Leo Kjelbotn Trøen

"A Handshake in Ulster"

A Mnemonic Study of Ireland's Troubled Past and Present

Bachelor's thesis in English
Supervisor: Dag Hjorth Endresen
May 2023

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Table of contents:

Abstract.. 1
1.0 Introduction..2
2.0 Historical Background.. 3
2.1- Factions and tensions.. 3
2.2 The IRA..5
2.3 Sinn Féin.. 6
2.4 Protestant & British groups..7
3.0 Meaning through memory.. 9
3.1 Memory and Identity..9
4.0 Manifestations and Representations of Memory..................... 11
4.1 Memory and the Good Friday Agreement.............................. 11
4.2 Memory & Sinn Féin..12
4.3 Memory & the Alliance party.. 13
4.4 Memory & the Enniskillen bombing.......................................14
4.5 Memory in Derry..16
5.0 Conclusion.. 19
Works Cited:.. 20

Abstract

This thesis analyses memory and identity in Northern Ireland, and how its troubled past– especially in regards to the Troubles– has led to contention regarding Irish identity. To illustrate this, the thesis first shows the historical context of the Troubles, and then examines the controversy of the handshake between Queen Elizabeth II and Martin McGuinness in addition to other manifestations and representations of memory both throughout the Troubles and in contemporary times, using examples from Irish politics, music/poetry and other acts of commemoration.

1.0 Introduction

In 2012, Queen Elizabeth II returned to Northern Ireland and shook the hand of Martin McGuinness, the province's Deputy First Minister. This handshake lasted a whole four seconds, emphasising its importance as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation. This event proved to be controversial, as McGuinness is a former leader of the (provisional) Irish Republican Army (henceforth denoted as the IRA), prompting reactions from many sides of the thirty year long conflict known as 'the Troubles'. This took shape in the form of minor Irish Republican protests, but The Times also reported that people who oppose IRA and Sinn Féin unsurprisingly felt angry and upset at such a reconciliation, interpreting it as a kind of victory for McGuinness's IRA past and Sinn Féin present. The newspaper article in question bears the subheading of: "for many the idea of the Queen shaking an ex-IRA leader's hand feels like a defeat. They are wrong: it is violence that has lost."[1]

This idea of the handshake being a defeat was not only felt by the opponents of IRA and Sinn Féin sentiment- but was also shared by some Republicans; The Northern Ireland of which he was the Deputy First Minister was not the 32-county socialist republic that the Provisional IRA had envisioned. As a result, there still existed republicans who, as The Times states, "have learnt nothing and forgotten nothing and believe Mr McGuinness is a traitor."[2] McGuinness had essentially gone from being a leading promoter of sectarian violence to being a leading preventer of violence, due to his importance in the peace process. This meant that the Republicans who wanted to fight until the end would view him as a traitor with the Loyalists viewing him as a former terrorist. In addition to these problems, this reconciliation in the form of a handshake with McGuinness can not have been an easy task for the Queen either, as the IRA had targeted her good friend, Lord Mountbatten and his family, killing him and much of his family in a bombing in 1979. As the Queen would note of her experience and recollection of the Troubles: "These events have touched us all, many of us personally, and are a painful legacy. We can never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families."[3]

But how did it come to this? How can such a seemingly insignificant event as a handshake be of such significance and prompt so much controversy 14 years after the Good Friday agreement? In order to understand how this troubled legacy of violence, terror, betrayal and concessions could lead to a peaceful, yet controversial handshake between a

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[1] The Times, 2012.
[2] The Times, 2012.
[3] BBC, 2022.

militant republican and a monarch, we must understand the basis for these strong feelings. It is now 25 years since the Good Friday agreement, which has again brought attention to the Troubles and these questions, with this anniversary being celebrated and commemorated in many parts of the world, including in the European Parliament.[4] In order to make sense of this situation and these reactions, it is necessary to look at the historical context; Especially important are the different factions, such as Sinn Féin, the IRA and the different Protestant groups (including the British army) involved, as well as the important events that lead to this relative peace.

However, though looking at the situation simply through a historical context may leave us with some context on how this conflict came to be, it would likely also leave us with more questions than answers. Because this topic is so tied to national identity it is relevant to examine it through the lens of memory studies, as the field of memory studies is more fitting in regards to analysing the human condition central to this situation, as this aforementioned controversy largely stems from individual- and shared trauma as well as a problematic (Irish) identity and a problematic relationship with the British. In this thesis, I will utilise the concepts of cultural memory, communicative memory and sites of memory (including lieux de mémoire) in order to illustrate the importance of memory in Irish collective identity, and how memory is used for different agendas, as well as discuss different manifestations of memory in Ireland both throughout the Troubles as well as in contemporary times.

2.0 Historical Background

2.1- Factions and tensions

Though it is generally agreed upon that the conflict known as the Troubles lasted from the end of the 60s to the Good Friday agreement in 1998, there is still some debate as to exactly when this conflict first originated. Some sources, such as Paul Dixon's comprehensive book *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*[5] and the more short-form YouTube video *the Troubles*[6] by Feature History trace this conflict all the way back to the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169, while others, such as Marc Mulholland's *Northern Ireland: A Very Short Introduction* trace the conflict back to the 16th or 17th century with Henry VIII's claim to Ireland and then the plantation of Ulster. Perhaps a more central event is the partition

[4] Walsh and Kleiner, 2023.
[5] Dixon, 2008: 2.
[6] Feature History, 2017.

of Ireland following the Irish war for independence, as this was when the two Irelands split: especially considering how the partition was widely considered to be a temporary measure, with provisions made for a potential voluntary reunification.[7] Nevertheless, one thing is certain: the roots of this conflict go far deeper than an outsider might imagine. Though this thesis will focus on the era from the 60s and on, it is important to keep in mind that this is a conflict that spans many generations, and thus these feelings go deeper than just the Troubles.

Another important part to understanding the conflict lies in understanding the demographics of Ireland and Northern Ireland and the different groups that were at conflict. The conflict in itself is largely sectarian, and the simplest way of discerning between the groups present in the conflict is to divide them between Catholics and Protestants, and/or into nationalists/republicans and unionists/loyalists. Dixon distinguishes these two pairs as follows:

> Within nationalism the term 'nationalist' is often used to describe someone who aspires to a united Ireland but is opposed to the use of violence to achieve it, while a 'republican' often shares much of the analysis of the 'nationalist' but is prepared to use violence; so all republicans are nationalists, but not all nationalists are republicans.
>
> …
>
> Similarly, within unionism the term 'unionist' describes a supporter of the Union who is opposed to the use of violence and uses more constitutional means to defend the Union, while a 'loyalist' is used to describe a unionist who tends to employ or advocate more militant methods to defend the Union, sometimes including violence.[8]

It is, however, important to note that though these two factions are separated by, and usually referred to by their religious belonging, this conflict is not of a religious nature. The reason why this is important is because the majority of Ireland as a whole, and especially the Republic of Ireland has a Catholic majority, while Northern Ireland has, since the plantation/colonisation of the early 17th century, been populated by a protestant majority. This protestant majority is generally of Scottish and British descent, and because of the nature of their residence many Catholics would view these Protestants as colonisers.[9] This naturally led to tensions steadily rising between the Catholic minority and the Protestant majority. Another reason for the tensions between the Catholic minority and the Protestant majority is the Protestant/British fear of Catholics slowly gaining more power in Northern Ireland, and as such the Stormont regime (Protestant government) would employ systematic discrimination against Catholics in order to maintain their power. As a result, the Protestant

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[7] Dixon, 2008: 4.
[8] Dixon, 2008: 6.
[9] Dixon, 2008: 4.

regime made sure that only a limited number of Catholics would gain positions in the higher echelons of the State, as well as rigging elections in their favour.[10] It is also important to note that though these two main sides of the struggle generally have the same goals, differences in ideology and willingness to employ violence led to a lack of unity on both sides.

2.2 The IRA

Perhaps the most famous, and most infamous group regarding the Troubles is the IRA. The IRA emerged in the Irish War of Independence, but would experience several schisms, splitting into two main groups in 1969. This resulted in two new IRAs: the 'Official' IRA (the Real IRA/RIRA) and the Provisional IRA. When talking about the Troubles, the Provisionals (Provos/Proves) were the largest and most active, and thus also most important. As a result, the name IRA became synonymous with the Provisional IRA, and as such, when this text mentions the IRA, it means the Provisional IRA rather than the Official IRA unless stated otherwise. This schism shows the lack of unity even among the people willing to start paramilitary organisations to fight the British. The goal of the IRA was to create a united Ireland, and as such they were never quite content with the partition, and saw Northern Ireland as an occupied area rather than as a part of Britain. Mulholland describes the IRA as: "[t]he historic defenders of the Catholic community, at least in theory…"[11] as well as "the army of the 'people', representing the martial prowess of the Irish nation for a substantial section of the Ulster Catholic community."[12]

The reason the IRA has become so infamous is because of its willingness to resort to desperate means such as violence and terror targeting what they deemed to be 'strategic targets'. Despite this, the IRA was unwilling to escalate the situation during the late 60s and very early 70s into a full-scale war, with Danny Morrison, a leader in Sinn Féin noting that "[t]here was no way at that time that the IRA could have shot Brits or policemen. They couldn't have sold it [to the people]. The reaction of the people would have been 'God almighty, did we produce people who are capable of doing that'?"[13] The public opinion surrounding this, as well as the opinion of the IRA, would change drastically after the events of Bloody Sunday. The IRA quickly became especially infamous for their bombing attacks, often also employing car bombs to carry out these missions. Because bombs are prone to collateral damage, many would come to view the IRA as a terrorist organisation due to the

[10] Mulholland B, 2002: 45.
[11] Mulholland A, 2002: 78.
[12] Mulholland A, 2002: 87-88.
[13] Mulholland A, 2002: 92.

many civilian lives lost in their bombing campaigns, some of which would even reach mainland Britain. One of the most well known and contentious of these bombings was the Remembrance Day Bombing (Enniskillen bombing), where the IRA detonated a bomb near the British war memorial (Cenotaph), killing 11 people and injuring 63 (which included 13 children).[14] The IRA also had ties to other controversial groups, such as Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, who would supply the IRA with large amounts of both weapons and Semtex explosives.[15] Republican paramilitaries (with the Provisional Irish Republican Army being the main culprit) were responsible for approximately 2139 out of the 3636 deaths during the troubles. This makes almost 60 percent of the total deaths.[16] With the IRA's responsibility in so many deaths, it is perhaps understandable how controversial it was when the monarch of the country they hated shook hands with one of its former leaders.

2.3 Sinn Féin

The political counterpart to the militant IRA is Sinn Féin, a political party which roughly translated means '[we] Ourselves' in Gaelic. Already in their name is it possible to ascertain their opinions on Irish identity and independence. Sinn Féin would first gain prominence in the 1918 general election, where Sinn Féin managed to secure a landslide victory, winning 73 of the 105 seats, showing promise for a potentially independent Ireland[17] When Sinn Féin rose to power, they ensured that many signs of British rule and authority in Ireland would be replaced in order to win widespread recognition for their independence. Some of the ways they did this was by creating a separatist parliamentary assembly (The Dáil), a local government pledging allegiance to the Dáil, a judicial system separate from the crown, and their own military formations to replace those of British origin.[18] In other words, Sinn Féin's goal was, and has always been, to create and strengthen Irish identity in order to secure their independence from the British.

Despite this, Sinn Féin was instrumental in the peace process leading up to the Good Friday Agreement. Though Sinn Féin and the British government would negotiate peace terms in the late 90s, this was for a long time done in complete secrecy from both sides, in order to maintain a public image where they were still fighting. These peace talks would eventually be leaked in the newspaper "The Observer" in 1993, leading to both the British

[14] BBC, 1987.
[15] BBC, 2011.
[16] Dixon, 2008: 12.
[17] Mulholland A, 2002: 81.
[18] Mulholland A, 2002: 82.

Government and Sinn Féin releasing their own versions of the peace talks.[19] Though both sides would release accounts detailing their contacts, these two accounts were different, and as Dixon notes: "[t]his is not surprising since they each had differing constituencies to reassure. The British Government needed to convince unionists that its 'contacts' with Sinn Féin were not intended to secretly sell out of the Union. The Sinn Féin leadership had to reassure the republican rank and file that it had not been 'colluding' with the British Government or betraying the struggle."[20]

In recent years, however, Sinn Féin has attempted to distance themselves from the IRA and the violence and terror that the IRA has become synonymous with for many around the world, and especially Brits. Dixon argues, however, that "[t]he evidence points overwhelmingly towards an inextricable link between the IRA and Sinn Féin, in spite of the attempts in recent years, for propaganda reasons, for Sinn Féin to claim a distance between itself and the IRA."[21] One example of this that explicitly ties Sinn Féin to the IRA is how Martin McGuinness would become Minister of Education following the Good Friday Agreement.[22] Another link between the IRA and Sinn Féin is seen through its former president, Gerry Adams, who was also instrumental in the peace talks despite being the supreme leader of the Proves according to British intelligence, who noted that: "Adams has honed the Proves into a deadly terrorist force."[23]

2.4 Protestant & British groups

On the opposing side from the IRA there are many different Protestant groups, with some of the main enemies of the IRA being official governmental groups such as the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), B-specials and the British army. In addition to this, as a reaction to the republican paramilitary IRA, loyalist paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) also saw a rise before- and during the Troubles. The UVF had the goal to "entrench existing polarities between communities and destroy illusions that Catholics could be loyal to the state."[24] The UVF attempted to do this by provoking the IRA through imitating their own tactics, such as the bombing attacks.

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[19] Dixon, 2008: 236.
[20] Dixon, 2008: 236.
[21] Dixon, 2008: 11.
[22] Dixon, 2008: 277.
[23] Time Inc., 1979: 1.
[24] Mulholland A, 2002: 67.

As Mulholland notes: “this coolly rational plan collapsed due to the sectarian enthusiasm of its members.”[25]

The RUC also became a very controversial participant during the troubles as the public organ who was supposed to be policing the state was almost exclusively made up of Protestants, and as a result had a clear bias against the Catholic population. They would also occasionally bring in the Protestant B-specials and eventually the British army to aid their small numbers in fighting Catholic protesters, signalling Northern Ireland’s bias towards the Catholic population. Due to the perceived IRA threat, the RUC would perform comprehensive, targeted house searches, also setting up checkpoints to check passing vehicles. This was because the RUC treated the different Catholic areas as IRA strongholds, hoping to provoke the IRA in order to eliminate them. In 1971 there were 17.000 house searches, rising to 36.000 in 1972 and 75.000 in 1973 and 1974. Between 1971 and 1976 there were approximately 250.000 house searches in total.[26] As Mulholland notes: “Catholic civilians, unsurprisingly, saw this as the actions of an occupation army.”[27] This illustrates the dynamic and different attitudes at play between the Catholics of Northern Ireland and the stately powers, and how the state could be perceived as illegitimate, non-Irish and hostile.

In addition to these searches, the British government imposed a policy of internment in August 1971 which was supposed to target and interrogate the perceived Catholic IRA threat. The problem with this policy was that this effectively meant that the government could imprison and interrogate anyone who they suspected may have IRA ties, leading to the possibility of imprisoning and interrogating random innocent Catholic members of the population. This introduction of internment ended what remaining hopes there were that Irish nationalists could cooperate with the Stormont regime, as it became ever clearer that the Stormont regime viewed the entirety of the Catholic population to be potential threats. As a result, internment proved disastrous, with death tolls rising from 66 killed (11 being soldiers) in the two years prior to the internment, and 610 people killed (146 of them being soldiers) in the first 17 months of internment.[28] Perhaps the most influential and controversial event perpetrated by the RUC and the British army during the troubles was the event known as Bloody Sunday, where the British army would open fire at Catholic protesters who had gathered to protest against internment policy in addition to petitioning for civil rights.

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[25] Mulholland A, 2002: 67.
[26] Mulholland A, 2002: 89-90.
[27] Mulholland A, 2002: 90.
[28] Dixon, 2008: 118.

3.0 Meaning through memory

3.1 Memory and Identity

In the introduction of this thesis, I stated that simply examining the situation surrounding the handshake and the troubles through a historical lens simply would not be enough, and that using memory studies would be a more rational way of explaining the different factors present in the controversy, and the main reason for this is, as Nora argues, that memory and history are far from synonymous, and now appear to be in fundamental opposition, as "Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past."[29] Thus, though the history of Ireland is important to understanding the struggle, the memories of the different people of Ireland are more important to understanding the different nuances to the conflict, as the individual memories manifest in ways that eventually render them into collective memories, thus shaping the collective national identity. As J. Assmann notes: "Memory is the faculty that enables us to form an awareness of selfhood (identity), both on the personal and on the collective level."[30] Erll argues that memory itself is not observable, and that we can only observe memory through concrete acts of remembering situated in specific sociocultural contexts, and that first through this we can hypothesize about memory's nature and functioning.[31] Thus, it is natural to bring up both the different ways of remembering and forgetting, as well as how different categories of memory such as communicative memory, cultural memory etc. shape the modern landscape, as well as examine how these memories differ based on who these memories belong to. Nora argues that memory remains in permanent evolution, and as such is a perpetually actual phenomenon, and that as a result, memory is "vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived."[32]

Regarding the national memory and nation-building, Aleida Assmann argues that most nations that had to struggle to become nations build their collective national identity on triumphant narratives, but that some others would define themselves through decisive and memorable defeats, and that this first way of building a national identity was more prominent through the nineteenth century, while the latter rose to prominence in the twentieth.[33] She elaborates, stating that

[29] Nora, 1989: 8.
[30] Assmann J, 2008: 109.
[31] Erll, 2011: 8.
[32] Nora, 1989: 8.
[33] Assmann A, 2015: 173.

> "[t]he structure of the new national memory differs from the former in that it no longer crystallizes around triumph (the moment of self-creation and independence after a heroic struggle) but around trauma, and that this "(re)birth of the nation was not triumphant but maimed and scarred; it was tattooed with a wound that is considered, however, not just a stigma but the badge of a distinct and unalienable ethnic identity."[34]

This is definitely the case for the Irish, as this trauma and these scars have left their mark on the Irish people– enough so that the strained relationship between Catholics and Protestants has yet to vanish completely, something that we can clearly see in the controversy surrounding the handshake. This lies not only in the more recent traumatic events surrounding the Troubles, but far deeper; Irish identity is largely built on traumatic events and defeats at the hands of the British. This issue goes far back in history, with the previously mentioned plantation of Ulster, but also the Great Famine, Irish war for independence, and Northern Ireland arguably being the first and last British colony. What these have in common is how the Irish people would unify against the British, creating their identity on the base of the traumatic events they were exposed to. Thus, national memory has been instrumental in the unification among the Irish people through their cultural memory.

In the text "Communicative and Cultural Memory", Jan Assmann distinguishes between cultural memory and communicative memory. In the simplest form, cultural memory is a form of collective memory which conveys a collective cultural identity. He argues that cultural memory is a kind of institution; Cultural memory encompasses the shared knowledge, beliefs, traditions and narratives that are transmitted and preserved over time. For example symbols and stories are important to cultural memory. Assmann also argues that "In order to be reembodied in the sequence of generations, cultural memory … exists also in disembodied form and requires institutions of preservation and reembodiment."[35] Communicative memory, on the other hand, is non-institutional; Communicative memory is a more immediate and informal aspect of memory which refers to the individual and collective remembrance that is shared and exchanged through daily social interactions, conversations and personal experiences. As a result, communicative memory is more fluid and subject to change over time, which also means that it is more easily influenced by personal perspectives and emotions.

As previously stated, memory in itself is not observable, which means that it can only be observed in the concrete acts of commemoration. One way to illustrate this is by employing Nora's concept of lieux de mémoire: different sites of memory, as memories manifest themselves in different ways and through different media. According to Nora, the most instrumental part to the lieux de mémoire is that they are "created by a play of memory

[34] Assmann A, 2015: 173-174.
[35] Assmann, J, 2008: 111.

and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination. To begin with, there must be a will to remember."[36] As a result, different material sites such as monuments and memorials are obvious lieux de mémoire, but also less tangible manifestations of memory can also be lieux de mémoire if these criteria are met. Erll notes that many critics pose the question of just what exactly can become a site of memory, and that "The answer is likely: any cultural phenomenon, whether material, social or mental, which a society associates with its past and with national identity."[37] As Erll also notes: "In the tradition of ancient mnemotechnics, they can be understood as loci in the broadest sense of the term, which call up *imagine,* the memory images … Such sites can therefore include geographical locations, buildings, monuments and works of art as well as historical persons, memorial days, philosophical and scientific texts, or symbolic actions."[38]

4.0 Manifestations and Representations of Memory

4.1 Memory and the Good Friday Agreement

The current year of 2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, and as a result, events commemorating this event are taking place throughout not just Ireland and Britain, but also in other parts of the world. For example, many places in the United States also commemorated the agreement through media such as speeches, music and poetry, celebrating Irish culture and shining a light on how far the country has come rather than on the troubled past.[39] These examples are of the cultural memory of Ireland being used in order to celebrate the Irish identity and memory. The President of the United States, Joe Biden, also joined in commemorating the Good Friday Agreement on his visit to Northern Ireland, where he noted in his speech that: "I came here in '91, in this neighborhood, and you couldn't have a glass building like this here in this neighborhood, I don't think … It's good to see Belfast, a city that's alive with commerce, art – and I'd argue, inspiration. The dividends of peace are all around us."[40] These examples show Biden employing communicative memory through his own experiences and memories in order to shift the focus from the past and onto the present and the future. He also notes that: "Where barbed wire once sliced up the city, today we find cathedral – a cathedral of learning built of glass and let the shine – light out – in and out … You know, it's an incredible testament to the power and the possibilities of peace."[41] This shows more focus on the cultural memory aspect of the situation, with the symbols of barbed wire and cathedrals being important for the cultural memory of Ireland, symbolising the

[36] Nora, 1989: 19.
[37] Erll, 2011: 25.
[38] Erll, 2011: 23.
[39] Ireland.ie, 2023.
[40] The White House, 2023.
[41] The White House, 2023.

struggle. Barbed wire, for instance, is a recurring symbol in Irish culture, symbolising the oppression faced by the British, and can thus be considered to be a lieu de mémoire in its own right.[42] Despite the prevalence of symbols with negative connotations, such as barbed wire, in contemporary times these symbols are used to illustrate a past they are glad to have left behind rather than oppression and the struggle for freedom.

Another significant site of memory which has hosted commemorations of the Good Friday Agreement through different events is Hillsborough Castle. This castle bears significance in Irish history as it has repeatedly played a central role through both negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement in addition to peacetime agreements in Northern Ireland such as the Anglo-Irish agreement in 1985 and the Hillsborough Castle agreement in 2010.[43] As a result, Hillsborough Castle has become an important lieu de mémoire which symbolises the strive for peace.

4.2 Memory & Sinn Féin

One way we can see the usage of Cultural (National) Memory to further a goal is through the rhetoric of Sinn Féin, such as through the meaning of the name Sinn Féin meaning '[We] Ourselves' in Gaelic. Erll argues that cultural memory is founded on these 'myths'/stories about a common past, and that these offer orientation in the present and hope for the future due to their identity-forming nature.[44] She argues that: "The myth provides the fundament for and legitimizes existing systems when it is perceived by society as an expression of a common history, from which present circumstances derive."[45] Jan Assmann argues that in the context of cultural memory, "the distinction between myth and history vanishes."[46] In other words, it does not matter whether or not this myth of a united Gaelic Ireland is rooted in historical truths, as these still shape Irish identity.

Another example of Sinn Féin utilising Irish Gaelic was when Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams opened his speech in 2005 with: "I want to speak directly to the men and women of Óglaigh na hÉireann, the volunteer soldiers of the Irish Republican Army."[47] Though he used the name Oglaigh na hEireann to address the IRA (and proceeds to use them both interchangeably through the rest of the speech), the name Oglaigh na hEireann is the official name of the Irish defence force, which means that Adams uses this to legitimise the IRA as perhaps the 'true' army of Ireland. He also utilises Gaelic in a third context in the speech, stating that "Now is the time for you to step into the Bearna Baoil[48] again; not as

[42] See for example 'The Town I Loved So Well': "And the damned barbed wire gets higher and higher"
[43] Historic Royal Palaces, 2023.
[44] Erll, 2011: 34.
[45] Erll, 2011: 34.
[46] Assmann J, 2008: 113.
[47] Irish Times, 2005.
[48] Roughly translated means 'gap of danger'

volunteers risking life and limb but as activists in a national movement towards independence and unity."[49] This Bearna Baoil is notably mentioned in the Irish National Anthem of Amhrán na bhFiann (The Soldier's Song), and is of such importance that it does not even get translated in the English translation. In other words, Sinn Féin invokes this myth of a once unified Gaelic Ireland in order to legitimise their actions, views and support for the IRA. It is, however, important to note that though Sinn Féin remains the largest party in Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin and the second largest party of the Democratic Unionist Party have both seen a 12 per cent decline in the 2019 election, showing a decline in popularity surrounding their politics.[50]

4.3 Memory & the Alliance party

In the Times article about the handshake much focus was directed towards the different reactions from 'both' sides of the conflict, but the Alliance party represents a third, seemingly more neutral side of the cultural and political dynamic of Northern Ireland. If Sinn Féin is the embodiment of employing myths about a common past in order to invoke Irish collective, cultural memory, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland is the embodiment of the exact opposite, namely a sort of collective forgetting or amnesia regarding the troubled past and memories surrounding this. While the name Sinn Féin attempts to invoke a feeling of national nostalgia, the name Alliance makes no attempt to play on people's memories, instead opting to appeal to people's wish for unity and peace, showing a clear contrast between Sinn Féin's appeal to cultural memory as the Alliance party employs more immediate communicative memory. As Erll notes about the relationship between remembering and forgetting: "The functions of forgetting within cognitive and social systems are at least as important as those of remembering."[51]

While the other political parties in Northern Ireland have strong ties to either Irish Nationalism or British Unionism, and who define themselves around the struggles surrounding this, the Alliance party has now become the third largest party in the Northern Ireland Assembly; all the while refusing to take either the Nationalist or Unionist side.[52] The Alliance party instead promotes a shared 'Northern Irish' identity, while stressing their desire for a united community and integration within Northern Ireland rather than on the Unionist or Nationalist views on the matter. Twenty-five years ago, at the time of the Good Friday

[49] Irish times, 2005.
[50] Tonge, 2020: 462.
[51] Erll, 2011: 9.
[52] Tonge, 2020: 461.

Agreement, surveys showed that only a third of electors stated that they were neither unionist nor nationalist, but the most recent survey in 2018 found that half of the electorate declared themselves to be neither unionist nor nationalist.[53] This shows a growing trend in Northern Ireland where fewer wish to take sides in the conflict, instead campaigning for reconciliation and unification through different means than identifying predominantly with one's religious affiliation. As a result, increasing amounts of people from all sides vote for a party which intends to be unaligned in the context of the ideological struggle, with the Alliance party having the youngest voters in addition to having the most evenly divided voters in terms of gender and religious belonging.[54]

This also ties in to the handshake, as it shows a shift from the militant attitudes that were so present before, and that the Irish people do, in fact, aspire for a more peaceful approach to reconciliation and unification in contemporary times. This is in agreement with Erll, who states that: "Of particular importance has been the topic of 'coming to terms with the past' (Verangenheitsbew\altigung), the problems of remembering collective crimes and atrocities, and of ensuing public acts of 'apology', 'restitution', and 'forgiveness'."[55] Another example of the Alliance party purposefully avoiding the utilisation of cultural memory and identity, is when Alliance leader Naomi Long met Joe Biden prior to his speech at the Ulster University in regards to the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, where she noted that "During our brief discussion, I spoke to President Biden about Northern Ireland's economy and also the need for political stability."[56] Not only did she avoid asking President Biden about the past or his stance on the problematic relationship between Catholics (with Biden possibly having a bias as a Catholic himself) and Protestants, the article about the matter on the Alliance's website makes no mention of Catholics, Protestants or even the fact that the reason he was holding speeches in Ireland was because of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. The article only talks about current political issues and optimism for the future, completely disregarding the issues of culture and memory.

4.4 Memory & the Enniskillen bombing

The Times article about the handshake makes several mentions of the bombing in Enniskillen and about the significance of the Queen visiting this site, as the Enniskillen bombing (Remembrance Day bombing) was an important turning point for the Troubles, as it

[53] Tonge, 2020: 464
[54] Tonge, 2020: 463.
[55] Erll, 2011: 60.
[56] Alliance Party, 2023.

prompted both national and international shock, lessening support for the IRA and Sinn Féin.[57] This bomb supposedly targeted British soldiers attending the town's cenotaph during a remembrance day, and was thus a direct attack on British memory and identity. As a result of all the international condemnation, the IRA would release a statement expressing their "deep regret" at the results of the blast, while claiming that the army were responsible for the detonation. This was later admitted to be false.[58] As Margaret Thatcher noted of the incident: "It's really desecrating the dead and a blot on mankind."[59] This shows the importance of memory and commemorating important events, as an attack on memory itself is controversial, especially when these commemorations are in honour of the dead. Despite the widespread condemnation and anger directed towards the IRA and Sinn Féin in the aftermath of the Enniskillen bombing, Gordon Wilson, whose daughter had been killed in the blast stated that:"I bear no ill will. Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie."[60] This shows a reluctance to enact vengeance or retribution, and a willingness to move on and focus on the future rather than the past.

After the event, The Clinton Centre was built on the site of the bombing as a peace centre, dedicated to bringing people together, housing an art gallery, a cafe and a youth hostel.[61] This building was named after former US president Bill Clinton, who was important in the peace process which led to the Good Friday Agreement. In a way, the name Clinton also acts as a lieux de mémoire in this context, symbolising the peace process and the international support Ireland received. Clinton was also present for commemorations of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement.[62] The Clinton Centre also houses a plaque memorising the people who lost their lives in the blast on one of the walls, so not only is the building itself a site of memory, and an observable physical lieux de mémoire, but one which houses another lieux de mémoire in the form of the plaque. One more lieux de mémoire which was set up after the Enniskillen bombing is the group called Enniskillen Together, which was set up to further the cause of reconciliation in the area.[63] Again the theme of reconciliation seems to dominate the public memory sphere of Ireland.

[57] The Times, 2012.
[58] BBC, 2010.
[59] BBC, 1987.
[60] BBC, 1987.
[61] Coyle, 2023.
[62] Coyle, 2023.
[63] BBC, 1987.

4.5 Memory in Derry

Another important site of memory in regard to the Troubles is the town of Derry. Derry led the way in the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) civil rights movement of 1968, drawing inspiration from the model of civil rights agitation developed by African-Americans in the United States, and as Mulholland notes: "This was an innovation, in that it was explicitly non-political. Rather than tie up allegations of anti-Catholic discrimination with traditional nationalist objections to the border, the new wave of agitation asked merely for 'British rights for British citizens'."[64] As Unionist MP Edmund Warnock recalled about Derry as it led the way in the civil rights movement:

> If ever a community had a right to demonstrate against a denial of civil rights, Derry is the finest example. A Roman Catholic and Nationalist city has for three or four decades been administered (and none too fairly administered) by a Protestant and Unionist majority secured by a manipulation of the Ward boundaries for the sole purpose of retaining Unionist control.[65]

Despite this civil rights movement's supposedly non-political nature, this civil rights movement would eventually culminate in two of the first and most violent riots of the early Troubles, namely the Battle of the Bogside and Bloody Sunday: especially the latter shocking the world as the British army was observed opening fire into the crowd of protesters, killing 13 Catholic men and injuring another 13. Among the 13 killed, 7 were still in their teens.[66]

In memorial of Bloody Sunday, the town of Derry would erect a monument commemorating those who lost their lives, and though this monument certainly is a lieu de mémoire, the town of Derry itself has largely become a lieu de mémoire, as it has become almost synonymous with the troubles and both British aggression and Irish strive for reconciliation. 2022 marked the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, and Derry naturally saw great commemorations of this event in various different forms. As Irish President Michael D Higgins would note in his speech addressing the people of Derry: "The 30th of January 1972 will live on in our collective memory, as will your efforts of vindication of the truth."[67] As Shea notes about memory in Derry:

> Examinations of the memorial imaginary for the nationalist community in Derry, particularly, have centered on events of the early Troubles. For many Irish Catholics in the North, the Republic of Ireland, and the diaspora, Bloody Sunday came to

[64] Mulholland A, 2002: 61.
[65] Mulholland B, 2002: 44.
[66] BBC, 2021
[67] McBride & Wilson, 2022.

> encapsulate and symbolize the inequalities and injustices that many believe fueled [sic] the fury that ignited the modern Troubles.[68]

A more abstract lieu de mémoire which took shape during this commemoration ceremony was a minute of silence as the bells of St Eugene's Cathedral rang throughout the city: once for every life lost.[69] This commemorative moment of silence is one of Nora's examples of lieux de mémoire, as he notes that: "... the observance of a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking a temporal continuity."[70] Another site of memory situated in Derry is the 'Hands Across the Divide' statue, which depicts two men reaching towards each other. This does not necessarily directly commemorate Bloody Sunday, but rather the sectarian conflicts and reconciliation.

The cultural memory of Ireland is also found in its poetry and its music; throughout the Troubles many artists on all sides would write poetry and songs about many different nuances of the conflict. This was also the case for Bloody Sunday, as this event quickly became famous not only in Ireland, something which naturally led to poetry and songs being written about Bloody Sunday. Two examples of this which show different sides and feelings related to the event whilst sharing names are the songs Sunday Bloody Sunday by U2 and John Lennon & Yoko Ono. Lennon's song was written shortly after Bloody Sunday, and as a result the lyrics show the shock felt at the atrocities while advocating for a unified Ireland, and contains such lines as: "The cries of thirteen martyrs / filled the free Derry air / Is there anyone amongst you / dare to blame it on the kids?"[71] and "You anglo pigs and scotties / Sent to colonise the north / How dare you hold to ransom a people proud and free / Keep Ireland for the Irish."[72] This song takes a more communicative memory approach, appealing to the recent memories of people, joining in on the uproar especially among republicans. This is a clear parallel to the republican sentiment and rhetoric which remains present in contemporary times, such as with the controversies regarding the handshake.

Sunday Bloody Sunday by U2, however, is in a way the antithesis of this song. It also tackles the shock felt after Bloody Sunday, also focusing on the communicative memory related to the incident, but opts to focus on reconciliation and opposing the violent rhetoric which started gaining prevalence in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday. As the U2 frontman,

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[68] Shea, 2020.
[69] McBride & Wilson, 2022.
[70] Nora, 1989: 19.
[71] Lennon & Ono, Lines 3-6.
[72] Lennon & Ono, Lines 23-24, 27-29.

Bono, famously noted about the song before performing it in the US in 1983: “This is not a rebel song.”[73] The fact that U2 felt the need to further anti-violent and anti-republican sentiment more than 10 years after Bloody Sunday illustrates well how strong the willingness to use violence stood among the people during the height of the troubles.

Another piece of art/literature which also touches on the problematic nature of identity and memory in Derry is the song ‘The Town I Loved So Well’ written by Phil Coulter. The song opens with the line “[i]n my memory I will always see the town that I have loved so well.”[74], and the song tackles Coulter’s memories of growing up in Derry and the nostalgia related to this, and it is this theme of memory that is at the very centre of the lyrics. The lyrics also make no mention of the events of the Battle of the Bogside or Bloody Sunday, instead opting to use vague remarks and symbolism to appeal to the broader memories of these events and similar events in the shared memory of the Irish people. This song appeals more to the cultural memory, evoking nostalgia-inducing memories of ‘the good old times’ before contrasting them to his memories of returning to Derry during the troubles. The final verse of the song goes as follows: “Now the music’s gone but they carry on / For their spirit’s been bruised never broken / They will not forget but their hearts are set / On tomorrow and peace once again”[75] ending with “Now what’s done is done and what’s won is won / And what’s lost is lost and gone forever / I can only pray for a bright brand new day / For the town that I loved so well.”[76]

The lyrics of this song encapsulate the problematic relation between the nostalgic shared memories and traumatic memories, as well as the strive for reconciliation and optimism among many Irish people for a bright future despite the problematic nature of their cultural memory; This is also clear in contemporary times such as with the handshake and debates surrounding Irish identity and memory. As Erll notes about the importance of memory and reconciliation in contemporary society: “Of particular importance has been the topic of ‘coming to terms with the past’, the problems of remembering collective crimes and atrocities, and of ensuing public acts of ‘apology’, ‘restitution’, and ‘forgiveness’.”[77]

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[73] U2, 2009.
[74] Coulter, Line 1.
[75] Coulter, Lines 33-36.
[76] Coulter, Lines 37-40.
[77] Erll, 2011: 60.

5.0 Conclusion

To this day, Irish identity remains an issue of contention and controversy, as their troubled past remains an important part of their collective cultural memory and thus an important part of their identity. Though it is still difficult to define exactly how far their troubled history with the British goes, this issue is not necessarily important; What is more important is the significance this history– or rather the myths surrounding it– has in the cultural memory of the Irish people, as their historical oppression by the British remains important. This conflicted identity has also prompted different attempts to determine an Irish identity based on the myth of a once unified Gaelic Ireland, with Sinn Féin and the IRA utilising this to legitimise their causes. The combination of this ancient historical conflict in addition to the more recent historical events surrounding the Irish War for Independence and especially the Troubles, has led to certain Irish people or groups struggling with coming to terms with the past, prompting outrage towards events commemorating this relative peace, such as the handshake in Ulster. As the article about the handshake puts it: "They are a reminder of the bloody sentimentality of the past."[78]

Despite the controversies, there exists a strong collective strive for reconciliation as increasing numbers of Irish people look to the future rather than the past, something which is reflected in both politics and the different manifestations and representations in the memory sphere of Ireland as a whole; The cultural memory in Ireland is abundant with themes of reconciliation and optimism towards the future. For instance, the growth of the Alliance Party and decline of Sinn Féin illustrates a collective will to move on: especially among young voters. The continuing popularity of Irish songs such as The Town I Loved So Well by Phil Coulter and Sunday Bloody Sunday by U2 also illustrate the popularity of these concepts of reconciliation, as they consciously avoid rallying behind the traumatic memories. As Coulter notes in the final verse of The Town I Loved So Well: "For their spirit's been bruised, never broken / They will not forget but their hearts are set / On tomorrow and peace once again."[79], and as is noted in the *A Handshake in Ulster* article: "[I]t is violence that has lost."[80] In other words, in contemporary times, both in politics and acts of commemoration, the main focus has become to leave this troubled past behind.

[78] The Times, 2012
[79] Coulter, Lines 34-36.
[80] The Times, 2012.

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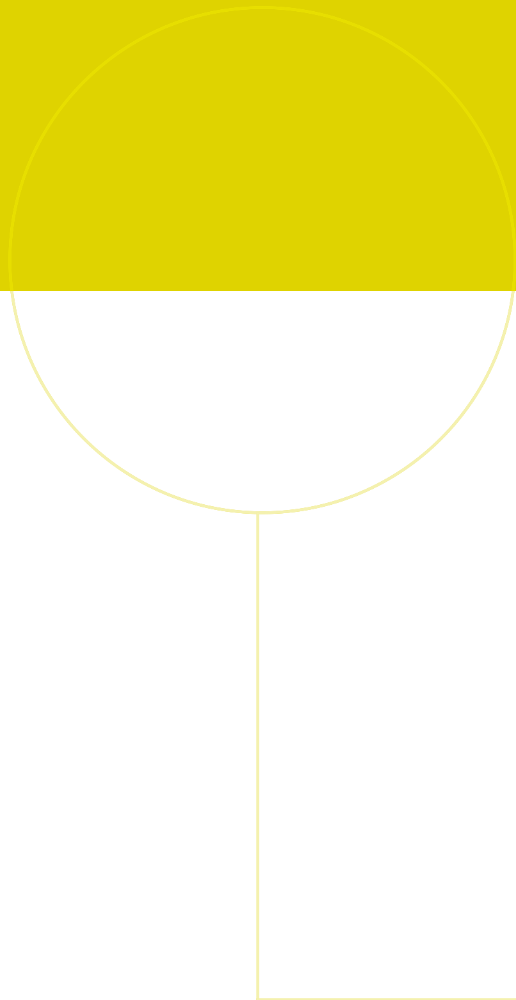

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