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Edwardian Ireland (1901-1914) is often described as “a coin with two faces” (Strachan and Nally 2012, 138). On the one hand, there was an overwhelming majority of the Irish electorate who sought the return of a domestic parliament to Ireland, or ‘Home Rule’. On the other, there was a small group of Irish people who were happy to be governed by Westminster and be part of the United Kingdom. Home Rule Bills were proposed in 1886 and 1893, but were defeated in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, respectively. But in April 1912, a third Home Rule Bill was put forward that recommended a bicameral Irish Parliament to be set up in Dublin. The Bill received strong opposition from Unionists (those in favour of the union between Ireland and Great Britain), particularly in the Ulster province where Ireland’s protestant minority was most heavily concentrated. As a result, between 1912 and 1914, the Ulster Unionist movement began a massive propaganda campaign against the Bill.

Funded by James Craig, the son of a wealthy whiskey distiller, the campaign permeated into all aspects of popular culture and was supported by public lectures, parades and demonstrations (Bowman 2007). One of the most important means of influencing public opinions on Home Rule was the picture postcard (Killen 1985). The picture postcard had emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and quickly became adopted by all classes of society as a cheap form of mass communication. As Fraser (1980, 42) notes, it proved an ideal vehicle for propaganda because it was low cost, easy to handle and had an instant visual appeal. According to Foy (1996), these postcards had four key purposes: to mobilise Ulster Unionists and reinforce their belief in the righteousness of opposition to Home Rule; to gain support from the British public for their cause; to convince the British government that Ulster was loyal to the Union; and to ridicule the idea that Irish nationalists could be entrusted with managing a modern industrialised state.

Drawing upon a dataset of 50 anti-Home Rule picture postcards published in Belfast between 1912 and 1914, this paper uses multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to identify the key themes that reoccur across this subgenre of postcards and examine how different linguistic and visual resources were used to promote opposition to Home Rule. In doing so, it will shed new light on the Home Rule crisis by showcasing how objects of material culture could be used to sell and advertise the Union as if it were a consumer product. van Leeuwen (2014, 288) notes that propaganda discourses have persisted much longer in visual communication than its verbal equivalent. However, up until now, few studies that adopt MCDA are focused on historical texts. Thus, this paper will highlight how historicising our understanding of the way in which semiotic resources are used to promote specific ideologies and power relations can enable us to rethink contemporary communicative practices and, particularly, how modern forms of political propaganda can be traced to the Edwardian postcard.

As stated by Carlson (2009), postcards have generally been overlooked in mainstream research on historical political attitudes, perceptions and propaganda. Furthermore, when used, they are rarely the object of study and are instead displayed as superficial illustrations to a political story (Jarman 1998, 89). Some studies have looked at the role of postcards in

spreading propaganda in imperial Britain (MacKenzie 1984), Nazi Germany (Wilson 1996), the Ottoman Empire (Ozen 2008), the Russian Civil War (Rowley 2008; Mathew 2010) and Fascist Italy (Sturani 2013), as well as in opposing women's suffrage (Palzewski 2005). However, there are many areas of research that still remain undeveloped. In the case of Ireland, most postcard studies have tended to focus on how images are used to construct stereotypes of Irishness (see Wilson 2015, 2018, 2020 and Price 2016). The only study concerned with Irish propaganda postcards was conducted by Killen in 1985. Since then, most research has tended to make reference to the anti-Home Rule campaign more generally (i.e., Foy 1996; Bowman 2007; Strachan and Nally 2012) rather than explore the campaign through material artefacts such as postcards. Therefore, a reassessment of the importance of these seemingly insignificant objects is long overdue. Unlike other texts, the apparent banality of postcards gave them the potential to intrude into the 'sanctum sanctorum' of family homes, thus turning potentially threatening political events into unthreatening everyday occurrences. This made their messages even more powerful and potentially troublesome. Applying MCDA to the context of Ulster propaganda postcards will unearth many hidden ideologies and demonstrate how different semiotic and material resources were used as cultural weapons in Edwardian Ireland to spread opposition to Home Rule and support for the Union.

### **The Home Rule Crisis: Brief Context and Background**

Until the Act of Union 1800, which united the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain, Ireland had its own parliament which sat at College Green, Dublin. Irish opposition to the Union was fierce and attempts were made in the 1840s under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell and his Repeal Association to revert Ireland to its position of legislative independence under the British Crown (Gilmore 2014). By the 1870s, the Home Rule League had been established. Led initially by Isaac Butt and subsequently by Charles Stewart Parnell, the Home Rule League (later, the Irish National League) campaigned in the Commons for an Irish legislature that had responsibility for domestic affairs, while Westminster would continue to have authority over imperial affairs (Jackson 2004).

In 1882, under Parnell's leadership, the League was renamed the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to emphasise its move from an informal alliance to a cohesive and unified political movement. The IPP quickly grew to over 1,000 branches throughout Ireland and secured the support of the Catholic Church who viewed the party as the guardian of church interests (Maume 1999, 8). Impressed by Parnell's dedication to the cause, in 1886, the Liberal government of William Gladstone introduced the first Home Rule Bill, but it was defeated in the Commons by just thirty votes after Liberal Unionists split from the Liberal Party to vote with the pro-unionist Conservative Party.

Throughout the late 1880s, Parnell was a dominant force in Irish politics. However, in 1890, he became embroiled in scandal when he was cited as co-respondent in divorce proceedings between William O'Shea and his wife Katharine. Gladstone informed Parnell that if he remained leader of the IPP, this would mean "the cessation of relations and of common action between the Irish party and the Liberal party" (cited in Finnegan and Cawood 2003). When

Parnell refused to step down, the IPP ruptured into anti- and pro-Parnellite factions: the anti-Parnellites formed the Irish National Federation under John Dillon, while John Redmond took over leadership of the Irish National League (ibid).

Despite the split, the 1892 general election results revealed that pro-Home Rule parties, when viewed as a whole, still gained the most votes in Ireland. Consequently, Gladstone put forward a second Home Rule Bill in 1893, which passed the Commons but was defeated in the Lords where there was a huge majority of Conservative and Liberal Unionist peers. After the Liberals lost power in the 1895 election, the cause of Home Rule was forgotten until their return to government in 1906 (Morton 2013).

In January 1910, the Liberal prime minister H.H. Asquith was forced to call an election because of a constitutional crisis caused by the Lords' rejection of the People's Budget.<sup>1</sup> The election resulted in a hung parliament, with the IPP (which had reunited in 1900 under Redmond's leadership) now holding the balance of power in the Commons. Asquith needed the support of the IPP to pass his Budget, but Redmond demanded that their support would only come if a measure was introduced to curb the power of the Lords – their last obstacle to Home Rule.

Following a second election in December 1910 that produced little change, the Liberals immediately proposed the Parliament Act 1911, which would remove the Lords' power to veto a bill and allow bills passed by the Commons in three successive sessions to become law even if rejected by the Lords. The Act was passed reluctantly by the Lords when the Government warned that it would ask King George V to create hundreds of new Liberal peers to ensure its success. Now with a clear path towards Home Rule, the Liberals put forward a third Home Rule Bill in April 1912, which offered Ireland self-government within the United Kingdom (Ballinger 2011).

The Bill had one key bone of contention: the Ulster problem. At that time, Ulster was a prosperous province of Ireland which depended on trade within the British Empire. Residents became concerned that a Dublin-based parliament elected by a largely rural country would have a devastating effect on their wealth and industry. Furthermore, Ulster was the only province of Ireland with a Protestant majority. As Morris (2011, 21) notes, at the time, just 2% of Presbyterians and 36% of Anglicans lived outside of the nine counties in the province. There were growing fears amongst citizens that a 'Catholic takeover' would result in widespread discrimination and a loss of their local supremacy. Ultimately, they worried that Home Rule would be the first step in an eventual total separation of Britain and Ireland, thus threatening their cultural identity, social belonging and economic growth (Killeen 2007).

In June 1912, an amendment to the Bill was moved to exclude the four north-eastern counties (Antrim, Armagh, Down and Derry) from Home Rule, but it obtained no support. In response, in September 1912, 500,000 Unionists gathered at Belfast City Hall to sign the Ulster Covenant, pledging to resist Home Rule by all means possible. After the Bill passed its first

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<sup>1</sup> The People's Budget aimed to introduce unprecedented taxes on the lands and incomes of Britain's wealthy to fund new social welfare programmes.

reading in 1913, Edward Carson, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, approved an Ulster Volunteer militia to oppose Home Rule by force of arms if necessary. In turn, Irish nationalists formed their own armed group, the Irish Volunteers, to enforce Home Rule and “secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to the whole people of Ireland” (Foy and Barton 2004).

It is against this turbulent backdrop of what was deemed by many to be the ‘coercion of Ulster’ that a widespread propaganda campaign was launched in Ulster to gather public support for its cause.

### **The Ulster Unionist Propaganda Campaign**

Taylor (1995, 6) describes propaganda as “the communication of ideas designed to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way.” In other words, propaganda is a “manipulation of opinion” (10) that entails a selective process by which only certain information is disseminated that will benefit the persuaders. While propaganda has its roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation and the spread of the printing press across Europe, it came of age in the early twentieth century as a result of the development of mass media and new technologies, increased education and literacy, and a broadening base of politics (Welch 2013, 4).

According to Welch (2013, 5), propaganda often emerges in periods of stress and turmoil, particularly when somebody wants to retain power or displace it. This was particularly the case in the years between 1901 and 1914 in Britain, as the country was gripped by an intense period of civil unrest, characterised not just by the ‘Irish Question’, but also the campaigns for women’s suffrage and tariff reform, mass strikes and rapid trade union recruitment, and growing public doubts about the future of the British Empire. Historiographies of twentieth-century propaganda tend to begin with the First World War, yet it was the Edwardian era, in fact, that laid the foundations for many of the propaganda techniques that were to follow. All of the above issues were subject to pro- and anti- propaganda campaigns on different levels, as figures of authority recognised the growing power of the ‘masses’ and the ability for new methods of communication to shape popular attitudes. As Welch (*ibid*, 15) candidly states, the aim was “to fuel fear and profit from ignorance.”

The Ulster Unionist propaganda campaign was run by the Ulster Unionist Council, a body of MPs, Orangemen, landowners and businessmen who were strongly opposed to Home Rule (Douglas, Harte and O’Hara, 1998, 153). The campaign was financed largely by one of the Council’s leading members, the millionaire James Craig, who defended the Union by mimicking many of the tried and tested methods of earlier propaganda campaigns by the Irish nationalists, the Tariff Reform League and Unionist Free Food League (Strachan and Nally, 2012, 146). The central message was that of loyalty to the British Crown and Empire, as well as an emphasis on the likeness between Ulster and Britain in terms of its morals and beliefs. As MacLaughlin (cited in *ibid*, 2012, 148) notes, the campaign fostered a sense of Unionist identity that rendered the north-east of Ireland a Protestant homeland with Belfast as its own Protestant capital. This was in direct contrast to previous nationalist campaigns that had

centred on the dichotomies between Ireland and Britain in order to construct a new revolutionary Irish identity (Novick 2002).

Following the abolition of newspaper taxes, reduced production costs and the rise of New Journalism,<sup>2</sup> the national press had grown exponentially in Ireland, attracting a broad range of newly literate readers and leading newspapers to divide into unionist or nationalist camps (Tilley 2014, 82). Ulster Unionists capitalised on this division to air their political opinions in newspapers that supported their cause. Unionist newspapers, such as the *Belfast News Letter*, *Northern Wing* and *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, as well as local publications like *Derry People* and *Tyrone Courier*, printed sympathetic coverage of Unionist activities, including the signing of the Ulster Covenant and the Larne gun-running. Advertisements were also placed in newspapers to recruit citizens to the Ulster Volunteers or to encourage membership of the Orange Lodges. The Unionists also took advantage of newspapers to spread “black propaganda” – i.e., information credited to a false source for the purpose of deliberately spreading lies (Jowett and O’Donnell 2011, 18) – about Nationalists. They claimed, for example, that Catholics were raffling off Protestant homes and land in Ulster, and that members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (an Irish Catholic fraternal organisation) pledged “to massacre Protestants, cut away heretics, burn British churches and abolish Protestant kings.” The fact that these beliefs had to be denied in Parliament by the IPP shows the extent to which the British government and public were susceptible to disinformation (Foy 1996).

The Ulster Unionists also exploited a wide range of other media and artefacts to promote opposition to Home Rule. Messages were spread through pamphlets, placards, songs and flyers, as well as cartoons, postcards, photographs and stamps. The growing medium of film, particularly travelling cinemas, was also used to broadcast short clips of the Ulster Volunteers and Orange Walks across the province. The campaign also focused on spreading propaganda through everyday household objects or personal possessions. Badges, brooches, buttons, coins, medals, plates, portraits, regalia, sashes and towels were all produced and could be purchased by members of the public to raise funds for the Ulster Volunteers (Jackson 1992, 118). These material artefacts were also accompanied by propagandistic events and displays to support the Union, including public lectures, parades, marches, drills, rallies, demonstrations, guided tours and church sermons where militant action was threatened if Home Rule was introduced. Publicity stunts included the unveiling of the largest Union Jack ever woven at a demonstration in Balmoral (Belfast) in 1912, as well as the use of a cavalcade of motor cars and bikes with Ulster Volunteer brass fender badges (ibid, 136). The campaign was truly a bombardment of propaganda in all forms.

Of all these visual artefacts and bold displays, the picture postcard stood out as a particularly effective propaganda device. Being at the cutting edge of new forms of communication, the postcard was able to intensify the propaganda campaign already at play in traditional print

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<sup>2</sup> A term first coined by Matthew Arnold in 1887, ‘New Journalism’ moved newspapers towards more populist and inquisitive styles, introduced formatting innovations, such as striking headlines and visual iconography, and championed new types of content, including interviews, human interest stories and celebrity features.

media by capitalising upon the growing dominance of images and the global circulation of information (Wollaeger 2006, 80). Furthermore, the postcard worked far more subtly than, say, a public march or newspaper advertisement; not only could it be circulated widely for a very small cost (just one halfpenny for domestic delivery), but the act of sending meant that it could be forced unwillingly upon recipients who had no control over the image (i.e., message) they would receive. In this way, political ideologies were transferred into the subconscious of many unsuspecting recipients without the need for much coercion or direction, thus domesticating the Home Rule crisis and making it easily digestible for people through simple pictures, bright colours and catchy slogans. Like cartoons, postcards must have a compactness of meaning, so creators strive for symbolic simplicity, often making use of understood referents and allusions, and translating complex and abstract ideas into simple and concrete forms by exaggerating, stereotyping or distorting information (Douglas, Harte and O'Hara 1998, 1). Therefore, like few other forms of propaganda, the postcard was able to make the complex political situation in Ireland seem more straightforward, Ulster's beliefs appear fair and desired, and their expected outcomes look believable and attainable. Postcards were the Edwardian equivalent of email or text messages with up to eight deliveries per day and the extent to which Ulster Unionists used them over any other propaganda resource is striking (Jackson 1992, 136). Thus, ignoring the role of postcards in the campaign against Home Rule is the equivalent of studying a contemporary political campaign and ignoring the use of the internet or televised commercials (Palczewski 2005).

### **Research Design**

Given the nascent state of visual culture research in Irish studies, it is important to reassess the way in which seemingly insignificant everyday objects, such as postcards, played a hugely important role in Ulster's anti-Home Rule propaganda campaign. This paper analyses six examples of anti-Home Rule picture postcards produced in Belfast between 1912 and 1914. These examples come from a broader dataset of 50 propaganda postcards collected through a manual search of the Postcards Ireland ([www.postcardsireland.com](http://www.postcardsireland.com)) website and have been chosen to highlight the key themes that reoccur across this subgenre. The collected postcards are explored using MCDA – a methodology that has not been used before in this context – in order to gain an understanding of the ways in which different semiotic resources were used to promote opposition to Home Rule amongst Irish people and convince the British government and public that Ulster was loyal to the union.

MCDA brings together two important methodologies from the field of sociolinguistics: multimodality and critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA seeks to demonstrate how power is transmitted and practiced through discourse and how certain practices, ideas, values and identities are promoted, naturalised and used as ideological instruments (Machin and Mayr 2012, 2-5). Although there is no one common approach to CDA (see Wodak and Meyer 2009), all CDA researchers share the view that language is a means of social construction that shapes and is shaped by society (Machin and Mayr 2012, 4).

Multimodality, on the other hand, arose in the early 1990s as scholars began to take a growing interest in the way that individual semiotic resources work together to make meaning. Like

CDA, a range of frameworks has been developed to explore multimodality in texts, but the most well-known is Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual social semiotics which provides a toolkit to the semiotic resources that are available to a person in a specific context and how these resources work together to create broader sociocultural meanings (van Leeuwen 2005a).

In general, multimodal analyses have tended to be non-critical, which has often resulted in subjective or *post hoc* rationalisations of design decisions (Ledin and Machin 2018a, 62-63). MCDA provides a method of avoiding this "tunnel vision" (Forceville 2010; Machin 2013) by exploring how linguistic and visual strategies are used to shape the representation of events and persuade people to think about them in a particular way. When applied to anti-Home Rule postcards, MCDA can help draw out the types of identities, actions and circumstances that are foregrounded, abstracted or concealed by Unionists through particular visual and verbal devices, pointing to their ideological and political consequences (Machin 2013, 352). Thus, while the postcards clearly promote anti-Home Rule discourse and serve to legitimate its cause, MCDA has the potential to reveal hidden ideologies and bring buried meanings to the fore, demonstrating how the general public could be manipulated. The approach to MCDA in this study draws particularly on the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2002), van Leeuwen (2005, 2005b, 2014) and Ledin and Machin (2018b) and is supported by evidence from newspaper and parliamentary records to ensure that analyses are grounded in historical facts.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Six key themes have been identified across the 50 collected Anti-Home Rule postcards: British patriotism; Ulster loyalism; Protestantism; Violence; Mockery of Irish Nationalists; and Comic relief. A summary of the recurring imagery, colours, slogans and figures across the postcards is presented in Table 1. What follows is a general outline of the characteristic features of each postcard subgenre and a comprehensive MCDA of one prototypical postcard representing each theme. The analysis will include discussions of how these semiotic choices are used to foster a unique Unionist identity that is strongly opposed to Home Rule.

<INSERT TABLE 1 HERE>

#### *British Patriotism: "One Flag – One Throne – One Empire"*

This subgenre is defined by its overt display of British patriotism. In exhibiting images that are strongly bound up with notions of Britishness, such as John Bull, bulldogs, lions, Big Ben and the Union Jack, Ulster is emphatically asserting its nationality as British, not Irish. This is further emphasised by the frequent use of red, white and blue – the colours of the Union Jack flag – and the combined symbols of the rose, thistle, shamrock and leek representing England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, respectively. When maps of the United Kingdom are used, these tend to include false geographical areas, with Ulster marked as 'Prosperity Province' and

other areas of Ireland as 'Poverty Province'. These labels serve to outline a clear contrast between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, showing that it is more aligned with Britain. Typical slogans on these postcards also make reference to the solidarity between Britain and Ulster ("United we stand, divided we fall") or directly appeal to the British government to protect Ulster's freedom ("Ulster's Prayer: Don't Let Go"). When real-life figures are used, they are often British supporters of Unionism, such as the Conservatives Andrew Bonar Law or Lord Cecil. Bonar Law's surname is frequently used as a double entendre to imply that he is committed to the Union, but that there is also legislation in place to block Home Rule ("And with 'Law' behind it too").

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

The postcard in Figure 1 shows a large Union Jack with a shamrock superimposed on its centre. The shamrock is split into three, with each segment representing an iconic building: the Palace of Westminster, Buckingham Palace and Belfast City Hall. Underneath the shamrock is the slogan "One Flag – One Throne – One Empire", while "No Home Rule" is printed below the flag. According to McNeill (cited in Strachan and Nally 2012, 138), in Ulster, displays of the Union Jack were not merely bunting for decorative purposes, but "the symbol of a cherished faith." This is furthered by Finlayson (1996, 95) who claims that, for Ulstermen, the Union Jack is not just a sign of heritage and cultural attachment, but also of a certain set of constitutional guarantees, rights and privileges. While this bold display of British patriotism may seem at odds with a demand that an act of British Parliament be abrogated, this is not something that propagandists seem to have addressed or thought about them. As McGaughley (2012, 73) notes in reference to the Ulster Covenant, while it threatened rebellion against the British government at Westminster, its declared allegiance to King George V was never in question, even if such a declaration was contradictory at the best. The postcards operated in a similar way. Here, the fact that this important emblem is overlaid with a shamrock – the symbol of Ireland – boldly implies that all of Ireland is against Home Rule, not just Ulster, thus creating an illusion of mass opposition to the Bill that gives the argument greater credibility and strength.

The three buildings have been carefully selected to showcase trust in British democracy, pledge allegiance to the King and emphasise Ulster's faith in the Union. The slightly raised image of Belfast City Hall and its position between the other two landmarks symbolises the city's contentedness – and therefore the whole of Ulster's contentedness – to be part of the United Kingdom but also be playing a central role in the country's prosperity. By placing an image of Belfast City Hall (i.e., a landmark of Ulster) within a shamrock (i.e., the symbol of Ireland), a certain element of underlying irony is given to the general message of the postcard that all of Ireland is behind the Union. However, as Strachan and Nally (2012, 139) point out, it was not uncommon to find both symbols in Unionist publications because they stressed the

importance of pan-Irishness when it came to matters of trade and the economy. Therefore, even though Ulster was keen to single itself out, the postcard suggests that certain Unionists were not opposed to pan-Irishness in the name of economic prosperity. Despite this paradox, the overall impact of the postcard is not hindered because of the way in which the three images work together as a rhetorical structure, mimicking the tricolon format.

The impact is also strengthened by the actual tricolon slogan below the shamrock, adapted from the Canadian organisation 'Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire', which aimed to encourage patriotic support across Britain's Empire. Here, the words and images work together, creating a "visual beat" (Zakia 2007, 39) that establishes a sense of unity between not just Ireland and Great Britain, but between Ireland and the British Empire as a whole. There are also religious connotations in the tripartite structures that make reference to the Holy Trinity and offer a subtle way of representing Ireland as a Protestant, rather than Catholic, nation when interpreted against the backdrop of the Union Jack.<sup>3</sup>

As if the main message of the postcard was not clear enough from its central image, "No Home Rule" is printed below and emphasised through the underlining of "No" and bold capital letters. According to Peled-Elhanan (2012, 133), framing is a powerful means of perpetuating official narratives, but also for creating alternative interpretations and perceptions. Here, marking Home Rule off from the rest of the image in a separate frame implies that the very concept is alien to Ireland and distant from their belief in the Union.

#### *Ulster Loyalism: "Against Home Rule Hands Up!"*

The principal aim of this subgenre is to express Ulster's loyalty to the United Kingdom and plead with the country not to abandon the province in its time of need. A central feature of these postcards is the Red Hand of Ulster – the traditional symbol that appears on Ulster's coat of arms, showing an open hand with the fingers pointing upwards and the palm facing forward. The polysemy of the raised hand is drawn upon across postcards to either express agreement with opposition to Home Rule, to declare that the Bill be stopped or to imply that Ulster holds all the cards in its ultimate outcome. Other common images are Lambeg drums, maps of Ulster and the gates of Derry, which were famously closed in December 1688 to stop the Jacobite army of James II from entering the town. Alluding to the latter image, postcards often feature the slogan "Shut the gates again", implying that a Catholic-led Ireland must be stopped. "Remember Castledawson" is also used as a direct plea to the United Kingdom not to give up on Ulster. In June 1912, the Ancient Order of Hibernians clashed with a party of Presbyterian Sunday School children in Castledawson, the end result being violent riots in Belfast that culminated with 2,500 people losing their jobs (McGaughey 2012, 53). Other slogans aim to emphasise solidarity across Ulster through emotive adjectives and collective pronouns: "Firm in Ulster's cause" and "We won't have Home Rule". Red and white – the

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<sup>3</sup> In her study of Irish nationalist postcards from the same period, Wilson (2020) identified a parodic version of this type of postcard. The writer, obviously familiar with the genre, wrote "A united Parliament, a united people, a united empire" on a postcard of the Houses of Parliament, followed by the bold statement "All that I have written below is sarkastick." This example shows how propagandistic messages could be subverted by groups with opposing views.

typical colours of Ulster – feature prominently in these postcards, while recurring figures are eminent Ulster Unionists – Charles Craig, Colonel Wallace, Edward Carson, Dawson Bates and William Moore.

<INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE>

Figure 2 shows an enlarged image of the Red Hand of Ulster pushing upwards from a map of the Ulster province. The names of the nine counties of the province are printed on the geographical depiction between six red letters that spell “Ulster”. The province is floating in, what is presumed to be, the Irish Sea alongside the caption “Against Home Rule Hands Up!”. Here, the Red Hand of Ulster works in “relay” (Barthes 1997, 41) with the written strapline to transmit the message that the whole of Ulster is in opposition to Home Rule and that it must be stopped. Jagged lines on the ground indicate that the sheer force of the hand is making the earth shake, thus symbolising the strength of the men and women of Ulster coming together as a collective to resist Home Rule. The red colour of the hand also carries metaphorical meanings of blood, passion, danger and revolution (Kress and van Leeuwen 2002, 348), implying that Ulster is prepared to go to all lengths to protect the Union. This message is in line with Bonar Law’s own remark, made at a Unionist rally in July 1912, that he could not imagine any length of resistance to which Ulster could go in which he was not prepared to support them.

The Red Hand of Ulster is, in fact, deeply rooted in Irish Gaelic culture. Its origins are often attributed to the mythical Irish figure Labraid Lámh Dhearg of the Fenian Cycle of Irish mythology.<sup>4</sup> It came to be associated with the O’Neill clan when it was used on their battle standards in the Nine Years War (1594-1603) to protect Ireland from English rule. According to Phoenix (cited in Cunningham, 2003), the Hand was appropriated by the Ulster Unionist movement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, appearing on the Ulster Covenant and the logo of the Ulster Volunteers. On this postcard, the Hand’s metaphorical potential in terms of colour and gesture enable the message of Ulster loyalism to be emphasised. This is also accentuated by the positioning of Tyrone directly below the wrist. Tyrone was the county of Ulster that fell to the English in the Nine Years’ War, bringing an end to Gaelic Ireland and leading to the Plantation of Ulster, an organised colonisation of the province by British people. Thus, its central location here serves to evoke the past and remind the British government of Ulster’s commitment to the Union.

At the time of this postcard’s creation, Parliament was debating whether certain parts of Ulster should be discounted from the Home Rule policy. Thus, presenting the names of all nine counties in this image stresses that Ulster must be treated as a collective bloc and that

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<sup>4</sup> According to the myth, the kingdom of Ulster had no rightful heir, so a boat race was organised and the winner would be declared King. One chieftain was losing the race, so he cut off his hand and threw it to the shore, thus becoming King of Ulster.

parts of it cannot be discounted from the Bill. This is further reiterated through the fact that each county is interlaced with the letters of “Ulster”, suggesting that they belong together and should remain united. In contrast to the forceful hand, Ulster is floating in a calm sea and sunny sky, implying that stopping Home Rule will be a smooth process. However, this is juxtaposed by the dotted line running along the bottom part of the image, which indicates a forced and physical separation from the rest of Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Protestantism: “No Surrender”*

The purpose of this sub-genre of anti-Home Rule postcards is to assert Ulster’s Protestantism as a distinct reason why it should be treated differently to the rest of Ireland. The predominant figure on all postcards across this sub-genre is William of Orange, a Dutch Protestant who was ‘invited’ by a group of British politicians to overthrow the Catholic King James II in 1688 and reign as William III alongside his wife Mary II (James’ daughter). Scenes from this period known as the ‘Glorious Revolution’ also feature regularly on postcards, particularly the Siege of Derry, Battle of the Boyne and Carrickfergus Castle. Another popular image is the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi, which shows Ruth (i.e., Ulster) having to leave her adopted mother Naomi (i.e., Britain), accompanied by the Bible quote “Entreat me not to leave thee.” MacPherson (2012, 64) notes that the story of Ruth and Naomi was popular in female Orange Order Lodges because the women were seen as models of friendship and social conduct. Unsurprisingly, the prevailing colour in these postcards is orange, which is still used today in Northern Ireland to signal the defence of Protestant civil and religious liberties (Smyth and Cairns 2002). Slogans serve to single out Ulster as being proudly Protestant (“Our civil and religious liberties we will maintain”), outline the risks of placing the province under Home Rule (“Home Rule is Rome Rule”) or assert its will to never give up fighting (“No surrender”).

<INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE>

Figure 3 shows a heavily condensed postcard with a range of images and text that serve to carve out a unique ethnic identity for Ulster based on the main feature that distinguished it from the rest of Ireland: the Protestant religion. Unlike the previous anti-Home Rule postcards, this example does not mention the concept of Home Rule anywhere, yet it is apparent from the combination of semiotic resources that the intention is to show opposition to the Bill by indexing a shared religious belief to Britain. Its top half mimics the layout and composition of a traditional coat of arms. A portrait of William of Orange sits within an octagonal ‘shield’ in its centre, framed by a stone archway entwined with banderoles and yellow lilies that act as the ‘mantling’. In heraldry, images are conceptual and consist of symbolic attributes that diffuse meaning about a person’s heritage (van Leeuwen 2005a, 5).

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<sup>5</sup> This is in line with other cards in the subgenre that show Ulster as a lid being removed from Ireland, a defiant bulldog chasing an Irish terrier or St George slaying a dragon.

Here, the image of William acts as a symbol of Ulster and its Protestant faith, while the stone archway evokes the Gates of Derry and the 1688 siege. The four banderoles state “Civil and religious liberty” (on the left) and “Aughrim” and “Derry” (on the right). Their symmetrical arrangement acts as a “visual rhyme” (van Leeuwen, 2005a, 17) that encourages British viewers to make a link between these historically significant battles and the need to continue to uphold and protect the civil and religious freedom of Protestants in Ireland. The stone archway is slightly obscured by two blue standards edged with orange tassels that feature a poem outlining Ulster’s long tradition of allegiance to Britain and beseeching the country to remember that now and help them in their time of need.

In place of the typical helm on a coat of arms is the Crown Jewels, placed on top a copy of *The Holy Bible* and a velvet cushion. The ‘crest’ is represented by a stone tablet showing the Ten Commandments. When viewed as a combined unit, these images further accentuate Ulster’s dedication to the Protestant religion and British monarchy. The ‘motto’ “No surrender” runs across the top of the stone archway, alluding to the shout of the Apprentice Boys who barred the gates of Derry in 1688 and implemented here as a Unionist battle cry. Above is the line “Truth, unity & concord”, which comes from the ‘Prayer for the Church Militant’ in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. In adopting this phrase, Ulster is framing itself as a soldier of Christ who is engaged in a form of spiritual warfare to protect the province from the ‘evils’ of Catholicism.

The top ‘coat of arms’ is linked to the image of the Battle of the Boyne in the bottom-half of the postcard by a plaque that describes William as being “of glorious, pious and immortal memory.” In framing these three elements as interconnected, viewers are reminded of the significance of William of Orange as a “timeless saviour” of Protestantism (Sluka 1992, 195). In the image of the Battle of the Boyne, he is depicted on a white horse which, according to Loftus (1994, 38) is still used frequently in Unionist propaganda to convey William as a “fantasy rider” who will protect Ireland and uphold the Protestant faith. Forker and McCormack (2009, 440) also note that illustrating William on a white horse served to grant him a saint-like quality, given that the Book of Revelation states that, on Jesus’ return, the armies of heavens will ride white horses. The image is flanked by two monuments: the Boyne Obelisk in Drogheda and the Governor Walker Monument in Derry.<sup>6</sup> In portraying commemorative symbols of two important events for Protestants in Ireland’s history, the postcard again serves to render Ulster as a distinct Protestant homeland and sharpens its religious profile to counter the ‘nationalist project’ of Home Rule (Officer and Walker 2000, 294). Here, the description underneath the image does not call upon the British to help Ulster; instead, it is presented as fact that they will help (note “secured to us *and our posterity* [my

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<sup>6</sup> The Boyne Obelisk was destroyed in 1923 by nationalists during the Irish Civil War, while the Governor Walker Monument was blown up by the IRA in 1973.

italics]). In doing so, it presents Ulster's cause as just, framing the British as disloyal if they do not fulfil their moral promises.<sup>7</sup>

*Violence: "Ulster Will Fight and Ulster Will Be Right"*

As the name suggests, this subgenre serves to advocate the use of violence to stop the Bill. In this line, key images are weapons, including rifles, pistols, cannons and knives, against a backdrop of the Union Jack or the Ulster coat of arms. Direct references are often made to the Ulster Volunteers and their willingness to fight, either through poetry or iconography, as well as Redmond and Asquith as being traitors. Another recurring image across these postcards is the maiden, depicted as a beautiful, young woman dressed in white and used as a representation of truth and justice. The image of Ulster as a maiden was also commonly used in Irish political cartoons of the period (Douglas, Harte and O'Hara, 1998, 162). Given that these postcards aim to showcase that Ulster is fully committed to the Union, the colours red, white and blue feature prominently. The most regularly employed slogan is "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right", first uttered by the Conservative Lord Randolph Churchill at an 1886 meeting in Belfast and later adopted by the Ulster Unionists as a catchy rallying cry. "No surrender" is equally employed in this context to index Ulster's resilience and readiness to use armed force if necessary.

<INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE>

The postcard in Figure 4 shows a personification of Ulster in the form of a maiden clutching a Winchester rifle and pointing to a Union Jack on which the words "Freedom & Love we want both; for love we will give life, for freedom we will sacrifice love" are written. Without any explicit mention of Home Rule, the postcard deftly outlines opposition to the Bill. In juxtaposing two elements that one would not typically associate together (i.e., a beautiful, young woman and a gun), the postcard brings about "schema disruption" (Cook 1994), unsettling viewers by challenging their existing knowledge structure and, thus, encouraging them to recognise the severity of the argument. Here, the postcard is not just condoning the use of violence in protecting the Union, but rationalising and defending its necessity in a bid to prove to the British government and public that Ulster is committed to its cause. In 1912, a leaked military intelligence report had noted that prime minister Asquith was "not satisfied that Ulster is in earnest." As Foy (1996) remarks, Ulster saw this comment as a challenge and took it upon themselves to do everything they could to prove to the government that they were serious.

The woman is wearing a headdress marked 'Ulster' and is barefoot and dressed in white, which both act as symbols of purity and innocence (Ledin and Machin 2018b, 102). She is

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<sup>7</sup> This is a theme that reoccurs in other postcards of this subgenre, which tell Britain that "thou cans't not find another that will love thee half so well" or asks "have you forgotten?"

kneeling down with her head tilted towards viewers in a look of distress. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 122) describe this gesture as an act of “demand” because it creates a visual form of direct address by acknowledging viewers explicitly. In this case, viewers are encouraged to recognise the woman’s (i.e., Ulster’s) desperation and understand that the province is a virtuous victim that has been roped into violence as a last resort. The personification of Ulster bears a striking resemblance to visual representations of Hibernia (i.e., the island of Ireland) throughout history. According to Forker (2011, 64), *Punch* magazine often depicted Hibernia as Britannia’s vulnerable and attractive little sister who turned to Britannia to protect her from Irish nationalism. The fact that she is portrayed here with a rifle in her hand in place of the usual harp indicates that she is now prepared to take matters into her own hands to protect the freedom of Ireland (or rather Ulster). Despite the negative connotations of weaponry, we as viewers feel empathy for the woman who has been corrupted and driven to an unthinkable act. Pittock (2011, 133) has found similar iconography in Unionist murals. He claims that portraying Ulster as a woman holding a rifle and calling men to arms softened the potential brutality of the act and made viewers more likely to sympathise with the cause.

The woman’s arm is outstretched and pointing to the word ‘sacrifice’. The arm acts as a “vector” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 56), illustrating a line of visual narrative that implies that the woman has had to make hard decisions and give up love in order to protect Ulster’s liberty. The text on the Union Jack that waves above her head warns viewers that Ulster wants freedom and love, but it is prepared to die for love and to give up love to be free. These words promote a ‘them’ and ‘us’ rhetoric (Coleman and Ross 2010), serving to show Britain that Ulster is clearly different from the rest of Ireland and, therefore, deserves some form of special treatment. This is also emphasised by the Ulster coat of arms that overlays the bottom of the flagpole and shows the famous Red Hand surrounded by nine stars to represent the nine counties and topped by St Edward’s Crown. Again, these images work together to frame Ulster as a devoted part of the United Kingdom whose nine counties must remain together.

#### *Mockery of Irish Nationalists: “Redmond Wrecks Hibernia”*

Another subgenre aimed to make fun of Irish nationalists and belittle their arguments for Home Rule by playing upon cultural stereotypes. To this end, Irish people are depicted as short, deceitful leprechauns dressed in green, violent and alcoholic men or dumb, old farmers with ape-like faces. These images have a long history in British caricatures of Irish people (see Curtis 1971; Douglas, Harte and O’Hara, 1998), but their usage by one Irish group against another is disturbing for viewers and shows that Ulster is prepared to reject its Irish heritage in order to carve out its own unique identity. Scenes in these postcards tend to be located in the countryside, emphasising the fact that ‘nationalist Ireland’ was primarily rural, and are populated by pigs, sheep, cows and horses who are often anthropomorphised as politicians such as Redmond and Asquith. Alternatively, they show urban scenes which have been ‘ruralised’ with grass and farm animals as a stark warning of what would happen if Ireland obtained Home Rule. Lines of text tend to be written in Irish dialect, with nonstandard spellings (e.g. wid, ye) and words/phrases (e.g. to be sure, whisht), and characters have typical

Irish names like Pat and Johnny. Other scenes show sinking ships with Redmond or Asquith at the helm, accompanied by other 'Anti-British' figures, such as Paul Kruger (the 'face' of the Boer cause against Britain in the Second Boer War) and James Fitzharris (a member of the Invincibles, a splinter group of the Irish Republican Brotherhood). Popular slogans include "No thoroughfare!" or "Stand back Redmond," indicating that the Bill will not pass through Ulster.

<INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE>

The postcard in Figure 5 shows an overexaggerated view of what Carrickfergus Castle would look like if it was under Home Rule. Through its use of visual hyperbole, it aims to capture the attention of viewers and warn them of the dangers of passing the Bill. The choice of Carrickfergus Castle is symbolic because it was here that the Jacobites surrendered in 1689 and William of Orange first set foot in Ireland. The castle is shown with three flags flying from its walls and tower, all in green – the colour associated with Catholic Ireland (Cronin and Adair 2002, xxiii). The first flag states "Erin go brag", a deliberate play on the Gaelic "Éirinn/Erin go Brách/Brag" meaning "Ireland forever" and used since the 18<sup>th</sup> century to express allegiance to Ireland (Corfe 2019, 505). Here, the polysemy of the word "brách/brag when used in English is drawn upon to mock the idea of Home Rule and imply that Irish nationalists are boastful and arrogant. The second flag's "Ireland a nation" is boldly insinuating that Home Rule will ultimately lead Ireland to total separation from the United Kingdom, which will only result in disaster, while the third flag's image of the green harp is a symbol of the short-lived Confederacy of Ireland – a period of Irish self-government between 1642 and 1649 – and is adopted to suggest that Home Rule will be equally brought to a rapid end.

The castle tower has been labelled "Molly Maguire's Home of Rest." Molly Maguire was the leader of the 'Anti-landlord Agitators' group who used violence to resolve Irish people's land disputes against English landowners (Loy 2009). In describing the tower as "Molly Maguire's Home of Rest," this postcard is indicating that Home Rule will prioritise Catholics over Protestants and may even legitimise the use of extreme force to ensure the birth of an Irish nation. The castle is also occupied by the "Ancient Order of Hibernians" (AOH), who traditionally protected Catholic churches from anti-Catholic forces. Again, its employment here suggests that Home Rule can only lead to the widespread persecution of Protestants and eventual separation from the United Kingdom. The castle has a bar built into its front, which is owned by "J. Devlin" – a nod to Joseph Devlin, an IPP MP and grandmaster of the AOH. His bar bears the sign "Support Irish industry" in reference to a campaign by the Gaelic League to encourage the purchase of Irish products only. What was seen as a worthy enterprise for Irish Nationalists is framed here by Unionists as a foolish and damaging idea. The left side of the castle is marked "Major McBride's Irish militia". Major McBride formed the Irish Transvaal Brigade who fought alongside the Boers against British forces in the Second Boer War. Placing an image of a gallows with a man hanging alongside the slogan forcefully implies that death

will come to all Unionists when Home Rule takes place. Although these thoughts may seem irrational, they reflect real concerns of the public at this time and bear a strong similarity to the “black propaganda” printed in Ulster newspapers that was outlined earlier in this paper.

In the forefront of the postcard, there is a statue of John Redmond, portrayed unflatteringly on a donkey. Viewers are likely to see the resemblance, albeit in a derisive manner, with the famous image of William of Orange on his white steed and draw comparisons between the two, concluding that Redmond would be a weak and ineffective leader. The fact that he is wearing a crown also frames him as a power-hungry man who will turn himself into the King of the new country of Ireland, while the Latin “Redmond Rex Hibernaie” has been graffitied with “Redmond wrecks Hibernia” to insist that his leadership would ruin the nation. Alongside the statue is a hut with the notice “To Let – Ulster’s Guardians of Peace” (a nickname for the Ulster Volunteers) and a man running out of the door brandishing a rifle. The suggestion is that, under Home Rule, the Nationalists will clamp down on the Volunteers and steal their weaponry for themselves. Again, this serves to build an argument that convinces the public of the dangers of Home Rule. On the castle moat – which has a symbolically green reflection – there is a sinking boat named “Prosperity of Carrickfergus”, which metaphorically indexes the widespread belief at the time that Home Rule would mark the end of Ulster’s good fortune (Killeen 2007). The moat is also filled with dead animals, hinting that the ‘Irish farmers’ will bring their animals to cities but will not be able to look after them effectively. Finally, a notice warns “Landlords, Ulster Scots and Rubbish shot here”, implying once again that Ireland under Home Rule will be ‘ethnically cleansed’ and Protestants will be killed in the name of freedom.

*Comic Relief: “You Can Lead a Horse to Water...”*

The final theme makes use of a range of humorous devices to soften the force of the arguments against Home Rule and inject some comic relief into the turbulent political situation. Some postcards do this by exploiting the polysemy of “Home Rule” and showing caricatures of long-suffering children or husbands with bandages stating that they have had Home Rule for years. Other postcards use images of children to tone down potentially violent statements (e.g. “Who said we’re to have Home Rule? Come to Belfast and we’ll shew ‘em”) or turn the Red Hand of Ulster into a boxing glove worn by Carson, ready to beat up those in favour of Home Rule. Home Rule is also depicted as a skull or a cigar with a caption making reference to the fact that it has already been buried or extinguished twice (i.e., the Bill) and is starting to smell. Just as Douglas, Harte and O’Hara (1998, 164) noted in their study of Anglo-Irish political cartoons, we also see images of cockerels in reference to Ulster being the loyal “Cock of the North”, a term first used to describe Rev. Henry Cooke, a Protestant leader who challenged Daniel O’Connell to a debate (Beiner 2018, 235). Another popular device was to use caricatures to add a touch of playfulness to opposition to Home Rule. Recurring images show Redmond as a milkmaid coming to ‘milk’ the Ulster cow, Carson as a new type of “Irish blackthorn” that disturbs the peace and William of Orange looking at his troops and asking “Shall we have to cross the Boyne again?”

<INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE>

Figure 6 shows the humorous image of a horse on its front legs kicking a man into a body of water with the strapline “You can lead a horse to water – but”. The horse is white, tethered with an orange harness and has “Ulster” branded on its body. These three elements work together to evoke the presence of William of Orange, turning the horse into a metaphorical representation of him and, thus, serving as a defiant act of loyalism to uphold the civil and religious freedoms of Ulster. The horse is clearly angry with steam bellowing out of its nostrils and its hind legs raised. The way that its front legs are ground firmly on top of the green grass symbolises Ulster’s will to hold onto the rest of Ireland and defiantly not let go. The caricature of the man bears an obvious resemblance to Asquith. Read in this context, the message is clear: that Asquith should leave Ulster alone and forget the Bill. As a whole, the image serves as an “act of offer” (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996, 124), with each element presented to viewers as “objects of contemplation [...] as though they were specimens in a display case” (119). This is emphasised by the lack of eye contact between the horse, Asquith and viewers, and their downward gazes, which encourage deeper engagement with its overall message.

The mountains in the background – which represent the Mourne Mountains – serve as an orientation device that help viewers locate the scene geographically (Jewitt 2016, 73). The perspective is shown from Carlingford Lough, a sea inlet that separates County Down (in Ulster) from County Louth (in Leinster). Supplied with these visual clues, viewers are likely to interpret Asquith as being physically kicked out of Ulster, implying that his views are not welcome in the province. “Home Rule” is written on top of the body of water. As van Leeuwen (2005b, 143) notes, typography carries ideational meaning and can be used to express attitudes to what is being represented. Here, the shaky form of the writing ‘performs’ the notion that Home Rule is destined to fail. Home Rule being represented as water also carries connotations of Asquith being out of his depth and drowning, as well as that the Bill itself should be ‘sunk’.

The strapline “You can lead a horse to water – but” is a well-known phrase completed by the line “you cannot make him drink”, meaning that you can provide somebody with an opportunity but you cannot force them to do something if they do not want to. Framed within the context of Home Rule, the postcard is clearly stating that the Bill might pass through Parliament, but that does not mean that Ulster will accept it. In providing half of the line only, the postcard ‘invites’ readers to finish the sentence and interpret it in connection with the image. These types of texts are powerful because their ideological meanings can be hidden behind or denied by the argument that they are ‘just a bit of fun’ (van Leeuwen 2014, 288), thus having a more subtle persuasive power that rouses the general public to take an active interest in the anti-Home Rule movement and bring pressure on Parliament through public opinion.

## Concluding Remarks

Following the proposal of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912, Ireland became gripped in an ideological battle between two conflicting beliefs about its future: one Nationalist and one Unionist. The Ulster Unionists considered it necessary to convince fellow Irish citizens, the British government and the British public that they were serious about their opposition to Home Rule and saw postcards as an important means of 'selling the union' to others in a palatable and engaging format. While these postcards ultimately aimed to reinforce the notion of Ulster as an in-group united in its common objective of stopping the Bill, their broad range of rhetoric and iconography, in fact, reflects the lack of political consensus across the province. We see everything from passive pledges of allegiance to the British state and crown or supplications that all of Ulster's nine counties are given special treatment to warnings that Home Rule will lead to total separatism from the United Kingdom or advocations of violence to stop the Bill at all costs. This was in line with the differing political views in Ulster, particularly of the two leading figures Edward Carson (who believed that if Home Rule was resisted by Ulster, it could not be applied to the rest of Ireland) and James Craig (who simply wanted to preserve the position of Protestant Ulster within the Union), as well as Andrew Bonar-Law (who sanctioned extra-parliamentary force to jettison government legislation) (Douglas, Harte and O'Hara 1998, 153).

However, shining an MCDA spotlight on the postcards also reveals that, in some cases, there are clear paradoxical messages within individual postcards: shamrocks, for example, are used to indicate that all of Ireland is united against Home Rule but are positioned alongside symbols of Ulster (e.g. Red Hand, Belfast City Hall) to show that the province is unique and should be treated as its own space. There is also a certain level of irony in the fact that Unionists use postcards to promise that they will rebel against British authority in order to prove that they are loyal to British rights and freedoms. An additional layer of complexity is brought by the fact that people would have come across these postcards displayed collectively in shops and, thus, viewed them as a unified body of commentary on the Home Rule crisis. However, as MCDA shows, the ideas propagated did not always sit comfortably together. Thus, MCDA reveals that, in their attempts to promote a unique and unified identity for Ulster, these postcards, in fact, obscure the sectarian reality of life in the province, where there were very mixed views on the subject of Home Rule, as well as who was united in opposition to it.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, the huge emotive power of the postcards, coupled with other propaganda resources, was successful at drawing attention to Ulster's cause and putting the province into the spotlight.

As Foy (1996) rightly states, no propaganda campaign can be effective on its own, divorced from the real world. While British politicians may not have directly engaged with these postcards, they could not shy away from photographs and newsreel images of mass united crowds in Ulster reflecting reality and showing that opposition to Home Rule was not merely

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<sup>8</sup> In reality, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan had nationalist majorities, while Tyrone and Fermanagh were almost equally divided between nationalism and unionism.

an illusion or an exaggeration. Nonetheless, as it became clear that the British government was not going to be convinced by Ulster's visual displays even if the people of Ulster were, the Ulster Unionist MP Charles Craig told the province that "ten thousand pounds spent on rifles would be a thousand times stronger than the same amount spent on meetings, speeches, and pamphlets" (Strachan and Nally, 2012, 148). The campaign was about to turn bloody if the British government did not find a quick solution.

On New Year's Day 1913, Carson moved an amendment to the Home Rule Bill to exclude all nine counties of Ulster, but it was rejected. Westminster feared that, in protest, the Ulster Volunteers would carry out acts of violence and preparations were made for the military to prevent them. In what became known as the Curragh Incident in March 1914, many officers threatened to resign or accept dismissal rather than obey the orders. Asquith subsequently claimed that the event had been a 'misunderstanding'. In May 1914, the Bill was read anew. Once again, an amendment was put forward, this time to exclude the whole of Ulster for six years. Asquith proposed a compromise: six of the nine Ulster counties (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone), which contained a greater number of Protestants than Catholics, would be excluded temporarily and continue to be governed from Westminster. As war with Germany broke out in August 1914, Asquith decided to abandon the proposed amendment and rushed through a new bill that would grant Home Rule to Ireland, but would be postponed for the duration of the conflict, along with the unresolved Ulster question. We now know the catastrophic consequences of this decision.

The Easter Rising of 1916 – an armed insurrection by Irish republicans to end British rule in Ireland – followed by the Conscription Crisis of 1918, which saw the British government impose military draft in Ireland, galvanised support for political parties which advocated Irish separatism rather than self-government. As a consequence, Sinn Féin took a resounding victory over the IPP in the 1918 general election, thereby derailing any prospect of Home Rule being implemented as planned and leading to the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) (Joesten, 2013, 28). Nonetheless, Britain went ahead with its commitment to implement Home Rule, passing a fourth Home Rule Bill in 1920, which formalised the division of Ireland into two self-governing territories of the United Kingdom: Northern Ireland, containing only six of Ulster's nine counties, and Southern Ireland, made up of the remaining twenty-six counties. The Bill was rejected by Irish nationalists, ultimately resulting in the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 which later evolved into the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom, but was marked by extreme conflict between Unionists and Nationalists over three decades of terrorism and political violence (1960s-1990s) known as the Troubles. This was not resolved until the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which established a Northern Irish Assembly with power shared between Unionists and Nationalists.

The Ulster Unionist postcard campaign was intense but short-lived. However, much of its iconography continues to be seen today in murals in Unionist areas throughout Northern Ireland. The recurring images of the Union Jack, William of Orange and the Red Hand of Ulster remind us that, just like the Anti-Home Rule postcards, these murals act as "polysemic

weapons” (Santino 2001, 134) that use semiotic resources to depoliticise highly political ideologies and make the rhetoric used seem pure and natural (Goalwin 2013). The rich history and cultural meanings of these postcards emphasise that they are not mere curios or insignificant visual artefacts, but rather an important “battleground for different versions of history” (White 2011, 322) that serve as collective memories of political events. Together, they work as a mosaic that synthesises Ulster’s way of looking at itself and encourages new reflections on the Home Rule Crisis that can educate people about the conflict and serve to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

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