EDITED BY
Thomas Paul Burgess

THE CONTESTED IDENTITIES OF ULSTER CATHOLICS

The Contested Identities of Ulster Catholics

Thomas Paul Burgess
Editor

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Editor
Thomas Paul Burgess
School of Applied Social Studies
University College Cork
Cork, Ireland

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For Mary and Ruby

PREFACE

One might not unreasonably assume that the genesis for this book emerged from the wish to see a 'sister' publication bookend the 2015 work, *The Contested Identities of Ulster Protestants*.

After all, despite years of empty rhetoric and cumbersome policy in the area of community relations, parity of esteem and cultural equality, we academics tilling away in the fields of Northern Irish identity politics, are certainly not insensitive to the requirement for balance.

However, the initial motivation for undertaking this book had its origins in a much less prosaic rationalisation.

In September of 1993, I confounded many of my contemporaries and perhaps surprised myself a little, when I accepted a lectureship at University College Cork.

I had spent most of my working life in Northern Ireland, in civic, community and academic involvements, which were invariably touched by the unique circumstances dictated by the conflict there.

Therefore, the appeal of training and educating community activists, not encumbered by sectarian politics but rather, whose primary goal was to challenge social inequality and poverty, proved undeniably attractive.

Over time, I gradually became accustomed to some of the more subtle differences specific to Southern Irish society. The little things: the insistent chimes of the Angelus; the sober state monuments to the IRA dead of the war of independence; an easy reticence, born perhaps of post-colonial legacy, leading to ambivalence towards observing 'questionable' rules and regulations; Fifty euro to the GP each time you cross the surgery threshold; the absence of a Saturday mail delivery service.

Indications of a Catholic state for a Catholic people? Or simply inconsequential differences of no import? In pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland, life, after all, moved more slowly.

To the American or European tourist, these maddening little anachronisms were quintessentially '*Irish*'. They were quaint and idiosyncratic. However, to the Ulster Protestant, they can jarringly take on a cultural significance far beyond their import. And so this proved with me.

However, these minor moot points were to pall into insignificance as my honeymoon with Catholic Ireland concluded dramatically one day, when I took a phone call at college.

'*This is Detective Sergeant Gallagher. From An Garda Síochána, Cork City. I'd like to speak with you on an urgent matter*'.

Later, as I watched at the window of my newly rented flat, two burly detectives arrived, shirtsleeve order on a hot day, clipboards in hand.

'*The thing is…*' "explained the more brusque of the two," '*…we've had an anonymous tip off to our "Crimeline" service. The Anti-Terrorist Squad have been given your name as someone involved in the terrorist murder at The Widow Scanlan's Pub in Dublin*'.[1]

To say I was incredulous would be an understatement.

For someone who had been publicly associated with projects and undertakings in Northern Ireland, which were committed to peace movements, community relations and reconciliation initiatives, it was nothing short of a personal insult. I was reeling from the fact that someone should dislike me so much as to wilfully concoct such a malicious slander.

Some years earlier in 1988, whilst a student at Oxford, two sinister-looking men who had been tailing my car consistently, had harassed me in an uncomfortable confrontation. Following a spate of IRA bombs in England, petrified with trepidation, I believed that it was only a matter of time before the S.W.A.T. team barged in to my student digs.

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[1] The incident was revisited in the press when the family of murdered doorman Martin Doherty claimed PSNI/RUC collusion in the attack. Irish Times, 28 October 2015.

What *did* arrive was a letter from the local D.H.S.S., informing me that I had been under investigation by a pair of over-zealous dole snoopers. My relief marginally superseded my anger.

Ah, the plight of the Irish in England during those dark days. Protestants, Catholics … all just '*Paddies*'.

However, this was Ireland. Surely, in the eyes of Republicans and nationalists, as an Ulsterman, this was my homeland as well?

To this day, I can only speculate as to whether a disgruntled student—or even colleague—sought to make mischief at my expense. At the time, the whole sorry episode seemed to reinforce my fears that Ulster Protestants were unwelcome in the Irish state.

I requested that a formal complaint should be registered and the matter investigated with an eye to prosecution. In reality, there was little more I could do.

Nevertheless, the experience had served as a salutary lesson in the marginalisation of '*the other*'. It was sobering to experience civil society as a member of a minority community or out-group.

So when, several years later, I learned that my Head of Department was appointing a former Republican prisoner to the staff team, I was both intrigued and a little troubled. (This was a west Belfast, PIRA bomb-maker and now Sinn Fein activist who had secured his Ph.D. whilst incarcerated. We certainly had a lot to discuss.)[2]

Now, I have always rather despaired at the bourgeois, liberal intelligentsia's unwholesome attraction to the 'whiff of cordite'. And so it proved in certain sectors of my institution. To rub shoulders with a 'freedom fighter' invited a frisson of delicious endangerment. Something tantalising for the book club crowd or the coffee morning set perhaps.

Worse still, I began to imagine that perhaps some sociological experiment might pit us both together, so that we could be observed under test conditions!

Therefore, I undertook to address the matter directly by inviting said colleague for a 'clear the air' libation. During this, I made it clear that—whilst I believed his organisation had waged protracted war on my community—I accepted that past grievances were rendered 'regrettable' in a post-Good Friday dispensation.

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[2] "IRA bomber now a lecturer on social policy", *The Irish Independent*, 21 October 2006.

Furthermore, I was prepared to vouchsafe a prediction.

That in 12 months' time, he would discover to his chagrin that he had, in fact, more in common with me (another west Belfast, working-class lad) than all the fellow travellers he thought to encounter in a 26-county Irish Republic.

By his own admission, this has subsequently been the case. At times, he has felt an outsider, as mistrusted and scrutiniszed as I had been. Maybe more so. However, how much more challenging this opprobrium must be for someone who had served a prison term for pursuing terrorist activities, in the quest for Irish freedom and a unitary state?

Around now you may be asking, 'what has all this to do with the contested identities of Ulster Catholics'?

Well, put simply, these episodes reinforced a conviction I had long harboured. That (much like the diversity of opinion and allegiance within the Ulster Protestant community) Irish (and Ulster) Catholicism/Nationalism/Republicanism, represented a swathe of attitudes and adherence not comfortably contained within the singular vision of Sinn Fein's socialist Republic.

Even a cursory re-visitation of historical expressions of Northern Irish Catholicism/Nationalism/Republicanism reveals a profusion of radically different visions, interpretations, and aspirations. Some of these have led to violent internecine conflict—others, to a disconnect with Mother Church over issues of social conservatism. Even the sacred shibboleth of re-unification has been brought into question.

Yet in Northern Ireland, as I write, the aftermath of the Westminster determinations has, in one fell swoop, eradicated the middle ground of Ulster politics and reinforced the 'Balkanisation' of the region in bluntly sectarian, East/West of the Bann terms. Power sharing has seemingly failed, and any opportunity for the expression of political nuance or gradation within both communities may have been set back for years.

Given the history and vagaries of Northern Irish politics, we understand the 'zero-sum' game of sectarian voting trends at times of political uncertainty. Only the most wilfully stubborn or opportunistic politician would attempt to claim that this simplistic mandate comfortably encapsulates and legitimises the manifestoes of both the main protagonists in their entirety.

But of course, there are many such ideologues in Stormont who will remind us that the people have spoken.

Therefore, it becomes imperative—perhaps now more than ever—for academics and commentators to challenge simplistic and tribal assumptions regarding monolithic opinion attaching to both these electoral blocs.

Cork, Ireland Thomas Paul Burgess

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Notes on Contributors

Thomas Paul Burgess is from Belfast and holds degrees from the Universities of Ulster, Cork and Oxford. His Ph.D. research was entitled, *The Reconciliation Industry; Community Relations, Community Identity & Social Policy in Northern Ireland*.

He is a Senior Lecturer at University College Cork where he serves as Director of Youth & Community Work studies. The main emphasis of his academic research has been carried out in relation to social policy developments in the areas of moral education, cultural identity, community work, youth work, community relations and conflict resolution in an Irish, British & European context and he has published widely in these and other areas. He co-edited *The Contested Identities of Ulster Protestants* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) with Gareth Mulvenna.

He has spent periods, variously as inner-city schoolteacher; Community Relations Officer in local government in Northern Ireland; and researcher for The Opsahl Commission of Inquiry into political progress in Northern Ireland.

He is a critically acclaimed novelist, *White Church, Black Mountain* (Matador Press, 2015) and *Through Hollow Lands* (Urbane Press, 2018) and, as a successful songwriter/performer with his band, Ruefrex, released seven singles and three albums, notable for their political commentary on the Northern Irish conflict.

John Coakley MRIA, is a Professor of Politics in Queen's University Belfast and Fellow of the Geary Institute for Public Policy in University

College Dublin. Recent publications include *Nationalism, Ethnicity and the State: Making and Breaking Nations* (Sage, 2012), *Reforming Political Institutions: Ireland in Comparative Perspective* (IPA, 2013), *Breaking Patterns of Conflict: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland Question* (co-edited, Routledge, 2015), *Non-territorial Autonomy in Divided Societies: Comparative Perspectives* (edited, Routledge, 2017) and *Politics in the Republic of Ireland* (co-edited, 6th ed., Routledge, 2018).

Tony Gallagher is a Professor of Education at Queen's University and Director of Research in the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work. From 2010 to 2015 he was Pro Vice Chancellor for Academic Planning, Staffing and Engagement. His main research interest lies in the role of education in divided societies and for the last 15 years he has lead a programme of work on 'shared education', promoting collaborative networks of Protestant, Catholic and Integrated schools in Northern Ireland. For the past six years he has supported related work on school networks in Israel, between Arab and Jewish schools, and Los Angeles, between traditional Public and Charter schools. He is also lead editor of the Sage journal Education, Citizenship and Social Justice.

Niall Gilmartin is a Lecture Fellow at the Department of Sociology, Trinity College, Dublin. His research interests include feminist theory; gender and armed conflict; conflict transition; Northern Irish society. He has published articles in journals including *International Feminist Journal of Politics* and *Irish Political Studies.* His forthcoming book *Female Combatants After Armed Struggle: Lost in Transition?* will be published by Routledge in 2018 as part of their *Gender and Global Politics* series.

Brian Hanley is an AHRC Research Fellow in Irish History at the University of Edinburgh. He has written widely on Irish republicanism and radicalism. His books include *The IRA, 1926–36* (2002), *The IRA: A Documentary History* (2010) and (with Scott Millar) *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (2009). His book on southern Irish responses to the Northern Ireland conflict *Boiling Volcano?* is forthcoming from Manchester University Press. He is currently working on the global aspects of the Irish Revolution.

David Hassan was awarded a Distinguished Research Fellowship from Ulster in recognition of his outstanding contribution to research. He has held several leadership roles at the University, including Head of

School, Head of Research Graduate School, Provost of the Belfast and Jordanstown campuses, and Associate Dean of the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences (Global Engagement). His work extends to being Editor of both an academic journal and a book series for the global publisher Routledge, Founding Co-Director and Chair of the Special Olympics Regional Research Centre at Ulster, and Chair of a range of third sector and voluntary bodies. His work in the field of intellectual disabilities has significantly enhanced the integration of young people with developmental and intellectual disabilities across Europe. He has published 15 books and 175 other research outputs.

Stephen Hopkins is Lecturer in Politics in the School of History, Politics and International Relations at the University of Leicester, UK. His book, *The Politics of Memoir and the Northern Ireland Conflict* was published in paperback by Liverpool University Press in 2017. He was co-editor (with Graham Dawson and Jo Dover) and contributor to *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain: Impacts, Engagements, Legacies and Memories* (Manchester University Press, 2016). He has written widely on life-writing associated with the Troubles, and has published recent articles in *Irish Political Studies, Irish Studies Review,* and *Memory Studies.*

Anthony McIntyre is a former Provisional Irish Republican Army member, writer and historian. He was imprisoned for 18 years in Long Kesh, spending four of those years on the no-wash protest. After his release from prison in 1992, he completed a Ph.D. in political science at Queens University Belfast and subsequently worked as a journalist and researcher. A collection of his journalism was published as a book in 2008, *Good Friday: The Death of Irish Republicanism.*'

Tommy McKearney is a socialist republican, a writer and organiser with the Independent Workers Union. He is also a former member of the IRA and participated in the 1980 hunger strike while imprisoned in the H-Blocks. He is the author of a book, *The Provisional IRA: From Insurrection to Parliament,* is a regular contributor to *Socialist Voice* and occasionally comments on republican politics and events for the media. During Britain's EU membership referendum in 2016, he spoke on platforms advocating a 'Lexit' position. He is originally from Co. Tyrone but now lives in Monaghan.

Gareth Mulvenna obtained a Ph.D. from Queen's University Belfast (2009) in the socio-cultural experiences of Belfast's Protestant working class from pre-Troubles to post-conflict. He is the author of *Tartan Gangs and Paramilitaries—The Loyalist Backlash* (Liverpool University Press, 2016) which was described by the leading journalist Ed Moloney as ‘a classic’. Dr. Mulvenna is regarded as an expert on loyalist paramilitarism and has regularly engaged with the loyalist community on historical commemoration and conflict transformation initiatives. He is also co-editor of this book’s precursor, *The Contested Identities of Ulster Protestants* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Conor Murray is currently undertaking a Ph.D. in history at DCU, researching the survival and growth of so-called foreign games in post-independence Ireland. Prior to this, his Masters at Ulster University examined the role of Cultural Identity in sport in Northern Ireland since 1998.

Malachi O’Doherty is the author of several books on Northern Ireland, including a recent biography of Gerry Adams and a memoir covering his work as a journalist during the worst year of the Troubles, 1972, ‘*The Telling Year*’. Dr. O’Doherty lives in Belfast and for most of his working life was a freelance journalist and broadcaster there, contributing to The Belfast Telegraph, The BBC, The Irish Times and Channel 4 among others.

Connal Parr is Vice-Chancellor’s Research Fellow in the Humanities at Northumbria University. His research has been published in various journals and edited collections, and his first book *Inventing the Myth: Political Passions and the Ulster Protestant Imagination* was published by Oxford University Press in 2017. His work emphasises the interconnectedness of history, politics, and culture, with a particular focus on how societies deal with a divided and violent past. Connal studied Modern History at the University of Oxford and obtained his Ph.D. in Ulster Protestant politics and culture at Queen’s University Belfast, before returning to Oxford as Irish Government Senior Scholar at Hertford College.

Claire Pierson is a Lecturer in Politics at the University of Liverpool. Her research focuses on the UN women, peace and security agenda, conflict transformation and reproductive rights and activism. She is currently a co-investigator on a project: ‘Tackling Girls and Young Women’s Reproductive Health through a Reproductive Justice Framework in the Philippines and South Africa’ and a unique research project funded by a coalition of Irish trade unions addressing ‘Abortion as a workplace issue on the island of Ireland'. She is co-founder of the Reproductive Health Law and Policy Advisory Group and has published in journals including; *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, *Parliamentary Affairs*, *The International Feminist Journal of Politics and Nationalism and Ethnic Studies.*

Aimee Smith received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Aberdeen in 2015. Her thesis explored the creation and maintenance of young Catholic identity in post-conflict Northern Ireland. She has since conducted research on religious education and diversity in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (Trinity College Dublin) and from August 2017, has been based in the Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation at Queen's University Belfast.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Thomas Paul Burgess

Our object in the construction of the state is the greatest happiness of the whole, and not that of any one tribe.
—Plato. The Republic

'*May you live in interesting times*', as the ancient Chinese curse would have it. And whilst undeniably 'interesting', disorder, change and democratic deficit have irrefutably been to the fore in the recent political developments of Northern Ireland.

At time of writing, the absence of an elected assembly at Stormont, during a tumultuous period when constitutional stability was most required, continues unabated and seemingly with little prospect of resolution. The last time that there *was* any demonstrable activity in the Northern Ireland Executive, it followed The Assembly elections called by the then Secretary of State, James Brokenshire, in March 2017. These produced gains for Sinn Fein, with the party taking 27 seats, just one behind the DUP's total.

T. P. Burgess (✉)
School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
e-mail: p.burgess@ucc.ie

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With so much in flux, you will not be surprised to learn that the contributors to this collection were barely able to hit ‘save’ on their keyboards, before another, seemingly more portentous event overtook their analysis. Attempting to ‘take the temperature’ of a community and thus establish trends and predict outcomes became an even more unusually fraught and inexact science. Even at the best of times, consensus around political aspiration, cultural affinity and the methodologies by which to express these has historically been contested within the nationalist and Republican peoples of the region.

Nevertheless, guided by the remit that informed our earlier collection, ‘*The Contested Identities of Ulster Protestants*’, the editorial policy of this book remained focused on offering up an eclectic collection of commentators, not drawn exclusively from the academic fraternity. Subsequently, former Republican prisoners sit cheek by jowl with journalistic commentary and conventional empirical academic findings. This in turn offers a variety of writing styles and, of course, viewpoints.

Perhaps, the most logical place to begin such an undertaking was with my own chapter, which offers a somewhat ‘glass-half-full’ perspective (albeit an ‘imagined’ one). External events and a changing of the guard—where some key political actors are concerned—has fashioned both threat and opportunity on the island of Ireland. Chapter 2 seeks to propose something of an invitation to both nationalists (and unionists) to ‘reimagine and own’ the changing political landscape, rather than have events dictate to them. I posit the view that Irish nationalists—north and south—must be prepared to re-examine (and perhaps compromise) treasured shibboleths established from the formation of the Irish state and before. In doing so I argue, a federal model can move Ireland forward with the imagination and courage of a state no longer mired in the politically infantile legacies of the twentieth century; Revolution and rebellion, church-state controls and post-colonial inferiority complexes.

Following from this is Professor John Coakley’s overview of Chapter 3. Coakley’s chapter assesses the evolution of Catholic public opinion in Northern Ireland over the past half-century, seeking to trace the manner in which it has shifted in apparent response to the reality of partition. He concludes that there is an increasing complexity in the manner in which Catholics define their identity patterns, a persisting loyalty to the main nationalist parties of the past, and a fluid, open attitude towards the question of Irish unity.

This endeavour to 'locate' a definitive identity or political aspiration within the Catholic communities of Ulster, when placed against a constantly changing political landscape, is one that journalist and broadcaster Malachi O'Doherty also addresses. O'Doherty examines the many ambiguities that surround the notion of a collective Irish, Catholic, nationalist identity. He suggests that many of the traditional indicators of this culture remain equivocal. The Irish language is respected but not widely spoken. The ideal of Irish unity has receded. Brexit may revive it, but that is under the auspices of an Ireland as part of an international community, very different from the ideal of De Valera, that it should be insular and protected, or of Adams in 1977, that it should be a socialist state.

Further investigations into exactly where sentiments regarding the place of Irish Republicanism might currently lie come from former IRA prisoners, commentators, Anthony McIntyre and Tommy Mc Kearney.

In Chapter 11, McKearney examines whether the changing make-up within the North's population will also mean an end to partition followed by the political reunification of Ireland. While most northern Catholics have a shared experience (or at least a shared folk memory); their experiences have not always been identical. As with any community, there are differences shaped by class, by family and even by location. How this group of people will react to future happenings will be determined as much by external factors as by residual historical memory. Issues such as Brexit, Scotland's growing disenchantment with London and economic conditions in the Republic are all bound to influence opinion in the North. He poses the question, therefore, whether a milder and more accommodating form of Unionism might persuade the Catholic bourgeoisie to remain within the UK, if indeed that state survives.

McIntyre looks at the widespread fragmentation within Republicanism and examines the more salient causes. He contends that within the nationalist constituency, constitutional nationalism has a hegemonic position that is virtually unassailable from within. The chapter questions what—if any—potential there exists for Republicanism to overcome its disparate composition to the point where it can challenge the current nationalist hegemon.

Sinn Féin now has a woman, Mary Lou McDonald, as president of the party, while Michelle O'Neill holds the position of Leas Uachtarán Sinn Féin and party leader in the North. Yet the Irish constitution still makes reference to a woman's place as in the home. And the referendum on abortion in Ireland—and landslide victory for the 'Yes' campaign—proved to be emotionally driven, contested and divisive.

Claire Pierson's chapter addresses this topical and still fiercely disputed issue for Irish Catholics. Gendered conceptualisations of nationalism present resonant imagery of women as mothers of the nation, often stereotyped in Irish nationalism through the highly Catholic imagery of the Blessed Virgin. Viewing women's key contributions to national identity through the role of motherhood creates assumed notions of nurturing and self-sacrificing identity. Abortion and its assumed rejection of motherhood crosses boundaries of ideal womanhood, and as such is presented as abhorrent to Irish Catholic nationalism and to Irishness more widely on the island of Ireland. This chapter calls on liberal theological conceptions of Catholicism such as that voiced by Catholics for Choice to envision how abortion stigma could be broken down in Northern Ireland.

Another fascinating aspect of gender politics in a northern Irish context involves women and the legacy of armed conflict. In Chapter 10, Niall Gilmartin contends that the gendered dichotomy of male-protector/female-protected remains a pervasive representational model of gender roles in armed conflict. Feminist scholars have long challenged the dubious links between femininity and 'peacefulness' by documenting women's role as armed activists. This chapter explores the pressing question of what happens to female combatants after armed conflict. While combatant women in non-state nationalist movements often experience high levels of activism and politicisation during the war period, feminist critiques of nationalism as a patriarchal structure often cite post-war regression, among others, as robust evidence of the pitfalls for women's participation within such highly gendered movements.

Both Education and Sport are at the heart of identity formation and allegiance within this cohort. Professor Tony Gallagher contends that Catholic schools remain the most significant social institution of the minority in the North, and their relationship with the State represents the most important interface between the Catholic community and the Unionist establishment. That relationship has changed significantly over time, and the author assesses the challenges to the power of the Bishops by the refusal of most Catholic grammar schools to move away from academic selection.

Professor David Hassan and Conor Murray suggest that many of Northern Ireland's unresolved issues are not solely political in nature but in fact have more to do with cultural identity and expression, when settling upon an agreed narrative concerning the country's divided past and it's telling in a public forum. A range of agencies has attempted to play their role, many again operating outside established political structures, focusing instead on expressions of identity promoted through sports. For the Catholic community, these are viewed as entirely legitimate forms of cultural expression, even if they carry added significance within such a divided society (where they constitute both a form of political allegiance by proxy and an important aspect of community expression for many, including those who feel disenfranchised from wider society).

Biographical research methods have increasingly become a useful and popular tool for contemporary social scientists. Three contributors here combine an exploration of the historical and philosophical origins of their topic, embracing this important field of qualitative research, using examples of the different ways in which biographical methods can be successfully applied in this context.

Connal Parr (the grandson of former prominent politician and activist, the late Paddy Devlin) employs a biographical approach to his chapter, where—via personal interviews, reportage and scholarly works—he fuses the biographical with the academic to explore Catholic politics in west Belfast. He reasserts Devlin's belief in the Labour movement, which led to his rejection of Catholicism and speculates whether his variegated political trajectory was a reflection of his own complex Catholic background.

Gareth Mulvenna draws on personal experience and family history in seeking to examine if Catholic social and political attitudes towards Protestants, Unionists and Loyalists has changed throughout the course of the 'Troubles' and the 'peace process' eras. He posits the view that the debate has been reversed from two generations ago and it is now Protestants who feel socially, economically and politically bereft in a society where republicanism is making significant cultural and political strides. As both communities talk of equality and inequality in a post-Brexit landscape, the chapter assesses the factors that have contributed to these discourses.

In Chapter 13, Stephen Hopkins analyses the politics of life-writing and published narratives in relation to the founding generation of the SDLP. His revealing insights pay particular reference to their attitudes towards the outbreak of the 'Troubles', and the increasing violence of the conflict in the early 1970s. He examines attitudes to critical aspects of the party's past, one of which is the complex relationship of many of the key individuals in the 'leading group' of SDLP founders to the Republican movement, and its embrace of political violence. He reflects upon the benefits and limitations of 'life-writing' as a research methodology, suggesting it is a key element in facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the 'memory struggles' which characterise the legacy of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

Throughout many of the chapters (and reflected in my preface), there emerges an ambivalence, ambiguity and at times downright hostility towards Northern nationalists from their southern kinfolk.

With Chapter 5, Brian Hanley suggests some origins for this. Hanley's chapter examines the reaction in the Republic to the outbreak of the conflict in 1969 and examples of widespread sympathy with nationalists between that year and 1972. He writes of a 'symptom of spreading infection… a new form of intolerance in Ireland, between Southern and Northern Catholics'. The chapter looks at the experience of those who came south as refugees and the growing perception that many northerners, in the words of Conor Cruise O'Brien, are 'tough, violent and virtually ungovernable'.

Finally, in a collection of this nature, it would be remiss not to ascertain something of the thoughts and opinions of the post-conflict generation within Northern Ireland. With Chapter 15, Aimee Smith explores feelings of identity amongst young Catholic's who are part of the first generation to have grown up during the Northern Irish peace process. While recent survey data shows that young Catholic's still see themselves as predominantly Irish, rather than British or Northern Irish, the traditional political identity of nationalism and support for a united Ireland are not as strong. Nevertheless, the chapter suggests a degree of ambivalence surrounding identity and social relations in Northern Ireland. Additionally, it shows that progress made in certain areas has not necessarily led to a social reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant young people who have grown up in the absence of inter-communal violence.

CHAPTER 2

‘The State We’re In: Imagining a New Republic; The Challenge to Irish Nationalism’

Thomas Paul Burgess

Leo Varadkar’s recent ‘bullish’ promise to Northern nationalists might have been unthinkable under an earlier Enda Kenny-led Fine Gael administration.

‘To the Nationalist people in Northern Ireland, I want to assure you that we have protected your interests throughout these negotiations. Your birth right as Irish citizens, and therefore as EU citizens, will be protected. There will be no hard border on our island. You will never again be left behind by an Irish Government’, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, 8 December 2017.

Yet, his comments and general demeanour regarding post-Brexit border arrangements—whether bolstered by assurances from Brussels or necessitated by the threat of potential Sinn Féin gains in any forthcoming election—have upped the ante in relation to the perennial ‘national question’.

T. P. Burgess (✉)
School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
e-mail: p.burgess@ucc.ie

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The re-imaging of a unitary state on the island of Ireland comes at a time, internationally, when an appetite for devolution and regional autonomy sits squarely in opposition to a renewed sense of nation statehood, bolstered by inward-looking self-interest.

The Brexit desire to make Britain great again has been echoed by a Trump presidency intending to achieve a similar goal in the USA. Unbelievable as these developments might have seemed just a short time ago, we are experiencing a new dispensation that resonates to the popular seventeenth-century English ballad, '*The World Turned Upside Down*'.

Elsewhere, Catalonia has presented the Spanish government with a number of demands for self-governance, Scottish nationalism currently keeps its powder dry in anticipation of a second referendum that may break up the Union and in Kurdistan, more than 92% of Kurds voted in favour of officially separating from the central Iraqi government.

In Northern Ireland, nationalists can now add estrangement from the European Union to their feelings of alienation from the Irish Republic. Yet, suggestions that this necessarily bolsters an appetite for Irish reunification from within the nationalist community might be exaggerated. (Irrespective of Sinn Féin clearly identifying this as an opportunity to advance their own vision for a United Ireland.)

Nevertheless, all actors—not least Sinn Féin—are now acknowledging the seismic changes on the political map of Ireland, north and south.

> In June 2016, the people of the North of Ireland – nationalist and unionist and others – voted to remain within the European Union. They did so despite very many having legitimate concerns regarding the EU. It is incomprehensible to have one part of Ireland operating within the EU and another outside it…The Brexit referendum result has swept away many of the previous political assumptions about the constitutional, political and economic status quo in Ireland. Ireland's political landscape, North and South, has been transformed dramatically. (Sinn Féin 2016)

In that virtually unique manner in which Northern Irish politics can reduce the most complex and nuanced issues to a simple binary sectarian electoral outcome, both communities there find themselves signed up to the respective Brexit positions of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin (by dint of the mandate delivered to them and irrespective of individual voter preference on the matter).

If dissent does occur within the virtually 'Balkanised' society of Northern Ireland, there exists no viable alternative political vehicle by which to mobilise or express it.

Calls for an Irish border poll on the national question further risk reinforcing both division and democratic frustrations, by again reducing a complex and multi-faceted conundrum to a simple 'Yes/No' designation. Similarly, proponents of the 'demographic inevitability theory', which reduces the question of national sovereignty to a sectarian headcount, make unfounded presumptions on the preference that the nationalist community will express when (eventually) in a majority.

In this context, the pronouncements of Taoiseach Varadkar and Tánaiste Coveney regarding their aspirational nationalism prove vapid and opportunistic. Neither politician seems publicly willing to address the two substantial elephants in the room; firstly, the 48% of the population identified as Protestants in the UK Census of 2011 and likely to express opposition to a United Ireland. Secondly, the massive annual subvention from Westminster that is necessary to keep the province viable. Without a feasible socio-economic solution to these daunting impediments to constitutional change, the Dublin government's assertions remain little more than empty (and destabilising) rhetoric.

Much in the manner that Arlene Foster and the DUP have been preening themselves with regard to their influence over the British Tory Party, Simon Coveney and the Fine Gael government have displayed considerable swagger concerning their apparent cast-iron guarantee from the EU that until the Irish border question is settled to their satisfaction, no Brexit deal can be agreed.

That a veto can effectively be placed in the hands of the (defacto) unionist Government of Northern Ireland and nationalist government in the Republic of Ireland places both jurisdictions further at logger-heads with one another and augurs gravely for the prospects of an agreed Brexit solution.

Whilst it might safely be assumed that the majority of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, this should not automatically translate into the misnomer that the Irish government now have a real role in defending the European civic rights of that community. For in doing so, this over-simplistic pronouncement once again conveniently ignores the vagaries of Northern Irish politics. Many non-nationalists—indeed unionists—voted to remain (just as they did in numbers on mainland UK). Yet, there is no appeal to them made by the Irish government, to promote or protect *their* wishes or interests. This therefore smacks of unprincipled jingoism on Dublin's part and suggests perhaps an opportunity missed by the Irish government to rise above sectarian politics.

The Appeal to 'Creative and Courageous' Nationalism and Unionism

Due to the outcome of the Brexit referendum, the fall of the Northern Ireland Executive, subsequent general election results in Britain and Northern Ireland and a change of Sinn Féin and Fine Gael leadership, the political landscape—which superficially appears in a state of flux—currently flounders in a bog of stagnation.

In some sense, the more things change, the more they stay the same. Witness the further estrangement of the Northern Irish electorate voting in the Westminster determinations. In one fell swoop, eradicating the middle ground from Ulster politics and reinforcing the 'Balkanisation' of the region in bluntly sectarian, east/west of the Bann terms.

Any serious commentary on this development surely must acknowledge that once again, historical legacy and the democratic process have failed the electorate of Northern Ireland. Insofar as the disconnect between both the DUP and Sinn Fein and their respective electorates, in respect of representation which fairly or accurately reflects a variety of social and political opinion and aspiration across both their constituencies.

Shared civic values and a common desire for stable effective devolved government have fallen foul of questionable ethics, conservative social mores, and a relentless pre-occupation with identity politics and partition. Whilst internationally, shibboleths and previous certainties come under review and revision, the immovable object of unionist intractability continues to be vexed by the irresistible force of aspirant nationalism.

Admittedly, in the context of a stalled power-sharing administration, the intransigence of the DUP and Sinn Féin regarding 'red-line' issues does not inspire optimism. The Irish Language Bill; the red herring of a re-emerging second-class citizenship; the lack of any meaningful mea culpa following the disastrous Renewable Heat Initiative debacle; and the hubris attaching to the disproportionate leverage the DUP enjoys with the Tory government, all perhaps render the term, 'Creative and Courageous' nationalism and unionism an oxymoron.

Nevertheless, creativity and courage from the political classes are exactly what is required to break the current impasse and move forward in governance. It is certainly what their respective electorates deserve and increasingly demand.

Despite the high rhetoric following the Good Friday Agreement (GFA)—of building a new power-sharing reality in post-conflict Northern Ireland—all attempts to engender a civil society where issues-based politics pre-empt old sectarian enmities have seemed futile. Unionists and Nationalists in the privacy of the voting booth forever reduced to the same 'zero-sum' game of 'Them' and 'Us'. It is now being suggested that the GFA itself has run its course, that it was little more than a Blairite monument to constructive ambiguity, and that it has now been found out.[1]

Up to now, the attitude of respective British and Irish governments has been to consign the Irish border question to the middle or distant future, remembering, no doubt, the horrors of the near past and concerned that any such re-emerging narrative would risk dangerous destabilisation.

Reluctantly, however, it may now be necessary to admit that until the 'national question' is adequately resolved, no durable and lasting solution to governance in the region is possible. We can no longer put the 'cart before the horse' so to speak.

Rather than simply invite a border poll or referendum on unity (the overly simplistic framing of which would abdicate political nuance and inevitably invite a groundswell of emotional 'heart – over - head' division) a more sophisticated set of determinants is required.

In the first instance, both communities (and political parties) in Northern Ireland should be encouraged to reflect upon the changing nature of their relationships with their respective 'Motherlands'.

Ulster Unionists have for some time feared that British citizens generally (and the metropolitan elite in particular) show a practised indifference to their status. Furthermore, whilst the DUP may briefly enjoy a position of influence with the British government, they should be in no doubt that the Tory party, civil service mandarins and a considerable number of the British public, are holding their noses whilst doing business with them.

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[1] Rather worryingly, the term 'constructive ambiguity' has become attached to political machinations leading to the December 2017 Brexit agreement on the Irish border.

Similarly, Northern Nationalists surely (if begrudgingly) must now accept that their 'Irishness' is viewed in somewhat different terms to those citizens residing in Munster, Connaught, and Leinster.

Sinn Fein's abstentionist policy at Westminster has been exposed for the symbolic ideological posturing that it has always been. Nationalist voters feel increasingly disenfranchised by this stance. Additionally, despite electoral gains, the party continues to be treated with suspicion by the political classes in the Republic, who forswear any political pact with them.

Archaic appeals to outdated notions of exclusive affinity with both British and Irish states need to be recast in terms of a common, shared agency, dictated by the uniquely historical, cultural, and sociopolitical factors pertaining to those who live within the state of Northern Ireland.

In short, an imaginative and bold 'reimagining' of the national question is required.

One that adequately accommodates the complex and unique identity forged by Irish, British, and regional/provincial associations. And whilst it has been the tradition of liberal left thinkers to assert that this must begin with the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community loosening their grip on the Union, this chapter will assert that the real challenge to resolving the national question in perpetuity lies with the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities in Ireland, north and south.

It is an oft-stated maxim in the Republic of Ireland—spoken from barroom to boardroom—that the biggest impediment to Irish unity is in fact… Sinn Fein themselves.

The irony of this is not lost on the reader, nor do I assume, on Sinn Féin.

Sectarian-infused interpretations and ownership of the concept of '*Irishness*'—where the term is given to be synonymous with 'Catholic, Nationalist, Republican'—have done much to alienate Irish (and British) Protestants (who otherwise might be encouraged to find common cause with shared affiliations). Sinn Féin have much to answer for in this respect.

In Leinster House and in the Dublin Financial District, Irish 'exceptionalism' has somehow come to replace a previously held feeling of pride—tempered by unpretentiousness—in Irish identity. Its hallmarks unfortunately are represented in the thrusting, neoliberal, twenty-first-century braggadocio of revitalised economic success and affluence.

Simultaneously, Ulster (or rather, DUP) 'Britishness' is now most assuredly out of step with the rest of the union in regard to their socially conservative positions adopted around abortion and same-sex marriage.

Therefore, central to the premise of nurturing political courage and creativity is the rejection of the perceived dichotomy of the designations, '*British*' and '*Irish*'. That is to say, that the two are not mutually exclusive and—in keeping with the tenets of the GFA—duel/joint nationality should be the accepted status of all citizens in the province. However, perhaps a third designation—that of *Northern* Irish—could usefully sit alongside these fixed affiliations and be actively promoted by legislators in all civic arenas.

The Unionist communities of Northern Ireland enjoy unique cultural attributes that are drawn historically from their time as residents on the north-eastern corner of the island of Ireland (long predating partition). Irish regiments within the British army display the trappings of Irish identity on their colours and paraphernalia. This in turn is complimented by the heraldry and symbols of the Royal institutions themselves. Of course, these are legacies of a time when a 32-county Ireland resided within the shared community of Commonwealth and UK.

Moreover, when 'Irishness' is deemed to be 'de-weaponised' and therefore 'safe' by Protestants, many are more comfortable to embrace these associations.[2]

Likewise, the nationalist communities of Northern Ireland are influenced by many cultural norms, which have their origins and perpetuation from within the UK. (The National Health Service, the Judiciary, the Social Welfare system, the Civil Service, and the BBC, all have exercised a significant sway in this community.)

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[2] Linda Ervine, sister-in-law of the late PUP leader, David, famously has championed Irish-language initiatives in Protestant working-class areas. Another easy affiliation in this context is the all-Island support for Irish rugby.

Crucially, the distinctive fusion of these shared Celtic/Scots/Saxon influences melds together into a unique regional identity that has been described as 'Northern Irish' (McNicholl 2017). (Although it is acknowledged that for some Nationalists, this descriptor—like many semantically challenged terminologies associated with the region—carries an implied legitimacy for the very state itself, which they reject.)

Hypothetically, freed from the limitations of an over-simplistic, bipolar, all-encompassing label of oppositional 'Britishness' or 'Irishness', an agreed, shared, regional designation would form the foundation to negotiate for a groundbreaking, political realignment. Perhaps ultimately leading to a form of reunification on the island of Ireland. (But employing a very different model than has been previously conceived.)

The Need for Constitutional Reform

> In the Name of the Most Holy Trinity, from Whom is all authority and to Whom, as our final end, all actions both of men and States must be referred; We, the people of Éire, humbly acknowledging all our obligations to our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ; Who sustained our fathers through centuries of trial; gratefully remembering their heroic and unremitting struggle to regain the rightful independence of our Nation. (Bunreacht na hÉireann, Preamble)

A New Ireland, it follows, requires a new constitution for the twenty-first century. And a referendum putting to the Irish people the need to reform and rewrite key aspects of the constitution will offer a valuable insight into the appetite for meaningful change regarding the national question. It would also communicate a strong message of intent to northern unionists, similar to the abandonment of Articles 2 and 3 revised by means of the Nineteenth Amendment, which took effect on 2 December 1999 (Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Act 1998).

In other areas, the state has made significant progress on the issues of same-sex marriage and abortion law. However, if constitutional change *is* to be undertaken, then there exist other aspects of its composition that might usefully benefit from revision.

In the context of cross-border and UK relations, some articles may present themselves as opportunities.

> Furthermore, the Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage. (Article 2, Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Act 1998)

Might there also be a case here, for adding an insertion regarding a special affinity with those who occupy the north-eastern region of the island, who share dual nationality or provincial kinship and offer another facet of Irish identity? Similarly, a statement regarding the unique relationship that Ireland enjoys with the UK (concerning culture, trade, and the movement of peoples) is perhaps also worthy of inclusion.

A new constitution would have to reflect the spirit of this innovative imagining, to which all could subscribe and aspire.

Writing over 45 years ago, Michael Sweetman stated plainly, what was required.

> We [in the Republic] have got to go back to 1912 and relinquish a great deal of what has happened since in order that both parts of the country can make a new start.
>
> He cited, "…consistent attempts to impose a narrow concept of Irishness, involving the primacy of Gaelic culture, the rejection of British strands in Irish traditions, and a particular view of history which made a virtue of fighting against Britain and a vice of defending British rule". (Sweetman 1972)

Furthermore, Sweetman did not hesitate to prosecute those historical, defining foundations of the state he viewed as backward-looking and repugnant.

> It is not from that kind of Republicanism, with its glorification of violence in the past and its incitement to violence in the present, that the new Ireland will come. (Sweetman 1972)

For those thinkers brave enough to countenance meaningful change regarding how we frame the national question, other customs, and cherished principles would additionally require review; Éire as the name of the state, Irish as the 'first national language', the tricolour as the national flag and a new national anthem would all be subject to review. (If deemed in the national interest, a reappraisal of Commonwealth membership might also be undertaken.)

For many, these revisions would undoubtedly prove too high a price to pay. But what if the reward for such courage was a newly imagined, 32-county Federal Republic?

A New Federal Ireland

The late Conor Cruise O'Brien made perhaps his most thought-provoking meditation on Northern Irish affairs in the late 1990s, when he suggested that:

> …the interests of the Protestant or unionist community in Northern Ireland were more threatened by the UK's determination to do a deal with Sinn Féin/IRA than they would be by a negotiated deal with Dublin to unite Ireland under a federal-type arrangement that guaranteed all existing rights to all residents of the North. This community, he maintained, would be better able to defend its interests under such an agreement than it would as "despised hangers-on" and a tiny minority in the UK. (Kennedy 2014)

O'Brien was speculating at a time that predated Sinn Fein's electoral successes on both sides of the border. And of course, the instability and division ensured by the Brexit vote.

Might a DUP majority realistically give credence to a Federal proposal that sought to include them in a new, Federal Ireland? In the current climate, the answer is almost certainly, a resounding 'no'! Yet as we have learned, Northern Irish politics can sometimes surprise. Few would have given any credibility to the idea of a power-sharing administration with the late Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness at its head.

The unionist community of Northern Ireland possess a keen appreciation of 'profit and loss' in regard to the practice of deal-making. Depressingly, their eye for a good deal is often subjugated to their fear of estrangement from Britain and this clearly remains so.

However, we are in a new, post-Brexit dispensation that has disorientated unionists (despite their bluster) and undermined the very Union itself. Furthermore, the prospect of a far-left Labour Party in power—with traditional ties to Sinn Féin—certainly focuses the mind. There have previously been periods when Unionism has been presented with opportunities to 'recalibrate' their locus on the island of Ireland, largely on their own terms and from an advantageous position of strength.[3]

Now is another such opportunity. Therefore, in any discussions relating to federalisation, what might be in it for unionists?

Put simply, dual nationality de facto could mean dual jurisdiction. Unionists have historically opposed any form of Dublin influence in *their* affairs as they saw them. However, dual jurisdiction is a two-way street. Whilst there would certainly be a move towards joint authority of the province, that arrangement could be reciprocated.[4]

The reunification of the nine Ulster counties, offering devolved powers to the region, might be a good place to begin. In a Federal Ireland, unionists would be a formidable voting bloc in a system of government where coalitions are the rule rather than the exception. Donegal, Cavan, and Monaghan natives who routinely complain about the 'Dublin-centric' nature of policy-making might welcome robust representation of their affairs by canny and battle-hardened Stormont veterans. (Now freed from shackles of sectarian politics to best promote their constituency interests.)

And what of Stormont, Dáil Éireann, and the Oireachtas?

In recognition of the dual (triple?) nationality afforded to the region, elected representatives might happily sit in both Westminster and Dáil Éireann[5] if returned to do so at respective elections held by the UK and Ireland in the provincial jurisdiction. Thus again, enhancing the political influence of the region within both states. Stormont and the Oireachtas might usefully occupy the roles of regional assemblies, the former for nine-county Ulster, the latter for 23-county Leinster, Munster, and Connaught.[6]

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[3] Another such opportunity arose around border Brexit negotiations. Had the DUP been confident enough to rise above the usual fears regarding a diminution of NI's place in the UK, then Northern Ireland as a region might economically have benefitted enormously as a 'special status' area, enjoying unique customs provisions between the UK and EU.

[4] The question of whether Irish citizens should be extended the right to hold British citizenship is the inevitable out-playing of this development.

[5] There may be a case for the use of the D'Hondt method in this regard. This is a highest averages method for allocating seats and is thus a type of party-list proportional representation. Proportional representation systems aim to allocate seats to parties approximately in proportion to the number of votes received. For example, if a party wins one-third of the votes, then it should gain about one-third of the seats.

The maintenance of Northern Ireland as part of the UK, whilst simultaneously playing a pivotal role in the governance of a Federal Irish Republic, may be a lot to ask nationalists to accommodate. But consider the juxtaposition for a moment. Sinn Féin, avowedly Irish Republicans to their bootstraps, enjoy MP status at Westminster (albeit in absentium), whilst the party are fully involved in opposition to the governmental processes of the Irish state.

The thorny question of who will foot the bill for a reconfigured Ireland is of course centrally important. It is unlikely that Westminster would sanction the continuing subvention for Northern Ireland as is, in any new arrangement. Neither could Ireland alone fund such an enterprise. Therefore, there might be subventions from both governments for a designated period, certainly until the region moves towards a degree of self-sustainability. Special funding arrangements—possibly benefitting from targeted initiatives from the EU and USA—would also apply.

It is neither possible nor desirable to speculate here on the broad, complex and far-reaching modifications required to the existing systemic and institutional workings of both states. However, some considerations seem axiomatic. For example:

- A National Federal Security Service could be put in place, with elite operatives from the PSNI and An Garda Siochana working together on an all-Ireland basis.
- Legal protections must be agreed in order to defend and promote genuine parity of esteem, specifically for the British/unionist tradition within the new state. These would traverse the education, health, broadcasting and religious sectors, amongst others.
- Initiatives to promote civic allegiance to and ownership of the new Federal Republic should be a high priority.

Rather than hold on grimly to a status quo (that will inevitably come under more scrutiny and increased stress from electoral demographics and a British government, indifferent to the plight of the regions in general and Northern Ireland in particular), unionist politicians must put the well-being of their people front and centre. To do this, they must be prepared to '*re-imagine*' the national question in a way that protects in perpetuity, the cultural identity, rights, and economic future of their electorate on the island of Ireland. To realise this, they must embrace a new dispensation, fit for a new millennium.

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[6] There is every chance of course that presented with such an arrangement, the other regions—particularly Munster—may press for a degree of semi-autonomy themselves.

In conclusion, it follows, then, that Irish nationalists—north and south—must also be prepared to re-examine (and perhaps compromise) treasured shibboleths established from the formation of the Irish state and before. In doing so, Ireland can move forward with the imagination and courage of a state no longer mired in the politically infantile legacies of the twentieth century. Revolution, and rebellion, church-state controls, and post-colonial inferiority complexes must be consigned to the dustbin of history.

Similarly, the GFA of 1998—groundbreaking as it was in brokering peace in Northern Ireland—has exhausted its usefulness in relation to the power-sharing administration of the province. Unionists must realise that they have a far more productive and safeguarded future with an increasingly self-confident and affluent Irish Republic than they do with a Sinn Fein Party, who have always been antagonistic towards them, their state and their legitimate place on the island of Ireland.

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CHAPTER 3

Catholics in Northern Ireland: Changing Political Attitudes, 1968–2018

John Coakley

Introduction

The position of Catholics in Northern Ireland before the outbreak of civil unrest in 1968 reflected the historically marginalised status of their community, especially since the creation of the new state in 1921. In the words of one observer, they were 'above all disorganised' and were 'by and large politically helpless, hopeless and cynical' (O'Connor 1993, p. 44). Though they looked south for moral and political support, they were unlikely to find much solace there. Minister for External Affairs Frank Aiken (himself of northern background) in 1965 privately urged nationalist acceptance of British culture (including ubiquitous loyal toasts), and retired Taoiseach Sean Lemass in 1967 openly called on nationalists to adapt to minority status, as the Protestant minority in the South had done (Coakley 2017a, p. 201).

A major survey conducted in mid-1968, just before the outbreak of the 'troubles', showed a certain level of disillusion with traditional nationalist

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J. Coakley (✉)
Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, UK
e-mail: j.coakley@qub.ac.uk; john.coakley@ucd.ie

J. Coakley
University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

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positions. Only 34% of Catholics disapproved of 'the constitutional position of Northern Ireland' (with 33% approving). Just 56% felt that the border should be abolished, with a quarter of these seeing Irish unity as their preferred goal. Only 51% expressed support for the traditional party of the community, the Nationalist Party, with sizeable portions opting for the pro-union Northern Ireland Labour Party (27%), the Liberal Party (5%) and even the Unionist Party (5%) (Rose 1971, pp. 213, 235, 477).

Using this episode as a benchmark, this chapter looks at the manner in which the nationalist community has evolved since the late 1960s. It begins by reviewing the transformation in the demographic status of the Catholic community, goes on to look at the enhancement of the political weight of that community and concludes with an overview of shifting patterns of identity and attitude among Catholics.

The Demographic Dimension

Since Northern Ireland's geographical extent was designed precisely to ensure that Catholics would remain a minority too weak to be able to offer an effective challenge to the new, predominantly Protestant state, it is not surprising that successive Unionist governments paid close attention to the demographic balance. Official data since the first Irish census to report religious affiliation appeared to confirm the solidity of the Protestant majority: the proportion of Catholics in the territory that was to become Northern Ireland had been falling steadily, from 40.9% in 1861 to 34.4% in 1911, and it fell further in Northern Ireland's early years, to 33.5% in 1926, a level at which it remained in the following census of 1936.

Behind the headline statistic of the modest size of the Catholic minority, however, lay a more significant demographic reality. It is true that there was little evidence of a significant Catholic–Protestant fertility gap at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Irish census commissioners, who would have been attentive to any noteworthy new trend, did not even report on the age structure of the major religious denominations in 1911, which suggests that no unusual patterns were visible. However, one statistic may be computed from data reported for other reasons. In 1911, the proportion of Protestants aged under nine in the six counties that would later comprise Northern Ireland was 18.7%, marginally greater than the corresponding proportion of Catholics, 18.1%.[1]

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[1] Computed from Ireland, 1913: 44 and Ireland, 1912: 47–9. The 1911 census reports did not break religion down by age, but for other reasons reported the number of children aged under nine in the case of the major denominations.

Careful reanalysis of the original census forms for 1901 and 1911 in selected rural areas of what is now north-western Northern Ireland suggested that 'the confessional gap hardly existed at all' in respect of fertility patterns at this time (Ó Gráda 1985, p. 86).

This position was not, however, to last. The Catholic fertility rate and mean Catholic family size crept steadily above the corresponding Protestant rates in the middle part of the twentieth century (Compton 1982). These patterns survived into the early twenty-first century: analysis of fertility patterns over the period 1997–2007 showed continuing significant differences between Catholic and Protestant women, with limited evidence of convergence over time (McGregor and McKee 2016, p. 618). The broad pattern is summarised crudely in Fig. 3.1. Because of the absence of consistent data over a long time span, it is not possible

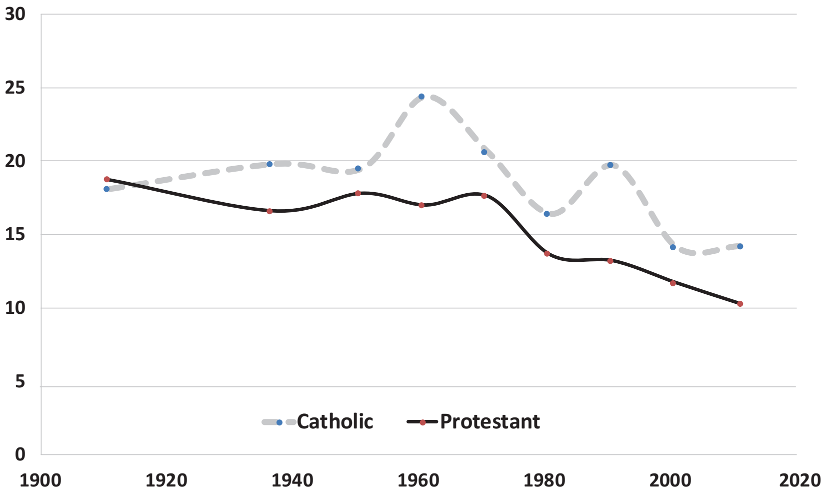

Fig. 3.1 Children aged under 10 by religious background, Northern Ireland, 1911–2011

Note Data points (census years) are 1911, 1937 and 10-year intervals from 1951 onwards. 'Protestant' includes all other denominations up to 1991; the 2001 and 2011 data refer to those of Catholic and Protestant background, respectively (including members of those religious denominations, plus those of indeterminate denomination or none, brought up in those religions). The 1911 data refer to children under nine. The 1981 data are less reliable than those for other years because of significant under-enumeration, especially of Catholics

Source Computed from Ireland (1912, 1913), Northern Ireland (1940, 1965, 1975, 1984, 1993), and www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census to compute the conventional total fertility rate, so we rely here on a straightforward indicator: children under the age of 10 as a proportion of the total population group (this of course is not a clear indicator of fertility, since it is affected also by mortality and migration trends). As the figure shows, there has been steady decline on the Protestant side, with this group of children accounting for 19% of the population in 1911, dropping to 10% in 2011. On the Catholic side, the trend line started at more or less the same level in 1911 (18%), rose to 24% in 1961 and thereafter declined steadily to 14% in 2011, a level still significantly above the Protestant one.

The overall impact of demographic factors on the distribution of the population in Northern Ireland is summarised in Fig. 3.2. Of course, fertility patterns are only one factor. While we lack data on mortality and

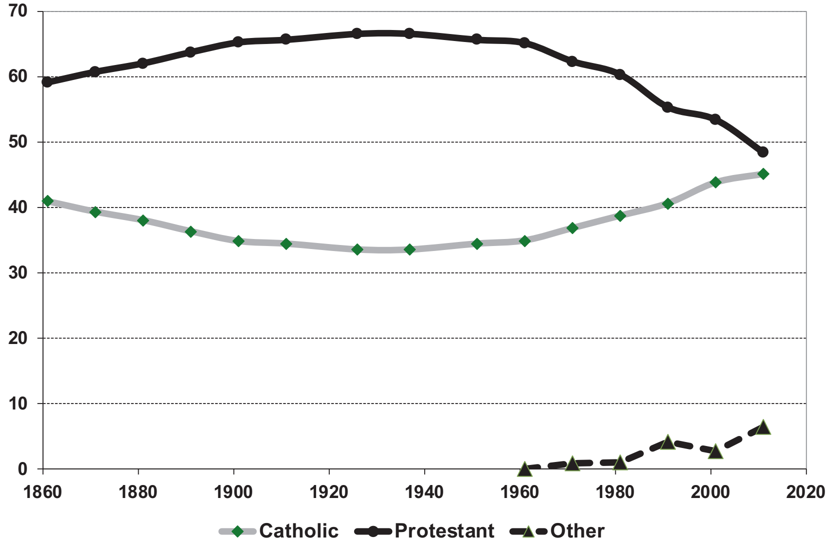

Fig. 3.2 Population by religious background, Northern Ireland, 1861–2011
Note Data points (census years) are 10-year intervals from 1861 to 1911, 1926, 1937 and 10-year intervals from 1951 onwards. 'Protestant' includes all other denominations up to 1991; the 2001 and 2011 data refer to those of Catholic and Protestant community background, respectively. See also note to Fig. 3.1
Source Computed from Ireland (1912, 1913), Northern Ireland (1940, 1965, 1975, 1984, 1993), www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census, and Jardine (1994)

migration trends broken down by religion, it is possible to estimate the latter. Such estimates suggest that the higher Catholic birth rate was offset by a much higher Catholic emigration rate. It has been estimated that in the middle part of the twentieth century (from 1937 to 1978) a clear majority of emigrants were Catholics (Compton 1982, pp. 91, 93). By the early twenty-first century, though, there was some evidence that not only had this trend been halted, but that it might even have been reversed, with a growing tendency for young Protestants to emigrate (Coakley 2016, p. 41). As Fig. 3.2 shows, the initial decline in the Catholic population as a proportion of the overall population was turned around in the late twentieth century, and since then the position of the two communities has been converging.[2]

The political significance of this change is considerable. It would be a mistake, as will become clear in the next sections, to present the relationship between the two communities depicted here as a kind of stark demographic ‘race’ (McEldowney et al. 2011). But it would also be a mistake to ignore its political implications. In circumstances where representatives of the historically dominant community are still disposed to label this as the ‘majority’, with immediate implications for political privilege, the relentless progress of demographic trends is likely to produce a considerable shock for the leadership of what has hitherto been seen as the dominant community.[3] It seems probable that, even if we make very conservative assumptions about the rate of natural increase of Catholics, effective parity in the size of the two communities will be recorded in the next census in 2021.[4] But quite aside from its demographic position, the

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[2] In 2001 and 2011, a new methodology was adopted in the census. Those refusing to answer the question on religion, or reporting themselves as not belonging to any particular religion, were asked to indicate the religion in which they had been brought up, and these answers were grouped with those on religious affiliation to divide the population by ‘community background’.

[3] For a contemporary example of the traditional view that does not take account of the extent of change, see remarks by former Ulster Unionist minister Lord Kilclooney (John Taylor) implying that the nationalist community is a political minority; *Irish News*, 31 August 2017.

[4] This is derived from a crude projection based on the 2011 census by (1) excluding the 2011 population aged 85 or more and (2) adding new age groups based on the assumption that their composition would be the same as that of the 0–4 age cohort in 2011. This would generate a Catholic population by community background amounting to 46.1%, with Protestants at 46.2% and others at 7.7%. In reality, the proportion of Catholics in this new group is likely to be higher than that estimated here since the new age cohorts are likely to have a higher proportion of Catholics than assumed here.

Catholic community is likely to be much more similar to the Protestant community in respect of its socio-economic position following the impact of reforms designed to ensure equality and fairness in the workplace introduced in the late twentieth century. It has also profited from the institutional reforms that have contributed since 1998 to place the two communities on a basis of political equality (Todd 2014, pp. 532–533; Ruane and Todd 2014).

The Political Dimension

The accumulation of political resources available to the nationalist parties may be considered from three perspectives. First, the electorate itself has expanded in line with the growing size of the Catholic community, though of course lagging behind total demographic growth because of its age structure. Second, there has been a marked professionalisation of political organisation, with the emergence of well-oiled party machinery. Third, the nationalist community has moved from a position of international marginalisation to a position where it enjoys the support of powerful external allies.

The story of the gradual expansion of the Catholic community as described above is reported again in Fig. 3.3, the top line of which represents Catholics as a share of the population as recorded in the census (not taking account of the adjustments made in Fig. 3.2).[5] But because of its age structure, this line is unlikely to represent the Catholic share of the electorate. To estimate this, the second (grey) line represents Catholics as a share of the population aged 20 or more at each census since 1937—a line significantly below the overall population figure, but with the two lines moving towards convergence in the early twenty-first century. The third line reports the nationalist share of seats in the Northern Ireland House of Commons (1921–1969), Assembly (1973, 1982 and 1998–2017) and Convention (1975), a more useful indicator than share of the vote because of the relatively large number of uncontested seats before 1969, a feature associated with the plurality electoral system then in force. The extent to which nationalist representation lagged behind the Catholic share of the population and of the electorate in the early years of the state is striking. Nationalists never won

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[5] Since corrected estimates of the population broken down by age group are not available, data reported in the official census report are used (despite their known deficiencies) to ensure comparability.

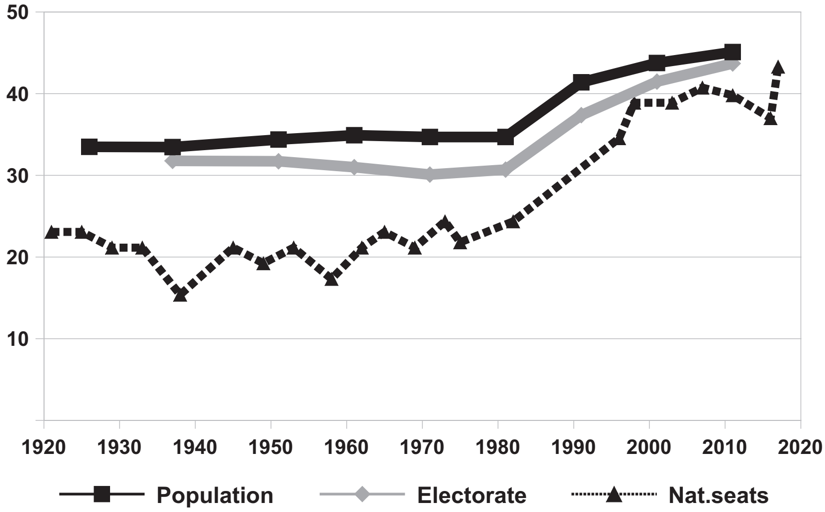

Fig. 3.3 Catholics as percentage of population and estimated percentage of electorate, and nationalist share of seats in Stormont, 1921–2017
Note Data refer to seats won by parties classified as nationalist, unionist or other

even a quarter of the seats in the Northern Ireland House of Commons, though their support base may be assumed to amount to more than a third of the population and of the electorate.

The rise in nationalist political power since the 1970s, however, has been dramatic, as may be seen in the steep rise in the nationalist share of political representation in the Northern Ireland Assembly from 1998 onwards. This reflected a growing nationalist share of the vote, as illustrated in Fig. 3.4. The contrast between the position in the early years of direct rule (up to the Assembly election of 1982) and the post-1998 period stands out vividly. In the first period, nationalists typically won about 25% of the first preference vote; after 1998, this rose steeply to about 40%. Growing nationalist success in converting these votes into seats may be attributed in part to abolition of the plurality system in 1973 and its replacement by proportional representation. Nevertheless, Catholic participation rates at elections have also increased. For example, when respondents were asked in 1968 whether they had voted in the previous election to the Northern Ireland House of Commons (in 1965), 16% of Protestants said that they had not voted, but the

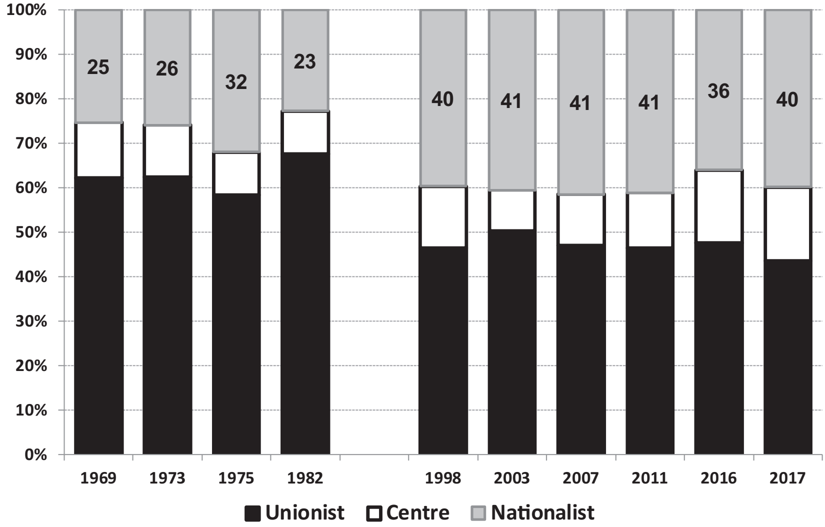

Fig. 3.4 Votes in elections to Northern Ireland House of Commons (1969), Assemblies (1973, 1982–2017) and Convention (1975) by bloc
Note Data refers to share of vote won by parties classified as nationalist, unionist or other

corresponding proportion for Catholics was 30% (this excludes those who were unable to vote due to ineligibility, absence or for other compelling reasons). Catholic alienation from the state may in part account for this, particularly, though not exclusively, in respect of supporters of Sinn Féin and the 'republican' movement. Catholic electoral participation appears to have increased subsequently, though, no doubt reflecting in part a softening of Sinn Féin's attitude towards the state. By the early twenty-first century, there was little difference in the turnout rate of the two communities, though a large survey conducted at the time of the 2016 Assembly election showed that 16% of Protestants, but as many as 21% of Catholics, had deliberately chosen not to vote.[6]

[6] The 1968 and 2016 data are computed respectively from the Northern Ireland Loyalty Survey dataset (ICPSR, study no. 7237) and the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly Election dataset (funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, Principal Investigator John Garry). The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey data show few differences between Catholics and Protestants in respect of voting at the 2001 and 2005 Westminster elections and the 2007 Northern Ireland Assembly election; see http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/.

The consolidation and growth in the nationalist vote were not just a consequence of demographic evolution. They were facilitated by a transformation in nationalist political organisation. A powerful political organisation that had once organised the Catholic vote all over the island of Ireland (the United Irish League and its predecessor, the Irish National League, constituency organisations of the Irish Nationalist Party) had faded out in the southern provinces in the years 1916–1918 and a little later in Northern Ireland (Coakley 2004). The Nationalist Party, the main political vehicle of Northern Ireland Catholics, simply lacked machinery that could be mobilised at election time and was forced to rely on the loyalty of Catholic voters to support its candidates at election time. Efforts in the late 1920s and in the 1960s to reorganise the party as a modern political machine floundered (Phoenix 1994, pp. 359–365; Lynn 1997, pp. 171–222; Staunton 2001). The inevitable consequence was a lack of policy coherence and absence of strategic orientation. Efforts to force the issue of modernisation of party machinery finally bore fruit only in 1970, when a new generation of politicians created the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), a party that, notwithstanding its name, effectively became the primary voice of the nationalist community. The new party quickly filled the gap left by the Nationalist Party, with an organisational structure that mimicked that of the typical modern political party (McAllister 1977, pp. 39–54; McLoughlin 2010, pp. 20–22).

There was a second dimension to the mobilisation of the Catholic electorate. The Sinn Féin movement, long representing a marginal force in Irish political life, was given new momentum by the civil unrest that began in the late 1960s. However, fearing rejection by an electorate reluctant or unwilling to endorse its violent methods, it remained aloof from the electoral arena. An upsurge in public support following the deaths of 10 hunger strikers in 1981, however, impelled the party down the electoral path, and during the 1980s and early 1990s it sought to combine conflicting approaches to political advance, symbolised in dual reliance on the Armalite rifle and the ballot box (see McAllister 2004). The contradiction between these two strategies was finally resolved in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), with the IRA ultimately permitting the decommissioning of its entire weapons stock and embarking on a programme which, though presented as a fast track towards Irish unity, amounted to an acceptance of the constitutional status quo in Northern Ireland (Bean 2007, pp. 138–173; Frampton 2009, pp. 183–192; Spencer 2014). The newly mobilised Sinn Féin was not just another party; it emerged in the 1980s as a well-organised movement on the model of other post-revolutionary parties, able to rely on a mass membership and a cohort of dedicated activists.

To an increasing extent, though, it was not so much Sinn Féin's growing electoral power within Northern Ireland, as the robustness of northern nationalism's international alliances, which dictated the pace of political change. For most of the twentieth century, British governments insisted that the Northern Ireland conflict was a domestic matter in which other states should have no say; Irish governments, though loudly denouncing the 'evils' of partition and presenting Irish unity as the only solution to the island's problems, were content in practice to leave the matter to British management.

In the course of the early 1970s, this position changed fundamentally. First, passionate British commitment to the union with Northern Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century, driven by British imperial sentiment and English nationalist emotion, had lapsed by the end of the century into passive support for an outlying part of the UK. As part of the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973, the British government agreed to part with Northern Ireland should a majority there support Irish unity, a commitment reiterated with increasing solemnity and precision until 1998, when it was embedded in the GFA. Second, Irish governments gradually moved from a position of stand-offish irredentism to one of cautious involvement in efforts to resolve the Northern Ireland problem, efforts that were in general more welcome to the nationalist community than to the unionist one (Coakley 2017a, b). Third, joint UK and Irish membership of the EU from 1973 onwards introduced a new actor with a vested interest in resolving the problem, and increased economic integration reduced the stakes, most visibly expressed in a withering away of the border. Fourth, especially after the end of the Cold War in 1989, the US government became increasingly involved in the pursuit of a settlement in Northern Ireland, one driven in particular by a close relationship between American leadership and the Irish nationalist tradition.

The cumulative effect of these changes, viewed over a long time span, has been a transformed nationalist community. Demographic expansion has led to a new perception of Northern Ireland Catholics no longer as a minority but as one of two communities of more or less equal weight. Electoral advances have secured a powerful position for nationalists in the Northern Ireland administration, with Sinn Féin, given its party political strength, capable of exercising a real veto on political progress within Northern Ireland. Notwithstanding the Conservative–Democratic Unionist alliance in the UK House of Commons following the June 2017 general election, the British government remains committed to the principles of the GFA. Despite its role as challenger to the southern Irish parties, Sinn Féin has achieved a special position as the voice of northern nationalism, even if this has not been entirely embraced south of the border. External actors, such as the EU and the American administration, remain on the sidelines as peace brokers who have traditionally been more favourably viewed by nationalist than by unionist observers.

The Public Opinion Dimension

The discussion so far has generalised on the basis of a set of crude binary distinctions, such as 'Catholic-Protestant' and 'nationalist-unionist'. But it is important to bear in mind the warning of Rogers Brubaker (2002, p. 164) against seeing categories of this kind as 'discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups' which constitute basic social actors and fundamental units of social analysis, given their fluidity and amorphous nature. In other words, it would be dangerous to take the census data described in the first section of this chapter, or even the electoral data discussed in the second section, as objective evidence of mobilisation behind specific political goals, such as attainment of Irish unity. It is therefore worth exploring further evidence that modifies the stark nature of the contrasts already discussed. To what extent do Northern Ireland Catholics feel Irish? Do they see themselves as members of a 'nationalist' community? Do they vote en masse for nationalist parties? Moreover, do they really want Irish unity?

Some immediate answers to these questions are reported in Fig. 3.5. Based on reanalysis of most major surveys carried out in Northern Ireland since 1968, it suggests a pattern of relative stability over time, though with some notable shifts. The double black line shows very substantial Catholic self-identification as 'Irish' in 1968 (76%), dropping to about 60% from 1989 onwards. Those not identifying as Irish cluster overwhelmingly in the category 'Northern Irish' (typically approaching 25%, and sometimes exceeding that level, since 1989). It is not clear why this label has proven attractive to many Catholics; it may reflect an increased sense of differentiation from those south of the border (who, reciprocally, appear to have drifted steadily away from northern

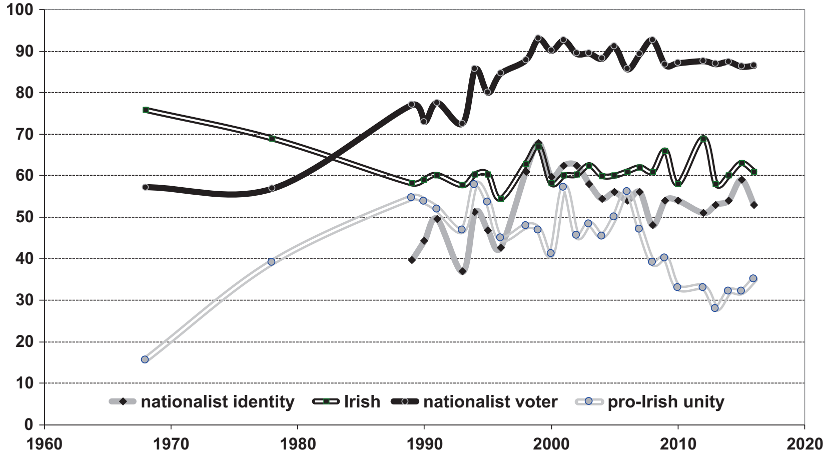

Fig. 3.5 Catholic identification patterns, 1968–2016
Note The lines report responses to the following questions (with possible minor variation over time) on the part of those of Catholic background: 'Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a unionist, a nationalist or neither?'; 'Which of the following best describes the way you think of yourself?' (with options British, Irish, Northern Irish, etc.); support for a party classified as nationalist; and preference for 'the long-term policy for Northern Ireland', with options 'remain part of the United Kingdom' and 'reunify with the rest of Ireland'. From 2007 onwards, three options were offered: the first option was divided into two, 'remain part of the United Kingdom with direct rule' and 'remain part of the United Kingdom with devolved government'
Source Northern Ireland Loyalty Survey, 1968 (ICPSR, study no. 7237); Northern Ireland Attitudes Survey, 1978 (UK Data Archive, study no. 1347); Northern Ireland Social Attitudes surveys, annually, 1989–1991, 1993–1996 (UK Data Archive, study nos. 2792, 2841, 2953, 3440, 3590, 3797, 4130); Northern Ireland Life and Times surveys, annually, 1998–2016 (Available from ARK—Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive: www.ark.ac.uk/nilt). The author expresses his thanks to the data archives mentioned for providing access to these data sets

nationalists over the decades; see Coakley 2017a). Alternatively, it may be that it reflects increased identification with 'Northern Ireland' as a political entity (an interpretation also likely to be applicable to the many Protestants who opt for this label).

Reflecting the extent of political polarisation in Northern Ireland, a further question on identity was introduced in 1989. This invited respondents to identify themselves as either nationalist or unionist. Prior to the GFA (which itself requires members of the Assembly to self-designate as unionist, nationalist or 'other'), only a minority of Catholics normally opted for the nationalist label (a larger share tended to describe themselves as 'neither'; see the thick grey line in Fig. 3.5). Catholic identification as nationalist peaked at 68% in 1999, but since then the trend has been downward, though a majority of Catholics (50–60% normally) continue to identify as nationalist. Almost all of the remainder identify as 'neither'. Catholics almost universally reject the label 'unionist', even if they themselves support the union, as many of them do.

Although reporting less than complete identification with the 'Irish' and 'nationalist' categories, Catholic respondents appear to be extremely loyal to the two nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and the SDLP (see thick black line in Fig. 3.5, which reports their combined support among Catholics). It was not always so; in the early years of the troubles, many Catholics voted for non-nationalist parties. Catholic support for nationalist parties comfortably exceeded 70% in the early 1990s and 80% in the late 1990s; it peaked at 93% in 1999, and since then has remained a little below that level. Strikingly, those who fail to support nationalist parties hardly ever support a unionist party (normally, fewer than 1% of Catholics do so), opting instead for parties of the centre, such as the Alliance Party and the Green Party.

One might expect supporters of the two nationalist parties also to favour the key objectives of their parties on issues such as Irish unity. But Catholic attitudes towards this central constitutional question are complex, with only modest support for Irish unity even as a long-term goal (see the double grey line in Fig. 3.5). The low level of support for Irish unity reported for 1968 needs to be treated with caution, due to the very different wording used at that time. Catholic support for Irish unity hovered around the 50% level from 1989 to 2006; it fell sharply thereafter, to a level of only just above 30% in 2010–2016. However, care is needed in interpreting this trend: instead of the two options traditionally offered as responses to this question (support for Irish unity or for continuation of the union), a technical change is likely to have boosted the pro-union position. The pro-union option was replaced in 2007 by two options: (1) support for the union, with direct rule, and (2) support for the union, with devolved government in Northern Ireland. The latter option proved attractive to many Catholics, causing a pronounced increase in the overall level of support for the pro-union position.

The data reported in this section seem in some respects contradictory, but they are consistent over time, if a little puzzling in certain respects. Since at least the 1990s, Catholics have overwhelmingly supported nationalist parties, with ‘leakage’ extending no further than the Alliance Party and other smaller parties of the centre. But those so voting, and Catholics in general, do not overwhelmingly label themselves as ‘Irish’ or see themselves as ‘nationalists’; very many Catholic respondents opt for the ‘Northern Irish’ and ‘neither’ labels, respectively, as regards these two designations. A few Catholics (5–8%) may label themselves ‘British’, but virtually none describe themselves as unionists—even if they support the union. Since 2007, a majority of Catholic respondents have supported the union, with support for Irish unity having dropped to about a third.[7]

To make this point concrete, and to render the apparent contradiction more obvious, data from the 2016 survey mentioned above yield the following findings, when the analysis is confined to Catholics, and ‘don’t knows’ are excluded. Of Catholics identifying as ‘Irish’, 49% support Irish unity (with 37% supporting the union in one form or another); of those identifying as ‘nationalist’, 53% support Irish unity (and 37% the union); and of Sinn Féin supporters, 54% opt for Irish unity (and 35% support the union; the corresponding figures for the SDLP are 32 and 56%).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at certain facets of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland, paying attention to those aspects of their political future that have been underexplored. The first is the transition from overwhelming numerical dominance on the part of one community to substantial demographic equality between the two. The second is the slow but effective translation of the demographic surge in the Catholic population into votes at elections and seats in parliament, assembly and council, to the point where those designated as unionists lost their overall majority for the first time ever in the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly election. The third is the complex pattern of values, attitudes and opinions within the Catholic community. These are represented by patterns of very strong allegiance to the two main nationalist parties, much weaker levels of identification with 'Irish' and 'nationalist' identity (but with such identification still being characteristic of a majority of Catholics) and sharp decline in support for Irish unity, with more Catholics reporting preference for the union over Irish unity since 2007.

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[7] It should be noted that a few respondents answered ‘don’t know’ to these questions, and they have been treated as a separate category in the analysis above; but in the case of the question on constitutional options a large proportion of Catholics responded ‘don’t know’. Excluding them would give a slight boost to the proportion of Catholics supporting Irish unity (and, of course, also to those supporting the union).

Nevertheless, important caveats in respect of these generalisations need to be noted. First, the focus on two demographic blocs may obscure an important and growing third group: 'others', who amounted to 8% of the population in 2011. This group comprises refugees from the Catholic and Protestant blocs, those belonging to other traditions, and members of immigrant groups; its real size is greater than this, since many of those described as Catholics and Protestants above no longer see themselves as belonging to these denominations.[8] The future political behaviour of this group is unpredictable, but it is of great importance since it holds the balance between the two main groups. Second, many of the characteristics of Catholic public opinion discussed here are likely to be brittle: support for particular constitutional options, for instance, or even specific forms of national or communal identification are not necessarily deeply held and are potentially displaceable by other values or identities. Third, external shocks may have a transformative effect in redefining, narrowing or even broadening the options available. The prospect of Scottish independence, for instance, and the Brexit deal negotiated by the EU and the UK may have a big effect on dislodging current preferences and priorities.

Almost five decades after Richard Rose's pre-troubles survey in 1968, then, the position of Northern Ireland's Catholics has been transformed. No longer a small, powerless minority without friends, its demographic and political resources match those of the historically dominant group, and it can rely on an extensive network of international allies. Whether this will result in a geopolitical transformation of Northern Ireland or further absorption of the Catholic community within it is likely to depend on greater external forces, such as those associated with the Brexit project, longer-term dynamics on the island of Ireland and other geopolitical developments within these islands.

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[8] Focusing on current religious denomination (rather than community background, the measure on which this chapter has generally relied) yields a much higher proportion of those in the 'other' category—17% in 2011.

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CHAPTER 4

Rights Versus Rites? Catholic Women and Abortion Access in Northern Ireland

Claire Pierson

Introduction

Religious and national ideologies are often dependent on explicitly conservative notions of women and gender ideologies. The intertwining of national identity with religion in the Northern Ireland context is expressed in a particularly conservative gender regime. Gendered conceptualisations of national identity present resonant imagery of women as mothers and biological reproducers of the nation, often stereotyped in Irish nationalism through the highly evocative image of the Virgin Mary (Ashe 2006). Academic consideration of Northern Ireland and its conflict has presented an insight into women's roles and experiences, highlighting that Catholic, nationalist, republican women were often visible and central forces within the civil rights movement and nationalist

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Data on political discourse on abortion were gathered as part of a British Academy Grant and are replicated here with permission of the Principal Investigator, Dr. Fiona Bloomer.

C. Pierson (✉)
University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK
e-mail: C.Pierson@liverpool.ac.uk

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and republican organisations (Aretxaga 1997; Cockburn 1998). Such visibility and activism are often presented in contrast to Protestant, unionist, loyalist women.[1] As such, Irish nationalism is portrayed as open to and facilitating gender equality and feminism.

This narrative has been challenged by feminist academic consideration of the Northern Ireland conflict and post-conflict period which has explored the gendered roles and activities of nationalist and republican women and their marginalisation in post-conflict peace-building processes (see e.g., Gilmartin 2015). What remains under-examined, however, is the continued influence of conservative Catholic ideology on Irish nationalism and the particular gendered effects of this influence. Kozlowska et al. (2016) illustrate how (in Catholic countries) a strong relationship between religion and national identity can result in conservative policy on abortion. Whilst 'Mother Ireland' and 'Virgin Mary' imagery have been confronted, they continue to be highly symbolic and resonant. Viewing women's key contributions to national identity through the role of motherhood creates assumed notions of nurturing and self-sacrificing identity. Abortion and its implicit rejection of motherhood cross boundaries of ideal womanhood and as such are presented at the macro-political level as abhorrent to Catholic nationalist identity and to Irishness more widely on the island of Ireland (Pierson and Bloomer 2017). Consequently, abortion becomes a key 'fault line' through which progressive notions of womanhood in Irish nationalism can be challenged.

Ideological certainties surrounding abortion are not rooted in the reality of women's experiences. English Department of Health statistics show that an average of 1000 women per year travel from Northern Ireland to England to access abortion services (Bloomer and Hoggart 2016). Women travelling from Northern Ireland identifying as White Irish are the largest ethnic group followed by White British. In addition, with high numbers of women travelling from the Republic of Ireland (approximately 5000 per year) it can be demonstrated that abortion is a part of life for Irish Catholic women. Public opinion polls have consistently also demonstrated a will for some relaxation of the law on abortion in Northern Ireland in both communities.

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[1] Whilst the author understands identity in Northern Ireland to be more complex than the simple binary of Catholic/Protestant, for the purposes of this chapter the terms Catholic, nationalist, republican and Protestant, unionist, loyalist are used for common understanding.

Despite the evidence, nationalist (and unionist) politicians and political parties in Northern Ireland continue to oppose abortion law reform and specifically refer to opposition to abortion as being something that unites Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. Within this political environment, women continue to travel to England to access abortion or procure illegal abortion pills online. Challenging hegemonic and ingrained notions of 'good' womanhood within national and religious ideologies is particularly difficult in the Northern Ireland context—where identity is defined through 'othering' and a zero-sum game approach to political decision-making—thus further entrenching conservative ethno-religious identity. This chapter illustrates how such discourses are global and ingrained yet can be challenged through considering historical and alternative faith-based views on abortion.

Abortion in Northern Ireland

Abortion is highly restricted in Northern Ireland, with approximately 39 abortions per year taking place in National Health Service (NHS) facilities (Bloomer and Hoggart 2016). This is a result of the lack of extension of the British 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland and the governance of abortion continuing under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act which criminalises abortion with a potential sentence of life imprisonment for procuring or assisting in an abortion. Case law from 1939 (The Bourne judgment) set precedent allowing for abortion in cases where a woman would become a 'mental or physical wreck' as a result of the pregnancy. Whilst this may have allowed for a more liberal interpretation of legislation in the past, a series of judicial reviews of healthcare guidance policies and increasingly draconian interpretations of the law in these policies have left a 'chilling effect' where healthcare professionals are reluctant to perform abortions (Reproductive Health Law and Policy Advisory Group 2016).

The result of these restrictions is not to stop abortion but to either displace it to another region or for women to procure illegal abortions. Approximately 1000 women per year travel to England to access abortion as a private procedure (there are likely to be more who do not use Northern Irish addresses or those who travel to other countries such as the Netherlands). The British government announced in June 2017 that they would pay for women travelling from Northern Ireland to access abortions. The scheme operates through a central booking system managed by the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and provides support with travel costs if women face financial hardship. An alternative, cheaper, option is to order the abortion pill online illegally (although exact numbers are unknown, over 5000 women from the island of Ireland ordered the abortion pill from the online provider, 'Women on Web' over a five-year period (Aiken et al. 2017)). Whilst this medication is World Health Organisation approved and commonly used in treating miscarriage, this option has serious consequences. Since 2015, a number of prosecutions have taken place over procurement and usage of the abortion pill, resulting in one 21-year-old being given a 3-month suspended sentence for procuring her own abortion.

There have been recent legal challenges to abortion law; a judicial review in December 2015 taken by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission saw the Northern Ireland High Court declare the regions abortion laws to be incompatible with human rights, in cases of fatal foetal anomaly and sexual crime (McNeilly 2015). However, this decision was overturned in the Court of Appeal in June 2017 and will now move to the UK Supreme Court. Amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill in March 2016 to allow for abortion in cases of fatal foetal anomaly and sexual crime were voted down and legislative progress in NI has stalled at this juncture.

At the international level, various UN human rights bodies have called for changes to Northern Ireland's abortion laws. Since 1999, the Committee for the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has made repeated statements on Northern Irish abortion law in their recommendations to the UK; most recently in 2013, they recommended that 'the State party should expedite the amendment of the anti-abortion law in Northern Ireland with a view to decriminalise abortion'. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child made a similar recommendation in its concluding observations to the UK in 2016 and other international bodies that have highlighted the inadequacies of abortion law in Northern Ireland include the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Committee on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Pierson and Bloomer 2017).

Despite the obvious inadequacy of the law and repeated calls at both the international and local level for it to be modified, politicians have resisted any change, with such resistance often couched in terms of the particular moral values and religious beliefs of the region and unity between faiths on the issue.

Religion, Nationalism and Gender Politics in Northern Ireland

Laws and policies on abortion fall within the remit of what are described 'morality policies' and are as such framed through the lens of religious morality. Theorists analysing such policy argue that at individual country levels, the impact of religion on abortion policy can be measured by an analysis of cultural heritage (Catholicism versus Protestantism) and levels of religiosity in a society (church attendance) (Minkenberg 2002). In a comparative analysis of countries with restrictive and liberal abortion policies, it was found that those with high religiosity were more likely to have restrictive laws, whilst those with low religiosity had liberal laws. Countries exhibiting high Catholic religiosity (Portugal, Ireland) were much more likely to have restrictive laws compared to countries with high Protestant religiosity (Sweden, Denmark). The extent to which religion is built into national identity increases the symbolic power of the church and makes anti-abortion sentiment more politically resonant (Kozlowska et al. 2016). It is therefore argued that the decoupling of religion from national identity will result in more liberal abortion law and policy.

The relationship between religion and nationalism is complex. Brubaker (2012) suggests four means of understanding the relationship: nationalism as a form of religion, religion as the origin and power of nationalism, religion as part of nationalism and religious forms of nationalism. Religion is an integral social, cultural and political identity marker within the divided societal context of Northern Ireland (Mitchell 2004). Although academic thought explains the divisions within Northern Ireland through ethno-national identity, ethno-nationalism is often loosely aligned with religious identification (McGarry and O'Leary 1995). Such categorisation merges almost seamlessly with the development of party politics in the region, and there is evidence to suggest that religious convictions (and the perceived religious convictions of party supporters) influence the development of party policies and the decision-making of some politicians (Tonge et al. 2014).

Governance in Northern Ireland is based on consociational principles including a cross-community, power-sharing executive with minority veto rights and cultural respect for both Protestant and Catholic communities.

This is intended to alleviate conflict and provide representation for the whole of Northern Ireland. Power-sharing principles have been critiqued for working to entrench ethnic identities rather than transform them (Taylor 2009). In addition, a growing body of work has provided a feminist analysis of power sharing and illustrated that its reification of ethnic identity works to obscure alternative identity cleavages and concerns, in particular women's rights (Byrne and McCulloch 2012; Kennedy et al. 2016). The particular prominence of religion within Northern Ireland's ethno-national identities also provides a socially conservative context from within which women's rights are easily marginalised (Thomson 2016).

Religion and religious leaders have played direct roles in politics in particular through conflict mediation. During the conflict in Northern Ireland, a number of church leaders were positioned as neutral moral observers and mediators at both inter- and intra-community levels. For example, the process of decommissioning of weapons in the aftermath of the Good Friday Agreement was overseen by a Catholic Priest and a Protestant Minister, religious leaders providing legitimacy to the process. In contrast to this, other church leaders were actively antagonistic, the late Reverend Ian Paisley, the founder of both the Free Presbyterian church (a highly conservative Protestant evangelical church) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), being the most obvious example of this. However, the role of churches in the peace process positioned them as pivotal to politics in the region and they hold a position of significance to both communities and political leaders (Brewer et al. 2011).

Mitchell (2004) positions the role of the Catholic and Protestant churches in the formal political arena as a mutually beneficial relationship. The roles of the Catholic church and Protestant churches are distinct in their direct influence in politics. The Catholic church is closely located within community social lives and has a particular role in education, whereas there is a much more overt overlap between Protestant churches and political actors (Mitchell 2004). Politicians, aware of this important social role, work in partnership with churches and provide them with a platform to promote their perspectives on social and moral issues. Politicians rarely oppose church perspectives or teachings; a notable exception to this in recent times has been the open support from some politicians, (including SDLP members) to equal marriage.

However, political parties' policies on moral issues, particularly the DUP and SDLP, largely reflect the positions of their respective churches. Church leaders' public lobbying against abortion has occurred on a regular basis. In 2008 when there was an opportunity in Westminster to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, the leaders of the four main churches wrote to UK MPs asking them to oppose the amendment in order to respect the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland and allow locally elected MLAs to legislate.

Politicians rarely speak out in favour of abortion law reform, whilst some may favour abortion access in limited circumstances (this is usually framed in terms of fatal foetal anomaly and sexual crime), the prominent discourse on abortion in the Northern Ireland Assembly is one which views abortion as against the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland more widely.

Political Discourse on Abortion and Catholic Nationalism

In Northern Ireland, abortion is positioned as an issue that unites political parties across traditional ethnic and religious dividing lines. In fact, one of the first political debates in the reformed Northern Ireland Assembly after the Good Friday Agreement was to vote on the non-extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland. This was despite the fact that policing and justice powers had not been devolved at this time. Abortion is also positioned as an issue which unites the island of Ireland. The all-island nature of opposition to abortion unusually extends to unionist politicians utilising the language of all faiths and an all-island approach to this particular political issue. For example, in a 2013 debate on an amendment to the Criminal Justice Bill that would restrict provision of abortion services to NHS premises, Paul Givan of the DUP stated:

> Across the island of Ireland, we share a common bond in seeking to protect and provide the best care for mothers and unborn children. We are recognised globally as one of the premier providers of maternal care. That this common political bond has been replicated across our religious communities is demonstrated by support from the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Catholic Church. People ask what

> a shared future looks like, and I point to this moment of an SDLP, DUP and Ulster Unionist bringing forward proposed legislation related to the most basic of human rights; the right to life. (Hansard 2013, p. 9)

Nationalist and republican political parties' positions on abortion also invoke Irish nationalism, civil rights and a conservative Catholic approach. Sinn Fein's policy on abortion is ambiguous. Both Gerry Adams and the late Martin McGuinness have stated that the party is anti-abortion. However, at the 2015 Ard Fheis a motion was passed to allow for abortion in cases of 'fatal foetal anomaly'. A Northern Ireland council member, Anne Brolly, resigned after this decision. Sinn Fein have also stated that they do not wish to extend the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland as it is a piece of British legislation. Within political debate, Sinn Fein use a rhetoric of empathy and emphasise the vulnerability of women across Ireland; this is a common global discourse which, whilst attempting to convey sympathy with women, positions them as vulnerable and as such questions their ability to make rational decisions (Cannold 2002).

The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), however, openly position themselves as a 'pro-life' party and various members have aligned themselves with anti-choice groups such as Precious Life. Politicians from the SDLP have more overtly linked their position on abortion as being part of their Catholic faith, indicating a form of nationalism built upon and intertwined with religious convictions. Pat Ramsey stated in the 2013 debate:

> My culture, background and faith mean that I — not just politically, but personally — want to be a champion for the unborn child. I want to protect the unborn child. I want to ensure that I prevent abortions. (Hansard 2013, p. 54).

The SDLP also draw on their status as upholders of civil rights and their stance of non-violence to position their stance on abortion:

> As a party that was born out of the civil rights movement, the SDLP believes that the right to life is the most basic right of all and includes the right to life of the unborn. My party has been consistently opposed to the taking of life, whether it be the life of Paul Quinn, who was so brutally murdered in Monaghan at the weekend; life that was lost during the civil

> conflict that society has endured for the past four decades; or life that is taken by the state through capital punishment. It is for that reason that the SDLP opposes abortion, upholds the right to life of the foetus and opposes the extension of the Abortion Act 1967 to Northern Ireland.
> (Carmel Hanna, SDLP, Hansard 2007, p. 51)

Whilst nationalist political parties and politicians position their views as representative of the communities they speak for, statistics on women accessing abortion from Northern Ireland and repeated opinion polls indicate otherwise.

Catholic Women, Abortion and Attitudes to Reform

The rate of abortion for women in Northern Ireland and specifically for Catholic women is difficult to define. Historically, it has been noted that less Catholic women in Belfast were prosecuted for backstreet abortions (before the 1967 Act) and that knowledge networks on abortion techniques may have been more developed in Protestant communities (McCormick 2015). Currently, statistics are collected by the English Department of Health on those accessing abortion in England; however, this does not take into account women who give false addresses, women who travel to countries other than England and those who order the abortion pill online. Statistics collected by the English Department of Health ask women to disclose racial identity; from this, it can be illustrated that women from Northern Ireland identifying as 'White Irish' access abortion more often than those identifying as 'White British' or any other ethnic group. Assuming that those identifying as Irish also identify as Catholic, we can see that Catholic women access abortion more often than Protestant (White British) women. Department for Health statistics for 2015/2016 show that in total 724 women identified as being residents of Northern Ireland and their ethnicity is presented in Table 4.1.

Repeated surveys and opinion polls have demonstrated appetite for legal reform on Northern Ireland's abortion laws. Support for relaxation of the law has come from both Catholic and Protestant respondents to surveys. The most recent and comprehensive survey results come from the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey which included a specific module on abortion in its 2016 edition. Such surveys show significant change in particular within Catholic respondents with regard

Table 4.1 Ethnicity of women from Northern Ireland accessing abortion in England

Ethnicity	*Number*	*Percentage*
White British	246	40
White Irish	380	48
White—any other	45	6
Mixed	2	0
Asian	13	2
Black	5	1
Chinese	12	1
Any other ethnic group	6	1
Not known/stated	15	

Source Summarised from English Department of Health statistics

to abortion. NILT data show that in 1990, only 28% of Catholics compared to 75% of Protestants and 78% of those with no religion thought that the law should allow abortion where there is a strong chance of a serious defect in the baby. In contrast in 2016, 72% of Catholics agreed that abortion definitely or probably should be legal where the foetus has a fatal abnormality and the baby will not survive beyond birth. In addition, 62% thought abortion should be accessible where there was a serious abnormality which meant that the foetus may not survive beyond the birth (Gray 2017). Table 4.2 has been replicated from a briefing document on NILT 2016 abortion data.

The actual experiences of women in Northern Ireland in accessing abortion and the views of the public provide a much more nuanced account of abortion attitudes than that of political decision-makers. Unfortunately, Northern Ireland is not unique in this respect. Globally, religious institutions attempt to influence political decision-making on abortion at both the national and international level, creating a dominant discourse of religious belief being firmly anti-abortion under all circumstances.

Challenging Dominant Discourse Globally and Locally

In the twentieth century, as a reaction to the increasing access to abortion globally, the Catholic church sought to influence international treaties regarding reproductive rights, with its goal being to halt any movement to legitimise abortion. In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, the

Table 4.2 Attitudes towards legality of abortion, by religion

		%		
		Catholic	*Protestant*	*No religion*
The foetus has a fatal abnormality and the baby will not survive beyond birth	Definitely/probably should be legal	72	84	93
	Definitely/probably should be illegal	24	13	5
	Don't know	4	3	2
The foetus has a **serious abnormality** and the baby may not survive beyond the birth	Definitely/probably should be legal	62	76	88
	Definitely/probably should be illegal	33	20	10
	Don't know	5	4	2
A woman has become pregnant because of **rape or incest**	Definitely/probably should be legal	69	81	92
	Definitely/probably should be illegal	26	16	6
	Don't know	5	4	1
A pregnant woman has a serious health condition and doctors say **she will die** if she has to continue the pregnancy	Definitely/probably should be legal	75	85	95
	Definitely/probably should be illegal	19	11	3
	Don't know	7	4	2
A doctor says there is a serious **threat to the woman's physical or mental health** if she continues with the pregnancy	Definitely/probably should be legal	65	78	92
	Definitely/probably should be illegal	27	17	7
	Don't know	8	5	1

Source NILT, 2016

Catholic church, under the leadership of the Holy See, lobbied against policies related to contraceptive use and abortion, resulting in a more conservative content of the Cairo Declaration than had been anticipated (Chong and Troy 2011). It used similar tactics in later years and—in parallel with the US administration, who sought to maintain the support of the Christian Right electorate base for the republican President George W. Bush—lobbied for reproductive rights and even the phrase reproductive health to be excluded from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001. Later, United Nations declarations sought to reverse these moves and in 2005, access to reproductive health was added to the

Maternal Health section of the MDGs (Guns 2013). However, the delay in the focus on reproductive health over a five-year period led to a reduction in resources for associated programmes and contributed to slow progress in achieving the targets for the MDGs. Hulme (2009) argues that the 'unholy' alliance which led to such moves should be condemned as immoral. The failure to focus on maternal health contributed negatively to efforts to reduce extreme income poverty, gender inequality, decreasing child and maternal mortality rates and tackling HIV/AIDS incidence rates (Hulme 2009). In doing so, both the Catholic church and the Christian right demonstrated that reproductive rights, health inequality, gender inequality and tackling poverty could be silenced in favour of moral conservatism.

Alongside international efforts to remove access to reproductive rights, campaigns have also been targeted at regional levels around the world. Commentators note that regions with poor reproductive rights are held up as beacons within the anti-abortion movement. The island of Ireland is lauded as a 'beacon' for the anti-abortion movement, particularly in the USA. Increasingly, lobbying tactics in these areas are characterised by a human rights approach to campaigns, mirroring the pro-choice lobby and in doing so acknowledge the effectiveness of the rights-based approach to campaigning (Morgan 2014). In Latin America, conservative Catholic theorists repackaged religious ideologies in secular rights-based discourse. This approach is applied to campaigns against public sex education and sexual health services resulting in 'an orchestrated backlash against Latin American reproductive and sexual rights movements' (Morgan 2014, p. 2). The backlash has occurred alongside developments which indicate that the behaviour of the largely Catholic population conflicts with the teachings of the church—divorce, contraceptive use and abortion are all prevalent in the region. In addition, critics have argued that the Catholic church has sought to challenge some moral infractions with less zeal than others (for instance, child sexual abuse versus abortion) (Morgan 2014). Such contrasts are also evident in Ireland and Northern Ireland with respect to child sex abuse committed by priests and the operations of the Magdalene Laundries which institutionalised young single mothers (Bloomer and O'Dowd 2014).

Such positioning on abortion ignores the fact that the political impact of religious belief is highly dependent on social context (Durham 2005) and that a liberal position is not in contradiction to religious belief.

For example, in the sixteenth century abortion was permitted by Pope Gregory XIV until the point of quickening, the point at which the woman felt the foetus moving (ensoulment). This mirrors the legislative position in Ireland during the same time period where abortion was considered a minor offence. It wasn't until the 1861 Act that the distinction between 'un-ensouled' and 'ensouled' foetuses was removed (McCormick 2015).

Whilst the rhetoric of political debate assumes commonality between religiosity and anti-abortion views, evidence suggests otherwise. International organisations such as 'Catholics for Choice' lobby for liberal abortion laws, arguing that Catholics do not follow church policy. Eig (2014, p. 109) notes that in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s in the debate around the contraceptive pill, Catholics were able to compartmentalise their beliefs, choosing which church teachings to adhere to and which to ignore. Evidence suggests the same is true of abortion for many Catholics in the USA, the UK and in Latin American countries (Clements 2014; McMurtie et al. 2012; Williams 2013). In Northern Ireland, Bloomer and O'Dowd (2014) also argue that on matters of LGBT identity, divorce, contraception and parenting outside of marriage, the Catholic population does not follow church policy.

Challenging dominant religious discourses is incredibly difficult in the Northern Ireland context. As noted above, religion is deeply rooted in ethno-national identity and also within political, social and educational structures and institutions in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, dominant religious narratives on abortion dominate and are accepted almost without question. For example, the religiously informed education system has a distinct influence on attitudes towards abortion. The Northern Ireland education system is almost completely segregated with less than 10% of children attending integrated schools and representatives of religious institutions being highly active in school management boards (Perry 2011). Teaching on abortion occurs in Religious Education (a mandatory subject) where a Christian ethos in teaching is advised. Non-statutory bodies who deliver sex and relationship education also put forth anti-abortion sentiment. Bloomer et al. (2017) illustrate how a Catholic ethos of sex for procreation is evident in women's narratives of abortion and that anti-abortion messages in schools were so strong that they were automatically accepted.

Bloomer et al.'s (2017) analysis of a community-based educational programme, however, gives some indication of how such dominant narratives could be challenged. Alliance for Choice, Northern Ireland's key activist group on abortion rights, developed an educational programme in 2011 to inform and challenge participant's views on abortion. This programme included perspectives on the Christian churches' stance on abortion (such as that described above) and consideration of how it had developed historically. It is clear that such knowledge created new 'truths' for participants and as such challenged hegemonic Catholic (and Protestant) teachings on abortion as being completely immoral. This type of education offers a means of resisting dominant discourse and allows a position of Christian and pro-choice to be imagined. Such positioning needs to be a part of wider debates on abortion in Northern Ireland, allowing a plurality of experiences and voices to be heard.

Conclusion

Whilst abortion is largely unavailable in Northern Ireland, and positioned as an issue which faith and ethno-national communities unite against, it is a reality in the lives of many women living there. Whilst it may be envisioned that Catholicism holds particularly conservative views on abortion, this does not mean that Catholic women do not have abortions. This chapter has sought to illustrate that whilst politicians and dominant discourse in the region may attempt to position abortion as abhorrent and in particular against religious norms and convictions, in reality, women of all faiths and none need access to this healthcare procedure.

Beliefs are harder to challenge in the Northern Ireland context as they are so often held in opposition to the 'other' in society and therefore become more entrenched and stagnant. The relationship between religion and nationalism in the region has created a particularly morally conservative society lacking progress on women's rights. Whilst the Republic of Ireland holds more restrictive legislation than Northern Ireland, the decision to hold a referendum on abortion laws in 2018, and the success of the equal marriage referendum in 2015, shows that there is more potential to change narratives of religion, citizenship and sexuality rights in a somewhat more 'unified' religious nationalism.

However, as illustrated, such dominant discourses on abortion do not go unchallenged in Northern Ireland. Grassroots and activist approaches to challenging dominant religious narratives on abortion may have more success in providing alternative views on the issue and in contesting the political stagnancy that lags behind the opinions and experiences of the people of Northern Ireland.

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CHAPTER 5

‘Tough, Violent and Virtually Ungovernable’: Lessons from History—Northern Nationalists in the Irish Republic 1969–75

Brian Hanley

‘They Wrecked Every Place They Went’

While researching her book on Northern Ireland *A Place Apart*, during the mid 1970s, Dervla Murphy heard ‘anti-Northern sentiments with increasing vehemence and frequency. Some such outbursts may be excused on grounds of frustration and despair but most, I fear, are symptoms of a spreading infection … a new form of intolerance in Ireland, between Southern and Northern Catholics’ (Murphy 1978). By 1980, the editor of *Magill* magazine Vincent Browne could assert that ‘the divide between the Catholic community in Northern Ireland and the rest of the population … is deeper than ever. The Catholic minority must now bear whatever further tribulations arise … as an isolated case, ignored and reviled by the rest of Ireland’ (Browne 1980, p. 26). In reality, such hostility was not new. As early as 1972 independent Mayo

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B. Hanley (✉)
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

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TD Joe Lenehan had claimed that 'the northern people were the authors of their own destruction and when thousands of them were given sanctuary down here, they wrecked every place they went' (*Irish Times*, 14 July 1972). 55.2% of the respondents in Mícheál MacGréil's groundbreaking study of popular attitudes in Dublin (conducted between 1972 and 1973) agreed that 'Northerners on all sides tend to be extreme and unreasonable.' 59% also believed that 'Catholics in Northern Ireland have more in common with Northern Protestants than they have with Catholics in the Republic' (McGréil 1977, p. 377). From an early stage, there were those in the Republic who suggested that 'they were all bigots in the North, Catholic and Protestant … and that we are better off without them' (de Paor 1972). This article examines some of the southern reactions to northern nationalists in the early years of the conflict.

'The South Doesn't Give a Damn …'

In early 1972, republican Rita O'Hare asserted of Dublin that 'it's just unbelievable the apathy down here … people just don't seem to care here. Their whole outlook is unbelievable. It's as though we were not their people at all' (Kelly 1972). Writing from Long Kesh in 1973, Provisional IRA man Seamus Loughran noted that 'it is possible the majority (are) not interested. Apathy would appear to be the watchword of the southern Irish, if their reactions of this past few years is anything to go by' (Loughran 1973). During 1974, Belfast school student Brigid Cowan complained that 'people down here … don't give a damn about the North. As far as they are concerned it might as well be Vietnam. They just don't understand and they don't come up either' (Murphy 1974). In 1979, a Belfast school teacher echoed her view that the 'South doesn't give a damn about us. It never did' (O'Clery 1979). In the same year, 'Homer' in the *Andersonstown News* had noted a recent huge protest march in Dublin against the PAYE tax system and remembered how in 1972 'busloads of us went down to Dublin to arouse the Dubliners to the evils of internment. I remember standing on O'Connell Street giving out leaflets. I remember the indifference and even the hostility of the passers by. I remember the march up O'Connell Street … very few Dubliners joined in. And now, apparently they have discovered a cause worth marching for. A cause in which justice coincides with self interest. It's not an altogether bad cause … but at the end of the day, its money they're marching for and not idealism. The marchers could have marched for many better causes, but they chose to march for money. Their manifest priorities tell us something about the twenty-six county state and its ethos' (*Andersonstown News*, 31 March 1979).

'The State Doesn't Need Northerners'

For a period in the early 1970s, northern politicians had been household names in the south. Nationalists such as Eddie McAteer, Ivan Cooper, Austin Currie and John Hume, labourites Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin, republicans Joe Cahill and Maire Drumm and the radicals Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin featured on TV and radio and were invited to speak at venues across the state. However, by 1973, Douglas Gageby of the *Irish Times* wondered if 'public opinion … may be reverting to its pre-1969 attitude. Prominent Northern politicians have noted a certain coolness to them down south, even from the man or woman in the street' (*Irish Times*, 13 February 1973). This coolness was apparent earlier whenever northern politicians commented on affairs in the Republic. Responding to statements by Belfast MP Paddy Kennedy during the Arms crisis, the strongly nationalist *Irish Press* contended that 'this State doesn't need northerners either coming in or being brought down to take sides in its internal affairs … any efforts made to discredit Mr. Lynch and the Government now at this crisis are blows struck in the cause of anarchy' (*Irish Press*, 9 May 1970). When Kennedy predicted growing support for a united Ireland in late 1971, the response of the *Sunday Independent's* 'Wigmore' was to assert that 'a very substantial number of people in the Republic are bloody well sickened by killings in the North and are no longer very much interested whether the blame can be put on the British Army, the Provos or the Officials. Hostility against them is fairly evenly divided. The only thing that affects people down here is that human beings are being brutally destroyed in the name of something called politics. The North today is a gross obscenity. And to hell with the Faulkners, Maudlings and Paddy Kennedys who keep it that way!' (*Sunday Independent*, 19 December 1971).

'Dog in the Manger'

Even prior to the Troubles, there was a perception that northern nationalists could be abrasive and aggressive. This co-existed with sympathy for their plight and a tendency to see these attitudes as the result of Unionist misrule. Thus, Kerry GAA officials could describe how during a dispute with their Down counterparts the Down men's 'dog in the manger' attitude showed not all bigotry and intolerance in the north came from unionists. Kerry Chairman Dr. Jim Brosnan explained that 'the men of the six counties were brought up in a different atmosphere and, possibly, were more bitter because of the historical background' (Devlin 1969, p. 11). There was also a sense that all citizens of the north enjoyed far greater social security than southerners and were unlikely in reality to want to give this up; 'it isn't just the Protestants who don't want a united Ireland, there's plenty of Catholics too. People living in a Welfare State know what sides their bread's buttered on' (Rudnitzky 1972).

'Our Stricken Brethren'

Certainly, evidence existed to support the assertion that the south did not 'care.' But the years between 1969 and 1972 had also seen unprecedented solidarity with northern nationalists. After August 1969, a series of organizations had come together to aid those affected by the violence. A National Relief Fund Coordinating Committee was established, under the Chairmanship of Fine Gael's Declan Costello. It included Catholic, Protestant and Jewish clergy, trade unionists and business people (*Irish Press*, 21 August 1969). A leading figure was Dublin businessman Dermot Ryan who had visited Belfast and seen 'the extent to which the Catholic population … are obliged to fight to defend their houses and lives.' He personally donated £1000 for relief (*Irish Times*, 18 August 1969). Republicans meanwhile formed the National Solidarity Committee, which included left wingers, cultural activists and trade unionists (*Irish Press*, 19 August 1969). The ITGWU's Michael Mullen was a member of both bodies. During August, Mullen visited his union's branches in Belfast, Derry and Newry. All of the ITGWU's 140 branches were instructed to offer accommodation to refugees if necessary (*Liberty*, September 1969). The union donated £5000 for use by members in the north and southern activists collected another £6500 in the next few months (*Liberty*, December 1969). The Workers Union of Ireland (WUI) (who organized exclusively in the Republic) donated £500 towards northern relief. A total of 800 Cork dockers worked one hour overtime to raise £400 for a fund established by the city's Lord

Mayor, while the Dublin Trades Council collected £1500 for northern relief (*Irish Times*, 18 August 1969; Cody et al. 1986).

Across the state, local councils and community groups responded. Thousands offered to open up homes to their 'stricken brethren' (*Drogheda Independent*, 22 August 1969). Branches of the GAA, the Irish Countrywomen's Association, the National Farmers Association and a myriad of local clubs began to collect money, clothes and food (*Irish Times*, 23 August 1969). Drogheda Trades Council organized factory collections for the Red Cross. In Louth, the singer Tommy Makem housed a woman and her five children. Concerts, cabarets and concerts were organized, Ronnie Drew, Luke Kelly and others performing at Dublin's Gresham Hotel (*Irish Times*, 25 August 1969). The Irish Countrywomen's Association, Muintir na Tire, the Union of Students in Ireland, the National Association of Tenants, several trade unions and Catholic, Protestant and Jewish clergy all joined the relief effort (*Irish Times*, 23 August 1969). £1000 was raised at church gate collections in Limerick, and the city's Archconfraternity established their own relief fund (*Limerick Leader*, 30 August 1969). The *Limerick Leader* reminded its readers that 'not so long ago the starving people of far-flung Biafra cried out for aid. Limerick answered the call. Let us now answer the call from our compatriots north of the Border. Let every organization, every business man, every man, woman and child give- and give until it hurts' (*Limerick Leader*, 18 August 1969). There were donations from young people, groups of workers and residents committees with £2000 later sent to Belfast (*Limerick Leader*, 29 November 1969). A total of 52 boys from Ardoyne arrived on 21 August and stayed for some weeks at the city's Redemptorist Retreat House. They were taken to the Limerick Horse Show and had dinner with Lord Mayor Stevie Coughlan, followed by a sing-song, where they 'showed that they had a great repertoire of rebel songs' (*Limerick Leader*, 25 August 1969). Such receptions were replicated across the state (Carty *Irish Press*, 23 August 1969).

'The Hut Always Felt Cold'

The most obvious sign of the crisis was the refugees themselves. In 1969, those fleeing south were accommodated in military camps with the aid of the Red Cross. During August, the Irish Army looked after 720 people, the majority at Gormanstown Camp in Co. Meath. Smaller numbers were placed in Donegal's Finner camp and in Kildare (*Irish Times*, 15 August 1969). The majority of those who arrived were women and children (*Irish Times*, 15 August 1969). Though the vast majority of the refugees were Catholic, a handful of Protestants also crossed the border (Long 2008). The facilities they found were basic, one woman remembering that 'our living quarters were the army billets. To me they were huts bordering on the likeness of a garden shed … No kitchen, no bathroom, the toilets were public toilets as were the shower facilities on the campsite. There was a caste iron burner in the centre of the hut to provide warmth … we spent our time gathering the turf from a turf stack to keep the burner alight day and night as the hut always felt cold' (Drogheda Community Forum 2004, p. 12). However, there was widespread praise for the soldiers and their efforts (Long 2008). The nearby Butlin's Holiday Camp offered free admission to the refugees, and the Army transported groups of children there daily. By the end of August, 300 people were still in Gormanstown (*Irish Times*, 29 August 1969).

'The Northerns Cried with Relief and Joy'

Not all those who crossed the border were looked after by the Army. Some refugees stayed in parish halls in Donegal, while 100 people stayed at the republican movement's Northern Relief Centre in Dublin's Parnell Square. A number of Belfast refugees were accommodated in Mullingar. This was due to a personal contact between a local woman and friends in Andersonstown. She offered to help accommodate people in Mullingar and helped form a committee (*Westmeath Examiner*, 20 September 1969). A far larger number than expected arrived, due to the escalation of violence after 12 August. They travelled by train to Dundalk and were then brought by car to Mullingar. On arriving 'the Northerns cried with joy and relief to find such a welcome awaiting them. Before long, they had been taken into Mullingar hearts and homes.' Numbering almost 200 they were housed in St. Loman's Hospital and St. Finian's Diocesan College (*Irish Times*, 20 August 1969). One of the Belfast women gave birth to a child while in the town (*Westmeath Examiner*, 30 August 1969). Some of the refugees were taken on a tour of Dublin by the Red Cross, given gifts of toys and footwear and allowed visit Dublin Zoo after closing hours (*Westmeath Examiner*, 6 September 1969). £1300 was collected to provide clothing and food. Contact was maintained after the refugees returned to Belfast with a delegation from Mullingar visiting Andersonstown and donating £481 to the local St. Theresa's Relief Centre. During 1970, there were public meetings in Lake County Hotel where Paddy Devlin, Austin Currie and Marie Drumm spoke. The committee sponsored a 'Childrens' Holiday Scheme,' and over 100 Belfast children were brought to Westmeath. After Bloody Sunday, they collected £209.98 for Derry relief (*Westmeath Examiner*, 18 March 1972). There were many other similar bodies in existence in the early 1970s which maintained a personal connection between local people north and south.

'Give a Kid a Break'

The northern child on a holiday from the 'Troubles' was a feature of southern Irish life in the early 1970s. The fictional Riordan family of RTE's popular drama series were among those who brought children south for Christmas (Sheehan 1987). In early 1972, 500 Belfast children visited Dublin as guests of the Rotary Club and Lady Wicklow (Eleanor Butler). CIE provided transport, and there was lunch in the RDS, and the pantomime 'Robin Hood' at the Gaiety, Maureen Potter and the cast performing for free (*Sunday Press*, 23 January 1972). Similar trips were organized by the 'Children Together' established to 'give holidays to children from the troubled part of this island.' This group was sponsored by Catholic and Protestant clergy, trade unionists (among them the eponymous Michael Mullen) Lady Wicklow, businessman Victor Bewley and academic Augustine Martin (Children Together 1972). Republicans were also involved, 60 internees children being given accommodation in Arklow, Co. Wicklow by Official Sinn Féin in early 1972 (Doyle 1972). By September 1972, there were an estimated 1200 northern children on holidays in the Republic. Those involved in accommodating them included republicans and religious and community groups (*An Phoblacht*, 1 October 1972). The Cork Based Association for Human Rights in the North organized holidays for around 300 people from Belfast during 1972 (*Irish Times*, 12 July 1972). There were also breaks for the elderly, 20 pensioners from Derry being given a weekend in Limerick at the invitation of its Mayor during June 1972 (*Irish Times*, 27 June 1972).

‘They Can’t Offer Comfort’

By mid-1970, it was apparent that the refugee crisis was not over, though the authorities were taken by surprise by the numbers who fled south in July that year. The Army was forced to open camps in Coolmoney, Co. Wicklow and Kilworth, Co. Cork. Soon, 1558 were being officially cared for. The numbers proved difficult to deal with and conditions were rudimentary; ‘they can’t offer comfort at Kilworth … twenty to a hut and no privacy except in the showers and toilets’ (Long 2008, p. 16). Though the Army ran the camps, responsibility for the refugees needs was assumed by the Red Cross. They supplied ‘pocket money at the rate of 10/- (later increased to £1) a week to each adult refugee and 2/6d a week for each child. They also supplied clothing and footwear, washing machines, personal toilet requisites, washing powders, babies’ bottles, baby foods, disinfectants, etc. They rendered first aid, cared for the sick and elderly, washed and dressed children, provided children’s games, organized school buses (at Red Cross expense), brought patients to hospital and met hospital bills. A full-time trained Social Worker was also provided for a time at Red Cross expense. The cost of all transport for refugees, including the cost of free travel vouchers for their return to their homes, was met by the Red Cross’ (*Memorandum for the Government Catering for Northern Refugees*, 1 February 1973).

Internment

By August 1970, most refugees had returned to the north. But the influx in 1970 was only a hint of the much bigger crisis after the introduction of internment. During August 1971, 5409 people officially arrived, forcing the Army to seek aid in accommodation from other state and religious bodies. As well as Gormanstown, Finner, Kilworth, Coolmoney and Kildare, camps at Kilkenny, Mullingar, Waterford and Tralee had to be opened. A further 250 people arrived in Dublin on a special CIE train and were placed overnight in the Old Coombe Hospital (*Irish Times*, 12 August 1971). Another 600 refugees were placed at the Garda training college at Templemore. Gormanstown operated as a transit camp for those moving elsewhere, and its resources were soon overstretched. Army medical staff struggled to cope with a number of injured persons, and Red Cross personnel and local volunteers were reportedly not getting more than one hour of sleep. There were soon numerous complaints about conditions in the camps. The Central Citizens Defence Committee in Belfast expressed disappointment at treatment of refugees, claiming that some were ‘preferring to brave the bullets than the standard of accommodation offered to them’ (*Irish Independent*, 17 August 1971). Labour TD Steven Coughlan ‘accused (the) government of not giving refugees … a fair deal’ and claimed that as they were ‘just thrown together in these primitive camps … its little wonder that many are annoyed and angry at the Government’ (*Irish Times*, 14 August 1971). The Department of Defence was forced to ask for the aid of local authorities, schools and religious bodies. Dublin’s Archbishop McQuaid announced provision for 1600 refugees in 38 convents and other church properties across the state from Leitrim to Waterford (*Irish Times*, 13 August 1971). By 14 August, 6000 people were being housed in Army camps, schools, convents and hospitals (Long 2008). But there was also a huge popular response. In Dublin, the Phibsboro and District Residents Association offered accommodation in private homes to refugees, its chairman stating that ‘this is just a Christian gesture … We feel that they should be able to stay here if they wished, in the surroundings of a private home, which might be more congenial and comfortable-Army camps are Army camps, and are not designed to be like home’ (*Irish Times*, 13 August 1971). The GAA and the Irish Countrywomen’s Association called on their members to help. Trade union and Labour party branches began to hold collections and relief committees were established, or reestablished across the 26 counties (*Irish Times*, 14 August 1971).

‘Did These People Think They Were Going to Butlins?’

In 1971, there had been much initial criticism of the camps. But views were mixed. A group of Belfast women refuted the complaints asserting that ‘we think it is very ungrateful of some people to make so little of the hard work the soldiers are doing for us. By the way, did these people think they were going to Butlins?’ (*Irish Times*, 14 August 1971). But reports also noted how as ‘bus-loads of kids drove away to Dublin’ from Gormanstown they sang ‘No surrender is the warcry of the Belfast brigade’ (*Irish Times*, 19 August 1971). The children played war games and identified with the IRA, as did some of their parents. An *Irish Times* report conveyed a sense of worry when describing how ‘the first sign from the leading coach was a waved fist and a cry to the soldiers lounging around. "Why can't yiz get on up there and give some help? Go on with ye and join our men above." … the door opened and poured onto the gravel drive a trio of women, almost speechless in their anxiety to talk themselves out of tension, quite frightening in their explosion of hate and fear. It burst out of the coach, flooding in strong, high-pitched Belfast accents…' The women were convinced that the violence could not be 'contained in Ballymurphy or even in Belfast. "It'll spread" they kept saying. Yesterday it did spread, briefly and irrationally, with all its paranoia, real and imagined, into the county of Meath. It was not pleasant' (Nowlan 1979, p. 1). Many observers 'noticed among some of the small children (the) stone-throwing habit which, no doubt, was acquired by imitating their elders during the riots. It is evidence of the impression which is being left on the minds of the coming generation and is one more deplorable aspect of this dreadful upheaval' (*Munster Express*, 27 August 1971).

'Deprived of Breadwinners'

Broad support for those interned after August was also apparent. In December 1971, a group of academics, writers and clerics formed the Association of Committees for Aiding Internees Dependents. Among the sponsors were historians Sister Benvenuta (Margaret McCurtain) and Liam de Paor, journalists John Horgan, John Mulcahy and Prionsias MacAonghusa, his wife activist Catherine McGuinness, Fr. Austin Flannery and the Reverend Terence McCaughey. Their aim was to alleviate the distress being felt by 'many northern families' who had been 'deprived … of their breadwinners.' The committee aimed to sponsor individual internee's families at £20 a month. They asked that committees be formed from 'a street, a firm, a factory, a family, a village, an office …' agreeing to sponsor a family. By March 1972, 400 such committees existed across the 26 counties (Sighle Humphries Papers, 1972). An indication of the breadth of sympathy was the fact that a Fine Gael supporter in Dublin's Blackrock 'collected and passed on some £750 from some thirty or forty neighbours here to help the families of half-dozen internees' (G. FitzGerald Papers, 1972). Dublin Trades Council collected £9000 for its internees fund (Cody et al. 1986).

Bloody Sunday

There were dozens of relief funds. After August 1971, the GAA had established a fund which was 'non-political (and) non-sectarian' and under control of county chairmen to ensure it was only used for the relief of distress (*Irish Press*, 3 October 1973). Altogether £60,000 had been raised by February 1972 (*Irish Press*, 8 February 1972). Bloody Sunday saw unprecedented mass mobilization with three days of strikes, demonstrations and protests across the state, culminating in a National Day of Mourning (during which the British Embassy in Dublin was burned down) (Hanley 2017). The *Irish Press* suggested that 'never has the Northern minority's cause received such widespread support in the South' (*Irish Press*, 1 February 1972). In the aftermath, several funds were established for the Derry victims. The ITGWU collected £15,163 from its members (*Liberty*, June 1972). Thousands of workers donated their wages from the Day of Mourning. The miners at Arigna in Co. Leitrim gave £736.95, and their management matched the amount raising £1500 (*Leitrim Observer*, 26 February 1972). £1000 was raised at a Dubliners concert in New Ross. Management and workers from Albatros donated two cheques; the hotel staff worked for free and bar takings were also donated at an event where Ivan Cooper MP was the main speaker (*New Ross Standard*, 18 February 1972). £2500 was collected at church gate collections in the Ardagh and Clonmacnoise Diocese (*Leitrim Observer*, 4 March 1972). But despite the widespread solidarity, there were some, such as a middle-class Dublin housewife who privately wrote that she and her friends 'do not feel what the newspapers yesterday called "the nations anger", only sorrow. We fear for our families and wonder what sort of Ireland our children will grow up in. We fear so much for them that we sometimes feel the North should be left alone to get on with its own destruction' (G. FitzGerald Papers, 1972).

July 1972

However, July 1972 brought the biggest refugee crisis yet *and* the most equivocal response. After the breakdown of the IRA's ceasefire violence escalated and thousands again fled south. By then, the Irish Army were no longer directly involved in accommodating refugees. Now local authorities and regional health boards were given the prime responsibility for dealing with the almost 10,000 people who arrived. By mid-July, there were 4000 refugees in Dublin (*Irish Times*, 12 July 1972).

There were 2500 people housed in Counties Cork, Kerry and Waterford and 1800 in Cork city itself (*Irish Times*, 17 July 1972). Others were placed in Donegal, Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim and Co. Limerick (*Irish Times*, 15 July 1972). As in 1971, there was a sympathetic public response. The Catholic Youth Council provided 300 volunteers to help refugees in Dublin (*Irish Times*, 19 July 1972). There was a 'tremendous response' to an appeal from the Women's Emergency Volunteer Services for clothes for women and children (*Irish Times*, 21 July 1972). In New Ross, Co. Wexford, 49 people, mostly children, from the Old Park area of Belfast were accommodated at St. Mary's School by the Mercy Nuns. The local public were 'magnificent … numerous people called to bring them on a day's outing' (*Irish Times*, 28 July 1972).

No Need to Leave Belfast?

However, as refugees arrived at Dublin's Connolly Station that July, one onlooker was quoted as saying that they had 'no need to leave Belfast, not one of them' (Vaughan 1972, p. 6). During that summer, many people asserted that the refugees were coming for a free 'holiday.' The *Evening Herald* reported how one woman said 'that her husband was about to pay the expenses of a holiday for herself and the children "but when the people came around rapping on the door asking if we would like to go to the South we came"' (*Irish Times*, 4 August 1972). By 1972, a system was in place whereby 'people arriving at Royal Victoria Railway Station (sic) in Belfast, and declaring themselves to be refugees, are issued with free rail travel vouchers to Dublin by the Railway authorities, the cost being recouped later from the Irish Red Cross Society.' The official view was that 'all and sundry can take advantage of this and many who have no good reason to leave their homes inevitably do.' Privately civil servants considered that in 1972, 'the exodus appeared to have been organised by different people from the various Catholic areas of Belfast.' There were reports from across the state that the refugees understood that their 'holiday' was being paid for by money collected for them (Memorandum, 1 February 1973).

'We Don't Take Cheek from Anyone'

In August, 32 young refugees from the Falls Road returned to Dublin's Busarus and spent the night there rather than accept accommodation in a former sanatorium in Newcastle, Co. Wicklow. The children were reportedly disappointed as they had been 'promised a holiday' and were eventually sent to another centre in Limerick instead (*Irish Times*, 5 August 1972). At the RDS in Dublin, 30 women and children from Ballymurphy staged a sit-down protest after they were told they were to be split up and sent to separate locations. The women sang 'Take it Down from the Mast' and 'We Shall Overcome,' and there were 'dark murmurings about hijacking a bus, going to O'Connell Street to stage a protest, or to Connolly Station to catch the next train back to Belfast.' One woman suggested that 'it was just this one high-up person came and told us if we didn't go on the bus, we could go wherever the hell we liked … we don't take cheek from anyone.' They were given accommodation with the Jesuits at Rathfarnham Castle (Grogan 1972). Another group from Belfast reportedly returned home complaining that the living conditions in a former sanatorium outside Portlaoise were 'atrocious, dirty and mean.' The women claimed that 'we had one toilet between us, the sinks were filthy, and the food was tasteless. We took our children into Portlaoise everyday to eat in the cafes there.' A spokesman dismissed the claims as 'ridiculous' while George Crean of National Refugee Control suggested that 'the refugees organised this episode to get themselves a fortnight in Dublin.' One aid worker explained that 'we are treating the Belfast people as refugees in a war-time situation. Given that definition, we provide them with emergency accommodation, and do the best we can to see that they have a nice time as well. Unfortunately, from the Belfast end, our offer is seen as an invitation for a holiday away from the troubles, and they come down expecting just that. Sometimes, it must be admitted, conditions are not exactly like Butlins' (*Irish Times*, 28 July 1972).

'Expectant and Anxious'

The arrival of northerners was increasingly seen as placing burdens on local resources. In Donegal 'Derry evacuees are coming to Buncrana in hundreds, sampling the goodness of local people, but also imposing strains on a domestic communal life that is not geared for this sort of change. Buncrana's streets today are full of children from Derry, away from shooting and bombing noises, but being brought nearer to the prevailing code of civil discipline which Buncrana is determined to maintain … Buncrana is expectant and anxious because at any moment, supposing things got really bad in Derry, there could be an invasion (or maybe it might be better called an evacuation) that would overwhelm local resources' (*Irish Times*, 7 August 1972). The young northerners were often perceived as cheeky or bold. There was a 'mini-riot' in Kilworth camp when children were denied sweets and many contemporary references to stone-throwing as a pastime of the young (Long 2008). Their street-wise demeanour could raise smiles as when an eight year old refused to throw away a cigarette so the Sister told him "go down there and report to the Reverand Mother". Five minutes later the same nun caught the same boy returning, smoking the cigarette. "I thought I told you to see the Reverand Mother" she said. "I did" said the youngster, 'She lit it' (*This Week*, 17 August 1972). Less humorously, the soldiers involved in relief work were occasionally referred to as 'Free State Bastards' (Long 2008, p. 47). Tony Meade in *The Kerryman* cautioned that 'it is easy to say that many of the refugee families are on holiday, particularly if their accents are different, perhaps loud, and if they tend to do the things which most of us do anyway but which we feel the refugee should not do. People cannot have long faces all the time, they cannot be conscious of their miserable lot all the time' (Meade 1972). But northerners had also noted resentment feeling that 'they look at you on O'Connell Street as if you had horns' (O'Callaghan 1972, p. 8).

'Demanding and Ungrateful'

July 1972 marked a sea change in how refugees were seen at official level. A report drawn regarding future policy argued that 'the refugees that came down from the North in appreciable numbers in 1969, 1970, and again in 1971 … did so largely through fear of their personal safety. Most of them came on the spur of the moment and in great haste, bringing with them only what they wore.' In contrast, in 1972 it was claimed many 'made preparations in advance for a holiday in the South' and 'most of them had suitcases' while some children brought 'swimming gear, tennis racquets (and) fishing rods.' The report asserted that 'refugees are not always just frightened people who are thankful for the assistance being given them. Some of them can be very demanding and ungrateful, even obstreperous and fractious- as well as, particularly in the case of teenage boys, destructive.' The report also claimed that some of the refugees would be 'misfits no matter where they were.' However, 'irrespective of their attitudes and behaviour, and their motivation coming South, Government policy has been interpreted – and continues to be interpreted – as requiring that they should all be accepted without question and treated to the best of our ability as groups of Irish people in need of help at a very difficult time.' However, the government required goodwill from local bodies to facilitate the refugees and as the alleged '"holiday" motivation' was 'widely known and commented on throughout the country … after the 1972 refugee situation had passed there were indications from some of the religious communities of an intention not to become involved in future' (Memorandum, 1 February 1973).

'Northern Bastards'

The mixed reception that the refugees received came as northerners were increasingly associated with disorder in the public mind. There were a number of serious confrontations in border towns that year. There were violent clashes in Lifford, which were blamed on protesters from Strabane (*Donegal Democrat*, 10 November 1972). In Buncrana during October, 'hundreds of Northern Ireland people rioted,' and the town's Garda station was attacked (*Irish Times*, 16 October 1972). Ballybofey in December saw clashes between Gardaí and revellers after a dance. A total of 400 people surrounded the Garda Barracks, and all its windows were smashed. Reports suggested that 'an element of the mob were from Northern Ireland' and that 'at least a dozen locals assisted the Gardai in dispersing the crowd' (*Donegal News*, 31 March 1973, p. 1). Some months later youths 'from across the border in Clady' attacked a Garda squad car near Cloughfin (*Donegal News*, 7 July 1973). Similar incidents occurred in later years (*Donegal News*, 17 October 1975). In Dublin during June 1973, there were serious clashes between inner-city youth and republicans returning north from the Provisional Bodenstown commemoration. After scuffles broke out in O'Connell Street, the trouble escalated with 'a three-way struggle between Northerners, Gardai and Dublin skinheads' developing (*Irish Independent*, 11 June 1973). Shop and bus windows were smashed, a car with northern registration was hijacked at knifepoint, and Gardaí reinforcements in riot gear had to be deployed (*Irish Times*, 11 June 1973). There were accusations from republicans that the Gardaí 'stood idly by,' while the republicans were attacked and had blamed 'Northern bastards' for the trouble (Breathnach 1973). A week later northern members of Official Sinn Féin were attacked by youths in Drogheda on the way back from their Bodenstown event (*Irish Independent*, 18 June 1973). In 1974, members of the Officials again clashed with youths in Dublin's Gardiner Street following Bodenstown. There were nine arrests, six northerners and three locals (*Irish Press*, 24 June 1974). 'Northern youths' were also blamed for a riot at the Butlin's holiday camp at Mosney in July 1973. A total of 200 people left the camp after the trouble (*Irish Independent*, 10 July 1973). The camp responded by cancelling a holiday for 200 Belfast children because of 'trouble caused by groups from the North in the past' (*Irish Press*, 30 July 1973). A sense that northerners brought conflict was evident in the recollections of one Galway-based Garda that 'the only time the troubles became … I won't say an *issue*, but even became a topic of conversation, was invariably in the summer months, Salthill would be … very well attended by people from Northern Ireland and invariably there would be trouble … it did seem to follow that when we got a large contingency of people from Northern Ireland, that you had troubles on the streets at night, and that, that was a fact of life' (Joe Lynch transcript, INCORE). What type of Northerner made a difference however. A report from 1976 described how 'a young Garda, standing on a corner warily eyeing traffic on Buncrana's Main Street' described how 'You can talk to a Derryman. If you can get a word in edgeways, that is. Keep talking and he'll go away. You might have sore ears listening to him, but you won't have a riot squad out on the street fighting with him. Now, a Belfast man …' (Gill 1976, p. 9). Indeed, young Belfast woman Bridget Cowan felt that her accent alone could 'put people's backs up' recounting how in Donegal she and her friends were told 'You can't do what you want down here. You're not in the back streets of Belfast now.' Such attitudes meant that she felt that 'I think a Tartan and myself would be on the same ground here. We'd both be laughing at their la-di-da accents and giggling and nudging one another' (Murphy 1974, p. 12).

'The Troubles Up Here Have Rubbed Off to Some Extent'

Though the GAA prided itself on the lack of crowd trouble at games, the 1970s saw a number of such incidents. One involved Derry fans at a game against Kerry in April 1973, when missiles were thrown at Gardaí and the referee and officials attacked. In the *Irish Times*, Paddy Downey suggested that 'in an effort to understand the behaviour of a section of the Derry following, but not to condone it … perhaps this thought is worth consideration: a people who have been so long striving for justice in other spheres may have been too quick to imagine that injustice was again their lot … in a place where they expected the very opposite, even in such a transient and relatively unimportant event as a game of football' (Downey 1973, p. 3). In 1978, there were clashes between Dublin and Down fans. The GAA's Seán Ó Sochain explained that 'we have had only rare occasions when such incidents … have occurred. Unfortunately, they have always been associated with occasions when teams from the North of Ireland have played here. I suppose it is reasonable to presume that because of the troubles in the North, actions of this type have come to the fore.' T. P. Murphy of the Down GAA countered that 'this type of behaviour at sporting events is a global problem, not just a problem in Ireland, North or South … Perhaps the troubles up here have rubbed off to some extent, but I believe it is a global problem' (*Irish Press*, 22 August 1978).

'Runners'

1972 was the last year northern refugees were a public phenomenon, though there were still 16 people being housed in Kilworth camp as late as 1974 (Pollack 1974).

But people continued to leave the north and settle in the Republic (Ralaheen Ltd 2005). In 1971, there were 26,183 people born in the six counties residing in the Republic; by 1981, this had risen to 40,557. The number was highest in Leinster, particularly Dublin, Meath and Louth, and in the three Ulster counties (Long 2008). There were considerable numbers of northerners in Dublin, but they were relatively diverse and did not form a distinctive community in the city. Many simply avoided contact with fellow Northerners and while 'there was an attitude that everyone from the North was a Republican' that was often far from the case (Some indeed left the north to escape the IRA) (Ralaheen Ltd 2005). But in some areas, 'specific local authority housing estates in or around Dundalk, Cavan town, and Monaghan town' became associated with northerners, so-called Little Belfasts (Ralaheen Ltd 2005).

'Never Feeling You Belong'

The Muirhevnamor housing estate in Dundalk was an area of substantial settlement, and the town itself became strongly associated with the troubles. A BBC documentary in 1972 solidified its reputation as 'El Paso,' much to the chagrin of many locals (MacGiolla Cearr 1972). There was some resentment of the number of republicans residing in the area, with 'fellows being in local pubs on the run since 1969.' The republican leaderships in Dublin received many complaints about the behaviour of some of their members in the town (MacGiolla Cearr 1972). During 1972, local judges commented on the number of cases involving northern youths before the courts (*Hibernia*, 22 September 1972). After a serious riot in September 1972, a local priest asserted that 'they are fooling themselves if they think goodwill is unqualified or that having welcomed many hundreds of refugees from Northern terror, the people of Dundalk will allow their town to be turned by young thugs into a town of terror' (*Irish Times*, 23 September 1972, p. 9). The *Dundalk Democrat* was in no doubt who had caused the trouble blaming 'the "runners" from outside areas, who have duped a number of susceptible teenagers and hotheads into committing acts more likely associated with the less civilised tribes of Africa, and (who) then disappear into the night when confronted with a few determined men' (*Dundalk Democrat*, 23 September 1972, p. 4). Those who moved to the town noticed that sentiment. One woman remembered 'never feeling you belong … local people resented people from the North being housed' (Ralaheen Ltd 2005, p. 69). One man recalled that 'people from the North were not immediately welcomed … (they) tended to socialise together around a number of bars/pubs frequented by northerners … I would hear through my work this part of the town being referred to as Provo Land.' One republican accepted that 'there were tensions, particularly in the early years … wild stories were spread … but likewise I have seen Northerners not afraid to misuse this fear and act in a bullying fashion' (Ralaheen Ltd 2005, p. 73). There was also settlement in Drogheda and as far south as Shannon, Co. Clare, where the Cronan estate was sometimes called 'little Belfast.'

Christina Bennett moved there from Belfast as a child; 'there was a lot of work to be got in this new town and lots of houses to rent. It was like moving to a foreign country. TV didn't start until about 4 p.m. and ended at 11 p.m. with the National Anthem … My Mum was beside herself with us—we wouldn't drink the milk as it was different. We wouldn't eat a lot of the food as it was different' (*Clare People*, 12 August 2016).

'A Very Argumentative Race'

A preception of Northerners as gripped by fanaticism was commonplace. Councillor JJ Quigley told Carrickmacross Urban District Council in 1972 that 'the people of the South … could not know or understand the feelings of the Catholics or Protestants in the North, and the politicians in the South should keep out if it. No one could understand the bigotry which was in the North.' Indeed Quigley was 'from the North himself and he could not understand it' (*Northern Standard*, 4 February 1972). In the aftermath of the 1974 Dublin bombings, a Dublin man wrote to the Taoiseach to demand that northerners resident in the Republic be forced to carry an identity card. He argued that 'it is apparent to most people here that the people from the six counties are a very argumentative race and very difficult to please unlike people from the West of Ireland or other parts of the country … If you had a referendum in the Republic in the morning to see if we wanted (them) as part of our country it would be a hundred to one against' (J. Malone to L. Cosgrave, 18 May 1974). These views seemed to be mirrored at official level. The British Ambassador claimed that Minister for Foreign Affairs Patrick Hillery had told him in 1972 that 'while the Irish were very emotional, the people in the South, on the whole and with exceptions, were not given to violence and murder. It was the men from the North who were cruel and violent and it was noteworthy that many of the recent bank raids and other crimes of violence in the South have been committed by northerners' (John Peck to W. K. K. White, 2 March 1972). Des O'Malley publicly complained that the task of the government in maintaining order was 'not made easier by the influx of dozens of gunmen from the North, whose "patriotism" expresses itself in armed robberies' as well as those who 'instigate civil strife and revolution down here as well as in the North' (*Irish Times*, 1 August 1972, p. 7).

‘DOOMSDAY’?

During 1975, the Coalition government became very worried at the prospect of a British withdrawal and subsequent ‘Doomsday’ scenario (Fitzgerald 2006). One of their concerns was a major refugee influx. A report by a senior Garda argued that while ‘refugees in the normal way are usually law abiding citizens fleeing from advancing enemy forces (and) are usually happy to be provided with shelter and food supplies on friendly soil until they return home’ a ‘good percentage of those we would be likely to receive from Northern Ireland would not fall into this category.’ He asserted that some of those who had come south between 1970–72 were ‘demanding, indisciplined and destructive, indicating that they felt entitled to the best treatment here while, at the same time showing scant regard for property placed at their disposal.’ Problems of anti-social behaviour would accompany any large influx but more problematically ‘many of these people will be bitter towards the Northern Ireland Establishment, Gt. Britain and possibly the Republic, depending on the stand taken by the latter in their defence.’ The refugees were unlikely to appreciate the problems that the state might face in defending nationalists and therefore would be sympathetic to more radical alternatives and so ‘in such conditions the seeds for aggressive activity flourish and a serious threat to the security and stability of the host country itself could be posed.’ Comparing the situation to that of the Palestinians in Lebanon, the officer noted that ‘small numbers from Belfast or Derry could create much greater problems than larger numbers from rural areas’ and warned that ‘Dundalk, Monaghan, Buncrana, etc. could well become shades of the Bogside, Ballymurphy or the Falls if there was no refugee dispersal policy’ (Department of Justice, 1 August 1975). In the same period, Conor Cruise O’Brien had explicitly ruled out any such intervention in 1974 warning that the arrival of huge numbers of refugees, including some who were ‘tough, violent and virtually ungovernable,’ could spell disaster for the south (*Hibernia*, 27 September 1974, p. 3).

Initial southern attitudes to northern nationalists were diverse and complex. A basic sympathy informed most of the public responses during the early stages of the conflict. While refugees were seen primarily as victims, they seem to have been welcomed. However, when they complained or appeared, ungrateful attitudes could change very quickly and anything other than gratitude and passivity was evidence of deviancy. The official view that many of those who arrived in July 1972 were holiday makers is remarkable given the situation in Belfast (where the majority of them had come from). July 1972 was the worst month of the worst year of the Troubles and saw almost 100 people killed. Lenadoon, where at least 500 of the refugees came from, was the site of breakdown of the IRA ceasefire and saw intense fighting (*Irish Times*, 28 July 1972). In Ballymurphy, from which hundreds fled, several people, including children, were killed by the British Army. Sectarian assassinations escalated and that month also saw the carnage of Bloody Friday. The tone of the official reports does not convey this sense of terror. Nor is it hard to discern an element of judgement on the people seeking help (80% of whom were children) and their behaviour. By and large those who came in 1972 were from urban working class backgrounds, while the officialdom they dealt with usually were not. By 1972, there was also a growing distancing from the violence of the north which contributed to a hardening of attitudes. As the south feared violence spilling across the border during the 1970s, it increasingly saw all of the north's population as complicit in the conflict in some way. This too intensified misunderstandings and prejudices which had in fact existed for decades.

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CHAPTER 6

'E pluribus unum; The Elusiveness of a Singular Community Identity'

Malachi O'Doherty

It is easy to assume that there is a 'Catholic' community in Northern Ireland, which is even more coherent than the community that is designated as 'Protestant', since it centres on one church. Most politics in the region works on the assumption that two communities live side by side and are at odds with each other. These communities now vote almost uniformly within themselves for Sinn Féin, a Republican party, or the DUP, which is Unionist. Walls still divide many of their residential areas.

When I am asked to explain Northern Ireland to outsiders, I set them this imaginative exercise. Walk in any direction from the centre of the city, for one mile other than straight into the sea. Now stop and look around you. You are in a street made up of red brick terrace houses. You have never been in that street before and you know nothing about the people who live there, but for one simple fact; nearly all of them will be either Protestant or Catholic. Nearly all of them will identify as either Unionist or Nationalist. That is the starkness of division in Northern Ireland. Further, you will not have much difficulty ascertaining which of the two communities you have arrived in for there will be murals or flags

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M. O'Doherty (✉)
Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK
e-mail: malachi@malachiodoherty.com

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to guide you. From this exercise, you may conclude wrongly, however, that these communities are homogenous and that for both of them, identity is the greatest concern. It is not so simple.

Identity recedes and recurs as a preoccupation. Indeed, this happens sometimes so dramatically that the danger of future stimuli to division should probably be monitored. One such trigger was the outbreak of violence after Civil Rights protests in the late 1960s. In particular, there was one horrific episode which came to define the whole period and to justify re-armament by paramilitaries. This was the period of rioting in Belfast from August 13 to 15th 1969. The Catholic community remembers this as a pogrom, a sectarian attack launched by the police and loyalists against the lower Falls Road area. Actually, it was people from the Catholic community who started the rioting and much of the chaos that followed from it arose from the inability of the police to cope. The Scarman Report presented the course of events in detail but communities have their own ways of recording history and the pogrom myth thrives still. Yet, while 1969 is remembered as the year of the trauma, which produced the Troubles, awakened massive insecurity in the Catholic community and revived the IRA, the culture of that community was massively different then from how it is now.

Catholic religious culture had already begun to change. Most Catholics were still religiously observant, that is attending mass every Sunday, abstaining from meat on Fridays, and participating in other routine sacraments, like Confession. Most Catholic schoolchildren were taught by religious orders like the Christian Brothers and the Dominican nuns. A Catholic teenager of today, projected back into that culture, would be appalled by its strictures, not least by the corporal punishment in schools, the sexism and racism in popular humour and the ubiquity of reverence for the clergy. Indeed such a teenager would be amazed to see so many priests, nuns, and religious brothers passing on the streets. That teenager now might wear a fashionable bangle with reproductions of holy icons on it. The Catholic teenager of the 1960s would be able to name all those saints. Paradoxically, a Catholic brought forward from that time to now would easily mistake the modern Catholic for a Protestant. In short, the changes are enormous.

Far fewer people go to mass at all; about half of Catholics go once a month. My own experience of going to funerals and weddings almost makes me an average Catholic though I reject the church's theology and wish to deny it any direct role in my life or death. Many of those who do still conscientiously practise their religion go to mass on a Saturday evening rather than on a Sunday morning. This has been accepted as legitimate observance of the Sabbath since the 1970s and allows the religious to have a lie-in on a Sunday morning.

A side effect of that change has been the disappearance of the suit of clothes called the Sunday Best. In the 1960s, a young man or woman had finer clothes set aside for church and other formal occasions like job interviews. These were of a conservative look. The Catholic who goes to mass on a Saturday night is more likely to be dressed for the pub or club afterwards. The religious orders have virtually died out. Far smaller numbers of Catholic men want to be priests; in fact, practically none at all. The priest's authority in a parish is minimal.

I recall a civil rights gathering in Casement Park on a Sunday, which was drawn to a close so that those who had missed mass that morning might be able to go to the evening mass. Even then, some scoffed at this announcement. And, worst of all, many of the toxic prejudices against the Catholic church, the evangelical propaganda that said priests were child molesters, have been vindicated beyond even the honest expectations of the those who purveyed those ideas.

This secularising trend within the Catholic community was started by the young. We usually expect attitudes to moderate with age, so that the young radical leftie becomes a Labour voter in his or her 30s when the burden of raising a family and paying a mortgage cautions moderation. This seems not to have happened to the generation who rejected Catholicism in their teens. Some felt they had to play the part for getting children into Catholic schools, but the determination to think independently endured.

Nor does it seem a feature of the secularising trend that people mature to reflect on things more carefully and reject religion in later life. The generational and gender profile of congregations suggests that the decision to leave is still taken in youth. Those who retain belief in their youth continue going to church in later years. Even they tend to be 'a la carte' Catholics rather than full literal believers. It is notable that women seem more inclined than men to go to church.

The starting point for the decline of religion originated with a younger generation, first giving up on church attendance around the mid-1960s. The waning of religious commitment among the young may have been facilitated by free education, which they received after 1947, enabling them to explore a wider range of ideas. It may also have been encouraged by the sixties revolution which celebrated sexual freedoms and freedom of expression. For some, the stimulus was the Second Vatican Council and the way in which its promise of greater freedoms was quickly qualified. The council had seemed to endorse the 'informed conscience'. Then the 'Humanae Vitae' encyclical confirmed a ban on artificial contraception and argued for chastity in marriage. The shock created by the frustration of rising expectations may have nudged people further away from the church.

I have spoken to former nuns who left their orders then because they had become more liberal. And the ban on contraception simply made untenable, for many women, an honest participation in the sacrament of Confession, essential to participation in the Eucharist. Losing women was a greater calamity for the church, since they were more inclined to be religious in the first place, and more likely to be the family members who would urge others out to mass. Therefore, the most radical change in the Catholic community is that it is no longer as Catholic as it once was. The question then is whether there is another way of being Catholic without actually adhering to Catholic teaching or participating in Catholic sacraments. And maybe there is.

The old maxim 'once a Catholic, always a Catholic' expressed a widely held presumption within the Catholic community that those who were imbued with Catholic values in their youth would be influenced by church tenets throughout their lives. But that assumption only allows us to define one generation of ex Catholics as still being Catholic in spirit. Successive generations have a more diluted legacy of early acculturation or indoctrination.

We can talk of the cultural Catholic as someone who knows the rites and the hymns, has some nostalgic affection for a Catholic past, deploys some of its imagery in writing or speech, does not go to mass but expects to have a Catholic funeral to keep the family happy. In these respects, Seamus Heaney was a cultural Catholic, I suppose. In effect, the cultural Catholic retains the traces of a religious induction and passes them on to another generation, if at all, as tradition rather than faith. Fifty years into a secularising trend, it has to be wondered if the word Catholic has any use at all in labelling the community, which carries that name. It does not define the parameters of that community or maybe even the beliefs of half of those who are presumed to belong to it.

We say we know whom we are talking about when we use the term. Yet, it includes avowed atheists, gays (whom the church regards officially as 'intrinsically disordered'), cultural Catholics, people who go to mass every day and people who like a choir or enjoy midnight Mass at Christmas, but never concern themselves with religious questions.

What is called the Catholic Community is also commonly called the Nationalist community. The presumption there is that Irish nationalism maps onto those who were baptised Catholic, or whose parents were. And roughly it does. Counting them and polling among them can produce useful predictions of electoral outcomes, for instance. Yet to apply that presumption to an individual would be sectarian stereotyping. The mapping is complicated further in modern Ireland, by the fact that many churchgoing Catholics today are first or second generation immigrants with no inherited sense that Ireland should be a single nation. Yet when politicians and journalists speak of the Nationalist community or the Catholic community, we all know what they mean. To impose on them the need to qualify these terms every time they use them, would simply clutter the discussion. Most people who once were Catholics, or whose parents were, are content to be labelled Nationalists, even though the very concept of Irish nationhood has evolved and changed.

For Eamon De Valera, one of the founders of the Irish state, Ireland was 'not only Catholic but Gaelic as well, not only Gaelic but Catholic as well.' That definition is obsolete now. The disputed status of the Irish language has been at the core of political deadlock, and it is presumed to have iconic importance for most Nationalists, but few actually speak it or would defer to the old maxim *Gan Teanga, Gan Tir* (Without your own language you are not a nation). So two strands of the core of Irishness as understood by the revolutionaries who fought for an Irish republic are now invalid as accurate definers of 'Irishness'. What is left is the third strand, though it is fraying, and that is the desire for Irish unity. That also has changed.

For some, their Nationalism is interwoven with Socialism. Some may even still cling to De Valera's idea of an Ireland that is Gaelic, Catholic and holier than the rest of the world. In the context of Brexit and its rejection by Nationalists and many others, the attraction of Irish unity is that it may be a means towards remaining part of an international community, the very opposite of what De Valera wanted. He hoped to create an Ireland protected from the evils of modern industrialisation. He had not just a religious vision and a linguistic one but an economic one, of an Ireland cut off from the world and self-sufficient. That idea is also obsolete.

Survey results suggest that people of this presumed Nationalist community would not all vote for a united Ireland in an imminent poll. Their nationalism seems to vary—from some who want Ireland united immediately, regarding the partition of the island as wholly illegitimate—through some who would like it united someday, but not yet. Finally, there are some who really don't much care whether it is ever united. These all, or mostly, feel themselves to be Irish rather than British but cannot be lumped together as uniformly Nationalist, any more than they are uniformly Catholic.

To avoid the difficulty of assuming uniform religious and political attitudes among them, the people of this community might simply be called the Irish in Northern Ireland, but many of them base their politics on an argument that people in the Protestant community are as Irish as they are, should they only realise it. In addition, indeed, many Protestant/British people in Northern Ireland are happy to be at least occasionally Irish, say when supporting the rugby team.

Many Ulster Protestants are Irish by ancestry. They are all legally entitled to identify as Irish if they wish, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Moreover, they did not all descend from the Scottish planters imported in the seventeenth century. Two communities in close proximity will always experience some osmosis. So the problem is not resolved by use of the designation 'Irish' for those who are commonly called the Catholic or Nationalist community, for we cannot use it exclusively in this respect.

In other communities of ethnicity or sexual orientation, the terminology of attribution is changing and it would be helpful if these terms Nationalist and Catholic could give way to more appropriate labels since they are no longer accurate.

There are things, which matter, to those who identify as British in Northern Ireland. And these do not inspire or intrigue most of those who identify as Irish. There is little actual reverence for the British monarchy among them, though many are indeed fascinated by the royal family, and are even respectful. Fewer from this community wish to join the police service. St. Patrick's Day matters to them, perhaps increasingly so. Undoubtedly, many of them are still Catholic, though not in the way their grandparents were, and most of them want a united Ireland but not all want the *same kind* of united Ireland.

The research of the 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey'[1] for the last twenty years finds diverse trends of belief within this community. In its researches on attitudes to women, race, sexuality and other concerns, it has routinely provided contrasts between beliefs among Catholics and Protestants. Catholics (in 1998) were found to be more likely than Protestants to say that people without children live empty lives. They were also more likely to say it was permissible for a couple to live together before marriage, a belief that is in clear contradiction of Catholic teaching. Two years later, they were found to be more likely than Protestants to think that contraception is wrong.

More Catholics than Protestants (in 1999) were in favour of the teaching of religion in secondary schools. In the 2000 survey, more Catholics thought the world was getting better. More Catholics than Protestants also thought equality should be a priority for government.

In 2002, more Catholics than Protestants thought of themselves as European. More of them thought that a female politician was more likely to be able to compromise.

The 2014 survey addressed cross-community relations and found that Catholics were more likely to say that relations were improving while Protestants were more likely to say that they were deteriorating or had stayed the same. A year later, both communities were seeing improvement.

Moreover, opinions differed within the two communities about gay rights and ethnic minorities. Twice as many Catholics as Protestants said that a member of their own family was gay or lesbian. Catholics were more likely than Protestants to say that they would accept a Muslim as a work colleague. They were less likely than Protestants to believe that migrants came here specifically to access welfare benefits.

Yet one might ask if this liberalism and the concomitant conservatism in the British community are inherent, perhaps derived from the receding religious culture, or whether it is cultivated as a mark of distinction from the other.

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[1] Set up by Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster and run every year, the survey aims to put on record the attitudes, values and beliefs of the people in Northern Ireland on a wide range of social policy issues.

One of the features of De Valera's insular Catholic Gaelic conception of Irishness was its racism, including anti-Semitism. Catholic Ireland had its own version of the 'White Man's Burden', a desire to culturally colonise developing countries and spread Catholicism. However, Northern Catholics like to identify as non-racist now.

A Lithuanian friend tells me the following story. She was harassed in her home in Belfast, in a Protestant area, after a football match between Northern Ireland and Poland. She moved to a Catholic area for safety. One morning, coming out of her home, she was approached by a man and prepared herself for more abuse. The man reached out his hand to her and welcomed her to the area.

Some of the liberalism and generosity of 'Catholics' may be expressed as a way of asserting themselves to be different from 'Protestants'. Paradoxically, this suggests that there is an element of sectarianism in their antiracism. Similarly, the Protestant lack of interest in equality legislation may be reactive, if they fear that Nationalists are just using equality demands to achieve dominance.

There are other precedents for the communities dividing external issues between them, Israeli flags flown in Protestant areas, Palestinian flags flown in Catholic areas. The tendencies revealed by the Life and Times Surveys suggest that Catholics want to be generous while Protestants are more concerned to be fair.

On reflection then, what are we to call these people when Catholic and Nationalist fail as labels? Where other groupings have found that the terminology in which they are named or discussed does not apply or appeal, they have adopted the traditional pejorative terms used against them and deployed them with pride in order to neutralise them.

Nationalists and Catholics do not describe their community with the same determined focus of the abusive terms, 'Fenian', 'Papist', 'Taig'. Two of these, Fenian and Papist, have already lost their power to encompass the whole community. 'Taig', is an expression of contempt for people of Irish Catholic extraction. It has the merit of leaving no doubt about who is being referred to, whilst not actually attributing any belief system to them. A movement from within that community to claim it for themselves would echo what was done when African Americans took on the word Black and homosexuals adopted the word gay (and even now the word Queer). Glasgow Celtic supporters have long called themselves 'Tims'. It was the Irish form of that name, Tadgh, which was reworked into Taig.

When people presume to know something about my thinking simply by referring to my ethnicity, I think I would prefer they used the word 'Taig', rather than 'Catholic' or 'Nationalist'. For their presumption does me an injustice, and they may as well be plain, direct and unequivocal about that.

So, to conclude: attitudes within the community which is called Nationalist and Catholic are diversifying and these labels are losing their validity. This fragmenting of belief in that community was reflected in the 2016 Assembly election results, when both Nationalist parties lost ground. That lost ground was recovered in the deadlock election of March 2017 and we have yet to see whether the recovery is solid or will dissipate when the issues in dispute are resolved.

Big political parties, dependent on community coherence, see their advantage in promoting sectarian division and a focus on divisive issues. Nationalism is not uniformly asserted by the people of the so-called Nationalist community but one of the lessons of nationalist history is that the background context can change in ways which favour a nationalist revival. This observation has often been summed up as: 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity'.

Therefore, we are living through the greatest change within the broader background context in a generation; 'Brexit'. So, just as the Troubles period was fired up by the trauma of August 1969, it is possible that events could again sharpen the sense of identity of Nationalists in Northern Ireland.

CHAPTER 7

The Story of Catholic Schools in Northern Ireland: Past, Present and Possible Future

Tony Gallagher

If the 1798 Rebellion highlighted the problem of trying to govern a country in which a Catholic majority was ruled by a Protestant minority, the 1801 Act of Union was an attempt to address this by shifting parliamentary representation to London. Even if the Catholics were then given the vote, they would always be a controllable minority in Westminster. Or rather, that was the plan. Even though a commitment to extending the franchise to Catholics had been part of the deal underpinning the Act of Union, George III refused to support it on the grounds that it would violate his coronation oath to defend the Protestant faith. The consequence was the rise of Daniel O'Connell and agitation for Catholic Emancipation, followed by a demand for Home Rule for Ireland. This also contributed to the increasingly sectarian character of Irish politics: the Irish Catholic interest gravitated around Home rule and nationalism, while the Protestant minority on the island gravitated towards Unionism, or defence of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland. Nowhere was this more acute than in the north-east of the country where a local

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T. Gallagher (✉)
Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland
e-mail: am.gallagher@qub.ac.uk

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Protestant majority saw no emotional, cultural or religious affinity with Irish nationalism. The fact that this region was industrialized meant that all economic logic pointed to maintaining the Union to keep open access to the global markets provided by the British Empire.

In 1836, the administrators in Dublin Castle saw value in developing a National System of schools. Such education as existed was largely controlled by the Churches, but Dublin Castle saw a possibility that the new National System of schools could act as an integrating force to bring the country together. When invitations were issued for applications to establish schools in the National System, it was declared that preference would be given to applications involving joint bids by representatives of different denominations.

Another rule was that religious instruction was to be provided outside normal school hours and clergy from any denomination would have the right to access any school, to provide religious instruction to children of their faith community. These aspirations were to be short-lived: Presbyterians in the North objected to the possibility that Catholic priests could enter their schools and sought the right to organize schools for Presbyterians alone. The Catholic Church was happy to follow suit and so very quickly, the National Schools took on a decidedly denominational character. Inter alia, Catholic influence on education increased over time, largely due to the sheer weight of numbers (Akenson 1970).

The Home Rule crisis in the early twentieth century was to change everything and even though nationalists protested against the idea of partitioning the country, some form of partition had effectively been conceded in the negotiations before the outbreak of the First World War. As the country moved towards partition, it was equally clear that one of the great areas of concern for the Catholic Church lay in the treatment of their schools in a new Northern Ireland, governed by Unionists (Phoenix 1994). When partition did occur, many nationalists supported a strategy of 'non-recognition' of the new Northern Ireland government. This has significant implications for education policy, not least because one of the first acts of the new government was to establish the Lynn Commission to bring forward recommendations for the future organization of schools. The Bishops declined to nominate any representatives to the group and so the deliberations proceeded without any Catholic input.

A more immediate consequence was that a significant proportion of Catholic schools refused to engage with the new Ministry of Education at all and, for a short time, the salaries of their teachers were paid from Dublin (Akenson 1973; Farren 1995).

The predominant view among the Unionist government at this time was to move away from the denominational arrangements which characterized the National School system and towards something more akin to English practice, in which Local Authorities owned and managed schools.

The recommendations of the Lynn Commission broadly reflected this preference, suggesting arrangements through which the Churches should transfer their schools to Local Authority ownership, though their recommendations on religious education were somewhat confused and controversial. The Minister of Education, Lord Londonderry, felt their recommendations came too close to creating two types of denominational schools, one Protestant and one Catholic, but with only the former fully funded by the State. His proposals in the 1923 Education Act removed this ambiguity to the extent that it required that religious education be provided outside the normal school day and that no religious test could be applied for the recruitment of teachers in State schools. His hope was that the Protestant Churches would quickly hand their schools over to the new Local Authorities. He had no expectation that the Catholic Church would follow suit, but there was an attempt to offer a 'middle way' in which schools could accept some level of public representation in return for additional levels of public grant. In fact, the Catholic Church denounced the new State schools as 'godless' institutions and maintained their distance from the Ministry.

More surprisingly, the Protestant Churches also declined to hand their schools over and agitated for a series of concessions. These included amendments which removed the ban on religious education during school hours, provided local control over the appointment of teachers and the removal of the ban on religious tests, and automatic rights of representation on School Boards for the Churches if they handed their schools over to Local Authorities.

By 1930, and over Londonderry's objections, these concessions were granted. For all practical purposes, the new State schools had become de facto Protestant schools and were fully funded (Akenson 1973). The parallel system of Catholic schools was offered a small increase in grant, but was still in a less favourable position. This increase in the level of grant was cited by the Ministry as evidence of fair treatment (on the grounds that it offered Catholic schools in Northern Ireland better conditions in comparison with Catholic schools in England). For the Bishops, however, the focus of their anger lay in the fact that Catholic schools in Northern Ireland now were treated less favourably, in comparison with arrangements in the National system before partition. Not for the first or last time, both sides of the argument looked to different criteria and arrived at different conclusions.

The next significant moment in education policy arose after the Second World War, when expansion was part of a widely adopted policy of educational reconstruction across Europe. In England, the terms of this debate had been set by a series of reports published in the pre-war period, but they found expression in the 1944 Education Act—which delineated primary and secondary stages of education—and, for the first time, made secondary education freely available (Barber 1994). Although there were debates in parliament on whether secondary education should be organized on selective or comprehensive grounds, the pre-war reports had largely come down in favour of a selective system and that was what emerged in 1944. Schools would be organized into separate grammar, technical and vocational schools, and only those pupils who achieved 'pass marks' on selective tests would gain places in the academically oriented grammar schools.

A broadly similar arrangement was adopted in Northern Ireland in the 1947 Education Act, but whereas in England most of the debate focused on the issue of academic selection, in Northern Ireland it was dominated by denominational concerns. The Protestant Churches were unhappy because, even though the 1947 Act continued previous arrangements for religious education, it also included a conscience clause for teachers. Unlike the 1930s, however, the Unionist Government did not concede on this point, possibly because of advice from the Attorney General that to do so may be ultra vires regarding the discrimination clauses in the 1920 Government of Ireland Act.

The Catholic Church was unhappy and argued that the level of capital grant was so low that it imposed an unduly heavy burden on the community and made it unlikely that they could build new secondary schools to the desired timetable. The Ministry conceded the issue of capital grants and agreed an increase in the level of grant aid. Even with this, the cost to the Church and community in meeting their 'voluntary contribution' to capital costs, meant there was a time lag in the growth of new secondary schools, to the disadvantage of the Catholic schools. More generally, the parallel school systems that had been established in the 1920s were rolled forward to the secondary and grammar schools. The burden of the voluntary contribution, however, did mean that the Catholic Church did not devote resources to supporting nursery schools or special schools (which partly explains why these sectors are today, generally mixed in terms of the religion of their pupils) (Osborne et al. 1992/1993).

By the 1960s, a new mood was evident in Western Europe—economic growth, Vatican II, the election of John F. Kennedy as US President, the rise of pop music and the hippies—all seemed to presage a new age of optimism and hope, and rather astonishingly this was echoed in Northern Ireland.

A Unionist Prime Minister visited a Catholic convent for the first time, and perhaps even more significantly, met the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland. The Nationalist Party accepted the role of Official Opposition in the Northern Ireland Parliament. In addition, the Catholic Bishops agreed a deal with the Ministry of Education that in effect, meant they accepted arrangements that had been on the table since 1923. From this point, all Catholic schools would accept public representatives onto the School Boards and would receive an increased level of public grant.

In a quid pro quo, the role of the Protestant Churches was confirmed for all State schools, even when the schools had never been transferred from the ownership of the Churches. However, just as the parallelism of the school system was being confirmed, Northern Ireland fell apart, as protest marches for Civil Rights collapsed into riots and disorder, and the British Army was sent in by the London government to stabilize an increasingly unstable political situation. The British Army in turn provided a target for resurgence Republican paramilitary groups, which in turn provoked the organization of Loyalist paramilitary groups. Within a few short years, Northern Ireland had collapsed into virtual civil war and would not emerge into peace for almost thirty years (Darby 1997).

As the political disorder spread, many commentators wondered if separate schools for Protestants and Catholics had contributed to community divisions and suggested that a common system of religiously Integrated schools might be the most propitious way forward (Heskin 1980).

The Head of the Catholic Church in Ireland, Cardinal Conway, had published a pamphlet, which sought to challenge this assumption, arguing for the holistic experience provided by Catholic schools and its continuity with family life. He argued that only in an environment where teachers and pupils shared the same beliefs—and these were reflected in the character and atmosphere of the school—could a true Catholic education be provided (Conway 1970).

Whatever one thinks of this argument it was noteworthy that the Civil Rights Campaign in Northern Ireland had focused on claims that the Catholic minority suffered discrimination in relation to employment, housing and political rights. Despite being heavily modelled on the US Civil Rights Movement, the Northern Ireland campaign never highlighted separate schools as an issue or proposed 'desegregation' of schools as a goal. Indeed, apart from those commentators who argued that common schools might act as a binding force for society, some Unionists argued that State schools were open to all young people, and that Catholic schools should be dissolved or run as entirely private institutions (Ulster Unionist Party 1968).

In the event, there was no consensus on the effects of separate schools, save from a tacit acceptance by many that schools should act in some way to promote tolerance and reconciliation. Even this was not a view held by all, however: some felt that schools should act as oases of calm and provide respite from a society that seemed to be tearing itself apart. From this perspective, schools should provide an escape from the harsh reality of an increasingly divided society, even if, at the end of the school day, children would return to that harsh reality.

For those educators who felt some more pro-active approach was required, varieties of interventions were pursued. The earliest, and most enduring, involved the development of common curriculums and textbooks in such areas as the teaching of history, religion, mutual understanding and, more recently, citizenship. Another early intervention involved taking groups of young Protestants and Catholics from violence-afflicted areas away on holiday together, using the effects of contact to defray myths and stereotypes. Later the contact approach was taken up by schools and pupils engaged in joint projects. Later still, this was linked to the curriculum and schools were encouraged, but not required, to use contact as one element of the programme of education for mutual understanding.

In 1981, the first planned Integrated school was opened, with 7 staff and 28 pupils. There had been legislation in the 1970s, which had permitted existing schools to change to integrated status, but despite lots of rhetorical support, no school successfully navigated the transition.

The 1981 initiative was prompted by parents seeking to prove that an Integrated school could thrive, and it did, and over the next decade, another dozen or so of these schools opened (Gallagher 2004).

The year 1989 proved to be a pivotal point for education in Northern Ireland, for a variety of reasons. The IRA hunger strikes of the early 1980s had ratcheted up political and community tensions and changed the political landscape. In its aftermath, there appeared to be a recognition that there was no military solution to the Northern Ireland problem and that some political resolution had to be found. Three particular developments came together in an unexpected way, one focused on the issue of equal opportunity for Catholics, the other two related to different aspects of education reform.

The British Government's immediate response to the Troubles in Northern Ireland had been to pass a series of reform measures to address issues raised by the Civil Rights campaign. The last significant measure was the 1976 Fair Employment Act, which outlawed direct discrimination on the basis of religion or political opinion. In 1973, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) had been established to advise the Secretary of State on the human rights aspects of legislation and policy. In 1987, SACHR published a critical analysis of the effectiveness of the 1976 Fair Employment Act (SACHR 1987), highlighting the continuing significance of the 'unemployment gap' between Protestants and Catholics. The latter were about twice as likely as the former to be unemployed and this was one of the factors leading to the passage of strengthened fair employment legislation, including a statutory requirement on employers to monitor the religious composition of their workforces annually.

The SACHR report had examined a number of contributory factors to the unemployment gap between Protestants and Catholics, including the role of education. Most significant was evidence, which suggested that, on average, leavers from Catholic schools, had lower qualifications than leavers from Protestant schools, and it was suggested that this may have impacted on labour market opportunity and the unemployment gap.

SACHR commissioned further work to explore the impact of this achievement gap and to consider some of the reasons why it existed, resulting in a series of research papers published between 1989 and 1992. One study focused on the issue of capital funding: virtually all Protestant schools received 100% capital grants, but Catholic schools received 85% grant. One study focused on the administrative arrangements for handling projects, the time involved in moving projects along various stages of the approval system, and the time delay between payment of bills and receipt of grant.

The study concluded that these arrangements resulted in a financial and administrative burden on the authorities of Catholic schools; that this burden probably affected the educational delivery of the schools; and that this contributed to the attainment gap between leavers from Protestant and Catholic schools.

More surprising was evidence of an unexpected differential in per capita recurrent funding levels for Protestant and Catholic schools, to the disadvantage of the latter. A consistent pattern of per capita differential was found across primary, secondary and voluntary grammar schools. There was no evidence of direct discrimination against Catholic schools in the determination of funding levels, but the study concluded that the per capita differential in recurrent funding, probably impacted on the educational delivery of Catholic schools and hence on the attainment gap among leavers from Protestant and Catholic schools (Osborne et al. 1992/1993).

Analysis of data on the schools' estate confirmed that Protestant primary and secondary schools had more per-pupil teaching space, in comparison with Catholic schools. While this may have been effected by differential population growth in the schools, there was also evidence that Catholic post-primary schools had less per pupil teaching space for specialist subjects, in particular science and craft, design and technology (CDT), in comparison with Protestant post-primary schools.

Among grammar schools, this overall pattern was heightened by the fact that proportionately more of the per-pupil science teaching space in Catholic schools was located in temporary accommodation. Further analysis highlighted a relative 'shortage' of places in Catholic grammar schools, as compared with Protestant grammar schools, and this gap in places was likely to increase. Given that leavers from grammar schools generally achieved higher performance levels, this also contributed to the religious achievement gap (Gallagher et al. 1994a).

All of this evidence suggested that—despite an overt commitment to equal opportunity on the part of government in the 1980s—in many important areas, the Catholic education system was not accorded full equity of treatment. Not surprisingly the Catholic authorities were unhappy when the research evidence emerged, but this was compounded by the fact that it had emerged after two other incidents.

In the first two terms of the Thatcher Government in London (1979–1983, 1983–1987) there had been little direct attention given to education. After their 1987 electoral success, the Government unveiled the 1988 Education Reform Act, which introduced major changes to the education system in England and Wales by moving it away from Local Authority direction, towards an education market-place in which schools directly competed for pupils. The Northern Ireland version of this legislation was the 1989 Education Reform Order, which carried over many of the market approaches, including parental choice, league tables, a statutory curriculum and more prescriptive inspections. It also included a series of measures addressing the role of education in promoting reconciliation, including formal support for the development of Integrated schools. One aspect of this was to give all Integrated schools access to 100% capital grants.

The Catholic Bishops sought a judicial review of the 1989 Order, because the 1973 Constitution Act made discrimination in the provision of services—including the funding of schools—illegal, hence, they claimed that the order discriminated against Catholic schools.

The Department of Education defended the 1989 Order and won its case, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. The judge accepted that the Order meant that all Catholic schools received 85% capital grants, while all Integrated schools, and virtually all Protestant schools, received 100% capital grants. However, he also noted that a small number of Protestant grammar schools also received 85% capital grants. On that basis while he accepted that the 1989 Education Order did discriminate against Catholic schools in relation to capital grants, because a few schools other than Catholic schools were in the same position, this amounted to indirect discrimination, rather than direct discrimination. Since only direct discrimination was illegal in the 1973 Constitution Act, the case for judicial review failed.

The second incident also revolved around the 1989 Education Reform Order. In the late 1980s, the Department of Education and the Catholic authorities had been in discussion to rationalize the relationship between Catholic schools and the Department. Each Catholic school operated under the authority of a local parish priest or, in some cases, a Bishop. And it was these individuals, as school managers, who engaged with the Department on a variety of issues, including capital development projects. The Bishops were interested in establishing a single Catholic schools' authority, through which they could exercise control over the sector as a whole. The Department was interested in having a single body to engage with, on what were often complex initiatives. Tacit agreement was reached that a Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) would be established, which would be the employing authority for teachers in Catholic schools, and provide management and strategic leadership for the sector. When the 1989 Education Reform Order was published, however, most of the strategic powers of CCMS had been removed. The reason for this was that the concept of a new Catholic authority to manage the schools was inimical to the market principles, which had been imported from the English legislation. The surprising thing is that no-one from the Department seems to have talked with the Bishops about the reasons for the change.

Thus, in quick succession, the Catholic Bishops felt they had been misled over a commitment to establish a new Catholic Authority, to provide strategic leadership for their schools. A judge had ruled that new legislation had discriminated against the provision of capital grants to Catholic schools, but not seriously enough to be illegal; and evidence had emerged to suggest there had been systemic under-funding of Catholic schools for decades, probably leading to lower levels of performance for pupils leaving those schools. To make matters worse, all this occurred at a time when other departments of government were making significant claims on their commitment to equal opportunity.

In fact, in a striking demonstration of its commitment, the government's response after the SACHR investigation was rapid. In 1991 the Government opened discussions with Catholic authorities over the level of grant to be made available for capital developments in schools and in 1992, announced new arrangements through which all schools could receive 100% capital grants: virtually all Catholic schools opted for this as soon as it became available. In the same year, the Department of Education funded the creation of two new Catholic grammar schools. Thus, while the 1989 Education Reform Order committed government, for the first time, to support initiatives towards the development of new Integrated schools, the government also seemed to acknowledge that for the foreseeable future, most pupils would continue to be educated in religiously separate schools. And that it was committed to equitable treatment of these separate schools (Gallagher et al. 1994a, b).

What happened next was a sea-change in the circumstances of Catholic education in Northern Ireland. The new financial arrangements allowed Catholic schools to improve their facilities and invest more in their activities. Although CCMS did not have the type of strategic power originally hoped for, it was able and willing to take robust action in Catholic schools to promote school improvement. The effects of this were not evident for a few years, but in that time, the achievement patterns reversed such that leavers from Catholic schools had, on average, higher performance than leavers from Protestant schools.

This was also a point at which demographics started to have an impact, as a long, steady decline in the number of young people began. This started to put pressure on school enrolments and meant an increase in school closures. Ironically, however, what this demographic decline also did was to make it harder to open new Integrated schools, with the result that the period of rapid growth in the Integrated sector started to tail off.

The growth of the Integrated sector had largely been driven by the establishment of new schools, but with demographic decline, this became an increasingly less viable option.

The 1989 Education Reform Order had allowed for the option of parents in an existing school to vote to change its status to Integrated schools. Over twenty schools have taken this option, but all have involved Protestant schools voting to transform. The Catholic authorities had made it clear that they opposed the option of transformation and that they would resist any attempt to transform a Catholic school. The argument they offered was that a school belonged to a community, not just the parents who happened to have children in it at a particular point in time.

In consequence, they intimated that if a vote did result in the successful transformation of a Catholic school to Integrated status, they would immediately seek to open a new Catholic school in the same area. In fact, this determination was never tested as less than a handful of Catholic schools have ever looked at the option of transformation, and only one has actually voted to do so. (In this case, the option was turned down by the Department of Education because the school's enrolment was already too small and the vote to transform was simply a means of trying to avoid closure.)

The new sense of confidence in the Catholic school system was then tested by two challenges, both of which remain to the present day. One of these challenges was educational and dealt with the thorny issue of academic selection; the other was political and concerned the response of the education system, more generally to the Peace Process. I will deal with the latter first.

The Good Friday Agreement was signed in 1998 and endorsed in referendums held in both parts of Ireland in the same year. In the immediate aftermath, most attention focused, quite properly, on the efforts of the politicians to get the new agreed political institutions up and running, but the Agreement also set in motion a series of educational initiatives.

Education was identified as an area of common interest in the work of the British–Irish Council and as a focus for North–South cooperation. It agreed to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish Medium education in line with provision for Integrated education (a similar statutory commitment to encourage and facilitate Integrated education already existed). The main measure was to commit further support for those working through education, to promote reconciliation and mutual understanding, and the Agreement specifically mentioned the '… promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing'.

The Department of Education established a group of educationalists, including the author, to join a group tasked with pursuing this goal, the Towards a Culture of Tolerance In Education (TACOTIE) group.

The Catholic Bishops and CCMS were invited to join, but the Bishops declined. At the first meeting of the group, the CCMS representatives challenged the terms of reference of the group and suggested that if its purpose was to find ways to expand Integrated education, then they had no useful contribution to make. If, on the other hand, its role was to find ways in which all schools could contribute to the promotion of reconciliation and mutual understanding, then they were quite happy to participate. The terms of reference were altered, or clarified, so that the CCMS stayed, and the work of the group continued over the next few years.

Two spin-off groups were established, one to produce support materials for schools wishing to transform to Integrated status and one which produced a critical report on the curriculum programme for Education for Mutual Understanding.

By the time the main TACOTIE group was moving towards the conclusion of its deliberations, the political context had lost most of the positivity generated by the Agreement and referendums. The group's final report contained a number of recommendations, but momentum behind the process had largely petered out (DENI 1999).

Perhaps more significant was the decision by the Catholic Bishops to establish their own review group to consider ways in which the Catholic education system could contribute to the new environment created by the Agreement.

This group had a much larger membership and included a number of people from other school sectors in Northern Ireland. Apart from reaffirming the importance of Catholic education and its role as a vehicle for promoting reconciliation, there were two main outcomes of the process. The first was that it provided an opportunity to discuss, in some detail, the issue of academic selection. The Bishops had traditionally been favourably inclined towards selection and did not formally change their view because of the discussions, but there was evidence of some shifts in positions as a consequence of the debates. As will be discussed below, this was to lead to a formal change in the Bishops' position, once a wider public debate on academic selection took place a few years later.

The second significant change was a recasting of the way Catholic education should work. Prior to this, the primary purpose of Catholic education was to maintain the faith community, and there was an implicit assumption that a Catholic school was defined by the fact that the teachers and pupils in the school were members of the faith community.

The Bishops' main report arising from the work of the group, published in 2001, changed that. While stating that Catholic education fulfilled a 'service of public usefulness'—and that this took its shape 'in the perspective of the Catholic faith'—the Bishops went on to state that their schools '[were] not reserved to Catholics only, but [are] open to all who appreciate and share its educational project' (Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland 2001).

This was a sea-change in approach and was, at least in part, inspired by examples of Catholic schools in other places, including the Netherlands and South Africa, which had expanded their mission to focus on their values, rather than the people who happened to be in the schools. While there was a conversion in rhetoric, 15 years later there was limited evidence of any real change in practice. There are a small handful of Catholic schools in Northern Ireland that have a religiously diverse pupil enrolment, but most continue to enrol almost exclusively Catholic pupils who are taught by almost exclusively Catholic teachers (Pluralism in Education 1996).

The second challenge related to a debate on academic selection, which lasted for many years, but did not result in any significant changes in policy or practice. However, it was marked by a significant shift in the position of the Bishops, although this may only have resulted in a weakening of their authority. Academic selection was established in Northern Ireland through the 1947 Education Act, which largely followed the 1944 Education Act for England and Wales.

Prior to this, most children were educated in elementary schools where they stayed until age 14 years, while a small proportion attended fee-paying grammar schools. The 1947 Act created primary and post-primary stages of education and opted for a selective system of secondary and grammar schools (with entry to the academic curriculum provided by the latter, to be mediated by a Transfer Test, popularly known as the 11+). Part of the original justification for academic selection was that scientific tests could identify children with academic potential, regardless of social background. In most places where they were used, the evidence of experience demonstrated by the 1960s, that this claim was not substantiated. And so there was a widespread change towards comprehensive arrangements for post-primary schools, at least until the end of the period of compulsory education.

Not so in Northern Ireland however. Despite similar evidence on the socially regressive effects of academic selection, the Northern Ireland Government decided to retain academic selection. There were attempts to move away from selection by the Direct Rule Ministers of the 1976–1979 Labour Government, but the succeeding Conservative Government (Sutherland 1990) stopped these. It was not until Labour was returned to power in 1997 that the issue was re-opened, when the new Direct Rule Minister with responsibility for education commissioned a report on the effects of the selective system. The research re-stated many of the findings that had emerged in other contexts and highlighted the high level of inequity of outcomes created by the selective systems. It also highlighted the way opinions on the system were sharply divided, largely based on which route people had taken through it (Gallagher and Smith 2001). By the time the research was published in 2000, the NI Assembly was up and running and Martin McGuinness was the Minister of Education. He established the Post-Primary Review Group, to be chaired by former Ombudsman, Gerry Burns, with a remit to review the research evidence, consult on options for the future and bring forward recommendations.

The Burns Report recommended, among other things, the end of academic selection and sparked a debate that continued for the next seven years (Burns Report 2001).

Inter alia, in almost his last act as Education Minister, before the Assembly was suspended in 2002, Martin McGuinness announced that academic selection would end, but offered no view on what arrangements would replace it. The debate continued and a series of reports and consultations added to the voluminous body of evidence, claims and counter-claims. The issue became embroiled in politics when the main Unionist parties took positions in favour of academic selection, while the main nationalist parties took positions against academic selection. The issue appeared on the negotiation table when the 2006 Draft Education Order, tabled by the Direct Rule Secretary of State, included a clause to abolish academic selection. In the St Andrews Peace Talks, the Unionist parties won a concession that this clause would only be activated by a consensus vote in a restored NI Assembly, knowing that they would be able to block any such proposal.

When the Assembly was restored, Sinn Féin still had control of the Education Ministry, but was unable to end academic selection, so the Minister did the next best thing, which was to abolish the official 11+ tests. Two consortia of grammar schools promptly established their own 11+ test regimes and used them to select pupils for entry to their schools. The first use of these unofficial tests was in 2008 and they have continued in use to the present day.

The challenge for the Catholic sector was that the Bishops and CCMS came out in favour of ending academic selection in response to the Burns Report and have remained faithful to this commitment ever since.

In 2009, they went as far as proposing that academic selection in all Catholic grammar schools should be phased out no later than 2012. This call has in large measure, been ignored by the Catholic grammar schools. At the time of writing, three Catholic grammar schools have stopped using selection, three others have declared the intention to stop using selection, and two admit all pupils, but use selection tests for streaming purposes. More than 20 Catholic grammar schools continue to defy the Bishops, though it is interesting that neither the decision of some to change, nor the decision of most not to change, has provoked any visible public reaction from parents. It may be that the process of change will continue, albeit slowly, but the experience is likely to reduce the authority of the Bishops in the longer run.

In conclusion, the story of Catholic education in Northern Ireland is broadly captured by a change from a position of dominance, before partition, to one of marginalization—throughout the period of Unionist rule in Northern Ireland—to a new found level of confidence, in a new Northern Ireland which is struggling to fulfil the promise of peace.

Catholic schools enjoy equitable levels of funding and influence, and the achievement gap, which once worked to their disadvantage, has now inverted, so that the Catholic sector outperforms all other schools sectors.

There remain significant patterns of inequality in outcomes across all sectors, but the Catholic schools have been somewhat more adept at addressing aspects of the challenge of social disadvantage and underachievement.

There are regular calls for an expansion of integrated education, but few practical suggestions on how this might be achieved.

The latter part of the 2000s saw the emergence of a new strategy called Shared Education, which promoted collaborative networks involving Protestant, Catholic and Integrated schools, so that teachers and pupils would move between schools to take classes, and share resources and expertise. Shared education was explicitly developed to address issues related to reconciliation and social cohesion, but also highlighted the role of collaboration in promoting school improvement and the more effective use of resources.

The strategy found favour with all the main Churches and has been taken up with alacrity by most of the political parties. It has been mainstreamed in government policy through a 2016 Shared Education Act, which requires the Department of Education and Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education (Gallagher 2016).

The authority of the Bishops may not be what it was, but perhaps it was never as high as many imagined: the Bishops' interest in Catholic schools is largely religious, but for many Catholics in Northern Ireland, their schools also fulfilled important social and cultural purposes. Throughout the period when Catholics faced significant barriers of discrimination in access to high-quality jobs, teaching provided an important source of high-status employment, while the schools provided rare public space where people could express their sense of Irishness (O'Boyle 1993).

The wave of secularism was late to come to Northern Ireland, but it has arrived and religious practice has declined. Systemic discrimination in the labour market is a thing of the past, and Catholics are no longer on the fringes of social, political or cultural life in Northern Ireland. In such a context it might be thought that the outlook for Catholic schools was somewhat parlous, but in fact, they continue to thrive largely, I suspect, because so many of them are good schools, with strong and positive links to their local communities. These features are likely to keep them in rude health for a considerable time to come.

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CHAPTER 8

Paddy Devlin, the Labour Movement and the Catholic Community

Connal Parr

The Labour movement tends to clash with Catholicism in vastly differing world views, concepts of state power and social change, and these battles took place in Northern Ireland as elsewhere (Cunningahm et al. 1966). Indeed, one of the many absurdities of the fashionable labelling of all Ulster Protestants as instinctive political conservatives is that a basic glance at the Labour movement in Northern Ireland reveals the prevalence of numerous Protestants. Many of the key figures of Labour in Northern Ireland, and especially those who came to prominence within the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), were Protestant: Alex Boyd, Harry Midgley, William McMullen, Sam Kyle, Jack Beattie, David Bleakley, Tom Boyd, Billy Boyd, Vivian Simpson and many others.[1] One figure who breaks this trend, however, is my grandfather Paddy Devlin,

[1] In electoral terms, women were less prominent, but activists including Saidie Patterson, Betty Sinclair, Sadie Menzies and Madge Davison are further exemplars of this vein of Protestant Leftism.

C. Parr (✉)
Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK
e-mail: connal.parr@northumbria.ac.uk

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who was born and grew up in the Catholic working-class Lower Falls area of Belfast known as the Pound Loney.

Paddy was a fiercely individualist and often changeable politician whose compassion and vision were matched by his aggression and idiosyncratic revision(s). Like many Irish politicians, what he said at one point tended to change over a relatively short space of time. However, we can surmise that what he represents in many ways is 'Republican Labour': a confusing choice of language in that this was a real political party in Northern Ireland headed at one time by Paddy's Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) colleague Gerry Fitt (Elliot and Flackes 1999).[2] Though this association was Fitt's, in some ways Republican Labour perfectly captures Devlin's political synthesis. Despite his eccentricities, or perhaps because of them, Paddy represents an effective vector through which to explore the Catholic community's complicated and strained relationship with the Labour movement.

Before delving into this subject, it is worth stating that I sometimes feel like a custodian of my grandfather's place in the history books—not out of pride, but the need for accuracy. Even good-quality publications referring to Devlin contain problematic falsehoods that might seem arcane to many (Cook 2017; Devlin 1993).[3] Important to Paddy, in a way which many journalists and historians sometimes miss, is the militancy of his early background. (Something later Labour comrades confirm he was always ‘up front’ about, even if he was later to renounce the militarism of the IRA (Garrett 2011).)

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[2] Founded in 1964 by Belfast Dock and Falls representatives Gerry Fitt and Harry Diamond, the party had several councillors and later became best known for its involvement in the civil disobedience campaign against internment without trial. Though Paddy Kennedy also became involved with Republican Labour, it was essentially finished when Fitt left to found the SDLP with five others (including Devlin) in 1970.

[3] In a recently published piece on the NILP'S Vivian Simpson, Andy Cook suggests that Paddy was sympathetic to Terence O'Neill's political vision of where Northern Ireland was heading in the late 1960s. Cook traces this to Paddy's autobiography *Straight Left* (1993), even though the same book shows that he was fundamentally unimpressed by O'Neill for his attacks on Labour. Paddy even expresses the view that had Brian Faulkner acceded to the leadership of Unionism; the later Troubles may have been averted. A reference in Cook's piece to Paddy enduring a 'difficult relationship' with Vivian Simpson is not backed up by evidence, and the description of his hurling a 'bundle of Hansards' at NILP Secretary Douglas McIldoon is rather light going by Paddy's standards. Cook is probably unaware of the story of my grandfather once losing patience with Conor Cruise O'Brien and registering his displeasure by firing a gun over the head of 'the Cruiser' as a warning shot!

This is significant to bear in mind at all times in this particular account. These dynamics in northern Catholic families are always interacting with one another. You do not get one without the other. As with the Orange Order in its Protestant working-class equivalent, the Catholic working class also had groups that appealed to their ethnic sense of brethren such as the Ancient Order of the Hibernians (AOH). Paddy’s own mother was the elected secretary of ‘the Hibs’ (as the AOH was known) on the Falls Road, where she tried to get him involved by tasking him with writing the minutes of her meetings. Though he appreciated the practical skill acquired, he registered his political objections to the group ‘by writing long convoluted sentences where simple ones would have sufficed’, and he was pleased to be dismissed from this particular job (Devlin 1993, p. 57). When Paddy went on the run with the IRA in the early 1940s, he later commented that he felt he was on the run from his mother as much as the Unionist authorities (she loathed the IRA and made it clear he was not welcome at the family home). Though he respected her, he admitted ‘we never got on, probably because of our identical hot tempers’, manifesting in debates between his parents as they exchanged posters of the leader of Northern nationalism ‘Wee Joe [Devlin]’—his mother’s favourite—and the NILP’s William McMullen in their front window on election days: ‘I always reckoned that my own political activism was nurtured in the political squabbling that went on between my parents. My political instincts were most certainly inherited from both my father and mother, although I tended to favour the Labour rather than the nationalist side, and therefore my father, when I joined the arguments’ (Devlin 1993, pp. 13, 15, 31).

In Paddy’s case, it is clear that he saw the Labour movement as an escape route from the nationalist militancy with which he grew up. At the same time, he was never ashamed of his IRA experience, treasuring especially the three years he spent in Crumlin Road Gaol from his 1942 internment (Devlin 1993). He regarded this as pivotal to his general education and saw the true meaning of Republican philosophy co-existing with a Labour instinct. Paddy was extremely critical of the physical-force methods of the Provisional IRA, though even here he tended to couch this criticism of ‘the Provos’ in terms of them being anathema to the IRA he had joined, most especially in their relentless sectarian violence against the Protestant community from 1969 onwards. Paddy noted that the ‘old IRA’ in Belfast avoided attacking Protestant civilians and targets (Devlin 1985). More generally, he saw the Labour movement in cultural terms, representing, in its own way, an alternative tribe.

A Belfast Tradition

Writing during the Second World War, poet and playwright Thomas Carnduff captured the rough ‘dividing line’ which had characterised Labour since the foundation of Northern Ireland: ‘The Catholic members always leaned towards the Republican ideal, the Protestants cleaved naturally towards a closer union with the British Labour Party’. At that moment in wartime, Carnduff disapproved of MP Harry Midgley founding his own Commonwealth Labour Party after being expelled by the NILP. ‘Labour on the whole will suffer’, Carnduff believed. ‘They were never too strong in Belfast’ (Carnduff 1942; Walker 1984). Though basically correct, this analysis neglects to take into account the way Catholic workers were caught between the rock of sectarian attack from Orange hardliners (notably in the riots of 1935) and the vindictive, anti-Left spleen of their own Church hierarchy (Hennessey 1997). Things began to shift in the general election of July 1945 when a Labour landslide in Westminster removed ‘Unionist’ Tories, just a month after the Left polled strongly in the provincial Northern Irish general election (Cradden 1993). Irish nationalism responded in turn with many of its supporters becoming convinced—as in present times—that Irish unity was back on the agenda. This feeling, and a strong Irish-American lobby, gave rise to the foundation of the Anti-Partitionist League (APL), which formed to coordinate Nationalist MPs at Stormont and create a grass-roots movement that aimed to unify the whole Catholic community of Northern Ireland (Purdie 1990, p. 38).

Febrile rallies began in 1946 featuring much heroic and villainous rhetoric, though for our purposes what is noteworthy was how established and well heeled the APL’s leaders were. It was led ‘mainly by Catholic professional men and organised by small-businessmen, with the support of the clergy’, and it concentrated on registering Catholics to vote, scrutinising Protestant registrations and generally bringing an electoral machine into being. In Belfast, however, the APL could not dent the influence of the Catholic representatives in the city 'who sailed under a variety of flags, all claiming some association with Labour politics' (Purdie 1990, p. 39). Along with the NILP defections that led to the Irish Labour Party setting up branches, there were also Independent Labour, Socialist Republican and other Labour Republican candidates. Not only did this enable cross-communal voting in mixed constituencies,[4] accommodating individual Protestants who could embrace a Left/nationalist viewpoint, the traditional Catholic attitudes of the APL on social issues could never command widespread support among urban Catholic workers (Purdie 1990, p. 39). At the same time, two politicians who proved especially useful to the APL in running local machines similar to the organisation of rural Irish nationalist politicians were Harry Diamond, Stormont MP for Belfast Falls, and Jack Beattie, Westminster MP for West Belfast. Both forged links with a group of Labour backbenchers at Westminster who styled themselves the 'Friends of Ireland'.

This was the political environment into which Paddy Devlin emerged from the Crumlin Road Gaol in September 1945. Though the British Labour Party is sometimes attacked by Republicans for passing the Ireland Act of 1949 and not doing enough to challenge the discriminatory practices of the Unionist administration, this ignores the way men like my grandfather were freed from prison precisely because Clement Attlee's government pressured the Unionist government to release internees. Paddy had left the IRA and started to become active in the Irish Labour Party, then organising in Belfast under Jack MacGougan (1913–1998)—yet another Protestant Labour man. An accountant by trade and Irish regional secretary of the Tailor and Garment Workers' Union, MacGougan mentored Paddy and taught him debating techniques (Devlin 1993). By this stage, the Irish Labour Party had seven Belfast Corporation seats in the Falls and Smithfield wards, while it was fronted in municipal politics by Jack Beattie, who Devlin regarded by this time as a 'defeated' man: 'By contrast I was new blood, heavily committed to the party, determined to be very active' (Devlin 1993, p. 70). Throwing his energy into politics, Paddy became the secretary of the Belfast branch of Irish Labour and joined MacGougan on Belfast City Council in 1956 when he won the Dock Council seat at the expense of an unknown merchant seaman by the name of Gerry Fitt. This gave him a taste of life in local politics, which he relished, even if the chamber occasionally struck him a little more 'than a club for old Unionist Party fogies'.

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[4] The importance of the Labour vote in the Ardoyne, north Belfast, cannot be underestimated. It kept the NILP's seat in Oldpark from 1958 until 1972, a consistent Labour stronghold as the NILP suffered the unwanted attention of Prime Minister Terence O'Neill and the onset of the Troubles.

Though sectarianism in the 1950s was still practised by the Unionist Party to stifle working-class unity, Paddy found that his chief problems on the council came from Catholic 'professional men': the kind who previously staffed the APL and kowtowed to Church authorities. He served on three City Hall committees: Transport, Police and Education, which is where he ran into trouble with the Catholic establishment of Belfast:

> (They) 'regarded the trade union and labour movement as nothing more than a front for communism. Their silent hostility to us exploded into public criticism after we voted in favour of setting up a crematorium for the use of Belfast citizens. In those days Catholics could not be cremated, so letters appeared in the local Catholic paper, the *Irish News*, pointing this out and attacking our position. We were told we were not good Catholic representatives. We were not Catholic representatives, we replied. We were socialists representing wards in which Catholics lived. 'If you want Catholics in the City Hall, then vote for them,' we said. (Devlin 1993, p. 72)

Alas for the Labour men, vote for Catholics they did at the next election, as part of a broader climate of 'Red Scare' anti-communism sweeping Europe at the time. No organisation was more encouraging of this sentiment throughout Ireland than the Catholic Church (Staunton 2001; Cradden 1993).

Devlin's presence on the Education Committee particularly incensed the Church because with state schooling essentially Protestant—the Catholic Church having opted out to set up their own schools, via public funds—they believed 'it undermined the Catholic school system to have me, a Catholic, on this committee, making teaching appointments and determining matters relating to Protestant schools'. One bishop ordered him to leave the committee, while another commanded him to ban the 'blue' films they appeared to be obsessed by. Along with other Labour councillors, 'We consistently adopted a liberal stance on such issues, bringing us into conflict with hard-line Catholic opinion as well as the hard-line Protestant viewpoints' (Devlin 1993, p. 74).

Paddy recounts this episode with a certain amount of gusto in his memoir, anticipating the backlash heading his way:

> By the time the next council elections came around in 1958, it was clear the Irish Labour Party was going to be confronted by a strong team of reactionary Catholics. Signs of new militancy on their part were all around us. In the trade union sphere, Catholics were turning up for the first time at branch meetings to vote Catholics on to the branch committees and into union jobs. The inspiration for this came from the Catholic Action movement, which had developed on the Continent in the wake of the Second World War. The main brunt of the attack against the Irish Labour Party on the Falls came from the members of the Clonard fraternity, a large group of men who gathered at the monastery of that name in the Lower Falls once a week for a prayer meeting. They were largely motivated by the parish priests of St Mary's and St Peter's in the Lower Falls. Frank Hanna, a well-known Catholic solicitor, also played a prominent role in the campaign. (Devlin 1993, p. 76)

Playing down the intensity and physical altercations of the ensuing election in his memoir, my grandfather does mention an incident when he and his Irish Labour allies used loudhailers to berate members of the confraternity as they were leaving the Clonard monastery after a meeting. Going on the offensive in this manner can only have exacerbated the fire he drew, and a few days later Paddy encountered one such 'zealot' on the street, asking him why he thought the Labour men were communists when they simply were not. 'Well, you look like communists', the man said (Devlin 1993, p. 76).

This idiocy was reinforced by the Catholic Church's canvassing of all Catholic employers against Irish Labour 'on the basis that we were anti-business and anti-Catholic'. The Knights of St Columbanus and other groups joined in, and they were even helped by Unionists who found time to recruit the Vintners' Association (under Charles Daly) and the Licensed Bookmaking trade (both organisations 'dominated by wealthy Catholics') to hammer the Irish Labour representatives (Devlin 1993). My grandfather was wrong in spuriously linking the effect this had on Protestant working-class voters with the emergence in the late 1950s of Ian Paisley, but his reading of Frank Hanna is verified by historical surveys. Hanna approached the parish priests of St. Paul's and St. Peter's, recruiting the former's chapel collector, and with the Knights, Vintners' Association, and the Clonard Confraternity membership merging together, a formidable political machine was about to flatten Irish Labour in Belfast. The group even co-opted Left parlance to create their own 'Independent Labour Group', and so the Irish Labour candidates were pushed to the bottom of the poll in all wards in the municipal election of May 1958. This group directed special venom towards Jack MacGougan because he was a Protestant, and the upshot was Paddy losing his council seat after just two years. At the election count, one priest performed an ill-advised celebratory jig on hearing of my grandfather's loss and was duly thumped by Paddy! Though such an incident is usually seen as part of his uncouth behaviour, clerical pressure had been such that 'the opposition found it difficult to vote, much less campaign': a 'bruising' overall experience that convinced Paddy Devlin to leave the Catholic Church (Staunton 2001).

Paddy was true to his fracture from Catholicism in later life. As he affirmed to the Sunningdale Executive as Minister of Health and Social Services at the start of 1974—the pinnacle of his political career—Paddy was the only secular member of the Executive, refusing to swear on the Bible (Bloomfield 1994). Decades later, my mother Anne wrote about the original consequences of his decision to leave the Church on the family within the community. With Paddy ceasing to worship, Anne recalled going to Mass at the age of four with her mother, passing a gable end where:

> … above the painted lines of a goal post, my mother points out our family name, my father's surname together with the letters VOTE NOW. Clonard Monastery I remembered as a baroque Catholic Church filled with the smoking gold urns and gold gates, flickering candles behind red stained glass and gladioli. I am pulled out of this pastoral reverie of doves and lambs and streams and flowers by my mother yanking my arm and

> drawing me out of the crush of bodies in the long pew, and I wonder what I have done. We are not alone in leaving the church. Someone is shouting…it is something that is being said, which my mother told me when we got outside the church: '*They called your father the antichrist*'…Later my mother told me '*They said your daddy hit me and he drank*'. (Devlin 2004, p. 20)

Paddy's split with the Church became, in that most Catholic of ways, personal as well as political. They slandered him from the pulpit. By the late 1960s, Paddy admitted to being 'thoroughly disillusioned' with Catholicism: 'The church had opposed me politically and this encouraged doubts, and undermined my beliefs in the teaching of the church' (Devlin 1993, p. 84). They in turn were aggrieved by his Leftist politics and refusal to toe their line—his refusal, perhaps, of their control. He never forgave them for their mendacious personal attacks and would only go back to the Church in his coffin—on my grandmother's wishes—on his death in August 1999.

Civil Rights and Provos

The 'local machines' of Harry Diamond and the Catholic middle class had rolled over Irish Labour politicians in 1958, but within a decade Paddy Devlin had built a power base in West Belfast through the NILP, and he was as one with the civil rights agitation through his close involvement with the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA).[5] Suitably, Devlin defeated Diamond for the Falls seat in the Northern Irish election of February 1969, ending the latter's career. Following his defeat, Diamond naturally reverted to nationalist type, referring to how Paddy Devlin's victory signified 'bringing the Union Jack into the Falls Road' (Parr 2012, p. 114). Paddy had fought West Belfast under the civil rights slogan 'Full British rights for British citizens', but on this occasion it was Diamond who had underestimated just how perseverant the Labour grain of politics was in West Belfast (Campbell 2015). Devlin rode the civil rights wave, at the same time as availing of IRA support in the 1969 election, months before the organisation split into Official and Provisional wings; but he also personified a Labour vein in West Belfast which was culturally Catholic at the same time as being intellectually dissenting and Left wing.

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[5] Fascinatingly, in a recent speech to mark the 50th anniversary of the civil rights agitation of 1967, current SDLP leader Colum Eastwood reeled off a list of names including John Hume, Austin Currie and Ivan Cooper of those associated with civil rights (*Irish Times*, 5 October 2017) and managed to leave out Paddy Devlin, despite his being the only SDLP founding member of the original executive of NICRA. On the other hand, Paddy would not have appreciated being endorsed by an SDLP leader who maintains the party's socially conservative views on abortion and Catholic control of schooling.

Another breach in Devlin's relationship with the Church stemmed from what he perceived as their role in the emergence of the Provisional IRA. It is well known that the Church's hostility to Left-wing politics had alienated them from the IRA under Cathal Goulding (1923–1998), who was taking the organisation away from physical-force methods (Hanley and Millar 2009). The Catholic Church had traditionally 'refused to recognise the need to allow politics to develop along party or class lines' and so moved 'by stealth' to undermine Goulding's IRA. The Provisional IRA was more 'compatible with its own views' and so 'until the ugliness and immorality for what the Provisionals really stood for became clear, they were actively promoted by the church and enabled to take over in Catholic areas' (Devlin 1993, p. 122). Though some Catholic priests made their sympathies with the Provisional IRA clear from the start (fatuous Father Sean McManus, an American, for instance), the crunch came during the hunger strikes of 1980–1981 when the tensions between Church and Provisionals were highlighted in a way which had rarely been exposed before (Moloney 2002).

On a simple level, events such as hunger strikes will always render Labour politics redundant, emphasising as they do the Catholic community's more ancient codes of sacrifice and mythology. It was a very difficult time in my immediate family's memory, as Paddy's refusal to overtly support the prisoners made them a target of Republican activists. Following attacks and intimidation, they eventually left their West Belfast home (Clarke 1987; *The Guardian*, 26 May 1981; *Irish Times*, 28 May 1981). They remember the atmosphere, 'shouting and a kind of whistle sound', outside the house. In one particularly upsetting incident, a Post-Boy who was treated impeccably and given treats by my grandparents was 'the one who pointed out the house' to a group of H-Block protestors: 'He was the only one who knew where the house was and he led them to it' (Devlin, P. 2009). A coat stand was placed behind the door nightly to prevent forced entries. This ornament remained in the new family house on the Oldpark Road, a relic of a more brutal era, until it collapsed under the weight of coats and history one evening in December 2017. My grandmother recalled:

> When we lost our house, Paddy didn't get anything because he was an MP. I got something and Peter and Joseph got something, but he didn't. And we were having a terrible time then, all his cheques were bouncing. The union, Micky (Michael) Mullen at the ITGWU (Irish Transport and General Workers' Union), leant Paddy the money to put up the deposit to this house. When I see now with all the money they're (Sinn Féin) getting up there (Stormont), and what they used to say about him having houses. [*Pause*] I found this house. (Devlin, T., 2009)

On leaving West Belfast, one of the public representatives to offer the family support was the SDLP's Dr. Joe Hendron, who denounced the attacks and insisted that, 'The vast majority of the people of Andersonstown, who are decent people, are incensed about what has happened to the Devlin family' (*Irish News*, 27 May 1981).

The SDLP

Rarely identified in historical scholarship and journalism is the connection between the clerical impetus of the 1958 local government election and the profile associated later with SDLP (the party my grandfather co-founded and became disillusioned with). On Election Day in May 1958, 'the Catholic businessmen and their allies turned out with their expensive cars and we were swamped at the polls' (Devlin 1993, p. 77). However, what of the current SDLP—the only apparent Catholic 'Labour' grouping of modern times? Despite the talents of at least two of its female Belfast representatives, it might be argued that the party should remove the 'L' from its designation, as it has lacked any real Labour element since the departure of Devlin in 1977 and Gerry Fitt two years later. Deep down its members know this. It retains membership of the Socialist International, following an application Paddy himself made back in the early 1970s, but following the loss of all its Westminster MPs in the June 2017 election, the party's long-term prospects look bleak. Its nationalism contradicts the internationalism of the Labour movement, as does its continuous opposition to the 1967 Abortion Act (introduced at Westminster via a Labour government). However, even granting the removal of Labour from its title to create an SDP, is the party even centre-Left? The idea is something of a stretch. It has campaigned in the last seven years against austerity but younger SDLP members are more energised by the Irish language and the pro-Europeanism of the anti-Brexit campaign, rather than any political focus to improve the lives of the poor and deprived.

The SDLP has had multiple chances to make itself a real progressive alternative and has taken the wrong turn almost every time. In June 1979, Devlin refused to nominate the SDLP solicitor Paschal O'Hare as Lord Mayor of Belfast. By this time, Paddy had engineered his own expulsion from the SDLP—in no small part due to his objections to 'sterile nationalism' and an all-Catholic party of 'fucking schoolteachers' (as Gerry Fitt so perfectly put it)—and was going it alone as an 'Independent Socialist' at City Hall. He refused to vote for O'Hare to be Mayor because, he said, he could never vote for a man who had refused to canvass areas because they were Protestant (*The Guardian*, 4 June 1979). Incredibly, when I lived in Belfast from 2007 until 2014, I heard contemporary stories of SDLP councillors in North Belfast refusing to canvass in certain territories for the very same reason. Those Protestant parts of town were just not 'theirs'.

In the 1980s, Paddy involved himself in the creation and struggle of various Labour groups including the Labour Party of Northern Ireland (LPNI) and Labour '87, both so minor that he thought neither warranted a mention in his autobiography (Cradden 1993; Elliot and Flackes 1999). But we might also reflect on another Catholic Labour scion, Turlough O'Donnell—a Judge of some repute. His passing in April 2017 is a further reminder of an alternative political history. As with the other members of the NILP, O'Donnell was remembered for the contribution he made to society beyond the political sphere (Purdie 1990), but he also represents a figure of standing within a community, which is—as with Ulster Loyalism—amnesiac of its Labour roots. None of the obituaries in the provincial newspapers recalled O'Donnell's Labour associations (O'Boyle 2017). He defended the last individual sentenced to hang in Northern Ireland and was very clearly identified by those who knew him as a 'Labour lawyer' in the 1960s (Holmes 2010). Though born in Newry in 1924, he moved to West Belfast and was an active member of the Falls branch of the NILP (Edwards 2009; Devlin 1993). As with Labour politics generally in Northern Ireland, these names and associations frequently appear as solitary torches in a ferocious downpour, but they made their mark and deserve more remembrance than is currently the case.

CONCLUSION

An interesting statistic to emerge from research carried out after the Belfast Agreement of 1998 found that a larger number of Catholic young people (11%)—than Protestants (7.5%)—reported that the Troubles had divided their family and set one member against another (Morrissey and Smyth 2002). I can vouch for this in the case of my own family. There are supporters of Sinn Féin, the SDLP, former Provisional IRA volunteers, former 'Officials', even some associated with the Irish National Liberation Army. Arguably, this reflects a fairly normal Catholic family from West Belfast. I met a number of this extended family at Paddy's funeral in August 1999 and listened to the diversity of their views. The way some of the family turned on him—along with the community following the 1981 hunger strikes—was difficult for him (O'Malley 1991). He could never really do justice to this in his otherwise candid autobiography *Straight Left*, leaving it to other writers. One such piece which depicts this time was *The Long March* (1984), a television play written by my mother about the 1980 hunger strike. It features veteran Belfast actor James Ellis (portraying a virtual impersonation of Paddy Devlin) who outlines—via the character of Joe Walsh—the best emotional representation of my grandfather's Republican Labour credo, during a row with his daughter:

> **JOE:** 'Listen to me: my family came from the country to the city for work – from the wheat fields to the flour mills. I grew up as a barefoot boy in the Falls. I sold sticks – firewood – for money. From the orange-boxes that the green grocer left in the entry. I didn't get my first pair of boots until I joined the Fianna. It was part of the uniform. I also got my first coat that way: a long green coat. And the Fianna ran the history classes at night. I was interned when I was seventeen and I read Kier Hardie in prison. When I came out, I was a socialist. (JOE *turns away from her, and goes to his wife who is sitting nervously by the table. He sits, while he continues.*) You didn't have to join the IRA to get an education or boots or a coat – a Labour government in England saved you from that fate.' (Devlin 1986, p. 120)

At the wake following Paddy's funeral, I met my great-uncle Bobby Devlin in the living room of my grandmother's house on the Oldpark Road. He told me everything I needed to know about Irish history. Everything that was wrong was encapsulated in the Anglo-Irish Treaty of

1921. Éamon De Valera 'had a lot to answer for'. I never saw him again, and Irish history expanded out for me from this time—in ways Bobby would disagree passionately with. Bobby was known for his pro-Sinn Féin views (and was rewarded for them with a regular column in Sinn Féin's *Andersonstown News*) (Devlin, n.d.). I imagine this was the most painful thing for my grandfather to face; the way many members of his own family sided with the people who put him and his wife and children out of their home.

The Labour element had been burned out by an older, more powerful flame. Perhaps more out of survival than anything, many of his relatives sided with his tormentors, or else, they might face the same thing he did: rejection from their own community. Nonetheless, having been estranged for years, Paddy did reconcile with his brother Bobby before he died, and that is surely some reason to have faith. Paddy once said 'We haven't any real politics in Northern Ireland. Politics has been reduced to the clash of tribes', and he clearly suffered—though he tried not to show his pain—when his own tribe turned on him (Devlin 1985). My mother dramatises this in *The Long March*, with a quote about the hunger strikers: 'I'm not exactly on their side. You know my politics: bread-and-butter issues move me. I've never been all that interested in tribes' (Devlin 1986, p. 141). This was only true up to a point, for Paddy chose Labour and not the Church.

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CHAPTER 9

Sport, Politics and Catholics in Northern Ireland

David Hassan and Conor Murray

Introduction

That Northern Ireland has been transformed in the last 20 years from a site of near daily violence—waged between paramilitary organisations pursuing polarised agendas and agents of the state—to an uneasy truce in which most forms of conflict have now ceased is unquestionable and, of course, welcomed (Arthur 1996; Nolan 2012). Considerable efforts have supported the task of making peace and seeking real and meaningful reconciliation in the country over recent years (NicCraith 2001). It represents a cruel irony therefore that through this very act of peace-making, further divisions emerge, or at least residual and festering sores become more obvious (Jarman 2007). It is as if the remaining points of division—albeit often concerning the most contentious issues—become

D. Hassan
Special Olympics Regional Research Centre, Ulster, Ireland
e-mail: d.hassan@ulster.ac.uk

C. Murray (✉)
Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: conor.murray79@mail.dcu.ie

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further amplified, despite the considerable distance that has been travelled by erstwhile opponents.

However, at the time of writing (late October 2017), the latest attempt to broker agreement between Northern Ireland's political leaders and re-establish that country's devolved Assembly sitting at Stormont had failed. The continued reality that all protagonists, be they Unionist or Nationalist/Republican, interpret both the cause and justification for the inter-ethnic division that defined life in the country over the second half of the twentieth century, from seemingly irreconcilable perspectives (Ruane and Todd 1996). It is clear that more work needs to be done in advancing the cause of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, some 20 years after the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement (GFA) that was largely designed to achieve just that (NicCraith 2001).

As this chapter will initially suggest, many of the unresolved issues are not solely political in nature but in fact have more to do with cultural identity and expression, such as the flying of certain flags, the place (and freedom) of cultural expression and settling upon an agreed narrative concerning the country's divided past (to permit its telling in a public forum). Alongside this, a range of other agencies have attempted to play their role, many again operating outside established political structures, focussing instead on expressions of identity promoted through popular pastimes and other similar pursuits (Bairner 2002). In so doing, they recognise the need to respect cultural differences, in relation to such matters as 'the arts', sport and membership of social/cultural organisations and clubs. As in all societies, individuals and groups pursue entirely legitimate forms of cultural expression in Northern Ireland. Within such divided settings, they constitute both a form of political allegiance 'by proxy', and also an important aspect of community expression for many, including those who feel disenfranchised from wider society (Boyd 2001; Brewer and Higgins 1999).

So, whilst much does need to be said about the continued inter-ethnic divisions that remain in Northern Ireland, including those in sport, what is of growing interest is the schism that has emerged—and again there is evidence of this in the sporting realm—between Catholics living either side of the Irish border. That these are two different sets of peoples cannot be denied—they live under different political structures, move in different circles and work in different places. But, without overstating this point, there is, it might be argued, an element of distrust, even a growing resentment, amongst sections of this population, about what each other now stands for—a sense (accurate or otherwise) on the northern side that some of their southern counterparts perceive them to be recalcitrant ‘backwoodsmen’, unreasonable and ‘stuck in the past’. On the other side of this argument, there would appear to be a view amongst southern Catholics that Northern Ireland is unquestionably a place apart—somewhere they don’t fully understand, rarely travel to, and have comparatively little interest in. Of course, these are broad generalisations but their undoubted existence in the minds of at least some northern nationalists fans the flames of a residual friction, it might be argued, between a collective who, on the face of it, should otherwise be on the same side of the argument and therefore sympathetic of one and other’s circumstances.

With largely separate governance structures on either side of the border and alongside this, distinct forms of organisation, sport serves to illustrate some of these issues more starkly than might be the case in other walks of life (with the obvious exception of politics). I will return to that discussion later but initially, it is necessary to say a little more about sport and politics in Northern Ireland itself, as, for Catholics at least, it reveals something about their perspectives on their ‘place’ within wider society. It also offers some context around their stance on issues that perhaps more liberal observers may struggle to appreciate. What increasingly emerges is a community—somewhat short of homogeneous—increasingly isolated from both their Unionist counterparts in Northern Ireland and their neighbours in the Republic of Ireland. They have become, perhaps inevitably so, isolated and caught between two groups: one they do not fully understand or entirely relate to (and ironically in the case of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland) and another that doesn’t really understand them and has an ever-dwindling interest in ever becoming acquainted with the reality of their lived experiences.

Sport in Northern Ireland

It is perhaps not surprising that of all available forms of cultural expression, sport has been the location where underlying community divisions that historically existed in Northern Ireland have offered the opportunity to present a hostile public expression. This ranges from verbal sectarian abuse, the chanting of songs designed to demonise ‘the other’ and, even occasionally, to spectator violence between supporters of football clubs aligned with competing ethnic traditions (Bairner and Darby 1999).

In addition, despite recent developments that may suggest otherwise, some sports continue to be perceived as being exclusively associated with one section of the community. Gaelic games (such as hurling and Gaelic football) are perceived to be for Catholics and Nationalists, whilst games originating in the main from Britain, e.g. hockey and rugby, are broadly understood as being solely for Protestants and Unionists (Bairner 1999). Nonetheless, there has been some 'shifting of the sands' around the edges of this historical analysis in recent times, largely the result of social class outcomes, for example, the sporadic interest in rugby union shown by the growing Catholic middle classes as a legitimate expression of their comparative well-being and general *bonhomie*.

However, in the face of periodic violent outbursts at, and in the vicinity of, their matches—and conscious that sport often presents the most obvious expression of ethnic division in any country—the major sporting bodies in Northern Ireland (namely, the Irish Football Association (IFA), the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU)) began to assume a wider community development role, following the GFA of 1998. And virtually in unison, they launched a series of outreach activities aimed at encouraging those who might have traditionally pursued other sporting interests, to become acquainted with theirs (Boyd 2001).

This was admirable and certainly ambitious work and meaningful developments, even some positive outcomes from this well-intentioned endeavour have been realised. However, it might also be argued that significantly more should have been achieved by the major sporting bodies in Northern Ireland around advancing the cause of 'good relations some two decades after the GFA'—specifically, on the key markers or 'sporting fault-lines' that remain in the country (Catholic support for the Northern Ireland football team, Protestant engagement with Gaelic games and working-class involvement in sports like rugby union). Whilst there have been undoubtedly some useful, if largely ephemeral, initiatives, it is difficult to state with confidence just how impactful these have proven to be over the longer term.

The other interesting issue in this realm has been the limited cross-border work that has been undertaken by these agencies, specifically the use of sport as a mediating influence when promoting improved relations between communities on either side of the Irish border. If removing barriers between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland continues to prove problematical, might there not be merit in encouraging a more expansive cultural appreciation on the part of some, by fostering closer links through sport, between working-class Protestants in Northern Ireland and their contemporaries from the Catholic tradition in 'the south'?

So, from the perspective of the main national governing bodies, overall the picture that emerges is one of a sporting bloc—not exactly operating in unison but certainly addressing broadly similar issues—struggling to make any meaningful cross-community inroads, yet spending a great deal of (often European) money in the process. Periodic 'own goals' (to use an appropriate sporting metaphor) ensured that sporting bodies ended up further alienating the very people they were seeking to build bridges with. Examples of this included the Irish Football Association's insistence in 2006 that its youth players be in possession of a British passport, when travelling abroad to play matches. That young northern nationalists were declaring for the Republic of Ireland on a near weekly basis hardly helped the situation. The GAA too has sometimes been much too slow to capture the public mood on matters such as engagement with the PSNI or comparatively more benign matters like who can, or cannot, use their often-impressive facilities. It is questionable also whether this organisation could have done more to build grassroots, community-level support for the PSNI in a way that would have encouraged young nationalists, to come forward and join the police in any meaningful numbers.

When the then Northern Ireland First Minister Peter Robinson, leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), took the opportunity to praise the work of the GAA (at a Cooperation Ireland event in Belfast in October 2013), it represented an example of truly changed times. Robinson and his colleagues in the conservative, Unionist-minded DUP were often staunch critics of the GAA, regarding the organisation as being overly acquiescent to the cause of Irish republicanism, including the actions of its militant wings (Bairner and Darby 1999). However, amid the new political dispensation, the GAA has had numerous seminal moments when previously taboo issues have been addressed.

Robinson's speech reflected the distance both the DUP and the GAA in Ulster had travelled. However, there is a marked difference between the carefully crafted words of a political elite and the views of a broader membership, which is perhaps less concerned with public image-making and more with the realities of their lived experiences. When prominent GAA commentator and former All-Ireland medal winner Joe Brolly responded to the continued concern of some Unionist commentators regarding the GAA's policy on nomenclature (specifically commemorating dead paramilitary figures by naming local GAA clubs in their honour), he simply stated that 'It's nobody else's business—it's as simple as that. People can either like it or lump it' (18 October 2013, *BBC Radio Ulster*). The fact that these comments came less than 24 hours after Robinson's speech in Belfast, placed into stark, contrasts the difficulties involved in leading an organisation in a direction not all its members necessarily wish it to move.

The dilemma for the GAA in Ulster now is which of these two images—the positive, progressive body that draws praise from Unionist politicians in Northern Ireland, or the regressive, defiant and unrepentant one that harbours an unidentified number of members who remain less than enamoured with its unrelenting move towards the centre ground—best reflects its true position. More to the point, how is all of this understood and interpreted by the organisation's majority membership south of the border? They too, it would appear, are unsure about what direction the GAA in Northern Ireland is moving and, devoid of absolute clarity on the matter, are left to conclude that not much has changed.

What this difference of opinion (on an issue as simple as the naming of a sports club) arguably demonstrates is a continued disagreement regarding the past and how it informs current and future actions on the part of ordinary citizens living in Northern Ireland (Nolan 2012). That said, the range of ascribed causes of the conflict in Northern Ireland is, of course, multifarious: it includes religious differences, antithetical historical memories, opposed national aspirations, incompatible political loyalties and a range of (often) conflicting cultural practices (Jarman 2007). A central feature of the GFA was the need to take into account of these various sources of community conflict and to initiate ways in which they might be transformed into positive and productive elements within the newly established political systems (NicCraith 2001).

Nevertheless, as implied, it is still the case that some sports have associated rituals that effectively deter the other community from becoming involved with them. For example, certain practices, such as singing and chanting at matches and playing specific anthems, are thought to be divisive (Bairner 1999). In March 2011, even an attempt to ban sectarian chanting at soccer matches failed in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The then Minister for Justice, David Ford, had included prohibition of sectarian chanting amongst the 108 clauses of the Northern Ireland Justice Bill, but met opposition from the Ulster Unionist Party. Its representative, David McNarry, argued that the subtext of the bill was such that it discriminated against the Protestant working class, and his party colleague Basil McCrea said it could lead to the silencing of legitimate political opinion such as ‘down with Tory cuts’. The Cohesion, Sharing and Integration consultation document, which had just been issued in draft format some months earlier by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland and was designed (yet again, some might sagely remark) to herald a new beginning to community relations in Northern Ireland, included an explicit commitment to ‘take action which will address sectarian behaviour at spectator events’ (Nolan 2012).

In a similar predicament to that faced by their contemporaries in the GAA, around the naming of clubs and their grounds, the IFA is challenged to successfully retain the support of their core supporter base—still largely Protestant, Unionist-minded males—whilst, almost simultaneously, appearing progressive, liberal and welcoming (especially to young Catholics who now, quite comfortably, refer to the Republic of Ireland national side as ‘their’ team). A failure to adequately address issues, like the playing of *God Save the Queen* prior to home international matches in Belfast or the extent of British symbolism that is regarded by some as being excessive, has continued to provide Catholics with ready justification for their non-engagement. Yet, it is also far too simplistic to say their support for the Republic of Ireland is somehow universally welcomed by supporters of the team who live in that country. Again, the spectre of politics, of sectarianism, even racism, casts a shadow, reasonably or otherwise, over northern support of the Republic of Ireland team, leaving others to wonder why those who live in Northern Ireland cannot simply support their ‘own’ team.

‘We Need to Talk About the Boys from the North’

Indeed, it was not very long at all before the diffusion of the unresolved cultural identity matters surrounding the Northern Ireland Peace Process was laid bare in the sporting arena. The ink was barely dry on the Belfast GFA of 1998 when an admission (to senior league football in NI) dispute arose between Lurgan Celtic and Donegal Celtic Football Clubs and the Irish Football League, which *The Irish News* (2 June 2000) reported as having required the mediation of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to be resolved.

This was undeniably a sporting controversy encompassing the historic inter-communal divide between Northern Ireland's two communities. In this case, these two perceived 'pro-Catholic' and 'pro-Nationalist' football clubs were, as they saw it, being unreasonably denied entry to the Irish Football League by, again, what they interpreted as a pro-Protestant/pro-Unionist League administration. That the diffusion of cultural identity divisions into the sporting sphere was of an inter-communal nature is perhaps unsurprising in this case, and there have been several very similar cases in more recent times. However, what could not have been foreseen is the extent to which the inter-communal aspect of the relationship between identity and sport for Catholics in Northern Ireland has arguably been usurped by *intra*-communal strife with their contemporaries south of the border. This will be considered through a case study that follows later in this chapter, in which recent developments within the Gaelic Athletic Association will be examined in detail.

It is indisputable that the GAA has endured a strained relationship with the Unionist community of Northern Ireland since the partition of Ireland in 1922. This was perhaps unsurprising as a sporting body advancing an unrepentant Irish Nationalist ambition would inevitably find itself at odds with the underlying ethos of a country demonstrating a robust Unionist majority. Indeed, Farrell contends that, 'The practical result of the creation of this Protestant police state was to be the permanent disaffection of the Nationalist minority' (Farrell 1976).

Rather, the GAA, as the Unionist community perceived it, epitomised an unwelcome Irish nationalist presence in the newly formed Northern Ireland, publicly displaying its presence in towns and villages up and down the country. What was more damaging to the GAA ever finding accommodation within the northern state at that time, however, was its own articles of association.

> The association's relationship with Northern Unionism has never been a happy one … they have strongly resented its prohibition on the police, enforced in 1904, and its longstanding ban on the playing of 'foreign' – or, as it seemed to them, 'Protestant' – games such as cricket and rugby. (Phoenix 1985)

The ban on so-called foreign games, or those that would have been enjoyed largely by the Unionist community, can easily be advanced as a historical fault-line underpinning those inter-communal disputes, in turn infiltrating the sporting sphere of Northern Ireland post-GFA, although it having been abolished from the GAA rule book in 1971.

From a southern perspective, these forms of exclusionary rules, even if they applied equally across the island, were always, perhaps too readily, aligned to its membership in Ulster. This was certainly true during the conflict spanning the last three decades of the twentieth century. The GAA, typically on the occasion of its Annual Congress, would deliver impassioned orations in support of its 'fellow Gaels' in Northern Ireland but did so, pointedly, from a distance. Rather, there was an overriding sense in which it remained regrettable that the GAA in the north had become so heavily embroiled in the 'Troubles', and more to the point, colleagues in the south could do very little about this and gradually, often silently, stopped engaging with the issue in any meaningful way.

Of course, it would not be until the early years of the twenty-first century before the GAA finally moved to properly address a series of contentious issues that had done little to build a lasting relationship with the Unionist community in Northern Ireland. The campaign for the repeal of Rule 21 (which denied membership of the Association to British security forces and police service personnel) witnessed the emergence of what, in hindsight, can now be understood as a northern GAA bloc, often portrayed as detached from an otherwise overwhelming southern consensus on this and many similar issues. *The Irish Times* reported (17 November 2001) that only one northern county, Down, supported the deletion of Rule 21 at a specially convened GAA Congress in November 2001, which hardly went unnoticed by Unionists in Northern Ireland, not to mention very many members of the GAA south of the border. It again allowed the GAA in Northern Ireland to be viewed in a negative light, as begrudging, unrepentant and people who will never accept the need to 'move on'. It remains, of course, much too simplistic an analysis. Very many rank and file GAA members in Northern Ireland were entirely happy to see Rule 21 removed from the GAA's statute book. They have no issue with a few soccer and rugby matches being played at GAA stadia and are sufficiently confident in their own position to appreciate that the 'sky isn't going to fall in' if the organisation is seen to give way on a few long-standing issues if it helps the overall direction of travel.

However, determined to send a message to the GAA at large, and as a virtual protest vote against examples of undeniably partial treatment towards some of its members in the past, GAA county boards in Northern Ireland could never be seen as being overly enthusiastic about the removal of Rule 21. Nevertheless, it might be argued that the GAA did not do enough as it might reasonably have done during this period to advance the case for new beginnings. As Rule 21 was once again in the minds of the majority southern membership of the GAA, ultimately designated 'a northern thing', it allowed an obvious comparison to be drawn between the 'reasonable', 'progressive' and 'liberal' south with the 'political', 'backward' and 'unforgiving' north.

The opening of Croke Park to stage the same so-called foreign games that 'the ban' had previously prohibited GAA members from playing was another key moment in the organisation's history. However, once again GAA delegates from the north, as they had done in 2001 when Rule 21 was ultimately repealed, voted in overwhelming numbers not to amend Rule 42. As was the case in 2001, their vote was widely interpreted as an expression of a hard-line, traditional form of Irish nationalism, (again) one increasingly seen as being solely aligned with Nationalists in Northern Ireland (Fulton and Bairner 2007). An editorial carried in *The Sunday Times* (17 April 2005) the day after the temporary repeal of Rule 42 reaffirms this, suggesting the voting of northern delegates reflected a mindset 'that belongs in the early years of the 20th century, not the 21st, and that is where yesterday's vote has consigned it'.

The extent to which the repeal of Rules 21 and 42 in the early twenty-first century served to alleviate much of historical animosity that the GAA had experienced from the Unionist community of Northern Ireland is difficult to gauge. For northern GAA members, the 'progress' that many felt would now permit them to consolidate a more fulsome expression of their cultural identity through participation in Gaelic games was far from a seamless process. Whilst much of the historical strife they had endured with their Unionist neighbours in Northern Ireland may have subsided, the *Sunday Times* editorial (quoted above) can be understood as the point at which a new era emerged for the besieged GAA community in the north. The resistance of some northern delegates to what were framed as the 'enlightened' and 'modern' initiatives sponsored by the southern GAA community did little to assuage a growing uneasiness between the organisations' membership on either side of the border. For northerners, the people of the south didn't, indeed couldn't, understand them, their history or even their lives experienced in a divided north. For southerners, precisely why everything in Northern Ireland needed to be viewed through the prism of politics and indeed why the GAA there needed to continue to take itself so seriously were typical sentiments expressed.

The increase in cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland arising from the GFA has therefore evidently not been replicated between the membership of Ireland's largest all-island sporting organisation, the GAA. It is difficult to determine how addressing the outstanding issues surrounding the GAA in the north led, perhaps unintentionally, to the widening of a schism between the organisation's membership in Ireland. Hassan's contention, published during the midpoint (2003) of the GAA's decade of repeals in the early twenty-first century, that a revisionist plot had taken hold of the GAA has been widely cited.

He argued at the time that:

> The growth of an enthusiastic revisionist grouping within the Republic of Ireland … has inevitably had an impact on the two sets of people living on the island … In essence, this suggests a fundamental lack of appreciation on the part of GAA members in the Republic of Ireland regarding the contrasting nature of the organization's role in Northern Ireland.

Success

On the field of play, there can be little doubt that the early twenty-first century witnessed unprecedented levels of success for northern teams in the All-Ireland Football Championships. The first-ever success for Armagh in 2002 was quickly followed by a maiden success for Tyrone the following year, with the latter going on to achieve further glory in 2005 and 2008. Whilst first-time winners are normally popular with neutral observers in many sports worldwide, the Tyrone success in 2003 is arguably a touchstone for much of the north–south animosity evident in the GAA over recent years. The infamous All-Ireland semi-final between Tyrone and Kerry in August 2003, in which an ultra-aggressive and intense Tyrone side arguably 'bullied' their much-fancied and illustrious southern adversaries, led to predictable levels of scorn from the game's self-appointed guardians, as reported in the *Irish Independent* (2 April 2005).

The thinly veiled assertion was that the aggression, stubbornness, indeed uncouthness (all too readily associated with elements of the GAA 'in the north', at least in the minds of some southern commentators) had been laid bare within the confines of Croke Park. The northern teams had brought an almost ungentlemanly level of competition to bear upon the game and, as such, the game, by extension, had become somehow 'contaminated' by the adversarial approach of those proposing it.

There is little doubt that such pejorative assessments, directed towards northern GAA teams and, indeed, their followers, from prominent figures within the southern GAA, have given rise to the creation of a 'siege mentality' within the northern GAA. Of course, the extent to which this, in turn, has been the result of an overreaction by a sometimes overly sensitive GAA community in Northern Ireland is difficult to properly assess.

There are other examples, perhaps of a comparatively marginal nature, of a partitionist mindset amongst GAA commentators in the Republic of Ireland towards their northern counterparts. Joe Brolly (*Gaelic Life*, 28 March–4 April 2012), highlighted this point when quoting a previous newspaper article written by the former Roscommon Gaelic footballer, Shane Curran. Curran had suggested, perhaps ungraciously, that:

> The emergence of the northern counties owes as much to the peace process and the financial assistance afforded to them by Her Majesty (Queen Elizabeth) than any real innovation. Money has played a significant part in the development of Tyrone and to a lesser extent Armagh.

There have also been allegations of racially motivated provocation being directed towards Gaelic footballers representing teams from Northern Ireland when playing against their southern counterparts. Whilst identifying the unwelcome emergence of what has, perhaps euphemistically, been referred to as 'sledging' in the sport, the leading GAA commentator Martin Carney, recalling a high-profile game in 2015, remarked:

> The poisonous remarks allegedly strewn in every direction would suggest that our game has some major questions to answer about the direction it is taking. While I would hope this was just a one off for the season, I have my doubts. (*The Connaught Telegraph*, 26 May 2015)

There is some evidence that 'sledging' has become a vehicle for the racial abuse of northern players by their southern opponents. In 2012, the alleged racist abuse of Armagh players during a league game against Laois was reported in the *Gaelic Life* newspaper (28 March 2012).

Specifically, it was reported that the Armagh captain that day, Ciaran McKeever, was 'believed to have been called a British bastard on several occasions, as well as having "God Save The Queen" shouted into his face'.

Even in terms of the northern teams' suitability for competing in the realm of Gaelic games, particularly hurling, there is a sense that these are games best left to those born and brought up amid the southern heartlands of Munster. Antrim senior footballer Stephen Beatty remarks (24 October 2017) that since minor level, his coaches would have consistently sought to inspire their teams by claiming their southern opponents 'didn't class us as having the same skill set or desire due to where we were from and this itself was very motivating'. Armagh senior hurler Danny Magee (22 October 2017) corroborates this view, claiming that his 'coaches (past and present) have stated how southern teams would laugh (claiming) northern teams are just there to participate and they will obtain an easy win'. The views of current Antrim minor hurler Tiarnan Murphy (24 October 2017) lends still more evidence of this sense that northern teams exist 'outside the tent' by claiming that:

> Playing a southern team always has that extra bit of spice to it because you know that they look down upon you as they see hurling and football as *their* sport and that there is no reason for us to be playing it.

Even away from the field of play, there has been a tendency to label supporters of northern teams as somehow 'a people apart', potential troublemakers and, in some cases, physically threatening. In 2012, the chairman of the Dr Crokes club in Kerry, prior to an All-Ireland club semi-final between the Killarney team and Armagh's Crossmaglen Rangers, called upon the GAA to consider 'segregating' followers of the northern team—a clear implication that supporters of Crossmaglen Rangers posed a latent threat to all other supporters, and therefore, it was the responsibility of the Association to prevent any trouble at the fixture from occurring. The wider significance of this episode was not lost on former GAA president Nickey Brennan, who suggested this call 'prompted some to question the relationship between clubs north and south' (*Kilkenny People*, 3 February 2012).

Conclusion

Nowadays, no one credibly argues that Irish Catholics, some nationalists and some not, are somehow a homogenous collective either side of the Irish border. It is of little surprise therefore that members of the GAA, an organisation almost exclusively frequented by Irish Catholics, would itself be divided along similar lines. This assessment is not one that sits comfortably with many within the GAA because it erodes the now arguably outdated suggestion that the GAA remains a unitary 32-county organisation, understood and experienced in a near identical fashion from Dingle in the south to Derry in the north.

What this chapter has argued is that even from the time when an end to the internal conflict within Northern Ireland was being initially muted—in the early nineties—there was evidence of hostility between GAA members—or at least those who spoke about and sometimes for the GAA—regarding the unwelcome 'contamination' of northern politics and division into the affairs of the GAA. For example, when the GAA took a decision in 1991 not to share equal billing with an association football game featuring two League of Ireland teams at a fundraising event in Dublin, it was because the GAA (then under the presidency of Peter Quinn from Northern Ireland) was 'caught in the past', unrepentant and, for some, simply sectarian. It was a convenient conclusion to draw—with a northerner at the helm, it might be said, this is the sort of unreasonable decision-making the GAA would simply have to come to terms with in future.

The same was true throughout the repeal of both Rule 21 and Rule 42—northern opposition to both was interpreted as being myopic, narrow minded and begrudging. There was little sense that northern GAA members were indeed different, and perhaps even reasonably so, but their actions reflected poorly on the Association at large and that made some members in the Republic of Ireland feel uneasy and compromised. Then, as Gaelic games have entered a new era of near semi-professionalism, some of the practices designed to secure advantage over one's opponent have again revealed a partitionist element. The labelling of northern teams, players and supporters has typically been to accentuate difference of a political kind, to underline separation and, ultimately, promote distance between the two 'Catholic' peoples on the island of Ireland.

The perhaps unanticipated outcome of this entire episode is that northern GAA followers have become even more isolated than they might ever have been before. Devoid of any real link with their Unionist neighbours, they have managed to carve out a civilised coexistence, whilst simultaneously becoming viewed as ‘a people apart’ by their contemporaries in the south. They are left to plough a solitary furrow, even if they continue to do so with resilience and emboldened with a remarkable sense of personal and community pride.

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CHAPTER 10

From the Front-Lines of War to the Sidelines of Peace? Gender, Republicanism and the Peace Process

Niall Gilmartin

Introduction

Conventional narratives of the Troubles often suggest that unlike their counterparts in state and loyalist forces, women were a visible and central force within militant republicanism. Moreover, while 'feminism would find a cold house in loyalism' (Potter 2014, p. 10) where it was deemed a 'dirty word' (Ward 2006), the Provisional republican movement is often accredited with providing a relatively receptive and fertile terrain for their particular brand of republican feminism. The simplicity of such narratives, however, conceals the gendered complexities and contradictions of women's roles and experiences within non-state nationalist movements. Although many forms of ethno-nationalism zealously propagate the notion of a horizontal 'us' in the shape of an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), feminist scholars convincingly contend that "all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender" (McClintock 1993, p. 43). Despite the importance of gender to the constitutive purposes

N. Gilmartin (✉)
Department of Sociology, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: niall.gilmartin@mumail.ie

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of ethno-nationalism, the reductive framework of nationalism is ultimately premised on particular notions of masculinity and femininity. Although women's role as combatants undoubtedly undermines the conventional feminine stereotypes of peacemaker or victim, nevertheless, gender fundamentally shapes (and often limits) women's roles and experiences in non-state nationalist movements. Women were unquestionably active and highly visible across a myriad of roles within Provisional republicanism; their involvements and identities during the Troubles, however, were also profoundly gendered. While a burgeoning body of work explored many of their gendered wartime experiences (see Alison 2004, 2009; Aretxaga 1997; Ashe 2006; O'Keefe 2003, 2013; Wahidin's 2016), the period of conflict transition since 1994 has received relatively less attention. Using a critical gender approach, this chapter explores the conflict transition experiences of women within the Provisional republican movement. I conceptualise gender as a structural power relation based on the culturally assigned and socially constructed differences between masculinities and femininities. Gender is, 'more broadly, a way of categorising, ordering, and symbolising power, of hierarchically structuring relationships among different categories of people, and different human activities symbolically associated with masculinity or femininity' (Cohn 2013, p. 3). A critical gender approach explores how notions about the appropriate roles, relationships and behaviours of women and men are created, sustained and legitimised by institutions, discourses and practices (Whitworth 1994). The analysis offered throughout this chapter demonstrates the indispensability of gender to explaining republican women's experiences of peace and conflict transition.

SOLDIERS OR SERVANTS? GENDER, NATIONALISM AND ARMED CONFLICT

Although nationalism as a social construct or 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) seeks to homogenise differences under the discourse of a broad horizontal comradeship based on equal membership, feminist explorations diligently expose the central constitutive role of gender, arguing that 'all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender' (McClintock 1993, p. 43). Nationalist discourse stresses that constructions of nationhood involve specific notions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood', whereby man equates with warrior, fighter and protector and woman as carer and nurturer (Moser and Clark 2001; Yuval-Davis 1997).

Gendered assumptions regarding linkages between femininity and vulnerability find its clearest expression in women's assigned roles as symbolic bearer of the nation's honour and identity such as 'Mother Ireland' (Ashe 2006), and biological and cultural reproducers of the nation (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). While the gendered dichotomy of male-protector/female-protected remains a pervasive representational model of gender roles, feminist scholars have long challenged the dubious links between femininity and 'peacefulness' by documenting women's role as armed activists (Lorentzen and Turpin 1998; Moser and Clark 2001; Meintjes et al. 2001; Jacobs et al. 2000; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). Despite its centrality to the composition and reproduction of ethno-nationalism, gender is rarely viewed as a significant concern within conventional approaches to both war and conflict resolution. Given their assigned subordinate status within nationalism, gender and by extension, women are largely conceptualised as being tangential, not central to conflict.

Furthermore, feminist scepticism of nationalism as a thoroughly gendered and patriarchal structure asserts that women's participation within nationalist movements is ultimately a futile endeavour as the eradication of patriarchy in anything other than rhetoric remains a low political priority for their male comrades. Cynthia Cockburn, among others, advices against the synthesis of feminism and nationalism because once anti-imperial movements gain power they quickly 'shed their socialist and feminist ideologies that were present during conflict upheaval' (1998, p. 42). Anne McClintock also warns against viewing nationalist movements as a panacea to women's emancipation, as feminist nationalists are frequently told by their male comrades to 'hold their tongues until the revolution is over' (1993, p. 77); promises of a more gender-equal society after the warring hollow whereby once conflict has ended, pre-conflict gender norms quickly re-establish themselves and 'feminist nationalists find themselves once again under the thumb of institutionalised patriarchy' (Nagel 1998, p. 253). In other words, women's support for the national cause does not result in a reciprocal gesture from men; 'nowhere has a national or socialist revolution brought a full feminist revolution in its train. In many nationalist or socialist countries women's concerns are at best paid lip service, at worst greeted with hilarity. If women have come to do men's work, men have not come to share women's work. Nowhere has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maidservant to nationalism' (McClintock 1993, p. 79).

Given this, it is unsurprising that women's role within Irish republicanism is vexed with contradictions. For all its rhetoric regarding its revolutionary and socialist credentials, the Provisional republican movement initially operated along a strict gender division of roles. Breaking with 'tradition', republican women in the early 1970s were not sated with the prospect of playing the auxiliary role in this evolving conflict and so demanded a full and equal role in the IRA.[1] So while initially women's contributions were restricted solely to the auxiliary roles of *Cumann na mBan*[2] (Alison 2009, p. 187), their demands for full entry into all aspects of militant republicanism meant that women became a vital part of the IRA (Ward 2004, p. 191). Therefore, the decision by the republican leadership to allow women to join the IRA as full members stemmed not from ideological considerations but more pragmatic concerns regarding the loss of male volunteers through internment and the spiralling levels of violence in the early 1970s (Power 2010). Within the IRA, 'initially women were assigned roles because of their gender, not in spite of it' (O'Keefe 2013, p. 66). Gendered assumptions by the state regarding male violence and the myth of women's innocence (Mukta 2000) ensured that women's republican activities such as communications, weapons smuggling or reconnaissance escaped largely unnoticed by state forces; baby prams and underwear were often used as a means of transporting (Alison 2009; O'Keefe 2013). Women's progression from auxiliary to front-line fighter saw them trained as proficient bomb makers. Even as early as 1972, the first IRA bombing team in England involved women and was allegedly led by the Price sisters, Dolours and Marion, who each received lengthy prison sentences for their role in the bombings.

Women convicted for bombing and shooting offences as well as the instances in which some died on 'active service' is indicative of women's permeations throughout the ranks of the IRA. This is not to suggest, however, that widespread sexism and even patriarchal views did not exist within the ranks of the IRA. Existing empirical studies suggest that despite feelings of 'empowerment', 'comraderie' and 'equality' across the ranks, women were critically aware of male dominance and sexism throughout the republican movement (Gilmartin 2017b; O'Keefe 2013; White 2017). Despite the active participation of women at all levels, the area of leadership presents a glaring absence of women. As a secret (and illegal) organisation, it is impossible to accurately determine the extent of women's participation at a leadership level but some suggest that women's leadership roles were located firmly at a cell or brigade level, never reaching the upper echelons. As in 'any hierarchical organisation (e.g. political parties), male prejudice and gendered norms dictated what leadership looked like, at the expense of women' (O'Keefe 2013, p. 78). Other reasons cited are women's lack of 'seeking power' through positions, while others refer to the gendered division of labour as primary explanations for the alleged dearth of women at the higher levels of leadership. Despite an overhaul in its gender regime at a rank and file level, women faced formidable structural barriers when the dearth of women at a leadership level is examined (Keenan-Thompson 2010, p. 235).

Moreover, women's bodies became sites of struggle and resistance, no more so than in the prison struggle of the late 1970s and early 1980s. While the attention of British state forces initially focused on men, in March 1972, Liz McKee was the first woman interned. From 1972 onwards, republican women were arrested, detained, interrogated, tortured and imprisoned. Women's bodies were often used by state forces as key 'battlegrounds', attempting to interrogate or extract information from female suspects using sexual slurs, strip searches, overtones and actual threats of rape (O'Keefe 2013, p. 35). Menstruating women in detention were also denied sanitary towels and personal hygiene. As their bodies were used as weapons against them, republican women became critically aware of the gendered ways in which they, unlike their male comrades, were experiencing the conflict. Through the state's widespread use of gendered violence against women's bodies, many women came to feminism through republicanism (Power 2010, p. 154). Although the 1981 hunger strike[3] signalled an end to the 'mirror searches' against the men, ironically, between 1982 and 1986 strip searching of women increased with precise regularity.[4] Refusing to consent to such practices, women were physically restrained by a number of prison warders (usually male warders) and clothing forcibly removed. Sexual slurs, beatings and mass cell searches, alongside strip searches were regular parts of the prison regime for women throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. By the 1980s, republican feminism, particularly in the establishment of the Sinn Féin Women's Department, emerged as a robust political force within the republican movement, 'aggressively campaigning' on issues of prisoner rights, reproductive rights and a lack of equality on the basis of sexual orientation and class (O'Keefe 2013, p. 133). By now, 'women's liberation was an integral part of the overall struggle against oppression' (Gillespie 1994, p. 17), indicating the synthesis between women's emancipation and national self-determination. Like many other non-state liberation movements around the world, republican women carved out political spaces within the republican movement to develop a broad social and political agenda that reached far beyond the national question, including gender equality, LGBT rights, ethnic and racial minorities and reaching out to other struggles in places such as Palestine and South Africa (Maillot 2005). The remainder of this chapter seeks to analyse some of the gendered experiences of republican women within a movement transitioning from armed political violence to a largely mainstream institutional political party.

Masculine Myth-Making: The Gender Politics of Post-war Commemoration

Commemoration plays a significant and deeply influential role in the shaping of collective memories and dominant narratives of wartime roles and events (Rolston 2003). It is, however, as much a process of forgetting as it is remembering (Forty and Kuchler 1999). ‘State formations, political parties or movements, and other social agents are all involved in constructing versions of the national past and national identity, selecting from or reworking the repertoire of stories and symbols to fashion effectively useable public memories for their particular ends and purposes’ (Ashplant et al. 2000, p. 16). In other words, commemoration is never an objective mirror accurately representing the past; architects of memorialisation are motivated and informed by specific political ambitions as they ‘imagine the nation’ (Anderson 1983). While various forms of republican memorialisation existed during the Troubles (typically parades, murals and a small number of plaques), the transition period under examination here witnessed a rapid increase, with a high percentage of memorials for every one of the 294 IRA volunteers who were killed in the conflict (McDowell 2008, p. 345). Republican commemoration today is prolific and manifested in monuments, murals, republican plots in cemeteries, ceremonies and annual commemorations, parades, wreath laying, graveside orations, sporting events, festivals, song and music (Graham and Whelan 2007). The vast number of murals, memorials and plagues indicates the value afforded to the use of prominent public spaces by republicans (and loyalists also) in order to tell their version of the war. Many memorials list IRA volunteers and civilians who died at the hands of the ‘British State’ constructing a vision of oneness and unity between the armed IRA and the community on behalf of which they vowed to fight for (McDowell 2007). Despite this spirit of collective resistance where 'everyone has a part to play',[5] republican commemoration has traditionally privileged certain military roles over others. More often than not, the male protagonist dominates the commemorative landscape with a notable relative absence of militant republican women (Graham and Whelan 2007; McDowell 2007; O'Keefe 2013). As well embodying a highly selective process, commemorative work is also highly gendered.

Wall murals have played a prominent commemorative role in republicanism from the hunger strike period onwards. An analysis of over 500 republican and nationalist murals in 1996 revealed that just six made reference to armed republican women (O'Keefe 2013, p. 102). Lorraine Dowler's extensive research in West Belfast in 1998 found vast levels of frustration among republican women at the male dominance and bias within songs and ballads. Of the seventy-four republican songs analysed by Dowler, she found just four made reference to women's roles in armed struggle. Echoing the experiences of interviewees here, Dowler's research reveals similar anxieties regarding the erasure of women's stories from the republican struggle. Although many republican women are consistent in stating their belief that the leadership was doing its best to include women within its commemorative work, there are palpable levels of resentment and frustration at the lack of attention to women's wartime contribution (Gilmartin 2017b). In addition to the dearth of 'visibility' within memorial works, there is discernible resentment towards ongoing processes of rewriting women's contributions as merely the 'backbone of the struggle'. Lorraine Dowler found a pervasive attitude among republican men that their role (as frontline fighters) eclipsed and superseded all other military roles. In particular, it revealed the austere criteria used by men in defining a 'combatant'. While men state that 'we [men] were the ones in the front lines……out there every night on patrol' (male republican cited in Dowler 1998, p. 172), republican women define IRA involvement as something far broader and eclectic, encompassing the diversity of roles women played within the republican movement including safe houses, weapons storage, reconnaissance, communications, weapons transportation, among others. Crucially, unlike their male comrades and that of most conventional war narratives, they argued that all roles of military resistance were of equal importance to the republican struggle (Gilmartin 2017b). Yet, militarism remains a vital sphere for the performance and evaluation of masculinity, and so, militaries have an ideological stake in confining women's roles to the periphery (Enloe 2000, p. 40). Given that conventional forms of soldering are often used to validate expressions of masculinity and vice versa, non-direct combatant roles, or supportive roles largely undertaken by women (though it must be stressed, not exclusively), are not deemed a valid expression of normative masculinity and therefore remain marginalised and devalued. While men do also occupy support roles such as porter, cooks and communicators, Megan MacKenzie (2012) contends that their roles and the validity in claiming the title of soldier are never questioned. Depicting women's support roles or 'backbone' contributions renders them simply as followers, bereft of agency and political consciousness, redefining their wartime endeavours as simply an extension of their domestic roles. The prevailing masculine definition of a combatant within commemoration work enforces a dichotomous classification which categorises women as supplementary parts of the armed struggle. At the heart of such hierarchical ordering is the notion that supportive roles, and therefore women's roles, are not 'real' forms of combat.

It therefore seems reasonable to concur that republican commemoration in the past fifteen years eagerly pays homage to a war fought by male combatants (Graham and Whelan 2007; McDowell 2008). When it comes to pinpointing women's 'invisibility' in commemoration, the issue of the prison protest is cited time and again. The perennial question among most is 'were we not in Armagh on the protest also?' The dominant story within republican commemoration which centres overwhelmingly on the H-Blocks and male hunger strikers projects a public and internal narrative that women were not really there during this turbulent and significant period. The prison protests of the late 1970s and early 1980s remain a dominant focal point for republican commemoration. Although republican prisoners, both male and female, were incarcerated in various jails across Britain and Ireland, the focus of the prison protest resided in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh[6] which housed male inmates and Armagh jail which housed female inmates. A first hunger strike involving both men and women collapsed in December 1980, and a second hunger strike in 1981 which lasted for more than eight months resulted in the deaths of ten men in the H-Blocks. The twentieth anniversary of the hunger strike in 2001 witnessed a plethora of acts of republican memorialisation regarding the prison protests and today remains a prominent feature in the republican commemorative calendar.

The image of the male militarist literally loomed large over the 1980/1981 commemorations in 2001. In Derry city cemetery, a ten-foot-high black marble stone statue was erected to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the hunger strikes. The figurative sculpture depicts a masked man in military uniform, wearing dark glasses and a beret brandishing a gun. The idea that the prison struggles of both women and men could be represented solely by a male figurative soldier caused offence to many republican women who felt their contribution to the prison protest, and by extension to the overall republican struggle was omitted (McDowell 2008, p. 343). The towering statues represent a vision of combatants as militarised masculinity (Graham and Whelan 2007). This trend continued with similar statues erected in republican strongholds throughout the North of Ireland in 2001, despite the disquiet and protestations expressed by republican women. As one former Armagh prisoner told me: 'women have just been wiped out of history and even with regards to the hunger strike and that. Some people are making documentaries or writing books about it, and it's like Armagh didn't exist and that can be very frustrating'.[7] The case of a recent and much-celebrated documentary is a pertinent example. Released in 2016, Brendan Byrne's *66 Days* documents the turbulent period of the 1981 hunger strike, primarily focusing on Bobby Sands. Despite the breadth and scope of contributors across the 106 minutes of documentary film, not a single female voice is included. This absence is magnified when we consider women's roles during the period in question; women were IRA volunteers, Relative Action Committees, Sinn Féin members and No-Wash protesting prisoners; they were *Cumann na mBan* volunteers; they were street activists; there were three female hunger strikers in Armagh in 1980; they were relatives and supporters. Even if just for tokenistic reasons, the inclusion of at least one female perspective may have mitigated the male-dominance slightly. The documentary represents yet another in a long line of examples revealing the extent to which a male dominated story has gained a hegemonic grip when recounting the prison protest period while simultaneously erasing the stories and contributions of women.

The example of the hunger strikes perfectly illustrates the deliberately diminished stories of women's experiences in Armagh when contrasted with the amplified male narrative of the H-Blocks and suggests that women's wartime contributions are rarely considered worthy 'celebrating'. There exists a broad consensus among former female IRA combatants that republican acts of memorialisation during the conflict transition period are not reflecting their experiences or contributions in a meaningful or accurate way, despite the fact that most also stated that 'the movement was doing its best' to include women (Gilmartin 2017b). The exclusion of women within commemoration indicates that while most republican women state that they played an 'equal' role alongside the men in the realm of armed struggle, the memorial landscape in the transition suggests that this view was not shared by the vast majority of men. It appears that the struggle for women to be recognised and included within commemoration in the transition period is in fact a continuity of their wartime struggle to be recognised and included as 'equals'.

It is important to state that I am not suggesting that all republican women are absent from republican memorialisation.[8] The Price sisters, Marian and Dolours, were both given life sentences in London in 1973 for their part in an IRA bombing campaign, the very first Provisional IRA bombs in England of the Troubles. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the two sisters were in fact the team leaders for that bombing campaign. Mairead Farrell was shot dead by the British army (SAS)[9] in Gibraltar in 1988 during an attempted bomb attack on British military targets there, specifically a weekly British military parade. Mairead had previously spent time in Armagh jail for her part in a bomb attack on the Conway Hotel on the outskirts of West Belfast. Dorothy Maguire and Maura Meehan were shot dead by the British army in the Lower Falls on 23 October 1971. At the time of their deaths, they were engaged in 'Hen Patrols',[10] scouting streets for the presence of state forces in order to warn active republicans in that area. As the British army entered Clonard street, just off the Falls road, the women attempted to warn republican by sounding the horn of their car. The British army responded and shot both women dead. Other *Cumann na mBan* volunteers such as Anna Parker and Anne Marie Pettigrew were killed when the bombs they were transporting for IRA volunteers exploded prematurely.

When we examine this cohort of republican women, it is interesting to see the ways in which some are prominent in republican commemoration while others are barely visible. Mairead Farrell is relatively prominent in public memorials such as murals and quotations, and her name is often placed alongside the names of other prominent republicans such as Bobby Sands during commemorative speeches and political speeches. This is somewhat similar in the case of the Price sisters. Although they parted their ways with the mainstream republican movement due to ideological differences,[11] they remain widely 'celebrated' for their 'successful'[12] bombing operation in London, despite their arrest and imprisonment. The cases of others, however, such as the volunteers of *Cumann na mBan* who also lost their lives, remain largely invisible. It appears that when women do come into view within male-led republican commemoration, they are those who were acting in accordance with the roles traditionally associated with being a 'combatant'. Those in roles deemed as 'non-combat' or support structures who also gave their lives barely elicit a mention. It suggests that when female combatants are included, they are included on men's terms and conditions—tacked on to a format which adheres to a masculine definition of militarism and is situated within an established commemorative discourse. Republican commemoration reflects the long-standing view that women's contribution is valued only when it fits into a masculine vision of combatant. Commemoration is therefore a reflective manifestation of a much broader trend which sees women's contribution appraised positively by men only when it occurs on their terms and definitions.

The 'invisibility' of female combatants in the post-war period is not an innocuous oversight and has major implications for gender relations in the conflict transition period. Gender power is socially, culturally and symbolically constituted and sustained through the hierarchical ordering of masculinities and femininities. The cultivation of militarised masculinity through gendered discourses, symbols and practices predisposes the commemorative landscape to a narrow vision which invariably produces a distorted history of women roles during armed conflict. The function of post-war appraisals, such as commemoration, is to airbrush any lingering vestiges of femininity from the war record and project a mythical narrative which re-secures the realm of soldering as a masculine space only. In other words, the tendency to conflate soldering solely with men and manliness draws sustenance from gendered role distinctions, which positions men at the vanguard of armed actions while simultaneously deposing women. It is clear that the majority of republican commemoration was guided by a rigid adherence to a narrow, masculine definition of combatant, exalting the male protagonist and recasting women as 'supporters', effectively dismissing their vital wartime contributions as supplementary. The daily reality for military movements across the globe, both state and non-state alike, is their reliance upon the military labour of women and men. Despite the reality of women's multifarious roles within republican armed struggle, the post-war commemorative milieu facilitates the erasure of women's contributions by fashioning soldering duties which adhere to normative masculine visions and conceptualisations. Conventional narratives of war magnify and value those activities typically associated with normative masculinity and its culturally assigned behaviours. Therefore, women's multiple roles are often invisible, but furthermore, many other roles that men undertake which fall outside what is broadly termed as direct combat are also missed. In other words, traditional, male-dominated approaches to remembering wartime roles are wholly inept for yielding an accurate account of what women and men do in times of war.

Lost in the Fog of Peace? The Sinn Féin Women's Department

The foundation of the Sinn Féin Women's Department in 1979 represented a collective effort by republican women to ensure that they had a voice and political spaces within the republican movement. Advocating strongly around issues which at the time were deemed highly controversial topics such as divorce, access to contraception, domestic violence and equality for LGBT, among others, suggests an overt feminist outlook motivated and informed much of this activism (Maillot 2005; O'Keefe 2003; Power 2010). In addition to the links and activism for women within working-class republican communities, the Women's Department was also having an impact on the formal politics of Sinn Féin (Maillot 2005; Side 2009, p. 75). A key contribution of the Women's Department was the women's policy document, the first of its kind of any of the political parties on the island, in which was included appeals for public childcare and childcare to be shared by both parents (O'Keefe 2013, p. 135). Sinn Féin became the first political party in Ireland to provide childcare at its annual *Ard Fheis* (party conference); a subsequent motion at the 1986 *Ard Fheis* ensured that the party would pay childcare costs when such facilities are unavailable at party meetings or functions. Sinn Féin has made good its promise around affirmative action, and in 2003, the party adopted a 50:50 gender representation for its Ard Comhairle. Today, Sinn Féin is widely hailed for its relatively progressive stance on women (Buckley 2013; Galligan 2013). Undoubtedly, however, strict limitations were placed on the scope of republican feminist activism, where they faced formidable internal battles with those of a more conservative standpoint, particularly around the issue of abortion (Frampton 2009). Despite its successes and its prominence in the lives of republican women, the subsequent demise of the department in the aftermath of the 1994 IRA cessation is enveloped in confusion and ambiguity.

Having endured and politically thrived during some of the worst years of armed conflict, I suggest here that the ambiguous collapse of the Women's Department is directly related to the Provisional's ideological shift to institutional politics within the post-ceasefire period. The feminist politics of the Women's Department and the overall movement's shift towards institutional politics constructed two incompatible strategies; the former, an echo of their revolutionary past; the latter, the future constitutional direction of the movement. Despite over 7 years of research on republican women, including formal interviews, informal inquiries, scores of email correspondence and secondary literature, there remains a profound and widespread ambiguity over the date and the reasons for its demise. There were no great fanfare, no statement from the party hierarchy announcing the ending of the department and no vast restructuring of the party apparatus; according to most, the Women's Department just 'fell away'. There is a suggestion among some that the Women's Department had ran its course, and moreover, that it had achieved its objectives in the mid-1990s by securing 'equality' for women within the movement (Gilmartin 2017a). There are a number of problems with such a sentiment. First, ostensibly the objectives of the Women's Department were far broader than simply including women as formal equals in party politics. Second, we know that women were and still are struggling for equality and recognition within the republican movement, despite their rhetorical assurances to the contrary (O'Keefe 2013; Gilmartin 2017b). The ideological shift towards institutional politics and the primacy afforded to the demands of the 'peace process' offer a more plausible explanation for the downfall of the Department. With control of state power at stake, many of the other political struggles were cast aside until the 'bigger question' of institutional power was resolved. In order to pursue the formal peace process, all republican energies, including those of the Women's Department, were channelled into formal peace negotiations and electoral gains. Feminist criticism of nationalism as a patriarchal structure often cites post-war regression, among others, as robust evidence of the pitfalls for women's participation within such highly gendered movements (McClintock 1993; Enloe 2014). Women pursuing a feminist agenda alongside their nationalist struggle are consistently told by their male counterparts to sideline their gender concerns for the more pressing issue of 'the national question'. Invariably, the advice to nationalist women from their male comrades when it comes to women's rights and equality is, 'not now, later' (Enloe 2014, p. 120).

Undoubtedly the transition years witnessed a leadership-driven discipline within the movement (Bean 2007; Tonge 2006) where the party moved from 'purported revolutionary republican vanguardism towards becoming a competitive actor in the political marketplace'. 'New' Sinn Féin 'seeks respect for its electoral mandate, co-operates with other parties and constructs its agenda primarily based upon equality and rights rather than issues of sovereignty and territory' (Tonge 2006, p. 136). While acknowledging that both the IRA and Sinn Féin always existed as hierarchical structure (and mainly male-led leadership), a hardening of party lines during this period contrasted with the spaces previously available to discourse and debate within the movement during armed struggle. And 'as the party becomes increasingly preoccupied with electoral success, the interests of women fade from prominence' (O'Keefe 2013, p. 138). Explorations of republican women reveal an awareness that the movement was shifting towards a more institutional path, and so, the radical, grassroots activism was something that required tempering and refinement to fit in with the new institutional departure. Moreover, as electoral contests gained primacy, public perceptions and popularity limited previously radical positions on broader social issues (Gilmartin 2017a).

While Maria Power (2010) suggests that the Women's Department was defunct by the late 1980s, there is much archival material documenting publications by the department throughout the 1990s and even as recently as 2002. Through extensive searches online but more importantly at the vast political literature collection at Belfast's Linen Hall Library, the final publication from the Women's Department that I could find dates to the year 2000 with *Women In An Ireland Of Equals.* After this, there is an abundance of party literature and policy documents on women's rights, yet they appear not as Women's Department publications but under different headings, again highlighting the ambiguity over the demise of the department. For example, in 2002, a document also entitled *Women In An Ireland Of Equals* is published by the Sinn Féin Women's Committee, while in 2007 the *Sinn Féin Women's*

Manifesto is a Sinn Féin only publication. The lack of an actual date or event marking the end (or at best, the reformulation) of the department muddies the waters on its exact demise, but it is distinctly apparent that by the mid-1990s the Women's Department faded and the new Equality Department emerged in its place.

During the course of previous research, I made both formal and informal inquiries of people in various positions in Sinn Féin and wider republican movement. The replies I received were highly mixed and at times opaque. Informally (through phone conversation), I was told that the Women's Department formally ended in the late 1990s, when Lucilita Bhreatnach, who was prominent within the Department, changed role within the party. Another source informed me that it 'never officially ended' because of the existence of a 'women's group' within the party today but then went on to reiterate that it is actually no longer an official 'department'. Another source told me that the Women's Department was still technically in existence after the formation of the Equality Department in 2002 and was subsequently renamed 'Gender Equality'. Another prominent Sinn Féin member told me through email that 'there is a lot of confusion regarding the dates. It's quite possible the Women's Department formally ceased in the late 1990s, or just ceased functioning as a department at that time, and there were maybe one or two people who issued documents under the name afterwards'. In 2006, a conference in Belfast called 'Entitled Voices - Women in International Struggle' was organised by the Sinn Féin Equality Department. A key speaker at this event was Eibhlín Glenholmes, a senior republican who was listed as Sinn Féin's National coordinator for Gender Equality at the time. In an interview published in the party newspaper *An Phoblacht/Republican News* in March 2006, she states that 'Sinn Féin's Party Development Department has been charged with creating and developing programmes and mechanisms by which we will truly become representative of society. Within that department I have responsibility to ensure gender equality. I will use whatever tools are necessary to ensure that women are not just seen but are also heard' (*An Phoblacht* 2006).

Of course an alternative reading here could postulate that the real story here is that now the crisis of armed action has passed; the reserve army of women was supplementary to requirements. Carol Coulter (1993) and Margaret Ward (1989) have both documented the historical pattern of women's marginalisation by Irish republicanism and nationalism in the aftermath of independence struggles of the past. In particular, both concur that women have never been accepted as equals by men within such movements. There is undoubtedly more than a grain of truth to such assertions, yet it is entirely premised on the ways men situate women as opposed to examining where women situate themselves in the aftermath of armed conflict. Unquestionably, women were marginalised during the period in question, yet that is but a partial telling of the story. In particular, there is no suggestion at all that Sinn Féin is excluding women. On the contrary, there is a chorus of feminist praise for the party's consistent progressive record on women (Buckley 2013; Galligan 2013; Sales 1997). After the resignation of Martin McGuinness in January 1917, the republican leadership endorsed and appointed Michelle O'Neill as its party leader in the North of Ireland. In the last Assembly elections in the North in March 2017, Sinn Féin returned 11 female MLAs out of its 27 MLAs, once again retaining its position as the party with the highest percentage of women among its elected representatives. In other words, the 'reserve army' thesis does not stand in the face of Sinn Féin's relatively progressive record on promoting women. What I argue here is that it is feminism, not women, which is the reserve army, now supplementary to post-war requirements. Therefore, it is important to link the shift towards institutional methods with the diminishing feminist politics associated with the Women's Department. According to Eibhlin Glenholmes, Coordinator for Gender Equality, the body which replaced the Women's Department actively trained women in areas of 'leadership' in order that they progress through the ranks of the party, yielding many benefits for the party's increase in female candidates. The demise of the Women's Department therefore should not be read as an outright exclusion of women within the movement as such, but is more indicative of the new ways in which the party re-conceptualised women's equality as women's participatory rights within formal politics.

The end of the Women's Department however does largely represent the end of republican feminism within Provisional republicanism. The ideological departure from revolutionary agitating towards a more mainstream position invariably shaped the spaces available to republican feminists. In the course of the peace process, republicans adopted the language and ideas more closely bound to mainstream politics (Ryan 1997): 'the softer language of transition and gradualism has replaced the maximalist imperatives of a revolutionary party' (Bean 2007, p. 141). In keeping with this new form of politics, the emergence of the 'Equality Agenda' during the peace process significantly blunted the cutting edge of republican feminism without actually cutting off republican women. By adopting relatively mainstream mechanisms such as quotas and utilising a discourse of citizenship and rights in order to pursue gender equality, the republican movement effectively included republican feminists while excluding feminism. The merging of the Women's Department with other political issues within what would be called the catch-all 'Equality Department' meant that what was once a relatively radical tool for republican feminism was replaced with the gender-neutral terminology of 'citizenship', 'equality' and 'rights', therefore removing the gender specifics of women's struggle.

Within the formal peace process, republican politics would now manifest solely in party policy, legislation and, of course, political rhetoric. In this new era, 'equality and rights' replaced the strategies of revolutionary agitation, and so, women's struggle for emancipation would be sequestered and emerge in the post-ceasefire period as something far more tempered and modest. Previous advocacy around reproductive rights or strip searching by state forces were watered down and substituted by mainstream actions such as legislative affirmation around gender equality of opportunity and the selective use of positive discrimination by use of gender quotas. The newly formed Equality Department bore little or no resemblance to the radical politics and feminist struggles that went before in the Women's Department. While women's struggle was deemed an essential part of the revolutionary strategy during the conflict by women themselves, armed conflict itself appears to have been a specific precondition for the housing of such a strong feminist voice within the movement's ideological canon. Implicit within the post-war, reordering is a view that feminism is somehow associated with revolutionary, subversive politics. In order to reflect the new state-centric political positioning, feminism was deemed unsuitable and replaced with a more fitting 'Equality Agenda'.

The Defined Limitations of Women's Struggles

The centrality of ethno-nationalism in Northern Ireland and the perennial ethno-sectarian headcount magnifies the need for control of women's reproductive capabilities. The dominance of religious conservatism and polarised ethno-national communities begets a highly restrictive political and social landscape with regard to sexuality and women's bodily autonomy. This heady brew is defused throughout the formal political system with all of the main political parties vehemently opposed to women's full access to reproductive health care, including Sinn Féin.[13] Elisabeth Porter (1994) argues that 'reproductive rights affirm equality as an extension of the principle of bodily integrity, and self-determination'. Throughout my years of research, the majority of republican women I have spoken with are broadly in favour of women's right to choose. It is important to state that a significant minority openly oppose abortion on what they described as a 'moral' principle. Some simply declared that they 'had big, big problems with it' while others stated that they were 'fed up with feminists within Sinn Féin banging on about abortion. When they get up to speak at the *Ard Fheis*, that's when I go for my tea break'.[14] In October 2016, Anne Brolly, a high-profile member quit the party after it changed its policy in 2015 to allow terminations in cases of fatal foetal abnormality. Anne Brolly became a leading member of a new republican lobby group Cherish All Children Equally.[15] It is an important caveat to any suggestions that the Provisional republican movement is wholly conducive or receptive to feminist politics and, moreover, is emblematic of the in-house complexities of pursuing a feminist agenda within a male-led nationalist movement. Its membership remains what it has always been—a broad church ranging from social conservatives to pro-choice feminists, and the resignation of Anne Brolly is indicative of the internal battles which rage within it around such matters.

While Sinn Féin sees itself as a secular party, open to people of all faiths and none, some of its 'leading members openly identify with the Roman Catholic Church' (Maillot 2005, p. 222). The internal battle for a pro-choice position has persisted since the emergence of the Women's Department in 1979 but the issue came to prominence during the party's *Ard Fheis* in 1985, which surprisingly passed a simple 'right to choose' motion.[16] According to Maillot, the motion, and the very issue of abortion itself 'raised a high level of discomfort and discontent…… as it was too divisive, too controversial, and ultimately too damaging' (2005, p. 113–114). Overturning the 1985 motion, the wording of the 1986 motion which replaced it appeared conservative and slightly ambiguous, stating that 'we are opposed to the attitudes and forces in society that compel women to have abortions. We are opposed to abortion as a means of birth control'. Broadly speaking, Sinn Féin retreated back to the politically prudent and conservative lines of that of many of Ireland's mainstream political parties. The current party position is contained in the *Women in Ireland* document endorsed by the 1999 *Ard Fheis*, which includes:

> Sinn Féin condemns the failure of the Dublin Government to enact legislation following the abortion referenda in 1992. Despite the result of the referenda, very little has changed for women in the 26 Counties. Sinn Féin believes that full information and non-directive pregnancy counselling, embodying all choices, should be freely available. Sinn Féin is opposed to the attitudes and forces in society which compel women to have abortions and criminalises those who do make this decision. We accept the need for abortion where a woman's life and mental health is at risk or in grave danger and in cases of rape or child sexual abuse.

While republicans tend to position themselves as more liberal on matters of gender and sexuality than their unionist counterparts,[17] their policy position is at best opaque and again positions women not as agents but as victims of 'attitudes', 'forces' and 'pressures'. Though republican women created the ideological and practical space to engage in issues around gender equality and feminism in the 1980s, it is also clear that there were defined limitations to how far women's struggle within the movement could go. It was regulated and monitored by those at the leadership level, and at times of peril for the party, women's struggle would be sequestered. While many republican women state that they are 'happy' with the party's position on abortion, most also qualified that it was far from perfect. Although the republican movement designates itself as a secular broad church comprised of an eclectic mix of traditional republicans, nationalists, conservative Catholics, socialists and feminists, 'Catholicism was a powerful cultural influence on republicans' (Bean 2007, p. 225). There remains a conservative attitude within Provisional republicanism that women's primary role is that of mother, valued for reproductive capacities, despite claims of secularism within the republican movement. The fact that dogmatic Catholicism within the party takes precedence over women's right to choose indicates that for all of the rhetoric regarding both the secular nature of the party and its advocacy for women's rights, there are clearly defined limits to the pursuit and trajectory of women's rights within the movement.

While some feminist scholars posit the notion of increasing women's presence within formal political parties in order to obtain a critical mass (Cowell-Meyers 2003; Ward 2006), an increase in women is no guarantee that political parties will respond positively and alter their positions on issues such as abortion. In 2007, without any internal consultation or debate, Sinn Féin supported a DUP[18] motion opposing an extension of the 1967 Abortion Act to Northern Ireland, much to the chagrin of many republican women. For some of the women who departed from Sinn Féin over the course of the last 20 years, the issue of choice and the strict adherence to party policy are consistently identified as a major difficulty they have with institutional politics, and they include Sinn Féin as an institutional party in that regard (Gilmartin 2015). For them, mainstream electoral politics entails a compromising of political principles, specifically around the issue of a woman's right to choose. For those still within Sinn Féin, there is a particular discomfort in having to publicly defend a party policy that they in effect personally oppose.

Along with religious conservatism, public perceptions and electoral fortunes are also key to understanding Sinn Féin's opposition to abortion. In terms of the abortion issue, many republican women I have spoken to recalled instances of private agreement from some members of the leadership that 'women do have a right to choose' but that the party could never state this publicly.[19] A female republican once recalled to me that in the early 1990s a senior male republican cautioned that 'adopting a pro-choice position would destroy the movement'. In other words, the key concern is public perception or electoral integrity rather than reproductive rights as women's rights. Janette, a life-long republican activist and now a Sinn Féin member and community activist, stated that the issue of women's reproductive rights:

> …was a very unpopular policy among Catholic voters so we [sarcastically] 'couldn't really have that'. So if you're trying to get a principled position that's in conflict with populism and if you also have to get elected again and again with a bigger and bigger majority, then each time you move from principled positions to more populist positions. We've always fought the good fight and still do but I think we aren't as radical as we could be simply because we have to keep getting elected again and again and so you have to appeal to the least common denominator, appeal to the most inclusive audience. Therefore you tend to bring up populist positions and generic one-size-fits-all policies which are wholly inadequate.[20]

Formal political parties are consistently focused on their electoral position in order to increase power and influence. And 'in order to maximise the electoral appeal, a political party needs to reach out beyond the hard core and appeal to the sympathisers and the uncommitted' (Neumann 2005, p. 947), presenting a rather limited political terrain. Popular electoral politics invariably demands a de-radicalisation of party positions in order to reach out to wider potential voters. While many of those within the party today reluctantly accept the need for compromise across a range of political topics, the issue of choice for women appears to stretch the elasticity of that acceptance more than any other issue. While all current party members clearly abide by the party policy in public, they are, however, equally determined to continue the struggle for changing the party's position to a straightforward pro-choice position. Moreover, some republicans are active on the choice issue outside of Sinn Féin and formal politics. Many are directly involved with single-issue grassroots groups advocating a pro-choice position, while others are also involved in providing support to those who wish to travel abroad in order to access medical treatment. It is also important to state that the long-standing and ongoing battles for women's reproductive rights have been led not by republicans or nationalists but by a broad range of grassroots, feminist and women's organisations across Ireland including Abortion Rights Campaign Ireland, Pro-Choice NI, Alliance for Choice Belfast, among others. Notwithstanding, there are republican women who are highly active in pro-choice activism outside of the republican movement, but for the most part, republican women stand behind party policy and position. Pro-choice feminists conceptualise the North's restrictive abortion regime as a form of male power, social control, a salient source of insecurity for many women and an underlying cause of gender inequality. Despite the republican rhetoric and commitment regarding gender equality, particularly during the years of peace process, women's lack of reproductive rights, the denial of their agency and the daily exile of Irish women seeking abortions abroad suggest that women's rights remain wholly contingent on needs and objectives of the overall movement.

Conclusion

While both male and female combatants may contend that the crisis of war diminishes the saliency of gender across the ranks of non-state militaries, the post-war reordering of men and women's roles, however, is profoundly gendered. Regardless of the extent to which women sacrificed and contributed to republican armed struggle, their post-ceasefire experiences serve to reaffirm the centrality of gender in processes of conflict transition and the way it is exploited and manoeuvred to undermine women's agency and participation. Issues at stake here such as republican memorialisation extend far beyond mere historical accuracy;

the dearth of women in post-war commemoration is in fact the manifestation of a long-standing struggle by republican women to be recognised for their wartime contributions. Feminists consistently argue that the struggle against patriarchy is a daily one; its omnipresence requires a relentless struggle of resistance by women at all times. The struggle by republican women to alter the commemorative landscape is not something unique to the conflict transition period. In fact, it represents a continuity of political struggle to have their voices, activism and interests as part of the Republican agenda, from the front lines of battle to the recollection of history in conflict transition. Furthermore, the institutionalisation of Provisional republicanism during conflict transition impacted upon the political struggles of women within the republican movement and finds that the shoehorning of political activism into elite, male-dominated peace talks, coupled with the zealous pursuit of electoral politics squeezed many of the political spaces opened up by women through the conflict years, including the much-lauded Women's Department. The struggles contained in this chapter are not exclusive to the period of conflict transition as such, but are in fact a continuity of struggle against sexist and patriarchal attitudes which date to the very birth of the Provisional republican movement. Conflict transition is in fact a new tier of patriarchy which republican women have a long-standing history of resisting.

Notes

1. For a thorough and comprehensive account of republican women during the conflict, see Miranda Alison's (2009) Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict, and Theresa O'Keefe's (2013) Feminist Identity Development and Activism in Revolutionary Movements. For explorations of women's prison experiences, see Azrini Wahidin's (2016) Ex-Combatants, Gender and Peace in Northern Ireland: Women, Political Protest and the Prison Experience.
2. Founded in 1914, *Cumann na mBan* was a female auxiliary force, providing supporting roles for the Irish Volunteers, which became the IRA in 1919. Since its foundation, the IRA has existed in some form or another. Its history is replete with bitter splits and feuds, often resulting in the establishment of multiple republican groups each stating their claim as the true successors to those who founded the organisation. Notwithstanding, armed republicanism has retained *Cumann na mBan* as an important part of armed republicanism. It is typically deemed by male IRA volunteers, however, as a supplementary role. Initially, the Provisional IRA operated along strict gender lines, whereby males

occupied the ranks of the IRA and females were restricted to *Cumann na mBan*. Stemming directly from the demands of republican women, rules barring women from the IRA were changed in the early 1970s.

3. After five years of the No-Wash protest, republican prisoners embarked upon two hunger strikes. The first hunger strike of 1980 involved by male and female prisoners and was called off in confusion about the possibility of a deal with the British. A second hunger strike commenced lasting from March to October 1981. Ten republican men died on this hunger strike, and it remains, as does the entire prison protest period of 1976–1981, a seismic epoch in contemporary republican history.
4. Strip searching against republican women continued right up to 1992, whereby it markedly declined during the emergence of the formal peace process. That said, strip searching continues to be used by State forces today against 'dissident' republican women.
5. This is a famous quote from the highly revered republican Bobby Sands, who died after 65 five days on hunger strike in 1981.
6. Long Kesh is located a few miles south-west of Belfast, near the city of Lisburn. It was a former RAF base but used as an internment camp and jail by the State in the initial years of the conflict. In 1976, the H-Blocks were opened on the same site which was then renamed the HMP Maze by the British Government, a title republicans (and some Loyalists) reject.
7. Interview with author in Belfast, June 2012.
8. It is also important to note that there has been a concerted commemorative effort to document women's multifarious contributions in recent times. Since 2006, women have engaged in book writing, drama, street plays, opened memorial gardens, opened the Irish Republican Museum in West Belfast, used remembering quilts as well as demanding new wall murals that encapsulate women's military labour in all their forms. Unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of this chapter but is explored in greater detail in the forthcoming book by Niall Gilmartin, *Female Combatants After Armed Conflict: Lost In Transition?*, published by Routledge.
9. The Special Air Services (SAS) is an elite unit of the British army widely used for clandestine activities, including what the British army describes as 'covert reconnaissance, counter-terrorism, direct action and human intelligence gathering'. In the North of Ireland, the SAS gained a fearsome reputation among republicans stemming largely from the SAS use lethal firepower to counter militant republicanism.
10. In the early 1970s, the British army began night-time incursions into republican areas for house raids and arrest operations and became known as 'Duck Patrols'. In reaction, groups of republican women began patrolling the streets in order to alert the community and active republicans of the presence of state forces. They became known as 'Hen Patrols'.

11. Marian and Dolours were given two life sentences and immediately embarked on a hunger strike for repatriation to a prison in the North of Ireland. They endured 167 days of forced feeding by the prison authorities. Upon their release in the early 1980s, Marian was relatively inactive politically but did emerge in the 1990s as a vociferous opponent of Sinn Féin. In November 2009, she was arrested and detained in connection with the killing of two British soldiers at Massareene Barracks, where she endured daily strip searches, among other brutalities, sparking a widespread campaign for her release. Like her sister Marian, Dolours emerged as a formidable opponent of Sinn Féin in the 1990s. She was a regular contributor to *The Blanket*, an online journal which heavily criticised Sinn Féin. It is widely known that Dolours mental health suffered, undoubtedly caused by the many years of abuse during her hunger strike, among other issues related to the conflict. She died in January 2013 at her home, evidently as a result of the toxic effect of a mix of prescribed sedative and antidepressant medications.
12. I use the word 'successful' to denote the ways in which IRA volunteers would appraise this operation and in no way should be interpreted as a way of disregarding the pain caused to the hundreds who suffered horrific injuries and the man who suffered a heart attack directly as a result of the bombs. This operation in particular is still hailed as a heavy blow against the British by republicans, despite the capture and jailing of the bombing team.
13. Access to abortion in Northern Ireland is governed by the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Section 58 of the Act criminalises any woman who has an abortion, and Section 59 criminalises anyone trying to help a woman to abort. Both actions are punishable by a maximum sentence of penal servitude for life.
14. Interview with author in Belfast, June 2012.
15. The title of the group is highly significant within the great pantheon of Irish Republicanism. 'Cherishing all the Children of the nation equally' is a direct quote from the hallowed 1916 Proclamation which declared an Independent sovereign republic during a failed rebellion in Easter of that year. The Proclamation document remains revered in the pantheon of Irish nationalism and Irish republicanism. It is read aloud at both state and non-state commemorations of the rebellion each Easter throughout the breadth of Ireland.
16. Some interviewees were involved in the passing of that motion. According to them, the reason the motion was passed owed to the fact that the vote took place late on Sunday evening when the *Ard Fheis* was coming to a close. At this stage in the evening, many party delegates had left the *Ard Fheis*, tilting the balance firmly in favour of republican feminists.
17. It would be disingenuous, however, to dismiss loyalism and unionism as being entirely inhospitable to progressive feminist politics. The Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) with its strong links to the UVF

marked itself as distinctive by adopting a straightforward pro-choice position on abortion, a seismic and bold move considering both the broadly conservative nature of unionism in Northern Ireland and of course the party's unionist/protestant support base.

18. The DUP contains a sizable membership of evangelical Christians and is renowned for its social conservatism on this matter and many others.
19. Online political bloggers, *Vixens With Convictions*, have published what they claim to be internal Sinn Féin leadership meeting minutes from 2000 where the party's stance on abortion is discussed. In particular, the minutes reveal an acute awareness of public perceptions and voter behaviour, whereby 'any position they take in abortion may impact on their electoral position'. For more, see http://vixenswithconvictions.com/2014/02/27/internal-sinn-Féin-minutes-adams-i-wish-it-would-all-go-away/.
20. Interview with author, Derry, June 2012.

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CHAPTER 11

From Platitude to Realpolitik; Challenging Generic Designations

Tommy McKearney

There is no one word or phrase that adequately describes what is referred to throughout this chapter as the Catholic community in Northern Ireland.

It is important, therefore, to define what we mean. The term is not used here in a religious or theological context but rather to identify a community. Many Catholics in the North do indeed practise their faith, but others have lapsed, even to the extent of being atheist. The commonly used term nationalist is inaccurate since many republicans reject both the term and its political connotations. Likewise, there are nationalists who do not care to be described as republican. Therefore, while recognising its limitations, we use the broad generic term Catholic to describe a community that is identifiable, but not monolithic.

Northern Ireland's Catholic population has a shared and common experience, but it is not something that they have all experienced identically. To put this concept into perspective, think, for example, of the Afro-American community in the USA. At a certain level, they all identify with shared currents and happenings in their history and will often respond to certain events in a similar fashion. There are nevertheless

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T. McKearney (✉)
Independent Workers Union of Ireland, Monaghan, Ireland

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differences between the life experience and outlook of those Afro-Americans with homes in the Hamptons and the unemployed people of colour in the rundown suburbs of Detroit city. There are similar echoes within Northern Ireland's Catholic community. At the end of the day, one's social status has a huge influence on a person's outlook or as Marxists say, it really is about class. It must also be said that in the Irish case, geopolitical issues and history also impact on the Catholic community's consciousness.

This is a community, though, that has changed over the past four decades. It is more confident and assertive than it has ever been. The period of absolute Unionist domination is over and with it, the era of structural discrimination. Yet Catholics are not content with the northern state. Unionism contrives to antagonise them, albeit in a manner different to that of the past. In the absence of agreement on how to manage the six counties, the seemingly irreversible impact of changing demographics means that instability is a constant undercurrent in the North. To have an insight into why this community remains discontent, we have to examine their unique experience.

As with many situations of deep-seated communal conflict, it is important to explore a region's history although not judgementally but by way of explanation or at least in an endeavour to understand. In this sense, there is at least three crucial periods influencing the situation in Northern Ireland today. First, there was the era of colonisation or plantation. Then, there was the period when the British government responded to revolutionary French republicanism and its supporters in Ireland. Finally, there was the creation of the Northern Ireland state in 1921 with the subsequent half-century of one-party Unionist rule culminating ultimately in the civil rights movement and ensuing armed conflict of the late twentieth century.

The political space known today as Northern Ireland had its origins in a colonial past where in order to make Ireland secure for the nascent British Empire, the northern part of the island of Ireland was forcibly planted with people loyal to the English crown and adhering to the tenets of the Protestant Reformation. Those who came as planters might well have become assimilated through time but for external machinations. Governments in London actively encourage ongoing division in order to maintain a virtual colony in Ulster. Feeling constantly under siege, the settlers acted as a garrison and thereby guarantor of London's strategic interests in Ireland.

Due, however, to the opening of the Americas as a more popular destination for emigration throughout much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ulster Plantation had limited success. It drew sufficient numbers to form a garrison population but not enough to entirely displace the surviving indigenous Catholic inhabitants who were left to seek a precarious and resentment-filled existence, often in the undesirable wastelands of the north of Ireland.

The American and French revolutions temporarily upset Britain's strategic calculation vis-à-vis Ireland. To London's alarm, the revolutionary anti-monarchist message had a great impact among the Northern Irish Presbyterians—the very people Britain saw as the core of its residential Irish garrison. Worse from a British government point of view, this was happening at a time when George III's kingdom was locked in a bitter war with Jacobin France. To counter republican influence in the north of Ireland, Britain's agents exploited unrest that had arisen in central Ulster as a result of mechanisation having led to the displacement of artisan Protestant weavers by cheaper, unskilled Catholic labour. Divisions cultivated and nurtured during that era have lasted to the present day.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Conservatives in Britain continued to see Irish demands for a devolved parliament in Dublin as a threat to the security of the Empire. To forestall what was widely seen as politically inevitable, they rekindled old animosities and as Tory MP Randolph Churchill said, '…played the Orange card…' (O'Cathaoir 2014). With backing from Conservative politicians, Northern Irish Protestants established their own separate, partitioned six-county state in 1921. The new state, designed in the words of its first prime minister as a Protestant state and a Protestant people, contained a large minority of people reluctant to endorse its existence (Craig 1933). This was a Catholic community that felt isolated, vulnerable and compelled to live within what they feared would be a hostile and unfriendly state. They were soon to learn that they were not mistaken.

When the new state was established in 1921, it inherited three centuries of distrust and animosity between its inhabitants. Two aspects of the new entity were ominously clear. In the first instance, those supporting the state were not just giving it political approval. In practice, they were also actively involved in its protection and maintenance and were therefore tasked to police their neighbours, resulting unsurprisingly in smouldering alienation. The second important feature was that in order to retain the loyalty and cross-class support of all its Protestant population, the new state found it necessary to reward its supporters with privileges that could only come through discriminating against the minority Catholic population. The significance of these two factors has been to leave a lingering legacy of resentment that can and does re-emerge at times of intra-communal tension or during difficult periods of political dispute making resolution more difficult if not altogether impossible on occasion.

When, after 50 years of discriminatory one-party rule, this disgruntled Catholic minority organised a high-profile campaign demanding reform. In the context of the time, it was almost impossible to avoid conflict. The leaders of the state and its supporters were ill-prepared and poorly equipped for dealing with opposition of any form and found it impossible to make the type and extent of concessions that would have been necessary to prevent civil disturbance. In previous decades, dissent and agitation for reform had been seen as subversive and met with physical suppression. Relying on a formula that had worked in the past, the Northern Ireland government resorted in 1968 to heavy-handed police tactics they unleashed a wave of resentment and fierce resistance.

The violent physical conflict that happened over the following three decades has not only had an enormous impact on the population of the six counties but also altered the underlying political dynamic within the area. While it has become the standard response to interpret the years of violence in an entirely negative light, this is an over-simplistic analysis. It goes without saying that the death and destruction resulting from the conflict left a deep and painful scar on northern society that cannot be underestimated or downplayed. However, the extent of the IRA's armed campaign and the civil disruption that it delivered meant it was necessary to work on a qualitatively different political arrangement. The situation required a settlement that would embed Catholic participation within the political and social management of Northern Ireland.

It is important, therefore, to examine the make-up, outlook and complexities of what constitutes the Catholic constituency within the six-county political entity today. As mentioned at the outset, the Catholic population of Northern Ireland is not a monolithic, homogeneous entity. As with any other group of people, there are differences in terms of class and outlook. However, after almost a century of living within the partitioned state of Northern Ireland, most Catholics share not only folk memories but also, other durable connections. Due to the nature and institutions of a society divided along sectarian lines, most Northern Irish

Catholics have grown up and lived within what became in some ways, a semi-autonomous community. It is important to point out though; this was not the choice of that community but rather how the state was designed from the outset.

Northern Ireland is a divided society, and this applies particularly to working-class communities, both Catholic and Protestant. Accommodation is effectively segregated, not by law but usually by choice or through fear. As the Irish News reported in 2016, almost two decades after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), more than 90% of social housing in Northern Ireland remains segregated on grounds of religious background and that figure rises to 94% in Belfast (Morris 2016). While the impact of this is felt in both communities, it does nevertheless reinforce a sense of separateness. This is especially evident among working-class people (on both sides) who rarely engage with each other on more than a perfunctory level at best.

Separation continues as children start school. Due to an understanding between the old unionist regime and the Roman Catholic Church, the education system is, in practice, divided between Protestant state-maintained and Catholic-managed schools. The result of creating and maintaining a divided education system hardly needs detailing. Separating people by religion in childhood and as young adults inevitably has reinforced a sense of difference, however artificial this may be.

Moreover, the Catholic education system has cultivated an awareness of a distinctly Irish culture. Irish history is taught; the Irish language is promoted at secondary level, along with an appreciation of traditional Irish music. This should not be misunderstood or exaggerated. Not all Catholics are steeped in the complexities of Irish history nor is the Irish language universally spoken. Traditional Irish music is not a mainstay within that community. What it has meant, though, is to have added to their sense of separateness or even isolation within Northern Ireland, a feeling intensified when confronted with the aggressively promoted Orange tradition.

Furthermore, sport was and is often experienced and enjoyed separately. Catholics, for the most part, participate in GAA events with local clubs forming an important part of their social life. GAA structures provide for loyalty not only to the club but also to the county. When this was combined with the acquaintances cultivated through sporting events and organisational meetings, it not just has created friendships but also provides networking that extends into business and political life.

Another and often overlooked aspect of the Northern Irish Catholic identity is an undercurrent of resentment towards the 26-county state. This sense of disconnection began in the years after partition when many felt abandoned by Dublin. The experience was exacerbated during the years of the recent Northern conflict, as the Southern Irish state endeavoured to protect itself and its institutions by putting distance between it and the violent disturbances in the six counties. This factor creates something of a paradox since Northern Irish Catholics look to the south for many things but don't always feel part of the Republic.

Taken together, this has had the effect of creating a self-referential community, albeit one with various layers and interests. Moreover, it is a community that has been undergoing significant change over the past half-century in terms of its political, social and economic influence.

The Catholic community in Northern Ireland has never been monolithic. There were differences between rural and urban populations, differences of class and fundamentally different political analyses. For a century prior to the beginning of the civil rights movement in the late 1960s, it was possible to identify a fault line separating militant republicanism and constitutional nationalism (often referred to as Hibernianism). While it was possible to identify the impact of class on the two rival currents, differences were often as much about tactics and strategy as ideology. For a number of reasons relating to the conflict and events thereafter, these demarcation lines have become blurred over the last 20 years.

Catholic society in the North remained relatively stable, static even, for a number of decades after the foundation of the state. This began to change with the education act of the late 1940s which in effect meant secondary and third-level education became accessible to the less well off. Over the course of the following two decades, a new phenomenon occurred in Northern Ireland, as young Catholics from modest backgrounds began to acquire second- and third-level qualifications. Unlike their peers in other parts of the UK—where working-class graduates could at least aspire to middle-class occupations either in the public or private sector—the Unionist-dominated state with its inbuilt discriminations largely prevented newly educated Catholic students and graduates benefiting to any great extent from upward social mobility.

As a result, working-class republican communities retained a greater number of educated and articulate people than might otherwise have happened. An important consequence of this was that, as the IRA's armed campaign ended, its political party Sinn Fein had significant numbers within its membership with the ability and capacity to engage skilfully and successfully on the electoral stage and elsewhere. The party was able to take advantage of changing conditions and circumstances emanating from the GFA.

The agreement did not end partition or the union with Great Britain. It did, however, emphasise two crucial points. Firstly, it made provision that anti-partitionist republicans could participate in the management of Northern Ireland. The second point was in relation to the status of Northern Ireland within the UK. Ostensibly reassuring Unionists that this can only be altered by a majority decision within the six counties, it simultaneously underlined the fact that the northern state's future is permanently vulnerable to trial by referendum. And in a region where the practice of sectarian head counting is deeply embedded, there is recognition that the state's existence is permanently vulnerable to changing demographics.

Nevertheless, when Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness agreed to form an executive in 2007, it appeared for a time that a majority of Northern Ireland's Catholic population was willing and prepared to work within the parameters set out under the terms of the GFA. With Sinn Fein encouraging its supporters to endorse policing and the judiciary in the six counties and leading members of the party attending annual Armistice Day commemorations for Britain's Armed Forces, it was obvious that there was a real possibility for a significant sea change in Catholic attitudes towards the northern state. What was required to make this effective and long-lasting was a reciprocal degree of goodwill from Unionism.

No political entity can remain stable for long without a working consensus shared by a majority of those governed. Use of the term 'loyal opposition' is not an accident. It indicates an agreed social contract that those out of office will remain supportive of the state, in spite of harbouring disagreements with the administration of day-to-day affairs by those in power. In Northern Ireland, where its very existence as a separate political unit is permanently open to possible referendum, a broad consensus is imperative for the state's long-term future and stability.

Making Northern Ireland a viable and sustainable political entity depends greatly on unionism making republicans and nationalists feel comfortable within the six-county state. This is not moralising but is the essence of pragmatic politics for Unionism. After all, the onus of 'selling the union' rests with those wishing to retain it. With Catholics making up either 40% or 45% (depending on how this is calculated) of the population, it is obvious that they comprise too large a section of society to be disregarded (NISRA 2014). Common sense would dictate, therefore, that a pragmatic Unionism would endeavour to accommodate nationalist and republican requirements so far as is possible and thus soften opposition to the union. Doing so depends not only on appropriate legislation and the activating of defined agreements but also a measure of what might be described as neighbourly goodwill.

Without a package including 'charm' as well as legislative concession, a considerable percentage of the Catholic community is bound to remain unenthusiastic about a state and its institutions from which they have long been alienated. Others (still a minority) take an even harsher view, believing that not enough has changed since the days of the Orange State and that Northern Ireland remains a failed political entity.

This more strident criticism can sometimes leave republican advocates for the GFA vulnerable as they endeavour to persuade their supporters to endorse the political institutions. This was evident most recently during the RHI scandal, when Sinn Fein's irate grass roots forced its leadership to suspend participation in the Executive (*TheJournal.ie*, 9 January 2017). Moreover, Unionist intransigency gives fuel to republican nay-sayers, who gossip that all politics and politicians are self-serving charlatans.

Yet in spite of what would appear to be a self-evident need for unionism to woo the broader Catholic community, there is an almost total absence of consensus building by supporters of the union. In fact, the largest unionist party, the DUP, not only appears totally oblivious of the need to create across-the-board agreement, but also actually seems intent on preventing it coming about. This has raised questions, and not just for sceptical republicans, about the nature and long-term sustainability of the Belfast Agreement (and indeed the entire Project Northern Ireland) when Unionism is represented by a party as uncompromising as the DUP.

The DUP has made little secret of the fact that it sees its role as obstructing Sinn Fein at every possible turn. As Stephen McCaffery wrote in 'The Detail', the DUP's problems were created under Peter Robinson's leadership, but they came to the boil under Arlene Foster (McCaffery 2017). When the DUP should have been winning-over nationalists, it instead opted to antagonise them. Instead of welcoming Sinn Fein as bona fide partners, the DUP has prevented the enactment of a raft of initiatives deemed a priority by Sinn Fein. The DUP has variously blocked: a Bill of Rights, legislation providing for the Irish language, building of a Maze interpretive Centre, legislation allowing for civic marriage and liberalisation of abortion legislation plus setting down 86 (out of 115) petitions of concern over a period five years, not to mention intransigence over flags and parades. All of this has been made worse by the DUP's treatment of the RHI scandal, when it appeared that they saw themselves as practically above the need to make its representatives accountable to any authority other than the party's own hierarchy.

Compounding the internal problems facing the Northern Irish political entity is fallout from the decision by the British people to leave the European Union. While it still remains unclear how this will impact on the six counties, there is a widely held view among many (and not only in the Catholic community) that the result will be detrimental to the region. British government response to the referendum decision has not been reassuring. Due to differences within the Conservatives and a damaging general election result for the party, Brexit negotiations have stumbled rather than moved confidently. When London finally offered proposals for dealing with withdrawal from the EU, they have been met with scepticism. Flawed and contradictory proposals around staying within a customs union—while negotiating unilateral deals—have eroded confidence in the British negotiating team's ability.

Nor has the British government reputation been enhanced by its proposal in relation to the border. While the paper dealing with this issue (published in August 2017) is heavy on aspiration for a seamless border, there is no guarantee this will work out in practice (O'Toole 2017). Guy Verhofstadt, the European parliament's lead coordinator on Brexit, has already described a previous British proposal as fantasy and may well be justified in saying the same about this one. While fears about a militarised 'hard' border are likely to prove exaggerated, other aspects of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union may serve to further disenchant nationalists and Republicans, already unenthusiastic about their position within the UK.

Of possibly equal significance to Britain's departure from the European Union may be the opportunity it has given the Republic's government to mention in some detail what was for several decades a taboo subject for cabinet members in Leinster House, namely Irish unity. Mixed with suggestions to the Irish government for dealing with Brexit are detailed proposals for implementing Irish unity. The Oireachtas committee chaired by Senator Mark Daly produced a report titled, 'Brexit and the Future of Ireland: Uniting Ireland and It's People in Peace and Prosperity' that clearly identifies steps towards unity (Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement 2017). Whether the measures outlined in the senator's report are realistic or workable is of secondary importance to the fact that the Dublin government has opened this discussion. It is unlikely that many in Northern Ireland will read the report in its entirety, but it has certainly stimulated discussion of the subject and equally important, indicates that an end to partition is no longer unimaginable to those in power in the Republic.

Irrespective of Brexit, the major factor undermining Catholics support for the six-county state is that—in spite of the GFA and subsequent events—Northern Ireland as a political entity has failed to win their confidence. A growing number of nationalists and republicans are becoming increasingly cynical about the nature of politics as practised in this part of the UK. It is important to be clear, though, that this should not be taken to indicate support for an armed campaign to overthrow the state. Rather, this feeling manifests itself on one hand, through disdain for the northern political entity, indifference to the union with Great Britain and a conviction that constitutional change is inevitable at some time in the not too distant future.

The extent of their disregard for the northern state became apparent after the latest British general election. Seven of the North's 18 constituencies elected abstentionist representatives. This means that these MPs are mandated to boycott central government institutions in London. Ominously, six of these constituencies form a connected crescent of territory stretching from Derry to Newry and thus surround the Unionist heartland east of the Bann while West Belfast with its Sinn Fein majority sits threateningly at the very heart of the Northern Ireland capital.

For decades if not centuries, the Catholic population of the northern six counties felt marginalised, discriminated against and alienated. Now, they are more likely to feel indifferent to the power structures within Northern Ireland and unconcerned about the government in London. Employment rates within the Catholic population are roughly equal to that within the Protestant community, and the Catholic demographic is, therefore, no longer curtailed by emigration as it was in the past (Canning 2017). As a consequence, there is a widespread and well-founded belief in the inevitability of a Catholic majority within the lifetime of, at least, some of those now voting (Kula 2017; Lowry 2017). Therein lies the real risk for the future. Politics in the North have for long been carried on using the dangerous practice of sectarian head counting. With demographics changing inexorably, the temptation to continue with this sterile and indeed dangerous process might be irresistible for some political parties.

Against this risky strategy, a better and more progressive approach surely has to be sought. Something better must occupy the body politic than simply watching 'the clock running down', until demographic change forces action. There are many problems to be addressed in the six counties. Just as south of the border, there is a housing shortage, too many people live on inadequate incomes, hospital waiting lists are growing longer, care for the elderly needs improving, and infrastructure requires upgrading. In short, these are the problems that should fill the political agenda and provide the basis around which discussion and debate take place.

Political institutions on both sides of the border have failed to adequately address these issues. A different political analysis, challenging the currently prevailing assumptions around neoliberal economics and faith in the ability of the market to solve all problems, is essential. Identifying the means by which this can be done and working to do so is probably the best method of ensuring—that sooner rather than later, we can stop talking and writing about Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland—and simply refers to all as citizens. This requires, however, that we face up to the inevitability of changing circumstances, speak reality to unionism and select a course of action that is more than a collection of platitudes.

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CHAPTER 12

Meet the New Boss…Same as the Old Boss; Assessing Republican Attitudes Towards the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist Communities in Northern Ireland

Gareth Mulvenna

MEMORY & CONTEXT

I grew up on the Cliftonville Road, part of the infamous 'murder mile', in the early 1980s. My primary education was by the Christian Brothers before I was sent to grammar education at Belfast's Methodist College. I was baptised in a Catholic church, and my family are Catholic but not nationalist. In my parents' house, you will find a holy water font in the hallway, and in the living room, you will find a large framed photograph of my great-grandfather, Private James Downey of the Royal Irish Rifles and the North Belfast Ulster Volunteer Force, standing solemnly in full uniform with his large Protestant family at his side. The picture has paper poppies attached. In the event, James—the reluctant 'old' soldier in his mid-30 s who only went to war because of the incessant mockery of the women in his neighbourhood—was shot through the head by a German

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G. Mulvenna (✉)
Independent Researcher, Belfast, UK

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sniper and is buried in Ypres. My grandmother, who also endured the death of a number of siblings, fell in love with a Catholic who worked as a printer in the *Irish News*. She felt obliged to convert to Catholicism before marriage to Thomas McNally and surrendered her Church of Ireland upbringing and beloved Sunday School.

As a child, I remember regular visits from Great Uncle Sam, who was a member of the Royal Black Institution. He would crouch on the floor and play with my toy cars, having devoured tomato sandwiches my granny had made for him. In later years, my mother asked my granny if she might consider converting back to Protestantism. She did not. However, I was brought up with that same generosity of spirit—to understand the importance of people's identity to them and to try to understand and respect what is important to a person. I am fortunate to come from such a background, and I have found it enriching, particularly when trying to wrestle with the inherent complexities and contradictions of our recent past in Northern Ireland.

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Unequivocally, for over 40 years, from the inception of Northern Ireland through to the Civil Rights campaigns of the late 1960s, Catholics were disadvantaged by the Unionist-dominated Stormont administration. Although Unionists governed many local authorities where they controlled with 'surprising equity', it was when their overall majority rule was threatened by demographics that they were '…willing to engage in systemic anti-Catholic discrimination in order to maintain the local balance of power' (Greer 2015, p. 42). While the majority of Catholics sought peaceful and democratic means by which to challenge the status quo, a historic culture of militant republicanism was allowed to thrive in the north, with the Provisional IRA in particular claiming over 1500 lives from 1970 onwards. This campaign coupled with the emergence of loyalist paramilitaries and the often-cumbersome roles of the British and Irish states all contributed to a more polarised society.

This chapter seeks to examine if republican[1] social and political attitudes towards Protestants, Unionists and Loyalists[2] have changed throughout the course of the 'Troubles' and the subsequent 'peace process' eras where, arguably, the debate has been reversed from two generations ago and it is now working-class Protestants who feel socially, economically and politically bereft (in a society where republicanism is making significant cultural and political strides) (Mulvenna 2012). As both communities talk of equality and inequality in a post-Brexit landscape, the chapter assesses the factors which have contributed to these discourses and whether Protestants have anything to fear from a republican majority in Northern Ireland.

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[1] Particularly Sinn Féin and its supporters, as the largest nationalist/republican party.

[2] I do not find the use of the PUL or CNR labels to be satisfying, but given the brevity of this chapter and the question being about the two main blocs in Northern Irish society these acronyms will be used in some instances.

Protestant Fears

Before assessing Catholic perceptions of the 'Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist communities in Northern Ireland', it is informative to explore aspects of what Protestants had to fear historically from the Catholic majority on the island of Ireland. Due to the competing ethno-political interests in Ireland during the early years of the twentieth century, trade union organisation in the north was complex. The Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in Ireland existed regionally throughout the UK and throughout this era, its members supported Home Rule for Ireland on a national scale. In Belfast, Protestants such as William Walker—who had begun work as an apprentice joiner in Harland and Wolff and eventually emerged as an important figure in the Independent Labour Party—viewed Home Rule in quite a different light. Despite many having socialist tendencies, their position on the constitution left men such as Walker open to accusations of insularity and sectarianism. Cradden has explained Walker's strong opposition to Home Rule: '… first, because it would cut off the Irish working class from the rest of the British working class; second, because it would place them under the rule of a Southern Catholic bourgeoisie whose predominantly agricultural interests conflicted not only with Northern bourgeois interests, but also with the interests of Belfast's industrial workers; and third, because socialist internationalism seemed to demand an end to national boundaries, not the creation of new ones' (Cradden 1993, p. 14). Walker's outlook was shared by a number of socially conscious but staunchly loyal Protestant, unionist and loyalist workers at the time and through the subsequent decades. Henry Patterson has restated Walker's conviction '…that the best defence of the Union was the return of progressive unionists to Westminster, who would demonstrate to the labour movement in the rest of the UK that unionism was not simply the reactionary creed of landlords and capitalists' (Patterson 2005).

By the dawn of the Troubles, Protestants in Northern Ireland were faced with the stark realisation that Catholics would no longer play second fiddle in the economic landscape. With the formation in 1967 of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and, later, Peoples' Democracy, many Protestants became convinced that the old foe, the IRA, was lying in wait behind these new fronts. The twin fears—of a new Catholic ascendancy and another campaign of IRA violence—led to a sense of frustration among Protestants. In his debut novel, *Burning Your Own*, Glenn Patterson wrote almost eidetically of a young working-class Protestant boy's rite of passage in the tumultuous summer of 1969. Mal, the protagonist, attends a restaurant with his more affluent aunt and uncle as elsewhere Belfast begins to burn. He observes his uncle admonishing a Catholic waitress. Unable to uphold a polite veneer and contain his irritation any longer, the uncle incandescently speaks to the other adults at the table about the contemporary political situation: 'Uncle Simon karate-chopped the table. "That's what I'm talking about: attitude. I tell you, where authority is concerned, there's a difference in attitude between them and us."' (Patterson 1993).

Two Protestant church leaders revisited this era in autobiographies. Robin Eames, former Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, suggested that it was the particular manifestation of the civil rights demands—in the form of NICRA and PD—and the subsequent 'communal shock' that left Protestants feeling a mixture of 'suspicious unease and shock' and a fear that behind the social demands requested by the Civil Rights campaigners lay a desire from Irish nationalists for a pluralistic state which would lead to the extinction of the Protestant ethos and culture (Eames 1992). The former Presbyterian Moderator John Dunlop was more explicit in his attempt to contextualise the Protestant experience of the late 1960s: 'After what many in the Protestant community saw as fifty years of progress, made in the face of constant hostility from the Republic of Ireland and less than whole-hearted co-operation from their nationalist fellow-citizens in Northern Ireland, it came as a considerable shock for them to be vilified in 1968 before world opinion as a discriminating gang of bigots' (Dunlop 1995).

The Catholic community in Belfast, particularly the working class, found itself in a double bind in the early 1970s—one which has possibly never been explored on its own terms properly. On the one hand, loyalists perceived that they were all members or supporters of the IRA. On the other hand, Catholics were as vulnerable as Protestants to the indiscriminate effects of PIRA's Belfast city centre bombing campaign.

PIRA claimed, of course, that its war was with the ‘occupying’ British forces; however, from an early stage, the organisation’s twin tactics were evident: to make Northern Ireland ungovernable and to draw their working-class neighbours in the Protestant community into a sectarian war. On these two fronts, PIRA was successful. Hennessey has challenged the PIRA narrative that its campaign was about civil rights and equality: ‘The only morally defensible case for armed struggle would be in a situation in which Catholics had been denied legitimate avenues for protest - and even in the examples of the Craigavon and Brookeborough regimes such a justification would be hard to make. In 1970 no such justification could be made’ (Hennessy 2005, p. 395). When the PIRA campaign began to bring widespread death and destruction to the streets of Northern Ireland from 1970 to 1972, the result was a complete breakdown in law and order. Hennessey has noted that:

> The Cassandras of the Protestant right were self-satisfyingly proved right in their predictions that Civil Rights was a cover for the overthrow the state. The Republicans were to be self-satisfyingly proved right in their claim that the state could not be reformed – but it was they, not the British or Unionist Governments who made it so. (Hennessy 2005, p. 395)

A by-product of the Troubles, with the introduction of the Fair Employment legislation, was that a new Catholic middle class emerged. Many Catholics, emboldened by the Education Act of 1947 and the campaign for civil rights, pushed for a greater stake in society.

In an article for the *Independent*, published two weeks before Christmas 1994, the north Belfast Catholic journalist Cal McCrystal quoted a ‘prominent Roman Catholic’ who stated that ‘Britain’s response to the Troubles - an attempt to end religious discrimination - promoted a new Catholic middle class … They moved into Malone Road, traditionally a wealthy Protestant preserve. The “hut” where Catholic servants used to attend Mass has been replaced by a £1.25m church. The Protestants have started to move out - to places like Cultra and other parts of the “Gold Coast”’ (McChrystal 1994). Indeed, it has been suggested that more affluent Catholics have ‘… tentatively embraced a degree of rapprochement toward the British state’ (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006). This ‘new’ Catholic middle class is distinct from that which existed a few generations ago, where there was a narrow over-reliance on occupations such as in the licensed trade to gain social mobility.

Access to education through the Education Act of 1947 is still spoken of as the turning point in broadening out the Catholic middle class in Northern Ireland. Many Catholics with similar opportunities chose to remain in the areas from which they hailed, or at the very least became socially and politically engaged in helping disadvantaged Catholic neighbourhoods. There has been a tendency among those in the Protestant working class who have made a similar transition to 'pull the ladder up' behind them. While researching for my Ph.D. in 2006, the East Belfast Ulster Unionist Michael Copeland told me that this was due to a complete transformation in people's mindsets once they had 'made it':

> I believe there's a hopelessness that because education was always at the centre of what you would call a Protestant work ethos … those who had any … what's the word … drive – their one notion was to get the hell out of where they were and get up the Antrim Road or get up the Castlereagh Hills. In the unionist community, most people had made not only the economic jump and the social jump but they also made a psychological jump and didn't tend to go back down into the areas which they came to reinvest in their own societies. (Copeland 2006)

Copeland juxtaposed this with the Catholic experience: 'Nationalism, however, and people who did well and got out – usually due to the Education Act … they continued to support the communities from which they came to a greater degree and evidenced a great deal less self-interest than their Unionist and Protestant fellow citizens' (Copeland 2006).

While middle-class Catholics might have enjoyed the economic benefits that came with social mobility, it is of interest as to what bearing—if any—this had on their views of the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist communities. Many who became empathetic towards the Union with Great Britain have fallen into the category of being 'castle Catholics'—a derogatory term used by other Catholics to describe those in their community who feel comfortable describing themselves as unionists with a small 'u'. While they may not sympathise, or support the more extreme cultural rituals linked to Britishness, such as Orangeism, which are commonly enacted by Protestants in Northern Ireland, they do feel an affinity with British society in social and economic terms.

In 2012, the then DUP leader Peter Robinson, speaking at his party's conference, stated that 'The reality today is that the 'left' and 'far left' policies of both of the nationalist parties leave many Catholics effectively disenfranchised' (Robinson 2012). His claim that the majority of Catholics and Protestants alike supported the Union appeared to be an attempt to sway socially conservative Catholics towards supporting his party. Ironically, many church-going Catholics would have similar views on issues such as abortion and marriage equality as the DUP (*Belfast Telegraph*, 13 June 2017). However, my mother, for example, still speaks with a real sense of anger at seeing television footage of Ian Paisley mocking the Catholic communion in an Oxford Union debate in November 1967 (Paisley 1967). Old wounds take a long time to heal in Northern Ireland, and it is unlikely that any significant number of Catholics will support the DUP. In the wake of Robinson's speech, one young Catholic unionist from the republican Andersonstown area of West Belfast told the BBC that 'There's legacy issues with the DUP. Robinson can stand up and make these very nice statements about how he wants to reach out to Catholics, but there's still the history of the DUP' (*BBC News*, 29 November 2012). As well as the mockery of the Catholic faith, there has been support—but not post-conflict leadership—among prominent DUP members for loyalist paramilitaries.

Just because middle-class Catholics are not voting for the DUP does not mean they are flocking to the republican ideology. In a fascinating article for *The Irish Times* in November 2012, Peter Shirlow noted that 'What we are observing are more Catholic middle-class pupils in Protestant grammar schools, more children with Irish names playing rugby and more importantly, more mixing due to a "Starbucks culture" and the effect of new and neutral entertainment arenas such as the now snazzy Cathedral Quarter in Belfast'. Furthermore, Shirlow observed that '…the constitutional position will be asserted through the principle of consent and demographic shifts. But I doubt a small Catholic majority will be the sudden end game for Northern Ireland as some unionists have learned that Catholic inclusion attenuates Northern nationalists' sense of Irishness' (*The Irish Times*, 19 November 2012).

Although the December 2012 flag protest at Belfast's City Hall inflamed tensions within the loyalist community to a degree not seen since Drumcree, Shirlow made a prescient point in his November 2012 article:

> In societal terms the steam may have gone out of the struggle. For the North's middle-class nationalists there has been no subversion to the Union Jack but most certainly a shift to "I'm alright Jack!" The battlefield of legitimacy over the constitutional future of this island is no longer on the streets but probably in the aisles of Marks Spencer. For those who wish to emerge triumphant from that battle there is a need to conclude that there are not two traditions in Northern Ireland but many that are either increasingly shaded or even faded. (*The Irish Times*, 19 November 2012)

Who Could Be Afraid of Equality?

In November 2014, Gerry Adams was revealed to have told an audience of his Sinn Féin acolytes in Co. Fermanagh that 'The point is to actually break these bastards – that's the point. And what's going to break them is equality. That's what's going to break them - equality. Who could be afraid of equality? Who could be afraid of treating somebody the way you want to be treated? That's what we need to keep the focus on – that's the Trojan horse of the entire republican strategy (is) to reach out to people on the basis of equality' (*BBC News*, 25 November 2014). While Adams was quick to claim that he was talking about bigots rather than unionists generally, the sound bite highlighted an uncomfortable truth for unionist politicians. While the DUP and UUP professed to be as British as anyone on the mainland, it has been the case that both parties—particularly the more dominant DUP—have been out of step with British public opinion on issues such as marriage equality.

In July 1971, the Sinn Féin president Ruairí Ó Brádaigh told a republican rally in Derry that 'We're on a high road to freedom, and what we need to do now is to rock Stormont and to keep it rocking until Stormont comes down' (Moloney 2002). While Stormont was prorogued just under a year later, it would be a bitter irony too far for Ó Brádaigh that the party he would lead until 1983 would become part of the Stormont-housed establishment—the very edifice that PIRA and Sinn Féin wished to destroy; the former IRA Chief of Staff becoming a so-called dissident during the twilight years of his life. Adams, the man who succeeded Ó Brádaigh, successfully transitioned SF into a slick political machine through the republican hunger strikes of the early 1980s and would increasingly become a hate figure for unionists throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In 2017, Adams is still regarded in the same light; however, it is not Provo atrocities that his opponents are vexed by, but instead his curious and infuriating brand of MOPEry[3] and triumphalism, a concoction which is heavily underscoring the image and ideology of contemporary mainstream republicanism. In May 2016, Adams took to Twitter—he is a persistent user—to tweet 'Watching Django Unchained-A Ballymurphy Nigger!' (McDonald 2016). People were horrified by Adams's use of the 'n' word, but less so at his wholly inaccurate appropriation of the horrendous historical experience of African Americans in the USA. By way of apology, Adams tweeted: 'Any1 who saw Django would know my tweets & N-word were ironic. Nationalists in Nth were treated like African Americans' (McDonald 2016). Irony is apparently not something Adams understands as on the one hand he has called for the prosecution of British soldiers who killed in Ulster while on the other he decried the potential jailing of PIRA members as 'totally and absolutely counter-productive' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 3 April 2017; *BBC News*, 4 September 2017). So when Adams speaks of 'treating somebody the way you want to be treated' he is being insincere, and this will not have gone unnoticed in the Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist communities of Northern Ireland—communities which, after all, bore the brunt of PIRA violence throughout the Troubles.

This warped sense of social, political and cultural superiority has even bled into the issue of flags. The manner in which it is debated says a lot about how many republicans view their loyalist neighbours. During the summer of 2017, a group calling themselves South Belfast Residents Against Flags,[4] fronted by hypnotherapist Dominica McGowan, led a campaign calling for the removal of loyalist flags in the mixed upper Ormeau Road area. Responding to a loyalist on Twitter, who had called her out for not using the term 'Northern Ireland' on *Radio UIster*, McGowan tweeted: 'Back to the er, um atlas, Dean. North / Northern / Norn Ireland not a country' (McGowan 2017a). On *Radio, Ulster* McGowan had demanded respect; very few people from a Protestant, Unionist or Loyalist background could find her message anything but ignorant. The republican strategy increasingly seems designed to infuriate even those unionists who might otherwise accommodate and engage with Sinn Féin as a democratic party.

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[3] MOPE is an acronym for 'Most Oppressed People Ever'.

[4] It is notable that many of the members of this group are Sinn Féin supporters. Indeed, Dominica McGowan signed election nomination papers for Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

McGowan's hypocrisy is glaring. On the one hand, she and her [somewhat ironically acronymic] group, SBRAF, demand the removal of 'UVF – 1913' flags from mixed residential areas, but on the other she openly supports the aims of republican terrorism. In August 2017, Fiachra McGuinness, the son of former PIRA commander and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, tweeted photographs of a republican parade with the following message: 'Large crowds today at our National Hunger Strikers Commemoration. Remembering them all with Pride, We will never forget them!!' One might imagine that Dominica McGowan, so horrified at the Ulster flag, the Union flag and an historical UVF flag, would have seen this commemoration of republican combatants as an outrageous and sectarian display. Instead, she quoted Fiachra McGuinness' tweet, stating 'Powerful speeches, moving poetry & music. No return to Stormont w/equality. Sense of determination palpable. Their sacrifice won't be in vain' (McGowan 2017).

Indeed, only a few hundred yards from where the latest controversy over flags has been occurring, in the Lower Ormeau Road, there are various plaques in commemoration to dead republicans. Is SBRAF saying that the Lower Ormeau isn't and shouldn't be a mixed area? Surely the whole aim of republicanism in 2017 is to gain equality and the eradication of polarisation? If you are concerned about UVF flags, then you should be equally perturbed by displays of support for PIRA; those sympathetic to Sinn Féin and PIRA's brand of republicanism see the organisation's campaign as completely legitimate. Loyalist paramilitaries are portrayed as illegitimate armed 'death squads' of the British state. The old Unionist Government saw nothing wrong with the strong-armed tactics of the B-Specials as directed towards Catholics; they also viewed the IRA as illegitimate.

In September 2017, the Red Hand Commando, a loyalist paramilitary organisation which had formed at the beginning of the Troubles in 1970, announced that it had written to the Home Office in a bid to be de-proscribed. The Loyalist Communities Council, a body representing the UVF/UDA/RHC organisations whose formation was overseen by Tony Blair's former Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell, stated that: 'It is … hoped that this course being taken by the Red Hand Commando can lay out a road map for the transformation of loyalist groups in general and that this action might be followed in due course by the other two main loyalist groups' (*BBC News*, 12 September 2017). Those former RHC members who spoke at the announcement highlighted that it had been ten years since the organisation had been involved in any paramilitary activity. It was their aim for former members to embark on community work in loyalist areas without fear of prosecution for having been in a proscribed organisation.

While many victims of loyalist violence understandably found the idea of the RHC continuing as a legal entity with the same name repugnant, it was once again an irony-free Sinn Féin member who decided to make explicit their opposition. Gerry Kelly, who only a few years previous to the RHC announcement had promoted a book he had written revelling in his role in a PIRA escape from the Maze prison during which a prison officer was shot in the head and another died of a heart attack after being stabbed, stated: '…why, would you have a paramilitary organisation working as a community group? And what does that say to the victims of this organisation if their status and their activities is to be somehow legitimised? I am sure victims would find that abhorrent' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 September 2017). It is worth recounting what Kelly, himself a former senior PIRA member who regularly attends PIRA commemorations, told the journalist David McKittrick about his role in the Maze escape of 1983. Having interviewed Kelly, McKittrick wrote:

> In a new book Kelly tells how, as an IRA prisoner, he threatened the prison guard with a gun: "Looking over the sights of the weapon straight at his face."
>
> He writes that he "very deliberately, very sharply" warned the officer: "Do not move or I will shoot you." Minutes later two bullets were fired, one of them hitting the officer in the head. (*The Irish Independent*, 29 October 2013)

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With Sinn Féin the largest 'green' party, creating a nationalist and republican majority in the (at time of writing) suspended Stormont parliament, is it a case 'meet the new boss, same as the old boss'?

When Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin ask for an amnesty for those unprosecuted republican combatants during the Troubles, but at the same time demand the prosecution of British soldiers, it gives the public a glimpse of how the largest republican political party views the world in general and justice in particular. The old Unionist government in the decades between 1921 and 1972 attempted to suppress dissent and alternative forms of unionist or loyalist expression. Anyone who was not only unionist or loyalist but also socialist was deemed suspicious. Now, in the same way, Sinn Féin has attempted to de-legitimise any form of unionist or loyalist cultural expression while advocating the implementation of an Irish Language act as a priority above health and employment. Although Sinn Féin members (quite legitimately) commemorate their patriot dead, they increasingly deviate from some of the key original ideological tenets of *The Green Book*—the text which underscores the allegiance of every IRA member. A paragraph reads:

> The injustice of being as an individual politically impotent, the injustice of unemployment, poverty, poor housing, inadequate social security, the injustice of the exploitation of our labour, our intelligence and our natural resources, the injustice of the bloody-minded destruction of our culture, our language, music, art, drama, customs, the inherent injustice of the state repression which is necessary to maintain the present system as a whole. (Melaugh 2017)

When Sinn Féin as the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland collapsed the Executive in early 2017, they left their electorate politically impotent. But at least promoting the artifice of the Irish language still being suppressed means that *The Green Book* lives on in their constitutional politicking, while they neglect the bread-and-butter concerns of working-class republicans. The party's caveat for the return of Government was the DUP's acceptance into legislation of a 'standalone' Irish language act. Not an act giving empowerment to minority languages such as Irish and Polish, but an act giving the Irish language primacy over others. Sinn Féin, standing as intransigent as they once claimed the old Unionist Stormont pre-1972 to be; bloody-minded on rarefied matters that do not solve the issues facing working people in their short-term, day to day struggles. If *The Green Book* bemoans the destruction of the Irish language, then Sinn Féin should remind its members how much is spent annually on the Irish language already.

At the time of writing health budgets in Northern Ireland are being decimated, people are on seemingly endless housing waiting lists.

Perhaps more intriguingly their attitude to legacy issues—another high priority on their agenda—is hugely coloured by a level of inequality towards other republicans, even former comrades. There were next to no protests by Sinn Féin when Ivor Bell, an ageing West Belfast former PIRA commander, was arrested and charged over the murder of Jean McConville, a mother of ten murdered and 'disappeared' by PIRA in 1972 (*BBC News*, 15 September 2017).

George Newell, a community worker based in Lagan village in South East Belfast, perceived that misgivings and criticisms about the sectarian nature of the mainly middle-class and upper-class Stormont Government prior to the Troubles had been transferred onto the loyalist community. Back in 2006, when I spoke to him, Newell suggested that, 'We're coming into a generation now where they're (Protestant working class in Northern Ireland) being labelled bigoted and sectarian because of their culture, not because of their working ethic. Now because of their culture, whether it's Orangeism or Unionism or Protestantism or Loyalism or paramilitarism…whatever they want to put to it. Now it's all over the news – 'Prods don't have a culture. It doesn't exist'. That Orange culture is sectarian and bigoted, 'you have to do away with it, yous are Irish…the problem is yous don't realise it yet'. Newell was firm in his rejection of the latter point: 'That is never going to happen' (Newell 2006). Some 11 years later, revisiting his earlier conversation with me, Newell echoed Shirlow's November 2012 thoughts by adding:

> Being labelled Irish is a choice of personal opinion and the more Republicans try to alienate Unionist cultural expression, the more the comfort of being and expressing their Britishness becomes the other political and cultural alternative. It would be very difficult especially after past events in both our histories that a unified "Irishness" is accepted by all in both communities. Perhaps the best and only solution to this complex enigma is to revert to us all being and promoting a "Northern Ireland" identity that all can buy into in many ways and let the past be the past. (Newell 2017)

One wonders if republicans have learned anything about their loyalist neighbours over the course of the past 50 or so years. The late PIRA volunteer Brendan Hughes stated that the republican objective from the beginning of what would be the Troubles was to 'Get the Brits out through armed resistance, engage them in armed conflict and send them back across the water with their tanks and guns' (Bean and Hayes 2001, p. 50). Going by PIRA logic, that meant that loyalists and working-class Protestants who largely regarded themselves as 'Brits' and part of the overall British working-class experience, would also have to go ‘back across the water’. Ronnie McCullough was one such working-class Protestant. As an 18-year-old in June 1970, he was to the fore in forming the RHC. Inside Long Kesh, Ronnie McCullough adopted the motto ‘Lamh Derg Abu’ for the RHC—an Irish phrase which means ‘Red hand to victory’. It has since been incorporated into the RHC crest. McCullough’s perspective is crucial, and he states the loyalist case with a nuance that republicans are struggling to come to terms with some 50 years later:

> To get the British out of the north part of Ireland effectively meant to get us out of the north part of Ireland, because we subscribed to the British identity. Whilst we were Irish and recognized the fact that we do have an Irishness, we were Irish Unionists and wished to remain part of the British household. (McCullough 2014)

Sinn Féin’s use of the Irish language as a cultural weapon has been challenged in recent years by people within the Protestant community who wish to wrest control of it away from the Republican Party and nullify its use as such. Linda Ervine, the sister-in-law of the late UVF and PUP member David Ervine, has been heavily involved in promoting the Irish language in Protestant working-class areas, particularly in East Belfast. The attempts throughout the Troubles by republicans to claim the language as part of the overall ‘struggle’ made Irish too controversial to be enjoyed by moderate nationalists in a conventional sense.

Are those who are seeking ‘Acht na Gaeilge Anois’ attempting to unify Catholic, Protestant and dissenter? Well, we have seen how Sinn Féin has responded to its dissidents or those who criticise their version of just about anything (McIntyre 2008). Writing in September 2017, Sir Reg Empey stated that Sinn Féin’s ‘…obsession with an Irish Language Act is quite clearly not about uniting the people of Northern Ireland - it is about dividing them’ (UUP.org, 2017). If the lack of support among those in the DUP and UUP for marriage equality is an uncomfortable position for liberal unionists to find themselves in, within a rapidly changing UK, then the uncomfortable truth for Sinn Féin (as a mainstream political party with Ministerial responsibilities) is that, like their old Ulster Unionist foes in the pre-1972 Stormont, they appear to have successfully hoodwinked the working class into believing that identity politics is of greater importance than social issues. The ‘struggle’ continues while the people starve.

Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. As it was, as it ever shall be?

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CHAPTER 13

Ideology and Identity in the Founding Group of the Social Democratic and Labour Party: Evaluating the Life-Writing of a Political Generation

Stephen Hopkins

This chapter will analyse the politics of memoir-writing and published narratives in relation to the founding generation of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), with particular reference to their attitudes towards the civil rights movement and the outbreak of the 'Troubles', and the increasing violence of the conflict in the early 1970s. This will involve an examination of attitudes to critical aspects of the party's past, one of which is the complex relationship of many of the key individuals in the 'leading group' of SDLP founders to the republican movement, and its embrace of political violence. Whilst these SDLP leaders eschewed violence from both the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Loyalist extremists, and were regularly on the receiving end of intimidation and occasionally violence, often there was also a certain ambivalence

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S. Hopkins (✉)
School of History, Politics and International Relations,
University of Leicester, Leicester, UK
e-mail: sh15@leicester.ac.uk

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at work; after all, many of these politicians and activists came from nationalist/republican backgrounds and understood (even if they did not condone) the communal and political wellsprings of militant republicanism.

The chapter will develop this theme with specific reference to the reaction of SDLP leaders to the republican hunger strikes of 1980–1981. This was, of course, a traumatic and fraught period for the entire Catholic nationalist community in Northern Ireland (and also across the island), and it demonstrates many of the complexities and ambivalences in the relations between militant, physical force republicanism, on the one hand, and 'constitutional nationalism' on the other. As Sarah Campbell has recently observed, with respect to the fiftieth anniversary of the civil rights movement (and the formal founding of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in 1967), there was an 'ever-present wavering between militancy and constitutionalism', and this complex relationship has also been identifiable in the historiography of the movement since (Campbell 2017; English 2006). During the worst years of the violent conflict in the 1970s and 1980s, there was an understandable dichotomisation of the choices open to Catholics in terms of political action, with physical force republicanism and constitutional nationalism often viewed as at opposite ends of the spectrum. However, a close reading of some of the life-writing of key individuals furnishes researchers with a more nuanced picture; the notion of a strict dichotomy always masked a more ambivalent relationship. Those SDLP leading figures of this 'founding generation' who have written directly or indirectly about their 'political lives' include Paddy Devlin, Austin Currie, Paddy O'Hanlon and John Hume. These resources can be supplemented with biographical studies of other critical individuals in this 'founding generation', including the first SDLP party leader, Gerry Fitt.[1]

The first section of the chapter discusses the concept of a 'political generation', as developed initially by historical sociologists Karl

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[1] It is surely not merely coincidence that the role of Protestants in both the civil rights movement and the establishing of the SDLP has not been much discussed, either in the life-writing or the academic analysis of the founding generation. A number of Protestant trade unionists and Communists had been significant activists in the civil rights movement, but the most prominent Protestant in the SDLP was Ivan Cooper, elected as an Independent in Mid-Derry in 1969. He was a founder member of the SDLP, but left the party in 1977; he has not published a memoir of this period.

Mannheim and Rudolf Heberle. In the context of the SDLP, it will be argued that there is a compelling case for treating the founders of the party as a political generation, even though there were significant differences between some of the individuals involved, both in terms of the demographic cohort to which they belonged and their geographical locations. The second section will analyse the attitudes of these core leaders, as recounted in their life-writing, to the republican movement. A third section is devoted to the particular case study of the hunger strikes and the problems associated with remembering this deeply distressing period. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a contemporary interpretation of these sources, from the perspective of twenty years of relative peace in Northern Ireland, and a concerted attempt by Sinn Féin (SF) to 'occupy' some of the ideological terrain on which the SDLP had previously stood.

Becoming a Political Generation

It is now a commonplace that political or sociological generations are not the same as biological generations, but the starting point for this fundamental insight was the work of Karl Mannheim in the early 1950s (Mannheim 1952). From this perspective, individuals may become conscious (often in their late teens or early twenties) of belonging to a particular social generation, in a fashion analogous to their appreciation of their position within a social class structure. In short, there is recognition of occupying a similar social location to others, even though this does not always entail belonging to a specific or concrete social group. These individuals are very likely to experience social and historical processes in a similar fashion, which will predispose them to characteristic modes of thought and (perhaps later) of action. For Mannheim, 'whereas mere common "location" in a generation is of only potential significance, a generation as an actuality is constituted when similarly "located" contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding' (Mannheim 1952). When individuals tend to interpret their circumstances in very similar fashion and thus develop an 'affinity in the way in which all move with and are formed by their common experiences', then a more defined 'generation-unit' may be discerned (Mannheim 1952).

In his study of the political generation of Jewish Communists in Poland from the 1930s until the 1960s, Schatz argues that many Jews in Poland shared a 'common location of social situation and cultural heritage', but they nonetheless formed diverse generation-units, with some joining the Communist Party, others becoming Zionists or Bundists and yet others embracing traditional Orthodoxy (Schatz 1989). In Northern Irish terms, it could be argued that many younger (and some older) Catholics in the 1960s shared a similar social situation and cultural heritage (experiencing economic and social discrimination and disadvantage under the Unionist-dominated Stormont regime and oscillating between abstention and participation in the political life of the state). However, not all of those who participated in the civil rights movement (whether formally or informally) from 1967 through until 1970 and beyond went on to become part of a unified Mannheimian generation-unit. As Campbell and others have argued, the civil rights movement represented a number of strands of opinion: we can therefore speak of 'civil rights movements (plural), suggesting that there was not one overall movement, but many movements with different approaches and agendas, all working towards the attainment of a more equal society' (Campbell 2017). Those who proceeded to form the SDLP drew different lessons from their similar experiences in relation to some of those who went on to espouse the Provisional republican breakaway from the Officials in late 1969.

It is my argument that although these groups formed distinctive (and often antagonistic) generation-units, they were (and are) related in complex ways. Even within the same extended family, individuals could decide to interpret the changing political circumstances of the civil rights era in varying ways. A flavour of the complexity of these relations is seen in the following quotation: 'republicans are – literally – cousins and siblings of SDLP members and voters. They know each other well. The history of animosity is measured out for many on both sides in sullen Christmas dinners and rancorous wedding receptions that have pulled them unwillingly together' (O'Doherty 1998, p. 205). Heberle argued that a political generation is 'a phenomenon of collective mentality and morality [in which those involved] feel themselves linked by a community of standpoints, of beliefs and wishes' (Heberle 1951). A political generation may not necessarily be born under the impact of a single dramatic event, but may evolve under less traumatic but accumulated social experience.

For the generation which developed in Northern Ireland during the period from approximately the mid-1960s through until 1970, there was often a combination of local and regional political experience (particularly in terms of the impact of civil rights rallies, marches and demonstrations), alongside the international or transnational development of a youthful culture which challenged established modes of politics. There has been a good deal of recent scholarship analysing the memories and trajectory of the '*soixante-huitard*' political generation, particularly in France and Italy, although (apart from the notable exceptions of Simon Prince and Chris Reynolds) there have been few attempts to systematically compare or extend this analysis to the Northern Irish political context (Gildea et al. 2013; von der Goltz 2011; Prince 2007; Reynolds 2014). Yet, the particular events of the years 1967–1969 (for instance the Derry civil rights march on 5 October 1968, or the Burntollet attack on student demonstrators in January 1969) did, arguably, constitute a severe shock to both younger Catholics who formed the bulk of the demonstrators and many older nationalists, who often placed these events in a longer-term context of Unionist misgovernment, and police over-reaction.

Those founding members of the SDLP in August 1970, despite the sometimes important difference in ages between them,[2] nonetheless can be interpreted as a 'political generation', in my terms, because they shared what Heberle termed 'decisive, politically relevant experiences'. Crucially, they shared not only certain mentalities and moralities as far as the realisation and extension of the civil rights agenda(s) were concerned, but they were also determined to take social and political action to further their cause. As Schatz rightly argues, both Mannheim and Heberle were prone to underestimate the critical importance of collective action as a marker of a 'political generation': 'there is a reciprocity between those two aspects in which a generation finds expression: social actions and the subjective world of standpoints, beliefs and wishes reinforce each other' (Schatz 1989, p. 27). Political generations should be seen as dynamic phenomena, changing over time, and subject to both internal and external pressures; 'generations always *become*, never *are*' (Schatz 1989, p. 26). Kansteiner has shown that the 'fabulous versatility' of the 'political generation' as an interpretive paradigm makes it more easily applicable in memory studies, rather than history, where 'applying the concept of political generation triggers unwelcome commitments to specific models of causality' (Kansteiner 2012). This chapter argues that although the

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[2] For example, the first leader of the SDLP, Gerry Fitt was 44 in 1970 and Paddy Devlin was 45, whilst Austin Currie was 30 and Paddy O'Hanlon was only 26.

SDLP has survived into the twenty-first century, despite the fact that it has been comprehensively eclipsed by the growth of SF since 2003, arguably the political generation that gave rise to the party had, by the late 1970s, begun the process of dissolving, with some of its members reverting to older, more traditional forms of Irish nationalism (or 'discovering' these anew), whilst others (notably Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin) believed that the party had downgraded its commitment to a labourist and potentially anti-sectarian politics. Both men had severed their formal connections to the SDLP by the end of the decade; however, in mnemonic terms, they are both primarily remembered for their associations with the SDLP, rather than their subsequent critiques of the party.

A related point is significant here: political generations do not exist in isolation from those that went before and those that develop subsequently. Therefore, the inter-generational transmission of collective mentalities and values adds another layer of complexity to the question of generational identity. For example, some in the '1968' generation in France or West Germany undoubtedly saw themselves as 'completing' or reinvigorating the work of the Resistance generation, thereby complicating the notion of an entirely new political generation. In a similar fashion, we can agree with Campbell's insistence that the SDLP 'founding generation' did not achieve a complete break with the foregoing Catholic nationalist political culture, despite the desire of at least some of its members to do just that. Nor did this generation manage to resolve to the satisfaction of all of its members the age-old dilemma: on one hand, participation or reform under the auspices of the Northern Ireland political system, and on the other, the traditional militant rejection of partition. 'From its inception until June 1971 the SDLP remained in the borderland between constitutional participatory politics and traditional Nationalism' (Campbell 2015, p. 50).

The Memoirs of the SDLP's Founding Generation

There has been significant research devoted to the origins and founding of the SDLP, and there is insufficient space to rehearse this story again here (Murray 1998; McAllister 1977). It is important to note that despite similar experiences and reactions during the civil rights movement, the 'founding generation' of Stormont MPs (elected or re-elected in the February 1969 contest) represented a diversity of political backgrounds.

Paddy Devlin had been elected in Belfast for the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), Gerry Fitt for the republican Labour Party (also in Belfast), whilst Austin Currie had stood for the Nationalist Party in Co. Tyrone, and Paddy O'Hanlon as an independent in South Armagh. Campbell is certainly correct to argue that one of the crucial areas of difference was between the more 'labourist' outlook of Fitt and Devlin in Belfast and the more rural constituencies west of the Bann, where more traditional Nationalist concerns were likely to hold sway. This geographical distinction, built-into the political 'DNA' of the SDLP, was exacerbated by the personality clashes that bedevilled the forging of a truly unified party after 1970: 'the consensus narrative is that the fault lines in the party were present from the start […]' (Campbell 2015, pp. 235, 249).

The memoirs produced by the prominent members of this founding generation are replete with evidence of such tensions. For researchers seeking to interpret the complexities of this period, it is instructive that of such a small group of core founders, so many have written extensively about their reflections. The timing of these publications is, of course, crucial, in at least two distinct ways: first, the contemporary political objectives at the time of writing (or publication) must be recognised and interpreted; second, those memoirs that are written *later* often seek to either refute or reinforce the arguments of those that appeared at an *earlier* juncture. On occasion, this may be quite explicit, but there is also often an implicit dimension to this inter-textual writing.

There is also the familiar story of the crucial period leading up to the SDLP's participation in the Sunningdale talks and its subsequent engagement with the power-sharing Executive in early 1974 (Murray and Tonge 2005, pp. 43–66; Hopkins 2013, pp. 114–132; McDaid 2013). This short-lived, but critically important period saw the party committed to working within the structures of a cross-communal devolved government at Stormont, alongside a putative all-island Council of Ireland. After the failure or collapse of this experiment in compromise and moderation, politics in Northern Ireland was dominated by paramilitary violence, direct rule from Westminster, security policy and, for the 'founding generation' of the SDLP, a prolonged and deep-rooted sense of frustration, at least until the 'peace process' of the 1990s.

In their memoirs of this foundational period, many of the leading figures in the SDLP recall the excitement and hope generated by the whirlwind activity of these years, but also the despondency caused by the intensifying violence, and the ultimate failure of political compromise and moderation. Austin Currie identified the 'period between Caledon [a housing protest in Co. Tyrone] in June 1968, and the fall of the power-sharing Executive in May 1974 [as] the most satisfying and fulfilling in my whole political career. Things were happening and I was helping to make them happen' (Currie 2004, p. 119). However, by the same token, 'these were also stressful and dangerous years when, on a number of occasions, I was lucky to survive'. The judgements of the key protagonists in the SDLP, with regard to the debate between full participation in the existing political institutions and the temptation of boycott or abstention, are a central dimension of this memoir-writing. Paddy Devlin effectively accused John Hume of wishing to form a 'Catholic party' rather than an authentically non-sectarian 'labour' or 'social-democratic' party; Hume was 'cast from the stuff that old nationalists were made of' (Devlin 1993, p. 138). Although Currie, responding directly to Devlin's claim, denied that there was any evidence for this accusation, nonetheless it does demonstrate the degree to which there was mutual distrust of the motivations of key individuals within the founding group (Currie 2004, p. 160; Devlin 1993, p. 140). One way in which to interpret the fundamental, but complex, tensions within the early leadership group is in terms of the nuanced attitudes which existed towards the republican movement and its growing challenge to the non-violent politics espoused by the SDLP.

Many of these memoirists recall that, as adolescents or young men, they had been exposed to republican ideas and historical interpretations of the conflict in Ireland. In this sense, republicanism was not experienced or understood as an alien force in many Catholic districts, even if it was usually minoritarian from the 1920s until 1960s. Even for the SDLP founders who firmly rejected Provisional republican violence, the movement could be understood as a misguided, but organic, outgrowth of emotional feeling and frustration. This was due both to the immediate repression and heavy-handed reaction of the Stormont authorities to legitimate civil rights demands, but also to the perceived original injustice of partition. The question of 'physical force' nationalism brought up a range of complex issues: whatever the stated intentions of the IRA, the *effects* of republican violence were bound to undermine the prospect of any genuinely non- (or anti-) sectarian politics developing. But, it could also be argued that *were* such violence to successfully challenge the UK government to fundamentally reassess its constitutional policy, and then perhaps it would be retrospectively endorsed by nationalist Ireland.

This did not make every Catholic nationalist a 'sneaking regarder' with respect to the republican use of force (although arguably this was a real phenomenon amongst some ostensible opponents of the IRA) (Currie 2004, p. 314). However, it did mean that many, even some in the SDLP, could *understand* and acknowledge the republican movement as 'one more element on the spectrum of possible responses to an unjust system that confronted northern Catholics and nationalists' (Hopkins 2013, p. 100). From this perspective, McGrattan has argued (citing Campbell's doctoral research) that there was a 'latent tradition of physical force', accompanied by a tolerance or even '*sotto voce* respect' for such politics within the wider Northern nationalist 'family' (McGrattan 2013, p. 107). This 'surreptitious role that physical force plays within the Northern nationalist imaginary' is both subtle and complex, and the memoirs of this founding generation provide one significant means of teasing out these ambivalences (McGrattan 2013, p. 110).

For instance, Paddy O'Hanlon was born into a family from the South Armagh/North Louth border region, and several close relatives had been active republicans during the War of Independence and taken the anti-Treaty side during the civil war. The opening chapter of his memoir is devoted to establishing this republican pedigree, and there is at least a hint of ongoing pride in this heritage, even if O'Hanlon uses this family history to illustrate his own journey away from the 'faith of his father'. O'Hanlon is rather hazy in the memoir with regard to the precise reasons for his rejection of this political commitment, but it was the radical student milieu of Dublin in 1968 which sealed his decision to support NICRA rather than traditional republican objectives. He was clear that the 'substantial Sinn Féin influence in the local community did not support the aims and objectives of the [NI]CRA. They looked upon the CRA marches as a recognition of the [Northern Irish] state, a campaign for internal reform and a betrayal of traditional republicanism' (O'Hanlon 2011, p. 27). There was a personal cost for O'Hanlon in throwing in his lot with the civil rights movement, and later the SDLP: 'Many people in South Armagh took it badly that I forsook the old ways. They viewed it as a form of desertion, but I toughed it out' (O'Hanlon 2011, p. 27).

Both Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin, despite their subsequent vehement disavowal of (especially Provisional) republicanism, had nonetheless been seduced by its romanticism as young men. Fitt had worked for the election of SF candidates in the late 1950s and was still running for office under a 'republican' banner in the late 1960s. Indeed, Currie reminded Fitt of his earlier allegiances, when the latter resigned from the SDLP in 1979, bemoaning what he regarded as the increasing influence of republican attitudes (Currie 2004, p. 315). Devlin had joined Na Fianna Eireann (youth wing of the republican movement) in the 1940s and was interned in Crumlin Road jail in Belfast for his republican activities during World War II. Although Devlin subsequently argued that there was no 'great political passion or patriotic zeal' in his decision to join the Fianna, nonetheless he went on to 'graduate' to the IRA in 1940 (Devlin 1993, p. 22). He acknowledged that 'I had an inflated sense of my own importance and I was hooked on the romanticism of the struggle. Although I was very much on the fringes of the organisation [the IRA] and was never involved in any direct acts of armed violence, I thought loftily of myself becoming a martyr like Patrick Pearse or James Connolly […]' (Devlin 1993, p. 31). Austin Currie recalled that, at nine years old, 'Dan Breen's *My Fight for Irish Freedom* was my favourite book'; this illustrates the importance of earlier republican memoir literature for transmitting the rudiments of republican philosophy and culture from one generation to another (Currie 2004, p. 28). Although he quickly left behind this youthful infatuation with the republican 'struggle', it is still instructive that Currie was, as a teenager, 'seduced by stirring nationalism', still capable of feeling satisfied that 'someone [was] putting the boot into the arrogant and dominating unionists' (Currie 2004, p. 32). Devlin underlined that his years behind bars permitted him 'for the first time, to understand and confront the issues raised by the IRA carrying on its activities in a so-called democracy […] Perhaps the most perplexing dilemmas I encountered arose when we debated how republicans acquired the moral right to wage war and take life, when they consistently received only a nominal vote at the ballot box and were therefore unrepresentative of the people'. He began to question and ultimately rejected the 'violent republican ethos' (Devlin 1993, p. 49).

The memoirs of these founding figures of the SDLP, all of whom took significant personal risks in publicly condemning Provisional IRA violence in the 1970s, demonstrate that militant republicanism was certainly not viewed as incomprehensible, even if it was rejected as either immoral, counterproductive or both. Either explicitly (as in the case of Devlin and Currie), or implicitly (O'Hanlon), these memoirists sought in their writing both to convey the contemporary dangers of the propaganda of republicanism and to outline their own 'escape' from this political dead end. One of the key objectives of this writing, therefore, was not so much to 'obfuscate' their erstwhile dalliances with republicanism, but to *utilise* these experiences in the service of undermining the potential appeal of this romantic attachment to 'physical force' (Parr 2012, p. 112). The period of the republican campaign against 'criminalisation', culminating in the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981, was to be a crucial episode in 'testing the mettle' of the founding generation of the SDLP, and the chapter turns to this specific case study in the next section.

Sympathy for the Devil? The SDLP Founding Generation and the Hunger Strikes

In the aftermath of the failed power-sharing Executive of 1974, many in the SDLP were increasingly frustrated by the slow progress towards political compromise and the lack of ambition displayed by the Labour government at Westminster after the abortive 1975 Constitutional Convention (Murray and Tonge 2005). Already, SDLP leader Gerry Fitt was bemoaning the 'United Ireland or nothing' mentality, which he alleged was gaining ground in the party (Campbell 2015, p. 213). Motions were passionately debated at SDLP congresses in 1976 and 1978 demanding a UK 'declaration of intent to withdraw' from Northern Ireland; in 1976, the motion was narrowly defeated, but nevertheless this was a position that Fitt characterised as some within the party 'beginning to think in Provo terms' (Campbell 2015, pp. 327, 337). By 1978, the SDLP almost unanimously supported a motion (sponsored by Currie's Coalisland branch) which began: 'Conference believes that British disengagement from Ireland is inevitable and desirable […]'. In his memoir, Currie presented this motion as an extension of SDLP policy, rather than a fundamental shift. He remained vehemently opposed to a unilateral UK withdrawal, on the grounds that it could potentially provoke a violent loyalist 'backlash'; more ideologically, 'there was no way I wanted my party to be associated with the simplistic "Brits Out" demand of an organisation [the IRA] that was killing and maiming on an almost daily basis' (Currie 2004, p. 64).

However, not all of the 'founding generation' were convinced by the apparent compromise: Paddy Devlin had already been expelled from the party, and Paddy O'Hanlon warned that the party risked 'slipping into pan-nationalism' and occupying 'a comfortable cultural ghetto', in which its principled stance against the violence of the IRA would be diluted, if not undermined more comprehensively (O'Hanlon as cited in Campbell

2015, p. 225). Even though Fitt supported the motion, his position was increasingly tenuous as leader, and we might question the judgment of one of his biographers that 'if Fitt was less nationalist than his colleagues, he masked it well' (Murphy 2007, p. 265). Campbell summed up this period as follows: 'undoubtedly, outside pressures forced the SDLP to a greener, more traditional form of nationalism' (Campbell 2015, p. 225).

Of these pressures, perhaps the most significant was the 'blanket protest' by republican inmates in Long Kesh and the mobilisation of many in the broader Catholic population in support of the restoration of 'political status' for these prisoners. Paradoxically, some of the founders of the SDLP had been instrumental in helping to win the original concession of 'political status' in 1972. Devlin described his chagrin at this error in his memoir: 'the unprecedented barbarity of the Provos' campaign and their wanton disrespect for human life had long removed from me all vestiges of sympathy for them and I was no longer in favour of them having these privileges' (Devlin 1993, p. 284). During the first hunger strike, in November 1980, Gerry Fitt echoed this view; speaking in the House of Commons, he argued that he bitterly regretted having made representations on behalf of both republican and loyalist prisoners in 1972 (Fitt as cited in Murphy 2007, p. 292). By 1977, both Devlin and Fitt were increasingly estranged from the prevailing mood within the SDLP, and both had effectively severed their formal roles in the party by 1979. This heralded the break-up of the 'founding generation', and it is important to note that arguably the primary cause of this splintering was the question of the SDLP's attitude to the republican movement.

However, other commentators have recognised that there was considerable sympathy in the ranks of the SDLP for the plight of the prisoners, and once the IRA leadership acceded to the hunger strike in autumn 1980, this sympathy became even more apparent (Ross 2011, p. 142). Murphy recognised that the hunger strike 'reduced the conflict to its communal fundamentals' (Murphy 2007, p. 294). Whilst it may be true in a narrow sense that the hunger strikers did not have any specifically religious motivation, nonetheless they were deeply imbued with a Catholic ethos of self-sacrifice and martyrdom (Hopkins 2018). As O'Doherty (1998, p. 21) argues, 'both republicanism and Catholicism in their histories of martyrdom accept that death can be part of the struggle'. There were very close affinities between the two belief systems, and they were skilfully fused by the republican movement into a powerfully effective appeal to the broad mass of Catholic nationalist Ireland. To stand outside or unequivocally against this wave of communal emotion would prove impossible for the SDLP, especially in the light of Fitt and Devlin's departures from the party. One of those Northern Catholics who understood the 'sacred drama' of the hunger strikes, and who was highly conflicted during their course, was the future Nobel prize-winning poet, Seamus Heaney. He admitted his sympathy for the men on strike, even his admiration for their courage, but he was 'highly aware of the propaganda aspect […] and cautious about being enlisted' (O'Driscoll 2008, p. 257).

In the particular context of the Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election in April 1981, brought about by the death of sitting MP Frank Maguire, the SDLP faced a hugely difficult conundrum (Murray 1998, pp. 105–110). Two years previously, in the 1979 Westminster election, Austin Currie had defied the party Executive, which had decided to allow Maguire, as sitting MP, a 'free run' as the only Irish nationalist candidate, and therefore best-placed to defeat the representative of unionism. Currie stood (unsuccessfully) against Maguire as an Independent SDLP candidate, having resigned his position as Chief whip. In his memoir, he explained the rationale: 'what really angered me [about Maguire] and made me determined that he would be opposed was his refusal to condemn even the worst atrocities of the Provisional IRA' (Currie 2004, p. 310).

In 1981, Currie again argued that the SDLP should contest the seat, even though Noel Maguire (brother of the deceased former MP) was being promoted as a 'unity' candidate. After a protracted debate, the SDLP Executive voted not to stand a candidate, on the understanding that Maguire would not withdraw; however, under pressure from republicans, this is precisely what ensued, leaving the hunger striker, Bobby Sands, a clear run against the Unionist, Harry West. On hearing the news from the returning officer, Currie recalled: 'He might as well have put a stick of gelignite under me. My first angry reaction was, "The Provos have won." My second reaction was, "The SDLP has lost"'. (Currie 2004, p. 321). Predictably, but forcefully, both Fitt and Devlin were incandescent with their former colleagues; the former argued that the decision was a 'shame, an outrage and a gross betrayal of non-unionist voters' who had no candidate for whom they could vote 'in conformity with their opposition to violence' (Fitt, as cited in Murphy 2007, p. 297). Devlin described it as a 'disgraceful failure' in his memoir; both he and Fitt were subject to violent attack for their stance against Sands' election campaign and the hunger strikes more generally (Devlin 1993, p. 285).

Sands' election arguably 'marked a uniquely close identification between the nationalist population – North and South – and what used to be called "physical force" republicanism' (O'Connor 1993, p. 103). It was not just the SDLP which found this period deeply distressing—as Elliott has argued, mainstream politicians in the Republic, as well as the Catholic hierarchy found themselves 'being pulled by their own past into being the apparent spokesmen for a tradition of violence which they abhorred' (Elliott 2001, p. 149). According to Currie, the 'nadir' was reached when the SDLP decided, by a slim margin, not to contest the subsequent by-election in August 1981, in which Owen Carron (a member of SF, but standing as an 'Anti-H Block proxy political prisoner') won the seat vacated by Sands' death on hunger strike. Currie recognised that the party was in a 'no-win situation, partly because of previous decisions, but principally because of the revulsion, shared by *all of nationalist Ireland*, of the callous and intransigent policy implemented by Thatcher' (Currie 2004, p. 323; emphasis added). Whilst ordinary nationalists 'deplored the activities of the IRA', in this existential confrontation, 'Thatcher was English, the hunger strikers were Irish, and whatever they had done in the past they were now showing courage and commitment and were dying for their principles' (Currie 2004, p. 323).

In an indication of how far the 'founding generation' of the SDLP had been pulled apart, Gerry Fitt took a position that he knew would be deeply unpopular with many in the SDLP, as well as the wider Catholic 'community': 'I had a lot of sympathy for the Protestant feelings at the time. […] It was hypocritical of Catholics to criticise the Protestants for their reaction to the hunger strikes, for the way the Church and community closed tribal ranks behind the hunger strike must have been deeply offensive and frightening' (Fitt, as cited in Ryder 2006, p. 359). Currie was left in his memoir to forlornly bemoan the fact that 'those of us who urged consideration of the broader picture', namely that Carron's victory would be used as a mandate for the Provo campaign of violence, 'were on a hiding to nothing' (Currie 2004, p. 323). It is perhaps instructive that Paddy O'Hanlon devoted only a short paragraph to the hunger strikes in his memoir, reflecting that it was 'the worst period in the recent history of the North' (O'Hanlon 2011, p. 68). Whilst the death of his father in March 1981 provides a personal explanation for his focus being elsewhere at the time, nonetheless this strategic silence may be understood as unintentionally eloquent, reflecting the sensitivity and pain that the hunger strikes were still generating, even thirty years on.

Conclusion

In October 2017, SF's newspaper, *An Phoblacht*, used the headline on its front page, 'Fifty Years on from the Civil Rights campaign is Unionism up for genuine power-sharing?' As Campbell has argued, 'the civil rights movement circulates through Northern Irish memory in forms and through channels that are at once powerful, dangerous and hotly contested' (Campbell 2017). Both SF and the SDLP have been engaged in a battle over 'ownership' of this terrain, as 'the true inheritors of the [civil rights] movement'. The SDLP have attempted to steal a march on their rivals by establishing a Civil Rights Committee, which has inaugurated its commemorative series of events with a public meeting on the forty-ninth anniversary of the 5 October 1968 civil rights march in Derry (*Derry Journal*, 3 October 2017). Guy Beiner has also argued recently that both constitutional nationalism and moderate unionism have been neglected in the field of memory studies devoted to the Northern Irish Troubles (Beiner 2017). This chapter has sought to redress this balance somewhat by concentrating upon the life-writing of the founding generation of SDLP politicians. However, what becomes clear from a close reading of these accounts is the complexity and ambivalence of this 'memoryscape'; this is particularly evident from the memories of the party's founders with regard to the republican movement. Two of the key members of this 'political generation', Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin, had already split from the SDLP by the time of the republican hunger strikes of 1980–1981, and they felt vindicated by what they characterised as the party's pusillanimous response to this momentous challenge. Whilst the early years of the SDLP suggested that this political generation had broken with the established patterns of political allegiance in Northern Ireland, by the late 1970s (and especially during the hunger strikes) it was clear that the older patterns had not been eradicated. The idea of a strict dichotomy between 'physical force' republicanism and 'constitutional nationalism' masked certain common features. Arguably, what these memoirs divulge is that there *was* a marked distinction, if not a dichotomy, between the philosophy of 'social democracy' and labourism, on one hand, and the more traditional tenets of Catholic nationalism, on the other, within the SDLP's founding generation.

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CHAPTER 14

Republican Fragmentation in the Face of Enduring Partition

Anthony McIntyre

Partition is anchored in the principle of consent.

This chapter, at one level, ponders the unifying political impact of the consent principle within that section of the nationalist community most identified with the North's insurrection (but which now defers to that principle rather than continuing to seek its rupture). At a second level, it seeks to establish the degree to which consent might also produce fragmentation within that body of republicans irreconcilably opposed to the principle. Does the principle of consent have a dual strategic function of consolidating political ground for those that consent, while fragmenting the ground of those who dissent? The more plausibly it can be claimed to have done so, the greater the success of British state strategy in Ireland, in smothering an insurrection against the rule and sovereignty of that state.

A. McIntyre (✉)
Independent Researcher, Belfast, Northern Ireland
e-mail: anthonymcintyre@outlook.ie

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The Primacy of the Consent Principle

Almost a century after its emergence, the partition of Ireland remains firmly in place and with the consent of an overwhelming majority of people on the island of Ireland. A Dublin government is sovereign in twenty-six of the counties, while a government in London exercises sovereignty in the remaining six.

Throughout its existence, partition has impacted greatly on public opinion, proving hugely divisive, often violently so. Its polarising properties invariably found their way into how the Northern political landscape was defined, becoming the dominant political cleavage often distilled down to the phrase "constitutional question" (Reddit 2017).

Partition has spawned its own resilience and endurance. Traditional Irish republicanism, which assigns no *de jure* right of veto over national unity to the population of Northern Ireland, has been rendered redundant as an answer to the question of partition. Its long trail of strategic misadventure suggests that it, rather than the state of Northern Ireland, is the "failed political entity"[1] (Stephen Kelly 2017).

The evidence for that is breathtakingly simple: notwithstanding several armed campaigns by the IRA and other groups,[2] which sought the end of the Northern Irish state as an entity politically and administratively separate from the rest of the island, territorial reunification of the island has remained beyond the reach of its most tenacious advocates. Ultimately, every republican attempt, bar none, armed or otherwise, that sought to bring about the unification of Ireland has crashed and dissipated on the rock of consent. In terms of the existence of partition and the British presence, republicanism is equipped only with the ability to make nothing happen.

While traditional Irish republicanism might not always subscribe to the notion of militarily coercing Britain out of Ireland, it most certainly exhibits a unity of purpose in refusing to assign any legitimacy to the claim of a Northern majority to prevent Irish unity. There exist only "the inalienable rights of the Irish Nation—rights which exist in their own space and time, beyond and impervious to current or future constitutional realities" (Bresnahan 2018).

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[1] While Charles Haughey coined the term to describe Northern Ireland, it is a concept that readily summed up Provisional philosophy.

[2] Saor Uladh and the INLA for example.

The British State and the Consent Principle Vis-a-Vis Republicanism

The British state's management of partition, or indeed non-management, helped fuel its negative effects. However, that state, more so in the post-war period than before, has not been opposed to the reunification of Ireland nor to its own withdrawal from the North. There were no clear enduring vital strategic, political or economic interests that would make retention of the territorial fragmentation of Ireland a major policy consideration for British decision-makers. What the British state opposed was not the end goal of traditional Irish republicanism of a unified Ireland (notwithstanding socialist add-ons), but the republican terms on which the island would be united.

The bottom line for a realist as distinct from a benevolent British state was an unwillingness to withdraw from the North without the consent of a majority in the six counties (McIntyre 1999). This was the dominant democratic British policy goal in the North. The British physical presence in Ireland while initially caused by expansionist imperial interests was no longer crucial to British long-term considerations.

Jonathan Powell made this very clear in his description of Prime Minister Blair's negotiating stance towards Sinn Fein when he outlined the "fundamental principle" as not one of remaining per se but only of remaining while a majority in the North consented to it.

> Tony had zeroed in on the fundamental principle: what was the unit that had the right to national self-determination? …It had to be the people of Northern Ireland who should have the say. For the unionists this was of fundamental importance. (McIntyre 2010)

In sharp contrast to the British position, the traditional Irish republican position was that the British must disengage regardless of what people in the North felt. There was and is no place in the republican Weltanschauung for the "unionist veto".

For the largest manifestation of anti-partitionist republicanism since the formation of the Northern state, and the body most to the fore in recent decades in seeking to coerce the British state out of Ireland against the wishes of unionism—the Provisional Movement—unity by consent was a fudge (Adams 1986).

Despite Sinn Fein revisionism in recent years designed to bamboozle the observer into believing that the Provisional IRA waged a war for equality (Spencer 2015), the discursive objective of the IRA throughout the entirety of its armed campaign was a British declaration of intent to withdraw from Ireland. Viewed through this prism, it is wholly consistent to read the IRA campaign as a major coercive assault on the principle of consent.

While Sinn Fein might still claim—through its most prominent political personality—to "believe that Irish Unity is achievable and winnable", this is accompanied by the rider that "we have to engage with unionism and seek to persuade that part of our society to support Irish unity" (Adams 2017). In short, the Provisionals have managed a 180-degree turn and now vigorously defend what they had previously vehemently attacked. In the words of a current Sinn Fein Westminster MP, "The very principle of partition is accepted" (Clarke and Jones 1999). Adams elaborated that "in terms of the realpolitik, we have accepted entirely, it's obvious, partition is still here, that the British jurisdiction is still here" (Millar 2009).

When Sinn Fein's project evolved to the point of dropping that core plank of its programme, it moved wholescale onto the constitutionalist ground cultivated by the SDLP, "enmeshed in the constitutional establishment" (Bresnahan 2017). For this to have been possible, there had to have been "seismic shifts in republican theology" which in theory held potential for the ideological vacuum to be filled by a rival republican project (*The Guardian*, 12 September 2007).

The upshot has been that despite the institutional and political volatility introduced by the 2017 collapse of the Northern Executive and compounded by the uncertainty caused by Brexit, the principle of consent is more firmly anchored than at any time in the history of the Northern State.

Within the broader nationalist political community, the constitutional nationalism of which Provisionalism is now the hegemonic element is in the ascendancy. It is virtually unassailable from within while being substantially buttressed from without. There may be different priorities, sectional interests and nuanced perspectives within that nationalist bloc, but on the consent issue there is now a unity of purpose and a consolidation. Fragmentation has been successfully displaced to the fringes of nationalism. Those opposed to the consent principle not only have been marginalised to the edges of decision-making power and influence, but have also been organisationally disintegrated. Whereas the consent principle has integrated and anchored the broadest spectrum of Northern nationalism, opposition to that principle has produced no corresponding cohesion. Dispersion has been the outcome.

The obvious question is: if the consent principle acts in a *centripetal* manner on constitutional nationalism, does it at the same time produce a centrifugal effect within its adversary? The widespread fragmentation within traditional republicanism invites probing as to some of the more salient causes and to what extent, if indeed at all, potential exists for republicanism to overcome its disparate composition to the point where it can challenge the current Northern nationalist hegemon.

Given how far the Provisional Movement had stopped short of the goals it pursued, as evidenced by the armed struggle waged by the Provisional IRA, it might well be thought that republican detractors of the Provisionals would be well placed to mount a substantial challenge to the hegemony of Sinn Fein, the current embodiment of Provisionalism.

Danny Morrison on two separate occasions took to the pages of *The Guardian* to describe:

> …the bitter pills the peace process has required republicans to swallow. These have included: the deletion of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution (the territorial claim over the North); the return of a Northern Assembly; Sinn Fein abandoning its traditional policy of abstentionism; reliance on British-government-appointed commissions on the equality and human rights issues and on the future of policing; and the implicit recognition of the principle of unionist consent on the constitutional question … Republicans sit in an assembly they never wanted. The British government never gave a declaration of intent to withdraw. There is still a heavy British army presence in some nationalist areas. The police have not been reformed. The equality and justice issues have yet to be resolved. (*The Guardian*, 13 July 1999; 14 October 2002)

As Tonge and Murray caustically observed “Morrison declined to draw from this catalogue of disasters; the conclusion that the peace process was an abject defeat for Republicans” (Murray and Tonge 2005).

Somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Ed Moloney in 2003 accurately offered a sense of the gap between Provisional objective and attainment:

> There was never a chance that Adams could have gone to an Army Council upon which figures like Slab Murphy, Kevin McKenna or Michael McKevitt sat and say, ‘listen lads I have an idea; how about we recognise Northern Ireland and agree that we won’t get Irish unity until the Prods say so, we’ll cut a deal with the Unionists to share power, Martin here can become a minister - and Barbara - meanwhile you guys will call a permanent ceasefire, give up all those Libyan guns, recognise a new re-named

> police force and eventually we'll wind down the IRA and disband it. If we do that, then Sinn Fein, under my leadership of course, will become the new SDLP and Fianna Fails of Ireland.' Does anyone here seriously think Adams could have gone to the Army Council with such a message and survive the experience? (McIntyre 2003)

Less wryly, Jonathan Powell indicated how highly the British thought of Sinn Fein leaders for having negotiated such a climbdown.

> It was a remarkable act of leadership by Adams and McGuinness to talk the IRA into peace and to persuade them to settle for something far less than they had demanded in 1993, let alone when the Provisionals were formed in 1969. (McIntyre 2010)

The implications this must have had for the IRA were huge. Eamonn McCann pointed to the very *raison d'etre* of the IRA having been turned inside out by such outcomes.

> In endorsing the 'principle of consent' contained in the Agreement - accepting that Northern Ireland will, as of right, remain part of the United Kingdom until such time as a majority within the six counties decides otherwise - Sinn Féin had ditched the idea that lay at the heart of its own tradition and that had provided the justification in political morality, for the campaign, indeed the existence, of the IRA. (McCann 2007)

From the perspective of Sinn Fein trying to mount a defence of its republican credentials, it does not seem propitious—vis-a-vis the arguments of its republican critics—that all the shortcomings outlined above came during the Provisionals' revolutionary phase. The most plausible case to be made is that the Provisional Movement from the outset had impossibilist demands that could never be fulfilled and that a more gradualist approach would produce dividends. These failings could therefore be offset by the achievements of a non-revolutionary strategy. So, "for over a decade, Sinn Fein has straddled a position somewhere between radicalism and reformism", with the flow inexorably away from radicalism and towards reformism (McKearney 2017a).

However, the reformist odyssey has proved no less problematic than the radical and has done nothing to shift the one crucial decision-making lever that controls the constitutional question—the principle of consent.

The Provisionals were forced to collapse the power-sharing executive despite their claims that: "devolution, the executive and the all-Ireland bodies that go with it … (being) …the only show in town" (*BBC News*, 2 July 2017).

A context to the peace process within which the Provisional project has been compelled to operate has been created by Edwards and Brennan, who have opined that it is:

> …more predicated on promoting 'top-down' realist/neoliberal forms of conflict management, rather than progressing the type of critical agency required to produce a more emancipatory and sustainable type of positive peace and transformative peacebuilding. (Edwards and Brennan 2016)

This characterisation points to the kind of conclusion proffered by one former Special Adviser to a Northern Ireland Secretary of State:

> Overall, the peace process has been transformational for life in Northern Ireland. But if you were poor and marginalised before it began, it's pretty likely you still are. Irish republican strongholds like Derry and West Belfast still have among the highest unemployment rates in the UK. (*New Statesman*, 5 January 2017)

It is impossible to conceive of the following SDLP observation, as stinging to IRA sensibilities as it undoubtedly is, ever having credence during the Provisionals at war era. The SDLP perspective was formed from within the Stormont parliament chamber, one of Sinn Fein's new "arenas of struggle", where "*former IRA men and women sat as quiet as mice as the DUP humiliated them*" (*An Phoblacht*, 17 September 1998; *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 January 2017).

When Sinn Fein felt compelled to call time on the Power-Sharing Executive, it claimed it had met with "deliberate provocation, arrogance and disrespect" throughout its ten years in partnership government with the DUP (Young 2017). However, Suzanne Breen reminded the party leadership that:

> It was forced to take that radical step by its own electorate which was increasingly disillusioned by what they saw as the party's constant capitulation to the DUP. This was a grassroots revolt, with the Shinners' head honchos playing catch-up. (*The Irish Independent*, 10 January 2017)

In the symbolically crucial area of policing, the party has failed to make the promised transformation of the PSNI into a civil rather than a political police force. BBC Spotlight demonstrated in September 2017 just how deeply resistant the PSNI was towards delivering justice to victims of state violence (BBC 2017). Sinn Fein's undertaking to put "manners on the police" has simply failed to materialise (*Belfast Telegraph*, 26 January 2007).

Having called for people to report incidents to the PSNI, party Justice Spokesperson Gerry Kelly was reduced to complaining that the PSNI were refusing to comply with court orders around disclosure and that the British government was turning a blind eye (*News Letter*, 2 December 2014; Gerry Kelly 2017).

An exchange between the *News Letter* and Barra McGrory, the Director of Public Prosecutions, also showed that the purpose of the much-vaunted Operation Kenova investigation into the activities of the agent Stakeknife, posed a greater threat to the IRA and its army council than it did to the British state (*The Irish Times*, 20 April 2017).

> **News Letter:** "That gives an impression that his focus is on state forces who tried to penetrate the IRA, not the IRA murderers."
>
> **DPP:** "No … My focus on Stakeknife is the possibility that many victims did not get justice, that those who may have been guilty of carrying out murders were permitted to escape responsibility for their actions … so it is those who carried out the murders who have most to fear from the Stakeknife investigation."

While SF seeks to make much of promoting itself as the only genuine all-Ireland party, its curbs on internal radicalism (in the arena of something as limited as left reformism in the south) indicate that it has been seriously underachieving. Prior to the last general election in the Republic the seasoned political commentator Vincent Browne wrote:

> Hundreds of thousands will vote for Sinn Féin thinking this will make a significant difference to the distribution of income, wealth, power, influence, cultural capital, social capital – they will be disappointed. It is not that Sinn Féin is a threat to the established order; it is that Sinn Féin wants to become part of the established order … one wonders why they don't just merge with Fine Gael, along with the Labour Party, Fianna Fáil, Renua and Shane Ross? (*The Irish Times*, 24 February 2016)

Since the election, Sinn Fein seems to be seriously considering Browne's advice about merging in some form of Coalition. Although in February 2017, the party's Eoin O'Broin would assert in response to some public utterances by the then Taoiseach, "Enda Kenny is having a laugh. Why would any self-respecting republican want to be in coalition with a right-wing partitionist party?" (Collins 2017). It was not too long before the party leadership was expressing a desire to do just that (*The Irish Times*, 4 August 2017).

Yet for all of these mishaps, ideological about turns, strategic diversions and the "catalogue of disasters" that preceded them, prompting the observation that "Sinn Fein have not delivered a united Ireland or much else" (White 2017), the 2017 Northern Assembly elections put Sinn Fein in a remarkably strong position. The Provisionals, seeing off all the challenges posed by dissenting republicanism, maintained their organisational cohesiveness. Moreover, they secured the acquiescence (at least, of their base), in the strategic direction of the leadership. They not only came within one seat of the Democratic Unionist Party but also witnessed their main rival within the nationalist community—the SDLP—falter. This left some from the Sinn Fein ranks, to express at "the failure of 'dissident' republicans to make much of an inroad into the Sinn Féin vote, despite some evidence of disillusion".

> In the republican heartlands, the disgruntled have either made their opinion clear by not voting, or in Belfast and Derry by voting for People Before Profit. (Treacy 2017b)

The consent principle as embraced by Sinn Fein (replacing the previous principle of coercion) is a serious vote winner in the North, just as it had been in the heyday of the SDLP.

Republican Fragmentation

Partition is no less effective than it was previously, just less offensive. Those it offends most are active republican opponents of Sinn Fein who resile from the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and the Northern governmental institutions.[3] Included in their number are people attracted to armed manifestations and for whom partition incites:

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[3] The late Brendan Hughes wittily claimed the acronym GFA meant "Got Fuck All".

> …the uncompromising view that British rule in any part of Ireland is illegitimate, unfair and irreformable, and that this historical wrong can only be put right through violence. (*The Irish Times*, 19 July 2017)

Nevertheless, armed militancy despite the media coverage it draws down (not to mention the hyperbolic alarmism from the North's security services) is not the sum of the republican anti-GFA spectrum. Dissident republicanism, "…embraces an eclectic, heterogenous collection of personnel ranging from anti-violence intellectuals to fundamentalist diehards" (*The Newry Democrat*, 12 December 2017; Tonge 2014). Nevertheless, those republicans who shun the use of armed struggle would share the sentiment of the armed tendency that British rule is to be opposed not deferred to, through observance of the consent principle.

Robert White states that:

> Irish Republicans who question Sinn Fein's direction may be grouped into three broad categories: former Provisionals who oppose continued armed struggle; republicans who formed organisations after 2005 in response to Sinn Fein's moderation; and "dissident" organisations that have not gone away. (White 2017)

There is nothing new about the divisive nature of modern Irish republicanism. It is a well-established adage that the first item on any republican agenda is a split (White 2005).

Since the split in 1969/1970 that threw up the Provisional IRA, the largest body to emerge (the Provisionals) managed quite successfully to maintain cohesion. Unlike the INLA, where divisions were deadly, transfer of power—if not amiable—was nevertheless a violence-free process (McDonald and Holland 2010). Despite serious tensions in both 1975 and a decade later, the Provisional Movement held itself intact until 1986, when Ruairi O'Bradaigh led a group out of the party's annual conference and formed a rival organisation, Republican Sinn Fein (RSF). A military complement to RSF emerged later in the form of the Continuity IRA. Both groups remained largely ineffective, attracted few members and had little or no influence over political events, finding themselves accused of a 'purism', that had no relevance to people's lives (*The Guardian*, 6 June 2013).

It was 1997 before a serious challenge seemed to emerge and compete with the Provisionals for hegemony within the republican constituency. This came via the Real IRA and its complementary political group the

32 County Sovereignty Movement (Mooney and O'Toole 2003). Despite a few initially successful commercial bombing operations, the Real IRA "would eventually destroy itself (and any credibility that republican armed struggle ever had) at Omagh in August 1998" (Treacy 2017b).

What is significant in the modern era is the sheer extent to which divisiveness prevails. Since the IRA campaign officially concluded in 2005, the fortunes of dissenting republican opposition could not have been more in contrast to the cohesiveness exhibited by the Provisional bloc. The three tendencies identified by White have manifested themselves in different forms: Real IRA; Continuity IRA; New IRA; Oglaigh na hEireann; Republican Action Against Drugs; the 32 County Sovereignty Movement; eirigi; Saoradh; 1916 Societies; and websites such as *The Blanket: A Journal of Protest and Dissent* (Carson and Hoey 2012). To that mix can be added the INLA and its political party the IRSP whose attitude towards the peace process is somewhat more ambivalent (*RTÉ News*, 8 February 2010).

What is crucial is that none of these groups, either individually or aggregated, have made a significant impact on either the organisational integrity or geographical expansiveness of Sinn Fein. At the same time, they have failed catastrophically to create a unified focus of opposition "with significant pull" towards which those unhappy with the Sinn Fein orientation might gravitate (Bresnahan 2017).

There seems little awareness of the challenge outlined by a former IRA prisoner, quite familiar with the workings of the movement in the Republic and its advanced trajectory into the bosom of reformism. Matt Treacy argues that:

> The republican critique of Sinn Féin therefore needs to be based on the failure of the past 20 years to deliver economic and social change for the people who elect them. The intellectual argument in favour of Irish unity needs to be just that, Retro marching bands and a fantasy of winning a war that the IRA could not win is just another blind alley. (Treacy 2017a)

Nor does there seem to be much awareness of the vital function of the consent principle in maintaining a political balance of forces so strong that it renders the political terrain conspicuously strategically inhospitable to a countervailing project based on coercion, either political or military.

The old reliable campaigning issues have not managed to spur an opposition into life. Protests around imprisoned republicans—even when the emotive term "internment" is employed to describe the process of imprisonment of some—are contained or defused (*The Irish News*, 12 March 2016). In at least two of the cases, Sinn Fein has intervened to make the case for the prisoners (the republican organisations to which they belong, failing to mobilise significant support) (Clarke 2013).

The "fractured and indeed fractious nature of republicanism outside of Sinn Fein" has been characterised in scathing terms by the former IRA hunger striker, Gerard Hodgins, an opponent of the party. It is his view that the main reason for such ineffectiveness and its concomitant fragmentation is internal, contending:

> My personal assessment is that the dissident world is about 30% misguided patriots and 70% assorted chancers. The dissidents are more dominated by egos than ideology. They mostly want to be latter-day Provos (without engaging in that level of activity) and have more contempt for each other than they do the British. None has created a dynamic conducive to armed struggle because they are more interested in policing nationalist areas than they are in fighting. All follow the same trajectory: each new dissident savior announces their arrival on the scene with a pledge to kill drug dealers, only to end up in a cozy arrangement with them … and the ego-driven putative revolutionaries are fertile hunting ground for the fishers of men. (Hodgins 2017)

Deaglan O'Donghalie, a dissenting observer of the Derry political scene, contributes in similar vein.

> The dissidents are disunited for a considerable number of reasons: there are important local variables that centre on the important issues of trust and personality, along with competition over localised influence and control; there is profound authoritarianism within some groups that guarantees fracturing and internal dissent, as many republicans are, very wisely, opposed to centralisation; there are internal tensions that are now being discussed publicly – particularly the admission of people who were, until very recently, fanatical and dangerous Sinn Féiners, onto dissident platforms and into dissident organisations. (O'Donghalie 2017)

Even though dissenting republicans are no more united on the reasons for the ability of Sinn Fein to hold, many believe that the party's unity is down to the iron grip the Sinn Fein leadership wields over the party apparatus and its willingness to suppress internal dissent (Perry 2017).

It seems indisputable that Sinn Fein controls its base in a very disciplined fashion. This has become more evident in the Republic where the party is facing accusations of bullying with ever increasing frequency (*The Irish Times*, 16 September 2017). This is arguably due to a tension between those coming into the party not being used to the old way of doing business and those longer-term activists and stalwarts who are happy with the way business is done.

Former IRA prisoner Richard O'Rawe who experienced the party's "threats and intimidation" when he punctured its myth on the 1981 H Block hunger strike, expands on this experience, believing that "the personality cult of Adams and McGuinness especially" have sustained Sinn Fein's cohesiveness (O'Rawe 2011, 2016, 2017).

Dominic McGlinchey explains Sinn Fein's ability to pull together in terms of personal advancement:

> The dynamic in Sinn Fein has changed over the last number of years. It`s operation is not too different to that of any corporate company. As long as the money keeps flowing down, those who are in paid positions will tow the line. (McGlinchey 2017)

Sean Bresnahan, a republican activist with the 1916 Societies, emphasises historical reasons:

> What integrates Sinn Fein is the historical bond between its members and the Republican Movement, forged during a time of war and upheaval when republicans had none but themselves to rely on … there remains a powerful residual attachment to the party for this reason among the membership. (Bresnahan 2017)

Allowing for the extent to which allegations of internal bullying, the cult of personality, historical loyalties and careerism are accurate, none of this has substantial effect outside the party and cannot therefore plausibly explain the disarray among republican opponents of Sinn Fein. However, discipline is applied internally within Sinn Fein, the days when the Provisional IRA could calmly intimidate republican opponents through violence, including homicide, are for the most part in the distant past (Twomey 2017; *BBC News*, 22 August 2015; Wordpress, n.d.).[4]

[4] The 2015 Belfast murder of former IRA member Kevin McGuigan suggests the existence of violent residue at play.

A more substantive argument is made by Tommy McKearney, a former republican prisoner and critic of the GFA:

> In the first instance the party inherited a very considerable machine when it decided to enter electoral politics. Sinn Fein could tap into a prevailing mood within the Catholic community in Northern Ireland which, after 25 years of conflict, was anxious for a period of peace and stability. Thereafter, Sinn Féin in the Republic could benefit from the fallout as a result of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger and the Irish Labour Party's ill-judged and badly received participation in an austerity administration.. Sinn Fein has been very careful to place itself within certain parliamentary parameters; such as support for the Gardai and PSNI, rejecting direct action on social issues North and south, acceptance of the European Union and not challenging free-market economics. In essence, Sinn Fein has transformed itself to become the new SDLP in the North and to replace the Labour Party in the South. (McKearney 2017b)

The matrix to this was sketched by Kevin Bean in his 2007 study of the Provisionals where he identified a process of institutionalisation which as it:

> … deepens, the power of the movement becomes measured more by the ability to obtain resources and political benefits from the state on behalf of its constituency than by its commitment to radical change … While the Provisionals acknowledged that ultimate power resided with the British state, some of the state's functions were in effect, sub-contracted to the Provisionals. (Bean 2007)

So, in the words of a former Sinn Fein activist, "…in place of a community *mobilised against the state*, the community would be *represented within the state by Sinn Fein*" (Ferguson 2008).

In all of these dissenting republican explanations for Sinn Fein cohesiveness—and by extension others' republican fragmentation—few address the potency of the consent principle, preferring instead recourse to: traitorous individuals, a culture of bullying, bad policy, lack of ideological commitment, insufficient finance and patronage, fidelity to the past, etc. It is as if the consent principle is largely invisible, inhabiting a strategic blind spot for republican critics. That so many people are in Sinn Fein in the first place, a great number of them with no history of participation in the armed conflictare indicative of the pull the consent principle has for the party. Nowhere can its members be found supporting the coercive approach of the dissidents.[5] Moreover, senior members, who over indulge in "celebrating" certain Provisional IRA actions, run the risk of censure and sanction (*The Belfast Telegraph*, 8 January 2018).

Conclusion

Clearly, the republican opposition to Sinn Fein is more disparate and disorganised than heretofore and this in an ideological environment where Sinn Fein has slaughtered almost every sacred cow of republicanism. The dissidents, in that memorable Seán Ó'Faoláin phrase, have not, "…a spare sixpence of an idea to fumble for" (De Bréadun 2000).

The base line of Northern nationalism is that its opposition to remaining part of the UK is considerably weaker than the opposition of Northern unionism to becoming absorbed into a united Ireland. While Sinn Fein pay lip service to the goal of a united Ireland, it is hard to conclude that it is any longer a defining narrative. The historian Richard English takes the view, "…nor do the conditions exist for anything like a return to the levels of violence which scarred the North and beyond during the 1970s and 1980s" (*The Irish Times*, 19 July 2017). His view is echoed by the former IRA prisoner turned author, Richard O'Rawe:

> Had unionism been more accommodating in the pre-Troubles era, the IRA would have been where the dissies are now; friendless and isolated … The prospect of peace, something the dissidents could not and did not offer … the nationalist people are not fundamental republicans; they are not, by nature, advocates of political violence. (O'Rawe 2017)

It is this abjuration of political violence—and its concomitant reluctance to hanker after the Provisional principle of coercion—that best explains the galvanising pull of the consent principle. It does not imply an ideological revulsion to a united Ireland but an aversion to coercive means to achieve it. The consent principle pulls too wide a band of nationalism into its orbit to allow for any substantive threat to that principle from those in opposition to it. While consent unifies and allows the broadest range of political forces to configure around it (thus preventing a haemorrhaging and transfusing life to the principle of coercion), it cannot be said that consent directly disunites the opposition, other than in ways that are mediated and refracted. The principle of coercion simply lacks the vitalising powers that the consent principle possesses.

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[5] Coercive is not synonymous with violence. Some republicans are of the view that the British rather than republicans should politically override the wishes of the majority in the North and terminate the North's union with Britain.

Because republicanism still clings to a traditional republican viewpoint; namely that the unionists in the North maintain their allegiance because of the British (ignoring the more plausible position that the British are in Ireland *because* of the unionists), they seem oblivious to the seriously circumscribed strategic options. While there are a range of radicalised dissident republican voices, there is no indication that this is going to manifest itself in a substantive *uno voce* strategic challenge to Sinn Fein hegemony.

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CHAPTER 15

Ambivalence in a Post-conflict Society: Young Catholics Growing Up in Northern Ireland

Aimee Smith

The Northern Irish peace process arguably started with the signing of the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement in 1998 (the Agreement). This was negotiated by British and Irish governments to ensure cessation of violence and laid out the path to a shared and peaceful future in Northern Ireland. Since then, violence has largely ceased; however, the post-conflict era has been characterised by issues relating to paramilitaries dealing with the past legacy of conflict, contentious symbols and traditions (Nolan 2013). Division also persists in political attitudes, residential areas and the education system.

This chapter focuses on young Catholics growing up in this environment. The 'peace process generation' are emerging into adulthood in a society that has undergone profound change. This is a good time to reflect on the legacy of conflict for the generation who have grown up in a time of peace. The chapter reports on data collected as part of a doctoral research project (2011–2014) that explored Catholic identity amongst young people. The rationale to focus solely on the Catholic community

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A. Smith (✉)
University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland, UK

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recognises that differences are found within groups as well as between. The research compared young Catholics growing up in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry[1] from different socio-economic backgrounds. While there were over arching similarities in the construction of themselves in relation to a Protestant 'other', division was experienced differently by the young people between the two cities.

Data was collected between October 2012 and October 2013. To place this data within the current context, I discuss recent findings from the 'Young Life and Times Survey' (YLTS), an annual survey asking a representative sample of 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland their attitudes towards a variety of topics. Questions relating to identity and community relations are asked every year, and alongside its adult counterpart, the 'Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey' (NILTS), it provides a rich resource for tracking changes in attitudes over time.[2]

Before engaging in an analysis of this data, the chapter discusses the current political and social climate in Northern Ireland. The period since this data was collected has been characterised by continuous political disagreement and a destabilising of the power-sharing institutions in Stormont. The UK wide referendum to leave the European Union (referred to colloquially as 'Brexit') in June 2016 resulted in a narrow margin in favour of leaving. (However, a majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain). This will have any number of consequences for Northern Ireland, of which it is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider.

Entrenched Division in a Post-conflict Society

In the two decades after the Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a divided society. This era has largely proceeded alongside stable governmental institutions; however, in recent years this has given way to increasing political instability. The data reported in this chapter was collected over 12 months from October 2012 to October 2013. This period of fieldwork coincided with the now infamous flags protest sparked in December 2012 by Belfast City Council's decision to restrict the flying of the Union Flag from City Hall to designated days only. Protests were widespread through the winter and continued to a lesser extent throughout 2013. Over the following years, negotiations to reach a consensus over flags, parading and dealing the past have been unsuccessful. Since 2016, there has also been a reduction in stability influenced by both internal (identity, legacy and equality issues) and external factors ('Brexit' and Westminster elections). These processes have served to further entrench political division in Northern Ireland.

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[1] Hereafter referred to as 'Derry'. This was the term used by the Catholic participants in the research.

[2] 'Life and Times' data sets are available from www.ark.ac.uk.

The Stormont power-sharing executive collapsed in early 2017 followed by an Assembly election in March, while uncertainty over Brexit resulted in a snap general election in Westminster in June 2017. Both these elections proved contentious and appeared to have entrenched the 'two tribes' mentality so characteristic of elections in Northern Ireland. The Assembly election in March 2017 saw Sinn Féin achieve their highest ever assembly win, reducing the seat margin between themselves and the DUP to one seat, removing a unionist majority from Stormont for the first time. An executive power-sharing government was not established in the aftermath of the election. Northern Ireland was without a government for most of 2017, but neither was this vacuum filled by direct rule from Westminster. The Westminster elections saw the effective dissemination of middle-ground politics in Northern Ireland with both the SDLP and the UUP losing their parliamentary seats, and the DUP (and one independent unionist) and Sinn Féin taking all 18 seats between them.

These events suggest ten years of power-sharing in Northern Ireland has not contributed to a shared identity. Catholics still overwhelmingly identify as Irish, eschewing both a British and Northern Irish identity (as can be seen from NILTS data). While Protestants are increasing in their support for the Northern Irish national identity as well as British, and they overwhelmingly reject an Irish identity. The Agreement enshrined the rights and legitimacy of both Irish and British identities, and this 'parity of esteem' results in an ambiguity (Ruane and Todd 2002). It can be seen to legitimise competing constitutional preferences for both retention of Northern Ireland within the UK and as a step towards Irish reunification. The Agreement also made it possible to be Irish in Northern Ireland without the need for an all—Ireland nation to provide this and this may have reduced the nationalist desire for reunification. In the 2016 NILTS, less than 20% of those surveyed were in favour of reunification. Nevertheless, in the years following the Agreement, ethno-national division shows little signs of disappearing and may have become further entrenched (Tonge and Gomez 2015). The debate on multiculturalism is beyond the remit of this chapter; however, it is perhaps important to reflect on this; separate identities coexisting may not in itself be a problem but the political division embodied in these ethno-national identities continues to bolster division and erode a sense of shared identity and the existence of the middle ground. While there is an increase in people eschewing identification as either nationalist or unionist, between the two communities there is little crossover in political affiliation; Catholics largely reject political unionism and Protestants reject nationalist politics. Hayward et al. (2014) suggest the consociational model of power-sharing contributes to a sense of powerless, a low perceived influence in decision-making, among those that do not identify strongly with nationalism or unionism. As the results from the 2017 elections show us, the middle ground has a long way to go before it makes an impact in the politics of Northern Ireland.

The Brexit vote in Northern Ireland also followed along national, religious and political lines. While the majority in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU by 55.8–44.2%, those who identify as Irish, Catholic or nationalist were more unanimous in their support to remain than those that identified as Protestant, British or unionist (Gormley-Heenan et al. 2017). While support for reunification remains low after the 2016 referendum, the decision to leave the EU had raised the possibility of a border poll and the implications for the Agreement, which assumed EU membership of the both UK and Republic of Ireland. It remains to be seen how this political shock will impact Northern Ireland in the long term; however, in the short term it perhaps has done little to improve political stability.

Being Young in Northern Ireland: Integration, Segregation and Ambivalence

Ethno-national division is also found among the younger populations. Irish national identification has been consistently high for young Catholics, while both British and Northern Irish identities are popular for young Protestants. While most young people growing up in Northern Ireland today do not have direct experience of sustained political violence, they have inherited a legacy of decades of conflict and centuries of religious and political division. For many, this legacy is found in continued social division particularly in residential segregation and the education system. In the 2011 census, 60% of wards were recorded as having populations of 70% or more from one community, with Catholics more likely to live in single community areas (Nolan 2013). There also has been little change in some of the most segregated areas of east and west Belfast and Cityside Derry (Nolan 2013) which include many of the wards where the research this chapter is based on was conducted.

While there has been a slight increase in residential mixing as noted in the 2011 census, education remains a divided system for both communities; over 90% of young people attend either Catholic-maintained schools or state-controlled (de facto Protestant) schools of which the majority attend a school associated with their community background (Borooah and Knox 2017). Integrated Education, which educates Catholic and Protestant children together, has been available in Northern Ireland since 1981; however, only 7% of the school-age population attends an integrated school (Wilson 2016). Shared Education is a more recent collaborative education innovation which shares resources and space between schools (Duffy and Gallagher 2017). While these are welcome developments, the reality for many is an education system that separates young people from an early age. There have also been increasing opportunities for integration outside of education in the post-conflict era, as well as strong evidence that more integration is desired by the population (Morrow 2015; Stockinger 2015); however, segregation is the norm for many young people. Young people are divided in space more often than they are united in it.

Young people growing up in Northern Ireland are not however passive recipients of this divided society. They actively employ strategies for dealing with the uncertainties of moving between and within spaces (Leonard 2010) and negotiate the constructions of their identity (McLaughlin et al. 2006). Through doing so, they can challenge dominant narratives but often also reproduce wider divisions (Leonard 2008). This can be influenced by the perception of danger that encounter with the ‘other’ community can pose (Leonard 2006; Leonard and McKnight 2011). The concept of ‘everyday peace’ (Mac Ginty 2014) can help us understand the social practices that govern everyday community interactions in divided or conflicted societies. While young people may not passively accept structures of division, they must move and navigate spaces that can be potentially unsafe, possibly more so for them than for adults, and evaluate risks with the knowledge they have.

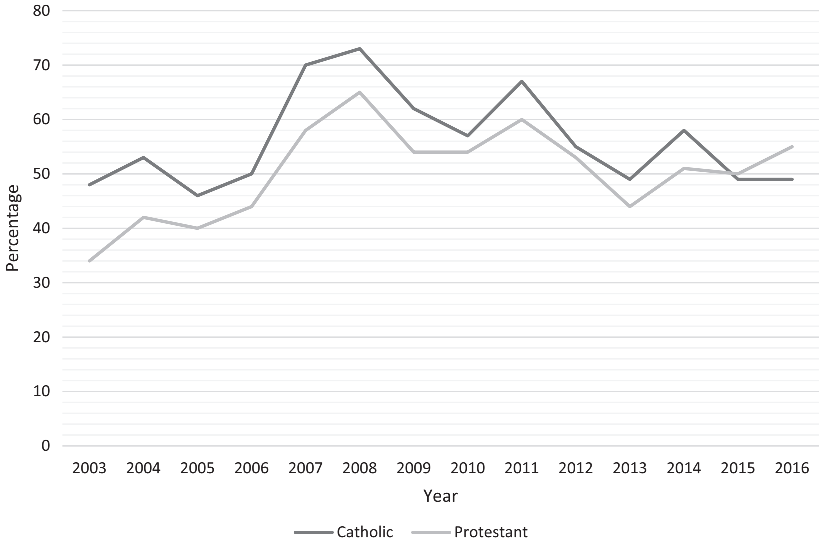

Fig. 15.1 'Are relations between protestant and catholics better now than they were five years ago?' Results for percentage of respondents answering 'better'
Source Young Life and Times Survey 2003–2016 www.ark.ac.uk/ylt

Without first-hand experience however, through contact with others, this knowledge can be largely informed by stereotypes (McAlister et al. 2014). Contact with members of the 'other' community, particularly engaging in good quality contact, can promote good community relations (Schubotz 2017). Good quality contact can help build trust towards others (Hargie et al. 2008; Tam et al. 2009) which in turn can be a mediating factor in reconciliation processes (Brewer et al. 2018). Young people in Northern Ireland however are still bound by external forces that exert influence on the way they navigate their everyday lives and limit the opportunities for contact (Magill and Hamber 2011; McAlister et al. 2014; McGrellis 2010).

One way to consider how far the peace process has delivered its aims of promoting a shared society is to look at perceptions of community relations. The annual NILTS and YTLS ask respondents whether they think relations between Protestants and Catholics are better now than they were five years previously, and whether they see relations getting better in five years' time. Figure 15.1 shows the number of 16-year-olds from both communities since 2003 (when the YLTS started) who perceive current community relations to be *better* compared with the previous five years. Attitudes of both young Catholics and Protestants have risen and fallen together, with young Catholics being generally more optimistic than their Protestant peers. This is in line with previous research showing that Catholic adults see more positive outcomes of the peace process than Protestants (Hayes et al. 2005). More recently however, young Protestants attitudes to community relations have increased, while the number of young Catholics seeing community relations as better now has decreased. This breaks a long-term pattern, and it will be interesting to see if this continues. Overall, the number of young Protestants who state that community relations have improved has risen from just over a third in 2003 to over half in 2016. The percentage of young Catholics, on the other hand, with the exception of fluctuations has remained steady, from 48% in 2003 to 49% in 2016.

It has been shown that the results of these surveys rise and fall with political and social developments (Morrow et al. 2013). The high point in Fig. 15.1 is in 2008, which follows the establishment of power-sharing. Apart from a high point again in the 2011 results, there has been a general downward trend for both communities reflecting the increased instability of the political process since. The break of this pattern in 2016 could either be a temporary break, or reflect a more permanent trend. The results show change in attitudes of young Protestants, and stability, or perhaps stagnation, in the attitudes of young Catholics. It could be that for a long, while Catholics felt more positive about the peace process and as time goes on, this has levelled out, while for Protestants there was room for increased positivity which we are now seeing. While it is good to see young Protestants attitudes improving, these results could also indicate a potential increasing pessimism among young Catholics with regard to relations with the Protestant community. Considering current political stagnation in Northern Ireland, erosion of community relations may be a cause for concern.

With relation to the adult surveys, Schubotz (2017) points out while annual results fluctuate the long-term trend is stability rather than change. This stability is noted here with regard to young Catholics who perceive community relations as better than the previous five years. For both communities, the number perceiving community relations to be *about the same* has also been stable over time, although this is decreasing for young Protestants and increasing for young Catholics, further contributing to the idea that there is increased optimism among young Protestants. Importantly, there has been a decrease in both communities of those that think relations have become *worse*; 4% for Catholics in 2016 and 5% for Protestants compared with 2003 (13% for Catholics and 22% for Protestants). Schubotz (2017) suggests monitoring this figure is important to assessing the success of the peace process. Similar trends for both communities are noted in the question relating to community relations in five years' time.

While it could be suggested that these results indicate stability, and we should celebrate the reduction in those thinking relations are getting worse, there is an overall feeling of stagnation. These results read in conjunction with other answers from the 2016 YLTS data set indicate an ambivalence towards community relations and integration. There is a strong perception among young people that religion will always make a difference to how people feel about each other (over 70% for each community). This does not mean overtly hostile perceptions however; more than half the 16-year-olds from both communities felt 'very' or 'quite favourable' towards the other community. Over a third of each community felt 'neither favourable nor unfavourable' towards members of the other community.

Questions also concerned young people's attitudes towards integration in different spheres of life. Over half of 16-year-olds from both communities would prefer to live in a mixed neighbourhood compared to a quarter who would prefer a single-religion neighbourhood. However, in the hypothetical question whether they would prefer to send their children to a school with children of only their own religion or a mixed-religion school, young Protestants were more favourable towards a mixed religion school (55%) than Catholics, of which 51% state they would prefer own religion school. While both residential and educational spaces remain largely single identity, mixed workplaces are widespread and young people appear to largely accept this, with over 70% from both communities desiring a mixed workplace. They appear to accept things the way they currently are and do not wish to abandon the shared spaces that exist, which is positive, however in spaces where mixing may be slower to occur such as residential areas and schools, there is still some hesitation. There is not an overwhelming desire to live and study with the other community but neither is there a desire for further separation. While there have been fluctuations in these responses since 2003 for the most part, the answers in 2016 have remained unchanged since 2003. Attitudes towards the other community are not overtly hostile; there is tolerance of others but also a degree of ambivalence.

Research Sites

The research on which this chapter is based was conducted by the author for doctoral research. Using in-depth group interviews, written exercises and observations, the research compares young Catholics throughout Belfast and Derry. Considering the purpose of this volume is exploring Catholic identity in Northern Ireland, the analysis does not include interview data from mixed spaces that were included in the original research (two integrated colleges and a youth centre). Table 15.1 outlines briefly the sites discussed in this chapter for ease of reference.

Level of deprivation was determined by two available measures, a) the 2010 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measurement (NIMDM) which ranks deprivation in electoral wards on a range of factors including unemployment, proximity to services, health and education and b) the number of students entitled to Free School Meals (FSM), which is often used as a proxy for deprivation. The average FSM rate for post-primary schools in Northern Ireland in 2011–2012 was 21.3%. One site was not a school, and in this case, the FSM rate used here is based on the nearest school which many of the young people in the area attended.

Table 15.1 Research sites

Site	*Location*	*FSM (%)*	*Deprivation*
All-boys secondary school	West Belfast	59.9	High
All-boys grammar school	West Belfast	21.7	Medium
All-girls grammar school	West Belfast	15.4	Medium
Community centre	East Belfast	32	High
Co-educational secondary school	Cityside Derry	44.8	High
All-boys grammar school	Cityside Derry	17	Low

Source Adapted from Smith (2015, 80–81)

Belfast and Derry have different population dynamics; Belfast is a mixed city with a slight majority Catholic population, while Derry has a sizable Catholic majority (Census 2011). Belfast forms a patchwork of segregated, single community and mixed areas, and Catholic majority and Protestant majority communities are often found neighbouring each other, particularly in the north of the city. The majority of the Catholic population is found in the north and west of the city. They can also be found in slight majorities throughout the wards of south Belfast and in small amounts in the east of the city which is predominantly Protestant. Derry has a more straightforward division in terms of community distribution. It is a Catholic majority city, divided into two 'sides', the Cityside and the Waterside, by the river Foyle. The Cityside is 80–100% Catholic (Census 2011). The Waterside area of the east bank is more mixed, with a Protestant majority, although the east bank as a whole is majority Catholic (Census 2011).

Findings below include extracts from group interviews. Some have been edited for clarity, and pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the young people who participated. The data is arranged into two sections. The first section is shorter and shows young people's experience of intergroup contact. The second section highlights the persistence of separation, where young people still negotiate and traverse spaces that perceived as safe or unsafe.

Encountering Difference: Contact Across Boundaries

The young people who participated in this research did not live in worlds completely devoid of contact with others. While there were overarching similarities across all research sites, division was experienced differently between the two cities. Data reported in this section comes mostly from Belfast as they were more forthcoming with stories of their encounters. As noted in the last section, there are differences in the physical geography between the two cities. This was found to influence on how young people move between spaces and impacted on their opportunities for moving across boundaries.

While most of the young people in the Belfast sites came from residential areas which are characterised by being single community and attended Catholic schools, they also spoke of their movements through space and encountering others. These were mostly in formal cross-community events and youth clubs, but informal contexts were also mentioned. Those that took part in these events felt they were positive experiences and lessened prejudicial attitudes:

> Before I did like a youth group over the summer I was pretty narrow minded, I wouldn't have anything against people, but I wouldn't really, be like these are 'my people' as such. (Shannon, Grammar, West Belfast)

Lacking the opportunity to meet members of the other community in a positive environment allows stereotypical views of the other to go unchallenged (McAlister et al. 2014). However, Grainne was sceptical whether these formal school-based initiatives gave those with strong negative views of the other the opportunity for positive contact:

> It only takes about 10 seconds of you talking to them to realise that they are just people. I think a lot of these cross-community projects don't reach the right people. Sometimes they feel a bit staged because schools will pick people who they know aren't going to cause conflict rather than getting to people who need it most. (Grainne, Secondary, Derry)

While these events were seen as positive at the time, they are also perceived to lack a long-term focus. Only a minority of young people reported longer-term friendships with young Protestants as a result of these encounters. Research on young people in Northern Ireland suggests that informal contact, often through a shared interest or hobby, may be more effective at developing longer-term attitudinal change than short-term encounters (McGrellis 2005).

For the young people who did report friendships across communities, the space these friendships were maintained was also important. In the Belfast sites, many young people saw the city centre as a potential 'neutral' space that was perceived as safer and less territorial in terms of Catholic space and Protestant space:

> There's less segregation in [Belfast city centre], everyone can go anywhere, it's not like, oh, that's a certain area, you know like you can't go in that area, and like that area is going to have more Protestants than Catholics or something like that or more Catholics than Protestants, you wouldn't get that in town, it would be, you wouldn't think about it. (Lana, Grammar, West Belfast)

The idea of the city centre being more accessible may be limited to certain times of the year however. City centre parading can be seen as inclusive or exclusive depending on community background (Leonard and McKnight 2015) and so the city becomes less ‘shared’ at these times. It has been found that young Protestants may prefer to socialise in more Protestant majority towns such as Bangor which are seen as more welcoming (Hughes et al. 2007). In the course of these interviews, while young people saw the city centre as safer than neighbouring communities, they also still characterised some areas of the city as *more* Protestant or *more* Catholic (and therefore, these parts of the city were safer).

Home areas were also seen as safe spaces; however, young people expressed how they would not meet their Protestant friends in their own community. When asked if they would visit their Protestant friends’ home areas, issues of safety came up. When discussing friendships with neighbouring Protestant young people, Sean from east Belfast mentions the local paramilitary group. He perceives that his friends would be safe in his estate, although he later states he mostly meets these friends in the city centre:

> We wouldn’t go [to the Protestant estate] because of the [paramilitaries] and stuff like that, we wouldn’t be allowed in their area but there’s nothing like that here so they would be alright here. (Sean, East Belfast)

His comments however that ‘they would be alright here’ perhaps overlook the evaluation of safety that his Protestant friends may also undergo. These comments highlight that in some areas, paramilitary presence can influence where young people play out their cross-community friendships. Paramilitary presence may be the biggest threat facing young people in some areas (Brown and Dwyer 2014). However, the concern for safety in encountering others also strongly influences young people’s movements.

In Derry, the discussions focused more on keeping separate, largely facilitated by the physical geography, which is covered in the next section. Those from the Waterside would speak of contact in largely negative terms, involving intimidation and tensions around interface areas. Many young people would often state that they ‘wouldn’t really know any Protestants’ and would have little opportunity to encounter others outside of school-based cross-community initiatives. However, similar to Belfast, when mixing does occur, there is an acceptance that the ‘two sides’ are not that different.

‘There’s Always Going to Be Barriers’: Persistence of Separate Communities

Despite positive stories regarding contact with others, it is also evident when discussing young people’s movement through space, that concerns for safety and a distrust of the other community coloured their everyday movements. Being Catholic was understood in relation to what they were not, and spaces were identified in community terms. Home areas were referred to as ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’ (perhaps reflecting the continuation of single-identity residential areas). Language also betrayed division such as ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the Belfast sites, in the both west and east of the city, home communities are characterised by peace walls. In the hypothetical situation of the removal of the peace walls, there would still be ‘two communities’ with different cultures:

> There’s always going to be barriers, cause either way, we’re still, no matter where you live we’d still be completely different communities, like we’ll still have different cultures … we’re always going to celebrate our different cultures, so when the wall comes down, just think Protestant and Catholics all living in the same community, when it comes to like, round August I’m still going to put a black flag out for internment and they’re still going to put the flags out for the Twelfth. (Aidan, Secondary, West Belfast)

While the two communities would be perceived as one without a physical barrier, a cultural barrier would still exist. Belfast has a number of peace walls; while some have been removed, there has been a decrease in support for their removal in recent years (Byrne et al. 2015). There are only a few in Derry, around the Waterside area and one on the Cityside separating the Protestant minority in the Fountain ward from the wider Catholic majority city. Although there is an absence of walls, the river Foyle acts as a ‘natural’ barrier. While ‘across the wall’ would have been the expression in Belfast, ‘across the bridge’ was the Derry equivalent:

> *Grainne*: “They [those from the Waterside] are so afraid though, they have good reason, you can understand why they’d feel so threatened, but because of that I think they’re getting a cinema like. And they definitely wouldn’t come over by themselves, which is sort of sad, as you wouldn’t like to think that about you.”
>
> *Niall*: “It’s the other way around as well.”

> *Grainne*: "Aye, I know. Well we wouldn't go to the Waterside by ourselves as well." (Secondary, Derry)
> *Darragh*: "It's always going to be divided in two different communities because they are separate communities like."
> *Conor*: "We're all Catholic, and wouldn't know any Protestants."
> *Darragh*: "… or go near Protestant areas."
> *Conor*: "I wouldn't walk over to the waterside."
> (Grammar, Derry)

The sentiments expressed here are uncertainty mixed with pragmatism. Grainne acknowledges (sadly) that fear prevents young Protestants from crossing the bridge yet she would not do so either. The boys at the grammar school also indicate not crossing through Protestant areas. Darragh is from the Waterside however but he also reported maintaining his distance from certain areas identified as Protestant and unsafe:

> I would walk through Kilfennan [Waterside] but I would put my hood up and walk fast but I wouldn't walk through the Fountain. (Darragh, Grammar, Derry)

For most of the young people in Derry, keeping separate was easy, facilitated by the geography of the city. For those from the Cityside, division was easy to maintain although it was not often acknowledged as such. There is a sense of 'we're all Catholic here' in Derry (particularly on the Cityside) which normalises division to an extent, and many young people do not need to undergo the same evaluations of space and security that those in Belfast, or even those from the Waterside, undertake. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gain access to a research site in the Waterside area. This is disappointing, as it would have been a useful comparison with the Cityside samples. The only young people from the Waterside who participated in this research were Darragh and Máiréad, from the Secondary school. Their responses seem to suggest there would be comparable differences in their experiences. When asked about whether there would be tensions in their home areas, Máiréad's experience differs greatly from her Cityside peers:

> *Grainne*: "It's hard for us [on the Cityside] to say, we live in communities of all the same. If we lived in an interface area maybe".
> *Máiréad*: "Growing up, I always remember, like the top of Irish Street [Waterside], that was all Protestant, a very divided place where I was

> from, and I could never get to my house, like every weekend there would be so much tension, because they are so close, literally just a street apart."
> (Secondary, Derry)

The communities in Waterside being 'so close' is similar to Belfast. Throughout the Belfast sites, young people commented on their everyday movements to ensure safety and not enter another's territory. This experience is largely missing from the Derry interviews, although they would still refer to spaces in exclusive terms. Maintaining difference in Belfast may come about from the potential for encounter, considering the close proximity that the two communities are from each other. Identity is constantly reinforced as difference is reminded. Jenkins (1996) conceptualised identity as being constructed through a process of similarity with the group and difference between the groups. Young people show evidence of working through these processes with regard to encounters with Protestants and differing cultural traditions. They brought up 'seasonal celebrations' as a time when identity is reaffirmed. Of particular note for those in Belfast is the twelfth of July, an annual commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne which is an important part of the Protestant cultural calendar. This event served to remind young Catholics of who they were, and what side they should be on:

> *Shannon*: "[The twelfth is] just a reminder like, throughout the year it's not something that is also consciously on your mind, but at these times when it's all over the media and on the news, and everyone's talking about it, it's just a reminder of what side you should be on and what you should be doing on that day".
>
> *Lana*: "My dad says there was one of his friends, and he has personally turned around to me and said 'you think he's a nice guy, you should see him on the Twelfth'. Apparently he becomes an absolute sectarian and he's the nicest guy you could ever meet but all of a sudden it turns, and everyone completely changes".
>
> *Shannon*: "I think each side, every side changes, at the time because the emotions heighten."
> (Grammar, Belfast)

Tensions around these times heighten. Symbols are displayed that mark exclusive boundaries between groups. Understanding symbols and the symbolism of events is an important part of navigating a divided society, but they could also be sources of ambivalence. In the above extract, Lana describes a Protestant friend of the family (indicating that having Protestant friends is not unusual) who becomes a 'sectarian' around the twelfth. Positive relations between the two communities can exist but can also be tested and strained during these contentious times. Likewise, symbols which are associated with difference can also be sites of resistance. In the west Belfast secondary school, the young males brought up the poppy in our discussion. This is a contentious symbol in Northern Ireland. As illustrated in the extract below, on the one hand the poppy represents British soldiers, but on the other they recognise the contribution of Irish soldiers to the First World War:

> *Aidan*: "It stands for *all* British soldiers but there were British soldiers come into Ballymurphy [west Belfast] and killed 11 people, a massacre, so that represents them, that's why I don't like the poppy… and there's Bloody Sunday."
> *Michael*: "It celebrates the battle of the Somme and all, and a lot of Irish men were actually killed in that."
> *Aidan*: "It celebrates them, but it also celebrates the ones who were in Bloody Sunday and the Ballymurphy massacre, therefore out of respect for the nationalist republicans who were killed, I don't like the poppy."
> *Interviewer*: "Do some people here [West Belfast] wear poppies?"
> *Aidan*: "He was going to wear one last year because his granddad was in the war."
> *Michael*: "[My granddad] was in the battle of the Somme at the time, so I was going to wear one but around our community you really can't."
> *Colm*: "If you had walked through Ballymurphy with a poppy on your jacket you would have just got absolutely annihilated on the spot."

While Michael would like to recognise part of his family history (he states it was his grandfather; however, it is more likely to have been his great-grandfather), the poppy remains a contentious symbol in his wider community and his wearing of it may have been met with derision. This highlights once again the knowledge of places and symbols and what they represent in Northern Ireland, and while young people may not necessarily agree with these consignments, external structures can reinforce their 'taking sides'. In addition, the above extract does not seem to imply that Michael would wear a poppy for the same reasons as members of the Protestant community. The poppy is not a symbol of British pride for him, but rather an alternative interpretation of pride in Irish soldiers and their role in the World Wars, something that has until recently often been overlooked in narratives of Irishness (McGreevy 2016).

Discussion and Conclusions

The section on intergroup contact was deliberately presented first as a reminder to the reader, but also to the author, that there have been changes in Northern Ireland. Young people are open to integration and when positive contact occurs, it can develop into a lessening of prejudicial attitudes. It should be noted however that this is often temporary contact between groups, and while in some instances it may lead to long-term friendships, there are wider processes of social division which colour young people's perceptions of the extended group. It is clear to see from the interviews that young Catholics experience everyday segregation and navigate a socially divided world. There is evidence of a lessening of prejudicial views towards others, but there is also distrust.

In the interview data presented, along with results from the annual Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS), young Catholics show a degree of ambivalence towards the other community. There are steps being made, but there is also hesitation to integrate fully. The continuation of separation as part of their everyday lives may not necessarily have been influenced by prejudice (although this may have been the case for some) but a necessary part of ensuring personal and group safety. Young Catholics in this research put a great deal of thought into their everyday movements through space, particularly in Belfast. Local space around their home areas is viewed in exclusive terms; it is 'our' space. Yet the same young people see the city centre as neutral and are willing to mix with others there. The young people in Derry had different experiences. They still lived within single-identity communities, but did not experience these as segregated. Young people on the Cityside have the potential to live, study, work and play within a Catholic majority space, and they move less through territory associated with the other side. The exception are those young Catholics from the majority Protestant Waterside area who were in attendance in the Cityside schools. There were only two in these interviews, so without a research site on the Waterside it is hard to discuss their experiences. It can be speculated however that they may share similar experiences to those in Belfast. It is important moving forward that we understand young people's identification of space with territory; that negative or restrained attitudes towards others may be influenced by the space within which these encounters occur.

In the two decades after the Agreement was implemented, Northern Ireland is in an ambivalent state. Many changes have occurred, yet there is political instability, continued segregation in both residential areas and the education system. Perceptions of community relations among young people have reflected this with a downward trend in the number of 16-year-olds who see community relations as better now than five years ago (YLTS 2016). Among young Catholics the perception of community relations is mixed; on the one hand, the number stating that relations may stay the same is increasing and the number indicating they are getting worse is decreasing. The number who say things are improving is decreasing and only recently has this been lower than Protestant 16-year-olds. Could it be that young Protestants are starting to feel the benefits of the peace dividend, or are their positive feelings at the expense of Catholic disillusionment, entrenching zero-sum politics into the next generation?

Contact between antagonistic groups can promote a lessening of negative attitudes. The data collected here suggests that for young people at least, positive attitudes do not necessarily translate to behaviour. A positive attitude does not undo the legacy of segregation in Northern Ireland. For the young Catholics in this research, there is tolerance and even favourable attitudes towards Protestants; however, this is not extended to behaviour (indicated in self-reported behaviour and movements in interviews) influenced by continued concerns for safety. Young people display an openness to integration (a positive attitude) but their movements contribute to the practice of segregation.

Moving from a society of conflict to one of peace involves rebuilding and restoring relationships particularly in shifting how people see themselves in relation to others (Lederach 1997). This research shows that young Catholics still see themselves in opposition to Protestants, as well as identifying spaces in exclusive terms. Continued insecurity brought about by interactions through contact with other groups, can be a barrier to restoring relationships. These young people however are not former enemies; they are part of a generation who did not grow up in conflict but the legacy of this conflict still exerts an influence over their everyday lives. Mac Ginty (2014) argues that while 'everyday peace' can help bring about interaction between former enemies, enemy's processes associated with everyday peace—such as avoidance—can contribute to prolonging the transitional phase from conflict to peace. The actions and behaviours of young Catholics in their interactions with the Protestant community can ensure individual and group safety, but can also prolong the processes whereby relationships across boundaries are remade and restored. There exists a space in post-conflict Northern Ireland between two communities, a space where former enemies have yet to become non-enemies. This space is also evident in the lives of young people where tolerance exists, but moving from tolerance to positive interaction and trusting behaviour is less forthcoming. This ambivalence is embedded in post-conflict Northern Ireland and may be an inevitable part of growing up with the legacy of the conflict.

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