

# **The Organic Crisis of Neoliberalism:**

The Case of Northern Ireland and Scotland

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## **Abstract**

This study strives to understand the currently undergoing neoliberal hegemonic struggle in British politics, through the perspectives of Northern Ireland and Scotland, and to what extent this struggle proposes a threat for the current structure of the United Kingdom. It concludes through analysing the hegemonic struggle in the UK, and by using Fairclough's theories of CDA and CPA, that in both cases there are a number of circumstances that differentiates them. The study concludes that Irish reunification would be more feasible, as they would join an already established, well-functioning country. However, due to the clash between the implementation of austerity by Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland and the anti-austerity politics, which have made Sinn Fein popular in southern Ireland, the party has been forced to refocus their electoral strategy in order to deflect attention from critique. Thus, the party's political strategy, especially in the North, is now focussed mainly on Irish reunification in regard to an anti-Brexit and pro-EU agenda. The study concludes that the situation in Scotland regarding secession is a different matter, as a go-ahead by the British government on a second Scottish independence referendum is not likely to see the light of day. The question of Scottish independence is furthermore normative and is not based on any material argument, such as the case with Northern Ireland.

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## Introduction

In recent times, the United Kingdom has seen itself in a crisis. This crisis has taken many forms such as in an economic and political sense, among others. Following the 1973-1975 economic recession, the UK found itself deregulating and privatising aspects of the British society. These actions by the Margaret Thatcher government saw itself failing by the start of the second millennium. Michael Moran argues that the most obvious failure lay in the attempt to create a financial sector which would be the motor of employment and the source of tax revenues to support public services (Moran, 2017, p. 71). The moment at which the Thatcher government's strategy failed, it was amid the *organic crisis* of post-Cold War global capitalism. This organic crisis has led to multiple unresolved crises in the world order, because of over three decades of neoliberal governance. An example of one of these unresolved crises includes the 2008 global financial crisis (Stewart, 2022, pp. 28-29). Something which the UK was not prepared for, with an economic strategy which fell short right around the same time as the arrival of the financial crisis. This study will be structured around this exact term, the *organic crisis*, which is a Gramscian way to describe a crisis which is not immediate, conjunctural, or short term, but rather a slow-moving, structural, and long-term crisis that the neoliberal governance of the Western-led world finds itself in today. Another example of an unresolved crisis is Brexit, a crisis which has seen itself shatter the political landscape of the UK to pieces.

Within International Relations, Gramsci-inspired scholars who reject philosophical and ontological state-centrism and analyse the ideological, material, and transnational class dimensions of global governance can approach the world contesting the neoliberal hegemony. This notion of hegemony will be explored within the British society, through neoliberal governance that exist within Northern Irish, Scottish, and the overall British societies. The opinions within the regional societies have taken a vastly different form from the greater society, as evident by the electorate. The notion of social transformation will be explored in the sense that we as people will undergo a transformation based on our perception of the multifaceted breakdown of society, through cultural, political, economic, and ideological components, and therefore will subscribe to more progressive ideologies (Stewart, 2022, p. 28). A similar breakdown is currently undergoing within the British society, as there has been a tremendous shift within political distribution of the Assembly of Northern Ireland and the Scottish

Parliament, Holyrood. These shifts in political paradigms are indications of a bubbling dissent, which these two regions find themselves slowly capturing, as the gap between the regions and the England is rapidly expanding.

Due to the complex nature of British politics, including all that comes with it in the sense of culture, economics, ideology, among other aspects, **this study strives to understand the currently undergoing neoliberal hegemonic struggle in British politics, through the perspectives of Northern Ireland and Scotland, and to what extent this struggle proposes a threat for the current structure of the United Kingdom.** It will seek to answer the following question: Have crisis events, and their following recessions, such as Brexit, COVID-19, and the War in Ukraine, weakened the trust from the regions of Northern Ireland and Scotland to the Conservative governments that have reigned in the Palace of Westminster since the election of David Cameron?

## Methodology

The study is designed based on a Gramscian framework regarding Gramsci's theory of hegemony. The theory of hegemony will be applied to the case that is currently undergoing within the UK to understand and comprehend the struggles which are tied to the organic crisis that the neoliberal governance of the West is currently amid.

This study is conducted through a desk-based research design with the use of both quantitative data, in the forms of statistics, and qualitative data, in the form of peer-reviewed literature. The literature is a mixture of statistics which reference the political sentiments, speeches by respective political leaders, and already conducted research that allow for a confirmation of new analytical findings, which will undergo an abductive approach.

The analysis includes a speech regarding Scottish independence by, at the time, British PM David Cameron. This speech has since then been transcribed and published by the public sector information website GOV.UK. The transcription of this speech is a *transcript of the speech, exactly as it was delivered* (Government Digital Service, 2014). Two further speeches from Cameron during his reign as PM will be included in the analysis to understand how the hegemon of the United Kingdom acted during Brexit. The first of these two speeches took place prior to the Brexit referendum, and the second is

after the outcome was decided upon. Similarly, to the Cameron speech regarding Scottish Independence, these two have also been sourced from GOV.UK. The speech which occurred prior to the Brexit referendum is the original script for the actual speech that took place, so therefore, some aspects of it may not be as delivered. Whereas the other one is transcribed as how the speech was delivered.

The study is not only concerned with the question of Scottish Independence but also the possibility of Northern Ireland reuniting with Ireland. Some limitations have been made in relation to the data collection, in the sense that there has been no speech regarding Irish Reunification from the British side as crucial as the speech Cameron delivered regarding the Scottish referendum. Thus, the part of the study concerning the British stance on Irish reunification and Scottish independence will be based upon Cameron's speech which initially only relates to Scottish Independence. The ideological notions unravelled in this speech will be applied to both cases. One of the reasonings behind this can be found in the discourse on the Scottish independence referendum. Cameron often refers to the UK as a whole and makes it noticeably clear that there is a strength in cooperation, something which then implicitly also applies itself to Northern Ireland and their future.

In the section analysing the foundation of Scottish independence, selections from a speech by Nicola Sturgeon regarding her Proposal of a 2023 Independence Referendum will be used, as well as comments from the current First Minister of Scotland, Humza Yousaf. The speech by Sturgeon is published by the official website of the Scottish National Party and has also been sourced through their website. Further official communication from the SNP and their politicians have also been included, to back up the party's policies as portrayed by Sturgeon.

Regarding the question of Irish reunification, a speech by Mary Lou McDonald, President of Sinn Féin, has been sourced through the official publication from the political party's own website. Similarly, to the case of Sturgeon, further official communication from the party will back up the claims made by McDonald to fully access the complete spectrum of the party's policies.

These speeches have been analysed to draw parallels between the respective actors that are involved in the case of Irish reunification and Scottish succession. The product, which these speeches allow for the circulation of, will be tied to the Gramscian

term of passive revolution, a term which in the case of this study is meant to reflect the strategic pursuit of overcoming certain neoliberal struggles through the adoption of demands which is expressed from the base of society.

Since the organic crisis is currently ongoing, the abductive nature of the research could very well change as the situation evolves with time. Further limitations, though, lies in the fact that we, as authors of this study have only ever experienced neoliberal governance throughout our lifetimes. Therefore, a bias for this exact system may also be experienced, and a lack of understanding how this neoliberal governance could be challenged can furthermore exist within the research.

## **Theoretical Approaches**

### **Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Policy Studies**

Prior to Norman Fairclough publishing the distinctive feature of *Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Policy Studies*, the two primary approaches to critical policy studies were derived from Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Cultural Political Economy (CPE) (Fairclough, 2013, p. 177). However, with Fairclough's impressive background in the connection between language use and unequal relations of power, particularly in modern Britain (Fairclough, 1989, p. 1), he offers a varied approach to critical policy studies with a focus on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a *problem-driven* approach which connects itself to the nature of Problem Based Learning (Fairclough, 2013, p. 185), which is also one of the key reasonings for CDA to be the chosen discursive theory.

How does Fairclough's approach differ and why is it the most suitable approach in the context of Scottish and Northern Irish grievances? The PDA approach by David Howarth is intricately connected to the "radical contingency and structural undecidability of discursive structures. Due to this, the argument is that every discursive structure is dislocated and therefore and underlying presumption of inconsistencies or tensions exist within every policy regime or practice" (Howarth, 2010, p. 312). This is connected to the primary crucial question of the PDA approach, which attempts to understand the way which social actors respond to the "radical contingency and undecidability of social relations" (Howarth, 2010, p. 313). To answer this question, it is

important for the PDA approach to establish the relational accounts of social forms which are seen through actors such as the state, the economy, and even governance networks. The establishment of these relational accounts, the concept of antagonism plays a crucial role in the limits of a practice or regime of practices. Antagonism establishes a presence of an 'Other' which blocks the identity of a subject, this establishment involves the drawing of boundaries and the creation of political frontiers, something which enables the constitutions of blocs and regimes (Howarth, 2010, p. 313). The PDA approach is according to Howarth closely tied to the role of power, which Michel Foucault has done immense research in relation to. This research especially stresses the role of power and conflict in forging identities, rules, and social forms, something which is important to Howarth's approach. Furthermore, Howarth ties the PDA emphasis regarding social structures that involves an exercise of power to the Foucauldian ideology that any struggle designed to modify existing social relations and to institute a new system of domination encounters resistance from the previously established power relations (Howarth, 2010, pp. 315-317). Another key aspect which Howarth presents is the idea of hegemonic practices. He categorises hegemonic practices into two intricately connected groupings. The first of these categories surrounds hegemony as a type of political practice that captures the making and breaking of political coalitions. The second regards hegemony as a form of rule that elucidate the way in which a regime's practice or policy holds sway over a set of subjects by winning their consent or securing their compliance (Howarth, 2010, p. 317). As Howarth furtherly establishes that hegemony is a political practice that involves coalitions that contest a particular form of rule, practice, or policy. It is thus a type of political relation that creates equivalences between disparate elements that divide social relations (Howarth, 2010, p. 318).

While Bob Jessop's approach to Critical Policy Studies centres itself around economics, he argues that it can still be applied elsewhere by combining the proposed semiotic analysis with concepts appropriate to other social forms and institutional dynamics (Jessop, 2010, p. 337). While there certainly are economic ties to the national grievances of Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are certainly also aspects that ascend beyond solely economics. The first step of the CPE approach is to acknowledge the complex nature of discourse, and because of this acknowledgement, it strives to break down complexity through the mechanism of semiosis, which is the intersubjective



production of meaning (Jessop, 2010, p. 337). Another means of complexity reduction which CPE offers is the emergent pattern of social interactions. These two forms of complexity reduction combined offers a means to transform meaningless and unstructured complexity into meaningful and structured complexity. This results in structuration of the social interactions, as they now become meaningful as opposed to their former state of being (Jessop, 2010, p. 338). These notions end up being important for the social construal and social construction, which is a key component to this approach. Due to the possibility of infinite construal variations, it is important to explore how their selection and retention are shaped by both non-semiotic as well as semiotic factors. Jessop argues that even though every single social practice is semiotic, it is not reducible to solely being semiotic. These notions are also interrelated with technology, which plays a key role in the selection and retention of specific imaginaries and the coordination of actions within and across specific personal interactions, organisations, networks, and institutional orders (Jessop, 2010, pp. 338-339). Another of the key features of the CPE approach is its integration of mechanisms of variation, selection, and retention into semiotic analysis. This integration is also referred to as including the role of extra-semiotic and semiotic factors in the contingent emergence, subsequent privileging, and ongoing realisation of specific discursive practices. What this means is that CPE wants to shift the idea of individual texts being analysed semiotic, and instead be analysed with a concern with both the semiotic and extra-semiotic to understand the relation between the mechanisms and their affect(s) on the discourse (Jessop, 2010, p. 340).

As the approaches of CPE and PDA have now been established, it is important to note that Fairclough argues that CDA, CPE, and PDA all include the aspects of political, political-economic, and more generally social events, processes and changes involving semiosis in combination or articulation with objects, actions, agents, practices, and structures. The differing aspect that CDA offers opposed to CPE and PDA is that CDA openly questions the ways in which the discursive turn is taken in CPE and PDA (Fairclough, 2013, p. 181). One of the areas where CDA differs from CPE and PDA is that it conducts social analysis with a particular focus on discourse and the relations between discourse and other social elements such as power, ideologies, institutions, social identities, etc. It is furthermore normative and an explanatory critique. It seeks to explain the existing realities besides simply describing them. The way which it explains

these realities is through showing effects of structures, mechanisms, or forces which the analyst postulates depending on a subject's reality. These effects of structures, mechanisms, and forces are linked to ideas of inequalities in wealth, income, and access regarding various social goods, which might be an effect of mechanisms which have been forced through by a political hegemony for instance. Another instance where CDA heavily differs from the two other approaches is in the sense that it openly questions the belief of how the discursive turn is taken. (Fairclough, 2013, pp. 178, 181).

To define what a text is, Fairclough has called it a product of the process of text production, a process which he then referred to as discourse. While that has been said, it is also important to note that discourse is not solely text-based communication and processes, it also spans beyond simply texts. However, for the case of the devolution acts during Blair's reign, the project will solely focus on the acts which his government passed, and not look at outlying discourse. Because of these processes, there is also a dependency on social conditions that contextualises these said processes. These conditions are known as the social condition of production as well as the social condition of interpretation. Furthermore, these conditions are tied to the interactions which people have with texts, something that is connected with the phenomenon *membership resources* (MR), something which is very urgent for CDA. This essentially means that there are three dimensions of the discourse. These three being the context, the interaction, and the text itself. Similarly, to how these three dimensions are tied to a text, there are also three dimensions of CDA. In this case, the three dimensions are description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 24-27).

When it is referred to that power is not embedded in institutions themselves, Fairclough argues that the power belongs to the powerholders within these said institutions. An example of this in relation to the devolution of the United Kingdom is that it would be unconceivable for Thatcher to have devolutionised, however, it was within the realm of Blair's political ideology (Fairclough, 1989, p. 61). When these institutions then employ a discursive appearance of neutrality, it is known as naturalisation, something which is inherently ideological. This is since ideology works through disguising its nature, pretending to be what it is not (Fairclough, 1989, p. 92). Continuing with the importance of ideology and meaning, it is also important to note the practice of establishing the common sensical. The reason this is an important aspect is because the dictionary has gained an authority over many words, and therefore it establishes a

mirage that words have fixed meanings. However, as evident by social dialects, as well as ideologically driven discourse, the fixed meanings which words are traditionally seen to have, then becomes blurred when peoples employ different meanings to things, due to a difference in common sensical background (Fairclough, 1989, pp. 93-94).

Finally, returning to the conversation regarding the MR. MR refers to elements that are left over in the discourse in the form of traces and cues. These traces and cues are similarly to the common sensical background, resources that are already within the interpreter's mental frame. These resources are made up of knowledge, language, representations, values, beliefs, and assumptions. These resources may end up affecting a textual product to suddenly vary in meaning, even though the production is equal for everyone. That is because the interpretation is not equal for everyone, due to differing quantities of MR (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24).

### **Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony:**

The traditional theory of hegemony can be seen as the process by which the ruling class disseminate their ideas and gain the consent of the lower classes (Bates, 1975). Meaning, the working-class consent to being ruled by the ruling class, and hegemony is the process at which this takes place. During his time, Antonio Gramsci saw a need for organic intellectuals among the proletariat for them to become a hegemonic class. Organic intellectuals being characterised as "directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they originally belong (Gramsci, 1971). An organic intellectual is, thus, a person within a class who has an elevated understanding of his class but is also able to understand the world outside his own class. Gramsci wrote several notebooks during his time in prison, *the Prison Notebooks*, which would come to reflect his political engagements as a member of the Socialist Party. His ideas of hegemony were built upon Marxist ideas of social class and Marx's Grundrisse, where the latter elaborates the concept of capitalist rule as composed of the "base", the economy, and his writings came as part of a critique of the deterministic economist interpretation of history (Valeriano Ramos, 1982).

Gramsci noted, firstly, how the bourgeoisie of Europe ruled with the consent of the subordinate masses. It was by protecting and promoting some of the interests of the subaltern classes that the bourgeoisie became hegemonic. Gramsci noted this as the

reason for the unsuccessful revolutions in Germany, Italy, and Hungary, contrary to the revolution in Russia, was due to the fact that Western states were ruling by the consent of the ruled, and not just through coercion as was the case in the former Russian Empire (Gramsci, 1999a, p. 145). The capitalist class convinced subaltern working classes, i.e., through nationalism, of common interests, which would leave the working class consenting to the rule of the capitalist class. The incentive for the proletariat was then to become known to the ideologies which were ruling them, overcome the leadership, and become hegemonic itself. Regarding economics, Gramsci talked about how *important nations* tend to provide an organised economic underpinning to its own political hegemony over nations subordinate to it. Gramsci also made a connection between the political and economic aspects, and how they are intertwined:

“Regional political agreements could become regional economic agreements, as a result of which the "agreed upon" levels of imports and exports would no longer take place between only two states but among a group of states, eliminating many very evident and not inconsiderable inconveniences” (Gramsci, 1975, pp. 350-351).

Within the regional political agreements of Europe, the one of most importance is unarguably the EU. The nature of the EU is embedded in the same ideology which is the root cause for the organic crisis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Western nations have naturally subscribed to the hegemony of the neoliberal governance in the post-Cold War era. Gramsci stated that this would result in a structural system, which would be more mindful of politics than of economics, as finished goods would take priority over heavy industry, something which there is no doubt about is the case within the EU and UK (Gramsci, 1975, p. 351). In the case of Northern Ireland and Scotland, this notion of politics being more important than economics also has a strong role. As there is a greater disconnect from the two regions to the general British politics and economics, as evident by their respective regional governments, there is a threat to the British hegemony in the sense that in order to prosper and thrive, actors within the two regions have gained support for their causes through campaigning and opting for changes in the neoliberal governance within British society.

Furthermore, Gramsci also regards how the ruling class in society establishes a trade with the working class offering them political privileges in exchange for the establishment of a monopoly.

“This caste [of working class] had seen the monopoly of the social role that explained and justified its existence – the monopoly over culture and education [...] the concordat recognises this monopoly afresh [...] since it ensures that the caste has preliminary positions and conditions which it could not have and maintain solely through its own strength” (Gramsci, 1999b, p. 179)

This exchange works based on the notion that the subaltern group are consenting to an ideology through what has been presented to them. These exchanges that the working class are accepting can also draw a further parallel to the situation in the UK. As Northern Ireland and Scotland are subjects of the UK, they are also embedded into the welfare systems which the UK employs. Northern Ireland and Scotland does not have the right to simply overturn the British monopoly, as they have been granted some political privileges through their existence within the UK.

Turning towards the cultural aspects, especially based upon the notion of a cultural monopoly, Gramsci noted that culture is a form of good sense, a conception of the world with an ethic that conforms to its structure, a rationality that comes to be accepted by the many, permanently (Gramsci, 1999a, p. 660). Following up on this, it is also important to note how cultures differ from one another, and Gramsci had the following to say regarding this difference:

“As two [actors] who owe their cultural formation to the same background, think they are upholding different ‘truths’ just because they employ a different scientific language [...] so too two national cultures, the expressions of fundamentally similar civilisations, think that they too are different, antagonistic, one opposed to the other, one superior to the other because they use languages that come from different traditions, formed through activities characteristic of and particular to each” (Gramsci, 1999b, p. 453).

Establishing this towards the British society, there are several aspects that are important in order to understanding these cultural differences between the regions. Starting out with Northern Ireland, there is first and foremost the Irish aspect. Great Britain and Northern Ireland is the official name of the country, and the name clearly distinguishes between the Irish and the British. Another distinguishment between the British and the Irish is the colonial implications which are also tied to Northern Ireland. British culture has imperialised Irish culture, something that parallels Gramsci's comment regarding superiority. Another cultural aspect which encapsulates both Scotland and Northern Ireland is the Celtic Culture, something which is also very different from the English. However, the Welsh, which also fall under the Celtic category, seems to find a greater balance tackling those cultural differences, compared to the Northern Irish and Scottish.

The way in which hegemony takes place can thus be through the process where the ruled adopts a certain ideology, which is presented to them through what would seem to align with their interests. It can be passed on to be pleasant sounding ideas, which can be vague in description, or more direct ideas tied to an ideology that the ruled adopt into their belief system. The way in which a person come to consent to the hegemon can be based on his frame of reference, and hegemony can therefore be understood as a form of social control. Now, a person adopting these ideas into their belief system will act according to the rules of said ideas. Meaning their ideas are not their own, but rather ideas presented to them, and to which said person consent to the validity of said ideas. We, as people, do this every day. These actions can be every-day engagements or traditions that we consider to be true or the right way of doing things.

“The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world;

and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed” (Gramsci, 1999a, p. 641).

Contradictory consciousness, as Gramsci called it, is the notion that individuals can be torn between different contradictory ideologies, unconsciously. It is through activity, and how a person’s actions might not reflect his ideology.

“Everyone is a philosopher, though in his own way and unconsciously, since even in the slightest manifestation of any intellectual activity whatever, in *language*, there is contained a specific conception of the world, one then moves on to the second level, which is that of awareness and criticism” (Gramsci, 1999a, p. 626).

As ideologies can be instruments of domination, they should be exposed to the ruled as a way for them to become aware of what they are consenting to. This is where the philosopher in people should become aware and intellectually independent. Now, Gramsci does not think we should weigh the merit of these particular actions in and of themselves necessarily, but rather consider how these ideas got put in our head in the first place (Gramsci, 1999b, p. 548), and then become intellectually independent. We did not ourselves make up our ideologies by ourselves, but rather, those concepts were ideas presented to us that we chose to adopt into our belief system. These are behaviours and actions which are controlled by ideas presented to us. So, by controlling a person’s loyalty (to a certain ideology), one can attain power. The key to power is controlling people through a narrative, which they willingly consent to. This, furthermore, links to the idea that the identity, which an individual adopts, is constructed out of symbols that the individual did not create. This is the process in which hegemony can take place. By, for example, teaching a group of people to hate the word communist, and then labelling a group of people as *communistic*, then the first group will develop a distain to the other group by the association of the word communist, regardless of factuality.

The term hegemon is understood as an actor who exercises hegemonic power, meaning a country can be a hegemon if they possess hegemonic power. According to

Gramsci, only weak states would come, very often, to rely on the threat or use of coercive power, whereas strong states rule almost exclusively through hegemonic power (Adamson, 1980). This is evident through the three phases of neoliberalism, which includes various regimes, that employ power in strong Western states, which will be applied to the UK (Davidson, 2017). The term hegemon is understood as an actor who exercises hegemonic power, meaning a country can be a hegemon if they possess hegemonic power. According to Gramsci, only weak states would come, very often, to rely on the threat or use of coercive power, whereas strong states rule almost exclusively through hegemonic power (Adamson, 1980). This is evident through the three phases of neoliberalism, which includes various regimes, that employ power in strong Western states, which will be applied to the UK (Davidson, 2017).

When it comes to gathering consent in the society, Gramsci referred to *passive revolution*, which is a term that describes the reorganization of social relations while simultaneously neutralizing the popular initiatives, so that the reorganization does not affect the domination of the ruling class (Hesketh, 2017, pp. 398-399). To put it into Gramsci's own words:

“The ideological hypothesis could be presented in the following terms: that there is a passive revolution involved in the fact that—through the legislative intervention of the State, and by means of the corporative organisation—relatively far-reaching modifications are being introduced into the country's economic structure in order to accentuate the “plan of production” element; in other words, that socialisation and co-operation in the sphere of production are being increased, without however touching (or at least not going beyond the regulation and control of) individual and group appropriation of profit [...] What is important from the political and ideological point of view is that it is capable of creating— and indeed does create—a period of expectation and hope” (Gramsci, 1999a, p. 310)

Through the intervention of the state in mildly reorganising social relations, by way of cooperating with the working class, it establishes a period which the working class is content within, as this period is affected by expectation and hope. While people are free



to work within the *plan of production*, they become part of a class which receives some benefits of what the current system offers, which is enough for the ruling class (or the state) to maintain their dominance over the working class.

## **Historical Contextualisation**

### **Scotland**

Following the death of Mary, Queen of Scots, her son, James the first, inherited both the English and the Scottish crown, as Elizabeth the first did not have any children (Castelow, u.d.). King James the first united England and Scotland under one Crown, though Scotland was still independent. Scotland was independent until the Acts of Union, which was signed in 1707, and it described the conditions for the creation of the United Kingdom. From this act until the change in 1999, Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, would be “Represented by one and the same Parliament to be stiled the Parliament of Great Britain” (Act of Union, Section III). Under the Act of Union, all former laws in Scotland, which were not related to personal rights, would be abolished, and the laws would be the same as they were in England. Essentially, Scotland lost its independence to the English, and would not until 1999 have its own Parliament. Donald Dewar said at the opening of the Scottish Parliament 1 July 1999: “Today, we reach back through the long haul to win this Parliament, through the struggles of those who brought democracy to Scotland, to that other Parliament dissolved in controversy nearly three centuries ago (Scottish Parliament, 1999)”. A celebratory day for Scotland, and one which had been long awaited by Scottish leaders. Looking back to 1707, it is undoubtedly seen as a Scottish defeat, though this defeat may be somewhat interpreted.

Prior to the Acts of Union, Scottish leaders and businessmen had witnessed many European countries having great success in establishing colonies around the world, and Scotland was tempted by the success of these other countries. Having been plagued with increased illness and famine, the Scottish made decision to try as a colonial power (Johnson, n.d.). At this time, King William the third of England was king of both England and Scotland, and he saw it as a problem if Scotland became a colonial power, which meant that the new Scottish Company, founded by William Paterson, could not be funded by the crown. He then went on to seek out funding from the Scottish

public and succeeded in raising £500,000 which were to fund the new company (Johnson, n.d.). Though the Scottish attempt to colonise the Darien jungle of modern-day Panama went horribly wrong from their first attempt in 1698. A few years later, following the failure of the Darien Scheme, suffering the loss of thousands of Scots and all accumulated investment (Johnson, n.d.), the Scottish leaders at the time approved the Acts of Union. In exchange for Scottish independence, Scotland would now have free access to the English plantations, as stated in the Act: “That all the Subjects of the United Kingdom of Great Britain shall from and after the Union have full Freedom and Intercourse of Trade and Navigation to and from any port or place within the said United Kingdom and the Dominions and Plantations thereinto belonging” (Act of Union, Section IV). The Act included a payment to Scottish investors which was almost the exact amount which was lost in the colonisation campaign (Johnson, n.d.). This is an interesting part of Scottish history, as it officially marks the end to Scottish independence, but also resulted in great profit from the access to the English plantations. This led to Scottish planters accumulating astounding wealth by entering the slave trade (National Records of Scotland, n.d.). The pressure of famine and illness may have affected the decision-making process at the time, though Scotland signed its independence in 1707.

As aforementioned, almost 300 years post the Act of Union was signed, the Scottish Parliament reconvened in 1999. This came as a result from two referendums in 1979 and 1979, and Scotland was now granted certain powers of increased self-governance. In 2014, the Scottish were granted an independence referendum, which was granted by the British Government by enacting section 30 of the Scotland Act. The referendum was made to decide whether Scotland should remain in the UK or become an independent nation. The vote saw 45% of people vote Yes to Scottish independence, and 55% voted No. Theoretically, Scotland could hold another referendum without permission of Westminster, a *de facto* referendum, to use the results of the election against the British government, to be able to force a go-ahead of another referendum (Quinn, 2022). This, however, might not be advisable, as it might bring not help the relations between Westminster and Scotland. If the Scottish people were granted another referendum, however, it is difficult to predict what the outcome of such a vote would bring. This would depend on varied factors within the process by which the next possible referendum is held.

The history of Scotland also carries some scars of English oppression. An example of this is the Highland Clearances, which took place around 1746 to 1850 and was an initiative to try and destroy traditional Scottish clan society with a ban on traditional clothing, language, and forced evictions (Britannica, 2023). Though this instance of oppression is such a long time ago, using it as the main reason to secede would make the argument scant.

The way in which the history of Scotland is understood by the Scottish themselves, is a portrait of bravery. It is tied to the notion that the Scottish people have proudly and fiercely fought against the English and other foreign invaders, and this fierceness has been deeply ingrained in the Scottish identity. Deeply rooted in mystical folk law and tales of battles with great Scottish warriors, this idea of a warrior-like spirit which can never be tamed, and highlands which have hardened this Scottish spirit (Brand Scotland Contributor, 2015). This notion can be traced back to the Roman Invasion, where the southern part of Britain was conquered by the Romans, though they were never able to conquer Scotland. Hadrian's wall is a testament of this Scottish bravery, as it still stands today, and represents the strength of the Scottish people (Breeze, 2023).

## **Northern Ireland**

The roots of English presence in Ireland goes back to the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in the late 12th century. Since then, English supremacy has come to mark Irish political and cultural history and has been the root of conflict for centuries.

The resistance in Ireland against the English kingship took off during the reign of King Henry the eighth. In 1534, Henry the eighth established the Church of England after his split from the Roman Catholic Church, and he thereby paved the way for a protestant England. In Ireland, the Roman Catholic religion was ubiquitous, and soon resistance exacerbated towards the abolishment of the Roman Catholic Church. The protestant English kingship in Ireland was threatened by a revolt in 1534 led by Lord Offaly of the Kildare heir, the most influential Irish Lordship, however, the English king demonstrated his supremacy when the revolt failed. Elizabeth the first, daughter of Henry the eighth, confiscated land owned by Irishmen in Munster and Ulster in Ireland and gave the land to English, Scottish and Welsh colonists. These circumstances mark the colonial aspect of the English presence in Ireland, when Irish people were deprived of their religion and

their home to make room for foreigners (Sky History, n.d.). In the 1650s, in the aftermath of the Second English Civil War that culminated in the execution of King Charles the first, the English military leader Oliver Cromwell led the mission in Ireland that were to gain control over the security situation in the country. In this regard, the Irish Catholic population were seen as a security threat to the newly established English commonwealth, thus thousands of English parliamentary soldiers were sent to Ireland (Stevenson, 2003, p. 183). Ireland's demographics changed during this period, when English protestant communities emerged across the country and challenged the livelihood of the Roman Catholic Irish inhabitants. Protestant supremacy in Ireland was ensured by the outcome of the Battle of the Boyne, which took place in 1690, when the deposed Catholic King James the second was defeated fighting against the English King William the third. Many Catholics had supported King James, but when he lost the battle, the slight hope of having a Catholic king and putting an end to the discrimination of the Catholic people died out. With the Penal Laws of 1695, the freedom of the Catholic population was severely restricted (Sunderland, 2018). Irish nationalism saw its beginning with the reform movement of patriots. This movement held a resistance against the repression of Catholics in Ireland and wished to be represented in the parliament alongside the protestant parliamentarians. Eventually, the pressure from these nationalist movements became too big of an issue for the English parliament to ignore, and the Penal Laws were relaxed (Sky History, n.d.).

In 1801, the United Kingdom, as we know it today, was created. This happened after a rebellion once again had broken out in Ireland in 1798. When the rebellion eventually failed, the Irish parliament was abolished. Ireland and England were thereby made into one state, and the Irish Church and the English Church were united. The Catholic association was created as a response to the establishment of the Union. It was a national movement fighting for Catholic emancipation. Northern Ireland, or Ulster, was in this regard pointed out as a central piece in the debate for the first time. Around 2 million Irish people died or migrated due to the potato famine in the 1840s. The British government handle the crisis badly and this led to an even greater desire for an autonomous Ireland (Sky History, n.d.). Around 1870, Isaac Butt, who was a member of the British parliament for Harwich and Youghal, founded the Irish nationalist party that would later become the Home Rule League or Party. The political party was campaigning for home rule for Ireland and had great success in re-establishing rights that had

previously been taken away from Irishmen. Among other things, the party pushed the British Prime Minister William Gladstone to introduce a bill that enlarged the freedoms of Irish landowners (UK Parliament, n.d., a).

The Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Sinn Fein political party, and other association communities were founded with the purpose of establishing grounds for an independent Ireland. However, especially the protestant Northern Ireland (Ulster) did not favour an independent Ireland but wanted to continue being a part of Great Britain. In 1916, nationalists led an uprising against English rule at a time when England was distracted due to the First World War; this uprising was called the Easter Rising. The Easter Rising was a rebellion led by Irish nationalists. On Easter morning, they proclaimed Ireland as an independent republic, when reading out loud the so-called Easter Proclamation. The public did, however, not show radical support to the rebel group and their new proclaimed Irish government, and the rebellion eventually failed when crushed by government forces (History.com editors, 2019). Though the rebellion failed, support for the nationalist groups was maintained and especially the popularity of Sinn Fein rose. After the rebellion, the fight for an independent Ireland was unified under one leadership. The Dail Eireann, which is the Irish assembly, was formed in the aftermath of the first election after the Great War. 73 candidates of the Sinn Fein political party were elected, however, they denied going to Westminster and therefore created their own assembly on Irish grounds (Sky History). With the Ireland Act of 1921, Ireland was divided into a northern part and a southern part. The northern part constituted six protestant counties of Ulster, whereas the southern part was made up by the remaining 26 counties of Ireland. The South was given domino status, which gave them some level of self-governance, and it was not until the Constitution of Ireland was ratified in 1937 that the southern part of Ireland was given full independence (Sky History, n.d.).

“The Troubles” is a period in Northern Ireland referring to the unrest that was especially present in the 30-year span between the 1960s and the 1990s. In Northern Ireland, tensions rose after the independence of Ireland (the southern counties), when the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland felt discriminated, while wishing for Northern Ireland to be unified with Ireland. Throughout the 1960s, violence erupted, and it continuously exacerbated up until January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1972, when British troops wounded and killed 30 Catholic nationalist protestors. This event is known as “Bloody Sunday” (Ross, 2021). The Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 was an attempt to establish peace in

Northern Ireland by introducing a power-sharing executive. It went into force in January 1974, however, protests against the agreement soon emerged. At the election in February 1974, 11 out of the 12 parliamentary seats in Northern Ireland were won by the anti-Sunningdale agreement coalition of the United Ulster Unionist Council, and not long after, the Ulster Workers Council went on strike to show their reluctance towards the power-sharing executive (UK Parliament, n.d., b). During the strike, several bombs exploded in the Irish counties of Dublin and Monaghan, and 32 people died. The Ulster Volunteer Force, which is a still active paramilitary loyalist group in Northern Ireland, was reportedly responsible for the bombings (Sky History, n.d.). On May 28, 1974, both the executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed, and for the next 25 years, Northern Ireland came under direct rule from Westminster (UK Parliament, n.d., b).

Several attempts to establish peace through political initiatives have been made throughout the years, however, none of them have succeeded. IRA prisoners had for years enjoyed special treatment in that they for example were allowed to wear their own clothes. However, in 1976, prime minister Harold Wilson abolished this special status that had been given to IRA prisoners. This soon sparked protests among the inmates, who among many things showed their dissatisfaction through hunger strikes. Margaret Thatcher, who was prime minister during the hunger strikes, refused to concede, and many of the prisoners died due to starvation. In 1984, IRA bombed the hotel where the Conservative Party was holding their annual conference. Margaret Thatcher, who was the leader of the party, survived the attack, however, five other party members were killed. In between, several of the prominent IRA prisoners were elected to the parliament (Taylor, 2021). In 1985, Margaret Thatcher and the Irish prime minister Garret Fitzgerald signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The purpose of the agreement was to further relations between Great Britain and Ireland by increasing contact and cooperation on various areas (Britannica, 2023). Additionally, two political initiatives in the late 1990s contributed to the emergence of a more peaceful era in Northern Ireland, respectively, the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994 and the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The negotiations leading up to what would be known as the Good Friday Agreement were under way for several years before the involved parties reached an agreement on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1998. Next step was for the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland to vote on the agreement, and with an overwhelming majority voting 'yes' to the deal, it went into force in December 1999. There are three central pieces of the

agreement that are essential to mention; these are called the three strands. The strands of the Good Friday Agreement are concerned with internal relations of Northern Ireland, the relationship between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and the East/West relation between the governments of Ireland and the British Government. With the Good Friday Agreement, new institutions were established to carry out the main task of maintaining a good relation between Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the rest of Great Britain. Furthermore, the wellbeing and fundamental rights of people of Northern Ireland were with the agreement given a very special focus (About the Good Friday Agreement, n.d.).

## **Analysis**

### **David Cameron and the British Society**

#### **David Cameron's Discourse Regarding the Scottish Independence Referendum**

During the 2010 to 2015 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in the UK, which David Cameron served as Prime Minister, Scotland had approved a referendum regarding its independence. In relation to this referendum, Cameron held a speech in London. First and foremost, the location of London is peculiar. Even though, a lot of people from Scotland end up settling outside of Scotland, the most natural place for a speech regarding the Scottish independence to take place, would undoubtedly be within Scotland's borders. With the importance of the location being mentioned, it is also important to note, that the event was co-hosted by the Scottish University of Glasgow Caledonian.

Initially, Cameron started the speech with a somewhat out-of-place comment regarding the venue and a former event that took place in the sense that he said:

“Less than 2 years ago, this velodrome was a cauldron of excitement. Chris Hoy was ripping round at 40 miles per hour. I was up there. I had a whole seat but believe me I only used the edge of it.” (Government Digital Service, 2014).

Which unconceitedly refers to a Scottish gold-winning Olympian and world champion track cyclist as well as Le Mans-winning racing driver, whom even has achieved the title

of Sir by the former Queen of England (Wilkinson, 2023). This is the first initial clue that Cameron wants to address the Scottish people, as well as the general British populace with this speech – as sports are a thing, which will bring people together. This can also be argued to be an initial attempt at closing the gap between Scotland and the UK, as all of the UK compete under as *Great Britain & Northern Ireland* (Team GB) at the Olympic Games. Something which is done in a lighted manner, which no one can really be offended at, considering the venue of the speech. This is also implied, as Cameron follows up the comment regarding Hoy with the following statement:

“But for me, the best thing about the Olympics wasn’t the winning; it was the red, the white, the blue [...] Everyone cheering as one for Team GB. And it’s Team GB I want to talk about today. Our United Kingdom.” This notion of Team GB is also used as the speech’s end note, as Cameron stated: “Team GB. The winning team in world history. Let us stick together for a winning future too.” Regarding other cultural aspects, Cameron states that: “Make no mistake: We matter more as a United Kingdom [...] it is about our music, our film, our TV, our fashion. The UK is the soft power superpower” (Government Digital Service, 2014).

Cameron highlights the cultural collaboration which the UK is able to export due to its soft power status. One of the direct examples Cameron highlighted was the *Sherlock Holmes* movies, which were in the theatres at the time of the speech – a series which was invented by a Scot (Government Digital Service, 2014). *The Guardian* has recently reported of a British Future poll, which has found that 71 percentage of people associate Union Jack and thereby its colours with Team GB (Savage, 2022). The metaphor regarding a winning future is also of great importance, something which may go by unnoticed politically, however it is certainly a win for Cameron’s coalition and ideology that the Scottish never withdrew from the UK. However, the cultural aspects of this are also embedded in a political matter. The general collaboration that occurs within a nation and its importance to other nation states are widely connected to the soft power notion which Cameron also mentioned. Through soft power, these cultural exports become more than solely a piece of culture, they also become a commodity.



Turning the vision towards the political aspects of the speech, Cameron has a clear unionistic discursive approach, as something which is evident by all of his comments regarding the UK:

“A question mark hangs over the future of our United Kingdom. If people vote yes in September, then Scotland will become an independent country. There will be no going back. And as I have made clear, this is a decision that is squarely and solely for those in Scotland to make.” This notion is continued in all of the following references to the union, “We would be deeply diminished without Scotland. [...] It’s not about Scotland’s strengths. [...] It’s about what we [...] can achieve together – the power of collaboration. [...] There is a moral, economic, geopolitical, diplomatic, [...] emotional case for keeping United Kingdom together. [...] To everyone in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. [...] You do have a voice. [...] You do have an influence” (Government Digital Service, 2014).

As Cameron refers to this *question mark* being *solely for those in Scotland to make* on the backdrop of the comment regarding the colours of the British flag, *Team GB*, and repeats the notion of *our United Kingdom*, there is no denying the fact, that Cameron wants to influence the Scots in a patriotic manner through a naturalised discourse of his coalition government. Furthermore, he refers to the *question mark* as a thing, where there is no going back in case of the Scottish gaining independence. This is something, which carries a similar notion to the question regarding Brexit. There is almost a threat that if they do achieve independence, they will be excluded from this group of collaboration. However, regarding the case of Brexit, something which will be mentioned later and was certainly not a concern at neither the time of the referendum nor the speech. They have since then been locked in a decision, where the majority of the Scottish population were against, wherein there are no going back without radical change. This notion of *our United Kingdom* is often referred to through the fact, that Cameron appeals the Northern Irish, Welsh, and English to use their voice, and often talk about how the four are country based on cooperation. Through these statements, it is clear to see the goal of Cameron’s government. He undoubtedly wants Scotland to remain part of the UK. Cameron even went as far, as to contacting the late Queen

Elisabeth II, in hopes of her using her influence to persuade the Scottish to vote to stay part of the UK. She later commented on the vote, saying that the Scottish people should *think carefully about the future* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019a). This is something which Buckingham Palace rarely does, as they refrain from commenting on politics or public affairs. However, Cameron used the power of being the PM, to persuade people to subscribe to his political interest. Scottish first minister at the time, Alex Salmond, stressed that the Queen would remain head of state in case of Scotland voting yes to the referendum, this is something which supported Cameron's belief that the Queen could make a difference in the vote, as there clearly was a connection between the Scots and the Queen. Something which is also evident by the turnout at the Queen's cortege in the heart of Edinburgh (Carrell & Brooks, 2022; British Broadcasting Corporation, 2022a). Furthermore, the interpretation of the said influence which the Northern Irish, Welsh, and English have, can both be seen as diminishing the fact, that this is indeed up for the Scottish people to decide, and not something which the rest of the country should have a say in – and on the other hand, there is the notion that no matter what Scotland would decide, this would also bring forth implication for the rest of the UK.

Regarding the economic importance of the union, Cameron emphasises the following opportunities and possibilities of the UK:

“You don't need a customs check when you travel over the border; [...] you don't have to deal with totally different tax systems and regulations when you trade; [...] we are the oldest and most successful single market in the world, and with one of the most successful currencies in the world [...] Last year we were the top destination for foreign direct investment in Europe [...] intellectual endeavour and commercial might combined to shape global economic ideas.[...] Take Scotch whisky [...] there is barely a meeting abroad when I don't bang the drum for whisky [...] as a United Kingdom gives us a much better chance of getting around the right tables, bashing down trade barriers, getting deals signed. And the result: Scotch whisky adds £135 to the UK's balance of payments every single second” (Government Digital Service, 2014).

There is no denying that Cameron was proud of the economy, especially considering that the financial crisis had just occurred, however, he was also aware that there was a chance for the economy to take a hit following a potential secession of Scotland. However, by emphasising the united economy, which the UK has, he could point out strengths that definitely appeal to the MR of the Scottish people. This was done through the mentioning of Scotch whisky. While Scotch whisky is a widely recognised commodity, he also strengthens the status of it by mentioning it in relation to high political meetings. However, this comes with the caveat, that Cameron is sure that the Scottish people would not be able to establish the same trade deals as the UK are. Furthermore, there are the aspects of foreign investment. There is no denying the fact, that London is one of the most heavily invested in cities, due to its sheer size of the city, however, this does not mean that Scotland brings in the same number of foreign investments, even though Cameron alludes to it.

### **David Cameron on the European Union Membership Referendum**

Prior to Brexit, Cameron held a speech in relation to the promised referendum, wherein he had the following statements regarding the cooperation between the UK and the union:

“We come to the European Union with a frame of mind that is more practical than emotional. For us, the European Union is a means to an end – prosperity, stability, the anchor of freedom and democracy [...] not an end in itself. [...] We have always been a European power – and we always will be” (Government Digital Service, 2013).

Cameron furthermore highlighted three challenges for the cooperation between UK and the EU, these are the following highlights:

“First, the problems in the Eurozone are driving fundamental change in Europe. Second, there is a crisis of European competitiveness, [...] and third, there is a

gap between the EU and its citizens which has grown dramatically in recent years” (Government Digital Service, 2013).

Regarding the first point, Cameron referred, not solely to the common currency of the Eurozone, and the speculation regarding that, but also the European single market, a single market which Cameron strove for the UK to remain within. Cameron is, however, critical of the governance and structural integrity of the Eurozone. Shining the light at the European competitiveness, Cameron refers to the projection regarding production for the following two decades. Here he states that *Europe’s share of world output is projected to fall by almost a third in the next two decades* (Government Digital Service, 2013), something which aligns with the overall economic crisis of the UK following almost half a century of backdrop for the former world superpower, based upon deindustrialisation shocks which arrived earlier in the UK than in any other industrialised country (Rice & Venbles, 2020, p. 3). Lastly, the gap between the citizens and the EU institution. Here, the notion is that the EU and its institutions acts upon its citizen instead of acting on behalf of them. Interestingly enough, following the last couple of years’ political climate within the UK, the public opinion has shown aspects of the same power relation between the British government and the British people, as the one Cameron talks about in relation to the EU and its citizen. Examples of this can be seen almost everywhere in the British society, especially when looking at the immense number of strikes within the British society lately. However, there is also the notion of regional inequalities within the UK, as they are amongst the largest in high income countries. These inequalities act as a source of economic and social deprivation and political discontent, so with the backdrop of the UK, there is no surprise in Scotland and Northern Ireland are showing signs of considering new avenues (Rice & Venbles, 2020, p. 17).

Now, reassessing Cameron’s discourse following the outcome of the Brexit referendum, there are other interesting aspects, which reflect notions that are also rooted within the crises regarding Northern Ireland and Scotland. One of the first things Cameron mentioned was:

“We should be proud of the fact that in these islands we trust people with these big decisions. [...] The will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered” (Government Digital Service, 2016).

Within this comment, the pride which people should find within the fact that the people of the UK are allowed to be the deciders in great decisions like the one regarding the withdrawal of the EU is the key aspect. Combined with the pride, there is also the will of the British people. These two aspects are arguably something which currently haunts the Scots and Northern Irish, as they are not simply allowed to announce independence referendums through Holyrood or the Assembly of Northern Ireland. Therefore, there is undoubtedly a will of the British people and a pride of this, that primarily finds itself embedded in the Welsh and English. This is also similar to the fact that the Brexit referendum favoured the will of these people, whereas the Northern Irish and Scots were paradoxically different in what they had in mind, regarding the future of the UK and EU.

Cameron had the following to say regarding the decision to leave the EU, reflecting the aforementioned belief of collaboration and unity is the optimal way which the UK can go forward:

“I was absolutely clear about my belief that Britain is stronger, safer and better off inside the European Union”, however, he also stressed the strengths of the UK in saying that “we have so many great advantages [...] a great trading nation, with our science and arts, our engineering and our creativity respected the world over” (Government Digital Service, 2016).

While Cameron stressed that Britain would be *stronger, safer, and better off inside the EU*, he also highlighted what he has seen as advantages to the UK, however, some of these advantages, such as the emphasis on the UK being a great trading nation, is definitely also something which is connected to their now former EU membership, as they were granted access to the European single market by their membership. This is also supported by the fact that Cameron previously spent time highlighting the importance of the Brits being a part of the European single market.

Following the outcome of the referendum, Cameron decided to resign, as this was not what he had in mind, regarding European cooperation. And without getting too much into the butterfly affects which Cameron's resignation have had for British politics, there is undoubtedly been a decline within British politics, and especially the trust put into British PMs since then. An instance of this is Theresa May, the successor to Cameron, who was also keen on remaining within the EU (Parker & Barker, 2016). By allowing a Tory that wanted to remain within the union take the spot of PM, Cameron's resignation does not carry the same importance to the matter regarding the decision taken by the public – something which invalidates the claim that *the will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered*.

Similarly, to how Cameron, shed some light upon the strengths of Scotland when he had his speech in relation to the Scottish referendum, Cameron does the same thing here in relation to the UK and their departure from the EU.

“Although leaving Europe was not the path I recommended. I am the first to praise our incredible strengths” (Government Digital Service, 2016).

The parallels between the Scottish strengths and the UK strengths are not to be taken for granted, as the Brexit Referendum occurred after the Scottish Independence Referendum. The unity that lies within the quote *our incredible strengths* is not something which is out of place whatsoever. However, as the implications which Brexit had for the future of the UK unity and UK politics, were unclear at the time of the speech, especially due to the fact, that the conditions which the UK would leave the EU on were not yet set. Transitioning over to the decision regarding referring to the EU as *Europe* is also something that is quite important to the undertones of the British departure from the union. The UK cannot physically leave the region of Europe, however the imagery of them leaving the region, regardless, is a strong notion, that represents how the minority voters of the Brexit referendum felt. Furthermore, it establishes a greater separation from the EU in a metaphorical matter. This metaphoric separation also supports the ideology of Cameron, as the graveness is emphasised by this discursive strategy.

## **Nicola Sturgeon and The Scottish National Party**

The question of Scottish independence has resurfaced since 2014 with quite an intensity. Nicola Sturgeon has been part of the Scottish parliament since its beginning in 1999, up until the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2023, and has been a front-runner in the Scottish pro-independence campaign. She has been First Minister of Scotland from November 2014, and she is widely recognised as a front-runner for Scottish independence. It is interesting to look at how Sturgeon voices the Scottish grievances which are tied to the union between Scotland and England. An example of how she appeals to the Scottish people through her discourse can be seen in her speech in June 2022.

### **Nicola Sturgeon's Proposal of a 2023 Independence Referendum**

Sturgeon initiates her speech by firstly mentioning the difficult process by which the Scottish Parliament was created:

“The campaign to establish this Parliament was long and hard. It was rooted in the belief that self-government would improve the lives of those who live here. And so it has proved” (Sturgeon, 2022).

In this statement Sturgeon is using a kind of Effort Justification to appeal to the Scottish sense of group mentality and their efforts to become independent throughout history. Effort justification is a theory mostly used in psychology and is tied to the notion that the harder you work for something, the more you appreciate the outcome, and the harder you will keep working towards the final goal (Shorey, 2022). So, by describing the process by which the Scottish Parliament was built as *long and hard*, the outcome is justified by its efforts, and thus appreciated more. She furthermore presents Scotland as a strong country that is held back by being a part of the UK. She refers to research with:

“Compelling evidence of the stronger economic and social performance, relative to the UK, of a range of independent countries across Europe that are comparable to Scotland” (Sturgeon, 2022).

By this statement Sturgeon is suggesting that by comparing Scotland with other European countries, based on economic and social factors, that Scotland is performing at a higher level than the rest of the UK. Sturgeon further addresses how Scotland should not be forced to be subdued by the politics of Westminster, seen in the following statement:

“Westminster governments we don’t vote for, imposing policies we don’t support, too often holding us back from fulfilling our potential” (Sturgeon, 2022).

By this statement Sturgeon is using a legitimisation in the words *don’t support* and *holding us back*, meaning what is in the interests of Westminster is not in the interests of Scotland. Furthermore, the words *we don’t vote for* implies a democratic injustice. A sense that the Scots have been robbed of a say in who and what they can and cannot influence. As no one wants to be forced under a rule they have no democratic chance to change, it is appealing to a sense of injustice amongst Scots. Though this argument falls a bit short, as the Scots did have a democratic say in 2014 but chose to remain a part of the UK. However, this was before Brexit, the corona virus, and the recession, which has impacted the Scottish people tremendously.

Sturgeon appeals through her discourse to a feeling of misrepresentation, democratic injustice, and political oppression amongst the Scots, by stating things such as: “Scotland – over generations – has paid a price for not being independent” (Sturgeon, 2022), and “the democratic rights of the people of Scotland are paramount” (Sturgeon, 2022). This builds on the notion that Scotland have been deprived in one sense or the other due to the lack of independence, and this has, in turn, been an issue “over generations” (Sturgeon, 2022). This sort of statement is well-linked to the idea of a generational Scottish oppression, which has seen it imposed by the English throughout Scottish history and comes alive in Scottish folk lore and movie representations such as “Braveheart” (MacSaorsa, 2021). Sturgeon lays forth the facts that the Scottish people are under-represented in Westminster, and this has, according to Sturgeon, “ripped [them] out of the EU against [their] will” (Sturgeon, 2022), saying that:



“The Conservatives have just six MPs in Scotland – barely 10 per cent of Scottish representation – and yet they have ripped us out of the EU against our will” (Sturgeon, 2022).

Here, Sturgeon is saying that even though only 10 per cent of the Scottish have voted Conservative, the majority in Westminster are Conservatives, which implies that the Tories in England *have ripped [Scotland] out of the EU against [their] will*. This was possible by the imbalance in the conservative representation in the UK and Scotland. By using words such as *ripped* she makes the action sound more macabre, and therefore it would stir a stronger emotion, or feeling of injustice, amongst the listeners. It is clear, when speaking, that Sturgeon is trying to appeal to the Scots through a sense of injustice and political oppression. This kind of discourse might land as Sturgeon intended amongst the Scots, as they are right now facing difficulties post-Brexit. Sturgeon, in her speech, paints the picture of “businesses and public services [that] are struggling for staff because freedom of movement has been ended,” and “our young people have been robbed of opportunity” (Sturgeon, 2022).

The powerlessness Sturgeon mentions in her speech and the political power looming over Holyrood by the powers in Westminster can be seen not just with Brexit but also within the nature of Section 35 of the Scotland Act. In 2023, for the first time, Section 35 of the Scotland act was invoked by a British Prime minister in order to block Scotland’s gender recognition legislation. Section 35 of the Scotland act allows the UK Government the power to block a bill passed by the Scottish Parliament from getting royal assent (McGrath, 2023). The legislation on gender recognition would allow trans people the right to obtain a gender recognition certificate (GRC) with no need for a medically declared diagnosis. The bill would furthermore bring down the minimum age of the prospect of applying for a GRC application from 18 to 16, and further reduce the amount of time a person would have to live within the acquired gender of said person (McGrath, 2023). This was what raised concern in Downing Street, as the legislation would, supposedly, clash with the ramifications of the UK equality law, which could potentially be threatened by the new gender recognition legislation, according to the

British Prime minister, Rishi Sunak. The critique on section 35 of the Scotland act, and what makes it controversial, is the undemocratic opportunity for intervention of a legislation which overrides the decision of elected representatives in Edinburgh (McGrath, 2023). Whether the bill should have been passed or not, act 35 serves as evidence of the political power that Westminster holds over the Scottish Parliament.

Sturgeon is using phrases such as: “we are powerless to stop our budget being cut,” and “we can’t block the Tories’ new anti-trade union laws; Or stop them tearing up human rights protections. We’re not able to restore freedom of movement,” (Sturgeon, 2022), to create a sense of powerlessness. She is suggesting a sort of Scottish oppression, and furthermore, a misalignment in the interests of Westminster and the Scottish Parliament, by saying: “They won’t prioritise tackling child poverty over investment in nuclear weapons” (Sturgeon, 2022). By using the word *they* about the Tories, she is creating an ‘us vs. them’ mentality which sees the Tories as the villain who is trying to do harm to the Scots, who are, due to their current lack of independence, powerless in their efforts to, as Sturgeon said, “live up to their full potential” (Sturgeon, 2022). This sort of explanation might seem quite banal, though this sort of discourse is quite powerful, as a person well versed in the power of discourse, might succeed in creating a mentality which achieves to make the Tories look pro-nuclear and anti-children, and thus seen as the ‘bad guy’. A narrative or an idea which some people might come to live by but was not created by themselves. It is an idea presented to them which offers an explanation to a feeling or a notion of an injustice. By using discourse, Sturgeon is first presenting an injustice to which the Scots are somewhat powerless, she is mentioning how the Scots are misrepresented and delivers it with a sense of powerlessness, which makes it all seem hopeless. Though, she offers a solution to all of these grievances which the Scots have been subjected to, namely independence. And so, a seemingly banal observation on language, can prove to be what might shift the support for independence. This quote is furthermore interesting when she mentions nuclear weapons, as the Sturgeon SNP has vowed to make Scotland Nuclear neutral if they ever were to become independent.

The way Sturgeon is portraying Scotland as a country which is not benefitting from the Union and comparing that to when the act of union was signed, when Scotland was benefitting from the Union, it is interesting to note that the benefit from the Union goes

both ways, and sometimes one may benefit more than the other. No one can be certain of what Scotland would have looked like today if they had not agreed to the 1707 Act of Union that granted them access to slave-trade.

### **What Renewed the Question of Independence?**

From the Scottish independence Yes campaign, the critique is well-defined: “The cost of Westminster control is clear. Households across Scotland are struggling to pay their bills due to the Tory Cost of Living crisis, compounded by their disastrous mini-budget and Brexit” (Hepburn, 2023). The current politics of Westminster, and their policies are being critiqued heavily, and they furthermore refer to how the food prices are their highest since 1977, which makes everyday households struggle (Hepburn, 2023). These are just a few of the social issues plaguing the UK, and Nicola Sturgeon has similarly not been satisfied with the way it has been handled by the British Government. She has called for action similar to the Covid response, to tackle the cause of inflation. She has wanted to reform the energy market, give more cash support to those struggling to pay bills, and she wants to see an increase in the funding of public services (Scottish Government Publications, 2022). One of the issues which is currently a part of the debate in the UK is the housing crisis, which is making it nearly impossible for people to own a house. This creates a general wealth inequality by restricting the opportunity for home ownership to those with wealthy parents. According to Legal and General research, 56% of first-time buyers under the age of 35 received financial support from their parents (Legal & General Group Plc, 2020). The housing crisis is fuelled by a number of things, e.g., Thatcher’s Right to Buy scheme, a lack of social housing, wage stagnation, a complicated case-by-case planning system, and a builder oligopoly, though is also due to the current inflation. In response to inflation, the Banks have raised interest rates, which makes taking out a mortgage loan more expensive, which when makes it less attractive to take a loan. However, many people in the current crisis is opting to downsize their home, which makes the demand for housing quite high despite how expensive these smaller houses have become. Some people cannot afford to live in a larger house, though as they have trouble selling the larger house, and the fact that downsizing to a smaller house is also costly, the process becomes a paradox in which it becomes impossible to afford.

When Sturgeon talks of an increase in the funding of social services, she is referring to the NHS, where the Scottish parliament successfully delivered deal to the NHS nurses, which Westminster was not able to deliver at the same time. The deal made for a general 6,5% uplift in payments to the Scottish NHS workers (Scottish Government Publications, 2023). The NHS in England have only recently been given a 5% general increase in salary, though many nurses and other members of the NHS staff rejects the proposal, as it does nothing to solve the issue of vacancy in NHS positions, leaving the general NHS understaffed and overworked (Savage, 2023). In order to emphasise examples such as this, Sturgeon says:

“Regrettably, the powers to act in the manner and on the scale needed do not lie with this Parliament. Frankly, they should. If they did, we could have acted already. But they don’t. These powers are reserved, for now, to Westminster (Scottish Government Publications, 2022)”.

The state in which some households are currently operating in is creating an understanding of the UK as a failed system. If people are having to operate and navigate within a crisis where the solutions from the government does not seem to solve anything, but only worsen them, it is then the mistrust in government can happen. This mistrust is what can create the beginnings of what could end as independence. If the current system is failing, it is time for something new, and this sentiment only grows stronger the longer a crisis is present. Before Brexit, similar issues were present in the UK, though the frustration was directed towards the European Union, and the solutions to the issues the UK was facing at could be solved by realising Brexit. This, however, did not happen, and the situation in the UK only worsened, and thus, the mistrust and anger were then directed towards Westminster. Especially as Scotland voted to remain in the EU. As in answer to the doubts to whether Scottish independence is feasible, Sturgeon says that:

“Independence won’t always be easy. It isn’t for any country. But it will give us the opportunity to chart our own course. To build a wealthier, greener, fairer nation” (Sturgeon, 2022).

By recognising the difficulties which will indeed be actual if Scotland becomes independent, she is recognising any opposing arguments which might be thrown at the cause, but she gives reassurance that it is what is necessary *to build a wealthier, greener, fairer nation*. It is not difficult to understand how Sturgeon was a favourite by the pro-independence Scots, but what will happen to the Scottish independence now that Humza Yousaf is First Minister in Scotland and not Sturgeon? It appears as though Yousaf shares Sturgeon's incentive to see Scotland independent, as he said: "we will be the generation that delivers independence for Scotland (Mure Dickie, 2023)". But him sharing the same goal as Sturgeon will not necessarily amount to the same results and votes Sturgeon has brought to the SNP. Current statistics on Scottish independence shows that in the aftermath of Sturgeon's decision to resign, support for Scottish independence have seen a slight decline (Learmonth, 2023). The process Scotland will have to go through if they ever become independent will be quite a lengthy and challenging process, as Sturgeon herself mentions, and Scotland will need someone who can handle the steering wheel during a possible secession. What cannot be denied is the support Sturgeon has procured from the general public as the face of Scottish independence, and if Yousaf cannot live up to the imprint Sturgeon has made within the independence movement, then Scottish independence might be a bit further away than it might have with Sturgeon in the lead. The SNP's Westminster leader, Stephen Flynn said: "She has taken support for independence to record levels and won every national election, by margins other parties could only wish for" (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2023). With Sturgeon having almost 10 years of experience as the leader of the SNP, the new first minister has something to live up to, and the question is: will Yousaf be able to secure independence? His rhetoric is similar to Sturgeon and connects the crisis in Scotland to the *economic mismanagement* of the UK government:

"We are in the midst of a cost crisis, made worse by the UK Government's economic mismanagement, which is harming people and hurting businesses right across the country" (Yousaf, 2023).

Yousaf speaks of Scotland as a wealthy country, though that wealth is not evenly distributed, and he wishes to be even bolder on taxation to see a better distribution of wealth (Yousaf, 2023). His ambitions range from social equality, better standards of living, and green energy for Scotland. According to new referendum numbers from Redfield & Wilson Strategies showed that 50% of Scottish respondents say they would vote “no” if there were to be a referendum tomorrow, 44% would vote “yes”, and 6% do not know what they would vote (R&WS Research Team, 2023). Though people may be frustrated with the current state of the politics of the British Government, the unknown result of a possible secession could make people vote to remain. According to the Redfield and Wilson Strategies Research Team, 27% of the Scottish respondents say if Rishi Sunak were Prime Minister at the time of a referendum, it would make them *more* likely to support independence (R&WS Research Team, 2023). When the participants were asked about how they would vote if a UK General Election “were to be held tomorrow”, the SNP leads Labour by five points and the Conservative party was in third place (R&WS Research Team, 2023). The Conservative Party finished second to the SNP in Scotland in 2019 and these results could be due to the supposed U-turn in the support of Boris Johnson, following respectively the parties at Downing Street during Covid-19, and the war in Ukraine (McDonald A. , 2022), where the support from the Scottish conservatives returned in support of Boris Johnson, though many were still dissatisfied with him during his time as Prime Minister.

### **Mary Lou McDonald and Sinn Fein**

At the Northern Ireland Assembly election on May 5, 2022, Sinn Fein became the largest party with 29% of the votes. This is the first time Sinn Fein is the largest party in the assembly, as well as being the first nationalist party to win a majority of the seats in a Northern Irish election (Burton, 2022). Since the beginning of the 2000s, Sinn Fein has been a significant and influential figure on the political scene in the Republic of Ireland, considering their share of votes at Irish general elections, which in the early 2000s were around 6-7%. Since then, the popularity of Sinn Fein has increased with every election, and it is especially significant to observe the dramatic increase that happened from the 2016 election, the year of Brexit, and the 2020 election, when Sinn Fein went from winning 13,8% of the votes in 2016 to receiving a share of 24,5% in 2020. The election in 2020 was especially remarkable as the two leading parties, Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil,

lost a great deal of their parliamentary seats to Sinn Fein (McCarthy, 2020). In Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has been one of two leading government parties for the past decade, as they have been part of a coalition government with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). The government broke down in 2017, and the political climate in Northern Ireland is struggling, however, Sinn Fein is despite criticism going strong (Coulter, 2018).

Irish reunification is the key issue for Sinn Fein. On their website, Sinn Fein expresses their wish for a referendum on Irish unity: “A referendum on Irish Unity is achievable and winnable. It’s time to set a date for the referendum and to let the people have their say. Irish Unity is now a do-able project” (Sinn Fein, n.d.,a). At the core of their argumentation is the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which asserts:

“It is for the people of the island of Ireland alone [...] to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish” (The Agreement, 1998).

Sinn Fein argues that the combination of several current factors makes it the ideal time to call for a referendum on Irish reunification. On their website, they specifically mention “the Brexit crisis, electoral, social and demographic changes in the North” (Sinn Fein, n.d.,a; Sinn Fein, n.d., b) as the main reasons for the growing discourse on Irish unity. Thus, it can be argued that the success of Sinn Fein is interrelated with the growing discourse on Irish unity.

2016 is a significant year to highlight when covering the success of Sinn Fein. The first crucial event to mention that happened that year is Brexit. Additionally, 2016 marked the 100-year anniversary of the event known as the Easter Rising. These two events can be directly linked to the increase in support for Sinn Fein.

Northern Ireland, London, and Scotland were the only parts of the UK that voted to remain in the EU. Ahead of the Brexit referendum, Sinn Fein campaigned for remaining in the EU, and in the aftermath of the election, Sinn Fein have fought to get Northern Ireland a form of special status within the EU (Sinn Fein, n.d., b). The party has among other things been in favour of the so-called Northern Ireland Protocol, which was negotiated as a part of the UK/EU break-up deal. It serves as a kind of protection of

Northern Irish trade, as the deal ensures that goods can still move freely across the border of Northern Ireland, as it did when the UK was still part of the EU (Culbertson, 2023). In the first issue of the Sinn Fein magazine, *New Ireland – Éire Nua*, Mary Lou McDonald, who is the current president of Sinn Fein, states the following:

“The failure of the Tory government of David Cameron to properly prepare for the Brexit referendum in 2016 resulted in an outcome that has sharply divided British society, encouraged the break-up of the British union, and created economic turmoil” (McDonald M. L., 2021).

McDonald directly blames the Brexit referendum of being the root to the political, economic, and social grievances that marks the political climate in the UK. Her argumentation is fierce in nature, when she uses wording such as: *the failure of; has sharply divided; and encouraged the break-up* (McDonald M. L., 2021), and her statements are a direct attack on the yes campaign. This narrative, which argues that the economic difficulties and the division between societal groups in the UK today is a consequence of the decision of the Tory government of David Cameron to call for a referendum on EU membership, might have some truth to it, however, it is merely a narrative. To Sinn Fein and McDonald, it is obviously a discourse strategy to put the blame of all the wrongs in society on their opponents, and since Brexit, this strategy has especially been a useful tool for Michelle O’Neill and northern Sinn Fein, which will be elaborated on later. This political strategy has been successful, which can be observed when looking at the share of votes Sinn Fein have received at the last couple of elections, and their course of action is clearly a power move. Evidently, this is not an original insight, as it is a given in national politics that opponents criticise each other’s political agenda. With that said, it is significant to highlight such rhetoric because it is a part of a narrative that appeals to a great number of the Irish and northern Irish voters. Since the 2008 financial crisis, economic initiatives, and welfare reforms by the Irish, the northern Irish, and the UK governments have sparked unrest among working people in the South and North of Ireland, and the narrative by Sinn Fein appeals to this group of people.

In 2016, Sinn Fein did an election manifesto ahead of the Irish Assembly election the same year. This manifesto was especially remarkable because it took its departure



in the 100-year anniversary of the Easter Rising. Sinn Fein used the occasion to criticize the Irish government, which at the time was a coalition between the Labour Party and Fine Gael, for failing to uphold the promises laid out in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, also called the Easter Proclamation (Adams, 2016). For that occasion, the then deputy leader of Sinn Fein, McDonald, stated: “From the outset the government has shown an unwillingness, a discomfort to commemorate the spirit of 1916” (Humphries, 2016). To Sinn Fein and Irish republicanism, the Proclamation of 1916 is a core document outlining the fundamental rights of the Irish people. In 2016, Sinn Fein refined their political platform based on the Easter Proclamation by adjusting their focus point to the working people, consisting of leftist populists in Ireland and the nationalist sentiment in Northern Ireland.

Besides the focus on Irish unity, Sinn Fein is concerned with the key issues of healthcare and housing; areas which they believe have been neglected by previous governments, such as the Labour/Fine Gael government (Adams, 2016). In the republic of Ireland, Sinn Fein has become hegemonic due to their anti-austerity political agenda. In the last decade, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, austerity policies have marked Irish and British politics, and as a consequence of this, Ireland has seen a decline in public services and public infrastructure. Furthermore, the cost of living has decreased dramatically, leaving Dublin to be one of the most expensive European cities to live in (Regan, 2020). Housing and healthcare are two of the areas which has been most present in the political debate.

While Sinn Fein in the Republic of Ireland is in opposition to government, as well as EU imposed, austerity policies, Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland has been accused of imposing austerity over the years on a pro-European agenda (Rafferty, 2020). In 2015, Sinn Fein voted in favour of the implementation of a Welfare Reform, which among other things allowed for job cuts. This reform was part of the British government’s response to the 2008 financial crisis, where the implementation of cuts within public spending had caused unrest to rise among anti-austerity parties. Sinn Fein was criticized heavily for going against their own politics when voting for the Welfare Reform, and within a month, they used their veto power to block the legislation (Gilligan, 2015, s. 42). Furthermore, criticism suggests that Sinn Fein has done little to prevent welfare cuts, cuts in corporate taxes, and increased privatisation despite holding a great deal of power in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Sinn Fein is a left-nationalist political party, however, in the North, its

politics appeals much more to a nationalist sentiment, which includes the large Catholic middle class as well as Irish American investors, than to the leftist audience. The political focus of the northern part of the party is in deep contrast to the political programme in the South, where Sinn Fein has become successful by adopting an anti-austerity approach and politics appealing to working people (Byers, 2019).

### **Speech by President of Sinn Fein, Mary Lou McDonald, at the Party's Annual Commemoration of the 1916 Rising**

The location at which the speech was delivered is especially significant to emphasize, and the speech also addresses the importance of the exact location. The location is Arbour Hill, which is the area in Dublin where the rebel leaders of the Easter Rising were put to rest after they had been executed. McDonald refers to Arbour Hill in the following way:

“Every nation has its sacred soil, its holy turf; places that evoke the sacrifice, courage and noble idealism of those patriots who went before us. For the people of Ireland, Arbour Hill is such a hallowed place” (McDonald M. L., 2023).

McDonalds speaks of Ireland and Northern Ireland as a united nation with a shared past and a shared vision. Furthermore, by announcing Arbour Hill as the nation's *sacred soil* and *hallowed place*, she determines that the most sacred place for both the people of Ireland and Northern Ireland is related to the reunification of the North and the South.

She gives historical references and speaks of some of the individuals who have fought for the republic of Ireland, its independence, and unity, among others the rebel leaders of the Easter Rising and IRA prisoners during the Troubles era. Next, McDonald appeals to the consciousness of the Irish people, when she says:

“Those who fought and died for the Republic did the extraordinary, but they were ordinary people. They had to work to put food on the table. They had rent to pay. They had children to raise. The Rising did not happen in the abstract. It happened

amidst the struggles of everyday life. Today is no different” (McDonald M. L., 2023).

She encourages people to take action and responsibility for the future of a united Ireland. Her point of departure is what she refers to as the “unfinished business of 1916” (McDonald M. L., 2023), which refers to the promises of the Proclamation of the Irish republic that she believes governments have neglected for decades, and she argues that the people, under the leadership of herself and Sinn Féin, will be able to create a better future for the Irish people. It is obvious that her agenda is to establish an idea that societal progress is enabled by the force of individuals. She often uses the pronoun “we” to refer to the nation as a whole and its wants and needs. For example, she states:

“We need change like never before” (McDonald M. L., 2023); “We need a government with the vision, energy, and determination to fix housing, to fix healthcare and build a fairer economy that works for everyone” (McDonald M. L., 2023); “We have built the peace. Now, we look to write the next chapter” (McDonald M. L., 2023).

She identifies with the people, and the people identifies with her. She mentions working families, single people, and pensioners, as well as the young generation, as those being especially threatened by the current political circumstances. Further on, she mentions healthcare and housing as areas which has been neglected by the two largest political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, for the past decade. Her agenda is populist. The characteristics of populist politics is political sympathy for the non-elite and marginalized (Simpson, Mayr, & Statham, 2019, p. 244). McDonald criticizes the political elite, while sympathizing with vulnerable societal groups, such as pensioners and single parents.

McDonald emphasises the significance of the Good Friday Agreement and its ability to establish peace after decades of conflict and violence. Her request to the people of Ireland is to take responsibility in writing the next chapter of Ireland and act on

enabling the process of change. By the end of the speech, she speaks directly to those in doubt about whether reunification is the best thing for Ireland:

“I ask *you* to join what is the most important discussion of our generation. This is *your* future too. *Your* culture, *your* traditions, *your* history matter. *Your* voice, *your* opinions, and *your* ideas matter” (McDonald M. L., 2023).

She here makes a shift from using the pronoun *we* to using the pronouns *you* and *your* by which she draws a line between us and them; those who are with her cause and those who are not. Addressing individuals directly by using second-person pronouns instead of addressing people as part of a mass audience is an effective discursive tool. Fairclough referred to it as ‘synthetic personalisation’ (Simpson, Mayr, & Statham, 2019, p. 100). Synthetic personalisation is often used in advertising, however, can also be used within political discourse. When using direct address, as McDonald does, the immediate implication is to persuade the audience to do a certain thing, which in this case is to join the conversation of reunification and support a referendum. The hidden implication of synthetic personalisation is to gain ideological power over the audience. According to Fairclough, a personal interaction is established between the addresser and the addressee when synthetic personalisation is applied in for example a political speech. One of the discursive features that is used to produce this personal interaction is the usage of presuppositions (Filipescu, 2022, pp. 444-445). McDonald presupposes that if a referendum was to be held, the outcome would be in favour of the reunification of Ireland, or that the reunification of Ireland is the best thing for both the South and the North.

She opens the last section of the speech with the word “friends” and with that word establishes a familiar connection between herself and the audience. Throughout the speech, McDonald paints a picture of Ireland as a united country; she refers to historical events and individuals and debates political issues that affect people of the North as well as the South; she addresses those who have not yet chosen to follow Sinn Fein and their political agenda; and she gives a voice to the ordinary people. Her speech is inclusive in the sense that it reaches a broad spectrum of the Irish people. It is especially important to observe the way she addresses the young generation, because she knows

that their opinion is essential in the debate and to the future of Ireland. Among other things, she says:

“We need a government [...] that really sees our young people, gets the challenges they face, and responds with urgency to allow them to fulfil their potential” and “we owe it to our young people to overcome our differences and to make progress happen” (McDonald M. L., 2023).

While she mentions the importance and urgency of addressing the needs of the young population, she also, between the lines, suggests that to make progress happen, Ireland needs a new government.

The success of Sinn Féin is borne by their ability to convince people of their vision. There are three modes of persuasion, which are essential elements of effective rhetoric – ethos, logos, and pathos (Sirk, 2020). Mary Lou McDonald with this speech appeals to people’s emotions, also known as pathos, when she mentions historical events and individuals that most of the audience has some sort of affiliation to. The Irish people have been through a lot of violence, hatred, and repression, and there is no doubt that it brings about an emotional response from the audience when faced with the reality of their past and also the possibility of a brighter future. Furthermore, McDonald addresses some of the big political challenges that are facing Ireland at the moment, healthcare, and housing, while also mentioning specific societal groups, e.g., single people and pensioners. Both things are clever political rhetoric because it makes people relate to the topic more easily.

It can thus be said that the discourse of both Sinn Féin and the SNP share the same disdain for the Tory Government in England. The politics of the British government are not aligning with the goals of Sinn Féin and the SNP. There is a feeling from both the Northern Irish and the Scottish side of being forced to endure the politics and bad decisions of the Tory government.

## Neoliberal Hegemony Within the British Society

### The Three Stages of Neoliberalism in the British Context

Gramsci discussed the *organic crisis* phenomenon during the 1930s and said the following regarding the ruling class response to a crisis like that:

“It represents the fusion of an entire social class under a single leadership, which alone is held to be capable of solving an overriding problem of its existence of fending off a mortal danger” (Gramsci, 1999a).

What the social classes fused under during this period was the neoliberal governance, as this model of governance slowly became the hegemon of the West in a bipolar world dynamic of the Cold War era. Following the neoliberal hegemony multiple differing neoliberal regimes have evolved since the 1970s.

The UK, like most of the Western world in the 1970s, succumbed to the establishment of the neoliberal hegemony. During this establishment, Thatcher was the reigning PM, and her governments acted as a vanguard regime of reorientation. Which is a broad term to describe the regimes which operated under the early establishment of the neoliberal governance hegemony (Davidson, 2017, p. 617). This *vanguard era* lasted approximately from the election of Thatcher as PM until the electoral shift during the early 1990s, where social democratic parties had undergone a transformation to become agents of neoliberalism themselves. Prior to this shift in the neoliberal order, the vanguard regimes of the neoliberal governance strove to limit the powers of organised labour. The amount of reduction in organised labour also became an indication of how successful each country was in their implementation of the new hegemony (Davidson, 2017, pp. 618-619). This involved a political agenda which was deeply committed to free enterprise and individual responsibility while being opposed to welfarism and socialism, something which was even evident as Thatcher shortly after winning the election said that “everywhere there is a crisis of Socialism. Everywhere a confirmation that capitalism produces freedom and prosperity” (Cooper, Tweedie, Andrew, & Baker, 2022, p. 199). This quote clearly reflects the neoliberal hegemony, and its opposition to the alternative model of socialism. Thatcher and her vanguard regime

started to reduce the state and its expenditures early on in her reign. This was achieved by reducing the size of civil services and privatising previously national industries. The reduction of civil service was based on the fact that it was an excess of welfarism and Keynesianism in the eyes of the government, and privatisation would generate new income for the country which would allow for minimising the personal taxation (Cooper, Tweedie, Andrew, & Baker, 2022, p. 203). These strategies are connected with the increasingly harsh treatment which unemployed people found themselves on the receiving end of during the vanguard era of the neoliberal governance. This was also a mean to weaken the efforts of unionisation, as people more or less became forced to accepting what would previously have been unacceptable (Davidson, 2017, p. 619), as welfare no longer would be able to support the weakest of the working class. Other strategies employed to weaken the labour movement included the establishment of new productive capacity, as well as sometimes even whole new industries, in areas where there was low or virtually a non-existent level of unionisation. However, Thatcher found some discontent among her own Cabinet Ministers, this resulted in multiple cases of ministers growing reluctant to the degree of privatisation which was proposed (Cooper, Tweedie, Andrew, & Baker, 2022, p. 205). This resulted in agencification, or the process of establishing agencies as governmental entities, a more business-minded approach. Agencification limited the powers of the ministers and placed corporatisation at the top, while ministers achieved a secondary role to the managers of these agencies through the circumscription of the democratically elected officials. The whole onslaught of the labour movement, which the vanguard regime managed to exercise, is a large reason behind the neoliberal governance and its hegemony today. This is because three longer-term developments came out of this onslaught. The first being an increased probability of economic growth, as well as limiting the recipients of this growth, due to a weakened labour movement, which would not be able to withstand pressure from the ruling class. Secondly, while the ability to force wages to remain stagnant or even decline had a negative effect on the consumer expenditure, the ability to create unknown levels of working-class debt would also stop their mobilisation desires. Finally, the weakened labour movement would not be able to put as large of a pressure on the social and liberal democratic parties, as the fiscal and capital institutions had been laid out, thus assisting the opposing political parties in adapting to neoliberalism (Davidson, 2017, pp. 620-621).

When the next phase of neoliberal hegemony occurred in the UK, the post-Thatcher government of John Major was at the helm. Major intended to create a classless society, as a means to weaken the threat of social inclusion by the opposing party New Labour. During the time in-between the two different forms of regimes, the Gramscian phenomenon of a shift from war of manoeuvre to war of position had already occurred. This transition is also what is referred to as a passive revolution. The war of manoeuvre surrounded the conservatives attack on the labour movement and the dissolution of the social democratic institutions that were established. The war of position was the establishment of new institutions, to counteract the dismantling of the old, as well as the commodification of new aspects of social life, in order for the successors to be forced within the neoliberal realm. The regimes which were at the forefront of the neoliberal governance at the time are known as the social regimes of consolidation. This transformation from the vanguard regimes to the social regimes were imbedded in capitalism's safety valve: democracy (Davidson, 2017, p. 621). The shift in neoliberal governance occurred due to two important social groups during this time. The first of these was the students and newly graduated workers in white-collar employment, and the second was the working class in the traditional industries. While the two groups had different concerns, the first group focused on a cultural critique of capitalism, and the second a political critique of the governance. These two critiques were able to exist simultaneously, as they did not have many afflicting interests. Furthermore, there was also a concern in regards of politics of personal identity. Homogenisation was a key component of the neoliberal globalisation, however, this component would always carry with it an inescapable group which would fall under diversification, as we cannot simply all be homogenous (Davidson, 2017, p. 623). During Blair's reign as PM, multiple equality and welfare reforms were passed in order to satisfy the shift in neoliberal governance. One of the key aspects of this is the fact that when Blair came into office, "nearly a quarter of the population was living on an income below 50 per cent of the average after housing costs", something which occurred while the income fell of the bottom tenth, while it saw an increase for the top tenth as well as the overall income (Lister, 2001, pp. 162-163). Due to this inequality in income, the Blair government was determined to create a more equal society because of the social and economic consequences of inequality. However, due to the neoliberal agenda, the *standard method* of redistribution through the tax-benefit system had been exchanged for redistribution of opportunity through education, training, and paid employment. This was due to the fact that high



taxes were perceived to be an electoral loss, following the fact that it had become a taboo subject due to the neoliberal hegemony (Lister, 2001, pp. 164-165). Due to this, an emphasis was placed upon rights and responsibilities for the British people. The responsibilities evolved around parents taking care of their children, the working-abled to work, and those who received welfare to take opportunities to escape from their dependency on public welfare (Lister, 2001, p. 169). However, there was also a larger focus on the future as opposed to the current state of affairs, as leaks of cuts in benefits for the disabled people, among other policies negatively affecting the lowest percentile of the working class, were among the earliest policy initiatives of New Labour, in order to channel more spending towards education (Lister, 2001, pp. 177-178). This was due to the fact that the government deemed the economic and social bills of the former regime a failure. The reforms of Blair's government were focused around eight principles, which the new form of neoliberal governance was concerned about following the reforms of the vanguard regimes. These concerns were in relation to work; partnership between public and private sectors; high quality services; support for disabled people; family support and child poverty; social exclusion and poverty; openness and honesty; and flexible and efficient delivery (Lister, 2001, p. 179). A lot of these policies of the time were aimed at the middle classes, not solely through a focus on their economic interests, but also by claiming that it took their social concerns and tolerance into account in a way, which the vanguard regimes were not able to. However, the neoliberal hegemony, along with the vanguard regimes, had shaped the political landscape in such a way that the social regimes had been limited through the economic trends, as evident by taxation policies and the taboo surrounding those.

After the social regimes, neoliberal governance found itself in the midst of the financial crisis. This caused the regimes to become what is known as crisis regimes of permanent exception. The first test for these crisis regimes was the financial crisis and the problems that it brought with it. In an attempt to save the economy, Western states bailed out various banks, transforming private debts of these banks into a national or sovereign debt. Following the Western states' acquisition of the private debts the economy had been weakened. Therefore, austerity became the commonsensical manner in which Western states had to economically sustain themselves following the incurrence of these debts (Davidson, 2017, p. 625). This austerity affected the society, which already heavily favoured those with wealth as well as the ruling class, to oppress

the weakest even furtherly. Furthermore, the expenditure on bailing out the banks, trickled down to affecting the incomes of unemployed, and mixing this with a villainization of asylum seekers, the hostility of society was deflected from the ruling class and instead placed upon these groups, as the neoliberal governance legitimised hatred towards certain groups in society. This is evident of how capitalists are generally uninterested in the broader social interests, however, through acquisition of private debt, capitalists also show an incapacity of assessing their own class interests, as they at times favour the short-term wishes of particular business interests, due to the belief that an unregulated market would benefit them in the end (Davidson, 2017, p. 625). With the economics of neoliberal governance being locked in place, it has as an affect limited the political landscape to something that is solely concerns the *social* sphere. This has, as evident through the villainisation of asylum seekers, allowed for an emergence of hard-right political parties which adhere to an enormously divisive working class (Davidson, 2017, p. 626). This has also proven successful as evident by political shifts such as Brexit. Other concerns regarding the neoliberal hegemony in the British case was the Eurozone dilemma. As Cameron stated, there were problems within this, problems which were embedded in the neoliberal hegemony, as institutions were dedicated to following the neoliberal economic paradigm in an attempt to de-politicise the economy. Due to the de-politicisation of the economic system a politicisation of everything else has occurred. This includes the state managers, with political parties becoming more homogenous, officials are required to turn themselves more completely into extensions of the parties themselves. Similarly, to the de-politisation of economics, the electorate has also become de-politicised – meaning that there is an abstention by sections of the electorate, who no longer have any parties for whom to vote for. This abstention primarily affects the middle class, as the neoliberal hegemony does not affect them in the same degree, as it does with the lower and upper classes (Davidson, 2017, pp. 630-631).

### **Holyrood's Place in the Neoliberal Hegemony**

As the people of Scotland, and the rest of the UK for that matter, realises that the current economic system is doing nothing to help them satisfy their basic needs, they explore other options. The SNP has placed itself at the head of Scottish politics, and currently holds the majority vote of the Scottish people. The SNP has had its main focus within

their politics on seceding from the UK and become independent. This incentive is justified through the incompetence within the British government in securing a system that ensures the social equality within the UK that is currently demanded across the Union as people struggle amid high inflations. Furthermore, the lack of investment within social sectors leaves people dissatisfied with the system. Some people in Scotland are split between the ideologies of Europeanism, British Unionism, Scottish nationalism, and their interests as workers. In-between these ideologies are the navigating forces of the SNP. This split between ideologies leans against Gramsci's notion of "contradictory consciousness". In a commentary leading up to the 2014 election, Neil Davidson argued that it is possible to support the continued existence of the United Kingdom without being a British Unionist, and it is likewise possible to support secession from Britain without being a Scottish Nationalist. He furthermore argues that for socialists, as opposed to British Unionists or Scottish Nationalists, the support or opposition to Scottish independence is essentially a tactical question (Davidson, 2014).

Now, the question of hegemonic power within Scotland is based within the politics of the SNP. The SNP has become Hegemonic within Holyrood by making a social democratic turn in contrast to New Labour. The SNP and Sinn Fein are two nationalist parties that are becoming hegemonic on account of their opposition of austerity, and as a response to the crisis of hegemony of the British state after the financial crisis. Yet after Brexit they are trying to shift their emphasis from social issues to Brexit, and this, in turn, come to strengthen the social issues and conflicting interests with the English government. The question of whether the independence and reunification movements will be successful can be partially found within the material and normative issues within the policies. In Northern Ireland it is a question of a material issue since any hard border there brings bad memories of British oppression in Ireland. In Scotland the issue is different as it is normative within the question: "should Scotland continue to be a part of the UK?". Neil Davidson furthermore argued that the problems posed by independence are not directly economic but are related to the capitalist economy through a series of mediations (Davidson, 2014).

Right now, the SNP is in an unsecure position, as according to the Scottish Social Attitudes survey, 84% of current supporters of independence voted for the SNP in 2021 Scottish Parliament election, while 11% of those who wanted to remain part of the UK did so. On average, the three polls suggest that just 68% of those who voted Yes in 2014

would now vote for the SNP in a Westminster election (Curtice, 2023a). Since Yousaf came to office, support for the SNP in the next Westminster election, polls show, showed a lower support percentage since Sturgeon announced her resignation. In comparison, the same polls show that the average support for independence remains the same compared to previous polls (Curtice, 2023a). This widened gap suggests that the alignment between the two has been weakened and when people were asked if they would vote for independence, within the group that would vote “yes” only 70% of those would vote for the SNP in a general election (Curtice, 2023a). So, by these numbers we can see that the support for independence remains roughly the same, while support for the SNP slightly dwindles. The same polls show that Scottish Labour is gaining popularity and might get more mandates in the next election, surpassing the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party and becoming the second largest party in Scotland (Curtice, 2023a). The SNP would still hold the majority vote, though it is somewhat of a set-back for them. Now this could be due to a number of things, one of them being Yousaf’s overall lack of popularity amongst Scottish SNP voters, and that this popularity merely needs to be gained, though this may take years of effort.

The Scottish Labour party has 22 Members of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP has 64, and the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party has 31 (Scottish Parliament, 2023). As the Scottish Labour party have benefitted from the resignation of Nicola Sturgeon, one might assume that the support for the SNP lay somewhat with Sturgeon’s ethos, rather than the SNP. According to polls in February, it was shown that the Scottish Labour Party does have some success in getting nationalist supporters, as the polls show that 15% of those who voted “yes” in the 2014 election would currently vote for Labour (Curtice, 2023b). This could be because the Scottish people would prefer a social democratic shift, more than they desire independence, as support for independence remains roughly the same, but there has been a change in support of the Parties. Both parties are centre-left parties, but what is the difference between the two? Well, the SNP supports Scottish independence, and Labour support British Unionism. The leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Anas Sarwar, said: “We may disagree on the final destination for Scotland, but what we can all agree on is that this is a rotten, immoral, economically illiterate Tory government”. Though, the fact that the SNP still holds the majority vote suggests that many people still support independence. This, however,

could also be due to the fact that the SNP is also considered a big-tent party, with catch all policies which catches a broad range of voters.

### **The Northern Irish Assembly's Place in the Neoliberal Hegemony**

In Northern Ireland, breaking away from Britain is not just about better social conditions, it is tied to the experience of real British national oppression. As outlined earlier in this project, Northern Ireland has a long violent history related to their fight for independence. The Northern Irish population is divided into a protestant/unionist and a catholic/republican population, which is essentially the root of the conflict. Once, the catholic population was a minority in the Northern Irish society, and they were heavily discriminated against. This changed moderately with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, and today, 25 years later, the catholic population is the largest population group of the two (Carroll, 2023).

The balance of power has changed in Northern Ireland since the 2017 election, when the Unionists lost their majority in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and even more so with the election of 2022, when Sinn Fein became the largest party in the Assembly. In Northern Ireland, the so-called power sharing system dictates that a government must consist of representatives from both national communities – those who wish to leave the UK and be reunited with the Republic of Ireland and those wishing to remain part of the UK. Of the nationalist parties in Northern Ireland, Sinn Fein has become the strongest advocate of ethnic Irish nationalism and has been sharing power with the DUP for the past decade. It has been custom that the first minister of Northern Ireland is chosen from the largest party in the Assembly, which has always been a unionist party, however, now that Sinn Fein has become the largest party, chaos has erupted, as DUP will not support Michelle O'Niell, who is the leader of Northern Sinn Fein, as first minister (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2022b).

Sinn Fein and DUP has been the hegemonic force in Northern Ireland for a long time. Though, the two parties hold very different ideological perspectives, they have come together through the power sharing arrangement by embracing neoliberal economic policies initiated by the British government. Their hegemony has enabled them to effectively minimise the effects of any inputs from alternative voices. For DUP, the cooperation with Sinn Fein has made it possible to conduct an economic policy

agenda which aligns with their ideological perspective, while it can be argued that for Sinn Féin the “key policy decisions are better understood as fulfilling the party’s electoral ambitions and nationalist objectives” (Byers, 2019). However, as noted, the balance of power is shifting in political Northern Ireland with the growth of Sinn Féin, and the power sharing between Sinn Féin and DUP is no longer a steady partnership.

The neoliberal policies of the British government were never pursued to the same extent in Northern Ireland as in other parts of the UK during the era of direct rule from Westminster, which ended in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement. In 2007, when DUP and Sinn Féin formed a coalition government both parties were quick to embrace the neoliberal strategies of the British government. In 2017, this coalition government failed when Sinn Féin’s Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, resigned, and the opposition of Sinn Féin to re-enter a new power sharing government with DUP on the same terms as previously has been the main reason that the government has struggled to re-establish (Coulter, 2018).

Sinn Féin has historically been an EU skeptical party. In 1973, Sinn Féin opposed Irish membership of the EU and has campaigned against several EU treaties - Maastricht, Nice and Lisbon. In 2016, Sinn Féin supported the remain campaign of the Brexit referendum and has in the aftermath of the referendum been much involved in the debate surrounding the UK/EU negotiations in order to ensure the best possible deal for Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin’s opposition to Brexit has been outlined in the following way:

“Sinn Féin was concerned that a UK exit from the EU could undermine north-south relations on the island of Ireland – a particularly important outcome of the peace process for Irish nationalists. There were also concerns that a UK decision to leave the EU would re-politicise the Irish border and destabilise politics and community relations in Northern Ireland” (Murphy, 2020).

Thus, Sinn Féin’s opposition is related to the well-being of Northern Ireland and is focused on creating the best possible circumstances leading to a reunification of Ireland; in 2016, the EU was a supportive force in realizing this goal, whereas Sinn Féin

viewed the EU as the opposite in 1973. In 1973, Sinn Féin's 'No'-campaign regarding EU membership was based on the following:

“Sinn Féin proposed a ‘New Ireland’ instead of admission to the Community. This would involve a new constitution, new governmental structures, complete state control over the import and export of capital, state control of industries and of the country’s mineral resources” (Department of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

In 1973, the agenda of Sinn Féin was the same as when they campaigned for that the UK should stay within the EU in 2016, namely the reunification of Ireland. It can be argued that when the EU suddenly became a supportive force in achieving Irish unity, Sinn Féin made a change of opinion regarding the EU. In the end, the proclaimed enemy is British oppression, and the main issue of concern for Sinn Féin is eventually Irish reunification, thus, everyone standing in the way of this goal whether it is the EU, the UK, or any other will be portrayed as the enemy.

However, Sinn Féin should not be viewed as a pro-EU party, as they are still skeptical regarding the EU political system. On their website, Sinn Féin elaborates on their skepticism:

“We have also argued that the European Union needs to change. Sinn Féin wants a social Europe, which promotes peace, demilitarisation, economic and social justice, international solidarity, and greater democratic accountability” (Sinn Féin, n.d., b).

In the Republic of Ireland, Sinn Féin has received great support due to their anti-austerity agenda, whereas, Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland has had difficulties with staying in line with the main party's politics. Northern Sinn Féin has been criticized heavily for conducting a neoliberal economic policy agenda. While the nationalist sentiment of the party's voters has benefitted from those policies, the more left-wing sentiment has felt neglected by the political agenda of Sinn Féin (Byers, 2019). The criticism is especially

concerned with social issues, such as healthcare and housing, which are two of the main areas of concern for southern Sinn Fein. In Northern Ireland, austerity policies have had consequences for these sectors in particular, as elaborated on earlier. The main political agenda for Northern Sinn Fein is concerned with Irish reunification, and after massive critique and the collapse of the power sharing system in 2017, it can be argued that it has been more suitable for the party to focus on an anti-Brexit and pro-EU political agenda. Thus, serving as an electoral strategy, which has been a way of deflecting attention from its record in office and the obvious differences to southern Sinn Fein.

When looking at opinion polls on the question of Irish unity, it becomes clear that it is a debate that divides the population, however, there are still people who are split between the ideologies of British Unionism and Irish Nationalism. In the end, it comes down to one thing: who do people believe has the best ability to redeem the crisis of neoliberalism and serve their individual interests best – the British government or the Irish Parliament. In 1973, the only border poll, which is the term referring to a referendum on Irish reunification, was held, and 99% voted to remain in the UK. This result was though not a real reflection of the public opinion as the turnout was rather low, and the nationalist public sentiment boycotted the election (Paun, 2018). A poll from December 2022 shows that in Ireland there is an overwhelming desire to reunite with Northern Ireland, whereas the majority of the Northern Irish population would vote to remain part of the UK if a border poll was held now. Protestant unionists are more supportive of the remain-campaign than Catholics are supportive of Irish reunification, according to the poll. Furthermore, there are a rather large number of people not identifying with neither Protestants nor Catholics who would vote to remain, however, a just as large number of them does not know how they would vote at a possible border poll (Leahy, 2022). If Northern Ireland is reunited with Ireland, they will automatically become member of the EU again. Thus, taking on a more pro-EU agenda can be seen as a part of Sinn Fein's electoral strategy, because it is a way of winning over some of those who are undecided regarding the question of Irish reunification (Dibble, 2020, s. 15). Furthermore, the number of catholic republicans supporting Irish unification is continuously rising, whereas the number of protestant unionist wishing to keep being part of the UK is falling (Leahy, 2022). This arguably suggests that Sinn Fein's electoral strategy in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum is so far successful in deflecting attention from the criticism that has made them vulnerable.



## Discussion

### Is Now the Time for the United Kingdom to break up?

In correspondence with the neoliberal struggle of hegemony, there is also a more concrete political struggle within the British society. A struggle which influences all the regions of the UK. Since the EU Membership Referendum, there has been a total of five PMs, during a time span of just seven years. While the first two of these, Cameron and May, have already been discussed, especially the former following his self-resignation after a misalignment between his opinions and the public opinions, the three PMs thereafter have not. The successor to Cameron, Theresa May, a closet-Remainer who strove for establishing a deal between the UK and the EU as they departed from the Union, proposed a plan of leaving the EU, which was declined by a large margin and followed by the first vote of no-confidence of the five PMs since the referendum (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019b). While May and her government survived the vote of no-confidence, this was a clear indication of where British politics were headed during these times. A lot of the struggle surrounding the approach by May lies in her promise of reaching a cross-party solution to the case regarding how the leave-deal should be established with the EU. However, she failed at properly including the rest of the British parliament, and as a result, it was almost exclusively MPs from her own government that voted for her proposed plan. However, almost half of her own party voted against the plan as well, as the Tories had a split between Eurosceptics and people that wanted to reach a deal with the EU (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019c).

Following these circumstances, which May found herself in, specifically with three denied withdrawal agreements, she was succeeded by Boris Johnson. Johnson promised a *do-or-die* departure from the EU, even if no deal was reached between the nation and the Union. Johnson's Brexit approach was riddled with several obstacles, some which were overcome such as the Irish Border situation, others that were severely advised against, such as how the Office for Budget Responsibility advised against a no-deal departure, as it would put the British economy into a recession (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019d). This lack of attention to the advisors combined with unpredictable events, primarily the COVID-19 pandemic and the War in Ukraine, has left the recession even worse than previously examined. Controversies also surrounded Johnson, during his time as PM. Firstly, there are the lockdown parties, which were

gatherings that opposed his very own government's restrictions in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2022c; British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019a). Secondly, there were multiple sexual misconduct allegations surrounding an MP from Johnson's government. MP Chris Pincher, following allegations of inappropriate behaviour during his time as Foreign Office Minister, were appointed as deputy chief whip by Johnson even though Johnson was aware of these allegations (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2022d). This resulted in a third resignation from a PM during a very short time span.

Liz Truss followed Johnson, and she is the shortest-serving PM the UK has ever seen. She came to office as the instability of the UK had skyrocketed, following the crisis which the war in Ukraine had put over the rest of the world. During this time, the Tories had also found themselves lagging behind Labour in the polls for the first time in twelve years, which resulted in outcries regarding a new general election having to take place, especially considering the problems surrounding all Tory PMs since Cameron's resignation (British Broadcasting Company, 2022e). The problems surrounding Truss were economic, as she was not able to live up to her promises. The final of the current ladder of PMs following Brexit is Rishi Sunak. Sunak is the third Tory PM serving based on the 2019 General Election, a clear indication of the tumultuous nature of British politics in the current era of crisis regimes. Sunak's political goals are clearly to unite the Tories with the electorate, while finessing around the instability of the current economy during the current recession.

With the turbulence surrounding the British PMs, there is no denying the fact that the de-politisation of the electorate can have an effect on the regions, which feel like their regional parliaments are more stable than the national parliament. While trickle down effects have occurred since the British crisis has gone into overdrive, the regions were relatively stable prior to the crisis of Brexit, which came as a result of the neoliberal governance and its failure to incorporate the working classes in more processes. Given the neoliberal hegemony's expediency for the ruling classes, there is no seeing the fact that they themselves would abandon it. However, conscious revolts, such as a potential succession from either Northern Ireland or Scotland would be a partial overthrow of the crisis regimes that they find themselves in.

The likeliness of Scottish independence might be further away than some initially thought, and the shift might be caused by the change in First Minister and leader of the

SNP. Even as support for independence remains strong, it might be difficult to, firstly, get the go-ahead for a referendum from Westminster, and secondly, Humza Yousaf might not be able to position himself as a First Minister who will bring Scotland independence. If he does not quickly gain the confidence of the SNP and independence voters, and become what Sturgeon represented, then Scottish independence might not be fulfilled soon. Though, if the Tory government continues to be widely unpopular, and nothing close to revolutionary in English politics happens soon, then a devolutionised Scotland may not be enough to satisfy the Scots. It is likely that the British government does not want to risk another independence referendum, as the result will most likely end in a Scottish secession. Considering the current situation of the UK, then Scotland should be allowed another referendum, if they wish it so, but what the result of the referendum would be is hard to foresee. The fact that the SNP might lose some votes next election would not necessarily lead to a failure in Scottish secession. However, the fact remains that the British government would not grant another referendum willingly. If Holyrood decides to execute a de facto referendum without the consent of the British government, then the result of such an election might prove to stir up more issues than it would solve. If a sustainable solution and alternative to secession were to be proposed, then the Scottish people might opt for that solution instead of venturing out into an unknown situation. Regardless of what is promised with independence, the effects from Brexit may leave people a bit weary of the unknown. It is a peculiar relationship between Scotland and England, as Scotland is a country within a country, and have all preconditions to secede, as they already have a functioning parliament, a national identity, clear borders, and a national flag. They have the option to join the EU, and become a NATO member, the only thing yet to be decided is the currency.

The fact that support for Scottish independence is strong amongst the younger generation of Scots (R&WS Research Team, 2023) suggest that this could be the generation to bring Scotland independence. It is, however, not as simple as most might want it to be. It is a process which requires a lot of political planning and thought, before it should be an option. Ethically, with the current situation in the UK, Scotland should be granted a referendum, but the Scottish parliament should be well prepared and realistic in its expectations. The EU might want to welcome Scotland into the Union, but they still need to go through an application process, a process where the timeframe is uncertain. It might be an easy process, or it might be a lengthy one. The success of Scottish

independence is dependent on EU membership. The uncertainty of the future might make the Scottish people choose to stay within the current Union, and it might be successful if the devolution tactics of Cameron is used again, causing the wish for independence to soften. If people are content and living within a stable social and economic situation, then they might not feel as strongly about changing the system as if the current situation is not changed radically. As Scotland has no legitimisation based on British oppression, they do not have as strong an incentive to leave the UK as Ireland has for reunification. Some politicians might still feel like Scotland is being held back from “its true potential”, but the real change needs to come from the voting public, and if they do not have something to be immediately dissatisfied with, they might not support change as much as they might otherwise have done.

Another aspect of Scottish independence is the dependence on an EU membership. If Scottish independence came in 2023, then it would emerge into the ongoing debate over the process of becoming EU member. Since Ukraine was granted the status of a candidate country, it has sparked a debate among other EU candidate countries, which have been waiting for more than a decade on entering the process of becoming member, and other EU member states (Moens & Lynch, 2023). It must be assumed that Scotland already live up to the Copenhagen criteria and therefore easily could get through the negotiations process. However, depending on how the case of Scotland is handled by the EU, Scotland will enter into the ongoing debate and the criticism surrounding it.

One of the arguments against Scottish secession is also somewhat based within how it will affect the English working class. Right now, the Scottish representatives in Westminster is functioning as a counteraction against the very conservative, very privileged Tory government. If Scotland was not there to counteract, then that would leave the English working class at the mercy of the Tories. This argument, however, is quite scant, as the English voters should take their fate into their own hands and change the system. For Scotland to be held back based on that argument is just not quite right. It would be more right to base an argument of Scottish secession on the alternatives to independence, rather than what Scotland would leave behind.

Another point, which is not really an argument against, is the question of defence. As Scotland is part of the British military, it could create issues in negotiations. Scotland currently holds the largest UK submarine base. It is a controversial defence issue, as the

UK's nuclear weapons program is stationed in Scotland (McLaughlin, 2021). The program is comprised of a rotating fleet of Vanguard-class submarines armed with ballistic missiles (McLaughlin, 2021). This would create some issues, as the Sturgeon-SNP has vowed to be nuclear neutral. The cost of a possible relocation of the base is estimated to about £20 billion, which would be quite a costly affair for England. Jens Stoltenberg, who is NATO Secretary General, has noted that Britain's nuclear capability is "one of the three pillars of NATO's defence, and any reduction of NATO's overall nuclear deterrence framework would have profound consequences for European securities" (McLaughlin, 2021). It might be possible that this fact would be turned into an intimidation campaign, as the threat to the British defence capabilities could have consequences for European security. However, it could be easily solved with a treaty that allows England to hold its nuclear sub-base, or it could simply be relocated at a cost of £20 billion.

In contrast to Scotland, Northern Ireland is a different case. So, what is the prospect of Northern Ireland reuniting with Ireland? Looking at the growing success of Sinn Fein, it is not far off arguing that a united Ireland is closer than ever. With the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and the following Northern Ireland Act, it is stated that the secretary of state must call for a referendum if the majority population express a wish for Irish reunification (Paun, 2018). Recent polls suggest that there is a rising support for reunification, and while this support does not at the time reflect the opinion of the majority, it might very well shift soon.

There are several things to consider regarding the possibility of Irish reunification. After Brexit, the circumstances have changed radically, and as explained earlier, Irish reunification is now not only supported by Irish nationalists but has come to include the entire segment of people wishing to re-join the EU. This has changed the dynamics of the debate dramatically, thus enabling the debate to re-emerge in present Northern Ireland.

In 2017, the Northern Irish government collapsed, and since then Northern Irish politics has been marked by uncertainty, thus the last 6 years can be categorized as a crisis for political Northern Ireland. It can be argued that this crisis reflects the political situation of the British government, where political chaos has been manifested in the continuous replacement of prime ministers. The backside of the political system in Northern Ireland, which was established with the Good Friday Agreement, is showing in

the midst of political uncertainty. The Good Friday Agreement dictates that a Northern Irish government must consist of a party wanting to remain part of the UK and a party wishing to be reunited with Ireland. The purpose of the system has been to ensure the establishment of a stable political system, where everyone is included in the political debate. For the majority of the time since the Good Friday Agreement went into effect, the unionist political parties have had the greatest support from the population, and even though Sinn Fein has been part of the government in coalition with DUP, DUP has held the First Minister position and more seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Thus, the power of the DUP has been bigger than that of Sinn Fein. This power balance has now shifted with the growth of support for Sinn Fein within the population, and a political crisis has emerged.

Michelle O'Neill has stated that Brexit is an example of how not to do a referendum by which she means that the lack of preparation for the outcome of Brexit has caused the political crisis of the British government to rise. She in this regard argues that the Northern Irish and the Irish government in cooperation needs to start planning for the possibility of Irish reunification (Mance, 2022). Some of the arguments weighing high in the debate is related to how in reality the people of Northern Ireland will be integrated into the Irish society. In Northern Ireland, there is a high unemployment rate; in 2022, the economic inactivity rate for people aged 16-64 was 28.3%. Furthermore, the Irish government will need to plan for how the Irish healthcare system will handle additional 1.9 million people without causing a shortage of staff and increasing waiting lists (Davies, 2022). Thus, many of the consequences that may occur from Irish reunification is related to the process of integration, especially in economic terms.

Conclusively, it can be said that the current debate of Scottish secession and Irish reunification has re-emerged as a response to the political chaos of the British government and its lack of ability to redeem the current crises. While it is difficult to foresee the possibility of the UK breaking up in the near future, it is safe to argue that the British government is challenged by the rising discourse on Irish unity and Scottish secession and the growing support for the nationalist forces of the SNP and Sinn Fein.

## Conclusion

In recent times, the UK has seen itself in a crisis of hegemony, which corresponds to the organic crisis which neoliberalism finds itself in. This crisis has taken many forms, such as in an economic and political sense, among others. Furthermore, post-Brexit and following the war in Ukraine, the aftermath of this crises has made the economic and social inequality ever more apparent. Through analysis of the current struggle for hegemony, it can be concluded that a passive revolution is currently taking place within UK politics, and this may have an effect on the final destination of the UK. This is due to the imperfected crisis regimes of the UK, which have allowed for far-right politics to surface at the front of British politics. Following the rise of popularity within far-right politics, new avenues have been sought after for political parties in the regions of Scotland and Northern Ireland, as there is a disagreement in regard to how the neoliberal hegemony should operate in a social and cultural context, as evident by multiple crises, within British society, which have evolved. Both Scotland and Northern Ireland may choose to separate from the UK, though the nature of the two cases may unfold in different results and under different circumstances. However, there is the likelihood that both will re-join a different form of neoliberal governance in the form of the EU, so it is not a direct separation from neoliberalism.

The organic, hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism extends itself into the regional politics of Northern Ireland and Scotland. Even though both cases are nearly identical in the underlying nature, they still represent various difficulties seen within the neoliberal model of governance. Due to the different historical backgrounds and different political goals within each government, it makes the respective situations of Northern Ireland and Scotland different from one another. With both cases there are a number of circumstances that differentiates them. One of the main points is EU relations; Northern Ireland will automatically become member of the EU if they reunite with Ireland, whereas Scotland will still stand outside the EU cooperation and will have to apply for membership. It can be concluded that Irish reunification would be more feasible, as they would join an already established, well-functioning country. However, due to the clash between the implementation of austerity by Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland and the anti-austerity politics, which has made Sinn Fein popular in southern Ireland, the party has been forced to refocus their electoral strategy in order to deflect attention from critique. Thus, the party's political strategy, especially in the North, is now focussed mainly on

Irish reunification in regard to an anti-Brexit and pro-EU agenda. In Scotland, the situation of Secession is a different matter, as a go-ahead by the British government on a second Scottish independence referendum is not likely to see the light of day. The question of Scottish independence is furthermore normative and is not based on any material argument such as the case with Northern Ireland. However, the future of both cases may change drastically based on the strategy from the British government. If they successfully propose an alternative to Scottish Secession, like they did in 2014, then Scotland would, in the current situation, choose to remain a part of the UK.



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