction of what Westminster considers problematic, Westminster is able to pull the figurative ripcord, and assume direct control over Northern Ireland, its Executive and the Assembly. It is not to be understood that this would ever happen lightly, but it is nonetheless a possibility.

The Catholic and/or nationalist population in Northern Ireland have historically had a hard time accepting this lack of sovereignty, afforded by what essentially is colonialism. The party that typically represents this demographic is Sinn Féin. Ever since their establishment, they have led a policy of abstention, refusing to take their elected seats at the UK parliament, despite them frequently taking turns with the DUP to be the largest party in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland, and Ireland before the partition of the two in 1921, have historically experienced a great amount of struggle gaining and retaining sovereignty against the imposed rule of the British. While the argument can be made that the Irish were once Brits, the tumultuous religious changes happening throughout medieval Europe also reached the British isles, and when the mainland British became protestants, the Irish remained catholic - broadly speaking. On the basis of a large Catholic population that have historically been oppressed to varying degrees, by what is best described as postcolonialism, Sinn Féin is a party that attempts to represent them best in politics, but do so through abstentionism. This project aims to understand the historical basis for this policy, and does so alongside the contention that Northern Ireland can be conceived of as colonized.

## 1.1 Literature review

This literature review has been conducted through scouring databases, such as google scholar news sites from the UK and Ireland, using the following keywords and phrases: Brexit and Northern Ireland, Westminster and Stormont, Sinn Féin, Sinn Féin abstentionism, Postcolonialism, Postcolonialism in Northern Ireland, Postcolonial discourse analysis

Furthermore, as part of my literature review and data gathering, I conducted an expert interview with Professor of social policy from the University of Ulster, Ann Marie Gray, to gain a primary source of information regarding the current experience she has of the Northern Irish perception of Northern Irish politicians and their experience of their representation in the UK parliament.

Throughout my literature review I encountered a few different themes. Through these themes I gained insight in the contemporary debate in the field. Subsequently I have been able to decide how and where I can contribute to the field and its current debates.

One of the most frequent topics regarding politics in Northern Ireland are Historical aspects. Professor John Coakley contends that the UK throughout its history as an imperial power has employed partition to best control which direction a region develops (Coakley, 2005). Coakley further contends that, historically, it was first quite late that the Catholic majority of Northern Ireland saw any socio-economic improvements, due to increased political engagement and mobility, stating that “First, their post-1968 mobilisation was associated with a socio-economic resurgence that saw a steady improvement in the capacity of Catholics to advance economically and in terms of their educational attainments, a circumstance that greatly assisted the process of political mobilisation.” (ibid.).

I knew I had an interest in Sinn Féin and their policy of abstention from the UK parliament, and as such, following John Coakley’s contention of British imperial rule over Northern Ireland, I found much debate regarding postcolonialism in Northern Ireland.

In a journal entry titled “*Ireland – a test case of Post-colonialism / Post colonialism*”, Brenda Murray contends that the Irish case of colonization is unique insofar as “*we are dealing with knowledges constructed in the West, and essentially of the West, unlike the situations more typically discussed in relation to third world countries*” (Murray, 2006:15). While Murray does not give much credence to historical underpinnings, she does contend that the Reformation of the 16th century meant that “*... the supremacy of ‘the English Protestant’ became the new hegemonizing force. The national identity of the Irish was now also infused with a religious identity and the Irish Catholic became the newly constituted ‘other’*” (Murray, 2006:20). Tangentially, in the case of Ireland, which this project will most likely deal with in passing, Ellen-Marie Pedersen argues in a chapter called “*Why Ireland Should Be Categorized as Postcolonial*” that “*History shows that Ireland definitely was a colony, and the attempted Irish resistance against the oppressive British government was evident. This violence could not end until they were finally independent from them*”. (Pedersen, 2016). In the case of Northern Ireland, Pedersen claims that due to Ireland still bordering up to Northern Ireland, which is a part of the UK, this ensures that “*the colonial moment is both past and present*” (ibid.). Interestingly enough however, Pedersen makes the observation that nationalist

Northern Irish figures, such as John Mitchel and Arthur Griffith, the latter of which I suspect I will deal with, did not wish to be seen as colonized, as this meant they were of equal worth to that of other subjects of colonialism, who, were not white (ibid.).

Finally, in a journal entry titled “*Locating postcolonialism*” by Mary Gilmartin and Lawrence Berg, it is argued that “*The long-term effects of settler colonialism are still evident in political conflict in Northern Ireland, which in turn has had a negative effect on the status of many Irish migrants living in Britain. Ireland is thus central to the construction of British identity and to British colonial identity: 'if Ireland had never existed, the British would have invented it'*”. (Gilmartin and Berg, 2007:122). They do however go on to mention that postcolonial analyses of Ireland and Northern Ireland are somewhat rare, but also mention how Northern Ireland often is casually compared to other European states that have been subject to imperial rule (ibid.).

This is where my main gripe lies; that much of the debate surrounding colonial rule in Northern Ireland is for most intents and purposes related to other similar cases - but then why does there continue to be so much unrest there? I contend that this finds its precedence in the history of its subjection to British rule, and more specifically, those who seek and have sought for its cessation. Sinn Féin represent the Catholics that have been most frequently targeted, and most harshly affected by this rule and discrimination. In my searching for relevant literature, regarding the application of postcolonial theory to anything related to Sinn Féin, I have found little. Mostly, these deal with how Sinn Féin relates to other cases of colonialism, such as the case of Palestine. Since I regard their abstention policy to be one of their defining characteristics, I will in this thesis endeavour to apply postcolonial theory to this, in the hopes of it being conducive to another way of understanding this unique approach to politics.

## 1.2 Research Question

As a result of my literature review, and from personal reflection over the topics I have met otherwise, I have arrived at the following research question:

***How can a postcolonial theoretical lens be applied to Sinn Féin's policy of abstention?***  
***- and what does the contemporary political landscape in Northern Ireland look like?***

To compartmentalize and supply additional issues to be examined closer, I have formulated the following set of sub questions and general pointers:

- What is the history behind the separation of power between Northern Ireland and England?
- How do the Northern Irish MPs utilize the seats they are given in the UK parliament?
- What is being said regarding the political landscape of Northern Ireland?
- How can the postcolonial concepts of Homi K. Bhabha be applied to the origins and contemporary practice of abstentionism in Northern Ireland?

Throughout these themes, it is my aim that my contribution to relevant literature will consist of the application of a postcolonial discourse analysis to the history of abstentionism in Northern Ireland, as well as a brief insight into the status quo of the political life there. It is, however, important to note that while there exists a gap of relation between the two parts of analysis presented, I contend that it is conducive to a more holistic understanding of the Northern Irish experience.

## 2. Methods

In this methods chapter, I wish first and foremost to introduce how I have acquired the data for the project, as well as how I will use it in my analysis. Following this, in a subsection I will familiarize the reader with my ontological and epistemological considerations, as I have found them to be decidedly important for this project.

In this project I have conducted desk research as well as an expert interview. Desk research constitutes secondary research, in which I make use of existing data that I have not collected personally. The interview I conducted was with professor Ann-Marie Gray of Social Policy at Ulster University. The interview with professor Gray was carried out as a semi-structured interview. The reasoning for conducting a semi-structured interview was to create a free flowing conversation, where professor Gray could highlight what points of concern she encounters in her work, as well as physical presence in Northern Ireland, regarding their devolved status, and what the public of Northern Ireland felt towards their politicians and the UK parliament at Westminster. For the most part, Brexit was used as the proverbial icebreaker, to highlight some of the issues this brings to the surface, primarily the fact that one can still consider Northern Ireland subject of colonial rule. The express goal of this interview was to let an expert in this area inform me of which topics frequently are brought up, and which don't appear as often, to not muddy the waters of my analysis with less relevant variables.

The questions I posed to professor Gray were therefore centered around the Northern Irish experience of the power relations between Westminster and Northern Ireland Stormont. Furthermore, granted her expertises in the fields of social policy and public opinion, it is my impression that she spoke from a neutral standpoint, to provide the most accurate representation she could. The answers she gave, and the conversation we had, concerning these topics, considered both/all sides of the argument at any given time, which is conducive to a more objective observation and discussion, as opposed to any partisan inspired arguments. While it seemed clear that Professor Gray was not particularly fond of the fashion in which politics are conducted in Northern Ireland, she remained impartial and considered the side of those who are content, or otherwise.

I attempted contact with other professors and journalists in relevant areas, but failed to get responses.

My analysis chapter will be divided into two parts. I will conduct a document analysis derived from a variety of data. I deal with the differing types of data mainly by splitting the analysis into two parts, limiting the crossover of qualitative and quantitative data.

The first part of my analysis consists of two distinct sections. Firstly, I present the current distribution of power in the UK, with a focus on how it relates to Northern Ireland. The

majority of the data I use comes from legal documents and reports from sources such as “UK in a Changing Europe”. UK in a Changing Europe typically presents independent research which is contemporary and, in my experience, mostly objective and thus impartial in its observations. The first part of the analysis will be substantially explanatory in nature, as it will focus on what the political landscape is in Northern Ireland, how their political relationship with England is, how it came to be, and how it functions.

For the second section of this first part, I conduct analysis on quantitative data of public opinion regarding issues that pertain to the research question. Here, I include polls of public opinion, as reported by those that have conducted the research, as well as second party publishers that convey the results of the polls. Among the issues covered by the polls is the Northern Irish experience of their representation at Westminster, their satisfaction with Stormont politicians as well as Northern Irish MPs in the House of Commons, and the question of Sinn Féin’s abstention policy. This section is not to be accepted as any sort of generalization, but rather, it is a cross-sectional insight into the opinions of what a sample of Northern Irish feel about the contemporary political landscape there. Furthermore, this section also lays some groundwork for the following analysis part, regarding how Sinn Féin’s policy of abstention came to be.

The second part of my analysis will be decidedly more analytical and interpretive by applying the indicators I derive from my choice of theory, to make sense of the results of the collected data regarding the history of abstentionism, and its current application. There will be cases where differing data types will be used for the purpose of constructing a coherent argument, across sources.

## 2.1 Methodological considerations

This project subscribes to an interpretivist approach, as described by della Porta and Keating (2008). I do this, as I am not conducting my research in the hopes of arriving at a positivist conclusion, i.e. an irrefutable conclusion on the basis of unambiguous data. Instead, I wish to explore and understand the subjective opinions and experiences of the people in Northern Ireland, and what informs these, regarding the main concerns of the distribution of power within the UK, and their perception of Northern Irish politicians. Furthermore, adapting an interpretivist approach allows me to seek meaning rather than an aforementioned positivist conclusion. In this vein, Della Porta and Keating state that “*The world can be understood not as an objective reality, but as a series of interpretations that people within society give of their position; the social scientist, in turn, interprets these interpretations.*” (Keating & Della Porta, 2008: 25).

In other words, I seek to interpret the data I will analyze, rather than taking it at face value or seeking objective truths. Important to this approach is the insistence on producing meaning and understanding rationale for observable phenomena. Della Porta and Keating contend that “... *this type of social science aims at understanding the motivations that lie behind human behaviour, a matter that cannot be reduced to any predefined element, but must be placed within a cultural perspective, where culture denotes a web of shared meanings and values*”. (ibid.: 26). As a result of this, while I understand the importance of theory, I have decided to restrict my choice of theory to function as a tool to best understand this proverbial web. In this web, these shared meanings and values are much derived from a crucial understanding of the history between the British and the Northern Irish, and in particular, the history of Sinn Féin’s abstention policy.

In my methods chapter I have presented the fact that I will be using both qualitative as well as quantitative data in my analysis, which might at first seem incompatible with an interpretivist approach, as it is often the case that quantitative data is preferred by positivists, and qualitative by interpretivists. When quantitative methods are to be used in an interpretivist approach, it has to be the case that the data is not “*broken down into variables but considered as interdependent wholes*” (ibid.: 27), but rather, by way of being interdependent wholes, contributes to a consolidating effort to create meaning from the interpretations of said data.

As a result, this project will analyse in said interpretative manner. As opposed to a positivist conclusion, I expect to contribute to the field by way of applying postcolonial theory to the specific issue of the abstention policy of Sinn Féin - an area lacking in analysis through this set of theoretical concepts.

## 2.2 Delimitations

With a project such as this, which deals heavily with history, there are some delimitations that must serve as a parameter for what is included, as there are a great amount of issues that each could warrant an entire project.

First and foremost, I have chosen to focus almost exclusively on Northern Ireland as my choice of devolved UK government to examine. Within the UK there exists other devolved governments such as Wales and Scotland, yet they are not historically regions of as obvious colonialist rule as Ireland. Furthermore, inclusion of mainland English regions that have expressed interest in increasing local power, obviously without colonial influence, such as Cornwall and Yorkshire, may also have been salient, if the purpose was to undertake a broader discussion of the spread of influence throughout the UK and the British Isles.

In terms of data, I have mostly avoided opinion pieces from news sites and similar sources. That does however not mean that I have excluded qualitative data, as I find the nuances that qualitative data can highlight valuable to a project regarding public opinion, such as this. I find aforementioned opinion pieces less salient, than statements from actors actively involved/employed in politics and social policy, and entries regarding history, such as bibliographies, encyclopedias etc.

Additionally, this project consciously avoids including the EU, despite postcolonial theory typically focusing on the annals of European colonialism, as this is a case of colonialism by Europeans against Europeans, as opposed to European conquest of peoples outside its geographical borders

Lastly, on a more philosophical note, while I have done my best to portray both sides of the arguments throughout, and attempt to as best as possible retain a neutral standing, I realize that my own bias may affect my decision making when selecting data sets. It seems particularly important to mention that I do not have any personal interest in furthering any type of propaganda, nor do I identify as being on either 'side', despite being born a British protestant. I consider the past treatment of Catholics in Ireland and Northern Ireland reprehensible, but I also do not condone the violent acts of rebellion that this has wrought - rather, I find that examining the history of the strenuous relationship of those involved from a neutral standpoint most interesting, and acknowledge that the past serves as inspiration for the future - not as a means to reprimand the descendants of it.

## 3. Theory

### 3.1 Introduction to the theory chapter

In this theory chapter I wish to outline what postcolonial theory is and how it will be applied in my thesis. As covered in my literature review, there is sufficient research to sufficiently consider pre-partition Ireland a colony, with post-partition Northern Ireland argued to contain characteristics that would allow for their designation as a sort of colony.

This thesis works under the assumption that there are enough of these characteristics to analyze the case of Sinn Féin through the lens of postcolonial theory. While the analysis will briefly touch on how this can be argued for in a few different ways, the largest part will deal with how postcolonial theory can help understand the origins and application of the controversial abstention policy of Sinn Féin. The analysis aims to do so by way of employing the concepts of ambivalence, hybridity and sly civility, as laid out by Homi K. Bhabha. These will be presented to the reader in a model, to better illustrate and highlight the theoretical framework that will be employed in the analysis.

### 3.2 Introduction to post-colonial theory

Postcolonial theory had its emergence in the 80's (Oxford, unpub), and has been used in many different ways. Examples of these are the theorizing of political representation, globalization, environmentalism and human rights (ibid.). By being employed as such, postcolonial theory can alter and otherwise seek to influence the way in which we (as citizens and as scholars) understand the histories of nations that have been, or continue to be, subject to colonialism.

### 3.3 Homi K. Bhabha: Ambivalence, Hybridity and Sly Civility

Ambivalence, as described by Homi K. Bhabha, presents a way in which to understand the push-and-pull relationship between colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha refers to this as 'attraction' and 'repulsion' (Mambrol, 2017). Herein lies the term 'ambivalence', due to the conflicting attitudes of the colonized to their colonizer, as they are rarely completely antithetical to the colonizer. Instead, sentiments of attraction and repulsion may flux. As a result, ambivalence is best understood as a wrench in the works of a colonizer, as it complicates an otherwise simple power structure between ruler and subordinate. Somewhat reminiscent of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, having colonial subjects who are ambivalent in their ideas and actions serves as disruption for the somewhat express goal of colonizers in securing subjects that assimilate to their ideas and norms.

This process of assimilation, when combined with ambivalence, produces what Bhabha calls 'mimicry'. Here, it is understood that this fluctuation of attraction and repulsion of the ideas of the colonizer, by the colonized, results in assimilation degenerating to mimicry, which often borders on the line of what Bhabha calls 'mockery' (ibid.). In this thesis, mockery won't be

included, as it is most salient in cases of literature study, where language plays a much greater role, for example, in Indian cases.

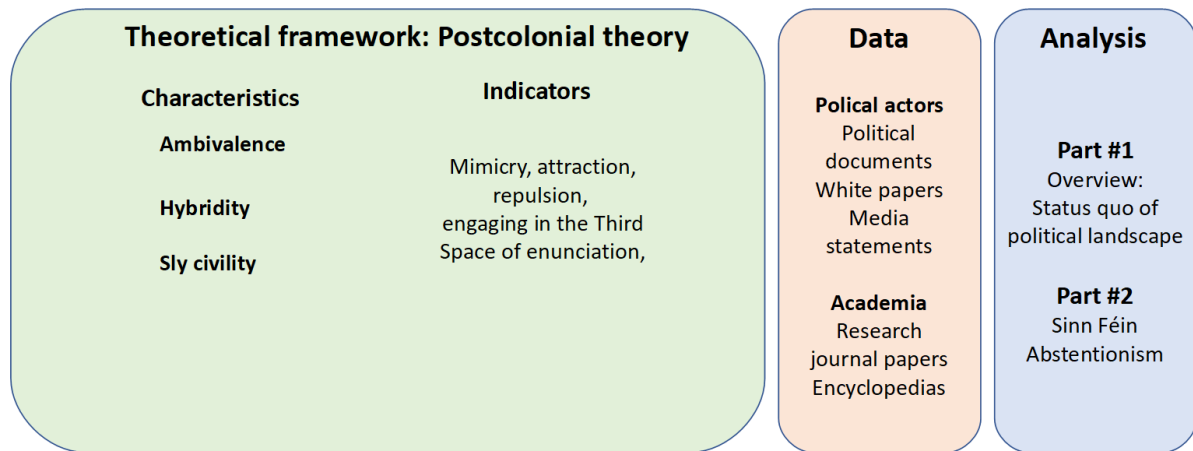
Like mockery, mimicry is also often used in this context. However, unlike mockery, mimicry is more apparent to observe in more cultural and political terms. Ambivalence and its subsequent mimicry are typically unwelcome traits, as understood by the colonizer. The colonizer generally wishes to produce subjects that comply with their institutions of power (Mambrol, 2017). However, by doing this, subjects assimilate, or mimic, and as a result of this, gain knowledge and thus power within these institutions: Armadeep Singh argues that mimicry can be “*subversive or empowering — when it involves the copying of “western” concepts of justice, freedom, and the rule of law*” (Singh, 2009). As a result, ambivalence that produces mimicry out of its flux between attraction and repulsion allows for the intentional or unintentional subversion of power by those that exhibit these characteristics. Attraction in this case would be the engagement of a colonized institution or actor in said concepts, such as the ruling powers’ version of justice, freedom and rule of law. Repulsion would be to actively rebel against, denounce or in other ways sabotage aforementioned concepts.

Hybridity finds its meaning in recognizing the interdependence, as it were, of the colonizer and the colonized, as this relationship can produce hybrid subjects - on both sides of the equation. Most salient in this thesis, however, is the idea of the Third Space of enunciation that is found within this concept. Within this Third Space, Bhabha contends that those who those that participate in “*exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves*”. (Bhabha, 2004:56). In this, it is understood that ideas of those that participate in this, leave as hybridized versions of who they were previously; producing hybrid subjects through a transformative cultural and political exchange.

And finally, while Bhabha is notoriously hard to grasp, the concept of ‘sly civility’ finds itself briefly described, but greatly influential. “*My contention, elaborated in my writings on postcolonial discourse in terms of mimicry, hybridity, sly civility, is that this liminal moment of identification – eluding resemblance – produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority [...] It singularizes the ‘totality’ of authority by suggesting that agency requires a grounding, but it does not require a totalization of those grounds.*”

(Bhabha, 2004:265). Here, it is important that I explain my conceptualization of what Bhabha is contending. I see sly civility as a way in which the colonized (subaltern) can act on their own terms, under the guise of assimilation, through the understanding and usage of what Bhabha refers to as grounding and grounds; i.e., legitimate channels of influence.

To illustrate how these will be employed in my analysis, I have made the following theoretical framework:



Here, I present an overview of how the concepts of ambivalence and hybridity are used. I do this to make the explicit distinction between what I perceive as being characteristics, and indicators, as the theory of Bhabha can be quite entangled and/or challenging to follow. In addition to this, the framework also depicts the data types used, and the structure of my analysis.

## 4. Analysis

In this analysis, I will first introduce how power relations are between Northern Ireland and England and why they are the way they are, by looking at key common political history and the contemporary facts of the distribution of power - both at Westminster and in Northern Ireland. While some repetition will occur between the first and the last section of this analysis, this is mostly the case to ensure a coherent narrative for the reader, in each respective section.

Following this, I will include a brief look at the Northern Irish experience of these relations, as well as an insight, as to how some Northern Irish perceive their politicians and their efforts. While this section includes statistics, these are not to be accepted as a generalization, rather, as a snapshot of recent sentiments amongst a sample of the Northern Irish.

In the second section of this analysis, I will apply the theoretical framework, as presented in the theory section, to the history of abstention in Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as how it continues to be employed today.

## 4.1 Part 1: Power relations between Westminster and Stormont

Firstly, as mentioned I will introduce this part of my analysis with an outtake from the interview conducted with Professor Ann Marie Gray. When asked if she expected the Northern Irish to trust Westminster to make the correct political decision for them, in the hypothetical scenario that Stormont would collapse again in the near future, she replied the following:

*“No. I think there’s a low trust in the Westminster government, across the Northern Ireland population, whether people are Unionist or Nationalist, there’s unhappiness there because Northern Ireland was three years without a government, and the Westminster government said ‘we’re completely hands off’. We didn’t have any kind governance at all. None - no direct rule. Northern Ireland was completely ungoverned during those three years, apart from a few times where the Westminster government had to pass emergency legislation around budgets. [And] they passed legislation on abortion and same sex marriage, they used that as a useful window for legislation. That pressure came from the United Nations.” (Gray, 2020).*

As previously mentioned, this initial part of the analysis will be decidedly explanatory, with the goal of uncovering and understanding the basic conditions upon which the political status quo and relationship between Northern Ireland and the UK is predicated. With this in mind, I aim to answer the following set of questions in this part of my analysis:

- How does Westminster function? What are the roles of the two houses in parliament?
- What is the history behind the current status quo of Northern Irish devolution and political power sharing?
- How do the elected Northern Irish MPs utilize their seats at Westminster? And what is the Sinn Féin policy of abstention predicated on?

First, I will briefly introduce the two houses that make up the British parliament at Westminster, what they include, and what their function is. While most of this can be considered general knowledge, the parliament and what it is made of can be somewhat convoluted.

The parliament at Westminster refers to two separate houses: the House of Commons, and the House of Lords. The House of Commons will be the main point of interest here, as the members of the Commons are elected by the public, unlike the members of the House of Lords. Despite this focus on the House of Commons, a basic understanding of the functions of the House of Lords is beneficial for a holistic understanding of the UK Parliament, and how it functions.

The House of Lords has over time lost much of its influence through various acts in the

name of democracy. This is the case, as the members of the House of Lords are appointed, rather than elected, and they typically remain in the House 'for life' and are unpaid. The function of the Lords is typically to assess, make amendments to, or (temporarily) block government legislation. The Lords are most commonly appointed by the Queen, on behalf/recommendation of the incumbent Prime Minister, typically chosen for their expertise in their assigned areas (Parliament, n.d). It is on these grounds that the Lords are able to execute their function. In addition to their role in passing laws, they also help spread the workload of the Commons by suggesting laws and acting as the highest court in the UK, known as the Court of Appeal.

The House of Commons is the second House that makes up the UK Parliament, consisting of members of Parliament (MPs), that are locally elected to represent their constituency in the Parliament at Westminster. The House of Commons is one of the most crucial bodies of the UK political system, as a majority in the Commons is required for the Prime Minister to stay in government, roughly speaking.

In the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, jointly formulated by the EU and UK parliament, it is ensured that certain crucial terms are met for the continued peace in Northern Ireland. Among the terms are important elements such as the guaranteed absence of a 'hard border' between Northern Ireland and Ireland (i.e. public border checks etc.)(European Commission, 2019). Within the protocol, however, article 16 outlines how Westminster ultimately has the legal jurisdiction to act unilaterally, albeit non-permanent, on behalf of Northern Ireland, without regard for democratic consent. This should only happen "*If the application of this Protocol leads to serious economic, societal or environmental difficulties that are liable to persist, or to diversion of trade*" (ibid.). The paradoxical nature of this, is that these are issues that Northern Ireland, to an extent, depend on the rest of the UK and its treasury to address. In losing the benefits granted from the EU, it is up to the British government, and its various relevant ministers, to ensure that this loss is not what could allow any of these 'difficulties' to become overwhelming for the Northern Irish government, and by extension, its people.

Historically speaking, 1972 was arguably the worst year for everyone involved in The Troubles. Following the shortcomings of numerous diplomatic efforts, and the failure to stop the paramilitary violence of the IRA, Westminster assumed considerable control of Northern Ireland by way of the "Northern Ireland Temporary Provisions Act". This act effectively replaced the Parliament of Northern Ireland with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act 1972). Following this temporary act, the parliament was permanently abolished in favor of a Northern Irish assembly in 1973 by the Northern Ireland Constitution Act. One noteworthy attempt of reconciling nationalist and unionist sentiments came in the form of the Sunningdale agreement in 1974. The Sunningdale agreement was an attempt at appeasing both sides of the political divide in Northern Ireland, by creating a Council of Ireland, which would include the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, to both oversee the politics imposed by Westminster. Much of the dissatisfaction from this agreement came from the Unionists, as the idea of having a Council of Ireland that included representatives from the Dáil Éireann (the parliament of the Republic of Ireland) was unacceptable (McDaid, 2012). As a result of this, Unionist violence and organized worker strikes caused the agreement to fail less than a year from it being signed. Unrest throughout Ireland, and continued failure of the Northern Irish people with

differing identities and beliefs to find common political ground, resulted in no real progress in any devolved governance and/or law making taking place, until the resolution of the Troubles, in 1998, by way of the Good Friday Agreement.

In this vein, it is also the case that, according to RTÉ, the British government recently have opposed, and subsequently declined the EU's wishes to retain their presence in Northern Ireland, by locating an office in Belfast. This office's charge would be to help ensure that the Irish protocol gets implemented correctly. The Irish protocol, in short, is a part of the greater withdrawal agreement, where, effectively, Northern Ireland continues to operate under the EU single market, to remove the necessity for customs checks between Northern Ireland and Ireland. This Irish protocol therefore is in place to ensure that lawfully required border checks between North and South will not become necessary, even if the UK and the EU should fail to conclude a deal in a timely manner.

The UK government is so much against it that they even consider the request '*for an EU office in Northern Ireland as contrary to the letter of the Withdrawal Agreement and tantamount to an infringement of sovereignty*.' (Connelly, 2020). Here, in a postcolonial sense, it is very much apparent that the UK is not interested in giving up their hegemony in Northern Ireland.

Taking history into account, one could make the argument that one of the reasons for initial, and continued, peace between Britain and Northern Ireland was partly predicated on the guidance of the EU: "*Hume's conception of the EU model was clearly visible in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998.*" (Tannam, 2020). It is important to remember, and acknowledge, how the late John Hume was one of the driving factors in establishing the 1998 Good Friday agreement. Without his willingness to cooperate across the political divide of Northern Ireland and Ireland, many doubt that the Good Friday agreement would have been signed and implemented (BBC, 2020b). John Hume worked across the divide both in the European Parliament as well as in Northern Ireland. Despite being one of the founders of the nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), he worked alongside DUP founder and leader Ian Paisley in the EP, and UUP leader David Trimble, in efforts to forge lasting peace across the Irish island. As a result, he jointly received the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize with David Trimble (Nobel Peace Prize, 1998).

As the layout of the House of Commons shows, Sinn Féin is labeled as abstentionists. This trend started all the way back in 1905 with the inception of Sinn Féin and its founding policies. (Feeny, 2003:33). It is worth noting that this extends to all of Sinn Féin, as Sinn Féin campaigns in Northern Ireland and Ireland alike. In the report "Parliament and Brexit" published by The UK in a Changing Europe, Professor Katy Hayward states the following in regard to Sinn Féin MPs abstentionist status: "*Sinn Féin's policy of abstentionism arises from the principle that the parliamentary oath of allegiance to the Crown is incompatible with its view that, not only should there be no Westminster rule over Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland itself should not exist as a region of the UK.*" (Hayward, 2020). Of course, this stems from one of the core beliefs of Sinn Féin. With Sinn Féin being the premier nationalist party in Northern Ireland, one of their main goals is the reunification of Northern Ireland and Ireland. In addition to this, as stated, they do not wish to be a part of the UK in the first place. The idea of Westminster ultimately ruling Northern Ireland runs counter to Sinn Féin, and their voters', core ideals.

Ultimately, this results in the refusal to officially participate in the various processes they otherwise would have influence on, at Westminster. This is, however, not to say that they entirely do not engage in politics in London: *“The influence of Sinn Féin in Westminster has come instead from the use of ‘coffee cup diplomacy’”* (ibid.). As stated before, Sinn Féin do not officially take their seats at Westminster. Instead, they exercise their elected status where elsewhere applicable in informal ways, such as through the exemplified ‘coffee cup diplomacy’. Coffee cup diplomacy is another way of describing informal lobbying. Sinn Féin partake in these informal practices to further strengthen their party and policies as a whole, as elaborated upon here: *“The party is experienced in making best use of the access it has to Commons resources and evidence, and makes sure that its MPs and advisers are well-briefed, clear and consistent in presenting the party line.”* (ibid.). This bears more weight than immediately apparent. Having access to the resources of the house of Commons, such as the Commons library, allows all MPs - abstentionists included - to become or remain well informed on any relevant topics.

Following the 2019 election, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) lost much of its power to Sinn Féin, and simultaneously went back on their promise to support the Conservatives at Westminster. Losing favor with the biggest UK party effectively means that the DUP loses much of its leverage in parliament, and as a result, the already scarce representation and influence of Northern Irish MPs fell. Given how parliament works, this leaves Northern Irish MPs in a less favorable position than prior to the Johnson government, and places difficult decisions in the hands of the DUP. Hayward notes that: *“Does it (DUP) push forward in resistance to the Protocol, in the hope that British MPs will finally wake up to what it sees as the ‘betrayal’ of the union? Or else does it swerve to develop a never-before-seen collaborative effort with other Northern Ireland MPs and parties to defend the common interests of the region vis-à-vis Britain at this critical juncture?”* (ibid.). Much reminiscent of how, historically, John Hume negotiated and worked alongside unionist DUP and UUP in pursuit of a common goal, Northern Ireland would undoubtedly have greater influence if opposing NI parties and their MPs found common ground, at the very least on some of the issues that are discussed at Westminster, and are not devolved. It is also worth mentioning that one could apply Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space of enunciation here, as the example of John Hume working cross-aisle can be seen as him entering into this third space, allowing and encouraging communication with the unionist parties.

What one could see as an issue here, is the above mentioned Sinn Féin abstaining from parliament, and furthermore the only recently adjourned Northern Irish executive at Stormont. One of the problems herein is the tumultuous history of Stormont, which has seen its fair share of problems. Biggest of these issues was when Stormont ceased to function on the backdrop of the so-called ‘Renewable Heat Incentive scandal’ (RHI), which was initially put into motion by Arlene Foster, when she was the minister of economy in 2012. In this scandal, the Northern Irish were encouraged to switch to, and use, more renewable energy, being subsidised for their efforts. However faulty calculations of this subsidising meant that people were paid more than the cost of fuel, effectively allowing fraud to happen. The BBC reported that this fraud resulted in *“overspend estimated to be about £490m”* (BBC, 2017a). These 490 million pounds were of course sourced from the Northern Irish treasury, hence the scandal. Following this coming to light, the then First Minister of Northern Ireland, Arlene Foster, refused to step down from her position as First Minister whilst an enquiry took place.

As a direct result of this, Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness resigned from his position as the Deputy First Minister, after being in this position since the original concept of power-sharing in Northern Ireland was established by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (BBC, 2017b). In his letter of resignation, Martin McGuinness puts forward his reasons for resigning, also beyond just the RHI scandal.

Among these, I found a few statements particularly interesting, as they specifically pertain to the indicators I presented in my theory section. I will present these statements here, with relevance to the research questions. Subsequently, I will convey what Martin McGuinness' resignation meant for Northern Ireland and its immediate political landscape. I do this with some caution, as the views of Martin McGuinness will of course be heavily influenced by his strong nationalist Sinn Féin views. With that being said, McGuinness highlights a number of interesting perspectives on the issues he has faced during his time as incumbent Deputy First Minister: McGuinness comments on the relationship between Northern Ireland and England during his time in office, saying that: "*Over this period successive British governments have undermined the process of change by refusing to honour agreements, refusing to resolve the issues of the past while imposing austerity and Brexit against the wishes and best interests of people here*" (McGuinness, 2017). This speaks to the dissatisfaction felt by the Northern Irish, despite it coming from the then Sinn Féin leader.

From a postcolonial perspective, it is interesting that Martin McGuinness mentions the 'refusal' to fix historical problems between the British and the Northern Irish. Furthermore, McGuinness says the following about the efforts to cooperate across the political divide, stating that "*At times I have stretched and challenged republicans and nationalists in my determination to reach out to our unionist neighbours. It is a source of deep personal frustration that those efforts have not always been reciprocated by unionist leaders*" (ibid.). While highly subjective in nature, one can at least acknowledge that the very idea of power sharing goes against the foundation upon which Sinn Féin is rooted.

It is also worth considering the role of postcolonial terms, such as Bhabha's concept of mimicry. Here, I make the argument that Unionists can, to an extent, be considered a product of mimicry of like minded British politicians, who, in this case, mimic the British sense of hegemony through their disinterest in compromise with the 'other'.

Due to the nature of the power-sharing set out by the Good Friday Agreement, this also forced Arlene Foster out of her position as First Minister, resulting in a so-called "snap election", which is overseen by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (British elected MP). With no First Minister and Deputy First Minister, the Northern Irish Executive ceased convening. After three years of failed negotiations to form government, the executive reconvened in early 2020, with an arguably significantly damaged public perception. Professor Gray also commented on the fact that due to Stormont being dysfunctional, no one was really representing the Northern Irish in specifically the Brexit negotiations, but also many other issues in the UK parliament, contending that: "*The assembly elections showed a move towards the middle ground, Brexit probably had something to do with that, as people were concerned with the lack of representation - that was a reaction or response to that*". (Gray, 2020).

Professor Katy Howard also argues that "the pro-Remain and pro-cooperative stances of the moderate parties (the SDLP and Alliance) resulted in strong performances from them and

sent three new ‘centre ground’ MPs to the Commons.” The move towards the political centre as a result of the lack of representation at Westminster may well encourage these aforementioned pro-cooperative stances going forward.

Pro-cooperative stances might well be one of the ways in which Northern Ireland can strengthen their position within the UK parliament, either through internal co-operation with the DUP and Sinn Féin (should they take their seats), or with other devolved regions’ parties. This cooperation is arguably a necessity, as Hayward contends that *“Whilst those parties are inevitably hindered by lack of numbers – by the way Commons procedures are arguably biased against smaller (especially regional) parties, and by the sheer size of Boris Johnson’s majority – those three MPs are widely respected as among the most effective political actors in Northern Ireland.”* (Hayward, 2020a). The focus here should be the effectiveness of these MPs, as being a smaller party allows for greater political maneuverability within the parliament, granting them exponential leverage when forming alliances.

However, despite these developments, historically, the Northern Irish have almost always been subject to the powers that be, with British MPs in parliament typically having the strongest influence, and subsequently the last say. As we know, the dissatisfaction stemming from this contributes to fuel conflicts like The Troubles in Northern Ireland, which is what is feared will repeat itself to some extent, should tensions greaten from lack of meaningful Northern Irish political representation and influence on issues important to the people they represent.

The report further comments that: *“If the Johnson government responds favourably to what may turn out to be an unprecedented willingness of the part of Northern Ireland’s parties in Westminster to work together and speak in common cause, it will be an important means of welding together the pillars of peace and stability amid what looks set to be a period of extraordinary political turbulence across these islands”* (ibid.). This is one of my primary arguments in this thesis, as the cross aisle cooperation of Northern Irish political parties would strengthen their overall position at Westminster: through increased representation comes more significant bargaining power, leading to greater influence on issues that matter to the Northern Irish. In another post for The UK in a Changing Europe, Professor Hayward comments on this saying that: *“At its heart, peace in Northern Ireland depends on people of all political views believing that democratic representation works and is worthwhile – including at UK level...”* (Hayward, 2020b).

Here it is plainly stated that the current peace-time is upheld by the idea that actors, both in Northern Ireland and in England, not only agree that Northern Irish representation at Westminster works, but that it is constructive and/or beneficial, for both sides. In the case of Brexit, for example, this rendering of the Northern Irish remain vote as effectively void, it can be hard to gauge what could have been done differently, as it is not a problem unique to Northern Ireland. In this vein, Iain McIver also comments for The UK in a Changing Europe, and argues that *“What is less easy to demonstrate is whether the devolved legislatures have successfully impacted the direction of the negotiations in terms of influencing the UK government’s negotiating position. However, this is arguably no different from the position faced by the devolved administrations in the negotiations.”* (McIver, 2020a). Herein lies the importance of demonstrating the value of democratic representation to the general population. While a democracy is a democracy, and a majority vote is a majority vote, it is understandable how it can be seen as problematic for the Northern Irish that an issue as

important as Brexit, in this example, is largely decided by the UK government. Be it decided by the UK government or not, the lack of influence by the Northern Irish on the negotiations of terms surrounding this, further garners general skepticism towards both the British rule, and the politicians of Northern Ireland that were largely unable to influence the terms of the signed agreement.

Although it comes with its own caveats, Northern Ireland could increase their influence quite significantly, if they, in the future, are able to form alliances within the UK parliament with some or all of the devolved regions. In another article, Iain McIver argues that the recent adjourning of Stormont, and thus the reappearance of Northern Irish MPs at Westminster could present such an opportunity: “The reinstatement of the Northern Ireland executive adds a further devolved dimension and potentially strengthens the hand of the devolved governments if they can work together as a trio.” (McIver, 2020b).

While this is not unthinkable, it would still require the Northern Irish MPs to be able to offer something meaningful in return for being able to leverage the Scottish MPs, for example, on issues important to Northern Ireland. Here, the seven empty Sinn Féin seats would arguably gain exponentially higher value. However, this is not the case, and as we know, Northern Ireland still sits at a significant disadvantage in the UK parliament, apparently at their own behest. How the Northern Irish perceive this will be further examined next, in the following part of the analysis.

## 4.1 Part 2: Public opinions and perceptions of the political landscape

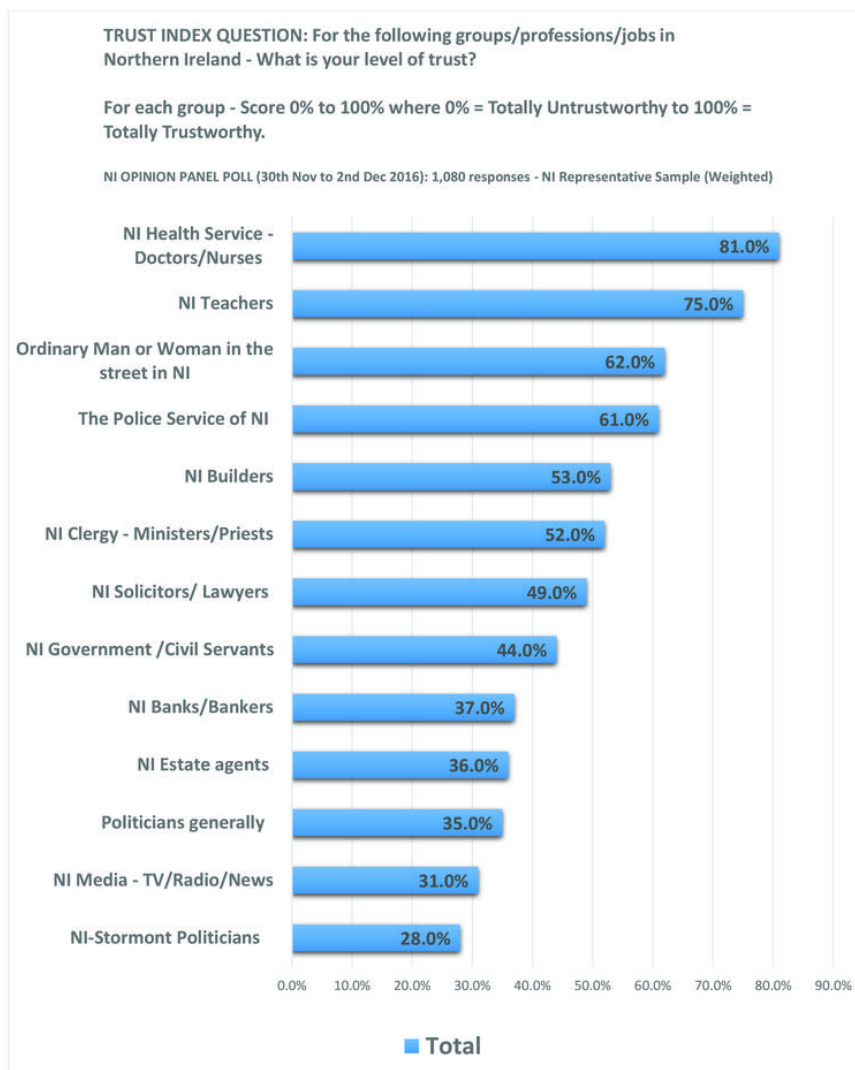
When asked about if the Northern Irish people feel represented at Westminster, and if this impact has resulted in anything, Professor Gray said following:

*“I’d say a lot of people feel they’re not, for a number of reasons. Most of the MPs at Westminster are DUP MPs. They are very clear in their view that they are representing certain main issues like the pro Brexit position. Some would argue that they are still arguing for Northern Ireland’s best interests in terms of trade and so on, but I think that is hard to say, when their starting position is that they want quite a hard Brexit. The other issue is that most of the other MPs are Sinn Féin MPs, who don’t take their seats at Westminster, so there’s no representation there. The recent elections in Northern Ireland have shown a move towards the middle again, so we now have one MP from the Alliance party, which was a big surprise, and one MP from the SDLP. The assembly elections before that showed a move towards the middle ground as well, now I think Brexit probably had something to do with that, that people were concerned about the lack of the representation, and that was a response or reaction to that.” (Gray, 2020).*

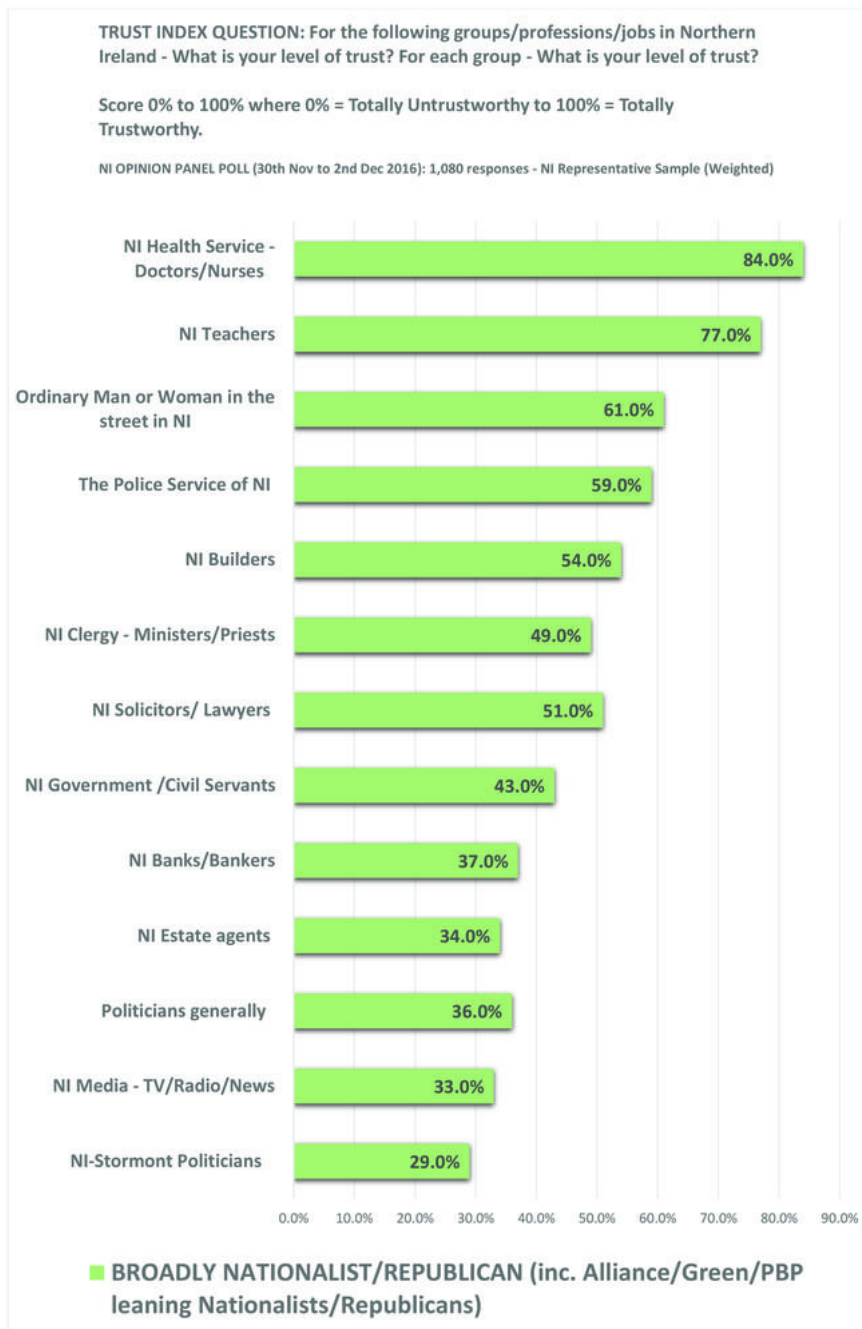
There is quite a lot to unpack here, as this is a large excerpt that touches on quite a few issues. As mentioned previously in my project, I used Brexit as a recent example of an issue that has posed an issue for the public as well as politicians in Northern Ireland. As a result of this excerpt, and on behalf of my literature review, I will seek to answer the following questions within this part of the analysis:

- What is the public opinion of current relations? Do Irish politicians do enough; does the Irish vote effectively result in anything?
- Do the Northern Irish have confidence in their politicians? Both locally, at Stormont, and at Westminster.
- What is the Northern Irish perception of Sinn Féin abstentionism?

In a very general sense, polls carried out by LucidTalk in Northern Ireland conclude that politicians in Northern Ireland are among the “least trustworthy” of all the professions included in their poll. This poll uses a 0-100% trustworthy range. The poll covers professions such as healthcare employees (doctors, nurses etc.), lawyers, bankers, to police etc. LucidTalk questioned both “broadly unionist” and “broadly nationalist/republican”, and while some of the percentages differ on professions other than politicians, the two are quite close when polled on politicians. In this poll politicians in general scored 33% with the “broadly unionist”, and 36% with “broadly republican”, and Northern Irish Stormont politicians coming in last at 28% and 29%, respectively. Between these two is the Northern Irish media with 31-33%, and highest on both lists are doctors and nurses with 81-84%. This is visualized in two following graphs, presented by Managing Director of LucidTalk, Bill White on behalf of The Belfast Telegraph:



(Graph 1, White, 2016)



(Graph 2, White, 2016)

While many factors can be to blame for this, the breakdown of Stormont is most likely to blame. Across the political and social divide in Northern Ireland, Brexit has also proven contentious. Professor Katy Howard argues that: “*That the Protocol on Northern Ireland/Ireland in Johnson’s Withdrawal Agreement was seen as the British government ‘selling out’ Northern Ireland was nothing unexpected in Irish nationalist circles. But for unionists it was a fresh blow to their confidence in the Westminster Parliament.*” (Howard, 2020a). Historically, identity has been one of the driving factors behind conflict in Northern Ireland. Often, it is related to the question of whether or not Northern Ireland should be a part of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, which is primarily a question of identity.

According to statistics reported by The Irish Times in 2019, the Northern Irish public has quite solid opinions regarding their representation at Westminster. A vast majority of 79% agree (Irish Times, 2019a) that the Northern Irish assembly at Stormont should resume their duties, which since the time that the article was written, has happened, as of the 11th of January, 2020. This, however is still a valid point, as the statistic provided is clarified by if this readjournaling of the assembly should take place regardless of any differences the parties may have, which in a lot of ways was the cause of the 2017-2020 collapse of the assembly. This indicates to me that there is an increasingly large majority that wishes to move beyond the historically binary and stand-offish Northern Irish politics, in favor of a collectively politically stronger Northern Ireland.

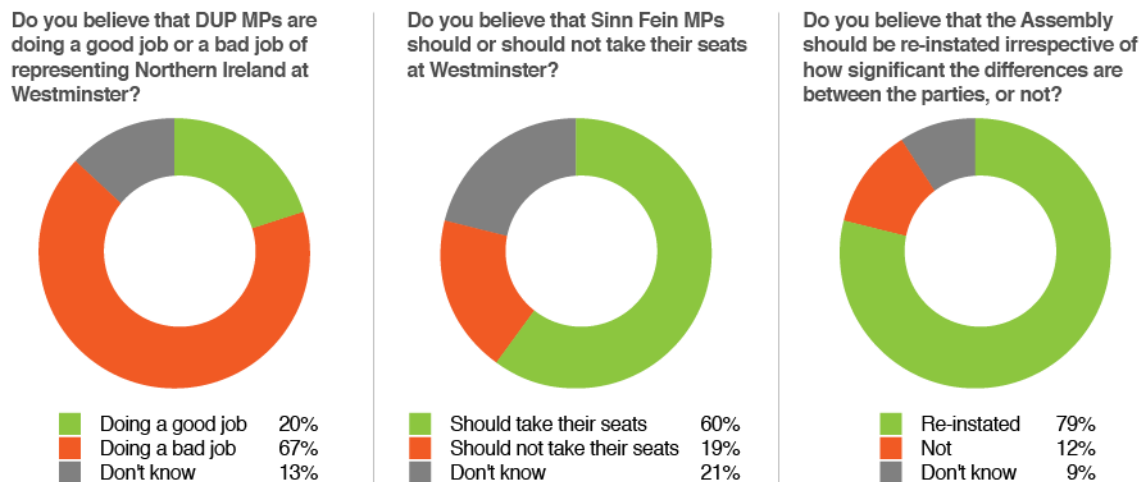
In addition, a whole 67% agrees that the Northern Irish DUP MPs are ineffective in their work, when representing the interests of Northern Ireland at Westminster. The particular interest of this statistic can also be found in how the remaining percentages are cast, with only 20% finding the DUP MPs work satisfying, with the remaining 13% who answered indifferently/don't know. Since only 20% of the votes express acceptance of their representation at Westminster, this tells me that the general discontent also spans across the Northern Irish political divide. This is increasingly interesting, as this implies that Sinn Féin voters are not the only ones represented in this statistic - DUP and other democratic voters are also displeased with their own parties' efforts.

In this vein, 60% wish that Sinn Féin MPs would finally start utilizing their allocated seats at Westminster, which, once again, suggests that there is at least some agreement across the political divide, that the Northern Irish MPs should leverage every bit of influence they can in their affairs with the UK.

The main point of interest that these statistics highlight, is that this is one of the exceedingly few topics, regarding politics, that the two overarching groups of identities in Northern Ireland agree on. It contends that there is anywhere between a sizable majority to a great majority across the identity and political spectrum in Northern Ireland that are generally displeased with the efforts of their elected MPs at Westminster. This sentiment is reflected in the interview I conducted with Ann Marie Gray, as I deliberated upon in the introduction to this part of the analysis, in which professor Gray explains how dissatisfaction and/or distrust with how the Northern Irish are represented by their MPs at Westminster is a phenomenon that transgresses typical unionist vs. nationalist identities. According to Ann Marie Gray, it seems like a general lack of trust is widespread in the minds of the general public in Northern Ireland.

However, while these statistics are rather quite plain in their message, I do personally wonder if people are genuinely distrustful and/or disappointed regarding their MPs at Westminster due to how they represent the population of Northern Ireland. I wonder this, as there may well be some confusion as to how to quantify and judge the Northern Irish MPs efforts, as this is a hard result to produce. Rather, I think there is a focus on the symptoms of a flawed political landscape: much is against the MPs at Westminster, most pressing of all, perhaps, is the reliance they must have on larger British parties when forming alliances within the parliament, which is frequently a requirement to be involved in any decision making and/or lawmaking. Since the majority of Northern Irish seats at Westminster are held by DUP representatives, this will more often than not result in the DUP members supporting

a Conservative government and/or majority in parliament. The problem then arises when the decisions, laws and deals made within the democratic government do not necessarily favor the collective Northern Ireland. This, combined with one of the founding Sinn Féin policies to not take their mandated seats at Westminster, creates a scenario where effectively only DUP votes in Northern Ireland count, with any Sinn Féin opposition or allying with the DUP at Westminster being impossible.



(Illustration by The Irish Times, 2019)

The Fianna Fáil leader and Taoiseach of Ireland, Michael Martin, has also throughout multiple interviews and Tweets criticized Sinn Féin for their lack of presence in the UK parliament, even stating that he believes they could have swung the 2018 outcome, had they taken their seats at Westminster (Martin, 2018). To The Independent Michael Martin said the following of Sinn Féin's abstention policy: *"I think it is not acceptable and I think it was a crazy (Sinn Féin) policy to say in advance we attack the Tories, we don't want the Tories in Government and we attack the Government in the Republic for not being strong enough with the Tories and, lo and behold, they get a mandate and they decide not to exercise it to curtail the worst excesses, if you like it, of the Tories."* (The Independent, 2017).

In essence, the Irish Taoiseach is expressing that the abstention policy of Sinn Féin is flawed: Firstly they would not side with the Tories (British Conservatives), then they criticize the incumbent DUP and Tory alliance for 'not being strong enough', and subsequently won't use the seats they are entitled to at Westminster to do anything about said complaints. In the following example from Sean Murray from The Journal shows how Sinn Féin could potentially have had a deciding influence on passing the proposed Brexit agreement from when Theresa May was the prime minister with her Conservative government: Out of the 650 elected MPs in parliament, 320 MPs must vote in favor of a vote to successfully create a majority. At the time, if the 316 Conservatives and the 10 DUP MPs all voted in favor of a vote (which they did not, due to internal disagreements), there would be a total of 326 votes. If Sinn Féin were to take their seats however, the votes needed to pass a vote would decrease to 324, which creates a margin of 2 MPs to vote against for a vote to not go through, which increases the power of the smaller parties exponentially (Murray, 2018). In this case, where the Conservatives do not vote unitarily, adding an entire seven seats in addition to the 10 incumbent DUPs, Northern Irish MPs would suddenly find themselves in

charge of a significant amount of leverage to negotiate favorable terms for Northern Ireland - not just in terms of a Brexit agreement (Murray, 2018).

In a more recent example in 2019, Conservative MP Kenneth Clarke's motion on the Customs Union in the Brexit agreement failed due with 276 in opposition, and 273 in favor (Parliament, 2019). When motions fail in such a slim manner, swing votes are crucial and intensely valued. Were even half of the elected Sinn Féin members potentially for the motion, they would gain an important bargaining chip in the negotiation of future deals. In addition to strengthening their future status in parliament, this would also give them, at the very least, marginal influence on the final outcome of Brexit and its effect on Northern Ireland. All of this is of course depends on the idea that other MPs would not change their stance on the grounds that Sinn Féin participates in parliament.

With this being said, however, Sinn Féin shows no signs of going back on their policy of abstention. Furthermore, according to polls conducted by LucidTalk in 2020, a massive majority of 75.9% of Sinn Féin voters agreed that Sinn Féin should continue to abstain from taking their seats in the UK parliament. In the same poll, 20.6% contended that they should abandon the abstention policy, while only 3.5% had no opinion on the matter. Harley Halpin reported on behalf of The Journal that, according to the leader of the Republic of Ireland's Sinn Féin division Mary Lou McDonald, if Sinn Féin were to take their seats in the UK parliament that "*were Sinn Féiners to enter Westminster, it would only heighten the political temperature*" (Halpin, 2019). This is an understandable position, as McDonald also contends that they are elected "*explicitly on an abstentionist mandate*" (ibid.). While it is not explicitly true, as is portrayed, 75.9% of Sinn Féin voters that maintain that Sinn Féin should abstain is a hefty majority, and to go against this would possibly spell the end for Sinn Féin as it is currently.

In the end, Sinn Féin and their voters, generally speaking, at their core do not want to be part of the UK, but would rather see a United Ireland. McDonald states that their abstention policy is "*a matter of principle*", and that "*Irish interest in this Brexit debacle are not best advanced at Westminster*" (ibid.).

## 4.2 Sinn Féin's abstention policy

As it has already been stated, Sinn Féin employs their infamous abstention policy, and have done so since its inception in 1905. The express result of this policy is, of course, that elected Sinn Féin MPs do not take their seats at the UK parliament.

The debate surrounding abstentionism typically focuses on the idea that these MPs represent a core belief of Sinn Féin, and in a more general sense, their voters, that participation in the UK parliament would legitimize the British rule of Northern Ireland (Kelly, 2019).

By applying a post-colonial theoretical lens, it is my aim to bring forth another way of understanding the persistence of Sinn Féiners to leave their elected parliament seats unattended - one that finds its roots in the more or less colonial history of Northern Ireland, as introduced in the start of this analysis chapter.

To do this, I will apply my theoretical framework to a longitudinal discourse analysis of the history of this policy of abstention. This will take place in a largely chronological fashion, as I find it important to understand the process and sentiments by which this policy came to be.

Though abstention was not initially the mode of operation for the Northern Irish, frustration was already apparent in Ireland in the late 1800's due to the then rather harsh restrictions put on the catholic population, which in various ways inhibited them from pursuing goals similar to the protestants. These restrictions, known as the Penal Laws, outlawed catholics from many civil rights, such as voting, owning land and finding employment in either positions of power and/or well-trained jobs (Britannica, 2020). Ultimately, this oppression coalesced in the Irish Rebellion in 1798, organized and led by the Presbyterian United Irishmen (Luain, 2017). While one could draw similarities here to other cases of colonies rebelling against the colonizer, I rather mention this in passing for sake of introducing the roots of what led to abstentionism.

Immediately after this rebellion, the British doubled down on their rule in Ireland, introducing the Act of Union of 1800, which saw the discontinuation of the Irish parliament in favor of complete British rule.

As a result of this, we encounter the first events where the concepts of Homi Bhabha can be applied. As covered in my theory chapter, the idea of sly civility allows for the subaltern to work towards its goals within the legitimate structures of the ruler. In this case, the abolishment of the Irish parliament allowed for the possibility of Irish influence upon British matters, as the protestant politicians in Ireland were afforded positions at Westminster. However, while catholic politicians were still banned from entering into politics in any official capacity, it meant that getting elected in Ireland would earn you a seat at Westminster. In 1828, catholic Daniel O'Connell was elected in his constituency. However, since the aforementioned Penal Laws were still in effect, this meant that he was not legally entitled to claiming his seat at Westminster. This, amongst general unrest in Ireland, caused the then Home Secretary of the UK, Robert Peel, and Prime Minister Arthur Wellesley, to push for what became known as the 'Catholic Emancipation'. Though the king at the time was a devout Protestant, and thus opposed anything of the like vehemently, he was convinced to give his royal assent, as was required to pass law, at the supposed resignation of Wellesley and Peel, should the assent not be given (Holmes, 2003). This resulted in the Catholic

Emancipation, repealing the penal laws, and thus affording, at least legally, the Catholic populace of Ireland equal rights and opportunities as their Protestant 'neighbors'. Now, Bhabha's concept of hybridity finds its first use here. As just mentioned, sly civility can be understood as a contributing factor to starting the process of Catholic Emancipation, but the passing and subsequent adoption of this can be observed in the change of heart undergone by those figures in power, in this case Robert Peel and Arthur Wellesley, as in their observation of the unrest in Ireland changed their political attitude to one of more sympathy with the Irish. In Richard Holmes' book "Wellington: The Iron Duke", it is described how Wellesley experienced the Irish reaction to O'Connell being legally unable to utilize his legitimate claim to his seat in parliament: "...the ensuing uproar ended with Wellington becoming convinced that: '*This state of things cannot be allowed to continue.*' Catholic emancipation was the only answer." (Holmes, 2003:281). While one could rightfully make the argument that, in saying "*this state of things*", referring to the unrest in Ireland, could be a logical explanation for the Home Secretary and Prime Minister to seek Catholic appeasement through emancipation, however, following events not directly relevant to this thesis, larger political shifts came to pass from this point onward. Hybridity can here explain the influence in which the colonial rule can have upon its subjects, in this case O'Connell and the Catholics in general, brought about the desanctification of the ideas and practices of those representing this colonial rule. Hybridity in this case can be understood through what Bhabha describes as an interdependent relationship between colonizer and colonized. In this case, their interdependence is quite obvious as they rely on each other for relative peace. It can also be related to what Bhabha refers to as the "Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 2004:55-56), wherein the ideas, norms etc. of those involved meet and influence each other outside of the status quo. Robert Young describes hybridity as being "*the moment in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning*" (Young, 1995:21). In this instance of hybridity, the notion of British hegemony thus became challenged in the practitioners minds.

However, as mentioned, the Catholics legally gained these rights, in practice it was not as successful, as they in a postcolonial sense still were seen as the 'other'. This sentiment drove Daniel O'Connell to first set in motion what would become the first variation of abstentionism in Ireland. In the book "The Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell" originally published in 1848 by William Fagan, it is stated that O'Connell stated the following regarding this state of affairs: "*Your paper Union we care not for - your parchment Union we care not for - give us a union of prosperity, and the rights of justice, and of benefits, for to such a union are we ready to concede...*" (Fagan, 1848:496). In this, the concept of mimicry is applicable, as it is posited that, according to O'Connell, the Irish would be willing to fully submit to British rule, should they be treated as one of them, and not as the 'other'. This is further described by him, stating that: "*The people of Ireland are ready to become a portion of the empire, provided they be made so in reality and not in name alone; they are ready to become a kind of West Britons, if made so in benefits and in justice; but if not, we are Irishmen again.*" (ibid.). Even more so than before, this highlights the ambivalence of O'Connell and those he represents, but, of course, it is given under the pretense of being absorbed wholly or not at all. This was not how things came to pass, however. While the Catholic emancipation allowed for these to take their seats in Westminster, O'Connell found that it was not fruitful for the interests of Ireland. Frank Rynne in the French Journal of English Studies contends that "*O'Connell disillusioned with Westminster, was organising monster Repeal*

*meetings which attracted hundreds of thousands of people*" (Rynne, 2014:105). O'Connell had previously gained political victories for Ireland in Westminster through the same use of legitimate channels that brought about the emancipation. Among these, was his first attempt at repealing the Act of Union of 1800, which did not bear fruits in terms of liberation, but rather, as Moody in the *Hermathena* journal explains, that: *"in return for O'Connell's parliamentary support, the whigs gave Ireland a number of important reforms and five years of fair-minded and sympathetic administration"* (Moody, 1966:11). The period of five years referred to here is between 1835 and 1840. In 1840, however, when the incumbent government changed, O'Connell put efforts into the repeal of the Act of Union of 1800 a second time. Here, however, the government that took over was not as 'easily' swayed as the former, and as a result backfired upon O'Connell and his efforts. In relation to this, Rynne expands on these failures, and also allows us to apply the postcolonial concepts of ambivalence, through the notions of attraction and repulsion. It is stated by Rynne, that: *"It is possible to characterise Irish political activity in the 1840s as comprising humiliation, collaboration and subjugation. Humiliation when, in 1843, O'Connell cancelled a Repeal Meeting that was expected to be attended by one million people; collaboration in 1846 when O'Connell aided Lord John Russell's bid for government and received insignificant return for this support..."* (Rynne, 2014:105). For sake of conciseness I have left out what was described of subjugation, as it referred to revolutionary efforts. However, it is key to observe the fluctuation of attraction and repulsion O'Connell undergoes, and how, ultimately, this leads to an impasse by way of the British not being willing to compromise their hegemony. Attraction in the way in which he attempted at leveraging legitimate channels of power, through parliament, to further the Irish goal of independence, and repulsion as a result of the failure to gain anything from the former.

The cause for the cancellation of this meeting was not a light one, as it was caused by threat of the British to bomb the place of meeting, as the meeting was to include what O'Connell called "a de facto Irish parliament" (Rynne, 2014:111-112). Furthermore, repulsion can also be seen in the actions of O'Connell, following the cancellation of his association meeting in 1843, as this effectively fueled the founding and leading of the political organization "Repeal Association". This association laid the groundwork for abstentionism. In 1843, following the former case of humiliation, O'Connell encouraged his fellow MPs to cease taking their seats in Westminster (Rynne, 2014:111).

Following this, O'Connell was unlawfully sent to jail for a year. As a result of this, we come to see another case of liminality through hybridity, since the conviction of O'Connell drove the Protestant MP William Smith O'Brien to sympathize with the plights of the Catholics. O'Brien became a member of the Repeal Association, and subsequently was jailed for not taking his seat in Westminster. To this, O'Brien wrote in a letter the following: *"Experience and observation have at length forced upon my mind the conviction that the British parliament is incompetent through want of knowledge if not through want of inclination, to legislate for Ireland, and that our national interests can be protected and fostered only through the instrumentality of an Irish legislature"* (Hansard, 1846:col.1162, in [Api.parliament.uk](http://api.parliament.uk). 2021). Here, it is my interpretation that what O'Brien describes as observation is his experience of the aforementioned plights, and what results is a state of hybrid understanding of the 'other'.

After these events took place, the idea of abstentionism made little significant/noteworthy progress until the founder of Sinn Féin, Arthur Griffith, came to the front in the early 20th century. Griffith presented his case for abstention based on a similar case of this phenomenon in Hungary, in his book "The Resurrection of Hungary: A Parallel for Ireland" in

1904. At the time, Griffith referred to this as “Passive Resistance”, stating that “*A policy of Passive Resistance and a policy of Parliamentarianism are very different things, although the people of Ireland have been drugged into believing that the only alternative to armed resistance is speech-making in the British Parliament*” (Luain, 2017). Here, although not explicitly included in my theories section, I find it compelling enough to mention that, insofar as the Irish ‘have been drugged’ into subscribing to a set of norms and ideas, one can consider this an expression of the sense of cultural hegemony that existed, and can arguably still be witnessed today.

Despite the efforts of Griffith, not much noteworthy took place in the immediate future, mainly due to the UKs involvement in the first World War.

Following the infamous Easter Rising of 1916, the many casualties and subsequent execution of the leaders of this rebellion saw Sinn Féin and abstention gain unprecedented traction.

Here, I will apply my theoretical framework to salient parts of this brief manifesto, as in it, postcolonial sentiments are quite clearly observed. At the onset of the manifesto, it is stated that: “*Ireland is faced with the question whether this generation wills it that she is to march out into the full sunlight of freedom, or is to remain in the shadow of a base imperialism that has brought and ever will bring in its train naught but evil for our race.*” (Sinn Féin standing committee, 1918). Here, Sinn Féin makes it blatantly clear that they consider themselves to be under imperial rule. As far as any concepts vis-à-vis Bhabha, there is not much to find here, as there is not any notion of compromise. Instead, Sinn Féin presents a zero-sum game, where there is either complete ‘sunlight of freedom’ or continued oppression by the ‘shadow’ of British imperialism. Sinn Féin goes on to list four points that they go to election on, in which I will cover only their second point. I do this to avoid repetition of the aforementioned non compromising sentiment that is found throughout the manifesto.

In this second point, it is proclaimed that Sinn Féin aims to gain sovereignty by: “*...making use of any and every means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland in subjection by military force or otherwise.*” (ibid.). This statement is particularly interesting, not so much for it’s express meaning, but more so for how it can explain much of the history of Sinn Féin that was to follow. Firstly, the history of the use of military force and/or guerilla warfare came to pass, especially in the period of The Troubles. Secondly, and most importantly to this thesis, the ‘otherwise’ is particularly salient. It is my interpretation that Sinn Féin here refers to the way in which they have consistently employed a sense of sly civility in their politics. This will be covered in an upcoming segment regarding how abstentionism is practiced today.

The election of 1918 was crucial for the future and indeed current day Ireland and Northern Ireland, as Sinn Féin saw overwhelming victory. The victory saw Sinn Féin create the still standing Irish parliament, and completely abstain from attending Westminster. The Irish War of Independence took place, and in 1922 the Anglo-Irish treaty was signed, which firmly solidifies what we today know as Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Between then and now, not much can be said regarding abstentionism, as much of the following time was occupied by internal strife following actors that disagreed with the Anglo-Irish treaty, and the subsequent long period of conflict of The Troubles.

Therefore, I will now conclude this part of my analysis with how Sinn Féin of Northern Ireland practices abstentionism in the current day/recent history.

Sinn Féin MPs are still, to this day, elected on abstentionist mandates. The reason for continual abstention is, according to Conor Kelly, predicated on the idea that Sinn Féiners do not recognize the legitimacy of British rule of Northern Ireland, and thus, they do not swear

allegiance to the Queen (Kelly, 2019). However, Sinn Féin MPs make use of a sort of sly civility through their rightful claim to a position in the UK parliament: Sinn Féin have staffed offices in London that deal with issues pertaining to Northern Ireland through means of lobbying. In an interview given by Sinn Féin MP Pat Doherty, when asked how Sinn Féin operates at Westminster, he argues that:

*“Well we do operate entirely here at Westminster; we have offices here, we have staff here. We do everything that any other MP would do in terms of lobbying for your constituents or your party position, on any given issue. We do not take the Oath of Allegiance, because we have no allegiance (to the Queen), and therefore they won’t give us the salary. That’s something we have always understood, and when we stand for election, as we will do in May, we make it abundantly clear that we will not be taking our seats at the parliament here, but we will give total and utter representation to the people in every other way.”* (Dwyer, 2015: 0:16 - 0:54).

Here, I contend that Pat Doherty describes the mode of operation by which Sinn Féin MPs typically operate. Previously in the analysis, it is mentioned how Sinn Féin engages in ‘coffee-cup diplomacy’, which I would more accurately describe as a practice of both sly civility and mimicry. Pat Doherty claims that they do everything any other MP does at Westminster to further their agendas, which in a quite obvious sense is a case of mimicry, and it is in this case, as contended by Singh in my theory section, empowering. Empowerment through legitimate channels of power, whilst at the same time practicing sly civility through abstaining from parliament, all the while gaining what they can from the resources afforded to them by way of location in vicinity of the parliament.

Thus ends this analysis. While I am aware that many similar examples can be given, it is my estimation that the point of highlighting some of the ways in which Bhabha’s concepts can be applied to this topic has been made.

## 5. Discussion

In this discussion I wish to further discuss the considerations arrived at in the above analyses. I do this to allow for additional comments on my behalf, as well as to summarize and clarify the findings, ultimately alluding to the conclusion of this project.

Most of the first part of the analysis is explanatory in nature, with some speculation that is examined closer in the second part. In the first part it is made clear that, while Northern Ireland is effectively self-governing for the most part, they are largely disadvantaged in national matters, i.e. politics that take place at the UK parliament. To this, however, I argue that it is not necessarily 'unfair', as they are given fair representation at Westminster, according to their share of the UK population, with a potential total of 18 seats in the house of commons, should Sinn Féin choose to take their 7 seats there. Instead, I contend that much of this could be mitigated in any one of three ways, which I will present in my conclusion - much of this, however, is centered around the aforementioned Sinn Féin abstentionism, and what could take its place, or lessen its impact on the influence of Northern Irish MPs that take their elected seats in parliament.

Additionally, this section of the analysis also finds that, given the right set of circumstances, the UK parliament would be capable of passing legislation on behalf of Northern Ireland, irrespective of public opinion and/or political disagreement, thus applying their absolute colonial rule over Northern Ireland.

In the second section of the first part of my analysis it is clear that, first and foremost, regardless of political affiliation or preference, a significant majority of the Northern Irish included in the data are dissatisfied with their politicians. This is both the case regionally and nationally, with politicians in general scoring 35-36% trustworthiness and Stormont politicians coming in last with 28-29% trustworthiness. In addition, 67% of those included perceive their politicians as doing 'a bad job' at representing the interests of Northern Ireland at Westminster, while simultaneously 79% wished for the Northern Irish Executive to adjourn despite any political difficulties that may arise from the polarization within it.

Meanwhile, it seems highly unlikely for a party such as Sinn Féin to go back on their policy of abstention, as it for many republicans is a core value on which they gain votes, with a huge majority of 75.9% voters affirming that Sinn Féin should stay out of the UK parliament.

In analysis part two, I contend that all the concepts set out in the theory section saw application. It is my belief that specifically Bhabha's concepts of 'sly civility' and 'hybridity' were most salient in their application. I make this argument in the case of sly civility, as it frequently highlights how it allowed the Northern Irish to manoeuvre within colonial rule, and later, under abstention, are able to further their own goals through 'coffee-cup diplomacy' without suffering subservience through allegiance to the Queen.

I found 'hybridity' to be intriguing in the ways it affords postcolonial theory a way of understanding the transformative phenomena observed in cases of Robert Peel, Arthur Wellesley and William Smith O'Brien. The idea of a Third Space of enunciation is a fascinating one. I found application for it in the case of John Hume in, in his cross-aisle

cooperation, and Daniel O'Connell when first supporting the Catholic emancipation. Whilst I did find some use for this concept, I found it somewhat lacking, insofar as its application to what is largely political in nature.

Ambivalence, and it's conflated mimicry, did find some use, most often in the cases of when a subaltern would allow for themselves to become ambivalent and mimic the ideas and politics of the British, under the pretense of being awarded similar benefits.

Lastly, while attraction and repulsion did see some use, as with the cases of O'Connell, I am generally unimpressed with this. This, I expect, is a result of the fluctuating nature of these, and the general incompatibility of such flux in matters related to Sinn Féin, as they are, in my experience, often very zero-sum oriented, which will be touched on in the following conclusion.

## 6. Conclusions

First and foremost, I will attempt to answer my research question in a satisfactory manner. Following this, I will point towards three different scenarios/recommendations, which, in my view, would serve to mitigate the sense of apathy towards Northern Irish MPs, mostly by way of strengthening the Northern Irish influence at Westminster, as well as what I consider to be compromises to Sinn Féin abstentionism.

My research question, which sets out to see how a postcolonial theoretical lens would apply to Sinn Féin abstentionism, I contend has been answered in the following ways: For the most part, I suspect the application of postcolonial theory to have much deeper potential, given either the use of a different set of concepts and/or a more comprehensive understanding of the ideas of Bhabha. Bhabha produces some applicable characteristics, most notably here is mimicry, sly civility, and the Third Space of enunciation. Each of these affords a unique understanding of both the history of abstentionism, as well as its application today. Mimicry highlights the wish for some, such as the DUP to assimilate their British neighbors, and for others, such as current day Sinn Féin, their efforts to best represent their constituents without pledging allegiance. Sly civility describes the various ways in which the Northern Irish have, and continue to, practice subtle opposition through legitimate means. The Third Space of enunciation lets us perceive the transformative moments in which the ideologies of both the hegemon and the subaltern are challenged.

With this being said, however, I do expect that undertaking a postcolonial discourse analysis would be better served through application of other, less convoluted theories. An example of this could be the application of Foucault's concept of 'power/knowledge', or Gramsci's 'cultural hegemony', as much of this logic finds itself implicitly involved in this thesis.

In regards to the aforementioned scenarios, firstly, a United Ireland would, of course, entirely remove Northern Ireland from the UK and the parliament. This would instead introduce a myriad of issues. This is exceedingly the case, as a vote for a united Ireland would have to be won by an overwhelming majority vote to ensure greater success of implementation, as it is largely issues stemming from the internal political and social disputes between the DUP and Sinn Féin (and their voters), and the subsequent feeling of being disregarded and/or oppressed that fueled the original civil conflict in Northern Ireland. Without any significant change of the public's sentiments towards a united Ireland, this would most likely be a disaster.

Secondly, Northern Ireland could significantly increase their impact and representation at Westminster if Sinn Féin would go back on their policy to not take their seats they are elected to sit in. This would, if not only, as just stated, increase their influence there, it would also help negate the lack of trust in the democratic processes of the Northern Irish people - as their votes cast on Sinn Féin do not only pertain to local Northern Irish politics. However, if Sinn Féin were to take their seats at Westminster, this would only do so much to advance the Northern Irish influence, as they are 'only' mandated to have seven seats in the Commons. With these seven seats, Sinn Féin could potentially swing votes, with some votes

depending on a small single digit majority to pass. With this being considered, parliament does currently function with the knowledge that Sinn Féin abstain, which presents the problem of any number of MPs being able to switch their position to effectively negate the Sinn Féin MPs, in the event of them taking their seats, which then leads to an impasse, potentially rendering the Sinn Féins break of their policy of abstention null and void.

Lastly, while mostly a vision of utopia, the Northern Irish MPs (including Sinn Féin's) could strengthen their influence greatly, if they were to cooperate at the very least at Westminster. If this were to happen, Northern Ireland would send a total of 18 MPs to parliament, which could move unanimously, securing much more leverage for Northern Irish MPs in national lawmaking.

I would like to remind the reader that, while these scenarios may sound wishful in nature, it is not impossible for the Northern Irish to cooperate across the political and social divide, as we witnessed with John Hume being one of the key figures in securing the ever so important Good Friday Agreement. Whether or not this cooperation will happen at all, or the natural progression of Northern Ireland is to eventually unite with the republic is yet to be seen. In a society still as polarized as Northern Ireland, most outcomes will inevitably see some amount of dissatisfaction. Personally, I believe cooperation, mutual understanding and interdependence is the most reliable set of values to prevent various historic events from repeating themselves.

## 7. Bibliography

Bhabha, H., 2004. *The Location of Culture*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis..

BBC News. 2017a. *RHI scandal: PSNI considering fraud investigation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-38656523>> [Accessed 13 January 2021].

BBC News. 2017b. *Martin McGuinness resigns as NI deputy first minister*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-38561507>> [Accessed 12 January 2021].

BBC News. 2020a. *Abortion: NI regulations pass final Westminster vote*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-53081992>> [Accessed 6 October 2020].

BBC News. 2020b. *John Hume: Reaction to the death of a 'political titan'*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-53634709>> [Accessed 12 January 2021].

Birrell, D. and Gray, A., 2017. *Devolution: The Social, Political and Policy Implications of Brexit for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland*. *Journal of Social Policy*, 46(4), pp.765-782.

Britannica. 2020. Penal Laws | British and Irish history. [online] Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Penal-Laws>> [Accessed 11 May 2021].

Coakley, J., 2005. *Ethnic Conflict and the Two-State Solution: The Irish Experience of Partition*. In: M. Hadi, ed., *Ireland And Palestine – Divided Countries United By History*. Jerusalem: PASSIA.

Dwyer, J., 2015. *Pat Doherty MP outlines Sinn Fein's abstentionist policy*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_-HqPEOonck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-HqPEOonck)> [Accessed 15 May 2021].

The Christian Institute. 2008. *Commons vote ignores public opinion on NI age of consent - The Christian Institute*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.christian.org.uk/news/commons-vote-ignores-public-opinion-on-ni-age-of-consent/>> [Accessed 15 November 2020].

Connelly, T., 2020. *UK refuses EU request for Belfast office*. [online] RTE.ie. Available at: <<https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2020/0401/1127912-eu-belfast/>> [Accessed 11 January 2021].

Della Porta, D. and Keating, M., 2008. *Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Education.niassembly.gov.uk. n.d. Power-sharing | Northern Ireland Assembly Education Service. [online] Available at: <[https://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post\\_16/snapshots\\_of\\_devolution/gfa/power\\_sharing](https://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post_16/snapshots_of_devolution/gfa/power_sharing)> [Accessed 4 January 2021].

European Commission - European Commission. 2019. *Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland*. [online] Available at:  
<[https://ec.europa.eu/info/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-withdrawal-agreement/protocol-ireland-and-northern-ireland\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/relations-united-kingdom/eu-uk-withdrawal-agreement/protocol-ireland-and-northern-ireland_en)> [Accessed 22 December 2020].

Fagan, W., 1848. *Life and Times of Daniel O'Connell*. 2nd ed. London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co.

Feeney, B., 2002. *Sinn Féin: A Hundred Turbulent Years*. Dublin: O'Brien Press.

Fierke, K., 2016. *Constructivism*. In: Dunne, T., Kurki, M. and Smith, S., 2016. *International relations theories*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gilmartin, M., & Berg, L. (2007). Locating Postcolonialism. *Area*, 39(1), 120-124. [online]. Available at <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20004594>> [Accessed 21 May 2021]

Gray, A., 2020. Professor of Social Policy at Ulster University, School of Applied Social Policy and Social Sciences. Unpublished interview conducted by Steen Daniel Hunter, 23 July, 2020

Greer, A., 2017. *Brexit and Devolution*. *The Political Quarterly*, 89(1), pp.134-138.

Martin, M., 2018. *Hardline Brexiteers won last evening's Westminster vote because of Sinn Féin abstentionism. Anti Brexit majority in Northern Ireland not represented in any forum. Durkan, Ritchie, and McDonnell would have defeated that damaging vote for Ireland.*, Tweet, 17 July 2018. [online]. Available at  
<<https://twitter.com/MichealMartinTD/status/1019133445895872512>> [Accessed January 6, 2021].

McGuinness, M., 2017. Letter of Resignation to Stormont Speaker, Mr Robin Newton MLA, 9 January 2017. [online] Sinn Féin. Available at  
<[https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/Martin\\_McGuinnessResignationLetter.pdf](https://www.sinnfein.ie/files/2017/Martin_McGuinnessResignationLetter.pdf)> [Accessed 5 August, 2020].

Murray, B. (2006). Ireland – a test case of Post-colonialism / Post colonialism. [online] *Educate~*. Available at <<http://www.educatejournal.org/index.php/educate/article/view/58>> [Accessed 28 April, 2021]

Murray, S., 2018. *The row over Sinn Féin's abstentionism (and why its MPs won't be taking their seats anytime soon)*. [online] *TheJournal.ie*. Available at:  
<<https://www.thejournal.ie/sinn-fein-abstentionism-explainer-4132042-Jul2018/>> [Accessed 10 January 2021].

Halpin, H., 2019. *Sinn Féin taking Westminster seats 'would only heighten political temperature'*. [online] *TheJournal.ie*. Available at:  
<<https://www.thejournal.ie/sinn-fein-westminster-brexit-seats-4572944-Apr2019/>> [Accessed 10 January 2021].

Api.parliament.uk. 2021. MR. W. S. O'BRIEN—REFUSAL TO SERVE ON A COMMITTEE. (Hansard, 28 April 1846). [online] Available at: <<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1846/apr/28/mr-w-s-obrien-refusal-to-serve-on-a>> [Accessed 4 June 2021].

Holmes, R., 2003. Wellington. London: HarperCollins.

independent. 2017. Micheal Martin: *SF are 'letting down their electorate' by allowing DUP to be sole voice in Westminster*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/politics/micheal-martin-sf-are-letting-down-their-electorate-by-allowing-dup-to-be-sole-voice-in-westminster-35808292.html>> [Accessed 6 January 2021].

The Irish Times. 2019. *Irish Times poll: DUP at odds with its base over Brexit approach*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/irish-times-poll-dup-at-odds-with-its-base-over-brexit-approach-1.3818272?mode=sample&auth-failed=1&pw-origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.irishtimes.com%2Fnews%2Fpolitics%2Firish-times-poll-dup-at-odds-with-its-base-over-brexit-approach-1.3818272>> [Accessed 16 February 2020].

Kelly, C., 2019. Understanding Sinn Féin's Abstention from the UK Parliament. [online] E-International Relations. Available at: <<https://www.e-ir.info/2019/08/19/understanding-sinn-fein-abstention-from-the-uk-parliament/>> [Accessed 27 April 2021].

Landlow, C. and Sergie, M., 2020. *The Northern Ireland Peace Process*. [online] Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: <<https://www.cfr.org/background/northern-ireland-peace-process>> [Accessed 12 November 2020].

Luain, K., 2017. 'A policy of Passive Resistance': Sinn Féin and Abstentionism – an historical overview – The Irish Story. [online] Theirishstory.com. Available at: <<https://www.theirishstory.com/2017/07/04/a-policy-of-passive-resistance-sinn-fein-and-abstentionism-an-historical-overview/>> [Accessed 1 May 2021].

Mambrol, N., 2017. Ambivalence in Post-colonialism. [online] Literary Theory and Criticism. Available at: <<https://literariness.org/2017/09/27/ambivalence-in-post-colonialism/>> [Accessed 4 May 2021].

McDaid, S. (2012). *The Irish Government and the Sunningdale Council of Ireland: A vehicle for unity?* *Irish Historical Studies*, 38(150), 283-303. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43654475> [Accessed 10 November, 2020].

McIver, I., 2020a. *Devolved institutions and future relationship negotiations* | UK in a changing Europe. [online] UK in a changing Europe. Available at: <<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/devolved-institutions-and-future-relationship-negotiations/>> [Accessed 8 October 2020].

McIver, I., 2020b. *How can the devolved administrations influence the future relationship negotiations?* | UK in a changing Europe. [online] UK in a changing Europe. Available at: <<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/how-can-the-devolved-administrations-influence-the-future-relationship-negotiations/>> [Accessed 8 October 2020].

McKenzie, L., 2019. *Many working-class people believe in Brexit. Who can blame them?*. [online] LSE BREXIT. Available at: <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/01/31/many-working-class-people-believe-in-brexit-who-can-blame-them/>> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

Moody, T. (1966). Thomas Davis and the Irish nation. *Hermathena*, (103), 5-31. Retrieved June 15, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039825>

NobelPrize.org. 2021. *The Nobel Peace Prize 1998*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1998/summary/>> [Accessed 19 January 2021].

Northern Ireland (Temporary Provisions) Act 1972.

Parliament and the Government. n.d. [online] Available at: <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/role/relations-with-other-institutions/parliament-government/>> [Accessed 6 January 2021].

Reus-Smit, C. (2005). *Constructivism*. In: S. Burchill, A. Linklater, R. Devetak, J. Donnelly, T. Nardin, M. Paterson, C. Reus-Smit and J. True, ed., *Theories of International Relations*, 3rd ed. Basingstoke: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.

Rynne, F., 2014. Young Ireland and Irish Revolutions. *Revue française de civilisation britannique*, 19(2), pp.105-124.

Tannam, E., 2020. *Brexit day: view from Ireland* | UK in a changing Europe. [online] UK in a changing Europe. Available at: <<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/brexit-day-view-from-ireland/>> [Accessed 11 January 2021].

Theys, S., 2017. *Constructivism*. In: S. McGlinchey, R. Walters and C. Scheinpflug, ed., *International Relations Theory*. Bristol, England: E-International Relations Publishing.

The UK in a Changing Europe, 2020. *Parliament and Brexit*. [online] The UK in a Changing Europe. Available at: <<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Parliament-and-Brexit-report.pdf>> [Accessed 21 December 2020].

Hayward, K., 2020a. *The parties from Northern Ireland*. In: The UK in a Changing Europe., *Parliament and Brexit*. Available at: <<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Parliament-and-Brexit-report.pdf>> [Accessed 21 December 2020].

Hayward, K., 2020. *Northern Ireland's MPs: their influence on Brexit* | UK in a changing Europe. [online] UK in a changing Europe. Available at:

<<https://ukandeu.ac.uk/northern-irelands-mps-their-influence-on-brexit/>> [Accessed 21 December 2020].

Pedersen, E., 2016. Star of the Sea: Why Ireland Should Be Categorized as Postcolonial. [online] Star of the Sea: A Postcolonial/Postmodern Voyage into the Irish Famine. Available at:

<<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/star-of-the-sea-a-postcolonialpostmodern-voyage-into-the-irish-famine/why-ireland>> [Accessed 21 April 2021].

Sinn Féin standing committee, 1918. The Manifesto of Sinn Féin as prepared for circulation for the General Election of December, 1918. [online] Available at:

<<https://celt.ucc.ie//published/E900009/index.html>> [Accessed 20 May 2021].

Singh, A., 2009. Amardeep Singh: Mimicry and Hybridity in Plain English. [online] Lehigh.edu. Available at:

<<https://www.lehigh.edu/~amsp/2009/05/mimicry-and-hybridity-in-plain-english.html>> [Accessed 5 May 2021].

White, B., 2016. Revealed: Which profession does Northern Ireland public trust least? Estate agents, doctors, priests, builders, politicians ... or journalists. [online] belfasttelegraph. Available at:

<<https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/revealed-which-profession-does-northern-ireland-public-trust-least-estate-agents-doctors-priests-builders-politicians-or-journalists-35297173.html>> [Accessed 16 January 2021].

Young, R., 1995. Colonial desire. London: Routledge.