

Possible introduction (a tad too long but I couldn't resist)

As the very long, strenuous and action-packed Brexit process unfolded and even when it became obvious that the Irish backdrop was one of the most serious complications, people may have underestimated the impact the process is having in Northern Ireland. The worrying effects it's had on politics in Westminster grabbed a lot of the attention but the consequences in Ulster, in Belfast and in Stormont may have been overlooked.

In this guest essay for *The New York Times* published in April 2023, playwright, poet and journalist Dwyer Hogg draws our attention to them. It was written on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement that put an end to the period of sectarian violence in NI referred to as The Troubles and allowed the peace process to unfold. But instead of celebrating the agreement, the author insists on how difficult it was to broker it, and more importantly on how brittle the peace it established still is.

She appears reluctant to celebrate an agreement **I/** that, true, was historical but remains fragile, **II** which had beneficial effects but **III/** which may be derailed by the Brexit process.

I intend to read a passage from the text later on in my presentation.

I/ Celebrating a historical yet fragile peace agreement...

At the onset of the text, Ms. Hogg refers to the celebrations but only reluctantly

A/ The 25th anniversary

- What the GFA was
- Official visits from the U.S. president and former president Clinton
- Mood of excitement and celebration

B/ Yet instead of hailing the agreement as a breakthrough she insists on the "darker side"

- First reminds the readers how painful reaching the agreement was: "compromises" to say the least; murders left unpunished / amnesty of some who had been sentenced; everyone had to swallow their expectations hoping the trauma would recede
- And then she reproaches people (her fellow citizens?) with mistaking what is simply the absence of blatant violence with long-term / stable peace and ignoring worrying signs
Enumeration: Stalemate in Stormont (since May 2022) / flaring up of violence / the fact still paramilitary groups on both sides using same methods

The warning she issues is best expressed in this passage > Reading from I 16 to 24

II/ .. that brought about positive changes... / that held tremendous potential...

She then proceeds to explain what the two main achievements were

A/ The hard border disappeared : no longer the military checks of a war zone of her childhood > only a few minor changes today (units, phone provider)

- Suggests it allowed a sense of community to develop again

B/ A different more flexible identity : could opt between two passports, have both, felt part of something bigger

III/ but that may be derailed by the Brexit process – and people seem to be oblivious

True the situation did not explode suddenly but it has rekindled tensions that had been lying dormant (she mentions three sources of acute tensions)

A/ The Northern Ireland protocol

B/ Stalemate in Stormont as a consequence

C/ The apparent indifference in Westminster...
...and at home even

Conclusion

This guest essay was published in one of the most prestigious American dailies, *The New York Times*, which has an international readership. In it Dwyer Hogg seems intent on warning American readers -and perhaps more specifically New Yorkers, many of whom are of Irish decent – that they shouldn't be complacent or deluded about the historical peace agreement that their country prides itself on having helped broker and that their president travelled to celebrate. The peace it established, she asserts, is very brittle and things could easily flare up. But she's also disturbed by the lack of reaction at home in the face of the unsatisfactory / undemocratic situation in Belfast.

Commentary

Notes

This text contains many references that would have to be explained and contextualised at one point in your commentary:

- What the GFA consisted in and what it led to / How power-sharing works
- Why President Biden and then former President Clinton came
- What is the current situation in NI (Border crisis / Power-sharing crisis)
- What does she mean when she says that Westminster doesn't seem to care
- One could also expand on The Troubles to explain what her generation went through and why she is so wary

Also note that the three files that we studied in class contains heaps of arguments and examples to feed a decent commentary. What you need to do is wrap things up in a tightly-knit and logical way

Here things can be taken further in two ways I think (and they can probably be combined)

- What are the future prospects for Northern Ireland?
- Has Brexit derailed other things? Or has it enhanced or accelerated existing / underlying issues / tensions?

> The text says "Insecurities about identity that had been slumbering began to wake" which is a sentence I would like to use as a leading thread in a commentary

Possible transition

Just like with the peace process in Northern Ireland, described as very fragile and likely to be derailed by Brexit, many other components to British identity, society, political life and even power seem to have been rocked. Dwyer Hogg states that "insecurities about identity that had been slumbering began to wake" and I would like to take this image further and show how Brexit has exacerbated rather than created weaknesses

as far as I/ British sense of identity is concerned

But also II/ in politics and within society

And even III/ in terms of its place in the world

I / Identity

- Expand and explain what is mentioned in the text about Northern Ireland
- Situation in Scotland
- Future prospects for Ireland? >>

II/ Political and social Crisis

- Brexit has accelerated polarisation and exposed divisions within each party
- Political crisis in Westminster (four PM / Prorogation of Parliament in August 2019 / almost paralysis it seems) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_British_prorogation_controversy
- But more deeply divided country (see results of referendum)
- And has only worsened a social crisis in the making (NHS, Poverty level csqce of austerity policies of the 2010s)

III/ Internationally > impact on hard and soft power

(cf ref to visit in American Presidents in the text)