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# Two Nations, One Struggle

A Qualitative Postcolonial Analysis of the Motivations of  
Pro-Palestinian Young Activists in Northern Ireland

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# Abstract

Adopting a postcolonial theoretical framework, drawing specifically on the concepts of *imagined geographies and subaltern nationalism*, this thesis explores the motivations behind pro-Palestinian activism among the post-accord generation in Northern Ireland since the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict beginning on October 7, 2023. Based on in-depth interviews, field observations and online content analyzed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis, the analysis reveals two overarching themes: (1) anti-imperialism and (2) nation-building. Particularly, the findings suggest that young activists in Northern Ireland are motivated to express pro-Palestinian solidarity by a sense of anti-imperial resistance, on a global level, as well as by challenging British imperialism, in which constructed parallels assist in bringing a distant cause close in an imagined geography. Similarly, young activists are motivated to express pro-Palestinian solidarity to reinforce nationalist imaginations and to define “we”, in which ethnonational divisions and discontent stemming from the failures of the Good Friday Agreement play a significant role. Ultimately, the study contributes to wider academic debates surrounding the younger generation’s role in transnational solidarity movements where the findings also challenge traditional narratives of young people as passive beneficiaries of peace, rather highlighting their role as active agents who constantly re-imagine the very meaning of peace.

Keywords: Pro-Palestinian Solidarity, Youth Activism, Northern Ireland, Imagined Geographies, Subaltern Nationalism

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*To my peace doves,*

# 1. Introduction

When I began my exchange semester in Belfast, almost a year had passed since the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, beginning on October 7, 2023. During my three months spent in Belfast, I was struck by the ways in which expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity were most evident in Nationalist/Republican areas and neighbourhoods, whereas support for Israel was almost exclusively found in Unionist/Loyalist areas. By observing wall murals, local interactions, and flag displays, it became apparent how support for either Israel or Palestine continues to be closely and intimately tied to the two main communities in Northern Ireland. Evidently, visual expressions of solidarity with Israel or Palestine (in the form of e.g. solidarity murals or flag displays) have been present in Northern Ireland since the 1970s, when the first pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian organizations emerged in civil society (Louvet, 2016: 1-2).

During the last decades, scholars have devoted attention to the various connections between the Northern Ireland and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, for example regarding similarities in aspects concerning settler conflict (Mitchell, 2000), parallels regarding partition and nation-building (Cleary, 2002), and connections between the Irish Republican Army and the Palestine Liberation Organization (Aveyard, 2023). Whilst previous research has to a large extent focused on unpacking and tracing historical ties and connections, less attention has been devoted to analysing more current and contemporary expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity. Recognizing how the re-intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has triggered massive waves of protests across Europe, not least in Northern Ireland, I argue that there is a renewed need to study expressions of solidarity with Palestine. Of particular interest is the fact that this recent solidarity movement, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, has been and continues to be predominantly driven by the younger generation. In Northern Ireland, this “post-accord” generation is commonly referred to as the “peace babies”, a label that carries with it certain expectations and a sense of responsibility to uphold and sustain the peace created by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (Hall, 2021).

## 1.1 Research Question and Purpose

As such, drawing on a postcolonial theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of *imagined geographies* and *subaltern nationalism*, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the

motivations that drive the “post-accord” generation in Northern Ireland to engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity. By doing so, this thesis aims to contribute to wider academic debates within peace and conflict studies by examining how legacies of conflict and colonial histories shape youth activism and transnational solidarity movements.

Thus, the research question that guides this thesis is: *What motivates young activists in Northern Ireland to express solidarity with Palestine following the escalation of the conflict on October 7, 2023?*

## 1.2 Scope and Delimitations

While expressions of both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli solidarity have been present in Northern Ireland since the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this thesis focuses exclusively on the former. This choice is motivated by both empirical visibility and analytical relevance. First, expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity have been significantly more prevalent in Northern Ireland since October 7, especially when considering the number of active activist groups and the frequency of public demonstrations and protests (The Irish News, 2025). Secondly, while the Republican community has a long-standing tradition of expressing solidarity with international struggles such as the Palestinian cause, pro-Israeli solidarity tends to be more reactive in nature and thus less established in the Unionist community (Arar, 2017: 864). Including both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli solidarity would thus risk undermining the depth of the analysis, and would require a broader empirical base than appears feasible for this study.

Furthermore, this thesis focuses specifically on the younger generation in Northern Ireland who engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity. The decision to focus the study on this demographic is based on two key considerations. First, the younger generation in Northern Ireland - “the post-accord generation” - represents a unique and politically significant group who is, arguably, often neglected in academic research. Having grown up in a post-conflict environment marked by sectarian division and the promises of peace, their outlooks are shaped, not by direct experience of The Troubles, but by its aftermath. As such, their engagement with international conflicts, such as the Palestinian struggle, offers a specific insight into how historical memory and local identities influence transnational solidarity movements. Second, the current wave of pro-Palestinian solidarity in Northern Ireland has

been characterized by significant involvement from the younger generation, many of whom are engaged in grassroots organizing and direct action. Additionally, this study is delimited to the period beginning on October 7, 2023, following the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This temporal limitation allows for an exploration of how young people in Northern Ireland have responded to the recent developments in the Middle East.

## 1.3 Conceptualizations

### *Unionist/Loyalist*

Furthermore, it appears important to detangle the terms Unionist, Loyalist, Nationalist, and Republican, and their relation to the two main communities in Northern Ireland. Unionists refer to individuals or groups who support Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom and are generally associated with the Protestant community in Northern Ireland, often associated with a British identity. Loyalists (primarily working class in nature) are considered a more radical or militant group of Unionists and have traditionally been associated with paramilitary organizations, such as the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) or the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) (Coulter & Shirlow, 2023; Imperial War Museums, 2024).

### *Nationalist/Republican*

Nationalists refer to individuals or groups who are in favour of a United Ireland and are traditionally associated with the Catholic community and an Irish identity. Republicans usually represent the more radical stream of Nationalists, traditionally linked with paramilitary groups, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) (Coulter & Shirlow, 2023; Imperial War Museums, 2024). However, it is crucial to note that these terms (Unionist, Loyalist, Nationalist, Republican) are not all-encompassing in nature.

### *Pro-Palestinian Solidarity*

The term pro-Palestinian solidarity, as will be used throughout this thesis, will refer to a range of actions and engagements undertaken to express support for the Palestinians and the Palestinian cause. Solidarity in this sense can be enacted in a variety of ways, for example through boycotts, demonstrations or fund-raising events.

## 2. Historical Context

The following section will provide a backdrop and historical context to the connections between the Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine conflicts, aiming to trace the development of pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli solidarity in Northern Ireland.

There are various points of similarities that have been and continue to be used as a way to establish connections between Northern Irish and Israeli-Palestinian struggles. One of the most frequently invoked comparisons concerns settler colonialism under British rule. Both Irish and British politicians and intellectuals have invoked comparisons to Israel and Palestine, not least during the years when Britain facilitated the creation of the Jewish state (Arar, 2017: 861). As the first governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs, wrote in his memoirs: a 'Jewish homeland ... will form for England "a little loyal Jewish Ulster" in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism' (1937: 364). Ulster Unionists have traditionally perceived the wider international community as unsympathetic, instead being described by others as having a "siege" mentality, comparing themselves to other communities under siege, such as Israelis or Turkish Cypriots (Doyle, 2007: 88). Similarly, by drawing on the Old Testament where a protestant theology is used to claim territory over Northern Ireland, Unionists have formed a connection to Israel - it is this British-Israelism through which some protestants characterize themselves as modern Israelites (Arar, 2017: 861).

Conversely, the Republican community in Northern Ireland has traditionally identified with the Palestinian struggle through a shared struggle against imperialism, where Ireland's hesitant and skeptical position towards the partition of Palestine in 1947 must be understood in terms of identification with Palestinian Arabs, stemming from their own experience of British imperialism and the partition of Ireland in 1920 (Arar, 2017: 862). This anti-imperialist ideology came later to shape The Troubles where the Provisional IRA framed their struggle against the Crown Forces as a stance against imperialism (Arar, 2017: 861). Extending beyond exclusively rhetoric parallels, inter-communal violence during The Troubles and the violent conflict in Israel-Palestine also led to shared debates over strategies and forms of resistance (Louvet, 2016: 4; Arar, 2017: 862). As Aveyard emphasizes, although dismissed by British official investigations, the IRA and PLO shared arms and exchanged expertise, linking the two conflicts by "self-interested parties to support a politicized

discourse of international terrorism, to assert perceived hierarchies of legitimacy and to advocate particular courses of action” (Aveyard, 2023: 509).

These political, ideological and material connections between the two conflicts came to find expression in the cultural landscape of Northern Ireland from the 1980s and onward. It was during this period, when Republican wall murals, not only gained prominence but also began to reference international themes, rather than exclusively Irish matters (Rolston, 2009: 456). Notably, Palestine was the subject of the first republican mural on an international theme. Since the 1980s, pro-Palestinian solidarity has been a recurring feature on Republican murals in Northern Ireland, not least during periods of heightened violence in the Middle East (Louvet, 2016: 4). This has been co-opted by a small, but active, civil society solidarity movement that has continued to grow in more recent years, particularly in regards to Israel’s assaults on Gaza in 2009, 2014 (Louvet, 2016: 4), and now since 2023.

## 3. Previous Research

In order to situate the study within the current research status, the following paragraph provides an overview of relevant literature regarding pro-Palestinian solidarity in Northern Ireland and youth activism. Recognizing the interdisciplinary nature of the subject of this thesis, literature from a variety of disciplines and fields will be utilized, drawing primarily from the fields of peace and conflict studies, sociology, political science, and history.

### 3.1 Pro-Palestinian Solidarity in Northern Ireland

To begin with, expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity in Northern Ireland and the usage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Republicans is a relatively sparsely covered topic. Despite the fact that several scholars highlight the lack of writing on the topic, they rarely build on each other's work, and the research status is thus characterized by a lack of conversation and interconnectedness between authors. As such, one aim of this thesis is to contribute to a more cohesive academic discourse by bridging previous perspectives and insights.

In the book *Civil Society, Post-colonialism and Transnational Solidarity: the Irish and the Middle East Conflict*, Marie-Violaine Louvet (2016) addresses Irish Republicans' solidarity work with Palestine. Louvet illustrates how the rise of pro-Palestinian civil society in Ireland and Northern Ireland was heavily connected to the escalating conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Ireland, where Republicans looked for support from allies who could also help legitimize them in the public eye. By adopting a postcolonial framework influenced by Edward Said's notion of *imagined geographies*, Louvet illustrates how Republicans interpret the Palestine question through the lens of their own conflict, centred around their own struggle against imperialism, colonization and occupation (Louvet, 2016). This thesis takes inspiration from Louvet's usage of Said's concept of imagined geographies, which will be further developed in [section 4.1.1](#).

In the article "The Brothers on the Walls": International Solidarity and Irish Political Murals" (2009), Sociologist Bill Rolston explores expressions of international themes in political street art in Northern Ireland. Rolston explores the history of Pro-Palestinian wall murals, illustrating how they began during the Hunger Strikes of 1981 and how they later transformed into for example also including female members of the IRA and the PLO. What Rolston

particularly emphasizes is how these murals, feared by unionists as representing a “terror international”, instead should be understood as expressions of international solidarity, where Republicans identify with other struggles against imperialism, oppression and imprisonment that resonate with their own struggle (Rolston, 2009: 467). It is within this context, that Rolston briefly highlights the concept of subaltern nationalism as a way to understand how Republicans view themselves as a “community of resistance”, thus drawing on and including other struggles in their nationalist aspirations (Rolston, 2009: 448). As such, this thesis aims to build on Rolston’s relatively limited engagement with the concept of subaltern nationalism by, together with the concept of imagined geographies, using it as a theoretical framework, as will be revisited in [section 4.1.2](#).

Moreover, scholar Rawan Arar (2017) instead emphasizes the more strategic purposes behind Republican expressions of solidarity with Palestine in the article “International Solidarity and Ethnic Boundaries: Using the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict to Strengthen Ethnonational Claims in Northern Ireland”. By analyzing how Unionist and Nationalist political entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland rely on expressions of international solidarity with Israelis or Palestinians, Arar develops the notion of *borrowed legitimacy* as a way to acknowledge how these entrepreneurs strategically make use of the ethnic boundary in expressions of pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli solidarity. As she puts it, “Borrowed legitimacy is a quality resulting from the process by which political entrepreneurs adopt outside nation-building narratives to justify and universalize locally advocated ethnic claims to the state” (Arar, 2017: 857). Importantly, the quality of borrowed legitimacy does not negate the authentic emotions associated with and connected to expressions of solidarity but rather highlights how even “real” or “genuine” emotions can be utilized as individuals behave strategically to construct ethnic boundaries. Thus, in cases of borrowed legitimacy, acts of international solidarity interact with and highlight the existing divide between ally and adversary, turning that very divide into a possible incentive for expressing solidarity.

Taking more of a cultural focus, anthropologist Stephen R. Millar examines the ways in which Irish Rebel music functions as a form of resistance that challenges British cultural hegemony in the post-conflict era. By examining portrayals of Palestine within this genre, for example, Wolf Tone’s “Song of Liberty for Gaza”, Millar illustrates how these songs help to rejuvenate or revivify the resistance culture among Irish Nationalists and Republicans (Millar, 2018: 360). While emphasizing how Belfast’s rebel music scene is replete with the

imagery of resistance, Millar also illustrates how, in a time where the peace process is beginning to get accepted by increasingly more Republicans and where physical violence is a thing of the past, such narratives of resistance are getting increasingly complicated and complex (Millar, 2018: 362).

Taking departure in the recent solidarity movement with Palestine following the escalation of the conflict on October 7 (2023), interdisciplinary scholar Brendan Ciarán Browne argues for “the need to avoid platforming unnuanced, romantic and mystical sentiments in light of Ireland’s “unfinished revolution” (Browne, 2024: 92). While still acknowledging the historical connections and similarities between Ireland and Palestine, Browne draws caution against unnuanced parallels, emphasizing how, while Ireland has its own experience of settler colonialism and an anti-imperialist struggle, Palestine has never had the luxury of “peacebuilding” or the option to put down arms. As such, when it comes to Irish support for the Palestinian cause and comparisons to Ireland’s fight for independence, Browne emphasizes how “our engagements in acts of solidarity must carefully avoid placing the tactics we pursued in our own brand of anti-colonialism, and, most crucially, the compromises that we were collectively willing to accept, on a pedagogical pedestal” (Browne, 2024: 97).

## 3.2 Youth Activism

Recognizing how this thesis is concerned with the motivations of the postaccord generation in Northern Ireland, it also becomes crucial to situate this thesis within previous research on youth activism. According to a report from UNICEF (2023), protests and social movements driven by young people and students have increased in the past two decades, accompanied by the rise of a “poly-crisis”. The report highlights the ways in which young people exercise citizenship differently compared to the older generations where they favour informal means, such as protests, petitions or boycotts, rather than formal means, such as through electoral voting (UNICEF, 2023: 9). Notably, the report highlights the factors driving young activists in which the economic, social and political marginalization of young people is proposed as a potential theory. From this viewpoint, contemporary youth mobilization is understood as a result of the failure of States to provide benefits to younger generations (UNICEF, 2023: 12). This perspective is echoed by Pickard (2019) who emphasizes the ways in which young people experience socioeconomic insecurities and exclusion from decision-making processes

in the book *Politics, Protest and Young People: Political Participation and Dissent in the 21st Century Britain*. Pickard also emphasizes the complexity and plurality of causes driving youth mobilization and activism which: “form part of youthful convergence of struggles and hopes around the globe that has arisen from the emergence across borders of a new young precariat, who are concerned about their own condition, but also the condition of the planet” (Pickard, 2019: 425).

## 4. Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 Postcolonialism

This thesis draws on a postcolonial theoretical perspective in order to highlight how colonial legacies and structures function as motivations to engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity in Northern Ireland. Postcolonialism as a theoretical perspective emerged and developed in the second half of the 20th century with scholars such as Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) contributing to the field by emphasizing the enduring cultural, political and epistemological impacts of colonialism on formerly colonized nations and societies. While postcolonial theory does not represent a single unified approach, its various strands share a concern with the generation of knowledge where the way that people know and represent the world depends on colonial hierarchies (Sabaratnam, 2022: 161). Thus, postcolonial perspectives emphasize “the importance of subaltern perspective as a site for thinking through relations of power” (Sabaratnam, 2022: 161). The term “subaltern”, often associated with Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, developed as a way to describe marginalized groups excluded from hegemonic structures and representations (Sabaratnman, 2022: 162). In this thesis, two postcolonial theoretical concepts will have a particular centrality and relevance to the analysis. These are Edward Said’s concept of imagined geographies and the concept of subaltern nationalism as developed from Subaltern Studies.

#### 4.1.1 Imagined Geographies

In his critically acclaimed work *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said explores how Western representations and narratives of the “Orient” have contributed to and served as a tool for imperial domination. By emphasizing how the “Orient” was, above all, a constructed place, Said develops the concept of imagined geographies as a way to describe and illustrate the construction of familiar and unfamiliar spaces in our minds. By contrasting a familiar space, and everything that space encompasses, with an unfamiliar space, containing everything alien, the “self” becomes distinguished from “the other”. Geography, in this sense, becomes a space where cognitive constructions of the other are projected, and where imagined geographies assist in the construction of structures of sympathy and antipathy (Louvét, 2016: 7). Thus, in the context of Irish solidarity with Palestine, interpretations of Irish history serve as the context through which people relate to and position themselves in relation to a distant

conflict. As such, despite being far away in physical geography, Northern Ireland and Palestine become close in imagined geography (Louvet, 2016: 7).

#### 4.1.2 Subaltern Nationalism

Emerging from postcolonial theory and Subaltern Studies, the concept of subaltern nationalism provides a way of separating between dominant or elite nationalism, the ideology of completed states, and the ideology existing when the nation does not exist or is perceived as incomplete (Rolston, 2009: 3). From this viewpoint, subaltern groups construct their own nationalist imaginations as a way to resist imperial or hegemonic authority (Chatterjee, 1993). As Hardt and Negri (2000: 106) emphasize, “whereas the concept of nation promotes status and restoration in the hands of the dominant, it is a weapon for change and revolution in the hands of the subordinated”. This progressive potential inherent in subaltern nationalism becomes central when understanding Republicanism in Northern Ireland where given their goal of Irish Re-unification, they are concerned with defining the boundaries of the nation, as well as defining the “we” (Rolston, 2009: 3-4). In this sense, while nationalism can, by all means, be exclusivist and narrowminded, it also holds the potential to be inclusive by constructing a connection to other struggles against imperialism, colonialism and state repression (Rolston, 2009: 3-4). In this sense, solidarity with Palestine becomes both an act of resistance and a way of reimagining nationhood beyond the sovereign state.

## 5. Research design

The following section provides a description of the research design used to examine and answer the research question.

### 5.1 Data Collection

In order to answer the research question, a variety of data have been collected to improve the validity of the analysis (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 19). To begin with, three qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with pro-Palestinian activists residing in Belfast. As suggested by Brounéus (2011: 131), in-depth interviewing offers a unique method as it provides research with depth, detail, and perspective, at a certain moment in time. I thus view interviews as particularly fitting for the research purpose of this thesis, seeing how they provide first-hand information surrounding the views of the younger generation in Northern Ireland at this particular moment in time, where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has reached new levels of intensity. Moreover, the interviews have been conducted in a semi-structured way in order to allow for both a base of structured questions, as well as the opportunity to explore aspects of the response to each question asked (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 313). It appears important to note that the initial goal was to interview a larger amount of respondents. However, the process of gathering respondents was characterized by several significant challenges, most crucially, in regard to the fact that three students of Queen's University Belfast have been facing legal charges for their demonstrative efforts since November 14th. This led many to decline to participate in an interview because of a general sense of uncertainty and concern about potential repercussions.

As such, working complementary to the interview data, and recognizing how in-depth interviews are usually used in combination with other methods (Brounéus, 2011: 131), this material has been triangulated with other types of data. Firstly, online content, for example from social media accounts of student-driven pro-Palestinian organizations in Northern Ireland has been used as a way to triangulate the material from the interviews. Secondly, this thesis also draws on observational data gathered during my exchange semester in Northern Ireland (2024-09-09 - 2024-12-16). Being physically present in Northern Ireland and engaging in everyday life with the younger generation allowed me to access a more nuanced form of knowledge that, arguably, solely interviews and online content can not provide. As

Halperin and Heath states: “...to get a ‘true’ sense of what people think and say and do, it is not enough to merely ask people questions and record their answers; it is also necessary to observe what people do in practice” (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 199).

## 5.2 Analytical Strategy: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Furthermore, a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) has been used to analyze the data informing this thesis. Thematic analysis is a method for systematically developing and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a set of data, allowing the researcher to develop and understand meanings and collective experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2023: 65). The “reflexiveness” of RTA entails an acknowledgment that “pure” induction is impossible, as researchers always bring their own values and preconceptions to the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2023: 67). Thus, through its emphasis on researcher subjectivity, RTA allows for a more organic coding process that abandons codebooks or coding frames. As such, following data familiarization, codes are developed procedurally and organically as the researcher works through the material, and can be subject to change during the process of data analysis. Themes are then developed from the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2023: 68). The data analysis process is characterized by six essential steps: (1) data familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) generating initial themes, (4) reviewing and developing themes, (5) refining, defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2023: 68-78). In order to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the research phenomena, an abductive approach has been used when analyzing the data, entailing that the codes and themes have been derived from a combination of both data and theory (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018: 5).

## 5.3 Informants and Selection

In regards to informants and selection, snowball sampling (the method of finding participants through referrals from initial subjects) has been used as a strategy to gather informants. Considering the previously mentioned difficulties in gathering informants, snowballing, offers a valid form of sampling in qualitative research, especially in cases where the respondents are hard to reach (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 300). Additionally, recognizing the arrests of pro-Palestinian students at Queen’s University Belfast and thus the general atmosphere of uncertainty, snowball samples can assist in cases where the respondents desire anonymity and where trust is a requirement for participation (Parker et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in-depth interviews as a methodological approach to data collection entail various challenges relating to selection and selection bias and pose the question of whom to interview. As emphasized by Söderstöm (2011: 154), while the selection of informants should be driven by the research theory and aim, other factors will undoubtedly affect the selection of the study. To begin with, recognizing how this thesis aims to analyze the thoughts, attitudes and beliefs of the post-accord generation in Northern Ireland, all respondents were selected based on the requirement to be born after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, thus being no older than 27 years of age. Moreover, seeing how the thesis aims to explore expressions of pro-Palestinian solidarity in Northern Ireland, all respondents had spent the majority of their lives in Northern Ireland. Although their hometowns varied, all respondents are currently residing in Belfast. All respondents have also been engaged in the pro-Palestinian solidarity movement in Northern Ireland, although in various ways. Two respondents had both been engaged in direct action and taken part in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movement in Belfast. The respondents had also engaged in different types of fund-raising and awareness-raising events, for example in the form of film screenings or taking part in demonstrations and protests.

Furthermore, recognizing how this thesis is concerned with identity formation and ethno-national divisions in Northern Ireland, it becomes important to situate the respondents within Northern Ireland's main communities. The respondents came from a variety of backgrounds, both in regard to geographical region and ethnonational identity. While two of the respondents came from a Catholic background and one of the respondents came from a Protestant background (and thereby having grown up in a Unionist/Loyalist setting), all respondents currently identified as Republicans. As such, recognizing that all respondents align themselves with a Republican identity, the respondents correspond with the traditional pro-Palestinian community in Northern Ireland, as will be further analyzed in [section 6.2.1](#).

## 5.4 Ethical Considerations

Recognizing the sensitive nature of issues surrounding activism, identity and political affiliation, several ethical considerations have been taken into account during the research process. Concerning the interviews, ethical guidelines have been inspired by the recommendations of the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024) which aligns

with the guidelines from the *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (ALLEA, 2023). Before conducting the interviews, respondents were given a document to sign with information concerning the conditions and terms of the interview. Through this document, the information requirement was fulfilled as participants were given information surrounding the subject and aims of the research. Secondly, the consensual requirement was fulfilled as the document functioned as a way for the participants to agree to the given conditions, thus providing written consent. Thirdly, by anonymizing the respondents and protecting any sensitive information, the confidentiality requirement was fulfilled. Likewise, as information surrounding the respondents will only be used for research purposes, the usage requirement was fulfilled. Thus, given these precautions, the findings in this thesis can in no way harm the respondent's safety or interest.

Moreover, it also appears important to address certain ethical considerations related to the observations conducted in this study. While this form of field observation does not meet the criteria of informed consent, since it was made without the participants' knowledge or agreement, Lalander (2022: 124) highlights that observational studies can still be ethically justifiable since it is not the private life of individuals that is being studied. Rather the study aims to understand broader patterns, in this case, the motivations of young activists. As such, "hidden" observations may serve a legitimate purpose, particularly in regards to minimizing the research effect, that is, the potential for participants to alter their behaviours as they are aware that they are being studied (Lalander, 2022: 124).

## 5.5 Operationalization

In order to carry out the analysis and answer the research question, theoretical concepts need to be operationalized in order to know what to look for in the data. First of all, the concept of "motivations to engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity" (as stated in the research question) will be influenced by an understanding stemming from the theoretical framework and theoretical concepts. As such, a postcolonial framework shapes this thesis's understanding of what drives pro-Palestinian solidarity in Northern Ireland where imagined geographies assist in understanding the connections and parallels drawn between the two struggles, whereas subaltern nationalism helps to understand how certain nationalist imaginations, stemming from experienced marginalization, serves as a motivation to engage in pro-Palestinian

solidarity efforts. The table below illustrates the operationalized framework applied in this thesis.

Concept	Theoretical framework	Example of Indicators	Example of phrases
Motivation to engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity	Postcolonialism	Shared colonial histories  Critique of global imperialism  Critique of British imperialism	“The same oppressive forces that set up on this island are the exact same ones that went over there.”  “Kick the Clintons out of Belfast.”  “It’s part of a global struggle against the same enemy.”
	Imagined Geographies	Construction of parallels between Northern Ireland and Palestine  Bridging physical distance through perceived shared oppression	“Defender of colonialism in both Ireland and Palestine”  “I think it's impossible to separate the two”
	Subaltern Nationalism	Use of the Palestinian struggle to reinforce local struggle  Use of the Palestinian struggle to reinforce local claims to the state  Resistance to hegemonic nationalist narratives	“There does need to be one democratic state”  “The North of Ireland”  “Because it's the existence of two states which allows that supremacist thinking”

## 6. Results and Analysis

The following section presents the key findings of this thesis. Through Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the data, two principal themes were identified: (1) Anti-imperialism and (2) Nation-building. The theme of Anti-imperialism is further divided into two subthemes: Global Imperialism and British Imperialism. Similarly, the theme of Nation-building is organized into three subthemes: Republicanism and Ethno-national Divisions, An Unfinished Revolution, and Discontent and Double Marginalization.

### 6.1 Anti-imperialism

#### 6.1.1 Global Imperialism

One of my strongest impressions from my exchange semester in Northern Ireland was when Hillary Clinton, the Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, came to visit the University in November, 2024. I had just come from a lecture when I passed the main building of the university and saw hundreds of pro-Palestinian students protesting against her visit. Slogans such as "Kick the Clintons out of Belfast" and "War Criminal Hillary Clinton" echoed all around campus. The protest took a confrontational turn and three students from the university were arrested during an attempt to display a Palestinian flag (see fieldnote in [section 9.2.1](#)). The arrest of the students started a campaign to drop the charges of the so-called "QUB3". As one of the arrested students stated during a demonstration on March, 15th this year:

As alluded to by all the previous speakers, the QUB3, myself and two other students, were arrested on November 14th for the so-called crime of protesting our war-mongering war criminal chancellor Hillary Clinton. Since then, we have been charged with fictitious and false charges of obstructing arrest, resisting arrest and even as far as assaulting a police officer. These are not only fictitious, they are an attempt to crack down on the student intifada, and student solidarity movement with Palestine. (@qub3solidarity, 2025)

In particular, the protest shed light on the international element of the pro-Palestinian solidarity campaign in Northern Ireland where the Israeli state is just one of many adversaries in a larger challenge against imperialism. Similarly, the below post from Queen's University of Belfast Palestine Assembly Instagram account depicts a call to protest the visit of

American ex-senator George Mitchell who played a crucial role in negotiating peace in Northern Ireland:



Source: @qubpalestineassembly - Instagram

By resisting the presence of George Mitchell at the University, pro-Palestinian student activists are situating him, not as a “man of peace”, but rather as a figure of imperial power. Thus, by re-situating him within a context of U.S. imperialism and as a “defender of colonialism in both Ireland and Palestine”, the movement is also actively challenging dominant narratives of peace in Northern Ireland where the emphasis is instead placed on the failures - “secterianism and deprivation” - of the Good Friday Agreement. As such, this imperial reframing of figures such as Hillary Clinton and George Mitchell assists in bringing Palestine into close proximity to local experiences, thus overcoming the physical geography by narrowing the imagined geography (Said, 1978).

This sense of a shared struggle against imperialism was also echoed by the respondents. As Respondent 1 noted, “Well, first of all, as a Communist, internationalism is very important to me. It's One of the main powers of the Communist movement is the ability to support people around the world in their anti-imperial struggles”. Similar perceptions were noted by

Respondent 3 who, when asked about his motivations to engage in pro-Palestinian activism, ended by stating “It's part of a global struggle against the same enemy”.

As such, rather than framing the movement towards one single adversary - the Israeli state - young activists are directing their demands towards various interconnected actors, all of who are re-situated within a context of imperialism, thus succeeding in re-inforcing the imagined connection between Ireland and Palestine. This suggests a more complex ally/adversary relationship than suggested by previous research (Arar, 2017), recognizing that, while Republicans may still express support for Palestine, Israel is not the only adversary, thus also complicating the potential use of the ethnic boundary between Republicans and Unionists. This suggests that engagement in pro-Palestinian solidarity is not primarily motivated by a desire to assert local ethnonational claim, but rather by articulating a form of solidarity rooted in a larger challenge against imperialism.

### 6.1.2 British Imperialism

While the previous section highlighted how young activists in Northern Ireland engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity through a lens of global imperialism, this form of resistance is also rooted in the joint experience of British colonialism and British settler colonial practices. As such, for all respondents, the connection between Northern Ireland and Palestine was reinforced by a historical experience of British colonial oppression. As Respondent 1 noted:

But obviously, [...], it is just the shared history that Ireland has with Palestine and the fact that these same oppressive forces that set up on this island are the exact same ones that went over there. It was the Black and Tans that were kicking the doors down in Cork, who then got in a boat and went and did the exact same thing in Palestine. These exact same men. I think it's impossible to separate the two. They were so intertwined.

Similar views were echoed by Respondent 3:

There are global structures that are naturally enmeshed, but specifically the history of Palestine with British colonialism. Obviously, it is a shorter story than that of Ireland, but that connection is very clear.

This intimate connection between Irish and Palestinian experiences of British colonialism is also powerfully articulated in one student activist publication by invoking shared experiences of partition, famine and occupation:

In the borders drawn around Gaza and the West Bank, we see the border drawn between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In the food shortages and lack of aid in Gaza, we see our own famine during the 1840s and the ships full of food that were exported by our British colonizer. In an occupied Palestine we see an occupied Ireland (Dempsey, 2024).

What is particularly interesting here is the temporal and spatial entanglement of the Irish and Palestinian struggles. Rather than viewing history as linear in which Ireland's colonial past is perceived as closed and Palestine's as ongoing - young activists links the past to the present, emphasizing the continuum of imperialist structures. This reflects a distance from an understanding of settler colonialism as a closed event, but rather as an active and continuing process. As such, young activists draw a direct connection between Ireland and Palestine, suggesting not only an imagined geography but also a material one. It is through this contraction of space in which they emphasize the shared actor of oppression linking Ireland and Palestine. In this sense, the choice to express solidarity with Palestine can be understood as also stemming from the joint experience of British colonial practices and thus a narrative of a "shared enemy" or "shared oppressor".

## 6.2 Nation-building

### 6.2.1 Republicanism and Ethno-national Divisions

This subtheme concerns the relationship between pro-Palestinian activism and ethno-national identities in Northern Ireland. As previous research has suggested, support for either Israel or Palestine has traditionally been connected to the two main communities in Northern Ireland where Unionists/Loyalists side with Israel and Nationalists/Republicans with Palestine (Rolston, 2009; Louvet, 2016; Arar, 2017). Thus, one of the aims of this thesis is to understand this new wave of pro-Palestinian activism in the light of ethno-national divisions in Northern Ireland and to examine to what extent these identities continue to influence solidarity with Palestine. Based on the interviews conducted with pro-Palestinian young activists, ethno-national identities appear to continue to have a significant influence on the

choice to express support and solidarity for the Palestinian cause. Not only did the informants fit within the binary categories of Unionist/Loyalist and Nationalist/Republican (which in itself reflects their continued significance), but their identity was also strongly linked to the choice to express support for the Palestinian cause. When asked how to understand the ethno-national division in Northern Ireland in relation to the Palestinian question, Respondent 1 stated:

There is still that divide that exists, but more and more so you're seeing a leakage on both sides of the divide. You'll have vehemently anti-Palestinian people who are from Republican backgrounds. [...] I will say that there's no real loyalist who is pro-Palestine. It doesn't make any sense. But there are people from Protestant communities who are pro-Palestine. A lot of my commerce in Queens come from loyalist areas, but they wouldn't associate themselves with that trend [...] They recognize that you couldn't be a loyalist who supports the division of Ireland and then go and support the freedom of Palestinians. It wouldn't really make sense.

The above quote illustrates the continued significance of ethno-national identities in relation to support for either the Israeli or Palestinian cause. What is of particular interest here is the suggested incompatibility between a Loyalist identity and pro-Palestinian engagement in which “you couldn't be a loyalist who supports the division of Ireland and then go and support the freedom of Palestinians”. This sentence alone captures both the continued significance of ethno-national identities, as well as the intimate connection between the Irish and Palestinian struggle, and speaks to the impossibility of separating the two struggles. Bringing in the concept of subaltern nationalism, this example also illustrates how solidarity with Palestine is used as a way to define the boundaries of the nation, or perhaps more importantly, to define “we” (Rolston, 2009). As such, by constructing this connection and suggesting that only one who opposes the partition of Ireland can support the freedom of Palestinians, this type of nationalism also becomes inclusive.

This suggested incompatibility became apparent in the case of one of the respondents who came from a Unionist/Loyalist background but had to leave that identity behind in order to pursue their political ambitions and their support for the Palestinian cause:

I'm certainly in the minority in that I'm from a Protestant background. So I was actually growing up quite unionist, quite loyal, actually probably quite pro-Israeli [...].

Here, the respondent also suggests that being from a Protestant background represents a minority in the pro-Palestinian activist community, and later also notes how a majority “continues to come from a Catholic background”. However, the fact that the respondent has been able to move across the divide suggests that there is space in the post-conflict era for more intersectional and complex identities. Thus, the previous statement “You’re seeing a leakage on both sides of the divide” suggests that the division is becoming slowly less rigid and more fluid. This perception of shifting boundaries was echoed by other respondents, for example, Respondent 2, who noted:

I wouldn’t say it’s necessarily as rigid as it comes across, especially now. I feel like the events since October 7 have shifted opinions. There are people who would have been relatively pro-Israel, and they’re like, This is fucking horrific. It’s hard to say because there has been a shift in altars, but even at that, it’s not 100 %.

These reflections thus appear to point to a possible weakening of deeply rooted identities within Northern Ireland’s main communities where the events following October 7 seem to, to some extent, have triggered a re-evaluation of both moral and political allegiances, even among the previously pro-Israeli community in Northern Ireland. As such, while ethno-national identities continue to shape and influence the decision to engage in pro-Palestinian activism, it is also possible to see how October 7 has contributed to some destabilization of identity formation in Northern Ireland.

### 6.2.2 An Unfinished Revolution?

Another particularly memorable experience from my exchange semester occurred during an evening in Belfast. My friends and I were approached by two local students in a pub, asking to join our conversation. At one point, one of them asked me what had brought me to Belfast, and I explained that I had developed an interest in Northern Ireland through my studies. I was quickly interrupted and asked, “Northern Ireland? I am sure you mean the six occupied states?”. I was just as ashamed of my exhibited ignorance and cultural insensitivity, as I was surprised to see how the legacies of partition and British imperialism still resonate with parts of the young population in Northern Ireland (see fieldnote in [section 9.2.2](#)). I was perhaps more surprised to find the same linguistic resistance in all respondents who, in a similar manner, refrained from using the term “Northern Ireland” as it legitimizes the partition of the

Island and instead preferred terms such as “the occupied territories”, “the occupied six counties” or perhaps more commonly, “the North of Ireland”.

From a postcolonial perspective, this refusal reflects how language itself is a tool of empire, shaping how people, nations, and conflicts are understood. By refusing to adhere to the established term “Northern Ireland”, young activists are thus actively challenging this type of linguistic imperialism where language, arguably, works as an instrument of power in colonial settings (Said, 1978). “Northern Ireland” in this sense becomes a social construct - an imagined place - where different narratives and interpretations of nationhood collide, and where solidarity with other struggles, such as the Palestinian one, is used to reinforce different nationalist narratives. Applying the concept of subaltern nationalism, this refusal to accept the term “Northern Ireland” can be understood as a way of resisting imperial or hegemonic authority through a subaltern construction of a different nationalist imagination - “The North of Ireland” -. This subtheme is dedicated to analyzing in what ways subaltern nationalist aspirations motivate young activists to engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity.

Central to understanding these dynamics of nation-building and nationalism is the question regarding the respondent’s aims with their activism and desired outcomes regarding the Israeli-Palestinian question. Here, all respondents expressed alignment in their view on the desired outcomes regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As respondent 3 noted:

Long term, I’d hope that the struggle over here can heighten to a point where in whatever situation that we find ourselves in, we are able to assist more and more materially and in terms of hampering the ability of the state over here to supply the Israeli state with arms and financial aid, to the point where that state collapses and a single Palestinian state remains.

Similarly, Respondent 2 expressed the goal for a single Palestinian state:

In terms of a long-term goal, for there to be one democratic Palestinian state, much in the same way that we can see that Ireland’s partition hasn’t worked. You can create two states, and there’s still violence. There’s still these legacies. For example, growing up around loyalism, there’s still very hateful supremacist ideas. So recognizing here that you can’t have these partition solutions, that there does need to be one democratic state. Because it’s the existence of two states which allow that supremacist thinking.

It is by drawing on the Irish experience of partition and the failures - “violence and supremacy” - of that partition in which young activists view a one-state solution as the only viable option for Palestine. As such, the Palestinian struggle also becomes a mirror that, not only reflects but also reinforces young activists’ critique of partition in Ireland. The Palestinian question becomes a resource and serves as evidence against any partition-based settlement, thus also providing fuel to the continuum of the Irish struggle; the unfinished revolution. Viewing this through the lens of subaltern nationalism, connecting failed partition in both Ireland and Palestine, thus including Palestinians in a community of resistance, becomes a way of imagining alternative nationhood. As such, rather than expressing solidarity with Palestine based on exclusively humanitarian or moral grounds, young activists can be seen as using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a way to justify and legitimize their own struggle for Irish Re-unification.

Furthermore, partition as a colonial legacy is also framed and understood as a challenge to the solidarity campaign in Northern Ireland itself. As respondent 2 noted:

Even if all the demands of the pro-Palestine movement in the 26 counties in the South were achieved, You still have the six counties. If you stop the export of dual-use technology to Israel from the 26 counties, you still have missiles from the six counties going over. So you can’t talk of Irish-Palestine solidarity without also addressing partition in that sense [...]. You can’t resolve this without also addressing the national question in Ireland, I suppose.

This statement reflects the respondent’s view that Irish-Palestinian solidarity cannot be meaningfully enacted without also confronting the political status of Ireland itself. As such, partition in Ireland is also viewed as a limitation and hindrance to Irish solidarity efforts where the fact that Northern Ireland remains part of the UK undermines any potential achievements in the Republic - partition in this sense also becomes a pre-condition for effective and “true” solidarity with Palestine.

### 6.2.3 Discontent and Double Marginalization

In order to further understand young activist’s views on the failures of partition both in Ireland and Palestine it becomes important to situate them within the context of “peace babies” and the expectations associated with belonging to the post-agreement generation in Northern Ireland. Thus, crucial questions to pose are: To what extent is pro-Palestinian

solidarity a manifestation of the failures of resolving the national question in Northern Ireland? Where is this discontent stemming from? Evidently, all respondents noted a significant difference between the older and younger generation in terms of understanding the post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland. As Respondent 1 noted:

I think there is a bit of a disconnect between the older generation that lived through it and the younger generation who's growing up after it, where the older generation is glad it's over, we're living with the fallout of what happened [...]. Yes, there might be no more, well, day-to-day violence to the same level that it was. The island is still occupied, and these core issues haven't actually been resolved for people. You see in the north, it's one of the highest suicide rates in Europe for young people. If you survive that, you either emigrate or you move to England or you move to Australia or something. There isn't a big future here for people. I think the older generation just are glad that the fighting isn't going on anymore. But we actually have to live in what came after.

Similar views were expressed by Respondent 2, who noted:

Whenever I speak to older people, they always say, "Oh, things used to be so much worse, you don't know how good you have it", but at the same time, growing up, most of my friends have left the country. There's a soon-up to the epidemic. More people have killed themselves than were killed by the troubles.

What becomes particularly evident here is the failure to create a positive peace in Northern Ireland where, despite having grown up in the absence of direct violence, the younger generation is still deeply affected by the aftermath of The Troubles and the post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland. Whereas the older generation is still affected by memories and traumas of sectarian violence, the younger generation comes from a more "privileged" position of not having experienced The Troubles. It is, partially, this position, that creates a space in which they have the possibility to be critical of the post-conflict situation and the peace in Northern Ireland. These reflections on the failure to create a positive and sustainable peace were also echoed by Respondent 3 who, by connecting the peace processes in Northern Ireland and Palestine, expressed a broader critique of negotiated settlements:

There's a lot of it which hasn't been implemented. There is no Bill of Rights. There's still ongoing issues in regard to sectarianism in the police force. I suppose here you can understand that there's a history of that you can't trust political agreements to resolve these things. The same, I would say,

goes to the Oslo Accord. It's been 31 years, and the Israelis haven't done anything to transfer authority to the different groups. I suppose there's an implicit hesitancy to trust any negotiated settlement [...].

What becomes clear when analyzing the above statements is a discontent stemming from social, political and economic grievances. These findings correlate with previous research on youth activism where grievances and the failure of states to provide benefits to young people are presented as one of the factors motivating young people to engage in social movements (Pickard, 2019; UNICEF, 2023). From this perspective, pro-Palestinian solidarity can also be understood and viewed as a manifestation of a broader critique surrounding the grievances experienced by the younger generation in Northern Ireland. From this viewpoint, young people in Northern Ireland represent a marginalized group in itself as they are deprived of the basic necessities to create a life for themselves. Connecting this to the theoretical concept of subaltern nationalism, this suggests a form of double marginalization where young Republicans, in particular, find themselves at the intersection of two subaltern positions: as youth facing limited access to economic opportunities and political influence in the post-conflict environment, and as members of a nationalist community whose aspirations remain unfilled under British rule. Pushing the boundaries of subaltern nationalism in this sense, this double marginalization also helps to explain why solidarity with Palestine resonates so deeply with young activists, seeing as it functions both as a mirror and a mobilizing site.

## 7. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The analysis revealed how, since the re-intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict beginning on October 7 (2023), young activists in Northern Ireland are motivated to express solidarity with Palestine by a sense of anti-imperial resistance, both on a broader and more global level, as well as through a direct challenge of British imperialism, and thus also by certain subaltern nationalist aspirations connected to both ethno-national divisions and a sense of discontent.

By challenging Western understandings of international political figures such as Hillary Clinton and George Mitchell and re-situating them within a context of imperialism, young activists are constructing an intimate connection between Ireland and Palestine through which they become close in an imagined geography. Similarly, this closeness in an imagined geography was reinforced by a more material and historical connection where the joint experience of British imperialism, and thus a sense of “shared oppressor”, also served as a motivation for young activists. Furthermore, the theoretical concept of subaltern nationalism assisted in understanding the nationalist aspirations of young pro-Palestinian activists where solidarity with Palestine becomes a way to articulate and reinforce subaltern visions and imaginations of nationhood. This became particularly salient in regards to the way young activists connected the failures of partition in both Palestine and Ireland as a way to promote one-state solutions in both contexts and where ethno-national identities and divisions in Northern Ireland (despite an increased fluidity) continue to influence the decision to engage in pro-Palestinian activism.

Moreover, the analysis also revealed how young pro-Palestinian activists can be understood as finding themselves at the intersection of two subaltern positions; as youth facing limited opportunities and, as members of a community whose nationalist aspirations remain unfilled, and as such, where solidarity with Palestine becomes both a mirror and a site to articulate this discontent. These findings contribute to wider academic debates within peace and conflict studies by illustrating how local experiences, colonial legacies and post-conflict structures play a significant role in transnational solidarity movements. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it speaks to the growing body of literature surrounding the role of youth in post-conflict processes by challenging traditional narratives of young people as passive

beneficiaries or sustainers of peace - so-called “peace babies” - but rather as agents who constantly contest and reshapes the very meaning of peace.

Connecting these findings to previous research, this thesis supports Rolston’s (2009) argument, by, in a similar manner, illustrating how Republicans identify with other struggles against imperialism that resonate with their own struggle. By building on and expanding his relatively underdeveloped engagement with the concept of subaltern nationalism, this thesis has illustrated the fruitfulness of subaltern nationalism as a theoretical concept when analyzing young activists’ pro-Palestinian activism in Northern Ireland. Similarly, the concept of imagined geographies, as used by Louvet (2016) in her historical analysis of Irish Republicans’ solidarity work with Palestine, served as an essential theoretical tool when analyzing the constructed connections between Northern Ireland and Palestine, reinforcing its continued relevance.

Moreover, this research complicates the findings of Arar (2017) seeing that, while, it similarly, demonstrates how activists adopt external nation-building narratives to justify, reinforce or universalize local claims to the state, the findings also illustrate a far more complex ally/adversary relationship in which young pro-Palestinian activists engage with a range of various actors who are all re-situated within a context of imperialism. Consequently, by not solely “targeting” the Israeli state, they are not, directly, drawing on the connection to the Unionist community and thus not engaging with the ethnic boundary to the same extent. Lastly, the findings of this thesis also become particularly relevant and interesting in relation to Browne’s (2024) argument in which he draws caution against idealizing Ireland’s anti-colonial struggle in pro-Palestinian solidarity work. Evidently, the findings suggest that young activists are aware of this tension, seeing how they articulate a solidarity that is informed by, rather than constrained to, their own experiences of (anti)-colonialism. Furthermore, Browne’s concern about “placing our own compromises on a pedagogical pedestal” is echoed in the way young activists reject and resist dominant narratives of peace in Northern Ireland. As such, rather than uncritically celebrating Ireland’s peace process, young activists take a critical position by highlighting its failures and limitations; while they may strive for an alternative future through their pro-Palestinian solidarity, they do so, not in a romantic or mystified way.

In regards to the limitations of the study, it initially appears important to address potential issues surrounding validity and reliability. To begin with, due to challenges in the process of gathering respondents (as discussed in [section 5.3](#)), the analysis is based on a limited number of interviews with young activists. As such, it is reasonable to see how the respondents may not fully capture the diversity of perspectives within the broader pro-Palestinian activist community in Northern Ireland. While the insights from the respondents provided an in-depth understanding of specific motivations, it is possible to see that the results can not be generalized to all pro-Palestinian young activists, which affects the reliability of the study. This becomes especially crucial when considering the context of Northern Ireland's divisions and the fact that the respondents identify as republicans. However, in order to deal with this potential issue with generalization, other types of data in the form of both observations and online content have been used as a way to triangulate the data gathered from the interviews to increase the possibilities of generalization. Moreover, the fact that the respondents appear to represent the majority of young activists engaged in pro-Palestinian activism in terms of ethno-national and political identity also speaks to a higher possibility of generalizability, thus also increasing the validity and reliability of the study.

Furthermore, while both postcolonialism and the theoretical concepts of imagined geographies and subaltern nationalism provided a fruitful lens by shedding light on the ways in which colonial legacies, structures and nationalist imaginations influence young activists' decision to stand in solidarity with Palestine, certain limitations of the theory were identified. In particular, the postcolonial framework failed to explain, on a deeper analytical level, the contemporary grievances and dissent experienced by the younger generation, as suggested by previous research on youth activism (Pickard, 2019; UNICEF, 2023). While the findings underscore the continued relevance of colonial legacies, there were also notions of more contemporary grievances stemming from the failures of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement to create a positive peace for the younger generation. As such, it is possible to see how a grievance-based theory would have been fruitful in shedding light on these structures of discontent. Given this limitation, a deeper exploration of how youth grievances serve as a driver of transnational solidarity becomes a subject for further research, where it also would be of particular interest to compare the grievances experienced in post-conflict regions as opposed to regions characterized by higher levels of positive peace.

As a final note, I want to emphasize that, while young activists may engage in pro-Palestinian solidarity as a means of both challenging broader structures of imperialism and reinforcing their own struggle and nationalist aspirations, such motivations should not be interpreted as diminishing the value or authenticity of their solidarity. It is with this recognition that I am echoing Arar's (2017) viewpoint that although this solidarity may serve multiple purposes, it does not negate the authentic emotions associated with and connected to solidarity efforts and engagements. Instead, this thesis has highlighted the multi-dimensional grounds on which solidarity is performed and enacted, and where the young generation, arguably, represents a significant and transformative actor in contemporary solidarity movements. In a time characterized by deep uncertainty and despair, let us hope that this generation brings about change, as history has repeatedly shown; for if this thesis demonstrates anything, it is the very real power of *imagining* alternative futures.

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# 9. Appendix

## 9.1 Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (age, area you grew up in, studies)
2. How would you describe your political or community background? (religious identity, ethnicity, community ties)
3. How would you say that growing up in post-1998 the North of Ireland has shaped your identity or worldly views?
4. Do you think that your views are different from those of your parents for example?
5. What are your views on the term “peace babies”?
6. How did you first become aware of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
7. What were your initial thoughts or feelings about it?
8. Have your views changed over time? If so, how?
9. Can you describe what kind of pro-Palestinian involvement you have been engaged with? (e.g. demonstrations, protests, art, online/offline)
10. What motivated you to take part?
11. What do you hope comes from your or others’ support of the Palestinian cause?
12. Do you feel a sense of responsibility to engage with these issues?
13. If so, how does this responsibility differ from that of for example politicians?
14. How would you describe your sense of connection with the Palestinian cause?
15. Can you recall a specific moment or event that made the conflict feel more personally relevant to you?
16. There are a lot of visual and symbolic expressions of solidarity with either Palestine or Israel in Belfast. What meaning do you think these symbols carry for different communities?
17. How do public expressions (e.g., flags, murals, slogans) affect your own perceptions of the conflict?
18. What does “solidarity” mean to you in this context?
19. How do discussions about Palestine/Israel appear in your university or friend circles?
20. Are there any tensions or divides in your circles regarding views on Palestine?
21. Have social media or news coverage influenced your perspective?
22. Is there anything else you’d like to add or feel is important to this topic?

## 9.2 Fieldnotes

### 9.2.1 November, 14th

This afternoon, as I was leaving a lecture in Gender and Politics together with my friend, I was surprised to see hundreds of students outside the main building of the University, protesting against the visit of Hillary Clinton, the Chancellor of the University. The students were shouting slogans such as “Kick the Clintons out of Belfast” and “No war criminal on our campus”. The atmosphere was intense and confrontational. There were police circling the protesters. The tone was defiant and emotionally charged. At one point, when a group of students attempted to lay out a big Palestinian flag on the lawn in front of the main building, tensions escalated and students were pushed to the ground by police officers, using excessive force. Three students were arrested and taken into police cars. My friend wanted us to go as she did not want to risk any type of confrontation with the police, so we left and walked home. I felt unsettled and a little bit shaken by what I had just witnessed. As we walked home, I could not stop thinking about the students who had just been taken away in police cars, and how quickly a university space had turned into a place of confrontation and repression.

### 9.2.2 November, 5th

This evening, my friends and I were grabbing a couple of drinks at our favourite pub in central Belfast. The atmosphere was great. There was live music and some people were dancing. We were standing at a table outside in our winter coats. After we had talked for a while, two guys, who seemed to be around our age, asked if they could join our conversation. They had a nice and friendly tone. We started talking about casual things: the best Pubs in Belfast, about the alleged Guinness shortage. At one point, one of them asked me what had brought me to Belfast, I explained that I had developed an interest in Northern Ireland through my studies back home. Before I could continue any further, I was quickly interrupted: “Northern Ireland? I am sure you mean the six occupied states?”. The correction was sharp and I was taken aback, not only by his assertiveness but also by my own lack of sensitivity to the political weight carried by certain terms. I felt embarrassed and slightly uneasy, and answered “Yes, that is what I mean”. He seemed to accept my answer and continued asking me what I studied instead. When we went home later that night, I could not stop thinking about the fact that there is still a part of the population in Belfast that continues to resist and oppose the idea of partition and “Northern Ireland”.