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Politics of Language in a (Dis)United Ireland

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ABSTRACT

Language is pivotal in the areas of human rights protection, good governance, peace-building, reconciliation and sustainable development. A person's right to use his or her chosen language is a prerequisite for freedom of thought, opinion and expression; for access to education and information; for employment; and for building inclusive societies. In the context of a potential political realignment of the island of Ireland, this essay considers the contentious political debates and acrimonious commentary surrounding language, primarily Irish and Ullans, and explores the sharply divided opinions regarding the role and place of language in society: how various attitudes are based on social context, social class and educational attainment, and the extent of the challenge to overcome these in the attempt to create

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a safe and neutral space in which the multi-layered aspects of the language debate can be addressed in a non-threatening manner. In conclusion, it teases out some of the more intense and extreme aspects, and how they might be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The motivations for granting language rights by states are also heterogeneous: magnanimity, justice, welfare, power relations between dominant and non-dominant groups, reciprocity with regard to the treatment other states provide for one's kin minorities, and obligations imposed as a condition to achieve or recover state's independence. (Arzoz Xabier)¹

Unionism's issues with the Irish language will need to be addressed by Unionism. (Choyaa, a Fermanagh Orangeman)²

Unionists needed to be careful not to give up their non-exclusive yet rich culture, whether Irish language or a character like St Patrick. (Councillor John Kyle, PUP)³

There is no reason, theological or otherwise, why a Protestant should not or could not master Irish. (Christopher D. McGimpsey, UUP)⁴

However this is dressed up let no one be in any doubt that statutory promotion of Irish isn't about civil rights but delivery of a key demand of the IRA. (Jim Allister, Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV))⁵

Let me be clear, it is not incompatible to be an Irish-language speaker and a unionist. (Arlene Foster, DUP)⁶

¹ Arzoz Xabier, 'The nature of language rights', *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* 6 (2) (2007), 1–35.

² Choyaa (a Fermanagh Orangeman), 'Unionism fighting a border poll ... – Slugger O'Toole', *News Press Live*, available at: <https://newspresslive.com/unionism-fighting-a-border-poll-slugger-otoole/> (9 November 2021).

³ Alan Meban, 'PUP conference – Irish language, welfare reform, parading, Matt Baggott and the leader's speech', 13 October 2012, available at: <https://sluggerotoole.com/2012/10/13/pup-conference-irish-language-welfare-reform-parading-matt-baggott-and-the-leaders-speech-pupconf/> (9 November 2021).

⁴ Pilib Mistéil (ed.), *The Irish language and the unionist tradition* (Belfast, 1994), 9.

⁵ Jim Allister, 'Irish Language Act would deliver key IRA Green Book objective', available at: <https://tuv.org.uk/irish-language-act-would-deliver-key-ira-green-book-objective/> (9 November 2021).

⁶ Brendan Hughes, *Irish News*, 28 October 2019.

We will not be accepting an Irish Language Age which requires discrimination against non-Irish language speakers, which requires the imposition of the Irish language on public signs, even where it's not wanted. (Sammy Wilson, DUP)⁷

The Irish language is nothing to fear in my community. People have politicized it by saying 'it's a big demand'—it's not ... Abortion is more important. (Rev. Trevor Gribben)⁸

Nationalists who claim the Irish language as their own property have no right to do so, and unionists who label Irish a foreign language don't know their own history. (Rev. Jim Stothers)⁹

This essay analyses the implications for the Irish language should the island of Ireland's current two-state configuration be altered. Despite the popularity of Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' claims, real differences in political, economic, social and cultural systems persist worldwide and, as Samuel Huntington warns, the end of the Cold War marks less the 'end of history' than the beginning of the clash of civilisations.¹⁰ This statement applies as much to the island of Ireland, where such issues are viewed through an 800- or 500-year lens.

The essay begins by viewing the issues of language in Northern Ireland through a lens of cultural unrest in the US, and argues that many of the cultural conflicts under discussion represent Irish reflexes to broader world issues: local embodiments of contentious global issues. It then moves to articulate and critique the arguments and positions as advanced by both sides. Subsequently it considers potential scenarios and challenges should the current two-state formation be reconfigured and what measures and steps might address and alleviate such concerns. In conclusion, it stresses the importance of global citizenship and language policy in achieving a harmonious society.

In the US, White supremacists and closet racists employ dog whistles and coded language to trigger racial stereotypes. Bilingualism in the US serves as a platform for covert and less than covert attacks on immigrants, fears of

⁷ Sammy Wilson, 'DUP MP says act for "failing" Irish language would be discriminatory', *thejournal.ie*, 6 September 2017, available at: <https://www.thejournal.ie/sammy-wilson-irish-language-act-3583868-Sep2017/> (3 October 2021).

⁸ 'Presbyterian leader wants unionists to drop Irish language red lines to stop abortion legalisation', *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 September 2019.

⁹ Andy Pollak, 'Could the Irish language be a tool for reconciliation in Northern Ireland?', *2 Irelands Together*, 1 May 2020, available at: <https://2irelands2gether.com/2020/05/01/could-the-irish-language-be-a-tool-for-reconciliation-in-northern-ireland/> (9 November 2021).

¹⁰ See Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (New York, 2011).

cultural change and resistance to the expansion of minority rights: a form of shadow-boxing less concerned with pedagogy than with social status and access to political power. Proposition 227, the 1998 California state ballot, and Proposition 203 in Arizona in 2000 dismantled bilingual education: one flag, one language. In the land of the free, English—and only English—‘is appropriate for use in the public square’.¹¹ Thus the phrase ‘Black languages matter’ refers to race-based linguisticism and marginalisation faced by speakers of Black languages.¹² State legislatures across the US advance bills that not only target transgender people, but limit local protections and also allow the use of religion to discriminate.

The 1619 Project/Critical Race Theory debates about ‘dark periods of the country’s past’ and ‘divisive’ issues have generated legislative bills against the endorsement of Critical Race Theory in Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Rhode Island and West Virginia. Similar bills passed in Utah, Arkansas and Tennessee. The intractable issue of ‘safe spaces’, where individuals can retreat from opposing ideas and perspectives, stalks US campuses and leads to ‘cancel culture’ wars: should acrimonious speech, ideas, performances—even if expressed by historically oppressed and obscured groups¹³—that offend others be allowed in the public sphere? Or should they be ‘cancelled’, rejected and forced to the margins? Is it the role of universities, governments and local authorities to shield individuals from expressions and ideas they find unwelcome or deeply offensive? Is the past the past and best forgotten? Is Critical Race Theory an approach to grappling with a history of White supremacy that rejects the idea that what’s past is past and the laws and systems derived from that past are detached from it? Or is it an intentional effort to exacerbate and inflame divisions and racial unrest?

Such debates rage in Chicago as much in Cookstown, in Duke as in Dungannon and in Berkeley as in Belfast. Unionists complain that others speak of respect while simultaneously denigrating and demonising any and

¹¹ James Crawford, ‘A nation divided by one language’, *The Guardian*, 8 March 2001; James Crawford, *War with diversity: US language policy in an age of anxiety* (Bristol, 2000).

¹² A. Baker-Bell (2020), ‘Dismantling anti-Black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms: toward an anti-racist Black language pedagogy’, *Theory into Practice* 59 (1), 8–21; Ayanna C. Cooper and Kisha C. Bryan (2020), ‘Reading, writing, and race: sharing the narratives of Black TESOL professionals’, in Bedrettin Yazan and Kristen Lindahl (eds), *Language teacher identity in TESOL* (New York, 2020), 125–42. See also Jane Saville, ‘Linguistics human rights in education: international case studies’, in Máiréad Nic Craith (ed.), *Language, power and identity politics* (London, 2007), 43–64.

¹³ Elwood David Watson, ‘Cancel culture, safe spaces, free speech, common sense and civility!’, *Medium*, 31 December 2020, available at: <https://medium.com/the-polis/cancel-culture-safe-spaces-free-speech-common-sense-and-civility-a6e1bec44805> (9 November 2021); Elwood David Watson, *Keepin’ it real: essays on race in contemporary America* (Chicago, 2019).

all aspects of British identity in Northern Ireland. Language is, as it ever was, a sensitive political issue: as profound a symbol of national identity as of personal identity. What is this but an Irish manifestation of the cancel culture debate? The contestation of public signage and the use of language in its written form in the public sphere has given rise to linguistic landscape studies that interrogate a space's linguistic territory, the multilingual character of a territory: the language of public road signs, advertisements, street names, place names, commercial signs, public signs and spontaneous signs (graffiti, cafe menu boards).¹⁴

If Brexit legitimised xenophobia and isolationism, it also increased 'lingua-phobia', whereby speaking a 'foreign' language risks verbal or physical abuse. Nigel Farage's 'awkwardness' at not hearing English being spoken while travelling on a train from London to Kent¹⁵ is but a twenty-first-century English reiteration of Theodore Roosevelt's linguistic exclusionism. In a 1919 address to the American Defense Society, Roosevelt declared 'we have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boardinghouse'.¹⁶ Is it a coincidence that one side in Northern Ireland aligns itself with Israel, the other with the Palestinian cause? Such disputes are neither distinctly provincial nor original: they are as universal as they are unyielding, but not intractable.

NEW DECADE, NEW APPROACH 2020

The 2020 New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) deal, with DUP (deeply conservative, staunchly opposed to abortion and same-sex marriage) and Sinn Féin (SF—a left-wing, nationalist party, widely accepted as the political wing of the IRA) support, appeared to restore the Executive and end a three-year standoff by reaching a compromise.¹⁷ The compromise promised

¹⁴ Višeslav Raos, 'Bilingual street signs policy in EU member states: a comparison', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 39 (10) (2018), 895–911.

¹⁵ 'Farage "felt awkward" on train', *Evening Standard*, 28 February 2014, available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/panewsfeeds/farage-felt-awkward-on-train-9158785.html> (9 November 2021).

¹⁶ Cited in Stephan Brumberg, *Going to America, going to school: the Jewish immigrant public school encounter in turn-of-the-century New York City* (New York, 1986), 7.

¹⁷ See Brian Ó Conchubhair, 'The Irish language and the Gaeltachtaí: illiberalism and neoliberalism', in Renée Fox, Mike Cronin and Brian Ó Conchubhair (eds), *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* (Abingdon, 2021), 77–95.

an Irish-language commissioner, services in Irish from public bodies, simultaneous translation services in Irish—and Ullans/Ulster-Scots—in the Northern Ireland assembly, the repeal of the 1737 Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) (banning the use of Irish in courts) and many similar measures, including a commissioner for Ulster-Scots. It did not offer the nationalist/republican desideratum, a stand-alone Irish Language Act, but allowed for the amendment of the 1998 Northern Ireland Act and the implementation of various language policies.¹⁸ As with any compromise, it went too far for some yet not far enough for others.¹⁹ But by March 2021, nothing promised had appeared.

Conradh na Gaeilge/the Gaelic League, an Irish-language advocacy group, issued the Northern Ireland Executive with a pre-action protocol letter (PAPL) concerning the failure to adopt the promised language strategy within six months of the agreement and publish within three months a comprehensive timetable for development and delivery of the Irish Language Strategy. COVID-19 had not prevented other strategies' implementation. For language advocates, a new decade, but no new deal.

As COVID-19, Brexit, the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland (an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement), abortion, marriage equality and Dublin and EU interference, as well as potential Scottish independence, all threaten the Union, more and more councils vote for bilingual street signs. Such factors bring the prospect of a United Ireland poll, if not the spectre of a United Ireland itself, into contention. The NDNA deal that reactivated Stormont appears at risk due to the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.²⁰ What appeared tied down in 2020 appears undone in April 2021.²¹

Arlene Foster, prior to stepping down as DUP first minister in 2021, cautioned language activists to be realistic regarding the timelines around implementing NDNA language legislation. The response from An Dream Dearg, a language pressure group, countered:

¹⁸ See Ó Conchubhair, 'The Irish language and the Gaeltachtaí'.

¹⁹ Critically, the DUP supported the deal despite Orange Order opposition and in the process not only broke with the Order but announced a decline in its influence. The Order had consistently opposed any further concession on language, especially an Irish Language Act.

²⁰ Ian Paisley MP has suggested that the DUP may disrupt the Irish Language Act should the British secretary of state extend abortion services in Northern Ireland to bring them in line with those in Great Britain.

²¹ Conradh na Gaeilge issued the Stormont Executive with a PAPL concerning the ongoing failure to adopt an Irish language strategy on 1 April 2021.

Our community has ‘waited’ long enough: we have been waiting almost three centuries on the repeal of the 1737 ‘penal law’ banning Irish in the courts; we have been waiting 23 years on the new era of equality promised at Good Friday; 15 years on the Irish language act and strategy promised at St Andrews; and over a year since the latest commitment on language rights at Stormont.²²

To renege on the agreement would ‘exclude scores of thousands of Irish speakers and their communities from a shared and equal rights-based society’.²³

The full implementation of the 2020 agreement is the litmus test for unionist politicians. Irish is clearly, therefore, a central part of an ongoing cultural war in Northern Ireland,²⁴ and as Robert Lane Greene remarked, arguments about language are usually arguments about politics disguised and channelled through the most distinctive markers of identity.²⁵ While Edwin Poots, having replaced Foster as DUP leader on 17 June 2021, pledged to implement Irish language legislation at Stormont as quickly as possible, the Belfast High Court granted Conradh na Gaeilge a judicial review into the Executive’s failure to implement a strategy for the language in the same month.

Poots’s reign was short-lived. His swift and spectacular downfall resulted from the nomination of his protégé, Paul Givan, as first minister, as part of a deal with SF that allowed the British Secretary of State to bypass Stormont and introduce an Irish Language Act via Westminster. The DUP rebelled, ousted Poots and replaced him with Jeffrey Donaldson on 30 June 2021.

The rapid change in leadership has unsettled supporters. Opinion polls in August 2021 show the DUP’s supremacy as the dominant unionist party threatened by the PUP and TUV: the DUP faces an electoral meltdown and SF’s Michelle O’Neill may become the next first minister. This combination of factors forces the DUP to burnish and brandish its loyalist credentials, to outflank its rivals as the most loyal of loyalists, the strongest defenders of the Union in the Union. In the Irish republic, reunification is largely discussed by

²² Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, ‘Implementation of language rights is now litmus test for new DUP leader’, *Irish News*, 1 May 2021.

²³ Mac Giolla Bhéin, ‘Implementation of language rights is now litmus test for new DUP leader’.

²⁴ See William D. Davies and Stanley Dubinsky, *Language conflict and language rights: ethnolinguistic perspectives on human conflict* (Cambridge, 2018) for a global perspective; see also Jeroen Darquennes, ‘Language conflict research: a state of the art’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2015 (235) (2015), 7–32.

²⁵ Robert Lane Greene, *You are what you speak: grammar grouches, language laws, and the politics of identity* (New York, 2011).

Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael to buttress their nationalist credentials in response to SF's rising popularity. In both Ireland and Northern Ireland it is the fear of SF, rather than SF itself, that drives the political narrative, with other parties responding from positions of duress and uncertainty. The two jurisdictions, it appears, have much in common.

THE CULTURE WAR AND THE LONG ARC OF HISTORY

Since the Good Friday Agreement (GFA)/Belfast Agreement (1998), mainstream republicanism and loyalism have almost entirely abandoned violence.²⁶ But with the cessation of the 'Long War', a cultural cold war commenced:²⁷ a war, unionists/loyalists contend, that targets them and their culture.²⁸ The battle front has moved from council estates to council chambers: solicitors have replaced snipers; rights have replaced ArmaLites. Harnessing the international discourse of human rights,²⁹ and presenting themselves as modernising champions of equality, nationalists/republicans embraced liberal views on gender and sexuality, gay rights and abortion. Unionism/loyalism, long comfortable in established traditions and never previously required to defend its political philosophy on cultural grounds,³⁰ found itself unwittingly and unexpectedly cast in the role of authoritarian traditionalists, out of step with the times. Radical eighteenth-century Presbyterianism has morphed into a dark and dour strain of twenty-first-century puritanism or fundamentalism. Northern Protestants, Maurice Leitch suggests, are simply defined by being 'agin things'.³¹

²⁶ Loyalist Communities Council (LCC), representing paramilitary groups including the UVF and UDA, withdrew its support for the GFA in protest at the Northern Ireland protocol in early 2021.

²⁷ For an overview since 2000, see Ó Conchubhair, 'The Irish language and the Gaeltachtaí'.

²⁸ Orange parade confrontations with the RUC—often violent, such as the annual Drumcree debacle—caused a schism in loyalism. 'Respectable', law-abiding middle-class unionists differentiated themselves from the mob. The loyal orders—the Orange Order and the Royal Black Institution—had long acted as a cultural cement binding various strands of unionism. Where once all loyalists convened at Lodge events as brothers, disagreement and disunity now existed. On unionist culture, see Alvin Jackson, 'Irish unionists and the Empire, 1880–1920: classes and masses', in Keith Jeffrey (ed.), *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), 123–49, and 145 in particular.

²⁹ See in particular United Nations – Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992); United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment no. 20, Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) (2009); European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1998).

³⁰ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: the literature of the modern nation* (London, 1996), 155.

³¹ Connal Parr, 'It's time to explore riches of Ulster Protestant culture', *Irish Times*, 4 November 2019.

Andy Pollak states that many people ‘see the North through a distorted lens which tells them that Irish nationalists and republicans are on the side of the angels – broad-minded, cultured and freedom loving people – whereas Ulster Unionists are narrow-minded, bigoted, uncultured and slavishly British’.³² The Irish-language policy, MUVE (Mid-Ulster Victims Empowerment) complains, is ‘slammed in our faces because European legislation can be quoted’.³³ The increasing visibility of Irish on the streetscape,³⁴ the DUP leadership’s covert willingness to recognise linguistic rights, and the border in the Irish Sea have heightened tensions, as evident in Peter Robinson’s depiction of besieged and betrayed unionists who ‘dwell under a cloud of injustice ... pilloried for not meeting each of the ongoing, incessant and unending demands from republicans to erase everything British and indulge everything Irish’.³⁵ A compromise for one side represents a concession for the other.

Robinson’s attitude, however, reveals nothing new. It speaks to a siege mindset and helps to contextualise the oft-cited ‘Trojan horse’ metaphor used in reference to an Irish Language Act. ‘Anyone’, Ben Lowry, deputy editor of the *Belfast News Letter*, protests, ‘who articulates a firm “unionist” viewpoint

³² Andy Pollak, ‘Fear of Irish nationalism is now the main obstacle to a united Ireland’, *2 Irelands Together*, 3 January 2020, available at: <https://2irelands2gether.com/2020/01/03/fear-of-irish-nationalism-is-now-the-main-obstacle-to-a-united-ireland/> (3 October 2021).

³³ A Council of Europe (CoE) report criticised the UK for failing to meet its responsibilities to promote Irish, highlighting the absence of provisions for public road or street signs in Irish. Robbie Meredith, ‘Irish language proposals not comprehensive enough’, *BBC News Northern Ireland*, 2 April 2021. Belfast City Council requires that one resident or their local councillor request a bilingual street sign with the support of 15 per cent of residents on the electoral register; it would then go forward for approval by the council. Applications can be made for any language including Ulster Scots and Chinese. The cost of putting up a dual-language sign in the city is estimated at about £1,000.

³⁴ See for example a typical interaction on the issue of place names at Causeway Coast and Glens Council. ‘Cáineadh déanta ar mheon “frith-Ghaeilge” agus “caint dhéistíneach” an DUP’, *Tuairisc*, 1 April 2021, available at: <https://tuairisc.ie/caineadh-deanta-ar-mheon-frith-ghaeilge-agus-caint-dheistíneach-an-dup/> (3 October 2021). See also Liam Tunney, “Stop bringing Irish language motions”, says DUP councillor’, *Derry Now*, 30 March 2021, available at: <https://www.derrynow.com/news/home/621251/stop-bringing-irish-language-motions-says-dup-councillor.html> (3 October 2021). For the council’s boycott of a Conradh na Gaeilge delegation, see ‘Cáineadh géar déanta ar pholaiteoirí a shíúil amach as cur i láthair ag Conradh na Gaeilge’, *Tuairisc*, 19 February 2021, available at: <https://tuairisc.ie/caineadh-gear-deanta-ar-pholaiteoiri-a-shiuiul-amach-as-cur-i-lathair-ag-conradh-na-ghaeilge/> (9 November 2021).

³⁵ Peter Robinson, ‘Unionists are more alienated than I have seen at any time in my 50 years in politics’, *News Letter*, 26 March 2021. In 2013 Robinson had called on unionists to move forward with nationalists to overcome the problems facing Northern Ireland. ‘Unionism has historically had a siege mentality’, he said. ‘When we were being besieged it was the right response. But when we are in a constitutionally safe and stable position it poses a threat to our future development’, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-24586529> (3 October 2021). See Aodán Mac Póilín, *Our tangled speech: essays on language and culture* (Róisé Ní Bhaoill, ed.) (Belfast, 2018), 26–40.

is branded a bigot on social media by some of the most sectarian and hypocritical people in Western Europe.³⁶ Fought along frontlines of history, literature, music, place-names and street-names—and, critically, language³⁷—this war, unionists contend, epitomises a cultural and symbolic dismantling of the Union. They fear the dilution of unionist social and cultural identities and the removal of political references and landmarks. A slow and steady republican take-over dismantles the ethos of places.³⁸ They believe this to be ‘the continuing logic of PIRA’s³⁹ “long-war strategy” and TUAS (Tactical Use of the Armed Struggle). It’s now a cultural struggle, subtle and less overt, to replace unionist identities with nationalist ones until we just come to accept a nationalist understanding and view of our world.’⁴⁰

The Irish language, nationalists claim, is a litmus test for parity of esteem and unionist commitment to a shared space. They see it in terms of human rights,⁴¹ colonialism and supremacy, a rejection of ‘century-long state-sponsored suppression of the Irish language’.⁴² SF states that ‘Equality is an integral part of a democratic society and this includes upholding the rights of Irish-language speakers.’⁴³

³⁶ Ben Lowry, *News Letter*, 27 March 2021. See also Peter Flanagan, ‘The more the British learn about Ireland’s loyalists, the less they like’, *Irish Times*, 10 December 2019.

³⁷ See Olaf Zenker, *Irish/ness is all around us: language revivalism and the culture of ethnic identity in Northern Ireland* (New York, 2013).

³⁸ See the Farset Think Tank discussion group: ‘It’s all a drip, drip process. Queen’s University no longer plays the National Anthem on graduation days. The Crown’s coat of arms has been removed from most courts in Northern Ireland. The Shinnars opposed the erection of “Welcome to Northern Ireland” signs along the border. The list of items which Sinn Féin councillors demanded be removed from Limavady council offices ranged from a “Charles and Di” commemorative mug to a statue of local Orangeman William Massey. In Newry they voted to name a children’s play-park after Raymond McCreesh, whose gun was linked to the Kingsmill massacre. Then the removal of the Union flag from Belfast City Hall. They want symbols of Britishness out and symbols of present-day Irish nationalism in. They even refuse to accept that Londonderry is part of the United Kingdom.’ Cited in Michael Hall (ed.), *Celebrating a shared heritage* (Belfast, 2018), 4.

³⁹ The Provisional IRA.

⁴⁰ The Newsroom, ‘Republicans use the Irish language as a weapon in their “long war” strategy’, *News Letter*, 17 December 2019 (attributed to James Dingley, chair of Francis Hutcheson Institute).

⁴¹ See Dónall Ó Riagáin, ‘The importance of linguistic rights for speakers of lesser used languages’, *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 6 (3) (1999), 289–98. See also M. Paz, ‘The failed promise of language rights: a critique of the international language rights regime’, *Harvard International Law Journal* 54 (1) (2013), 157–218; Colin H. Williams, ‘Language policy, territorialism and regional autonomy’, in Bernard Spolsky (ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of language policy* (Cambridge, 2012), 174–202; Colin H. Williams, ‘Governance without conviction’, in Susanna Pertot, Tom M.S. Priestly and Colin H. Williams (eds), *Rights, promotion and integration issues for minority languages in Europe* (Basingstoke, 2009), 89–122.

⁴² Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, ‘Fighting for Irish language rights’, *Red Pepper*, 16 April 2021, available at: <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/fighting-for-irish-language-rights/> (3 October 2021).

⁴³ <https://www.sinnfein.ie/equal-rights-for-irish-speakers> (3 October 2021).

What unionists see as a slow, insidious attack, Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin frames ‘as an increasingly assertive, confident generation of young Irish speakers ... demand[ing] equality and respect in an Ulster, where the vestiges of colonialism and bigotry are beginning to be consigned to the historical dustbin, where the Irish language gains acceptance as a precious cultural heritage open to all. There can be no going back.’⁴⁴ For nationalists and language activists, the language issue is a case of the arc of the moral universe being long, but ultimately and inevitably bending towards justice, where justice equates with full recognition and equal rights for citizens who wish to deal with the state through Irish. Language activists understand their role as pulling it towards ‘justice’. They tend to see the Irish issue in splendid isolation; unionists see it rather differently: same characters, same narrative, but very different plot lines. The issue of rights is critical here. Once the language is framed as a fundamental human right, opposition seems ill-advised if not ignorant.

The two factions assault each other with disability (including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)) rights, linguistic rights, mobility rights and equal opportunity rights.⁴⁵ Conradh na Gaeilge has campaigned for a comprehensive rights-based Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland. Fearghal Mac Ionnrachtaigh framed republican objectives in terms of ‘the Irish language in a rights-based society built on equality and justice’.⁴⁶ Similarly, MUVE objected to the Mid-Ulster Council’s draft Irish language policy on bilingual place-names and language services. Its opposition, rooted in rights discourse, claims that ‘our religious, political and cultural beliefs are not being accorded equality of opportunity’. In a point-by-point rebuttal of proposals for the use of Irish in ‘shared spaces’—‘a blatant intimidation to those of Ulster culture, Ulster-Scots or British’—again and again, the objection charges that ‘our religious, political and cultural beliefs are not being accorded equality of opportunity’. In a similar vein:

Our disabled members feel intimidated by the overwhelming use of the Irish language because they have previously heard it used in IRA recordings of IRA funerals, in abusive and violent situations where they were trying to maintain law and order and with

⁴⁴ Mac Giolla Bhéin, ‘Fighting for Irish language rights’.

⁴⁵ For examples, see *Minority language rights: the Irish language and Ulster Scots. Briefing paper on the implications of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, European Convention on Human Rights and other instruments*, June 2010, 25–7. Issued by Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

⁴⁶ Interview with Seánna Walsh and Fearghal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, ‘Radical plan for language revival outlined: Irish is central to republican struggle’, *An Phoblacht*, 8 December 2005, available at <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/14510> (3 October 2021).

triumphalism when convicted murderers took political office ... it is a continuing attack of their mental fragility. Our disabled members feel the whole slant of the consultation is re-creating the intimidation, threats and mental and physical pain our community of law-abiding Ulster people suffered during and after the ‘Troubles’.⁴⁷

To whom is given the wisdom to judge, and judge fairly, between competing rights? When competing rights are evaluated, human rights and other legally codified rights usually hold a higher status than interests and values, and scholars distinguish between the infringement of human rights and the violation of human rights.

The acceptance of rights, beginning with the rights revolution since 1945, produced, in Arzoz Xabier’s opinion, ‘an inflation of rights claims’.⁴⁸ As a result, and unsurprisingly, language activists invoke language rights ‘as though they were obviously human rights or as though they existed prior to positive enactment’. Xabier opines that the right to learn and speak one’s mother tongue and to learn at least one of the official languages in one’s country of residence is an inalienable, fundamental linguistic human right, but that beyond the educational sphere, ‘the notion of “linguistic human rights” is less certain’.⁴⁹ Further, he contends that most human rights are not absolute, and cautions that ‘the notion of limits (practicability, critical mass, demographic concentration, availability of corpus and status resources, etc.) is scarcely mentioned in the “linguistic human rights” approach’.⁵⁰ Drawing on Joshua Fishman (ethnolinguistic democracy must incorporate some notion of limits) and Henri Giordan (un programme d’écologie linguistique doit opérer des choix culturels et politiques⁵¹), he argues that no universal understanding of language rights exists: ‘They are not essentially given and do not exist prior to positive enactment.’ Rather, language rights, just as most human rights, are ‘local, historically-rooted claims, not fixed universals’.⁵² Irish has a ‘privileged’⁵³ status in

⁴⁷ ‘Draft Irish language policy for Mid Ulster Council’, available at: <http://www.muve.org.uk/draft-irish-language-policy-for-mid-ulster-council/> (15 November 2021).

⁴⁸ Xabier, ‘The nature of language rights’.

⁴⁹ Xabier, ‘The nature of language rights’.

⁵⁰ Xabier, ‘The nature of language rights’.

⁵¹ ‘a linguistic ecology programme must make cultural and political choices’.

⁵² Xabier, ‘The nature of language rights’.

⁵³ See, however, Ciarán Ó Cofaigh, ‘Státseirbhíshigh naimhdeacha, polaiteoirí laga agus Gaeil cheannaithe a mharóidh an Ghaeilge’, *Tuairisc*, 6 May 2021, available at: <https://tuairisc.ie/statseirbhisigh-naimhdeacha-polaiteoiri-laga-agus-gaeil-cheannaithe-a-mharoidh-an-ghaeilge/> (10 November 2021).

the 1937 constitution of Ireland—Irish is the first official language and English a second official language—which strengthens Irish speakers’ claims in Northern Ireland. But were Article 8⁵⁴ to be amended, how would that alter the wider debate?⁵⁵

Numerous situations exist across the globe where rights, interests and values conflict: where one party’s human rights and freedoms, as protected by law, conflict with the other party’s legal entitlements. Not all interests, practices and customs are legal rights. We recognise the right to freedom of expression, but can it be limited when views incite hatred? Do a teacher’s off-duty comments (freedom of speech) undermine their ability to fulfil their functions as a public school teacher? Does a photographic requirement for a driving licence conflict with Hutterite religious practices?

Certain cultural practices (abortion, corporal punishment, female genital mutilation, gay adoption, gay conversion therapy, Halloween fireworks, pub opening hours, spousal abuse, etc.) may be historically ingrained in a culture’s traditions. Indeed, the law may reflect such values as allowing polygamy, observing the Sabbath and refusing blood transfusion. But are they rights? Are they universal human rights? Are all such practices, traditions and customs morally, ethically, culturally and politically justified and justifiable? Can, and should, they all be treated as acceptable and/or equal in a twenty-first-century democracy? Can, and should, they be even entertained, let alone traded off and negotiated?⁵⁶ Human rights, states Louis Henkin, ‘belong to every human being in every human society. They do not differ with geography or history, culture or ideology, political or economic system, or stage of societal development.’⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Article 8 of Bunreacht na hÉireann/the Irish Constitution states: ‘The Irish language as the national language is the first official language. The English language is recognised as a second official language. Provision may, however, be made by law for the exclusive use of either of the said languages for any one or more official purposes, either throughout the State or in any part thereof.’ Under the terms of the GFA, a referendum was held on proposed amendments to Articles 2 and 3. The referendum was carried, and the articles were amended to remove any reference to a ‘national territory’, and to state that a united Ireland should only come about with the consent of majorities in both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. The amended articles also guarantee the people of Northern Ireland the right to be a ‘part of the Irish Nation’, and to Irish citizenship.

⁵⁵ A point worth considering is the extent to which the failure of much of the more ambitious language policies in the Irish Free State/republic across the 20th century is a key, but unspoken, backdrop to these debates and arguments. To what extent does the Irish republic need the consolidation of Irish as much as—maybe in some ways even more than—Northern Ireland?

⁵⁶ Máiréad Nic Craith, ‘Reviving ethno-linguistic identities’, *Culture and identity politics in Northern Ireland* (London, 2003), 70–94.

⁵⁷ Louis Henkin, cited in Francisco Forrest Martin et al. (eds), *International human rights and humanitarian law: treaties, cases, and analysis*, (Cambridge, 2006), 941.

Not all claims are equal before the law. Some are afforded a higher legal status on the basis that they better serve society's anti-discrimination goals. Can, or should, all traditions and values be regarded as negotiable items? If a group, rightly or wrongly, considers a practice to be culturally sacrosanct, how might such a practice be reconfigured to accommodate other traditions and practices? Should racist/homophobic/anti-Semitic beliefs be accepted as legitimate positions? Should women be required to wear a burka? Should women be entitled to education? Is the right to march/protest/celebrate in a public space an inalienable one? Is burning effigies part of an intangible cultural heritage to be protected and preserved? Is toasting the Queen/pausing for the Angelus a key component of cultural identity? What of commemorating historic battles/killings, and the naming of trophies and public spaces? Are such practices rights or traditions?⁵⁸

IRISH: A CATHOLIC LANGUAGE?

That Irish is, or ever was, the sole preserve of Catholic nationalists is a falsehood: a myth that, by and large, loyalism/unionism failed to challenge.⁵⁹ Numerous studies attest that Irish was never the sole preserve of Catholics.⁶⁰ Non-Catholics spoke, wrote, preached in and employed Irish for a variety of purposes. The Presbyterian Church frequently supplied Irish-language

⁵⁸ See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The invention of tradition* (Cambridge, 2012). See also Paul Post, 'Rituals and the function of the past: rereading Eric Hobsbawm', *Journal of Ritual Studies* 10 (2) (1996), 85–107. If street names reflect dual cultures, should GAA club names reflect similarly the dual heritage of nationalist/Catholic and unionist/Protestant figures? The GAA, however, is not a state institution.

⁵⁹ How and when this myth entered popular discourse is unclear and requires exploration. Who advanced this notion, how did it persist and who benefits from it?

⁶⁰ See for example Risteard Giltrap, *An Ghaeilge in Eaglais na hÉireann/The Irish language in the Church of Ireland* (Dublin, 1990, 2019); Roger Blaney, *Presbyterians and the Irish language* (Belfast, 1996); Pádraig Ó Snodaigh, *Hidden Ulster: Protestants and the Irish language* (1973, 1977, 1995); Deaglán Ó Mocháin, *The hamely tongue – cultúr Ceilte*, broadcast on TG4, 20 January 2010; T.C. Barnard, 'Protestants and the Irish language, c. 1675–1725', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (2) (2009), 243–72; Louis Marcus, 'Na Gaeil Phrotastúnaigh', TG4, 18 January 2003; Diarmait MacGiolla Chríost (2000), 'Planning issues for Irish language policy: "an Foras Teanga" and "Fiontair Teanga"', available at: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/language/macgiollachriost00.htm> (10 November 2021); Rosalind M.O. Pritchard, 'Protestants and the Irish language: historical heritage and current attitudes in Northern Ireland', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 25 (1) (2004), 62–82; Breandán Ó Buachalla, *I mBéal Feirste cois cuain* (Dublin, 1968, 1978); Ian Malcolm, *Towards inclusion: Protestants & the Irish language* (Belfast, 2009); Mac Póilin, *Our tangled speech*, 147–56; Thomas James Stothers, 'The use of the Irish language by Irish Presbyterians with particular reference to evangelical approaches to Roman Catholics' (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1981, cited by Roger Blaney, *Presbyterians and the Irish language* (Belfast, 1996), vii, 219); Lisa Goldenberg, *The symbolic significance of the Irish language in the Northern Ireland conflict* (Dublin, 2002).

preachers in Munster and Connacht.⁶¹ To promote Protestantism, Elizabeth I not only had a typeface manufactured to print religious literature in Irish, but commissioned a translation of the Bible into Irish and even appointed bishops based on their Irish-language proficiency, as well as ordering that ‘services in Irish be available in one church in each diocese’. John Knox’s *Book of Common Order* was translated into Irish and Scottish Gaelic. It is also alleged that several of the original apprentice boys who shut the gates of Derry spoke Irish.⁶²

The Presbyterian Rev. William Neilson produced the seminal *An Introduction to the Irish Language* (1808). The *Northern Star* advocated the use of Irish to advance radical Presbyterian views. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Protestant gentlemen purchased and published Irish-language manuscripts. The Marquess of Downshire, patron of the predominantly Presbyterian Ulster Gaelic Society/Cuideacht Gaeidhlighe Uladh, organised Irish language classes and collected manuscripts. In the 1830s, this society taught Irish in the schools to the lower classes.⁶³ Loyal Order Lodge No. 1303’s banner bore the inscription ‘Oidhreacht Éireann’.⁶⁴ The Grand Master of Belfast (1885–98), Rev. Dr Richard Routledge Kane, served as Belfast Gaelic League patron and signed the lodge meeting minutes in Irish.

An analysis of the 1911 census suggests that the Shankill Road housed as many Irish speakers as the Falls Roads, and in ‘some streets, up to 17% of people – all Protestants – said they had a level of Irish’.⁶⁵ ‘Erin Go Bragh’ served as the 1892 Unionist Conference motto. Educated in Dublin, Brian Faulkner allegedly spoke some Irish.⁶⁶ The Red Hand Commando (1970–), an Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) splinter group, adopted an Irish-language motto, ‘Lámh Dearg Abú’. Gusty Spence (UVF leader) and David Ervine (PUP founder) learned Irish in prison.

Elizabeth II offered a toast in Irish at a state dinner in her honour in Dublin Castle (2011). Her son, Prince Charles, uttered some symbolic Irish during a

⁶¹ See Ó Snodaigh, *Hidden Ulster*, 49–59.

⁶² Lindy McDowell, ‘How Protestants have flown the flag for Irish, even if some of us can only name pieces of household furniture’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 May 2017.

⁶³ Goldenberg, *The symbolic significance of the Irish language in the Northern Ireland conflict*, 13.

⁶⁴ Now defunct, this lodge was linked with William McGrath, ‘the Beast of Kincora’, convicted of sexual offences at Kincora Boys Home, Belfast.

⁶⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, ‘Census 1911: Belfast’s Shankill had as many Irish speakers as Falls’, 2 April 2012. See in particular Fionntán de Brún (ed.), *Belfast and the Irish language* (Dublin, 2006) and Ó Buachalla, *I mBeal Feirste cois cuain*.

⁶⁶ St Columba’s produced a primer for its students as early as 1845.

2019 Dublin visit and, in relation to a language dispute in Scotland, stated ‘I would suggest Gaelic, like any other language or culture, belong [sic] to all the people and communities of a nation whether they or not they are actively involved with it.’⁶⁷ His sons, William (2021) and Harry (2018), both spoke a few token phrases at high-profile public events in recent years.

This historical fact (that Irish was never the sole preserve of Catholics) is well-attested, well-known and widely acknowledged in academic circles, but for various reasons—political, educational, and ideological—the false narrative persists, the lie lingers, the misrepresentation endures.⁶⁸ As Alvin Jackson observes, while the peoples of Ireland have reached some tacit agreement ‘on the issues of killing, or being killed by, Germans, in the early twentieth century, their mutual slaughter remains much more difficult territory’.⁶⁹ A tacit agreement as to the roles the language played in unionist, loyalist and Protestant lives and cultures is required. Otherwise, to paraphrase David Trimble, writing in 1992 about the Irish war dead: ‘Irish Nationalists are doing violence to part of their own heritage and the need to suppress and deny that heritage may help to explain the continuance and virulence of their hatred of things British in general.’⁷⁰

In answer to the question posed by the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland’s (ECONI) Alwyn Tomson (‘Why has it changed? What engendered such hostility?’⁷¹), some suggest the politicisation of Conradh na Gaeilge/the Gaelic League, culminating in the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) takeover at the 1915 ard-fheis, the corruption of Douglas Hyde’s vision, and the subsequent deployment of the language by nationalists not only as a central plank in a rural, Catholic, Irish-speaking identity in the Irish Free State/Republic but also as a counter-balance to English. The Free State’s preoccupation with reviving Irish, coupled with its aspiration for a reintegration of the entire island—embodied, it appears, by Éamon de Valera—linked, in the unionist/loyalist imagination, the restoration of Irish with their expiration. Irish was, in a very real sense, the language of the oppressor at the gate and the traitor within.

⁶⁷ ‘Prince Charles comments on row over Gaelic in Caithness’, *BBC*, 14 October 2010, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-11541611> (3 October 2021). Charles also studied Welsh at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth in 1969.

⁶⁸ Among the efforts to educate the public, see the lecture series organised by the PRONI and Foras na Gaeilge. <https://www.irishgenealogynews.com/2014/08/irish-language-culture-proni-lecture.html> (15 November 2021).

⁶⁹ Jackson, ‘Mrs Foster and the rebels’, 143.

⁷⁰ David Trimble, *The Easter Rebellion* (London, 1992), 17, quoted in Alvin Jackson, ‘Mrs Foster and the rebels: Irish unionist approaches to the Easter Rising, 1916–2016’, *Irish Historical Studies* 42 (161) (2018), 143–60: 158.

⁷¹ Alwyn Thomson, ‘Evangelicalism, culture and the Gaelic tradition in Ireland’, in Gordon McCoy and Maolcholaim Scott (eds), *Gaelic identities* (Belfast, 2000), 50.

After partition, reciprocal animosity grew. The Free State stressed Irish at every opportunity. In Northern Ireland, those in power viewed and used English as a ‘tool of cultural triumphalism’.⁷² As the Free State promoted and privileged Irish, Stormont penalised and punished it.⁷³ Northern Ireland’s first education minister removed Irish from the curriculum, while unionist MP William Grant allegedly stated that the ‘only people interested in this language are the avowed enemies of Northern Ireland’. Thus, Irish speakers in Northern Ireland in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s suffered a ‘malevolent neglect’⁷⁴ as Stormont suppressed the language. Irish words and signs became ‘inscriptions of disloyalty and exclusion ... it was a treachery, a plot, and a Machiavellian political scheme of the disloyal and the dangerous’.⁷⁵ Gary Hastings, however, recalls that prior to the 1970s, ‘Irish wasn’t politicised, nor was the music, but that soon changed’⁷⁶—many would disagree.⁷⁷

Others argue that more recent antipathy springs from the coupling of Irish in the popular imagination with the hunger strikes of the early 1980s.⁷⁸ Séanna Walsh, an ex-prisoner, stated that ‘during the Blanket, we had nothing but our bodies to use as a weapon of protest, and we utilised the Irish language as a symbolic and practical means of resistance’.⁷⁹ Danny Morrison claimed that the greatest boost to the Irish language in the past 25 years came from the prisons.⁸⁰ Similarly, across the ideological divide, Nelson McCausland noted that, after 1982, SF’s cultural department became ‘very active in promoting

⁷² Christopher D. McGimpsey, in Pilib Mistéil (ed.), *The Irish language and the unionist tradition* (Belfast, 1994), 8–9.

⁷³ See An Dream Dearg’s historical overview, available at: <https://twitter.com/dreamdearg/status/1389162924325883905?s=11> (10 November 2021).

⁷⁴ McGimpsey, in *The Irish language and the unionist tradition*.

⁷⁵ Richard Irvine is a Belfast-born teacher and lecturer in English and history, and writes on current affairs.

⁷⁶ Charlie McBride, ‘This is Galway’s church, not just our church: Rev Gary Hastings, rector of St Nicholas’ Collegiate Church’, *Galway Advertiser*, 5 October 2017.

⁷⁷ ‘...when in 1969 a cohort of pioneering, working-class activists established their own Gaeltacht in West Belfast, a small area where activists built their own houses with a view to constructing an Irish-speaking urban enclave. Having built their own houses, the seven young couples wrote to the Department of Education that same year expressing their wish to establish an Irish-medium primary school for their children. The department responded that any such endeavours would lead to their arrest and imprisonment.’ See Mac Giolla Bhéin, ‘Fighting for Irish language rights’.

⁷⁸ See Feargal Mac Ionnrachtaigh, *Language, resistance and revival: republican prisoners and the Irish language in the North of Ireland* (London, 2013); Diamait Mac Giolla Chriost, *Jailtacht: the Irish language, symbolic power and political violence in Northern Ireland 1972–2008* (Cardiff, 2012); Dieter Reinisch, ‘Political prisoners and the Irish language: a North–South comparison’, *Studi irlandesi* 6 (2016), 239–58.

⁷⁹ ‘Interview with Séanna Walsh and Fearghal Mac Ionnrachtaigh: Radical plan for language revival outlined: Irish is central to republican struggle’.

⁸⁰ Danny Morrison, ‘Borders, identity and language’, address to the Planet K conference in Venice, 29 September 2009, available at: <https://www.dannymorrison.com/borders-identity-and-language/> (3 October 2021).

the language for political ends and it became part of the Sinn Féin strategy of “broadening the battlefield”.⁸¹

A key question to be asked is how did one party become the embodiment of the Irish language? Perhaps, as unionists abandoned their claims to Irish, moderates remained largely silent when officials denied funding to language projects. Into this vacuum stepped SF. Politicians such as Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, Pat Rice and Gerry Adams ‘stood up for the language when others were shamefully silent’.⁸²

This topic requires further exploration and examination. Attention must also be paid to Aodán Mac Póilín’s critique of

the tendency to claim that the language movement is non-political, while at the same time pursuing what is really a political agenda. This will not be believed ... On the other hand, cries to ‘depoliticise’ the language are usually disguised (political) attacks on nationalism, and a nationalist perspective on the language is just as valid as a unionist one.⁸³

No less contested is belief in the Cruithin theory and its standing among the unionist/loyalist communities.

THE RISE OF THE CRUITHIN

Once the cultural war commenced, some within unionism/loyalism, rather than contest the distorted narrative of Irish as Catholic/nationalist/republican code, launched a counter-offensive based on the theories of Ian Adamson, a former UUP mayor of Belfast.⁸⁴ Modern loyalists, according to this thesis, descended from the Cruithin, a British tribe long in conflict

⁸¹ Nelson McCausland, ‘Sinn Féin linguists fired “bullet” into language of our politics’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 February 2014.

⁸² Conchubar, ‘The Irish language belongs to us all, not just to Sinn Féin’, 11 November 2014, available at: <https://sluggerotoole.com/2014/11/11/the-irish-language-belongs-to-us-all-not-just-to-sinn-fein/> (10 November 2021).

⁸³ Mac Póilín, *Our Tangled Speech*, 142.

⁸⁴ John Coulter, ‘Reclaiming Irish’, *The Blanket*, 27 December 2004, available at: <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/jc0201052g.html> (10 November 2021). Adamson founded the Ullans Academy and served as its President. With the establishment of the Ulster-Scots Language Society (1992), he became its first rector and founder chairman (1994). He served as a member of the Ulster-Scots Agency (2003–12) and was also a founding member of the Cultural Traditions Group, the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and the Ultach Trust. See also *The identity of Ulster: the land, the language and the people* (Belfast, 1982).

with the more recently arrived Celts, who were the original inhabitants of north-eastern Ulster.⁸⁵ Cú Chulainn, now a metonym for indigeneity, appeared on murals as the iconic Cruthin defender against Celtic/Irish invaders from Connacht, Leinster and Munster.⁸⁶ Presenting loyalists as British *ab origine*, ‘Cruthin studies’ became ‘the preserve of Unionist apologists’⁸⁷ and found an institutional home in Dalaradia (Dál nAraidí), a vehicle for ‘working class’ loyalists in Antrim, many of whom were ex-combatants.⁸⁸

In the face of scholarly scorn, cultural intellectuals abandoned Cruthinism in favour of a simpler but no less controversial strategy. Adamson, central once again, merged the geographical terms ‘Ulster’ and ‘Lallans’ (the Scots for ‘Lowlands’) to create ‘Ullans’, the form of Lowlands Scots speech in Ulster. This ‘language’, he argued, served as a counter-balance to Irish and deserved equal status.⁸⁹ Not all agreed. The Northern Ireland Office’s J.A. Canavan considered the claim for Ulster-Scots as a living European lesser-used language ‘questionable’,⁹⁰ but recognised that it undeniably resonated with unionist grievance at the level of official funding of Irish.⁹¹

⁸⁵ See Ian Adamson, *Dalaradia: kingdom of the Cruthin* (Newtownards, 1998); Adamson, *The identity of Ulster*; Ian Adamson, *The Ulster people—ancient, medieval, and modern* (Newtownards, 1991).

⁸⁶ ‘Dalaradia was one of the Ancient Ulster Kingdoms, sitting in the area now occupied by the Mid and East Antrim Council, it was bordered in the North by Dalriada and in the South by Dal Faitach. In 1967 our borough was to be named Dalriada but following a challenge in court was renamed Newtownabbey ... The Earldom of Ulster was founded in Carrickfergus Castle in the territory of Dalaradia and St Patrick’s first noble convert was Bronagh, daughter of the Dalaradian King, Milchu, also St Comgal a Dalaradian warrior monk founded Bangor Abbey which became the Centre of European Christianity. The Pretani – “Cruithin in ulster gaelic” – were the indigenous British people of Ulster and Dalaradia in particular. Both Ptolemy and Caesar wrote of the Isles of the Pretani when referring to the British Isles, the larger island known as Great Britain and Ireland known to them as Little Britain. The original Brittonic – Welsh version of Pretani – remains today as Prydin on the second page of British Passports’, available at: <http://www.dalaradia.co.uk/?p=1070> (10 November 2021).

⁸⁷ Available at: <http://www.ianadamson.net/the-academic-suppression-of-the-native-british-or-pretani-the-people-of-the-cruthin/> (19 February 2021). Nonetheless, Adamson’s imaginative and creative response to an intractable cultural and political challenge exemplified the type of imagination and flexibility required of, and involved in, myth-making, nation-building and problem-solving.

⁸⁸ See in particular Alex Woolf, ‘Ancient kindred: Dal Riata and the Cruthin’, available at: https://www.academia.edu/1502702/Ancient_Kindred_Dal_Riata_and_the_Cruthin (10 November 2021); Ewen Campbell, ‘Were the Scots Irish?’, *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 285–9.

⁸⁹ For promotion of Ullans in North America, see Niall Ó Dochartaigh, ‘Reframing online: Ulster loyalists imagine an American audience’, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16 (1) (2009), 102–27. See also Mac Póilín, *Our tangled speech*, 45–79.

⁹⁰ In 2017, Wallace Thompson was quoted as stating that Ulster-Scots ‘is a dialect and should not be equated with Irish’. See Claire Simpson, ‘DUP founder: Ulster-Scots “is not a language”’, *Irish News*, 1 July 2017.

⁹¹ Éamon Phoenix, ‘State papers: Ian Paisley battled for Ulster-Scots’, *BBC*, 31 December 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-50919056> (10 November 2021).

Nor were fellow unionists convinced. John Coulter of the Revolutionary Unionist Convention, who grew up in rural Antrim, viewed it as ‘nothing more than a broad Ballymena accent! ... it is nothing more than a dialect, but not a separate language.’⁹² Perhaps. Perhaps not.⁹³ Coulter has suggested that rather than trying to repackage the Ulster Scots Ballymena accent,⁹⁴ unionists should ‘form their own version of the Gaelic League and reclaim the Irish language back from republicans’.⁹⁵ The European Commission’s Dublin-based Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages found scant evidence to recognise Ulster-Scots in 1996.⁹⁶

In putting their linguistic eggs in an Ullans basket, its supporters tacitly agreed to a false narrative and voided the Protestant, loyalist and unionist role in preserving, advancing and speaking Irish. Yet the Ullans thesis has potential if accepted by the unionist/loyalist community. It widens the debate from a simple English–Irish binary to a tripartite option of English, Irish and Ullans. Governments could solve a problem by funding and supporting Ullans and Irish and thus possibly remove a source of tension. Such an approach appears evident in Stormont’s April 2021 creation of a translation hub to accommodate the use of Irish and Ulster Scots in its departments and other public bodies.

Whether Ullans can counter-balance Irish ‘concessions/recognition’ remains unclear. Jim Allister’s position suggests not. The TUV’s leader severely warns: ‘No matter how it is deceptively packaged, the inescapable purpose of an Irish Language Act is to hollow out the Britishness of Northern Ireland. It is political in its intent ... There is no room for compromise on this issue, nor dressing it up along with some sop to Ulster Scots.’⁹⁷ The DUP’s and PUP’s attitude and approach remain inscrutably enigmatic, if not dogmatically oppositional.

⁹² See Rona K. Kingsmore, *Ulster Scots speech: a sociolinguistic speech* (Tuscaloosa, 1995); Cliona Ní Riordáin and Wesley Hutchinson, *Language issues: Ireland, France, Spain. Austria* (New York, 2010).

⁹³ Whether a dialect or a language, it remains an emotive cultural icon. For a cogent argument, see in particular Tony Crowley, ‘The political production of a language: the case of Ulster-Scots’, *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 16 (1) (2006), 23–35; Wesley Hutchinson, ‘Ulster-Scots in Northern Ireland: from neglect to re-branding’, *Études Irlandaises* 38 (2) (2013), 9–23.

⁹⁴ Coulter, ‘Reclaiming Irish’.

⁹⁵ Coulter, ‘Reclaiming Irish’.

⁹⁶ See also Anne Smyth, ‘Publishing the “invisible” language – some influences on Ulster-Scots publishing in the modern revival period’, *Études Irlandaises* 38 (2) (2013), 27–40. Smyth is described as ‘Chairman of the Ulster-Scots Language Society’.

⁹⁷ Comments attributed to Jim Allister, ‘TUV publish document spelling out dangers of Irish Language Act’, available at: <https://tuv.org.uk/tuv-publish-document-spelling-out-dangers-of-irish-language-act/> (10 November 2021)

THE IRISH LANGUAGE: A TROJAN HORSE?

Many unionists/loyalists see Irish (in linguistic, cultural and symbolic form) as an existential cultural threat to Britishness (itself an amorphous concept) in a different way than either abortion or marriage equality. For John Wilson Foster, the latter issues rather are healthy cross-sectarian concerns, but an independent Irish Language Act would be perilous to the Union in the long term.⁹⁸ Similarly, Lowry fears that a Language Act will ‘push Irish in places where people feel uneasy about it’.⁹⁹ What and who these places and people are, and why and how they are uneasy, must be unpacked and explained. Is it, as an Orangeman proposed, a case of ‘the age-old problem within unionism, the fear of the unknown, building the unknown into something worse than what it is’?¹⁰⁰ Or does Andy Pollak capture that wider unionist fear in the following?

Former members of the security forces – and there are tens of thousands of unionists who served in the RUC and the UDR – fear that retribution will be taken against them for that service. Many unionist farmers, particularly in the border region, fear that the land their ancestors seized four hundred years ago, will be taken away from them. Others worry that Britain’s once much admired National Health Service and other remnants of the post World War Two welfare state will become a thing of the past. Most importantly of all, a large part of the unionist community, passionately attached to the connection with Britain, fear for their political, cultural and religious identity if they are swallowed up into a united Irish state.¹⁰¹

True or not, Irish has replaced Lundy as the loyalist bogeyman.¹⁰² The reasons may be muddled, the history misunderstood, but the anxiety the Irish language manifests among unionists/loyalists is visceral. Irish-language activists must

⁹⁸ John Wilson Foster, ‘Academic: an Irish Language Act would be a long-term threat to the Union’, *News Letter*, 8 May 2019.

⁹⁹ Ben Lowry, ‘There should not be an Irish language act, but it is too late – the DUP has agreed one’, *News Letter*, 27 March 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Choyaa (a Fermanagh Orangeman), ‘The Orange Order’s complex relationship with the Irish language’, 12 January 2020, available at: <https://sluggerotoole.com/2020/01/12/the-orange-orders-complex-relationship-with-the-irish-language/> (10 November 2021).

¹⁰¹ Pollak, ‘Fear of Irish nationalism is now the main obstacle to a united Ireland’.

¹⁰² Choyaa, ‘The Orange Order’s complex relationship with the Irish language’.

acknowledge and address it. Some, indeed, have, but much remains to be done if they are to assuage their neighbours' anxieties.¹⁰³ Among the most repeated concerns, and the language that frames them, are the following.

- Any Irish Language Act is a Trojan horse. Its real intent is the erosion of unionist identity as well as social, cultural and political references and landmarks, the dismantling of the environment and ethos of places. The 'long-war strategy' and TUAS is now a cultural struggle, more subtle and less overt, but dedicated to replacing unionist identities, understandings and worldviews with nationalist ones.¹⁰⁴

Alienation

- The Irish language/bilingual signs threaten 'Britishness'.¹⁰⁵
- Bilingualism will lead to unionists feeling alien in their own land, taken over by hostile forces. Irish is 'another bullet in the freedom struggle'. Bilingualism makes those who don't see themselves as 'Irish' feel alienated in 'their own' land.
- Irish undermines their sense of belonging and security and encourages a migration of unionists.

¹⁰³ See for example Neil Comer, *Ár dteanga chomhroinnte: aspects of a shared heritage* (Dublin, 2017) and the Turas project administered by Linda Ervine: <https://www.ebm.org.uk/turas/> (10 November 2021).

¹⁰⁴ Jim Allister cites the 1970s-era 'Green Book', an IRA handbook, as evidence of the sinister intent: Allister, 'Irish Language Act would deliver key IRA Green Book objective'. The 'Green Book' states: 'Culturally we would hope to restore Gaelic, not from the motivation of national chauvinism but from the viewpoint of achieving with the aid of a cultural revival the distinctive new Irish Socialist State: as a Bulwark against imperialist encroachments from whatever quarter.'

¹⁰⁵ Equally disconcerting is the increasing distance between British identity, as construed by unionists/loyalists, and that lived by an increasingly socially liberal, pluralist and multiracial England, where English is no longer the first language for the majority of pupils at one in nine schools. Of the ten schools with the highest proportion of children who do not speak English as their first language, all but two are outside London. More than 300 languages are spoken in London's schools; Birmingham pupils speak 108 languages. Manchester is the UK's language capital: up to 200 languages could be spoken by long-term residents in the Greater Manchester area. London is becoming more multilingual: 41 per cent of state school pupils in London speak another language besides English. Sheffield is one of England's most culturally diverse cities: currently more than 120 languages are spoken there. 27.5 per cent of Leicester residents speak a language other than English as their main language. England's multilingual nature makes the Irish debate seem trifling. See *Multilingual Britain*, available at: <https://www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Multilingual%20Britain%20Report.pdf> (10 November 2021) and Association for Language Learning (ALL), 'Languages are Great Britain', available at: <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/features/languages-great-britain/> (15 November 2021). The BBC reported in 2021 that Northern Ireland is home to 17,400 'newcomer pupils'—students who may have been born outside the UK and do not initially speak the same language as their teacher. More than half of the pupils in St Patrick's College, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone are classified as newcomer pupils. See Niall McCracken, 'Children here are free to be who they are', available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-northern-ireland-57349669> (10 November 2021).

Discrimination

- Linguistic rights will discriminate against non-Irish speakers in court and legal proceedings and limit their employment opportunities in the legal profession and the civil service.
- Affirmative action (hiring bilingual staff) in state bodies will deprive unionists/Loyalists of employment opportunities.
- Irish will be an official language in Northern Ireland on a par with English.
- An Irish Language Commissioner will insist that public bodies promote Irish and punish those refusing or failing to cooperate.

Economics

- Investment in Irish (schools/translators) will defund ‘critical’ social services.
- Providing a fully bilingual public service will cause needless expenditure in courts, councils and the Assembly.
- Recognition/Support of Irish will deter inward investment and creation of jobs that provide longer-term employment and economic security.¹⁰⁶

Others

- The creation of Gaeltacht areas in Northern Ireland is a threat.
- De Valera invented/created the Irish language and acceptance of Irish is an acceptance of his ‘vision’.

A linguistic, cultural and political accommodation or understanding must be reached if unionists/loyalists/Irish speakers/Ullans speakers are to accept and feel accepted—culturally, socially, religiously and intellectually—in any new configuration. Irish-language speakers are not going to go away. Mastering the copula and *réamhfhocail* will transform neither working-class loyalists nor Ravenhill unionists into Catholic republicans. Nor should it. Several commentators from both communities stress the need for Irish to become, if not a

¹⁰⁶ The Newsroom, ‘Republicans use the Irish language as a weapon in their “long war” strategy’, *News Letter*, 17 December 2019, attributed to James Dingley, chair of Francis Hutcheson Institute. The institute’s website notes that in the interest of civic society, ‘it is important to socialise as widely as possible, which involves a conscious choice to avoid emotive and subjective matters in public places, whether economic, political or social, which implies excluding religion and ethnic identities from public discourse’ (<https://fhinst.co.uk/values/tolerance>, 10 November 2021). The idea that all ethnic identities be removed from public spaces seems controversial if not impossible, and seems to be the great unionist fear.

safe space, a non-threatening space for unionists/loyalists. Chris McGimpsey, among others, has spoken of a need ‘to alter the perceptions of unionist people’.¹⁰⁷

One may ask if the nationalist perception of Ullans requires modification. Is it a language, a dialect, an accent? Does it deserve equal status to Irish? A non-threatening Irish-speaking ethos remains essential if unionists/loyalists are to come to the language on their own terms.¹⁰⁸ What concessions are Irish-language activists and/or nationalists¹⁰⁹ willing to make or have made for them? Scholar Breandán Ó Buachalla, never a man to mince his words, stated in 1992 that it is ‘more than ever incumbent on those who profess to promote the Irish language to ensure that it be presented at all times in an apolitical and secular context. False and untenable arguments which had been put forward in good faith in the past should be jettisoned once and for all.’¹¹⁰ Aodán Mac Póilín roundly rejected the idea that the language movement could claim to be non-political while pursuing a political agenda. Similarly, he dismissed the use of Irish culture to sugar the pill of Irish nationalism, just as he described calls to ‘depoliticise’ Irish as usually being no more than ‘disguised (political) attacks on nationalism’. Among proposals are suggestions that unionist intellectuals and strategists recognise and advertise the prominent role Protestants, both nationalists and loyalists, played in the development, cultivation and preservation of the Irish language.

Several groups have responded to McGimpsey’s call,¹¹¹ but, as he noted, the change in mindset rests not solely ‘with a small number learning to speak

¹⁰⁷ McGimpsey, in *The Irish language and the unionist tradition*, 13. In some ways Linda Ervine’s efforts represent such a programme.

¹⁰⁸ McGimpsey, in *The Irish language and the unionist tradition*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Not all nationalists are Irish speakers, nor are all Irish speakers nationalists. Some nationalists would be happy to abandon the Irish language entirely in the interest of an agreed settlement.

¹¹⁰ Breandán Ó Buachalla, in *The Irish language and the unionist tradition*, 43–4.

¹¹¹ The Fitzroy Presbyterian church, one of the earliest Presbyterian churches in Ireland, located at 77 University Street, Belfast, holds monthly meetings (An Tor ar Lasadh/The Burning Bush) in Irish. Kyle Paisley accused Gregory Campbell of ‘shaming unionism’ by mocking Irish in the Northern Assembly. Linda Ervine, David Ervine’s sister-in-law, runs Irish classes in the heart of unionist east Belfast. Her Turas programme on the Newtownards Road currently has more than 150 people studying the language in thirteen classes. May 2020 brought a GAA club in historically loyalist East Belfast with a crest featuring the outline of the Harland and Wolff cranes, a shamrock, a thistle and a red hand, and the club’s motto ‘Together’ written in the three languages of Northern Ireland: English, Irish (‘Le Chéile’) and Ulster-Scots (‘Thegither’). In the Ulster Protestant identity process, the Glens Centre in Manorhamilton, Leitrim, and later the Garrison Church of Ireland Hall are welcome signs of efforts to move beyond the old stereotypes and discuss writers who reflect Ulster Protestantism’s diverse, dissenting, contrary and occasionally progressive character. The PSNI also offered language classes for its members. Kyle Paisley’s criticism of Gregory Campbell for ‘shaming unionism’ by mocking Irish in the Northern Assembly may be indicative of a changing attitude.

the language but with a willingness to identify with a language that many of our forefathers spoke'.¹¹² The Equality Coalition, convened by UNISON and the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), issued a 2019 report that documented Irish-language speakers' experience of sectarian abuse and discrimination—ranging from verbal sectarian abuse (regardless of community background) to sectarian hostility in the workplace (including practices of 'banning' speaking the language), or to an environment oppressive to even speaking the language in public.¹¹³ Authored by Robbie McVeigh, the report describes a pattern of 'sectarianisation, where the language is labelled as exclusively nationalist, despite advocates stressing its cross-sectarian heritage'.

While this dynamic raises a specific language rights brief, it has also become a convenient proxy for sectarian discrimination. At one level it is difficult to explain such hostility as anything but sectarianism. This is both due to the historical context but also the lack of alternative explanation for objections, which instead tend to be justified through the deployment of clichés around 'politicisation' or the contention the language is a 'weapon'. However, it is worth noting that hostility to the Irish language is very rarely discussed as a manifestation of sectarianism.¹¹⁴

This report complicates claims and counter-claims about politicisation and weaponisation of the language, which allow various sides to avoid the issue and hide behind counter-accusations.

WHO DARES TO SPEAK?

With the death of Mac Póilín (2016) and Adamson (2019), who speaks with authority and credibility on Irish-language politics in Northern Ireland?¹¹⁵ What are each political party's philosophies as regards bilingual education, bilingual signage, media and so forth? Are they driven by short-term

¹¹² McGimpsey, *The Irish language and the unionist tradition*, 11.

¹¹³ Robbie McVeigh, *Sectarianism: the key facts*, December 2019, 42–5, available at: <https://www.equalitycoalition.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Sectarianism-The-Key-Facts-FINAL-LOW-RES.pdf> (10 November 2021).

¹¹⁴ McVeigh, *Sectarianism: the key facts*.

¹¹⁵ Foras na Gaeilge defunded Pobal, Iontaobhas Ultach and Forbairt Feirste in 2014.

politics and transactional beliefs or hardcore ideological positions? Are all unionists/loyalists of one mind as regards Irish, language rights, and an Irish Language Act? Connal Parr cautions us to remember that ‘a rich and vibrant Ulster Protestant literary and political heritage exists beyond the boundaries (and grip) of the Democratic Unionist Party’.¹¹⁶ Numerous unionists see Irish as neither a threat nor a menace, but oppose an Irish Language Act.¹¹⁷ As Jackson rightly observes, ‘The cultural roots of Unionism defy glib assessment.’¹¹⁸ The DUP, under Foster, appeared amenable to Irish-language legislation if it included protections for British culture and Ulster Scots identity,¹¹⁹ but not at the cost of ceding votes and seats to the TUV and PUP and power to SF.¹²⁰

But what of nationalism and republicanism? Just as loyalism and unionism are fractured and fragmented in their approach to and understanding of Irish, nationalists are no less variegated. And neither are nationalists on either side of the border identical. They range from traditional cultural nationalists who dream of a bilingual nation to those who see no value—cultural, political or economic—in the language and would align closely with some unionists/loyalists.¹²¹ Remove the names and labels, and the arguments and attitudes are remarkably similar: some unionists/loyalists share common ground with those in the Irish republic who seek to remove Irish from the educational curriculum, reduce its presence in public life and defund the language.

Who speaks for the Irish language—the president of Ireland, an taoiseach, the Irish government, Údarás na Gaeltachta, an Foras Teanga, Foras na Gaeilge, Conradh na Gaeilge, an Dream Dearg, Misneach, or the (junior)

¹¹⁶ Connal Parr, ‘It’s time to explore riches of Ulster Protestant culture’, *Irish Times*, 4 November 2019. See also Connal Parr, *Inventing the myth: political passions and the Ulster Protestant imagination* (Oxford, 2017); Jackson, ‘Mrs Foster and the rebels’.

¹¹⁷ ‘Foreigners, Lundys and the Irish language’, available at: <http://amgobsmacked.blogspot.com/2013/12/foreigners-lundys-and-irish-language.html> (10 November 2021). John Manley, ‘Interview with a unicorn – the Dublin-based Catholic Gaelgeoir who joined the DUP’, *Irish News*, 3 June 2019; see also Cate McCurry, ‘DUP’s Foster right to resist Irish Language Act, says Gaelic academic Ó Coigligh’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 February 2017.

¹¹⁸ Jackson, ‘Irish unionists and the Empire’, 142.

¹¹⁹ Henry McDonald, ‘Arlene Foster says she does not think Irish language is threat to union’, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2017.

¹²⁰ Gerry Moriarty, ‘Some unionist commentary on Irish language Act was hysterical and irrational’, *Irish Times*, 16 February 2018.

¹²¹ For the relationship between languages and economic development, see John M. Kirk and Dónall P. Ó Baoill (eds), *Language and economic development: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland* (Belfast, 2009), especially John Walsh’s chapter, ‘Ireland’s socio-economic development and the Irish language: theoretical and empirical perspectives’, 70–81; Finbarr Bradley and James J. Kennelly, *Capitalising on culture, competing on difference: innovation, learning and sense of place in a globalising Ireland* (Dublin, 2008); Caoimhín de Barra, *Gaeilge: a radical revolution* (Dublin, 2019).

minister for the Gaeltacht?¹²² Who speaks for SF,¹²³ Alliance,¹²⁴ the SDLP? Do an Dream Dearg and Conradh na Gaeilge share the same priorities? Are they the de facto spokespersons for the Irish-language ‘movement’—whatever that is?¹²⁵ What role does an Foras Teanga, founded as part of the GFA to promote ‘both the Irish language and the Ullans/Ulster Scots language’, play?

A vacuum exists around the language issues. The experiences, approaches and expectations of Irish-language activists, advocates and speakers in the Irish republic differs vastly from their Northern Ireland counterparts. A coherent cross-party policy on the Gaeltacht, Irish-medium education and the Irish language in society is lacking. *An Straitéis 20-Bliain don Ghaeilge/The 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010–2030*, audacious and aspirational prior to Brexit and COVID-19, is now foundering if not floundering. Hence confusion confronts any loyalist/unionist seeking to understand how the Irish language might function in a united Ireland. And fear of the unknown and the other is the root of almost all hate.

NOT A BULLET, NOT AN OUNCE, NOT A VOWEL ...?

Should Ireland and Northern Ireland somehow, some way ‘merge’, various scenarios are available: some utterly unrealistic, others immediately unacceptable

¹²² The department’s title continues to change, indicating a downgrading of the importance of the language. See Ó Conchubhair, ‘The Irish language and the Gaeltachtaí’. Whereas once the language and the Gaeltacht were the responsibility of a senior minister with a seat at cabinet, this was reduced to a junior minister by several governments and the range of responsibilities greatly expanded and diversified.

¹²³ Available at: <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/sinn-fein-no-comment-if-affirmative-action-for-irish-speakers-among-talks-demands-36119903.html> (2 October 2021). The Sinn Féin website makes the following commitments: ‘Sinn Féin Would: Full review and upgrading of the 20-year strategy on the Irish language with additional funding to make it happen. The Language Commissioner should have a stronger role in overseeing its delivery. Implement the recommendations of the report from the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Gaeltacht on the Official Languages Act. Full status for the Irish language in the European Union – end the derogation now. Increase funding to Údarás na Gaeltachta and Foras na Gaeilge. Deliver proper language rights for citizens and guarantee the range and standards of service in Irish that citizens can expect from the State. Ensure a clear government focus on the survival and development of Gaeltacht areas. The future of the Irish language is dependent upon the continuing existence of sustainable Gaeltacht communities where Irish remains the primary language of the community’, available at: <https://www.sinnfein.ie/equal-rights-for-irish-speakers> (10 November 2021).

¹²⁴ The Alliance party’s website has a clear and detailed Irish-language policy, available at: https://www.allianceparty.org/irish_language (2 October 2021).

¹²⁵ See Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost, ‘Language planning in Northern Ireland’, *Current Issues in Language Planning* 3 (4) (2002), 425–76; Diarmait Mac Giolla Chríost, ‘Implementing political agreement in Northern Ireland: planning issues for Irish language policy’, *Social & Cultural Geography* 2 (3) (2001), 297–313; Kirk and Ó Baoill, *Language planning and education*.

to one or other party. But perhaps the very act of eliminating them from serious consideration may serve some purpose and set parameters for discussion.

- English becomes the sole official language for all political, legal and state matters. No official status for any other language. Replace the national anthem ('Amhrán na bhFiann') and all political and other titles (taoiseach, tánaiste, teachta dála, ceann comhairle, Dáil, Oireachtas, Garda Síochána, Áras an Uachtaráin, Busáras, RTÉ). Official documents (passports, driving licences, birth/death certificates) in English only. Irish no longer a required subject in the educational system or for university matriculation. Curtail any cultural expenditure that is not revenue-generating.
- A strategic alliance of 'progressive business-minded' stakeholders across the island who see language as a sacred cow devouring scarce resources.¹²⁶ Such individuals exist in all political parties and sections of society. Loyatism could find common ground on reducing the time and resources allocated to Irish in the educational system for the advancement of French, Chinese and Spanish. The role of Údarás na Gaeltachta and Irish-language subsidies could be reconsidered.¹²⁷
- Kill it with kindness. Tolerate the language, but with a reduced status. Align with like-minded politicians and activists across the political, social and cultural spectrum to remove obstacles to those who know or wish to know it. Re-establish the Language Freedom Movement and align unionism/loyalism with sectional interests. In the interest of cultural parity,

¹²⁶ See for example Victoria White, 'No crocodile tears for language to be worn as a green nationalist sash', *Irish Examiner*, 2 March 2017. See also Peadar Tóibín's criticism of Sinn Féin on the Language Act in 2019 as distracting from 'bread and butter, life and death concerns' (Gerry Moriarty, 'Aontú chief calls on Sinn Féin to reactivate Stormont', *Irish Times*, 3 December 2019); Enda Kenny's 2011 commitment to make Irish optional in State exams ('Kenny vows to make Irish optional', *Irish Independent*, 7 February 2011); Ruairi Quinn's 2012 criticism of the class time allotted to Irish (Sean Flynn, 'Quinn questions school emphasis on Irish, religion', *Irish Times*, 5 April 2012); Ivan Yates's 2012 call for the replacement of Irish and religious studies by computer studies/information technology to enhance economic performance ('The formula is simple: real change', *Irish Times*, 14 February 2012). How such arguments may sound to people in the Irish republic if articulated by unionist politicians remains to be seen, as does the Irish republic's politicians' willingness to align with unionists on cultural issues. But on the language question, the old unionist/nationalist divide has been long breached. In a neoliberal, globalised world, notions of identity and political allegiance are transactional.

¹²⁷ See for example the Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (2008), available at: <https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/handle/10197/1257> (10 November 2021).

abolish language requirements for educational qualifications—teachers, gardaí, lawyers and judges. By removal of structures that ensure the presence of the minimal number of speakers to sustain the system, the Irish language will die out in two generations.¹²⁸

- Unionism recognises and embraces its Irish-language heritage, retakes possession of the language, adopts the Irish republic's current educational curriculum wholesale and teaches Irish as a required subject.¹²⁹
- Make Ullans the legal, political and culture mirror of Irish and demand equal rights, funding and opportunities for Ullans in any new constitution, educational system, legal system and civil service system.
- Embrace federalism. Propose federal status for regions throughout the island. Regional entities (islands, north-east Ulster, Gaeltacht regions, areas with high-density Traveller populations) retain control over their internal affairs, specifically cultural affairs, planning permission, inward investment and appropriate budgets to advance those goals.
- A federation of the islands, with London no longer in charge (because the Union is no longer working for Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland). Thus, separating a little from the UK—whether as Northern Ireland or a united Ireland—but bringing the Irish republic into a relationship of closer ties with Britain. Irish, Welsh, Manx and Gaelic protected and respected (Linda Ervine doctrine).
- Remove Irish as a core Leaving Certificate subject while reinforcing it in the Gaeltacht (Donncha Ó hÉallaithe doctrine).¹³⁰ Make north-east Antrim an 'Ullansacht' where signage is in Ullans only and Ullans is protected and promoted. State-funded schools, boarding schools and summer colleges teach Ullans as Irish is taught in the Gaeltacht.
- Ignore the Irish language. The Irish republic's government and the majority of its politicians have neither the will nor the imagination to maintain the language and will oversee its demise as a communal language within 20 years.

¹²⁸ Similarly, however, given that the Irish republic has failed to sustain, let alone expand, the Gaeltacht, can unionists—a minority in an all-island context—expect fair and equitable treatment in an all-Ireland context?

¹²⁹ For objections, see McGimpsey, in *The Irish language and the unionist tradition*, 13. Nationalists might find the analogy to Black children in South Africa being forced to learn Afrikaans somewhat ironic.

¹³⁰ 'Tá sé in am ábhar roghnach a dhéanamh den Ghaeilge don Ardteist', *Tuairisc*, available at: <https://tuairisc.ie/ta-se-in-am-abhar-roghnach-a-dheanamh-den-ghaeilge-don-ardteist/> (2 March 2021). The response such calls might elicit when made in a 'Northern' accent rather than a Connemara accent remains to be seen.

- If Irish is to have a special status, request that Ulster-Irish be the official linguistic and grammatical standard.
- Official recognition of the Shaw's Road gaeltacht and funding equal to that of other Irish-speaking districts.
- The establishment of a ministry for Ullans and loyalist heritage (equivalent to Department of Gaeltacht), with equal funding, resources and time on national broadcaster.
- 12 July be recognised and funded to the same level as 17 March, with state-sponsored celebrations throughout the 32 counties.
- The poppy, shamrock and Easter lily be considered as potential official symbols.
- An academy/university equivalent to Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge or Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean (Scotland) be established east of the Bann to research and promote Ullans and loyalist culture.
- The establishment of academic departments and chairs of Ullans/modern Irish and loyalist history and culture in all universities on the island.
- The state funds children to attend summer camps in Ulster and Scotland to experience loyalist culture.
- Ullans literature taught in all schools.
- The GAA—a private amateur organisation—be encouraged as an act of goodwill to rename any club now named for a nationalist for a nationalist *and* a unionist.
- An Gúm publications appear simultaneously in Irish and Ullans.
- Loyalist intellectuals become involved in setting curricula and syllabi for Irish-language schools to ensure parity of esteem and equal recognition of the loyalist historical narrative.

Again, many of these suggestions are unpalatable if not untenable, but their discussion, if not their dismissal, charts the terrain and maps the boundaries of what is (un)acceptable, (im)possible and (in)conceivable.

Debates about language cannot be reduced to two diametrically opposed sides: republicans v. loyalists, unionists v. nationalists, Northern Ireland v. Irish republic. In reality, there are multiple languages, religious groups, linguistic codes and pressure groups at play. Within Northern Ireland there are a plurality of voices and attitudes on all sides, just as in the Irish republic. There

exists a diversity and range of opinion within unionist politics (the Orange Order, the Caleb Foundation) as within language pressure groups (Glór na Móna, an Dream Dearg, Comhaltas Uladh and Conradh na Gaeilge). Northern Ireland is subject to the European charter for regional or minority languages, the Irish republic not so.¹³¹ Northern Irish language activists have leveraged concessions won by their Welsh and Scottish counterparts.

Irish is more politicised in Northern Ireland. In the Irish republic, language activists depend largely if not exclusively on government funding (and thus, by definition, are political). Also relevant, but frequently lost in the political rancour, is the role and status of other languages currently in use on the island: Gammon/Shelta, Polish, Chinese, sign language,¹³² Lithuanian, Yoruba, French, Spanish, Romanian, Portuguese, Braille and Arabic among others.¹³³ Such languages, as much as Irish and Ullans, cannot be considered in isolation.

Language does not exist in a vacuum: language choice and usage are pragmatic decisions where power, social access and material advancement are critical motivators. It would be a serious mistake to consider language(s) a marginal issue, of only symbolic significance—something to be traded off at the last moment in some base form of cultural horse-trading to secure a compromise deal at any costs (i.e. the St Andrews Accord)—in any new political formation.

Social class is also a factor. Class certainly impacts attitudes to languages and language learning, and the role of working-class Catholics and Protestants in contemporary Irish-language affairs is under-studied and neglected.¹³⁴ The false notion that additional languages are the preserve of the ‘elite’—a marker of their special intelligence—as well as the valorisation of certain languages

¹³¹ The UK government signed the charter in 2011. COMEX issued its fifth report on the charter’s implementation in July 2020 (https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680948544#_Toc7705761). The UK responded on 5 January 2021 (<https://rm.coe.int/ukiria5rev-en/1680a0eef6>).

¹³² Heath Rose and John Bosco Conama, ‘Linguistic imperialism: still a valid construct in relation to language policy for Irish Sign Language’, *Language Policy* 17 (2018), 385–404.

¹³³ See contributions by Nadette Foley, Anna Man-Wah Watson and Bob McCullough in *Language and politics: Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Scotland* (Belfast, 2000).

¹³⁴ Is it a coincidence that the label ‘working-class’ is used to refer to Linda Irvine, those who attend the Turas classes in South Belfast, the members of Dalriada (<http://www.ianadamson.net/2013/10/07/the-dalaradia-organisation/>), and the original founding members of the Shaw’s Road Gaeltacht project? Mary Delargy, ‘Language, culture and identity: the Chinese community in Northern Ireland’, in Nic Craith, *Language, power and identity politics*, 123–45; Gabriele Marranci, ‘Faith’, language and identity: Muslim migrants in Scotland and Northern Ireland’, in Nic Craith, *Language, power and identity politics*, 167–78.

as ‘useful’ and ‘important’ are key factors. French represents ‘cosmopolitan sophistication’, but Irish, Swahili and Polish smack of ‘provincialism’.

How languages are viewed, used, treated and legislated will not be a marginal decision in any proposed new political configuration on the island. Language not only shapes but cuts across society’s entire social fabric. The treatment of minorities—religious, cultural, ethnic, tribal, racial, linguistic, national, refugee, sexual, political or immigrant—reveals much about a society’s nature and attitude. This reality will be as true of any new configuration as it is of Northern Ireland and Ireland today. Much more is at stake in the discussion of language than a squabble over ‘our’ versus ‘their’ language. This debate goes to the very heart of societal values, national aspirations and mutual respect for fellow citizens/subjects. How language(s), heritage(s) and culture(s) are perceived, funded and promoted depends on the dominant political ideology.

Languages and language issues reflect the fault lines between the various political, cultural and linguistic factions on the island. The resolution of the language questions is not ‘a green litmus test’¹³⁵ but a fundamental indicator of the social and communal values and aspirations of any new constitutional configuration, and its tolerance of differences, openness to alternative traditions, and acceptance of competing truths and a plurality of voices. Will speakers of various languages have equal rights to communicate and access to administrative services? Will the new configuration be a radical form of inclusion based on shared cultural values rather than historical traditions, a form of inclusion that hears and listens to all voices rather than a radical, corrosive identity-based politics based on narrow visions? Whatever happens, the following factors will come into play.

Legal

- Constitutional status of language(s); official recognised languages: English, Irish, Ullans, Cant, sign language, Braille. Should English have ‘official’ legal status?
- Charter of speakers’ rights: legal rights, government services, judicial proceedings
- ‘National’ symbols, anthems, letterhead and markers
- Language commissioners: roles, powers, limits

¹³⁵ Goldenberg, *The symbolic significance of the Irish language in the Northern Ireland conflict*.

- Signage/Announcements in public and private sectors
- Access/Rights to instantaneous translation¹³⁶

Educational

- Education: syllabi, examinations, textbooks, core subjects, university matriculation
- Professional qualifications: teachers, gardaí/police, judges, barristers, translators, interpreters, civil servants

Civil administration

- Centralised or localised school/government/health system
- Designation of special status areas—Gaeltacht, Galltacht, Ulltacht, Chinatown, Gaeltacht quarter, Polish town

Tourism/Community development and enrichment

- Funding for language promotion, cultural preservation
- Language and cultural promotion
- Cultural tourism

The debate is currently cleaved in two, with each side operating according to a different set of assumptions. The tendency to reduce everything to binaries detracts from the multiple overlapping webs complicating each element of the issues in play. Utopia for one is the other's dystopia.

Several matters are unclear: what do various parties oppose and propose? Which group speaks on behalf of whom, and with what authority? Do party leaders drive political policy? Is party policy ideological or strategic, short-term or long-term? What are various groups able/willing to 'concede' or cease demanding while inevitably expecting reciprocity for any 'concession'?

All involved need a coherent strategy and vision, based on ensuring parity of esteem for all languages and traditions rather the exclusion or denial of the other's language and culture. One cannot play chess without knowing

¹³⁶ Technological advances will resolve certain issues in time, such as translation and interpretative services. Artificial speech translation is not new. Pixel earbuds, using Google Translate, offer voice translation via a smartphone application and Skype can translate some ten languages. A 'language-transparent society' is not too far away. See Marek Kohn, *Four words for friend: why using more than one language matters now more than ever* (New Haven, 2019).

how many pieces one and one's opponent hold. Nonetheless, the numerous variables at play allow for creativity and constructive discussion. Here, deliberative democracy and the impact of group values on perceptions of risk and related facts will prove critical.¹³⁷ What might productive discussions and welcoming gestures look like?

- Engage in dialogue regarding unionists'/loyalists' fears, i.e. the 'Trojan horse'.
- The perceived issue of sectarianism as regards language use needs to be addressed.
- Explore and publicise the multilingual nature of modern Britain and the bilingual nature of Welsh and Scottish heritage and identity.
- An Dream Dearg/Conradh na Gaeilge reassure unionists/loyalists that an Irish Language Act or demands for language rights will not result in restrictive language policies or linguistic disenfranchisement, as appears to be the case in Latvia, Ukraine and even Russia, where states, based on the language of the ethnic majority, seek to affirm official national identity at the expense of the monolingual linguistic minority.¹³⁸
- Identify stakeholders, particularly unionists/loyalists, who see value and merit in linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Identify the policies/attitudes and red lines for the various political parties, pressure groups and community organisations.
- Create new metaphors, a new discourse, a new set of symbols and a public education campaign illustrating and highlighting the value of bilingualism and bilingual education. Monolinguals generally regard language learning as a zero-sum game.
- Scholarships for 'working-class'¹³⁹ unionists/loyalists to attend Gaeltacht colleges and for 'working-class' nationalists/republicans to attend similar Ulltacht experiences/courses. Create learning experiences that validate

¹³⁷ See for example Dan Kahan, "Ideology" or "situation sense"? An experimental investigation of motivated reasoning and professional judgment', *University of Pennsylvania Law Review*, 164 (2) (2016), 349–439; Dan Kahan, 'The politically motivated reasoning paradigm, part 1: What politically motivated reason is and how to measure it', *Emerging Trends in Social & Behavioral Sciences* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0417>; James S. Fishkin, 'Cultural cognition as a conception of the cultural theory of risk', in Sabine Roeser et al. (eds), *Handbook of risk theory: epistemology, decision theory, ethics and social implications of risk* (Dordrecht, 2012), 725–60.

¹³⁸ Aneta Pavlenko, 'Multilingualism in post-Soviet countries: language revival, language removal, and sociolinguistic theory', *Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 11 (3 & 4) (2008), 275–314; Kara D. Brown, 'Language policy and education: space and place in multilingual post-Soviet states', *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 33 (2013), 238–57; Carol Schmid, Brigita Zepa and Arta Snipe, 'Language policy and ethnic tensions in Quebec and Latvia', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 45 (3–4), 231–52.

¹³⁹ See note 132.

and reflect the diversity, identities, histories, contributions and experiences of all, and allow all to see the world through the windows of historical accounts, but also to understand history in ways that mirror who they are.

- Age-appropriate textbooks and graphic novels that tell of the shared linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Produce attractive DVDs/podcasts, TV documentaries that explore Irish culture.
- Fund assistant teachers to work in unionist/loyalist areas.
- Develop online classes on place names, bilingual unionist/loyalist historical figures.
- Work with scholars of Scottish culture to discuss and enrich mutual understanding of St Patrick, Colmcille.
- Explore and publicise the bilingual nature of Scottish and Welsh religious life.
- Expand the unionist/loyalist conception of contemporary Irish-language culture and literature.
- Based on existing models, fund Irish-language and Ullans poets to conduct joint tours of Ireland, the UK and Europe to promote understanding and mutual appreciation.
- Explore what a 'de-weaponised' Irish language means. Discuss what actions would 'de-weaponise' the language.
- Clarity on each political party's long-term vision/commitment to Irish rather than short-term political gains.
- Clarity on various parties' attitudes to Ullans.
- Greater funding for a renewed Iontaobhas Ultach/Ultach Trust (Ulster language, traditions and cultural heritage) that seeks to identify obstacles to Protestant and unionist engagement with the language and to raise awareness within the Catholic and nationalist community of the difficulties experienced by learners from other traditions.

Ulster Protestants, as Parr observes, 'like it or not, will play a large part in the future of this island in whatever political, social and economic form that takes'.¹⁴⁰ For every sufferer of xenoglossophobia¹⁴¹ and xenolingohassen¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Parr, 'It's time to explore riches of Ulster Protestant culture'.

¹⁴¹ A clinical anxiety related to hearing foreign languages.

¹⁴² Hatred and intolerance of other languages.

there is a Rev. T.P. McCaughey: a Presbyterian minister and Trinity College scholar who

when challenged by unionists in Oxford to say what knowing Irish did for him, replied ‘I feel a fuller person for having learned Irish.’ Simple but profound. Imagine trying to tell an Orangeman he is to be denied of his feeling, ‘a fuller person’ because of his Orangeism. That would be preposterous as long as that individual in the same way as the aficionado of the Irish language doesn’t shove the mutual manifestations of either cultures [*sic*] into each other’s face.¹⁴³

CONCLUSION

Democracy is inherently messy and fractious. A nation, the philosopher Ernest Renan said in 1882, is ‘a great solidarity’, its existence ‘a daily plebiscite’. It constantly needs to remember—and to forget—things about itself. What constitutes a nation has been, and continues to be, elusive yet inescapable. Every modern nation-state is predicated on some perceived essence, a bearer of an identity sufficiently different and distinct from its neighbours to justify its declaration as independent, unique. Such identities are, and must be, a judicious admixture of truth and lies, elisions and exaggerations, omissions and overlooking of inconvenient truths and facts. Yet in an age of ever-increasing globalisation and transnational flows, might we shift the focus from the nation and the state to the citizen and the individual? Rather than conceive of good and loyal citizenship in terms of traditional patriotism—depending on a nationalist monoglot ideology—and contribution to society, might the notion of a global citizenship articulated via valorisation of multilingual competence grounded in shared values—reflexivity and flexibility—be a viable alternative?

Global citizenship centres on transformative notions of democratic and reflexive citizenship, and requires a critical reimagining of how existing structures and policies function. Global citizens require a form of government that designs and delivers services based not on its own requirements and

¹⁴³ Éamonn Mallie, ‘End to cultural conflict means Irish language and parity of esteem for all’, 5 January 2020, available at: <https://eamonnmallie.com/2020/01/end-to-cultural-conflict-means-irish-language-and-parity-of-esteem-for-all-by-eamonn-mallie/> (10 November 2021).

processes, but rather on the needs and wants of its citizens: a citizen-centric approach with personal welfare and social harmony at its core.

In thinking about any new state formation on the island of Ireland, a bold and imaginative focus on language issues is essential if the new society is to be harmonious, stable and peaceful. Rather than ignoring the past and repeating its failures, why not harness the tensions, complementarities and affordances of rights and citizenship frameworks as powerful engines for long overdue political, educational and social change? The language issues discussed here provide a process of engagement that opens doors for respectful and deconstructive negotiations on the systematic creation of 'otherness' and difference that can be creatively engaged with and resolved. Successful bargaining and negotiation require each side to learn and understand the other's interests and concerns. Genuine good-faith efforts are prerequisites for achieving mutual gains. All parties need to emphasise the benefits of their demands, and dispel any perception of a threat.

How should a discussion of languages and cultures be framed so that it appears inviting rather than a zero-sum game for any stakeholder? Cultural critics, public intellectuals and decision-makers need to engage each other, but more importantly listen to one another to understand everyone's concerns, fears, desires and expectations. Knowledge and understanding increase potential for movement and the number of variables, while listening without defending not only defuses anger but does not require any 'concession'.

Edna Longley, writing in 1996, considered the question 'What do Protestants want?' What 'they' wanted, she opined, was 'an open-ended, pluralistic, evolutionary, culturally literate, regionally distinctive, and much less male-dominated society, which some day might come up with different symbols'. Such an aspiration seems more than reasonable and an appropriate starting point. Language inflects every aspect of culture and society. Language is essential in the state's interaction with its citizens. Language is everywhere in society: politics, religion, cultures, commerce and identity. In written and verbal form it is unavoidable. That is both its strength and weakness. It's easy to give up and allocate responsibility to the educational sector, voluntary groups, under-funded government units.

Envisioning a society in which the state serves its citizens' various linguistic needs is challenging, but a key element in creating a society that addresses historical fissures, deep-rooted cultural animosity and mutual mistrust. No more than having a social safety net to protect the weakest in society, an ideal system would respect all, discriminate against no one and disenfranchise

none culturally or linguistically: a system where the state respects the citizen and seeks to serve the citizen.

Many of the suggestions outlined here risk exasperating, frustrating and irritating various groups, but resolving generations of strife is neither easy nor straightforward. Politics may be the art of compromise, but great politics is not about finding a solution, but imagining a solution. Change is the law of life. Those who focus exclusively on the past or the present miss not only the potential but the promise of the future.

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