

**A Historiographical guide to the Irish Question:
1965 to 1998**



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Master thesis in Modern International and Transnational History

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Acknowledgments

The writing of this thesis has been a journey with many ups and downs leading to the product before me. Starting my master's degree during a global pandemic was one thing, writing my thesis in the middle of the same pandemic was another. Getting access to material turned out to be a challenge, however, I am proud of what I have accomplished and the finished product before me.

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Abstract:

The so-called Irish Question as a historical phenomenon first came to be in 1884 and was thought solved by 1922. The Irish Question has been the umbrella term used for all issues concerning the border of Northern Ireland and whether the nation belongs in the United Kingdom or should become a part of the Republic of Ireland during the Troubles. Though the Question was thought solved in 1922 this turned out not to be the case. The Question once again resurfaced in the mid-1960s, this time around, it turned out to be what would spark the most violent period in Northern Irish history, more commonly known as the Troubles. The aim of this thesis is not to write the history of the Irish Question during the Troubles, but rather it is to look at how scholars from different disciplines have researched the Question between 1965 and 1998. The questions asked in this thesis are:

-How have scholars from different disciplines researched the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998?

-Is there a development within this timeframe of how the Question has been asked?

-Are these schools of thought applied sufficient in understanding the Question or is there a need for a new school of thought?

Through a broad survey of scholarly texts written on the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998, I will explore how different scholars have applied different schools of thought to their research and how it is possible to see developments within these schools of thought through the Troubles, but also after. I argue that the Irish Question that resurfaced between 1965 and 1998 needs to be seen as a continuation of the Irish Question prior to 1922 and not as a break in history. Furthermore, I argue that the development that took place within the schools of thought, to some degree, is connected to the political developments taking place in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and the international system during the period in question. Lastly, I argue that there is a need for a new school of thought when it comes to interpreting the Irish Question, not only in the context of the Troubles but also as the Irish Question resurfaced again in connection with Brexit and has once more become an important part of politics in the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland and the international system.

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Introduction:

During Easter of 2021, violent riots took place in Northern Ireland. The rioters were for the most part Northern Irish youth tired of the social and economic situation in the country. The economic situation being a consequence of the new trade barrier in the Irish Sea, courtesy of Brexit, coming into effect on January 1st.¹ The riots during Easter for 2021 were of such a magnitude that several government officials spoke out condemning the riots and stating the danger they posed to the fragile peace agreement and peace process.² These riots were the first time since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 that there had been violent riots of this dimension in Northern Ireland that could be linked to the Irish Question. The Irish Question being the umbrella term used for all issues concerning the border of Northern Ireland and whether the nation belongs in the United Kingdom or should become a part of the Republic of Ireland during the Troubles (1967/68-1998).

People have attempted to answer the Irish Question many times from the 1960s and onwards. The latest attempt being the negotiations that took place between the European Union, the United Kingdom and the Republic for Ireland leading up to Britain leaving the European Union.³ This being the first time that parts of the international community spoke up about the fragility and importance of the Good Friday Agreement for the peace in Northern Ireland and the Irish Isle. Scholars from many different disciplines have also tried to seek a possible end to it, by making the mechanisms behind the Question clearer through research. However, no matter how much research is done on the Question, or how much it has been discussed in political circles it tends to resurface time and time again and cause problems in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and in the United Kingdom.

The aim of this thesis is to look into how the Irish Question as a phenomenon has been researched by scholars between 1965 and 1998. More specifically, the thesis looks into the ways scholars from different academic disciplines have used different schools of thought in their research in order to make sense of the Question and its many issues. Simultaneously, the thesis will also map out developments within the different schools of thought applied as time went on. The main question that needs to be answered is whether the schools of thought applied

¹ Hirst, "NI riots: What is behind the violence in Northern Ireland".

² U.S. News, "Northern Ireland Leaders Seek Calm After Violence Escalates".

³ Hirst, "NI riots: What is behind the violence in Northern Ireland".

by the scholars between 1965 and 1998 are sufficient in explaining the Question, or if there is a need for a new way of interpreting the Question? Additionally, the thesis will look if it is feasible to apply the interpretations of the Question between 1965 until 1998 to research done on the Question in the context of Brexit or is there also here a need for a new school of thought?

Scope and Limitations:

The Irish Question has a long history, that can be traced back to the early nineteenth century and the Act of Union in 1800. The Act made the Irish Isle a colony under the British Empire and British Rule.⁴ Though the Questions history can be traced back to the Act of Union the term ‘Irish Question’ was first raised in the British Parliament in 1844 by Lord John Russell.⁵ Because the Question has a long history this thesis will focus on the period from 1965 to 1998, I have limited the thesis period to about 33 years because a longer periodization would fall well outside the scope of the thesis. The historiography of the Irish Question from 1965 to 1998 is also particularly interesting as there has not been much historiographical research done about the Question in this time period.

By limiting myself to this period I will be losing out on an interesting time in the Irish Questions history, but by not having the earlier history of the Question as my focus, my thesis will be a larger contribution to the historiography of the Irish Question from 1965 to 1998. However, this does not mean that I will be completely ignoring the time period before, by situating the period from 1965 to 1998 in a longer time frame and thus firmly contextualizing it, I avoid the danger of presentism. This is done by connecting the historiography of the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 with the historiography of the Irish Question up until 1965. I am also avoiding the dangers of presentism when looking into the Irish Question in the context of Brexit by connecting how the Question is being researched in contemporary times to how it was researched in the past. This through seeing if the schools of thought applied between 1965 and 1998 is still applicable to research done on the Question today or if there is a need for a new and updated school of thought.

The thesis will take a transnational approach to the historiography of the Irish Question as it will not only focus on one angle of its historiography, but several different national perspectives of what the Irish Question is and how it should be researched and understood. By taking a transnational approach to the historiography of the Irish Question I am not only focusing on

⁴ Gibbons, “Drawing the Line: The Irish Border in British Politics”, vii.

⁵ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 1.

how the different schools of thought view the Question, but also how their ideas and perspectives cut across the national borders of Northern Ireland, Britain and the Republic of Ireland in a variety of contexts and ways.⁶ Furthermore, this thesis is also transnational in its scope as how the different scholars are researching the Irish Question have been influenced by their own education, their interaction with scholars from other nations, and by events and developments taking place outside the national borders of Northern Ireland. Lastly, the thesis has a transnational scope as it looks into how scholars have been influenced by people, ideas and events taking place in other parts of the world that have transcended the national borders of these countries.

State of the Art:

My thesis will be a contribution to the wider thinking on how different schools of thought have been applied to research on the Irish Question and how they have developed. Through history there has been written a lot about the history of the Irish Question, different traditions, interpretations, and perspectives have been applied and have affected the way in which the history of the Irish Question has been written. The historiography of the Irish Question, or how it has been researched is the study of the intersection between two political and historical traditions. These being the traditions of writing British and Irish history.⁷ On one side there is the British tradition of writing history that sees British history as a history of growth for the English Empire. This aligns with the Whig school of thought which views the past as an inevitable progression towards liberty. On the other side there is the Irish tradition of writing history that sees Irish history as a morality tale needed to build up under the idea of an Irish national identity. The necessity of the intersection between these two historical traditions is not something scholars of either tradition have wanted to take into consideration. For British historians, British history makes more sense without taking Irish history into account, while Irish historians fail to see the connection between British and Irish politics and history.⁸

For British historians the history of the United Kingdom, without taking the Irish Question and Irish history into account, is seen as the foundation and growth of the Great English Kingdom who gradually integrated Scotland and Wales into its social, political, and economic system. The Irish Isle and its history were on the other hand seen by these historians as an alien and troublesome interruption of the greatness of British history and politics. For these historians,

⁶ Iriye, "Transnational History", 213.

⁷ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics 1868-1986", 13-14.

⁸ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986.

Irish history and politics was seen as a question that needs to be solved, while Irish historians saw their own history as anything but a question in need of answering.⁹

Until the 1950s, Irish history was written as a deliverance tale with the nationalistic perspective forming the spine of any understanding of the Irish past. This way of presenting Irish history saw it as a struggle between the emerging Irish nation and that of the tyrannical English Empire.¹⁰ However, this dominating trend started to change as early as the 1940s when Irish historians began to reconsider their understanding of many key episodes in the nationalist interpretation. Consequently, Irish history slowly moved from a version of Brit-bashing history writing to a more critical way of looking at its history. This newer way of viewing history was more balanced, less partisan, and more thoroughly researched.¹¹ By the 1980s few of the nationalist truths had survived after the thorough questioning of the orthodox tradition by revisionists.¹² Authors that stood at the forefront for this change in the writing of Irish history is Roy Foster, R.D Edwards and T. Moody. During the 1980s and 1990s the historical focus moved away from the high political drama of Irish politics in the direction of social and cultural history. This move away from older tradition led to what was seen as the revisionist turn. This newer way of writing history was seen as less judgemental, more sensitive to the precise nature of British involvement in Ireland or the Irish Landlords, and more willing to challenge widely popular assumptions, as well as being intrigued by other traditions within the Irish society such as Unionism and the diversity of the Irish experience.¹³

However, this turn away from the nationalistic interpretation of Irish history was not something that was recognized and accepted by every Irish historian. One of the foremost critics of the new revisionist interpretation was Brendan Bradshaw.¹⁴ His attack on revisionism centred around the removal of what he deemed the human experience and pain from what was, by any stretch of imagination, a tragic past, and instead offering a sanitised and value-free version that had filtered out the trauma of the Irish people.¹⁵ A. T. Q Stewart being another scholars that

⁹ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986", 14. This trend within early British history writing can be seen within R.C.K Ensor's book *England 1870-1914* in the Oxford history of England series.

¹⁰ Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 1.

¹¹ Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 1.

¹² Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 1.

¹³ Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 6.

¹⁴ Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 8.

¹⁵ Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 9.

emphasises the importance of the human experience and emotions within Irish history writing.¹⁶

The ongoing debate between the nationalist orthodoxy and the revisionist sets up a false dichotomy within the tradition of writing Irish history. The turn that was taking place in the historiographical tradition of writing Irish history at the beginning of the 1940s is better viewed as a broadening of historians' knowledge on Ireland's past, rather than a revision of it. As Smith argues in his book *Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence* all writing of history is after all an unceasing process of change, challenge, and response.¹⁷

In British academia, the mainstream understanding of Irish history stuck for the most part to the orthodox nationalist version of events. However, after 1945 British historians became preoccupied with two great issues concerning the United Kingdom; the decline of British power, and the rise of the welfare state and gave less attention to the history of the Irish Question.¹⁸ At the same time as these issues grew, British historians became more interested in writing the history of phenomena and developments that were relevant to the political debate in the present. The Labour Movement and the growth of the Welfare system during the 1940s, 50s and 60s being a good example.¹⁹ This shift in focus had a huge influence on the writing of the history of the Irish Question from the 1960s and onwards and also the writing of the historiography of the Irish Question as its role in British political history was minimized.²⁰

This thesis is a contribution to the historiographical research done on the Irish Question. It is also a contribution to the larger debate taking place as to how the Question should be interpreted in order to get an as deep understanding of the Question as possible. It is a part of the larger field of historiographical studies on the Irish Question as I, together with Paul Arthur, argue that the Irish Question of 1965 to 1998 needs to be understood as the same phenomenon that is being studied up until 1949.²¹ Where Irish and British historiography have focused on the Irish Question in a traditional national perspective this thesis shows that these schools of thought are not enough, and that newer schools of thought needs to be given more space and time in order to better our understanding of the Irish Question.

¹⁶ Ferriter, "The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000", 2.

¹⁷ Smith, "Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence", 8.

¹⁸ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986.

¹⁹ Allum, "The Irish Question", 6.

²⁰ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986".

²¹ Arthur, "Anglo – Irish Relations and the Northern Ireland Problem", 37.

Method and Theory:

My approach is historiographical, in that I use scholarly texts as my primary sources. This means that the scholarly texts in question will be understood as expressions of the time in which they were produced. The use of scholarly texts as my sources offers me a better understanding of how scholars have researched and interpreted the Irish Question, and also how these schools of thought have developed within the period of 1965 to 1998. This being the case as different scholars apply different approaches to their research and puts emphasis on different factors that they find important to their research on the Irish Question.

Because there has been little research done on the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 from a *historical* perspective, scholarly texts from other disciplines such as political and social science is also of interest to my research. By not limiting my source material to historical texts I am gaining access to a more comprehensible understanding of how the Question has been researched in this period.

The goal of the selection of sources have been to look into a large variety of scholarly texts arguing for different interpretations of the Irish Question and its history. By doing this I am aiming at avoiding a too narrow focus on one side of the Irish Question, as only looking into how one school of thought sees it deeper than how all the schools of thought understand the Question would exaggerate the importance of one school of thought instead of show that the Irish Question and its historiography is of a transnational nature and the fact that it needs to be studied as such.

As my sources consist of scholarly texts, the main method I will be applying throughout my research is document analysis. The book *Hvordan gjøre dokumentanalyse: En praksisorientert metode* by Kristin Asdal and Hilde Reinertsen together with the introductory chapter *How to read Primary Sources* by Benjamin Ziemann and Miriam Dobson will be the sources of my inspiration for how I read the different scholarly texts. I take inspiration from both of the texts as they portray different ways of conducting document analysis. On the one side there is Ziemann, and Dobson who focuses on what is actually written in the document and how the connotations of words, phrases and concepts influences how readers understand the documents as sources.²² On the other side there is Asdal and Reinertsen who put more of an emphasis on how documents have been seen as a product of social context in which they are written.²³

²² Ziemann and Dobson, "How to read primary sources".

²³ Asdal and Reinertsen, "Hvordan gjøre dokumentanalyse: En Praksisorienterte metode", 15.

By applying both of these methods for document analysis to my own thesis I am analysing the scholarly texts from all angles, which offers a comprehensive understanding of the historiography on the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998. The discursive method through identifying different arguments that have been utilized by scholars applying different schools of thought. Furthermore, this way of analysing the scholarly texts also offers a glint into how the use of words, phrases and concepts are important for how the arguments in the individual texts are understood and interpreted. By additionally applying Asdal and Reinertsen's context-oriented analysis of documents to my source material I will also get a contextual understanding of my sources, such as when they were written and how this affected the scholarly texts in front of me. This will give a more nuanced understanding of the sources as they are not seen in isolation of events taking place in society, but as a product of the society in which they have been written.²⁴

By applying both of these analytical angles to my thesis and the fact that my sources consist, mostly of scholarly text written in the past it is important to analyse them as a part of the time and society they were written. I also need to be careful of not basing my analysis of the sources on my own values and beliefs but rather, as objectively as possible analyse and see the texts as they stand and, in the time, they were written in. I also need to keep in mind that the texts are not objective renderings and analysis of the Irish Question and its history. On the contrary, it is important, that while analysing the texts, I keep in mind that the scholars writing these texts wanted to get a message across or show one interpretation of the Question as better and more legitimate than the others. As Anton Froeyman argues "...the choice of one narrative over another ... is always determined by personal ideological preference".²⁵ As Frøland shows in book chapter *In Defence of Objectivity: Facts and Theory Choices in Historiography* objectivity is something that can only be achieved on a local level and striving for a global objective view of a historical event is unobtainable.²⁶

²⁴ Asdal and Reinertsen, "Hvordan gjøre dokumentanalyse: En Praksisorienterte metode", 15.

²⁵ Cited in Frøland, "In Defence of Objectivity: Facts and Theory Choices in Historiography", 92.

²⁶ Frøland, "In Defence of Objectivity: Facts and Theory Choices in Historiography", 90.

Relevance to the Field of Research:

My thesis is relevant for the field of research on the Irish Question as it is a contribution to the historiography of the Irish Question from 1965 to 1998. It is relevant for this field as there has been done little to no research done on the historiography of the Irish Question in the period. Most of the research done on its historiography had been about the Irish Question from late 1800 to 1925. Furthermore, my thesis is relevant for the field of research as it shows the importance of continuously evolving already existing schools of thought when their ideas no longer seem feasible or comprehensive enough in their explanation of the phenomenon being studied.

Structure:

The thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will function as a prologue and give a short introduction to the historiography of the Irish Question before 1965. I have included this chapter as the Irish Question has a long and complex history and historiography, and a short introduction to how scholars have researched the Question before 1965 will offer some fundamental insights into how the history of the Irish Question have been written. Additionally, it offers a better understanding of why scholars have researched the Question from 1965 to 1998 as they have and where the interpretations applied to the researched in this period grew out of.

The second chapter will be looking into how scholars have applied different interpretations or schools of thought to their research on the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 and how these interpretations have developed during the period. This chapter naturally follows the first chapter as it is a continuation of the historiographical trends seen in the first chapter. The third chapter will move almost two decades into the future and will be looking into the schools of thought applied to the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 is still applicable to the Irish Question in more contemporary times, such as in the connection of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. This chapter follows the second chapter as it is interesting to see if there exists a continuation of how the Irish Question is understood, or if there is a need for a paradigm shift and a new school of thought that might be better suited to give a more nuanced picture of the Irish Question as it stands today. This chapter is also important as it offers a fundament for arguing that the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 needs to be understood as a continuation of the Question prior to 1922, and not as a break in history.

Chapter 1: The road so far: The Irish Question before 1965

Are we dealing with a microscopic instance of a problem of world importance, as de Beaumont maintained a century ago [from 1980], or with a particular problem resulting from local mentality or character, as the protagonists still claim? These points of view are the alternatives found in the historiography and the interpretations of the Irish Question in its classic phase and in its present form as the Ulster Question.²⁷

This quote shows one of the problems with studying the historiography of the Irish Question. The two alternatives of how to view the Question shown above are just two of the many interpretational alternatives found within the historiography of the Irish Question. Furthermore, the quote shows that the historiography of the Irish Question we see between 1965 and 1998 is not based on new discoveries but is rooted in well thought out ideas with a long history, such as de Beaumont's idea and argument that the Irish Question can be seen as a problem of world importance already in 1880s. The quote clearly shows that there is a continuation of how scholars have interpreted the Irish Question from de Beaumont's time to how it has been interpreted between 1965 and 1998 as it references the term 'the Ulster Question' used as a synonym for the term Irish Question post 1922.

This chapter will give a short introduction to some of the main arguments and trends in the historiography of the Irish Question before 1965. It is not meant as a deep dive into the historiography, on the contrary, the idea behind this chapter is to show how the writing of the history of the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 is building on thoughts, ideas and traditions that can be traced back to before 1965 and is a part of a longer historiographical tradition taking place over centuries. This chapter will consist of two parts, the first will be looking into the English tradition of writing history and how this has been applied to the Irish Question, while the second will be looking into how the history of the Irish Question was written based on Irish traditions. Both of these national perspectives have had a huge influence and impact on how the Question has been defined and debated in historical sources as well as sources produced in other disciplines such as political and social science.

²⁷ Cited from Allum, "The Irish Question" 6.

The Irish Question is considered to first show up in history in 1844 when the House of Commons debated the fact that Ireland was seen as occupied and not governed.²⁸ As one would expect there has been done extensive research on the history of the Irish Question and on its historiography. However, most of the research done is set to the period between 1844 and 1922, after this research done on the Irish Question is scarce. As mentioned, the history of the Irish Question and its historiography needs to be understood as an intersection between both British and Irish political and historical traditions. The historiography of the Irish Question concerns not only the Irish Question as a part of history, but also its connection to both British and Irish politics throughout the decades.

The Irish Question and the British Historiographical Tradition:

As shown above the Irish Question first shows up in history in 1844. However, it was not until the beginning of the 1880s that it became an important factor in British politics. Because of this, what has been written about the Irish Question in its early days is heavily influenced by the British orthodox tradition that came into existence in the United Kingdom somewhere between the 1860s and 1890s. This tradition was occupied with what was called ‘the Quest’, focusing on finding the answer to the origins of the legendary stability of English political institutions,²⁹ or said in another way historians during this period were focused on answering the question of why English political institutions were so stable in a time when political stability was not the norm.

This orthodox tradition came into existence at the same time that history as a general discipline was first professionalised. Consequently, the history of the Irish Question being written during this time meant that it was heavily influenced by the German school of thought and their philosophical approach to methodology, as well as their faith in historical science, such as archival research and source criticism, which was first introduced by Leopold von Ranke in the 19th century.³⁰

The British historical tradition was extremely Anglocentric in its perspective. For these historians the stability of England and the British Empire were contributed to the courageous and unbound commitments by the British to the idea of civil and individual liberty. Everything that was not modelled of the British way of living was seen as inferior, which was the case with

²⁸ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 1.

²⁹ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 6.

³⁰ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 6. Bolt, “Leopold von Ranke on Irish history and the Irish nation”, 2.

the Irish and their history. The Irish were, as were the case with the peoples of many British colonies, seen as barbaric in comparison with the British, who saw themselves and their way of life as an intellectual gift to the leaders of the world.³¹ A good example of this Anglocentric sentiment in British history writing can be found in the book *English and Ireland* written by J.A. Froude where he “declared his purpose of discovering why the Irish had so few achievements to their credit while the English, their neighbour and masters, had been able to construct one of the greatest empires in history”.³²

For Froude, and other historians sharing his sentiment, the writing of the Irish Question’s history into British history was seen as posing a dangerous threat to Britain’s most precious possession, the British constitution.³³ For these historians the British constitution symbolised British superiority, and if Irish history were to be made a part of that British political history the constitution and what it symbolized would not survive, and the British Empire would ultimately be weakened internally, as well as on a global scale.³⁴

The writing of the Irish Question’s history from a British perspective is not only heavily influenced by the orthodox tradition of writing history, it is also influenced by the fact that some of its history was written at a point when the Irish Question had yet to go from a contemporary political question to one in the history books. Consequently, two themes have had a huge influence on how the Question was researched and how its history was written. Firstly, it was heavily influenced by the fact that it was not seen as a typical political question. This created an almost non-political or apolitical approach to the history of the Question.³⁵ Instead, the Question was regarded as a special case that the British took on out of folly or the goodness of their hearts.³⁶ Consequently, viewing the Irish Question not as a politically important question, but rather as a charity case influenced how the history of the Irish Question was written from a British perspective to the degree that it was seen as an even more unimportant factor in British political history and therefore did not need to be given much attention.

³¹ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 7.

³² Cited from Allum, “The Irish Question”, 7.

³³ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 7.

³⁴ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 7.

³⁵ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 139.

³⁶ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 139.

The second theme that influenced the writing of the Irish Questions history from a British perspective being, contrary to the above theme, that the Irish Question were of some political importance as it posed a danger to the democratic fabric of the United Kingdom and injecting initiate bitterness and violence of Irish politics into British politics.³⁷ This trend in British politics, resulted in a tendency that historians would see the Irish Question as fundamentally irrelevant for British mainstream history. A historian that gives a refined example of this is R. C. K. Ensor in *England, 1870-1914* in the Oxford History of England series.³⁸ Another scholar that shows this clear Anglocentric mentality in an excellent way is David George Boyce, who in his book *The Irish Question and British Politics 1868-1986* writes:

*British history makes more sense if Ireland is left out, for it can then be seen as the foundation and growth of the English Kingdom ... If Ireland was considered historically at all it was in the terms of a troublesome and alien interruption into British body politics.*³⁹

During the 1940s British historiography underwent a veritable revolution, it became more professionalised as the writing of history moved away from an activity being done in salons in London to an activity done at British universities.⁴⁰ Additionally, sources outside of official British archival material were starting to be utilised in a much more significant way, oral history being one these types of sources. These sources had until, somewhere in the 1940s, been seen as ‘incorrect’ sources and should not be considered when partaking in historical research as they are not seen as objective or scientific enough.

Little research has been done on the Irish Question between 1922 and 1949. One of the reasons for this being that as the Irish Isle was divided in 1922 the Irish Question and its many issues were pushed to the margins of British politics after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921.⁴¹ As the Isle was divided British mentality towards the Question changed as it was no longer considered a British problem, but rather an Irish one. Boyce gives a good rendering of this shift in British mentality towards the Question after 1921 when he writes “They [*The English/British historians*] could console themselves with the reflection that a relationship that should have ended in 1886 at least ended in 1921, for the good of England as much as

³⁷ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 139.

³⁸ Ensor, “England, 1870-1914”.

³⁹ Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 13-14.

⁴⁰ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 7.

⁴¹ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 6.

Ireland”.⁴² The second reason for the lack of research being that the tradition of writing history in Britain moved towards focusing on things in the past that was important for the political life in the present, such as Labour Movements and labour history,⁴³ meaning that the history of the Irish Question was of no interest. Though the relationship between the British and the Irish was seen as ended in 1922 it did not end completely until 1949 when the Irish Free State became the independent country of the Republic of Ireland and cut all ties with its former colonial ruler. Until this point Irish politics were still a part of Britain, though marginalized.

The Irish Question and the Irish Historiographical Tradition:

Though the Irish Question was seen as irrelevant for British history from 1922, this was not the case pertaining to Irish history. First of all, the writing of Irish history has a tendency to start between the years of 1921 and 1922, rather than in 1900, this even though there is a clear Irish history from the early 1900, such as the history of the Easter Rising in 1916 or the founding of the nationalist party Sinn Fein in 1905.⁴⁴ From the beginning the dominant trend to writing Irish history and the history of the Irish Question has been as the history of an uninterrupted struggle for independence.⁴⁵ It was told as a morality tale where there was a lesson to be learned about the Irish struggle against the British ‘imperialists’.⁴⁶ This way of recollecting the past can also be seen in how the history of other colonised nations have been written around the world and not something exceptional to Irish history writing.⁴⁷ In the Irish case the Irish people was seen as the heroes of the Irish independence struggle, while the British was seen as the villains of the tale. J. Michell’s *The Last Conquest of Ireland (perhaps)* is a good example of how Irish history was written and understood in its earlier days.⁴⁸ Additionally, to being written as a morality tale, the history of the Irish Question was also used as a political tool made to strengthening the nationalistic feeling in the country, and as a way of legitimizing the Irish struggle for independence.⁴⁹

⁴² Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 15.

⁴³ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 8.

⁴⁴ Ferriter, “The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000”, 1.

⁴⁵ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 6.

⁴⁶ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 6.

⁴⁷ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 8.

⁴⁸ Michell, “The Last Conquest of Ireland (perhaps)”.

⁴⁹ Allum, “The Irish Question”, 8.

Ethnocentrism was also widely applied within the Irish tradition of writing history. Irish ethnocentrism was not only meant as interpretation of their own history, but also as an intellectual support for the growing Irish nationalism, as shown above. Contrary to the historical mission of the British, which was to show the superiority of British political institutions and the British people, Irish historians' mission were to show the British interpretation of the Irish people as a barbaric people as wrong. Their goal was to show that the Irish people had a long history of being considered the intellectual cradle for the region and based on this deserved to govern their own people as they saw fit.⁵⁰ For these historians the writing of Irish history and the history of the Irish Question was not only seen as a retelling of the past, but as taking a political standpoint. In the case of Irish history, the writing of history was used to influence political arguments and vice versa.

As the Irish Question and its history moved from being a British problem to an Irish problem what were to become two well established schools of thought formed based on how different people within the Irish Isle saw the Irish Question. On one side there were those that viewed the Irish as barbaric and needing to be looked after or governed by the British, while those on the other side viewed the Irish as an intellectual people equal to the British.⁵¹ These arguments are in most cases seen as parallel to the political and ethnical divide on the Irish Isle of those seeing themselves as Catholic/Nationalist/Republican, and those seeing themselves as Protestant/Unionists/Imperialists.⁵²

Though these models of how to view the Irish Question seem different, they do have several traits in common. Firstly, both have a partisan spirit, secondly, they are essentially political, and third they determine the means in function with the end. Additionally, the models are more concerned with proving or disproving an event or movement than in understanding the mechanisms behind the event or movement being researched.⁵³ Their differences come forth through how they view the relationship between the British and the Irish, and who was considered Irish, and who was considered to have the right to the territory of the Irish Isle.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Allum, "The Irish Question", 7-8.

⁵¹ Allum, "The Irish Question", 8.

⁵² Allum, "The Irish Question", 8.

⁵³ Allum, "The Irish Question", 8.

⁵⁴ Allum, "The Irish Question", 8-10.

The Republican model became the most dominant interpretation used in the history of the Irish Question after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921, and even more so after the Second World War. The reason for this being that the Republican model were based on the philosophy that if British historians could ignore the Irish side of the Question and the influence that Ireland had had on British history, Irish historians could do the same. Furthermore, this was also seen as the interpretation closest to Irish nationalism. However, the problem with this interpretation of the Irish Question from the perspective of Irish history is that the Republican model was incapable of taking the unionist case into consideration when writing its history. As a consequence, the republican model's way of interpreting and writing history became extremely one sided. Scholars applying this model in their research of the Irish Question saw the union with the British as a negative union forced upon the Irish by the British, and the Irish Isle as belonging to the Irish that supported a united and independent Ireland.

Scholars applying the Unionist model to the Irish Question, on the other hand, saw the union with the British as a necessary Union from an Irish point of view. The reason for this interpretation being less popular with Irish historians being that the Unionist interpretation at this point was closer to that of the British school of thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth century something that clearly went against what Irish historians were trying to do when writing the Irish Question into their history. Academics applying this saw the Irish people as lacking the ability to take care of their own country as a consequence of their Gaelic blood.⁵⁵ The core of the Unionist model on the Irish Question is easily summed up by E. R. Norman who wrote that "English politics had been in general just and could have succeeded, were it not for irrational, wicked and ungrateful Nationalists who persisted in interpreting the history of Ireland as a series of British exactions".⁵⁶ These historians viewed the Irish Isle as a geographical territory that should be under British rule and belonging to those loyal to Britain to the same degree as to the Nationalists.

As shown above the historiography of the Irish Question up until the 1960s was to a large degree influenced by the different political debates taking place in Britain and on the Irish Isle. All of this simultaneously, to the fact that the Irish Question came into history at a point when history as a discipline were getting professionalized for the first time. From a British perspective the Irish Question and its history was until the 1960s seen as a nuisance for the British Parliament and British politics in general. The Irish Question and its history were also

⁵⁵ Allum, "The Irish Question", 7.

⁵⁶ Cited from Allum, "The Irish Question", 10.

seen as a not relevant for British political history as it was considered a black spot and as ruining the picture British historians were trying to paint of the Great British Empire. On the other hand, from an Irish perspective, the Irish Question and its history was seen as a way of legitimizing their struggle for independence and later on for a United Ireland. From an Irish perspective the Irish Question's historiography is also seen as an internal fight over who has the right to the geographical territory of the Irish Isle, and who has a right to govern it, is it the Nationalists or the Unionists? Are they two different peoples or are they two different communities of one people? These are some of the questions the historiography of the Irish Question started to raise already before 1965 and the Troubles.

Chapter 2: The trail they blazed: a scholarly view of the Irish Question, 1965 – 1998

When civil violence erupted again an entire aeropaus of sociologists, anthropologists and politicologists rushed to the scene, following the journalists of the world press, to see and diagnose the conflict. From this has come, in recent years, an abundant literature.⁵⁷

This quote was written by political scientist Percy Allum in 1980. The quote describes how the outbreak of violence in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, later known as the Troubles, lead to an abundance of literature on the ongoing conflict. It also shows that though there was an abundance of literature on the conflict from 1965 and onwards, there was a lack of research conducted from a historical perspective. This has, however, in the last decades started to change as there has been an increase in research done on the Troubles and the Irish Question from a historical perspective. The research that is done and the scholarly texts that are being produced have a tendency to see the Irish Question that followed the peaceful protest in 1967/68 as a break with the Question prior o 1922 and not as a continuation of the Irish Question researched before 1965. For many historians, especially the British, the Irish Question disappeared with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1922, A. J. P. Taylor's quote "Lloyd George conjured it out of existence."⁵⁸ is a good example of this mentality. As a consequence of this mentality there has been little to no historiographical studies done on the history of the Irish Question from 1965 to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. As with the historiography

⁵⁷Cited from Allum, "The Irish Question", 6.

⁵⁸ O'Farrell, "Irelands English Question", 293. It has not been possible to find the original source of this quote as none of the authors that have used it have managed to reference the quote.

of the Irish Question before 1965, two national perspectives dominated the historiography between 1965 and 1998. These two perspectives being the British and Irish national perspective, with the Irish perspective being divided between those scholars viewing the Question from either south or north of the border or as for and against the unification of the Irish Isle.

There are many ways in which the Irish Question during the Troubles in Northern Ireland can be understood and interpreted. From the sources read it is possible to discern five schools of thought. These schools of thoughts will be used the same way that landmarks are used to make sense of a map. They will be offering guidance as I map out the historiography of the Irish Question as it stands today, by showing how the different scholars interpret the Irish Question during the Troubles. The scholarly texts will be placed into the different school of thoughts based on who the academic considers the principal antagonists of the Troubles and the Irish Question. The antagonists being Britain vs. Ireland, Southern Ireland vs. Northern Ireland, and Protestants vs. Catholics within Northern Ireland.⁵⁹ Based on these three sets of principal antagonists the chapter will be divided into the five schools of thought: *The Traditional Nationalist Interpretation*, *The Traditional Unionist Interpretation*, *The Internal – Conflict Interpretation (or Two Community Interpretation)*, *The International Interpretation*, and *The British Interpretation*. By including the more traditional schools of thought, such as the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation and the British interpretation, to my historiography the discussion of developments within the historiography will not be standing by itself. On the contrary, by including these three schools of thought it is being contextualized in the larger historiography done on the Irish Question. Through including these traditional schools of thought to my analysis I indicate that there is a continuation in how the Question has been researched from prior to 1965 and between 1965 and 1998, and that the Question between 1965 and 1998 is a continuation of the Question researched before 1922.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ These pairs of antagonists are borrowed from Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 114.

⁶⁰ Though I am limiting my own analysis to the school of thoughts mentioned above, I find it important to mention that there is one interpretation of the Irish Question that has also played an important role in research done on the Irish Question. This interpretation being the Marxist interpretation. I have however decided not to include this frame of analysis in my own thesis as I believe that much of the scholarly texts that could be considered to fit into the Marxist interpretation can be placed into one of the interpretations mentioned above.

Though the Irish Question was considered conjured out of existence in 1922 by British politicians and historians, I argue that the Question never disappeared from history. On the contrary, I agree with Arthur and his article *Anglo-Irish Relations and the Northern Ireland Problem* that the Irish Question continued to exist, but that it changed its main territorial base from that of British politics to that of Irish and Northern Irish politics.⁶¹ In this chapter I will be conducting a historiographical analysis of the Irish Question from 1965 to 1998. The main argument in this chapter is that the Irish Question continued to exist after 1922 and that the Question that arose with the Troubles should be seen as a continuation of this by scholars and not as a break in history, as British historians have a tendency to argue. Furthermore, this chapter argues that political developments taking place within the period have had an influence on the Question and how the different schools of thought have developed.

From The Traditional Nationalist Interpretation to ‘New Nationalism’:

The traditional nationalist interpretation or school of thought were by many scholars, sympathetic to the Nationalist/Catholic cause, seen as the main, if not the only, way of interpreting and understanding the Irish Question. The interpretation can be traced back to the Republican model mentioned earlier and is influenced by the nationalistic ideology of Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein being the biggest nationalist party in Northern Ireland fighting for the unification of the Irish Isle and was founded in 1905. The interpretations fundamental ideas and arguments can be summed up in two propositions: Firstly, the belief that the people of Ireland form one nation, secondly, that the fault of division of the Irish Isle lies with the British and their presence on the island.⁶²

These fundamental ideas on how to understand the Irish Question were the consensus among nationalistic academics for years. However, they did not stay unchanged or unchallenged. The hard-line nationalistic interpretation had already started to change before the Troubles began in 1968/69. The changed started in the early 1950s as the traditional view of the Question as a purely British and colonial problem was rapidly losing support among scholars. Instead of this colonial perspective, scholars started arguing for the Irish Question as a by-product of Unionist and Protestant fears over what might happen to them in a United Ireland.⁶³ This new perspective

⁶¹ Arthur, “Anglo – Irish Relations and the Northern Ireland Problem”, 37.

⁶² Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 117.

⁶³ Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 147-148.

grew and got considerable traction as the most feasible explanation for why Northern Ireland continued to be a separate country and a part of the United Kingdom.⁶⁴

This change in antagonist can be seen in how the definition of the Irish Question changed from Liam de Paor's book *Divided Ulster*, where it is defined as “[*The Northern Ireland problem*]...colonial problem, and the ‘racial’ distinction (and it is actually imagined as racial) between the colonists and the natives is expressed in terms of religion.”⁶⁵ To Garret FitzGerald who in his book *Towards a New Ireland* defines the Irish Question as “... the fruit of Northern Protestant reluctance to become part of what they regards as an authoritarian Southern Catholic State.”⁶⁶ Or as Conor Cruise O’Brien defines it in *States of Ireland* “... our problem is not ‘how to get unity’ but how to share an island in conditions of peace and reasonable fairness, ...”⁶⁷

These changes in the interpretation were accelerated by the onset of the Troubles, and the fact that more sources became available. The feasibility of the British argument was again weakened as more sources showed that the segregation and unrest were the cause of Protestant fear. For instance, the sources show that many of the reforms implemented by the British government in Northern Ireland were reforms that the Protestant community rejected and that benefited Catholic families to a larger degree than Protestants, such as the reform concerning family allowance.⁶⁸ In addition to these reforms, the stationing of British troops in Northern Ireland in 1969/70 were not, at the start, meant as protection of the Protestants. On the contrary the troops were stationed in Northern Ireland in order to protect Catholics against Protestant violence.⁶⁹ These examples taken from scholarly texts indicates that the change taking place within the academic interpretation of the Irish Question was influenced by developments taking place in the political sphere, as the Troubles were unfolding in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This even before many of the official archival sources would become available to the public. Additionally, the examples show how the British could no longer be said to carry all the blame for the Question and the violence taking place.

⁶⁴ Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 147-148.

⁶⁵ Cited from de Paor, “Divided Ulster”, 13.

⁶⁶ Cited from FitzGerald, “Towards a New Ireland”, 88.

⁶⁷ Cited from O’Brien, “States of Ireland”, 297.

⁶⁸ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics 1868-1986”, 100.

⁶⁹ Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 121.

Consequently, a divide took place within the school of thought between those still arguing for and following the older and more nationalistic hard-line analytical framework, and those arguing for a newer and more inclusive nationalistic interpretation. Nonetheless, despite this divide the core value of the traditional nationalist interpretation; the belief that the people of Ireland form one nation stayed the consensus among academics. Because of this, the conviction continued to be that the only way to solve the Question was through the unity of the Irish Isle. John Darby gives a good example of this in his book *Conflict in Northern Ireland* where he references the definition of the Irish Question from *The Handbook of the Ulster Question* which states that:

*Ireland is by natural design a complete geographical entity. This natural design enforced on the political life of Ireland at a very early date the ideal of national unity, and it is doing violence, not only to nature, but to the whole trend of the political life of the island to divorce politically at this late date in her national existence a considerable section of the northern part of the country from the motherland.*⁷⁰

Even though this quote from *The Handbook of the Ulster Problem* is from 1923, just after the partition of the Irish Isle, it is still a good representation of the core values of the nationalist school of thought.⁷¹ More than that, Darby's interpretation of the argument gives scholars applying the nationalistic analytical framework to their research on the Irish Question a historical depth and weight that anchors their research in the Question's earlier history, and in earlier historiographical studies. Furthermore, the use of this quote additionally shows that the Question studied between 1965 and 1998 needs to be seen as connected to the Question prior to 1922 and needs to be studied as such.

Because the traditional nationalist school of thought was losing followers as the Troubles went on, scholars saw the need to adopt a different angle to their interpretation in order to be able to continue their argument of the British as the main antagonist in the history of the Question. This meant that scholars turned away from the political and purely colonial argument they applied before the Troubles and adopted a more economic argument. They argued for British presence on the Irish Isle as a consequence of British economic interests on the island.⁷² However, the plausibility of this argument of British presence on the island came up short when

⁷⁰ Cited from Darby, "Conflict in Northern Ireland", 179.

⁷¹ See Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism" page 20 for the core values of traditional nationalism.

⁷² Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 16.

the British government in 1993 made it clear, through the Downing Street Declaration, that the British had no economic interest in Northern Ireland.⁷³ Once again the fundamental argument of who to blame from a nationalist perspective had to evolve. This time into arguing that the goal of British presence on the island was to exercise British economic control over the Republic of Ireland through their power in the region.⁷⁴ Both of these changes in the interpretation can be seen as having a colonial undertone and as clinging to the belief of the British as a colonial power, and therefore that all negative things happening could be blamed on the British, instead of the traditional nationalists needing to look inward and see if maybe the problem was something internal.

A new nationalist interpretation?

Despite the work done by those following the traditional nationalist school of thought to keep the fundamentals of the school of thought the same, a shift in how the Question was understood took place. The Irish writer Desmond Fennell is a good example of this shift from the old school of thought to a newer version of the nationalistic interpretation. Firstly, Fennell disagrees with the traditional nationalist consensus of the Irish Isle needing to be under the rule of the Irish Republic based off a territorial understanding of the concept nation.⁷⁵ Instead, he bases his view on nationalism and the nationalist interpretation on the idea of an all-Ireland humanitarianism,⁷⁶ meaning that the idea of a united Ireland should be based on the belief of the two peoples living on the island can co-exist peacefully.⁷⁷ By doing this he is rejecting the traditional nationalist idea that the Irish Isle is consisting of one Irish people.⁷⁸ Instead he is acknowledging that there are some people on the island that do not see themselves as Irish in the terms that Irish nationalism defines being Irish, and that they need to be respected equally to the Irish identifying with the nationalist definition of Irish.

Fennell played an important role in the changes that have occurred within the nationalist interpretation of the Irish Question. He is mostly known for his work on rewriting Irish history from a non-traditional catholic point of view.⁷⁹ *The State of the Nation, Beyond Nationalism*,

⁷³ Roche, "Terrorism and Irish Nationalism", 85.

⁷⁴ Cox, "Bringing the 'International': The IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War", 863.

⁷⁵ Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 10.

⁷⁶ Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 10.

⁷⁷ Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 22-23.

⁷⁸ Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 44.

⁷⁹ Desmond Fennell should not be seen as a revisionist though he does not interpret the Irish Question in a traditional nationalist interpretation. He is still writing interpreting the Irish Question from a nationalist point of view; however, he is not partaking what he sees as a hard-line republic-nationalistic retelling of Irish history and

and *Revision of Irish Nationalism*, is just some of the work he is known for. Fennell's research has some clear nationalist tendencies which can be seen in the book *The Revision of Irish Nationalism*. However, he rejects some of the traditional nationalist ideas such as the tradition of seeing all Irish as one people.⁸⁰

The New Ireland Forum (1984) is the first place this new nationalist interpretation can be seen to emerge both in academia and political debates. The forum was a place where Irish nationalist politicians could discuss possible political developments that might alleviate the Troubles. It is also the place where the unionist cause and identity are brought into the light of the nationalist interpretation for the first time.⁸¹ Until this point the importance of the unionist cause had been ignored or downplayed in nationalist research. In his 'newer' nationalistic interpretation of the Irish Question, Fennell goes even further than changing the traditional nationalist interpretation. To some degree he also bridges the gap between the nationalist and the unionist interpretation of the Irish Question by acknowledging the unionist cause and its legitimacy. This theoretical and scholarly gap has always been a point of criticism directed towards academics applying the traditional nationalist interpretation to their research on the Irish Question.

Fennell's way of viewing the Question have some of the same communalities as what was to become known as the internal-conflict interpretation, or the two communities' interpretation, which will be discussed and analysed later. Though Fennell is forgoing the traditional nationalist interpretation, he is still partaking in one of the traditions the interpretation applies when researching the Irish Question. The tradition being that the blame for the unrest and segregation falls on British shoulders.⁸² On this point the other new nationalist interpretation of the Question is better equipped to analyse the Question as it has moved away from seeing the British as the main antagonist, and rather see the antagonist as the Protestants and their fear of unification.

The main developments within the traditional nationalist school of thought is the division between those applying a hard-line nationalistic view to the Question and those arguing for a softer and more inclusive interpretation of it. What they do agree on is that the Irish Isle needs to be unified, however they disagree on how. For the traditional nationalist the goal is a

interpretation of the Irish Question. Rather he is choosing to apply a newer and more inclusive nationalistic ideology to his interpretation.

⁸⁰ Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 22-23.

⁸¹ Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 24.

⁸² Fennell, "The Revision of Irish Nationalism", 22-23.

territorial unified Ireland inhabited by the Irish, while it for those following Fennell's newer nationalism it is about unifying the peoples independent of their ethnical, religious or political background and affiliation. It is clear that the political development within Irish nationalism has had a huge influence on the academic interpretation of the Irish Question, and vice versa. What is also made clear is that as the Troubles evolved it became increasingly hard to keep arguing for a strictly nationalist interpretation of the Question, this as the Protestants became the main antagonist and not the British moved to the side-line.

The Traditional Unionist Interpretation:

Opposite to those arguing for a nationalistic interpretation of the Question are those arguing for a unionist interpretation. These scholars belong to what is called the traditional unionist interpretation or school of thought. Academics following this school are often seen as sympathetic to the Protestant or Unionist cause and point of view when it comes to the partition of the Irish Isle and its possible reunification. They argue that Northern Ireland should stay a part of the United Kingdom. The fundamental ideas of the traditional unionist school of thought can be summed up in two propositions. Firstly, they see the Irish Isle as constituted of two distinct peoples, the Protestants and the Catholics (or Unionists and Nationalists). Secondly, the core of the Question for these scholars is that the traditional nationalist interpretation refuses to recognize that there exist two distinct peoples on the Irish Isle, and that the Nationalist refuses to afford to Unionists the same right to self-determination as they claim for themselves.⁸³

Though the British state does not play an equally important role in the traditional unionist interpretation, they are still afforded some agency. For scholars conducting research based on the traditional unionist interpretation the British are seen, to a large degree as an unreliable ally. They (the British) are seen as giving more in to demands from the Catholic than supporting and fighting for the Protestant community, which they are bound to protect through the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1922 as the Protestant community is considered a part of the British Empire.⁸⁴ An example of this perceived unreliability can be found in Patrick J. Roche's book chapter *Terrorism and Irish Nationalism* in *The Northern Ireland Question: Perspectives on Nationalism and Unionism* where he writes that the Labour Party in its party documents since 1987 have gone against their own 'equal validity' thesis in exchange for a coercive indictment

⁸³ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 146.

⁸⁴ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 146.

of unionist consent to Irish Unity.⁸⁵ What he is showing here is the unreliability of the British through the fact that a British political party in their official party documents are supporting and pushing for the unification of the Irish Isle, though they are supposed to support the Protestants in staying a part of the United Kingdom.

Roche's book chapter is also a good example of the second proposition that the nationalist not understating the importance of the unionist case. He writes:

*The total rejection of the legitimacy of unionist opposition to Irish unity is an absolute requirement of the imperatives of Irish nationalism – specifically of the core, 'one nation' claim. Unionists are (for nationalists) a 'minority' within the Irish nation and therefore have no legitimate or de jure right to veto the right to self-determination of self-government of the Irish nation.*⁸⁶

Here he not only confirms traditional unionist scholars' belief that unionists are seen as a lesser people than nationalists. He also shows that their fight for being seen as a people is legitimate as they in nationalist eyes do not have the legitimate right to veto nationalist claim to self-determination of the Irish Isle.

When it comes to understating and downplaying of the other community the traditional nationalist school of thought is not the only one partaking in this trend. The traditional unionist school is also partaking in this trend.⁸⁷ Where the nationalist interpretation downplays the importance of the unionist case, the unionist interpretation downplays the whole concept of the Irish Question and there existing an Irish problem. Whyte's book chapter *Traditional Unionist Interpretation* is a good example of this. In this chapter he shows that unionist scholars through economic and national arguments argue that the best solution for Northern Ireland is to stay in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, he argues that they do not see why there should exist an Irish Question, when the best for both peoples is to stay in the United Kingdom.⁸⁸ For many of these academics the Irish Question is unnecessary as they do not see the problem with the British union.⁸⁹ Through arguing this they are not only downplaying the Question in itself, but also the nationalist cause as it is centered around the belief that Northern Ireland would do better as a part of the Irish Republic. Ian Paisley et al. is also a good example of this mentality

⁸⁵ Roche, "Terrorism and Irish Nationalism", 85.

⁸⁶ Cited from Roche, "Terrorism and Irish Nationalism", 90.

⁸⁷ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 162.

⁸⁸ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 162-163.

⁸⁹ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 150.

as they in their book *Ulster: The Facts* argue that “Evidence from prehistoric times shows that the northern parts of Ireland was the home of a succession of cultures rather different from Southern Ireland”.⁹⁰ Paisley et. al. is showing that the north of the Irish Isle has never been made up of Irish the same way that the south of the island has. The Irish of the north are for Paisley et. al. closer to the British than to the Irish.

In much the same way as for the traditional nationalist interpretation, the traditional unionist interpretation has gained much of its legitimacy and feasibility from being able to connect the understanding of the Irish Question during the Trouble to a lengthy Unionist historical background that can be traced back to the earlier history of the region. The best example of this can be found in Marcus Willem Heslinga’s book *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide*. Here he argues that the partition of the island is a natural consequence of the deep-seated difference between the Catholics and Protestants. He concludes by arguing:

*... in so far there are differences between various parts of the archipelago, they are between north and south rather than between west and east, and that the Republic is in temperament and culture closer to England than to Northern Ireland.*⁹¹

This connection to a lengthy historical background can also be seen in Dennis Kennedy’s book *The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State 1919-49*. Where he argues that Unionism as a political ideology were founded in the late 1800s as a reaction to the growing Nationalist ideology growing forth that wished to dismantle the Union of 1800 in favour of some form of legislative independence. Their (the unionist) belief was that the economic welfare of Ireland depended on the legislative union with Britain, and therefore the Union should stand.⁹²

From the mid-1980s the traditional unionist interpretation faced scrutiny from academics outside the school of thought. Consequently, this led to a reassessment of the interpretation and its ideas. The main criticism was that what was seen as a feasible theory to the outbreak of the Troubles prior to the mid-1980s, no longer held enough conviction to be used as an argument as to why the Irish Question still existed. The main example of this is that as the Troubles went on, it became increasingly difficult for scholars to blame the violence taking place in Northern

⁹⁰ Cited from Paisley et al., “Ulster: The Facts”, 32.

⁹¹ Cited from Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 147.

⁹² Kennedy, “The Widening Gulf: Northern Attitudes to the Independent Irish State 1919-1949”, 2-3.

Ireland on Irish people living south of the border. A good example of this is that it through research became increasingly apparent that it was not the Irish south of the border that were fighting to end the partition.⁹³ On the contrary, the violence that was taking place sprang out of the Catholic and nationalist community inside Northern Ireland, and their disagreement with the Protestant way of governing Northern Ireland.⁹⁴

As the old interpretation of the core of the Irish Question were no longer feasible, how the Question was researched changed. Academics applying the unionist interpretation moved towards a more internal interpretation and understanding of the Irish Question. Though there were some changes to how the Question was being researched from the unionist school of thought the main argument of the Unionist cause being downplayed by others, stayed unchanged. Because of this, the traditional unionist interpretation, is the traditional interpretation that has stayed the most unchanged as the years went by.⁹⁵ This can for instance be seen in Paisley et al.'s book *Ulster: The Facts* where many of their arguments fits with the original traditional unionist interpretation.⁹⁶ It did not, as with the nationalist interpretation, divide into two competing schools of thought. It did however, with the years become increasingly important for scholars to show that there was a difference between the unionist interpretation of the Question and the British interpretation. This difference was shown through what is mostly known as 'Ulster Nationalism' which takes pride in an Ulster identity that does not always align with British identity and nationalism. This change did not only happen in academia but was a consequence of political shifts and developments within the Unionist political wing.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, what the traditional unionist understanding of the Question lacks is a clear goal on how to solve it, and on how to make it more comprehensible. In the case of the nationalist interpretation there is a clear ideological goal behind how scholars research the Question this is lacking within the unionist interpretation. The unionist interpretation it seems are following the tradition of being against everything without coming up with their own solution to the problem.⁹⁸ This way of viewing the Question can to some degree be attributed to the fact that academics researching the Irish Question from this interpretation do not see the Irish Question

⁹³ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 147.

⁹⁴ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", p. 147, Roche, "Terrorism and Irish Nationalism", 90.

⁹⁵ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 148.

⁹⁶ Paisley et. al. "Ulster: The Facts".

⁹⁷ Darby, "Conflict in Northern Ireland", 183.

⁹⁸ Darby, "Conflict in Northern Ireland", 182.

as an equally large problem as academics applying the nationalist school of thought to their research do, and therefore do not see the need for a solution.

Equal to that of the traditional nationalist interpretation the traditional unionist has gone through developments as the Troubles evolved. However, the developments were not as fundamental as those for the nationalist interpretation. The two largest changes being that as it did not stay feasible to blame the violence on Irish south of the border. This change leads to a shift from understanding the Question as a national development to one of internal-conflict instead. The second change taking place was the growth of a clearer 'Ulster nationalism' which differed from the British. Nevertheless, the idea that the unionist interpretation still needed to stay true to its original idea stayed strong as there was still a fear that the unionist case might be lost or ignored. What is clear within the unionist interpretation is that also here politics have had an influence on how the Question is being interpreted and vice versa.

The British Interpretation: A New Irish Question?

The British interpretation of the Irish Question is something that has been forgotten by many scholars. After the partition of the Irish Isle in 1922 many scholars saw it as unnecessary to look at the Irish Question from a British perspective.⁹⁹ Mostly because the Question was, as mentioned in the introduction, considered to have been 'conjured out of existence'.¹⁰⁰ By this, scholars saw the Question as non-existent as it was no longer considered to be a problem that the British needed to concern themselves with. However, this changed with the eruption of violence in 1968/69 in Northern Ireland.

Where there is a set framework for how to interpret the Irish Question from a nationalistic and unionistic perspective, this is not the case when it comes to how to interpret the Irish Question from a British perspective. Nevertheless, there are some trends that seem to take place in research that take the British perspective into consideration. One of the most profound changes was that it went from being considered of a *political* nature to one of *cultural* nature. This change in conceptualisation happened in order to legitimise viewing it from a British perspective as an internal problem contained to Northern Ireland. The change in the understanding of it fits with the first of the trends in research done on the Question from the mid-1960s, mainly the belief that its issues needed to be contained to Northern Ireland. The

⁹⁹ Boyce, *The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986*", 15.

¹⁰⁰ O'Farrell, "Ireland's English Problem", 293.

argument being that it needed to be researched in such a way that it would not gain equally as much space and attention in British politics and history writing as it did prior to 1922.

Equally to this trend of minimizing the British role and involvement in the Irish Question, it (the British interpretation) partakes in the trend of viewing the British as superior to the Northern Irish or Irish. This way of viewing the Question takes inspiration from the older historiographical trend in writing of British history where the British are seen as extending a helping hand to peoples that are not capable or equipped to handle the complex issues in their societies.¹⁰¹ Better known as Whig history. The main argument being that history needs to be seen as a journey from an oppressive and benighted past to a 'glorious present'. This sentiment can for instance be seen in *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective*, where Adrian Guelke writes "[*The Irish Question is*] ... a seventeenth century religious conflict in modern dress".¹⁰²

Boyce is one scholar that plays a central role in the development of a British interpretation of the Irish Question. He is one of few scholars that goes against the grain and specifically argues for the importance of the British role in the Question. His book *The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868 – 1986* and the updated version *The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868 – 1996* are good examples of this. Moreover, he argues that the Question needs to be written into British political history in general as it did play a role in British politics during the period but also prior to 1965.¹⁰³ This can be seen by the fact that there were not only reforms put in place to try and stifle the growing unrest, such as the stationing of British troops, but British politicians did also discuss how they could possibly isolate the Question to Northern Ireland in length, so that it would not spread to the rest of the British Empire.¹⁰⁴

The duality to which the British interpretation is applied to the Question is impressive. On one side scholars applying the interpretation to their research are arguing that the Irish Question needs to be kept at arm's length, and as something that the British should not be concerned with as it does not concern them. On the other hand, they see the Troubles as a matter internal to the United Kingdom that no outside actor should concern itself with and that needs to be solved within the union. A good example of this duality can be found in Boyce's book where he writes "This double standard – that Northern Ireland must be integrated in one sense, but

¹⁰¹ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986", 139.

¹⁰² Cited from Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 198.

¹⁰³ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986", 180.

¹⁰⁴ Boyce, "The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986", 99-100.

still kept at arm's length in another – was to bedevil Labour, and indeed British perception of the new Irish Question that was emerging in the 1960s.”¹⁰⁵ It is also interesting how Boyce uses the term ‘new Irish Question’. By using this he is showing that the British considered the Irish Question in the 1960s as not connected to the Question prior to 1922. However, he is also showing that he does not support this term as he clearly argues that the ‘to Questions’ are connected. This he does through naming his book *The Irish Question & British Politics 1868-1986* indicating that their history is connected and needs to be seen as such.¹⁰⁶

Although Boyce is going against the grain by arguing that a British interpretation of the Question does have a role in both the history of the Question and in British political history he is also influenced by earlier traditions when it comes to understanding the Question. For instance, he sees British involvement in the Irish Question and the Troubles as a part of British superiority, this can be seen in his argument that states: “[*The British*] ...took the first step into the Northern Ireland crisis in the conviction that they were rectifying defects in a part of the United Kingdom where British standards of democracy and British idea of civil society had not so far prevailed.”¹⁰⁷ This argument does have clear communalities with the colonial and imperial mentality of the British during the height of the British Empire and the colonial times, it also clearly partakes in the Whig tradition of writing history.

Furthermore, the argument fits into the traditional way of seeing the people of Northern Ireland as divided into two communities with ‘ordinary decent people’ as one and ‘extremists’ as the second.¹⁰⁸ The community that is seen as ‘ordinary and decent’ is the community that is closest to the impartial power and share more communalities with them, while the other community are seen as ‘extremist’ and fits with British idea of barbarism. This differentiation between the people of Northern Ireland as parts of two communities fits into the pattern of moving away from nationalistic interpretation of the Question to one focused more on it as an internal problem

The problem with the British interpretation of the Irish Question is that the connection between the two is missing, something both Graham Walker and Boyce argues and shows. Walker in his book chapter *Northern Ireland: Devolution Pioneers* and Boyce in his book *The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986*. Walker does this by writing “It is indeed important to

¹⁰⁵ Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 103.

¹⁰⁶ Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 103.

¹⁰⁷ Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 105.

¹⁰⁸ Gilligan, “The Irish question and the concept ‘identity’ in the 1980s”, 610.

write Northern Ireland properly into the constitutional and political history of the UK, and not compartmentalise it, in a facile way, as ‘a place apart’.”¹⁰⁹, while Boyce shows it by writing “Britain in the last century was a multinational state, as she still is today [1993]. It is time that her historians began to acknowledge this and write multinational history”¹¹⁰. The problem with writing the history of the Question and Britain in isolation, as both Walker and Boyce argue, is that one part of history does not exist in its totality without the other and vice versa. By not taking British political history into consideration when writing the history of the Irish Question scholars are missing an important actor that played a significant role in forming the Irish Question. As Boyce writes “This British view, like Gladstone’s view of the Irish Question in 1886 helped define the question in significant ways and push it in directions that were to have influence on its character”.¹¹¹

As the Troubles evolved and became what we know it to be today, the most violent period in Northern Irish history, so also did how the Question was interpreted by scholars from a British perspective. This evolution in how the history of the Irish Question have been written from a British perspective fit into the traditional view of British history writing and research. How its history was written is significantly influenced by British political attitude towards the phenomenon or event being studied. This evolution of British interpretation of the Irish Question can be seen in Chris Gilligan’s article *The Irish Question and the concept ‘identity’ in 1980s*, where the fighting in Northern Ireland went from being categorised as between ‘ordinary decent people’ and ‘extremists’ to being between two communities divided by ethnical differences.¹¹² This change can also be seen in how the Question and the Troubles changed from being interpreted in one way up until the Fall of Stormont, to being interpreted two ways after. Boyce gives a good rendering of this when he writes:

[The Northern Ireland crisis] ... *can be interpreted in two ways ... The crisis continued to bear the characteristics of its earlier ‘British’ phase, with the emphasis placed on implementation of long overdue reforms on the lines of the British polity itself; but it now bore an increasingly menacing ‘historical’ character with those familiar spectres ... of communal violence, sectarian war cries, the flaunting of provocative symbols and flags, Orange and Green.*¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Cited from Walker, “Northern Ireland: Devolution Pioneers”,81.

¹¹⁰ Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”,17.

¹¹¹ Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”, 113.

¹¹² Gilligan, “The Irish question and the concept ‘identity’ in the 1980s”,610.

¹¹³ Cited from Boyce, “The Irish Question & British Politics, 1868-1986”,108.

This quote not only shows the historical connection between how the Irish Question was understood prior to 1922, it also undermines the idea that the Irish Question were ‘conjured’ out of existence in 1922.¹¹⁴ This clear example of a historical connection between the Question of 1922 and 1965 also undermines his use of the term ‘new Irish Question’. The quote clearly indicates that there is a continuity from the first appearance of it to the second and that this needs to be taken into consideration.

The existence of a British interpretation of the Irish Question is not only important for British history, but also for both the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation of the Irish Question. By there existing a British interpretation of the Irish Question, and the fact that it is based on old traditions of writing British history both the nationalist and unionist argument that the British played a role in the Question is strengthened. Had this interpretation of the Question not existed, scholars applying the two former interpretations would have had a larger problem with legitimizing their arguments of British involvement and role in the Irish Question’s history.

The main arguments used by scholars applying the British interpretation is that it is important to write the British perspective into the historiography of the Irish Question. For them the importance of a British interpretation lies with the fact that the Irish Question were once a British phenomenon that British politicians gave a name and definition. By not recognizing that there is a British dimension to the Question and that there is a need to view it from a British perspective, scholars are going against the idea that Northern Ireland is a part of the larger British Empire and therefore belongs to the United Kingdom. The British school of thought is also, as with the two former interpretations, clearly moving away from viewing the Question in a national perspective to one of an internal-conflict perspective.

The Internal – Conflict Interpretation:

There was, as shown above, a considerable theoretical and analytical gap between the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation. Though it closed some with the reassessment of the two schools of thought it still existed. It is this gap that the internal-conflict interpretation or two community interpretation tried to close, in order to make the Question more comprehensible. The interpretation first emerged in the United Kingdom in the late 1960’s

¹¹⁴ O’Farrell, “Ireland’s English Problem”, 293

early 1970s, just as the Troubles began. It was seen as an answer to the growing need for a new way of understanding the Question as the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation was not efficient enough.¹¹⁵ The interpretation grew as it was discovered that it was longer not enough or feasible to see the Question from a national perspective. What differentiates this interpretation from that of the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation is in how it viewed the peoples in Northern Ireland, and in which factors were taken into consideration. Where the former interpretations saw the people as two nationalistic groups claiming to be the only legitimate people of the territory, the internal-conflict interpretation saw the people of Northern Ireland as being of the same nation but with different ethnic backgrounds.¹¹⁶ This internalisation of the Question can also be found in the British interpretation. However, in that case the Question is not internal on a national level, instead, it is seen as internal on a regional level as Northern Ireland is considered a part of the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, also withing this interpretation it was discovered that the national perspective was not enough to make it comprehensible, and a focus on more internal factors was needed.

Whereas scholars applying the former frameworks put great emphasis on exogenous explanations such as British and Irish influence and role, academics applying the internal-conflict interpretation focused on endogenous explanations such as discrimination, segregation, and education.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, this does not mean that these scholars do not recognize the fact that external factors do play a part in the Irish Question and how it needed to be understood. On the contrary, they saw the conflict in Northern Ireland as internal because of how the two communities occupying the territory, the Catholics and the Protestants, or Nationalists and Unionists, related to their neighbours differently.¹¹⁸ A good rendering of this is found in John Darby's book *Conflict in Northern Ireland* where he writes:

Whatever the values of the various theories about the conflict the one factor which emerges with greatest force is its Ulster character. Clearly it is also an Irish Problem and a British problem, but its roots lie in the social, economic, cultural, and geographical structure of Northern Ireland. Whatever political formulae are introduced to reduce its violent

¹¹⁵ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 194.

¹¹⁶ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 194.

¹¹⁷ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 194-197.

¹¹⁸ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 194.

*manifestation – whether a united Ireland, or union with Great Britain, or an independent Ulster – a peculiarly local conflict will still continue.*¹¹⁹

This view of the Irish Question can also be found in Moody's book *The Ulster Question 1603-1973*. Where Moody argues that the conflict that started in Northern Ireland in 1968/69 can be traced back to the early seventeenth century and is a consequence of the colonisation of the isle, and ultimately the emigration of non-Gaelic people to the isle.¹²⁰ However, where other scholars, like Whyte and Darby, minimized the influence of exogenous explanations Moody saw their importance even though he emphasises endogenous explanations such as discrimination, sectarianism and disaffection. Although Moody clearly has an internal-conflict understanding his work is also nationalistic in the way it argues that Ulster is a part of Ireland.¹²¹

Whyte is another renowned scholar that backed up Darby's claim of the Question being an internal conflict. Whyte did this in his book *Interpreting Northern Ireland*. Already before he starts his analysis of the Irish Question, he shows that he favours an understanding of it as a problem internal to Northern Ireland. This can be seen through Whyte naming the first part of his book 'The Nature of the Community Divide'.¹²² Here he directly shows that he views the Question as between two communities, and not as between two national groups. In addition to this, Whyte has decided to refer to the Irish Question as 'The Northern Ireland Problem'.¹²³ This indicates that he sees the problem as something contained to the territory of Northern Ireland. Furthermore, he goes as far as to interpret the works of other scholars on the Irish Question as supporting the consensus that the Irish Question is an internal conflict in Northern Ireland. This can be seen in his conclusion where he writes "... I shall take as a given the conclusion ... that there is widespread consensus on the heart of the problem being an internal conflict between two communities within Northern Ireland."¹²⁴ For Whyte the focus on understanding and interpreting the Irish Question lies in understanding how the internal factors of politics, religion, economics, and psychology play into each other and into the ethnic divide that exists in Northern Ireland.¹²⁵ For him by understanding this, it would be possible to answer the Question.

¹¹⁹ Cited from Darby, "Conflict in Northern Ireland", 196.

¹²⁰ Moody, "The Ulster Question, 1603 – 1973", 96.

¹²¹ Moody, "The Ulster Question, 1603 – 1973", 94.

¹²² Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 1.

¹²³ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", viii.

¹²⁴ Cited from Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 210.

¹²⁵ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 26-111.

Lawrence J. McCaffrey and his book *The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict* is yet another academic example that fits into the internal-conflict school of thought. Where Whyte puts emphasis on understanding how different aspect of the Irish Question influence each other and the divide between the two communities, McCaffrey puts emphasis on the role of the social issues, such as discrimination, housing and education as the main root of cause for the Question and the Troubles. He argues that the main reason for the divide between the two communities in Northern Ireland is social injustice.¹²⁶ Furthermore, McCaffrey argues that the only reason that Britain and the Republic of Ireland can be seen as playing a role in the Irish Question is because of the paramilitary activity conducted by the Provincial Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) on British and Irish territory. In his view, the Irish Question and its many issues are influenced by external factors only because internal actors, such as the IRA and UVF, are involving external actors in the internal conflict through their actions. An example of this is the IRA bombing of British targets, which means that the British government needed to get involved in the Irish Question as no response would have been seen as weakness.¹²⁷

McCaffrey's book is, additionally, a good example of how the internal-conflict interpretation is bridging the gap between the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation. Where the traditional nationalist interpretation does not take into consideration the Protestants and their fear when debating for a United Ireland, McCaffrey, by seeing the Catholics and Protestants as two different ethnical groups of the same nation, argues that the only way of achieving the United Ireland that the nationalist interpretation is advocating for, is through recognizing the needs of both communities as equal.¹²⁸ This means that the needs and wants of the Catholics should not be put above those of the Protestants. Protestant fear of what will happen to them in a United Ireland are, for academics applying the internal-conflict interpretation equally as valid as the Catholic fear of a divided Irish Isle.

Connor Cruise O'Brien, F. F. L. Lyons and John A. Murphy are other examples of scholars applying the internal-conflict interpretation to their research.¹²⁹ Though O'Brien could also be argued to belong in the traditional nationalist school of thought. A second argument that McCaffrey uses to support his internal interpretation of the Irish Question is that:

¹²⁶ McCaffrey, "The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict", 161-162.

¹²⁷ McCaffrey, "The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict", 170-171.

¹²⁸ McCaffrey, "The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict", 172.

¹²⁹ McCaffrey, "The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict", 186.

*Anglo – Irish Protestants, Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Catholics have separate historical experiences and perspectives. Heroes and victors to one side are villains and defeats to the other. Both have a siege mentality. Catholic defensiveness reflects the reality of oppression, while the Protestant version is based more on fear of what might be than on what actually did occur.*¹³⁰

Here he shows how both sides are a part of the same community, but because of their different historical background they understand the violence taking place as meaning different things. He shows how different vantagepoints leads to different understandings of what happened and why.

To further their argument that the people of Northern Ireland are two different communities and not two different national identities, scholars applying this school of thought argue that there are more similarities between the two communities than there are differences. Because of this, the two communities should be considered as a part of the same national identity but with different ethnical backgrounds, and not as two separate national identities occupying the territory. Chris Gilligan is one scholar that applies this interpretation of the internal – conflict interpretation to his article *The Irish Question and the concept ‘identity’ in the 1980s*. He shows how the concept of identity can be used to show that the traditional national interpretation’s understanding of an Irish identity as something connected to the national territory of the Irish Isle and a United Ireland is not what should be the ultimate dream.¹³¹ This shift in how the term ‘identity’ is used can also be seen in Fennell’s *Irish Humanitarianism*.¹³²

Though he takes a different approach to the internal-conflict interpretation of the Irish Question he is clearly building on earlier research as he references Whyte and his internal- conflict analysis of the Irish Question.¹³³ Furthermore, he argues that the use of ‘identity’ as a concept has moved how scholars applying the traditional nationalist interpretation saw nationalism as an ideology as he writes:

¹³⁰ Cited from McCaffrey, “The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict”, 186.

¹³¹ Gilligan, “The Irish question and the concept ‘identity’ in the 1980s”.

¹³² Fennell, “The Revision of Iris Nationalism”, 10.

¹³³ Gilligan, “The Irish question and the concept ‘identity’ in the 1980s”, 607- 608.

'Identity' was a useful concept in helping to make this shift It moved the referent for 'Irishness' away from territorial space and into the realms of subjective feeling. An Irish identity made the aspiration to a united Ireland an issue of self-conception and cultural recognition, rather than an issue of national self-determination. ¹³⁴

The problem with the way these scholars interpret the Irish Question is that although they contribute some understanding of the Irish Question to the British and the Irish, they are still seen as having minor influence on the Question and how it is understood. By not giving more space to external factors and actors in how the Question is understood these scholars, such as Whyte, Darby, and Gilligan, are taking away important parts of the Irish Question's history.

For instance, they are removing the Question's historical connection to before 1922, which is an important part of the Question as it was the first time that the Question came into existence. Secondly, by applying the internal-conflict interpretation to the Irish Question these scholars are also taking away important external influences such as the regional actors Britain and Republic of Ireland. Furthermore, by isolating the Question they are minimizing the influence social and political movements in other countries might have had on the Question. An example of this is the civil rights movement in the United States, and its role in taking the social injustice from being an injustice, to a movement that wanted change.¹³⁵ This lack in focus on external factors and their influence can in the case of McCaffrey and Whyte, be contributed to the fact that both of these scholars conducted their research at the start of when international actors such as the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States had just become active actors in the conflict and had little influence.¹³⁶

What is interesting is that though many scholars are set in their way of researching something, Whyte manages to see that the internal-conflict interpretation might have started to outlive its own usefulness and that it might be time for what he calls a 'new paradigm'. As Whyte states "As time moves on, so new ideas may emerge or the balance of forces may shift, and an analysis written at the end of the 1980s may not reach quite the same conclusions as one written a few years earlier".¹³⁷ Maybe this new interpretation could be one of a more transnational or international aspects as it seems that the interpretations analysed above does not give a

¹³⁴ Cited from Gilligan, "The Irish question and the concept 'identity' in the 1980s", 608.

¹³⁵ McCaffrey, "The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict", 184.

¹³⁶ Guelke, "Northern Ireland: the international perspective", 199.

¹³⁷ Cited from Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 209.

consensus to the nature of the Irish Question and what should be emphasised when researching the Question.

The International Interpretation:

As Whyte clearly states in his concluding chapter, one paradigm that might have been giving a valuable understanding of the Irish Question at one point in history might not be enough at a later time.¹³⁸ It might therefore be necessary to change the paradigm to an analytical framework that gives a better understanding of the Question as it stands at that point in history. Could this new paradigm possibly be a paradigm based on an international framework with external factors in focus?

Several scholars went against the grain of the internal-conflict interpretation and the three national interpretations and argued for the importance of understanding the Irish Question in a larger and more global setting than that of it being an internal or national problem. For them the external factors such as changes in the international system, the Cold War and decolonization, played an important role in how the Question needed to be researched and understood between 1965 and 1998. For these scholars the internal-conflict interpretation and its focus on endogenous explanations to the Irish Question was not enough to understand the complexity that is the phenomenon the Irish Question. This can also be said about the national focused interpretations. Though the international interpretation was a fairly new way of interpreting the Irish Question in 1965 it was not the first time that the Question has been seen in light of the international. Already in the early 1800s Beaumont argued that the Question needed to be seen as of international importance.¹³⁹

Adrian Guelke, the political scientist, is considered extremely influential within the international interpretation or school of thought. In his book *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective* he explores the interconnectedness between Northern Ireland's sectarian division and the province's anomalous international status.¹⁴⁰ He shows how different exogenous and endogenous factors interact with each other and how these affect how the Irish Question needs to be understood. Guelke emphasizes how the international dimension grew in importance from 1968/69.¹⁴¹ For instance, he argues that the growth in communication methods during the 1960s and 1970s did play an important role in internationalizing the Irish

¹³⁸ Whyte, "Interpreting Northern Ireland", 259.

¹³⁹ Cited from Allum, "The Irish Question" 6.

¹⁴⁰ Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 197.

¹⁴¹ Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 1.

Question, without more access to communications devices such as the television and radio the Troubles and the Irish Question would have stayed much more isolated to people and the fight itself might not have been influenced by external factors to such a large degree.¹⁴² By arguing that the Question became internationalized during the 1960s and 1970s Guelke is showing how the world has become more global and less local. In doing this he undermines the feasibility of the internal-conflict interpretation as well as the feasibility of the national perspective interpretations. Nevertheless, though Guelke is applying the international framework to his research on the Irish Question he still affords some agency to the fact that the Question is located in Northern Ireland, and as a territorial Question needed to be seen as internal to Northern Ireland.¹⁴³

For Guelke, and in line with the framework of the international interpretation, the internationalization of the Irish Question in light of the Troubles has helped make the Question more intractable. This because factoring in the role of external factors have put the Question and the violence used on both sides in a global pattern, legitimising the use of violence as it is no longer seen as exceptional to Northern Ireland but a part of bigger historical developments. By placing the Irish Question in the larger global pattern of decolonization, taking place after the Second World War, Guelke has made the Question more comprehensible. An example of the Question's history partaking in the trends of decolonization is that the issue between the Protestant and Catholic community over the sovereignty of Northern Ireland is in many ways the same as in other colonial countries such as South Africa. His argument for the internationalisation of the Question is strengthened further by him quoting James N. Rosenau saying "politics everywhere, it would seem, are related to politics everywhere else".¹⁴⁴ Further, he shows how the Irish Question fits into the international system by writing, "The strength of support for nationalism among the minority in Northern Ireland therefore fits the pattern of political developments elsewhere in the world".¹⁴⁵ This argument fits into the common understanding of the Irish Question from an international perspective as 'representing unfinished business from the colonial era',¹⁴⁶ which again fits into the global pattern of decolonization and the importance of the right to self-determination that grew forth after the Second World War.

¹⁴² Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 1.

¹⁴³ Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 3.

¹⁴⁴ Cited from Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 195.

¹⁴⁵ Cited from Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 196.

¹⁴⁶ Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 198.

Where Guelke looks at the interconnectedness between the sectarian division and the provinces international status, the political scientist Elizabeth Meehan applies the international interpretation from another angle. She looks more closely at the role that the European Economic Community have had on the Irish Question and how this needs to be taken into consideration when researching it. She does this in her articles *'Britain's Irish Question: Britain's European Question'* *British – Irish Relations in the Context of the European Union and the Belfast Agreement* and *Bringing in Europe: The Peace Process and the Europeanisation of the Irish Question*.¹⁴⁷ Meehan clearly knows that there is a larger debate going on about how the Irish Question needs to be understood and the importance of an international interpretation of the Question when conducting her own research. She clearly sees her work as being a part of this debate and situate her own work within the scholarly debate taking place between scholars such as Guelke, Michael Cox and Gillespie.

For instance, she supports Guelke's argument about the fact the Irish Question is by many academics seen as something exceptional even though it clearly is not. An example of this is where she writes "Indeed there has been a tendency on the island of Ireland to think that the Irish Question is both unique and explicable by factors internal to the 'British Isles'"¹⁴⁸ Further she argues that there is indeed a lack of literature dealing with the international dimensions of the Irish Question.¹⁴⁹ She continues to argue that the ideas and values of the European Economic Community had an important influence on how the Irish Question needs to be understood, and that this influences how the different sides of the Question sees and understand it and a possible solution. For instance, Meehan used the theories of functionalism and neofunctionalism to better understand how the work to solve the Question is a delicate balance between hope on one side, and fear on the other.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Meehan, "Bringing in Europe: The Peace Process and the Europeanisation of the Irish Question". Meehan, the same way as Guelke is not a historian, but her research on Ireland and the Troubles is still widely known within the field of the Troubles. Be it as a historian or political scientist.

¹⁴⁸ Cited from Meehan. "'Britain's Irish Question: Britain's European Question?' *British Irish Relations in the Context of European Union and the Belfast Agreement*", 84.

¹⁴⁹ Meehan, "'Britain's Irish Question: Britain's European Question?' *British Irish Relations in the Context of European Union and the Belfast Agreement*", 84.

¹⁵⁰ Meehan, "'Britain's Irish Question: Britain's European Question?' *British Irish Relations in the Context of European Union and the Belfast Agreement*", 93.

Paul Gillespie continues this focus on the importance of the international dimension in his article *Optimism of the intellect, Pessimism of the Will: Ireland, Europe and 1989*.¹⁵¹ Where Meehan focuses on the European Economic Community's influence on the Irish Question Gillespie puts more emphasis on the influence of changes in the international system up until 1989. Gillespie interprets the Irish Question through the international perspective by arguing that the re-shuffling of the international systems as a consequence of the Cold War had a huge influence on the Irish Question as a historical phenomenon. He applies some of the same arguments as Guelke, such as the effect and growth of de-colonisation as a movement taking place around the world. However, in addition he puts some emphasis on the influence of European values and norms during the Cold War, something he has in common with Meehan. He argues that "European norms and values have been essential elements in drawing the conflict out of its immediate fame and reference into a wider one..."¹⁵²

Furthermore, following the same trend as Guelke, Gillespie sees the Irish Question as more manageable and comprehensible when seen as a part of larger international trends, and not as something unique to the British and Irish Isle.¹⁵³ The reason being that the Question, in an international perspective, no longer is a part of the tradition within the discipline of history of exceptionalism. By arguing this, Gillespie is showing one of the weaker points to the internal-conflict interpretation. Namely that scholars applying the internal-conflict interpretation to the Irish Question have a tendency to only look at the endogenous explanations to the Question and sees its history as something special, though similar developments are taking place all over the world, even as close as Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁵⁴

Michael Cox continues this emphasis on the importance of the international dimension in his article "*Bringing in the 'International': The IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War*".¹⁵⁵ Cox sees the lack of attention to the international dimension in research as the Question existing outside world history.¹⁵⁶ This is, however, clearly not the case when taking Guelke, Meehan, Gillespie and Cox research and arguments into account. However, it is important to keep in mind, as Cox argues, that just because it is possible to argue that there are some connections between the Irish Question and changes in the international system, this does not mean that

¹⁵¹ Gillespie, "Optimism of the intellect, Pessimism of the Will: Ireland, Europe and 1989".

¹⁵² Cited from Gillespie, "Optimism of the intellect, Pessimism of the Will: Ireland, Europe and 1989", 164.

¹⁵³ Gillespie, "Optimism of the intellect, Pessimism of the Will: Ireland, Europe and 1989", 164.

¹⁵⁴ Gillespie, "Optimism of the intellect, Pessimism of the Will: Ireland, Europe and 1989", 164.

¹⁵⁵ Cox, "Bringing the 'International': The IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War".

¹⁵⁶ Cox, "Bringing the 'International': The IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War", 676.

these connections are direct. Most of the connections that can be said to exist are of an indirect type and needs to be applied carefully. One of the changes that Cox is referring to is the Cold War, or more specifically the end of the Cold War. He argues that the structural changes taking place in the system as a consequence of the Cold War challenged traditional republican thinking and presented the nationalist with a unique opportunity to end the Troubles in their favour.¹⁵⁷

There is some overlapping between the international interpretation and the traditional nationalist interpretation, for instance Cox does still to some degree see British presence in Northern Ireland as the main reason behind the Question and its many issues. However, were the traditional nationalist interpretation sees it from an internal perspective, being that the British have an economic interest in Northern Ireland, Cox sees the reason of British presence as one of security, as he writes:

*... fear of might happen if Ireland were ever united. The fear was rooted in what republicans saw as Britain's position and role in the Cold War system. For locked as it was into what seemed like a permanent military conflict with Russia, Britain – they believed – stayed on in the North to secure one part of Ireland for NATO and prevention the creation of a united and neutral Ireland outside of the NATO alliance.*¹⁵⁸

By arguing this Cox is showing how the international dimension became increasingly important as the Cold War went on, and that interpreting the Irish Question without putting some emphasis on the international factors would make it more difficult to understand and research the Question. Additionally, he shows how taking the international dimension out of the Questions history does not make sense as it clearly had an influence on the development of it between 1965 and 1998.

Guelke gives a good summary of the mentality behind the international school of thought when he concludes his book *Northern Ireland: The International Perspective*:

The extent of the internationalization of the conflict means that the range of developments capable of exercising a significant influence on the nature of the conflict has been greatly enlarged. In way quite beyond the possibility of

¹⁵⁷ Cox, "Bringing the 'International': The IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War", 676- 677.

¹⁵⁸ Cited from Cox, "Bringing the 'International': The IRA ceasefire and the end of the Cold War", 683.

*prediction, internationalisation may yet benefit Northern Ireland, though at present the role of internationalisation appears to be largely malign. ... Northern Ireland is very far from being isolated from international influences. In particular, external factors have played a central role in the Troubles that began in 1968. To ignore their role is to neglect an essential element of the current conflict.*¹⁵⁹

Not only does it argue that the international system has some influence on the Irish Question, it also shows that the Irish Question and its history is not isolated from international developments and influences and needs to be considered a part of the global history. Furthermore, the quote shows that the number of factors that have had an influence on the Question grows when seeing it as a part of the international system, and through this shows that the factors taken into consideration within the other interpretations is not enough as there are clearly more factors playing in.

Chapter Conclusion:

*The disadvantage of men not knowing the past is that they do not know the present. History is a hill or high point of vantage from which alone men see the town in which they live or the age which they are living. In Northern Ireland Unionists and Nationalists look at history from different heights and see segregated town, and for many of them the past is indistinguishable from the present.*¹⁶⁰

This G. K. Chesterton wrote in *All I Survey*. Though this quote looks at the unionist and nationalist interpretation of the Irish Question, it is applicable to the other three interpretations as well. The traditional nationalist and unionist interpretations were good starting points for how to interpret the Irish Question. However, as the quote insinuates the way history is written is more often than not coloured by the place and time in which men are living. In the case of the traditional nationalist interpretations this can be translated to that it has too much of a focus on the nationalist side of the Question and forgets to take into consideration the unionist view of the Question. On the other hand, in the case of those following the traditional unionist interpretation the same can be argued. Not only do the unionist interpretation do what they accuse the traditional nationalists of doing, they also have a tendency to only go against what

¹⁵⁹ Cited from Guelke, "Northern Ireland: The International Perspective", 206.

¹⁶⁰ Cited from McCaffrey, "The Irish Question: Two Centuries of Conflict", 188.

is being proposed as a solution instead of actually coming up with one themselves. When it comes to scholars applying the British interpretation, they have a tendency to either see the Question as not relevant for British history writing or give the British too much credit for their work towards solving the Question.

These three interpretations have done their job when it comes to making the history of the Irish Question more comprehensible. They have done their job in offering a guide to map out the terrain of the Irish Question and its historiography from a nationalistic perspective. However, as with many if not all maps, new technology is invented and becomes available that gives even better rendering of the terrain trying to be mapped out. In the case of the Irish Question these new technologies consist of paradigm shifts leading to new interpretations that might be better suited to apply to research on the Irish Question and its history. This can be said to have happened with the gradual move from the nationalistic interpretations of the traditional nationalist and unionist interpretation and the British interpretations to the more inclusive internal-conflict interpretations and later the beginning of the international interpretation.

As with the cases of the nationalistic interpretations there are some shortcomings to these new paradigms as well. In the case of the internal-conflict interpretations it has too much of a focus on endogenous explanations to the Irish Question and puts too little emphasis on exogenous explanations. However, though there are some shortcomings the internal-conflict interpretation is better than the three nationalistic interpretations as it tries to take all national perspectives into consideration when analysing the Irish Question.

Where the internal-conflict interpretation fails to take exogenous explanations into account the international interpretation bridges this gap. However, in the case of the international interpretation the problem and shortcomings are that endogenous explanations are given a minimal role. Furthermore, a problem with applying this interpretation is that it is difficult, if not almost impossible, to connect events taking place on an international level to the development of the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998. Additionally, research based on the framework of the international interpretation from a historic point of view is lacking. Most of what has been written with the international framework in mind has been written from a political science or international relations point of view.

As seen above there has been a gradual reassessment of how the Irish Question has and is being interpreted by scholars. New schools of thought are appearing when the older schools of thought are no longer considered to be of any value to the field of research. This question now is how does these interpretations hold up against the Irish Question understood in the context of Brexit? Are these interpretations still valid or is there a need for a new paradigm that takes the event of Britain leaving the European Union into consideration when trying to understand the Irish Question as a modern question?

Chapter 3: The Return of the Question: The Irish Question and Brexit

*To me, Brexit is a threat to the Good Friday Agreement simply because it threatens to drive a wedge between Britain and Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and potentially between the two communities in Northern Ireland.*¹⁶¹

The Irish Question were by many, if not all parties involved, thought solved with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.¹⁶² . Consequently, the Question were for many years considered a phenomenon that moved out of contemporary politics and into the academic circle of disciplines such as history, political science, sociology, and international relations. Nevertheless, the Irish Question was not gone permanently. This quote, taken from the Irish Taoiseach speech of May 2018, shows that the Irish Question though thought solved in 1998 was showing its head again during Brexit, and that Brexit posed a threat to the political peace and stability that the Good Friday Agreement had started in 1998. The Agreement not only symbolized the end of the Troubles but also the beginning of the end for the Irish Question. This time around, it resurfaced in connection with the negotiations following the referendum in the United Kingdom in 2016, focusing on questions concerning what was going to happen with the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, became one of the many things the negotiating parties needed to deal with.

The focus of discussion in this chapter is the Irish Question in the context of Brexit and the negotiations leading up to the United Kingdom leave the European Union on January 31st, 2020. This chapter will be looking into if it is feasible to apply the schools of thought used to understand the Question between 1965 and 1998 to the Irish Question in the context of Brexit.

¹⁶¹ Cited from Guelke, "Northern Ireland, Brexit, and the Interpretation of Self-determination", 395.

¹⁶² Guelke, "Northern Ireland, Brexit, and the Interpretation of Self-determination", 397.

The main question to be answered in this chapter is whether or not it is feasible to apply the analytical framework discussed in chapter two to the Question in a more contemporary understanding, or does this context of the Irish Question strengthen the claim made in chapter two that there is a need for a paradigm shift and new school of thought?

Where research done on the Irish Question during the Troubles contain scholarly texts of a historical nature, this is not the case pertaining research done on the Irish Question in the context of Brexit. The research on the Question during Brexit is for the most part written from the discipline of political science and international relations. This can be attributed to the fact that the Irish Question is once again a large part of the political debate taking place in society and has yet to get out of the contemporary frying pan and into the history books to become a part of the Irish Question's historiographical map.

The schools of thought and Brexit:

In his article *Northern Ireland, Brexit and the Interpretation of Self-Determination* Guelke clearly shows how the international and British school is still feasible when applied to research on the Irish Question in the context of Brexit. In the case of the international school of thought this can be seen through his continued emphasis on the important role of external factors, such as a European Union membership, for the political stability of Northern Ireland and the Good Friday Agreement.¹⁶³ However, where the scholars discussed in chapter two puts emphasis on the positive influences changes in the international system have on the Irish Question in research, Guelke in this article shows how changes in the international system such as the election of President Trump, right wing populism and majoritarian nationalism, poses a threat to the post-Cold War global order and consequently how one needs to see the Irish Question from an international perspective. Instead of applying arguments in line with economic growth and cooperation one needs to apply arguments of what he categorises as "... reminiscent of the imperialist era before the First World War",¹⁶⁴ that have a more protectionist perspective of the international community and its role. Through this moving back towards a more national perspective of the Question.

Through his article Guelke shows that the international school of thought is still applicable to research done on the Irish Question, however, he is also showing that the school of thought and the arguments applied have gone through some changes. In this case, changes in the

¹⁶³ Guelke, "Northern Ireland, Brexit, and the Interpretation of Self-determination", 383.

¹⁶⁴ Cited from Guelke, "Northern Ireland, Brexit, and the Interpretation of Self-determination", 396.

international system from cooperation to a majoritarian nationalism, have had huge consequences for how the Question needs to be researched. This trend is not only the case within the international interpretation but is also the case when it comes to the other schools of thought.

In the case of the British school of thought this change in application can be seen in the argument claiming Britain as the only legitimate sovereign leader over Northern Ireland. This argument changed drastically as a consequence of the Republic of Ireland's growth on the international stage. This growth being the consequence of the Irish Republic gaining international recognition after it became a member of the European Union, legitimising its territorial claim to Northern Ireland. Consequently, this leads to the British sovereign argument being weakened, and ultimately needing to be reasserted as it is no longer the only actor that has an internationally recognized claim to Northern Ireland.¹⁶⁵ This development within the British school of thought, and to some degree the Irish school of thought, can be seen in how Sylvia de Mars et. al. in the book chapter *Navigating the Irish Border* argue that the Irish Republic strengthened their legitimacy argument to Northern Ireland through aligning their arguments of sovereignty during the Brexit negotiations with those of the European Union, ultimately gaining the support of the Union.¹⁶⁶

Opposite to the British school of thought is the Irish school of thought. Where the Irish interpretation during the Troubles were extremely national in its argument it has today developed into also including more international arguments. This being the consequence of adding external factors to the already existing and researched national factors.¹⁶⁷ By mixing arguments from the two schools of thought these scholars are not only strengthening the Irish interpretation, but they are also weakening the British. This through making it harder for those applying the British interpretation to gain legitimacy and feasibility for their arguments which are based on the claim that Britain is the only state with sovereign right to the territory of Northern Ireland.¹⁶⁸

In the same way that it is possible to apply the British interpretation to research done on the Irish Question in the context of Brexit it is also possible to apply the nationalist and unionist interpretation. Nevertheless, as with the British and Irish interpretations the nationalist and

¹⁶⁵ de Mars et al., "Navigating the Irish Border", 20.

¹⁶⁶ de Mars et al., "Navigating the Irish Border", 20.

¹⁶⁷ de Mars et al., "Navigating the Irish Border", 20.

¹⁶⁸ Hayward, "Why is it impossible for Brexit Britain to 'take back control in Northern Ireland'".

unionist interpretation went through some developments from how they were applied to research done during the Troubles to during Brexit or post-Good Friday Agreement. Mainly it was the focus of the interpretations that changed. Scholars applying these schools of thought went from arguing for and against the unification of the Irish Isle to include arguments for and against remaining or leaving the European Union. Consequently, these schools of thoughts can also be seen and argued to be more suitable called ‘remain or leave schools of thought’ when applied to research during Brexit and the Irish Question. The article *Brexit and Westminster’s “Ulster motivation”* written by John Rodden is a good example of how the two nationalist interpretations applied above is still feasible and how they changed.¹⁶⁹ For instance, in his arguments he shows how the focus within the two schools of thought have shifted from focusing on arguments related to identity, religion and culture to focusing on the economic aspects of Brexit and consequently how these economic aspects might influence the Irish Question. Instead of, the economic argument not getting as much attention, as was the case between 1965 and 1998, it is in the context of Brexit, front and centre changing how the Question is seen and understood.¹⁷⁰

What is becoming apparent is that, as with the interpretation of the Irish Question during the Troubles, there is a strong connection between how the Irish Question is being interpreted in scholarly texts and how it is seen and understood in political debates. An example of this can be found in the British interpretation and in British politics. How the British interpretation is applied to the Question depends on to which degree the Question have gotten political space in parliament and more generally in British political life. Guelke’s article is also a good example of this in the case of the international schools of thought as he shows that changes taking place internationally have a huge impact on how scholars will argue when they apply the school of thought to their research on the Irish Question.¹⁷¹

Paul Teague takes the interpretation of the Irish Question in the context of Brexit in another direction. Instead of viewing the Question specifically through the lens of one of the schools of thought already established, he positions his research it in such a way that he looks into how Brexit have influenced the Irish Question. This he does in his article *Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling a Fragile Political Bargain*. However, this does not mean that his research does not take the schools of thought into account. Teague argues

¹⁶⁹ Rodden, “Brexit and Westminster’s “Ulster Motives””.

¹⁷⁰ Rodden, “Brexit and Westminster’s “Ulster Motives””, 322 - 323.

¹⁷¹ Guelke, “Northern Ireland, Brexit, and the Interpretation of Self-determination”, 383.

that there are two different ways of viewing the Question in light of Brexit. The first view is based on the belief that Brexit will and is posing a grievous threat to the Good Friday Agreement and the political stability in Northern Ireland.¹⁷² This view has clear nationalist sympathies in how it views the influence of Brexit on the Irish Question and is clearly influenced by the nationalist school of thought and its way of viewing the Question. Teague's second view argues that the destabilisation argument is being overplayed, if not concocted and is just a ruse by nationalists bent on using Brexit as a way of pushing for Irish Unity.¹⁷³ This argument is clearly influenced by the unionist school of thought and their arguments against Irish unification. Teague's article is also a good example of why the first way of looking at the Question is legitimate, this through the fact that Northern Ireland and the relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland and the European Union did become strained and destabilized as a consequence of Brexit. The reason being that there was a chance for a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, something that would have jeopardised the peace agreement that was built upon the idea of an open border promoting cooperation. This again legitimises the Irish and nationalist school of thought when applied to research on the Irish Question during Brexit. Teague's article also shows that the unionist argument that the danger of destabilization was overplayed is not feasible as Brexit did lead to destabilisation of Northern Ireland.

It is clear that, though the interpretations and schools of thought from chapter two is applicable in this chapter there is a need for a new school of thought, even more so now than when conducting research on the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998. In the case of the Irish Question and Brexit there is not only a need for transnational interpretation, but also a need for a post-Good Friday Agreement interpretation as the Question went through some changes from how it was seen pre-Good Friday Agreement. Furthermore, it is no longer feasible to see the Question as something that belongs strictly to one nation or one region, on the contrary it is important to see the Question as something that touches upon the whole region and to some degree the European continent.

In other words what this chapter shows is that there is a need for a paradigm shift and a new school of thought that is more transnational in its approach to the Irish Question. This need for a transnational interpretation of the Irish Question can be seen in Paul Teague's article *Brexit*,

¹⁷² Teague, "Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling a Fragile Political Bargain", 690.

¹⁷³ Teague, "Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling a Fragile Political Bargain", 690.

the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling Fragile Political Bargain, where he argues that many of the political institutions connected to Northern Ireland and the Irish Question was, after the Good Friday Agreement, of a transnational nature promoting cooperations across the Irish border.¹⁷⁴ Not understanding these new institutions in the light of a larger non-local interpretation would mean losing a deeper understanding of the Irish Question as a political and historical phenomenon. Additionally, academics might miss the influence of important factors that do not fit into the already existing schools of thought. A new school of thought would offer some guidance to map out areas of the Question that has yet to be researched and understood in the larger picture. Lastly, a new transnational school of thought can also offer an understanding of how the schools of thought already existing fit together and influences each other.

Conclusion:

Though the Irish Question is something that many scholars have relegated to history, the newly held election in Northern Ireland and the victory of Sinn Fein are good examples that this is not the case. The Irish Question will continue to show up in contemporary politics until all perspectives are taken into consideration, and an answer that all parties involved can be satisfied with is found. If this solution is the unification of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is something only the future will show. However, what is certain is that how scholars see and understand the Irish Question through their research, no matter interpretation and perspective, is important for how the Irish Question is approached in the future, both in politics and in future academic research. It will be impossible to find a solution to the Question, if it's complicated history is not taken into account and mapped out in such a way that it becomes comprehensible for those studying it.

Firstly, this thesis shows that the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 is a continuation of the Question prior to 1922. Secondly, the five schools of thought analysed in this thesis have shown that the way that the Irish Question was researched between 1965 and 1998 did go through a development as the Troubles evolved into what we know it to be today. Furthermore, there is clearly a running theme to how the Irish Question has been researched before 1965, through the Troubles and into contemporary times. It is clear that contemporary political debates and trends have influenced how the history of the Irish Question has been written, and also how its historiography has been researched and written. This can for instance be seen in

¹⁷⁴ Teague, "Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling a Fragile Political Bargain", 691.

how the nationalist school of thought to a large degree were influenced by political changes happening within the national political debate, such as moving from a hard-line nationalism to one being more inclusive. The same can be said for the unionist school of thought. However, there is also a clear non-political development taking place. Firstly, how the Question is understood develops from being seen in nationalistic perspectives to being understood as an internal-conflict between the two communities within Northern Ireland. Secondly, as it becomes apparent that only looking at internal explanations for the Question and the Troubles were not enough, the international school of thought developed and shifted the focus from internal factors to also include external factors such as changes in the international system because of the Cold War.

Thirdly, this thesis shows that the analytical framework of the schools of thought between 1965 and 1998 is for the most part applicable to research on the Irish Question and the context of Brexit. Nevertheless, these schools of thought have gone through some changes as how the Question is defined today has evolved and changed. Furthermore, the rise of the Question in the context of Brexit additionally shows that there is a need for a new paradigm when interpreting the Question from a scholarly point of view. With the Question no longer being contained to the British and Irish Isles but being a phenomenon concerning the European Union as well, there is a need for a more transnational school of thought and perspective on the Question today. Furthermore, the transnational school of thought is also needed as the political institutions in Northern Ireland in many respects are multinational and needs to be understood as such. Lastly, the transnational school of thought is also needed within the historiography of the Irish Question between 1965 and 1998 as its history is not only the history of one nation, but of several nations and their connection to each other.

What is clear is that Whyte was right in his conclusion when he wrote “As time moves on, so new ideas may emerge or the balance of forces may shift, and an analysis written at the end of the 1908s may not reach quite the same conclusion as one written a few years earlier.”¹⁷⁵ The world is ever changing and so how scholars interpret events taking place in the world needs to change as more information becomes available and new understandings of patterns come into light. In the case of the Irish Question this is important in order to work towards understanding the Question and in the future finding a suitable and sustainable answer to its many issues.

¹⁷⁵ Whyte, “Interpreting Northern Ireland”, 209.

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