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“No idle sightseers”: The Ulster Women’s Unionist Council and the Ulster Crisis (1912-1914)

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Abstract:

This paper examines the role of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council (UWUC) during the Ulster Crisis. When the UWUC was founded in 1911 dominant gender norms constituted the organization as an auxiliary of the male-dominated Ulster Unionist Council. However, within a year of its establishment the UWUC was the largest women’s political organization in Ireland. Yet the literature related to Ulster unionism and twentieth-century Irish politics and history has constituted the UWUC as a marginal Ulster unionist organization. This paper seeks to contribute to redressing this. It argues that the UWUC was not an “idle sightseer”, or passive observer, of the Ulster Crisis; rather it played a significant role during the Ulster Crisis and in constituting Ulster as a distinct and united polity.

Keywords: Gender, Ulster, Ulster Crisis, Ulster Unionism, Ulster Women’s Unionist Council

1. The Rise of Ulster Unionism

In the 1890s a distinct and institutionalized Ulster unionism began to emerge¹. The Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892, a mass gathering of un-

¹ Here Unionist (capitalized) is used in reference to those who were formally affiliated with the Conservative/Unionist Party, the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) (established in 1905), and the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council (UWUC); unionist (lowercase) is used in reference to the broader community in Ireland (but in the region that would become Northern Ireland in particular) who wished to maintain the political and economic union between

ionist men from across Ulster², was held to demonstrate the scope and unity of the resistance of unionists in Ulster to Home Rule, or self-government for Ireland over domestic issues. It was not until the early 1900s, however, that Ulster unionism materialized as a more fully institutionalized and distinctive political and ideological force (Jackson 1989, 7). Unionists from Ulster were increasingly isolated within the Conservative and Unionist Party caucus at Westminster which was split over the issues of tariff reform and free trade.

Beginning in 1903, Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary in the Conservative government, opposed the government's existing free trade policies. He endorsed the protection of British industry and the application of tariffs on goods produced outside of the empire. Others within the party continued to support free trade. Chamberlain resigned his cabinet post in September 1903 and thereafter campaigned against free trade. Others followed him in leaving the party. This schism within the party meant that the focus of many politicians in Great Britain shifted from Home Rule to economic issues. Although unionists in Ireland attempted to build and maintain alliances across the UK, they now felt increasingly dependent on local rather than pan-British resources and support. In the previous Home Rule debates of 1886 and 1893 the bonds between Unionists and Conservatives in Ireland and Great Britain based on opposition to Home Rule, were stronger, but those bonds had been weakened in the intervening decades as the question of Home Rule was perceived by many British politicians more and more as an "Irish issue". The stakes were much higher in terms of the perceived threat of Home Rule between 1905 and 1910 (Jackson 1989, 301). This increased investment by Ulster politicians in the local politics of Ulster resulted in the establishment of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) in 1905 as an umbrella institution of various Ulster-based unionist organizations which linked local activists with a caucus of approximately twenty Irish Unionist MPs in the House of Commons at Westminster, most of whom represented constituencies in Ulster (Stewart 1967, 32; Jackson 1994, 42-43; Powell 2002, 134; Fitzpatrick 2006, 9).

The Conservative Party lost the 1906 national election to the Liberal Party due to the rift discussed above. In 1909, the Liberal government's "People's Budget" was vetoed by House of Lords sparking a constitutional crisis and another national election in January 1910 which resulted in a mi-

Ireland and Great Britain. Some in Northern Ireland also often use the term *Loyalist* interchangeably with *unionist*, reflecting a particular community's loyalty to the British Crown and/or Northern Ireland's political, economic, and (some argue) cultural ties with the UK.

² The author is aware that Ulster is a contested term in the context of Northern Ireland. It is used here because it was the term commonly used by unionists during the early twentieth century and was the concept of an entity and people constituted as distinct from the rest of Ireland through unionist discourse, traditions, rituals, rules, and symbols explored in this article.

nority Liberal government. The defeat of the first two Home Rule bills and the perceived dependence of this minority government on the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP), an Irish nationalist political party in the Westminster Parliament, made it seem to ever more people that Home Rule for Ireland might be achieved. The veto power of the House of Lords at Westminster, which had been used to defeat the second Home Rule bill in 1893, was removed by Asquith's government in 1911. This raised the concern of unionists in Ulster that the third Home Rule bill, introduced in April of 1912, would be passed by Parliament (Foster 1989, 462, 599-619; Stubbs 1990, 876; Kee 2000, 414, 421-422, 463; Powell 2002, 128; Walsh 2002, 17-18, 28; Jackson 2003, 107, 361-378; Walker 2004, 14, 27; Bardon 2007, 411-413, 431, 436). Given the demographics of Ireland in the early 1900s – roughly seventy-five percent Catholic and twenty-five percent Protestant, with most Protestants concentrated in the province of Ulster – unionists and Protestants, especially in Ulster, feared that if Home Rule was granted to Ireland they would be a minority in a Catholic – and Irish nationalist-dominated Irish Parliament (Megahey 2001, 160-161).

This growing Ulsterization of unionism coupled with increasing support for the Irish nationalist demand for Home Rule in Ireland, set in place the dynamics out of which the Ulster Crisis arose. Ireland was divided on the question of Home Rule. The most concentrated, institutionalized, and well-mobilized opposition to Home Rule was located in the nine counties of Ulster. This placed those counties squarely in the centre of the Home Rule debate during the early 1910s. Unionists argued that civil and religious liberties – values and rights constituted as integral to Ulster – would be threatened if Home Rule was granted to Ireland. Sir Edward Carson³, the leader of Irish Unionist MPs in Westminster, declared: "There was no sacrifice which Ulster loyalists are not prepared to make in order to defeat the most degrading and humiliating conspiracy which now aims at the destruction of their civil and religious liberties" (*Minute Book of UWUC Executive Committee [ECM]*, 1911-1913. 16 January 1913). This reflected a widely shared sense amongst unionists in Ulster that Home Rule posed a threat and danger to Ulster.

The women's suffrage movement and its organizations, such as the Irish Women's Franchise League, Irish Women's Suffrage Society, Women's Social and Political Union, and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies also emerged and grew during these decades. The suffrage movement in Ireland, and the institutions associated with it, added further complexity to the contested nature of citizenship and the constitution of the nation in these years.

³ Carson was leader of the Irish Unionist MPs at Westminster from 1910 to 1921 and leader of the anti-Home Rule campaign during the Ulster Crisis ("Sir Edward Carson", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <www.oxforddnb.com> (05/2018).

The Irish suffrage movement was split over the issues of whether gender and national liberation could/should be addressed simultaneously or separately and the use of violence within the movement. Many suffragists argued that questions related to the political and economic independence of Ireland could not be divorced from the political liberation – the enfranchisement – of women. Others chose to concentrate on the cause of suffrage. They claimed that the nation could not be liberated if women in Ireland remained disenfranchised. These suffragists were criticized by many within the Irish nationalist and Ulster unionist movements and labelled “traitors” to their nation for focusing on women’s suffrage to the alleged detriment of Ireland’s political and economic liberation (Owens 1984; Murphy 1989; Ward 1993; Ryan 1995; Ward 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). In September 1912 the UUC approved plans for a provisional “Government of Ulster”. It would assume control of Ulster in the event Home Rule became law and hold “Ulster in trust for the King, pending the Repeal [sic] of Home Rule” (McNeill 1922, 145). Initially these plans involved a commitment to include women in this government, but this pledge was later withdrawn to the consternation of many (Buckland 1973a, 207; Urquhart 2001, 81; Paseta 2013, 141). Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, an Irish Republican, suffragist, and critic of the UWUC noted to fellow Irish Republicans and feminists that Cumann na mBan (the Irish Women’s Council), a militant Irish nationalist women’s organization, had not received a similar guarantee from the Irish Republican movement (Ward 2017, 102-104).

2. The Emergence of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council and the Gendering of Ulster

The establishment of a distinct unionist movement in Ulster and its political and economic power in Northern Ireland has been well documented. Much of this literature, however, has focused on the male-only or male-dominated institutions (see: Stewart 1967; Edwards 1970; Buckland 1973a, 1973b; Gibbon 1975; Jackson 1989, 1990; Akenson 1991; Jackson 1992; Collins 1994; Jackson 1994; Bew *et al.*, 1996; Shirlow, McGovern, eds, 1997; Loughlin 1999; Edwards 2000; Boyce & O’Day, eds, 2001; Jackson 2001, 2003; Boyce & O’Day, eds, 2004; Walker 2004; Loughlin 2007; Miller, 2007; Prince, 2007). Male-dominated political parties (see: Aughey 1989; Aughey, Morrow 1996; Ruane, Todd 2000; Walker 2004; Aughey 2005; Prince 2007) and the emergence and activities of Protestant paramilitaries have also been extensively researched (see: Bowman, 2007; McGaughey, 2012) – as have the Troubles (see: Edwards 1970; Farrell 1980; Aughey 1989; McGarry, O’Leary 1995; Aughey, Morrow 1996; Bew *et al.*, 1996; Ruane, Todd 2000; Aughey 2005; Tonge 2006; Prince 2007).

Significant contributions have also been made in terms of exploring questions related to gender and highlighting the contributions of women within unionist communities and the unionist movement. Fidelma Ashe (2012) and

Jane McGaughey (2012) have explored militarized masculinities during the Troubles in Northern Ireland and at the turn of the last century in Ulster respectively. McGaughey has argued that the normative ideals of masculinities in Ulster divided men based on class identities. Linda Racioppi and Katherine O'Sullivan See have addressed the gendered nature of unionist parades in Northern Ireland (2000b) and the gendered processes of nation-building (2000a), asserting that such parades and nation-building processes are fundamentally gendered and have resulted in the marginalization of women within unionist communities and the nation-state. Rosemary Sales and Rachel Ward have examined the roles of women within unionist, Loyalist, and Protestant communities during the Troubles and throughout the peace process in Northern Ireland. Ward (2006) has claimed that women have contributed significantly to the work within those communities in spite of the normative ideals of femininity which have ascribed women an auxiliary role within such communities. According to Sales (1997a, 1997b), women have been subordinated within Northern Irish society as a result of religious and political sectarianism. Diane Urquhart has furthered the understanding of the role of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council (UWUC or the Council) in the unionist movement during the 1910s and 1920s. The edited collection of the minutes of the UWUC, which Urquhart edited (2001), has made important primary sources related to that organization much more accessible to scholars and the general public alike. Additionally, she has detailed the work of members of the UWUC during the 1910s and 1920s, and has posited that members of the UWUC and other women's organizations, such as Association of Loyal Orange Women, did not challenge, but maintained and/or reinforced existing perceptions of gender differences within the unionist movement during the early twentieth century (Urquhart 2016, 2000, 1996, 1994).

This paper contributes to an understanding of the mutually constituted gender and unionist identities in Northern Ireland and to the critical literature which challenges the stereotypes of unionist women as apolitical and passive. It also expands the range of theoretical frameworks in this field of research. It reconfigures how feminist historical analysis and approaches have understood the role of unionist women in the ethno-nationalist politics of Ireland. Moreover, this paper concentrates on tracing and understanding unionist women's political agency through a case study of the UWUC and its role in the Ulster unionist movement and in the constitution of Ulster as distinct from the rest of Ireland during the Ulster Crisis (1912-1914), a period of male hegemony and significant political conflict. As such this paper offers new insights related to the involvement of unionist women in the constitution of the nation and in the defence of the nation and the national people. Furthermore, it opens up new angles of analyses through the development of Rogers Brubaker's (1996) concepts of nation, nationhood, nationness, and the original concept of nation-work. I argue that the nation, nationhood,

nationness, and nation-work of Ulster were established through unionist discourses, norms, symbols, rituals, and traditions.

According to Rogers Brubaker, the nation is a practical category, nationhood is the constitution of nation as institutionalized form, and nationness is the foundation of the nation through contingent moments and events. These are the mechanisms through which institutions such as political parties, state bureaucracies, and social movements constitute the nation as a real polity and entity based on particular categories of analysis such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, and – I contend – gender. Nation as practical category relates to a particular “category of social vision and division” which constitutes the nation, as conveyed through nationalist ideology (Brubaker 1996, 21). Understanding nation as practical category enables one to grasp how a “people” are constituted as a collective entity experienced as real and united through categories of classification (Brubaker 1996, 14-15, 21). Brubaker additionally posits that practical categories of nation become institutionalized through state-related organizational structures and practices including political organizations, such as the UUC and the UWUC, as well as organized nationalist, labour, and civil rights movements (for example) (Brubaker 1996, 18-21).

Nationhood, or nation as institutionalized form, elaborates fundamental forms of political identity (i.e., national, ethnic, gender, class, and religious) and provides the elementary forms of political understanding and action through institutionalized norms, traditions, rituals, symbols, and practices. In this way, the institutionalized discourse of nation constitutes classifications which are fundamental to “political understanding, rhetoric, interests, identity, and action” and provides the central parameters of political rhetoric and particular political interests (Brubaker 1996, 21-22, 24). Therefore, when analyzing nation it is important to understand not only how “the political fiction of the nation” (including its gendered constitution, I argue) shapes perceptions, ideas, and experiences, but also how it informs the discourses and actions of nationalist institutions and movements (Brubaker 1996, 7, 16). Nationhood affords a comprehension of how Ulster was institutionalized through the rules, norms, rituals, and traditions of the institutions of Ulster unionism. Institutionalized rituals, symbols, and traditions are significant ways through which the nation is embodied and institutionalized. They mark the significant events of a collectivity, provide a sense of unity, signify membership or belonging, and define the terms of membership through particular norms of participation. Finally, nationness, that is “[a] contingent, conjuncturally fluctuating, and precarious frame of vision and basis for individual and collective action” (Brubaker 1996, 19), provides an understanding of how a polity is constituted through perceived but “precarious” common aims and experiences, and mass mobilization related to unforeseen events. As the article will make evident, in the case of Ulster unionism and the UWUC, the Ulster Crisis can be understood as contingent events through which Ulster and the Ulster people were constituted.

Nation-work encompasses not only discursive and symbolic work, but also physical work that includes actions undertaken by individuals *within* and *through* institutions on behalf of the nation. Nation-work constitutes the nation and institutionalizes it through representative practices that not only instantiate the nation, but also delineate and defend its membership, boundaries, and norms, and recompose the nation in response to changing political, social, and economic circumstances. The UWUC's opposition to Home Rule; its work during elections to secure parliamentary seats for Unionists; and its education, and lobbying efforts are examples of the nation-work of the UWUC during the Ulster Crisis. The UWUC's claims of nation established particular political activities of the UWUC undertaken in the name of Ulster. However, as will be demonstrated below, such nation-work was gendered. Dominant norms of femininity and masculinity constituted particular roles and activities for unionist women and others for unionist men in Ulster.

In this paper I draw on primary sources such as the minutes of meetings and correspondence of the UWUC⁴ and newspapers such as the *Belfast News-Letter* and the *Northern Whig*, as well as secondary sources related to Ulster unionism in order to examine the UWUC. Since the focus of this paper is the unionist constitution of Ulster and gendered Ulster identities, it is beyond its scope to examine unionism in other parts of Ireland.

An understanding of the UWUC's involvement in the Ulster unionist movement and its constitution of Ulster expands analyses of Ulster unionism and the constitution of Ulster. As many scholars have illustrated, gender is central to the ways in which power operates within nationalist movements through nationalist discourses, norms, practices, and traditions (see: Enloe 1989; Yuval-Davis, Anthias 1989; Walby 1992; Enloe 1995; Peterson 1995; Allen 1997; Benton 1997; Yuval-Davis 1997; Enloe 1998; Peterson 1998; Yuval-Davis 1998, 2001; Walby 2002; Yuval-Davis 2004; Vickers 2006; Walby 2006; Ashe 2012). It is important, therefore, to understand the gendered constitution of nation and nationalist movements.

The Ulster Crisis was a moment of nationness central to the unionist constitution of Ulster and the Ulster people – the first modern and popular mobilization of unionists in Ulster. The increasing constitution of Ulster as a place apart from the rest of Ireland set the stage for the eventual acceptance by most Ulster unionists of partition as a way out of the volatile political situation during the early 1900s (Loughlin 2007, 160). Ulster unionist discourse established male unionists and Protestants as the rightful holders of political and economic power in Ulster. The Ulsterman was constituted

⁴ The minutes of meetings are part of the records of the UWUC held at the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) in Belfast and were reproduced as a collection edited by Diane Urquhart which was published in 2001.

as the embodiment of Ulster. He was loyal, tough, authoritative, independent-minded, rational, honest, determined, pious, business-oriented, modern yet tradition bound, and urban; a Protestant man of honour who had the common touch, and a steadfast unionist who would not shirk his duty to defend Ulster through the use of arms if necessary (Loughlin 2007, 160; McGaughey 2012, 55, 57, 70). This was personified in the emergence of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in January 1913. The UVF was a Protestant paramilitary force whose male members were sworn to defend Ulster against its “enemies” (Bowman 2007, 46-47, 64-65). Ulster was often symbolically depicted as a woman in need of protection or rallying her men to her armed defence. Ulster’s defenders were always male, and depicted as the Apprentice Boys⁵, William III⁶, or Edward Carson – a “modern-day Moses” and “galant statesman” (Jackson 1992, 164; Foy 1996, 50).

Leadership, authority, determination, steadfastness, physical strength, courage, and an independent spirit were constituted as masculine and Protestant traits personified in the ideal of the Ulsterman, and vital to the work of public administration. They were valorised as integral characteristics of Ulster which distinguished it from the rest of Ireland (Jackson 1989, 15; Loughlin 1999, 110-113; Jackson 1992, 18, 179-183; Foy 1996, 53; Walker 2004, 36-37; Miller 2007, 99, 115; McGaughey 2012, 55, 57, 70). According to such normative ideals of masculinity, male unionists and Protestants were constituted as the rightful holders of political and economic power in Ulster (Jackson 1992, 184; Sales 1997a, 144; McGaughey 2012, 159-161). Conversely the qualities

⁵ Founded in 1823 the Apprentice Boys Society is an organization similar to the Orange Order. It was named after thirteen Protestant men – apprentices in guilds in Londonderry – who locked the gates of the city from King James II’s forces during the Siege of Derry (1689), thereby protecting the city’s Protestant inhabitants from the danger of attack by James’ forces. The membership of the Apprentice Boys and the Orange Order has frequently overlapped indicating the ideological commonalities between the two organizations (Farrell 1980, 350; Edwards 2000, 113, 193).

⁶ William of Orange (later William III) was a member of the Protestant royal house of the Netherlands. He married Princess Mary (a Protestant), the eldest daughter of James II of England (a Catholic). The Westminster Parliament was concerned about moves made by James II that curbed Protestant power and privilege (he attempted to reduce Parliament’s powers; he altered the charters of municipal corporations – with the exception of Belfast – to provide majorities to Catholics; he granted the majority of judicial, privy council and county sheriff offices to Catholics; and he stripped Protestants of officer positions in the army). In 1688 Parliament declared William and Mary to be joint sovereigns of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. James II landed in Ireland in late 1688 and attempted to reclaim his throne. William III followed in the summer of 1689. Several battles ensued. The Siege of Derry (1689) and Battle of the Boyne in 1690 – at which William III’s forces defeated those of James II – have gone down in Ulster unionist history as the triumph of Protestant over Catholic and the reassertion of Protestant political and economic power in Ireland (Bardon 2007, 140-143, 150-165).

of nurturing and caring were constituted as inherently feminine traits making women ideally suited to the spheres of home and family, and the work of mothering and childrearing. The primary role for a woman, according to Ulster unionism, was that of wife and mother, supporting men active in unionist and Protestant struggles, and inculcating children with unionist and Protestant values and norms. Men were constituted as the active, public agents of Ulster unionism; women as passive subjects and auxiliary agents to be called upon in times of need, but otherwise positioned in the private sphere of home and family – sidelined from any formal representation or work in the public sphere (Racioppi, O'Sullivan See 2000b, 3, 13; Ward 2006, 1-3, 7). Such normative gender ideals and gender-segregated spheres gave rise to gender-segregated unionist institutions, such as the UWUC, the UUC, and the UVF.

Many women asserted that their role as a mother and wife legitimated their involvement in the unionist cause during this time of threat and danger. One commentator observed: "The gravity of the crisis has [...] made it necessary to call upon women for their aid in defending the union" (*Northern Whig*, 24 January 1911). Numerous members of the UWUC argued that, as wives and mothers, women had an even greater obligation to protect the Union than men. "To uphold civil and religious liberty, to testify on behalf of justice and honour and righteousness in public as well as in private life, to protest undivided loyalty to the Throne, and to withstand the forces that make for corruption and tyranny – these are the duties which every good woman is ready to fulfil" (*Northern Whig*, 24 January 1911). Thus, as a moment of nationness the Ulster Crisis opened up space within which members of the UWUC could work to oppose Home Rule. This allowed women to do work in the public domain in a way that did not explicitly challenge or transgress those normative gender ideals, but did afford a broadening of roles for women in the public sphere. By extolling these normative ideals of femininity, the UWUC extended caring/nurturing of women in their individual families to the wider unionist polity of Ulster. Although unionist normative ideals of femininity cast Ulster unionist women as "teamakers" (Ward 2006, 1-3, 7) and supporters of "their men," members of the UWUC were not "idle sightseers" (McNeill 1922, 113) – passive observers or merely behind-the-scenes supporters – during the Ulster Crisis. They played a significant part in the Ulster unionist opposition to Home Rule and its constitution of Ulster as a distinct and unified, but gendered, polity. I call such work nation-work. Nation-work constitutes the nation and institutionalizes it through representative practices that not only instantiate the nation, but also delineate and defend its membership, boundaries, and norms, and re-compose the nation in response to changing political, social, and economic circumstances. Nation-work encompasses not only discursive and symbolic work, but also physical work that includes actions undertaken by individuals *within* and *through* institutions on behalf of the nation.

The UWUC was established on 23 January 1911 in the midst of the emerging Ulster Crisis. Although the founding of the UWUC was not the beginning of women's involvement in the unionist cause, it was significant. It afforded women the ability to work together "in a more systematic and coordinated political campaign" for Ulster unionism (Fitzpatrick 1998, 19; Urquhart 2001, xii). Women had actively opposed the first two Home Rule Bills in 1886 and 1893 (Jackson 1990, 842, 852; Urquhart 2001, xi). A petition contesting the second Home Rule Bill was signed by 20,000 women and presented to the Westminster Parliament in April 1893. In June of 1893 a mass demonstration of women in Armagh was dubbed the "shrieking sisters" of unionism by local Irish nationalists (Jackson 1990, 852). Additionally, approximately 1000 women in Strabane, 1700 in Omagh, and 500 in Raphoe demonstrated against the second Home Rule Bill (Urquhart 2000, 48). Nevertheless, the subsidiary status ascribed by gender norms of the day to women and women's organizations constituted the UWUC as an auxiliary unionist organization. It was the only one excluded from the ranks of the UUC until the partial enfranchisement of women in the UK in 1918. The heightened organization of unionist women fits a broader trend in Irish and UK politics during the late 1800s and early 1900s. These decades saw a growth in the number of political associations, particularly women-only ones, such as the Association of Loyal Orange Women, the Order of the Daughters of the Empire, the Primrose League, and the Victoria League (Graves 1994, 5-15, 22, 25, 28-33, 35-36, 93, 110-114; Gleadle, Richardson 2000, 12-14, 60-65, 115-133, 143-146; Urquhart 2016, 1), as well as the suffrage movement discussed above.

Like their male counterparts, members of the UWUC objected to Home Rule on religious, economic, imperial, and constitutional grounds – thus constituting Ulster as nation, or practical category. Members of the UWUC feared that a Dublin Parliament would be dominated by Catholics and Irish nationalists, and hence be detrimental to the rights and freedoms of Ireland's Protestant and unionist minorities – most particularly to Ulster, the region in which the largest percentage of those minorities were concentrated. Cecil Craig, future President of the UWUC, declared: "If [Irish] Nationalists were in any way given control of the loyal minority dreadful things would come to pass [...] and that] their [Irish nationalists'] desire for self-government was based on the wish to have control of Ulster, but Ulster would never submit" (*Belfast News-Letter*, 24 January 1911). Members of the UWUC further claimed that Home Rule would not only be disastrous for Ulster's, and Ireland's, industrial and commercial interests, but would harm the integrity of the Empire and lead to its disintegration. Moreover, they asserted that it was unconstitutional to impose Home Rule on Ulster against the will of its people (Urquhart 2001, xv).

The motion that founded the UWUC drew on this unionist sense of impending danger and the metaphor of family. It invoked the "sympathy and help

of our sisters in England and Scotland" at this "serious crisis in our Nation's history", and imbued the unionist discourse of "our Nation" with a sense of naturalness through a perceived shared kinship amongst "the people" of Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England (*Northern Whig*, 24 January 1911). Furthermore, it illustrated the connection between the every-day/private spheres and the public/electoral spheres, pledging its members to work in their "neighbourhoods" – the every-day/private spheres – so that every constituency, or the public/electoral spheres, in Ulster would have a group of committed people working on behalf of the unionist cause. This was distinct from the self-declared domain of formal political constituencies, which the male-only UUC, as the "medium of [...]Ulster Unionist opinion", considered to be its sphere (*Irish Times*, 3 December 1904, cited in Buckland 1973b, 20-21; McNeill 1922, 36).

The UWUC strove to be representative of every constituency, region, and class from "peeress to peasant"⁷. Within the first month of the Council's existence over 4000 women had joined the West Belfast Branch believed to be comprised primarily of working-class women⁸. By the end of 1911 the UWUC had a membership of approximately 40,000 to 50,000. By 1913 its membership was estimated at between 115,000 and 200,000; and it had 32 associations in every constituency in all nine counties of Ulster, making it the largest women's political association at the time in Ireland (Kinghan 1975, 14; Urquhart 1994, 97; 1996, 32). In comparison, Cumann na mBan had approximately 1,700 members in late 1915, one year after it was founded; and an estimated 3,500 women were involved in the Irish suffrage movement (Urquhart 1996, 32; Paseta 2013, 235). The scale of the UWUC's membership and the fact that its membership spanned all nine counties of Ulster highlighted the fact that the discourse of Ulster advanced by the Council spoke to a large number of women and not only to a particular class or region. Through such a range of membership the UWUC constituted Ulster as nationhood, or institutionalized form, by claiming to speak for "the women of Ulster".

The motion that founded the UWUC, its Constitution, and the women's Declaration, discussed below, established Ulster as nation through a triad of Ulster unionist identity: Ulster was British, but also part of Ireland; loyal to the British Crown; and Protestant. This made Ulster distinct from the Irish na-

⁷ At the inaugural meeting of the UWUC held on 23 January 1911, Edith Mercier Clements, Assistant Honorary Treasurer of the UWUC from 1911 to 1920, declared that both "peeress and the peasant would be represented" within the Council, and that its work would include the "education of the working class" (*Belfast News-Letter*, 24 January 1911).

⁸ In his account of the events which gave rise to what he called the "the Ulster Movement", Ronald McNeill, a member of the Standing Committee of the UUC and a Unionist MP, claimed that one West Belfast branch of the UWUC was comprised of approximately eighty percent "mill workers and shop girls"; he further asserted that "no women were so vehement in their support of the Loyalist cause as the factory workers" (McNeill 1922, 37, 113).

tionalist constituted Catholic, Celtic Ireland (Fitzpatrick 1998, 24; Stanbridge 2005, 25). The UWUC's membership rules, practices, and rituals catalyzed this identity still further. Its meetings began with the popular Protestant hymn, *O God Our Help in Ages Past*, reflecting a sense that a Protestant Ulster had a covenant with God, and closed with the singing of *God Save the King*, which constituted Ulster as British and loyal. Such work can be understood as establishing Ulster as both practical category and institutionalized form.

According to Ulster unionist discourse, this British, Protestant, loyal Ulster identity was best protected by the Protestant British Crown and a predominantly Protestant, British Parliament not a majority Catholic-dominated independent Irish Parliament. Thus, preserving the political and economic union of Great Britain and Ireland was the basis of unity among Ulster unionists and the singular purpose of the UWUC, the formal institutional vehicle through which unionist women could dedicate themselves to that singular goal. As Theresa, the 6th Marchioness of Londonderry⁹ and President of UWUC from 1913 to 1919 recalled, the Council had been established: "to express the feelings of the people of Ulster who have fought with every means in their power to remain associated with England [...] We banded ourselves together to see how we might best organise ourselves to impress upon our fellow countrymen in England with the fact that Ulster will not consent to the tearing asunder of this country [...] since the union she [Ireland] has prospered commercially in every way" (*UWUC Council Minutes 1912-40*, 28 January 1919, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 192-193). According to this perspective, Home Rule not only threatened the British, Protestant, and loyal identity of Ulster and its people; it also endangered the economic strength of Ulster and Ireland as a whole.

The rules, norms, rituals, and aims of the UWUC instilled in its members a sense of unity based on a perception of common purpose and a shared Ulster identity. This Ulster nationhood constituted Ulster in opposition to a Catholic, Celtic Ireland, which afforded Ulster, and unionist institutions such as the UWUC, an internal coherence that they did not have in reality. The fact that this unity was expressly stated in the motion that founded the Council, as well as its Constitution and its motto – "United we stand divided we fall" (Kingham 1975, 89) – was indicative of the primacy of the

⁹ Theresa, the 6th Marchioness Londonderry, married into one of the most prominent families in Ireland when she wed Charles Vane-Tempest-Stewart, the son of the 5th Marquess and Marchioness of Londonderry in 1875. She was Vicereine of Ireland from 1886 to 1889 and counted several Prime Ministers and Cabinet Ministers, as well as Walter Long (Chief Secretary of Ireland), Edward Carson, King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, and King George V and Queen Mary as friends. As a friend of such prominent politicians and society figures, and one of the preeminent political hostesses of her time, Theresa exerted significant political influence in her own right (Urquhart 2007, 76-79, 83-90).

unionist discourse of Ulster within the UWUC. Moreover, it highlights the UWUC's recognition that on other issues, such as the enfranchisement of women, its members were potentially divided; hence the leadership of the Council deemed it best to avoid such potentially divisive issues altogether. Consequently, members of the UWUC were forbidden to discuss suffrage or any issue other than Home Rule.

This unity of purpose and singular focus was catalysed through the practices of members of the UWUC. Every meeting of the Council included the recitation of a pledge to only discuss the issue of Home Rule. It was further institutionalized through the 1911 Constitution of the UWUC which proclaimed that: "the sole object of the Council shall be to secure the maintenance in its integrity of the Legislative Union between Great Britain and Ireland, and [...] to resist all proposals [...] which have for their object the establishment of any form of an Irish Parliament [...] all other questions [...] shall be subordinated to the single issue of the maintenance of the Legislative Union" (*Draft Constitution of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council*, January 1911, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 215). Differences amongst members of the UWUC were to be subsumed in the interests of this singular cause, around which all members were united – so the Council claimed. Consequently, Home Rule was *the* central and tangible issue around which the UWUC quickly galvanized members and organized.

The leadership of the UWUC took the institutionalization of this singular focus still further. It wrote to other organizations to inform them of this limitation on their members, which apparently went beyond the Council's meetings. The UWUC's Executive Committee accepted the request of the Women's Amalgamated Unionist and Tariff Reform Association (WAUTRA) that the Council send some of its members to speak on Home Rule because they were only asked to speak on that topic. However, the Executive Committee asked that when advertising these talks by members of the UWUC, WAUTRA "make it quite clear that they [members of the UWUC] are concerned solely with the question of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland [...] as [...] under our Constitution we are precluded from touching any other subject" (*UWUC ECM 1911-13*, 21 April 1921, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 16). According to the executive of the UWUC, it was necessary to discipline Ulster, meaning to constitute and reinscribe its boundaries and to tame threats against it both from within and without, not only by imposing limitations on what its members could and could not discuss, but also by making other organizations aware of such constraints. Asserting a unified polity, and thereby minimizing the potential threat of social and economic cleavages within that polity, was one way to do this. Moreover, this rule highlights the contested and unstable nature of Ulster and the disciplining role that institutions such as the UWUC played in relation to the constitution Ulster through the deployment of unionist discourse, symbols,

and rituals. As Myrtle Hill has noted, during the early 1900s unity within the women's movement in the north of Ireland was precarious due to "multiple, intersecting, and frequently opposing identities" related to gender, class, and national interests (Hill 2007, 225). Unity within the Ulster unionist movement was similarly tenuous; hence the perceived need to discipline Ulster through concentrating on one issue around which unionists could agree and avoiding potentially divisive issues such as class, faith denomination, or women's suffrage.

3. *"For the Cause of Ulster" (UWUC ECM 1913-40, 2 March 1923, Letter from A.W. Hungerford to the UWUC, Reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 137)*

A unionist woman's role as wife and mother was used by many members of the UWUC to assert public and active roles for themselves within the unionist movement and resistance to Home Rule. This allowed members of the Council to challenge such ideals in socially acceptable ways. According to Ulster unionist normative gender ideals a woman's role as wife, mother, daughter, or sister was constituted as one of support and helpmate, and as her primary role. The private spheres of home and family were thus catalysed as the cardinal domains of women – and the basis of the anti-Home Rule work undertaken by members of the UWUC. Given the perceived dangers that Home Rule posed to Ulster and its people, and the gender norms which constituted family and home as a woman's primary spheres of interest, women in Ulster were called to "do their part" to protect not only their individual families and homes, but the collective Ulster family and home. Members of the Council asserted that women, as wives, mothers, and promoters of the Union and the Empire within the home, had a responsibility to protect the "civic and religious liberties" – a cornerstone of the Ulster Protestant identity (Jackson 1990, 853).

The Lurgan Women's Unionist Association established this womanly duty proclaiming:

If our homes are not sacred from the priest under the existing laws, what can we expect from a priest-governed Ireland [...] let each woman in Ulster do a woman's part to stem the tide of Home Rule [...] the Union [...] meant everything to them – their civil and religious liberty, their homes and children [...] once the Union was severed there could be no outlook in Ulster but strife and bitterness [...] Home was a woman's first consideration [...] in the event of Home Rule being granted, the sanctity and happiness of home life in Ulster would be permanently destroyed. (*Minute Book of the Lurgan Women's Unionist Association*, 13 May 1911, cited in Urquhart 2001, xv)

Echoing this sense of womanly duty and constituting a common unionist British identity the Executive Committee of the UWUC declared: "We are

now on the eve of a [...] critical struggle. It is [...] essential that Unionists [...] should [...] join together to defeat the destructive policy of the Government [...] The civil and religious liberty of the women of Ireland and the security of their homes can only be guaranteed under the Legislative and Administrative Union of Great Britain and Ireland; we are deeply conscious of our responsibilities and are determined to take our full share in the conflict that lies before us" (*UWUC ECM 1911-13*, 8 September 1911, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 28-29). Women were the guardians of their individual family homes. The perceived threat that Home Rule posed to their collective home of Ulster broadened this guardianship role and the scope of nation-work undertaken by Unionist women. Thus members of the UWUC actively campaigned against Home Rule. As is discussed below, they spoke against Home Rule at meetings, disseminated propaganda, organized demonstrations, maintained electoral registers, lobbied politicians, and organized events on Ulster Day.

The UWUC trained members in public speaking, educated them about the unionist position related to Home Rule, and sent these women on "missions" across the UK speaking against Home Rule. This work expanded rapidly from twenty missionaries speaking in six constituencies in 1911, to ninety missionaries speaking in ninety-three constituencies, addressing 230 meetings and an estimated 100,000 voters in 1913 (Kingham 1975, 14-15). The minutes of the Executive Committee of the UWUC for 19 March 1912 record that "Mrs Smith from Banbridge had addressed a meeting of 2000 people in Macclesfield and was speaking at other places during her visit to England" (*UWUC ECM 1911-13*, 19 March 1912, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 50). Records of the speeches made during these missions are difficult to find since they were often held in private homes or were open only to members of particular groups. However, the meeting minutes of the Council and its Executive, as well as the notices related to some of these talks which are found in the Records of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council, indicate that numerous women undertook such work speaking to various issues related to Home Rule in many parts of Great Britain (see "A Book of Sample Badges, Tickets, Notices, Menus of the UWUC, 1912-1928").

The UWUC gave this nation-work a religious connotation, insisting that its missionaries were "most anxious to address Radical Audiences rather than meetings of convinced Unionists" (*UWUC Active Workers' Committee Minutes*, 15 November 1912, cited in Urquhart 2001, xvi). Just as religious missionaries aimed to convert "non-believers" into "believers", so the missionaries of the Council hoped to convert the UK public to their anti-Home Rule stance and thereby establish mass opposition to Home Rule. Through these missions Ulster was constituted as British, loyal, and Protestant, and the UWUC not only supported the men of Ulster, but asserted women's agency within the Ulster unionist movement. Members of the Council were not going to accept a merely supportive, behind-the-scenes role, but were prepared

to take on work which placed them front and centre as public speakers. They also established networks and supporters across the UK. This work was so important to the UWUC that it established a committee – the Active Workers' Committee – which regularly reported on the number of places at which, and people to whom, its members had spoken.

Members of the UWUC established themselves as a force through such nation-work. They received requests to speak to particular organizations and constituencies. The volume of such requests is indicative of the importance which the Council attached to this work, and the obvious success its members achieved in terms of their public speaking skills and the publicity these missions garnered. The leadership of the UWUC was careful to vet such requests and the organizations with which it worked, making clear the parameters under which it would send its missionaries, as is evident in its correspondence with the WAUTRA discussed above. Although normative gender ideals cast the UWUC as a supposedly auxiliary unionist organization, the leadership of the Council asserted “charge and control” in relation to this work undertaken on behalf of the organization. Men approached the UWUC to do mission work under its aegis as early as September 1911, only nine months after the Council was founded. The Executive Committee moved that “these men be employed on special service when necessary, each case to be separately considered by the Executive Committee” (*UWUC ECM 1911-13*, 25 September 1911, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 31).

The production and dissemination of anti-Home Rule propaganda nation-work went beyond this public speaking by members of the UWUC, however. Members of the Council also produced and distributed anti-Home Rule propaganda across the UK. By 1913 they sent approximately 10,000 pro-unionist leaflets and newspapers weekly to Britain (*Annual Report of the UWUC*, 1913). Moreover, members of the UWUC organized demonstrations. In October 1912, they held a rally attended by an estimated 10,000 women; and in 1913 Edward Carson spoke to an audience of over 25,000 women in West Belfast – said to have been the largest gathering of women ever at that time in Ireland (*Annual Report of the UWUC*, 1913). These demonstrations were critical to the constitution of a united Ulster *people*. As Theresa, the 6th Lady Londonderry observed, the sight of women demonstrating *en masse* was a reminder “that the Government were [sic] not up against a political organization, but against a whole people” (*Darlington and Stockton Times*, 22 November 1913, cited in Urquhart 2000, 46). These rallies illustrated tangibly to both Irish nationalists and the British government that they would have to contend with an institutionalized, organized, and mobilized people who opposed Home Rule.

Ulster's loyal and British identity was also forged through the nation-work of members of the UWUC related to the canvassing of voters. Edith Mercier Clements declared that the creation of the Council was “the beginning of real and solid work and a thorough organising of the women of Ulster [...]”

to begin work at once, to canvass voters [...] and to endeavour to bring every single voter to the polls during elections, so that every seat in Ulster shall be won for the Union [...] the women of Ulster will be in no way behind the men in striving for so noble a cause" (*Belfast News-Letter*, 24 January 1911). It was hoped that this work would ensure electoral success for Ulster unionists and contribute to the defeat of Home Rule. Mercier Clements was one of the more progressive members of the UWUC, so her views cannot necessarily be taken as broadly representative of the Council's membership. Nevertheless, her statement reveals that at least some members of the UWUC felt a sense of insecurity regarding the auxiliary status accorded to the organization within the Ulster unionist movement, and were concerned that their nation-work be deemed as significant as that of unionist men.

Members of the UWUC also undertook the administrative nation-work related to the maintenance of the Unionist electoral registers. This was critical to the goal of unionists to defeat the Home Rule Bill. The Dowager Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava noted the importance of such work in a letter to Theresa, the 6th Lady Londonderry. She remarked: "I am sure the registration of voters is most important. There is no doubt the other side [Irish nationalists] are [sic] attending to that" (Dowager Lady Dufferin and Ava to Lady Londonderry, 4 October 1916, D 2846/1/8/49). This work was tied to the protection of the interests of Ulster and the UK. The women of Ulster, as represented by the UWUC, had a clear role to play in the unionist work of preserving the political and economic ties between Ireland and Great Britain. William Wilson, Secretary of the North Tyrone Unionist Constituency, echoed the importance of this administrative work, observing that "in Irish Constituencies the whole fight is at the Revision, not at the Election [...] and] as everyone knows, in this country [Ireland] it is a mere matter of religion" (Wilson to Dawson Bates, 9 November 1910, D 1327/23/1A, cited in Walker 2004, 25). Since elections in Ireland, including the nine counties of Ulster, were often won in the revision courts, much depended on the capacity of local political associations to ensure that its party supporters were registered and, therefore, eligible to vote to the greatest extent possible.

Members of the UWUC also asserted their political agency and established Ulster as nation and institutionalized form through the nation-work of political lobbying. They petitioned MPs and both Houses of Parliament. In June 1911, a resolution was submitted to the House of Lords in the name of the UWUC "protest[ing] in the strongest manner against the passing of any Home Rule Bill for Ireland as they know that the civil and religious liberty of the women of Ulster and the security of their homes can only be guaranteed under the Legislative Union of Great Britain and Ireland" (*UWUC ECM 1911-13*, 16 June 1911, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 22). This resolution connected the security of Ulster, its women, and their homes to that union. Although in 1911 women in Ulster, and the rest of the UK, did not

yet have the right to vote, members of the UWUC still felt a duty to campaign and lobby against Home Rule. In May and June of 1912 members of the Council secured 104,301 signatures to its petition against Home Rule, which had “to be rolled by machinery to bring it within reasonable bulk as the slips when pasted together measured from 1600 yards or almost one mile in length” when it was presented to the House of Commons in June 1912 (Kinghan 1975, 20; *UWUC ECM 1911-13*, 21 May 1912, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 57). Members of the UWUC had publicly pledged to “stand by our husbands, our brothers and our sons in whatever steps they may be forced to take in defending our liberties against the tyranny of Home Rule” (*Belfast News-Letter*, 19 January 1912). However, they clearly did not see themselves simply as supportive wives, sisters, or mothers, but as a polity with political agency and a duty not only to “stand by” and support “their” men, but to organize, demonstrate, and lobby in their own right against Home Rule.

4. *Ulster Day*

The Ulster unionist campaign against Home Rule culminated in Ulster Day: 28 September 1912. This day was an expression of Ulster unionists’ resistance to Home Rule and the apparent threat they deemed that it posed. It began with religious services of worship. The signing of the Solemn League and Covenant – the Covenant – by men was constituted as the high point of the day, and signified their endorsement of Ulster unionism and loyalty to Ulster and the British state (*Northern Whig*, 30 September 1912; McNeill 1922, 117-119; McGaughey 2012, 48). Women were not permitted to sign the Covenant. Thomas Sinclair, a member of the UUC, drafted the Women’s Declaration – the Declaration – which they could sign. Illustrating the prominence and authority of men and the UUC within the unionist movement, Sinclair sent a draft of the Declaration to the UWUC for comments, but unionist women were not permitted to create their own document, and the Declaration was subject to the final approval of the UUC not the UWUC (Urquhart 2016, 3).

The signatories to the Declaration and the Covenant constituted Ulster, its people, identity, values, and aims. However, these documents made clear that authority and leadership were accorded to masculine Ulster. Both asserted Ulster’s loyalty to the British Crown and appealed to God to defend Ulster from the threat of an independent Irish Parliament. Yet these gender-segregated documents and associated signing ceremonies simultaneously institutionalized separate gendered expectations for men and women. The signatories to the Declaration claimed to speak for “the women of Ulster”, and invoked God to protect Ulster and its “cherished place in the Constitution of the United Kingdom”, which they tied to Ulster’s loyalty to the British Sovereign. They “desire[d] to associate” themselves with “the men of Ulster” implying a supportive, passive role for women in Ulster, while the Covenant

invoked action. The men of Ulster pledged to defend by "all means [...] necessary" their "equal citizenship in the United Kingdom". The Declaration did not directly assert citizenship for its female signatories, but it appealed to God to save Ireland, including Ulster, from "this calamity" of Home Rule (*Women's Declaration*, <<https://apps.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenant/image.aspx?image=W0042550004>> [05/2018]; *Solemn League and Covenant*, <<https://apps.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenant/image.aspx?image=M0043260001>> [05/2018]). The God invoked in the Covenant was a martial God who would defend their right to remain British citizens. The Covenant drew on a history of past "stress and trial" in its confident assertion that God would continue to be on "their" side. In signing the Covenant and the Declaration, Ulster's men and women had made a pact with God. God would repay this faith by protecting Ulster from becoming a loyal, Protestant, British minority in an independent, Catholic, Celtic Ireland, and preventing the imposition of Home Rule on Ulster against the will of "its people".

Ulster unionism spoke to many women who felt strongly enough about the unionist cause to publicly declare their loyalty to the British Crown, their Protestant identity, and sense of British Ulster identity. This was most tangibly demonstrated by the number of women who signed the Declaration: 234,046 women as compared with 218,206 men who signed the Covenant; a majority of almost 16,000 female over male signatories in Ulster (*ECM 1911-13*, 16 January 1913; Urquhart 1994, 100). Nonetheless unionist men and the Covenant were deemed to be the primary agents in the constitution of Ulster. Newspaper coverage of Ulster Day emphasized the Covenant as *the* primary document, and its male signatories as *the* main agents in the defeat of Home Rule (*Northern Whig*, 30 September and 1 October 1912; *The Times*, 23, 24, 26-29 September 1912; McGaughey 2012, 48). The *Northern Whig* declared: "We have seen this week [...] evidence of a great brotherhood [...] which] signed the Covenant [...] and] will shrink from no steps that are necessary to give effect to it" (*Northern Whig*, 28 September 1912). Newspaper accounts also reflected the popular ideal of militarized masculinities. The "great brotherhood" of Ulster unionists was described as "well-disciplined [...] marching in fours, with a smartness and precision that commanded general admiration" (*Northern Whig*, 30 September 1912).

Differentiating feminine Ulster from this militant masculine Ulster the *Northern Whig* observed that while men signed the Covenant in the Belfast City Hall "women [...] sign[ed] their anti-Home Rule pledge in various lecture halls and other places arranged for that purpose. It is gratifying to think that the women of Ulster are standing loyally by 'their menfolk' in this crisis, are prepared to go the whole way with them, and to take their share of whatever sacrifice the step may entail" (*Northern Whig*, 30 September 1912). An editorial in the *Irish Citizen*, the paper of the Irish Women's Franchise League, criticized unionists for not addressing the position of women in their

demand for “equal imperial citizenship”; it charged that the Declaration was “[...] not the real thing; it is a mere insignificant auxiliary [...] a document of separateness of which is in itself a perpetuation of the old false tradition of women’s inequality and unfitness for political thought and action” (Urquhart 2016, 4). This constitution of Ulstermen as authoritative, disciplined, united, well-organized, and determined and Ulsterwomen as supportive and auxiliary contrasted sharply with the active role which members of the UWUC undertook within the unionist movement during the Ulster Crisis and the political agency which they asserted.

The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 paused the Ulster Crisis. The third Home Rule Bill was passed, but suspended for the duration of the war. The issue of the exclusion of Ulster from Home Rule was unresolved, but would be revisited when the war ended. Amendments to the bill were introduced in the House of Lords and passed by the UK parliament in July 1914, prior to the passage of the original bill itself. The *Amending Bill* temporarily excluded Ulster from the future *Home Rule Act*. There was neither consensus about the time-frame related to this provisional exclusion, nor whether this omission applied to all nine counties of Ulster or only to the six counties which would become the province of Northern Ireland, however (*Government of Ireland (Amendment) Bill*, HC Deb 30 July 1914 vol 65 cc1557-8; Jackson 2003, 161-164). As a result, the leadership of the UUC encouraged members of the UWUC to continue their anti-Home Rule nation-work. Richard Dawson Bates, the Secretary of the UUC, advised: “Notwithstanding the fact they [members of the UWUC] are doing war work, they should not lose sight of the main object of the association, namely the defeat of Home Rule” (Bates to Lady Londonderry, 3 January 1917, D 2846/1/8/65). Hence, although much of the Council’s focus shifted to supporting the British war effort and Ulster’s troops its anti-Home Rule work continued, but on a much smaller scale, and informally through individual members. Blurring the lines between the public and private realms members of the UWUC were urged to “in their private capacity [to] try to reach as many colonial soldiers as possible” in order to “instruct them” on an issue of public concern: Home Rule (*UWUC Advisory Committee Minutes*, 2 January 1917, cited in Urquhart 2001, xviii).

A letter sent on behalf of the UWUC to the Lord Mayor of Belfast further illustrates the gendered constitution of Ulster and the obfuscation of the private and public spheres through the work of members of the Council. A man’s duty was “to rally round the Flag”, while a woman’s “duty [was] to see [the] families and dependents [of those men] are cared for”. This letter asserted that the UWUC “form[ed] a unique organisation for investigating, registering and dealing with all cases of want or suffering and for dispensing such relief as may be found necessary” (*UWUC Council Minutes 1912-40*. 18 August 1914, reproduced in Urquhart 2001, 188-189; Draft of Letter from Lady Lon-

donderry, Lady Abercorn and Lady Dufferin and Ava to the Lord Mayor of Belfast, 11 August 1914, D 1098/3/5). Individually women were deemed to be responsible for the care and nurture of their own families; combined women were expected to nurture and care for the collective Ulster family.

Normative ideals of femininity – passivity and supportiveness – were constituted as the basis of women's anti-Home Rule nation-work through the Declaration and the constitution of the UWUC; however, by 1918 members of the UWUC were increasingly emphatic in terms of expressing their agency and displeasure with the established male power of the UUC. The leadership of the Council wrote to the UUC declaring that:

Our advice has never been asked [...] All the same we have held fast to our Unionist opinions, and our voice has been heard and acted upon although perhaps the 'Ulster Unionist Council' may have thought us an entirely negligible quantity [...] We should be comrades in defence of a common cause. What is the position of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council? It has none – we are nothing [...] we have not been treated as comrades [...] We must have more power for immediate action. (*Advisory Committee Minutes, UWUC Council Minutes 1912-40*, 4 June 1918, D 1098/1/2)

Early in 1918 the suffrage campaign's demand that women be enfranchised was partially met. The *Representation of the People Act 1918* received Royal Assent on 6 February 1918. This act granted women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification, and all men 21 years and older, the vote. This may have contributed to the greater assertiveness of members of the UWUC. Undoubtedly it afforded credibility to their demand for equal representation for the Council within the UUC relative to other Unionist organizations. This increased forcefulness indicated the sense of pride which members of the UWUC felt in relation to their nation-work during the Ulster Crisis, as well as their sense of agency. It also revealed a continuing sense of insecurity amongst Ulster unionists. Unity remained vital since the goal of maintaining the political and economic union between Ireland and Great Britain was not yet settled. Thus, differences of gender, class, faith denomination, and political ideology still had to be down-played.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the Ulster Crisis members of the UWUC played a significant part in Ulster unionism's constitution of Ulster and its opposition to Home Rule. The discourse of Ulster evident in UWUC documents such as the motion which founded the organization, its Constitution, and the Declaration constituted a collective Ulster people united by a shared culture, religion, and political aims and goals. The nation-work of the rituals of the Council, the

events associated with Ulster Day, the administration of electoral registers, as well as the campaigning and lobbying against Home Rule undertaken by members of the UWUC constituted a British, Protestant, loyal Ulster identity. Such work also established Ulster as gendered. Men and women had different roles in Ulster. Appealing to normative ideals of femininity and a history of women who had actively supported unionism allowed members of the Council to do work in the public realm in a way which did not overtly transgress gender norms, but enabled a broadening of roles for women within what was perceived to be the masculine public sphere. Many members of the UWUC drew on these ideals to instill unionist values in their children and encourage and support “their” men’s defence of Ulster. They also used such ideals to carve out space for themselves in the public realm of party politics in support, and as a significant part, of the Ulster unionist movement.

The scale of the mobilization of members of the UWUC, evident in its broad-based membership and the number of signatories to the Declaration, as well as the scope of the anti-Home Rule work undertaken on behalf of the Council makes clear that the UWUC was not peripheral to Ulster unionism; nor were its members “idle sightseers” in terms of the events of the Ulster Crisis and the constitution of Ulster. By incorporating gender into analyses of Ulster unionism one’s understanding of that movement is expanded, and divisions within the Ulster unionist movement based on normative gender ideals and the ways in which the Ulster constituted through the Ulster unionist movement was experienced differently by men and women are exposed.

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