

NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY IN THE NORTHERN IRISH
TROUBLES*by Landon E. Hancock*

This study examines the manners in which individuals and organizations used historical narratives to justify images of themselves and of the other, contributing both to the outbreak of the Troubles and the difficulty in resolving the conflict. The role of cultural identity formation through symbolic interpretation creates a backdrop that colors struggles over access to political and economic resources and assists in either fomenting conflict or fostering the peaceful resolution of differences. Despite the relative success of the Good Friday Agreement, I argue that many of Northern Ireland's identity narratives persist and continue to provide a fertile ground to interpret new conflicts through the old lens of identity conflicts. Understanding the construction of these identity narratives and how they contributed to the conflict may provide avenues for identity reconstruction, which may assist in making Northern Ireland's peace more durable.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Northern Ireland's tumultuous history, each community has used narratives of themselves and others to build cultural identities that were created on the foundation of what Donald L. Horowitz describes as the fear of extinction, an "anxiety-laden perception" that contained fears about survival of the group, whether physical, cultural or symbolic, fears of swamping, and fears of domination.¹ The fear of extinction acts like a self-fulfilling prophesy, spreading throughout the community and gaining strength from negative interpretations of each ensuing act of "provocation" or violence; eventually spreading from the dominant group to the subordinate one, generating a dialectic of escalating acts of violence until they reach full-blown civil conflict.²

Despite the relative success of the Good Friday, or Belfast, Agreement, this article argues that Northern Ireland's identity narratives

persist and continue to provide fertile ground to interpret new conflicts through the old lens of identity conflicts. The goal of this study was to understand the historical construction of these identity narratives and how they continue to be used in Northern Ireland today. I believe that by doing so, we can better understand the impediments to identity reconstruction and conflict transformation and hopefully chart a more fruitful path toward making Northern Ireland's peace more durable.

In problematizing cultural identity, this article will first begin with a basic analysis of identity formation and maintenance, emphasizing the role of historical narratives in that process. Following this, I will examine some of the historical narratives in place before the outbreak of the Troubles. Next, I will assess how these narratives have been activated and reflected through the civil rights movement, during the Troubles themselves, during the peace process, and how they continue to impact the postconflict arena, complicating efforts to achieve communal reconciliation and impeding efforts to fully transform Northern Ireland into a postconflict society.

Despite the fact that evidence shows the creation and maintenance of cultural identities that impede conflict transformation within sections of both communal groups—sometimes discussed as different traditions—this study will largely focus on the Protestant/unionist/loyalist (PUL) community in its analysis. This is partly for the sake of brevity, but also because despite the recent resurgence of dissident republicans, it is largely within elements of the loyalist community that we can see the most resistance to changing historical narratives and the most vocal opposition to implementing social changes designed to transform the conflict. By doing so, I do not imply that current problems with the peace implementation and conflict transformation can be laid solely at the feet of the PUL community, but I do recognize that elements of this community, like those labeled as republican dissidents, continue to oppose the peace process and work to stall its implementation.

IDENTITY FORMATION & MAINTENANCE: BOUNDARIES & NARRATIVES

Researchers across multiple disciplines agree that one of the key elements of identity formation and its maintenance is the fact that it refers to a process involving comparison of the self with others. At all levels of identification, individual to national, identities are created

and maintained as much by what they are not as by what they are. At the most basic level, the self or self-concept is defined as something which has the quality or condition of being the same as something else and as being a distinct and persisting entity different from everything else. Theories that underpin this view of identity include psychological examinations of the self and identity dating back to the works of Cooley and Mead, but also include theories of personality, social identity theory and its many offshoots, theories of ethnicity and anthropology, race and nationalism.³ From multiple perspectives and across many disciplines, identities, whether conceived of as individual, familial, group, ethnic, sectarian, or national, are created and maintained through a dialectical process of sameness and differentiation between in-group and out-group members.⁴

I posit here that an integrative approach to understanding identity would begin with a combination of Mary E. Clark's idea of community having a basis in human biology and Richard Jenkins's idea of primarily socialized identities to understand the affective component of identities like those expressed by Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.⁵ Clark's analysis combines work on biology and basic human needs, arguing that because human beings were social beings before they were human beings, one of the most important needs that individuals have is the need for a community—a need which is “hard wired” into our brains.⁶ According to Clark, the communities we are born into provide us with our first and deepest bonding experiences, those required for physical and psychological development. This bonding provides individuals with their initial sources of meaning for the world and patterns of interaction within it.

Clark's idea of a need for bonding dovetails with Jenkins's work on socialization and the nature of our first learned, or primarily socialized, identities. While some scholars view identity as a priori or fixed and immutable, Jenkins holds to the Barthesque notion that all identities are the product of social construction, but with certain caveats, namely that ethnic, or kin-based, identities are socialized in a manner that gives them more weight than identities acquired later in life. The first two of Jenkins's three primarily socialized identities are an understanding of humanness and gender identity, while the third is based on kin relationships. Following our earlier logic of in-group to out-group dialectic, we can posit that one of the first things a child learns from its parents is the nature and importance of kin relationships, extending from the nuclear family through the extended family and to member-

ships in ethnic, sectarian, or national communities.⁷ The power of these identities stems from their role in early socialization, making them typically stronger and more stable than identities developed later in life.

The marriage of these two theories within a larger pattern of identity creation and maintenance shows why certain identities have a stronger affective component and, when combined with a third theory, show how threats to primarily socialized identities often lead to conflict escalation and identity polarization. This third idea derives from Terrell A. Northrup's examination of identity dynamics in conflict situations.⁸ When a group perceives a threat to its primarily socialized identities, the permeability of identity boundaries decreases and identities begin to polarize into powerful camps of "us" and "them." When a conflict begins to escalate, the definition of such groups shifts to the point where membership in one group means taking on an attitude of hating the other group, for example, when being a Hutu meant hating and killing Tutsis.⁹

Because many perceived threats to primarily socialized identities are embedded in history and derived from narratives regarding past abuses or occurrences of conflict between particular groups, a good place for beginning an analysis of whether cultural identity had a significant impact upon the outbreak and conduct of the Troubles is to examine narratives of conflict and difference present in the two main communities in Northern Ireland.

SETTING THE STAGE: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES BEFORE THE TROUBLES

The history of Ireland is a long and complex tale filled with incidents of great violence alongside images of great beauty. Given the complicated and complex history of interaction between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, we will concentrate briefly upon a few significant events which color the narratives of how each group views itself and the other. While recognizing that this study cannot hope to do justice to the detail of even one of these events, I will draw out narratives of identification that passed down through the generations, defining in-group and out-group. In doing so, I will draw upon Vamik Volkan's concept of the chosen trauma, described as perennial mourning processes that affect later generations through the passing down of the memory of events and the feelings associated with them.¹⁰ I also will draw upon Marc Howard Ross' concept of psycho-

cultural interpretations and dramas.¹¹ Chosen traumas, psycho-cultural dramas, and fears of extinction represent facets of the same thing, namely an element of self-identification that is rooted in the fear of another group. Therefore, as we begin our examination of Irish history, what we are looking for mainly are the chosen traumas developed within the PUL community, representing their fears of extinction at the hands of the Catholic/nationalist/republican community. I argue that each of these events created chosen traumas that have been passed down within one or both communities, becoming fears of extinction and laying the foundations for the extreme reactions by loyalists to the civil rights struggle and the equally extreme counter-reactions of republicans who viewed the initial violence as only confirming existing beliefs about Protestant desire to subjugate the Catholic population of the north.

PLANTATION & REVOLT

Although recurring violence had taken place between English landlords and Irish natives since Henry VII proclaimed himself king of Ireland, the relationship between the two groups in the Northern Province of Ulster underwent a sea change following the unsuccessful revolt of the O'Neill clan in 1601.¹² The upshot of this revolt was that the losing side's ancestral lands were confiscated and distributed to "planters," both lords and common folk—largely Scottish Protestants.¹³ This plantation brought the beginning of a sense of two traditions in Northern Ireland, with the importation of a distinct population who practiced a different religion, spoke a different language, and followed different cultural and commercial practices.¹⁴

A direct result of plantation was the 1641 Rising, during which several massacres of Protestant planters took place at the hands of native Irish. This rebellion can be described as the first act, in a cycle of relationships between native and planter, which would come to be characterized largely by hostility, with one side believing that its rights to the land had been usurped and the other constantly fearing that its tenure was under threat of retribution and rebellion.¹⁵ Denis P. Barritt and Sir Charles F. Carter indicate that these massacres left "a bitter memory" for Protestants and were avenged by Cromwell with "an equally ruthless and indiscriminating cruelty" following his landing in Ireland in 1649.¹⁶

The third main event during this time was Ireland's part in the conflict between the Protestant King William (known as William of Orange for his Dutch ancestry) and the Catholic James II, who had been removed from the British throne. The war between these two was fought largely in Ireland between 1689 and 1690 and contained two events of importance for defining the cultural identity of northern Protestants. These two events were the siege of Derry/Londonderry and the Battle of the Boyne, where William of Orange soundly defeated James II's forces and secured Ireland's Protestant Ascendancy.¹⁷ The first of these events is important because of the actions of thirteen apprentices who locked the city gates of Derry in the face of the approaching forces of James II, spawning the association known as the Apprentice Boys of Derry.¹⁸

The Battle of Boyne also gave rise to a group of Protestant associations, known as the Orange Order in honor of William of Orange. Although the order was not founded as such until 1795, its purpose is to commemorate William's victory over a "despotic power" which "laid the foundation for the evolution of Constitutional Democracy in the British Isles."¹⁹ A series of other associations either affiliated with the Order or accessible through ascension within the order also exist, including women's and youth auxiliaries, many of which participate in the yearly marches to commemorate the Protestant victory over King James II.²⁰

This period, with its back-and-forth clashes between the two communities, deepened and hardened the divisions between the two and the fears that members of each community had for members of the other. A.T.Q. Stewart notes that it is not the historical fact of the rebellion that inculcates this fear, but the nature of the narratives told about the massacres of Protestants. He relates that depositions taken from survivors:

Tell of men and women butchered with revolting cruelty, burned alive in churches and farms, drowned wholesale in rivers, of infants slain before their parents' eyes, of scores of Protestant clergy put to death, and of refugees perishing from starvation and exposure.²¹

It seems clear that the 1641 Rebellion is, for Protestants, the starting point for a chosen trauma which is recognized and sublimated into Volkan's chosen glory commemorating William of Orange's victory at

the Battle of Boyne. Whether this chosen trauma became a true fear of extinction within the Protestant psyche will be explored below in the narratives brought forth during the civil rights campaign and beyond.

UNITED IRISHMEN & ORANGE ORDER

The United Irishmen revolution was largely focused on class rather than on sectarian divisions. The most famous of the United Irishmen and their manifesto's author was a Protestant, Theobald Wolfe Tone. Like prior revolutions against British authority, this one failed to overthrow the monarchy and, in fact, generated only a moderate amount of fighting. Also like prior rebellions, this revolution had its share of cruelty and massacre on both sides (and had Catholic as well as Protestant participation on both sides). One element of importance for republicans was the class element of the United Irishmen. The United Irishmen were largely concerned with absentee landlords who charged exorbitant rents of their tenants and sucked the wealth out of the country. They felt that both Protestants and Catholics at the lower end of the economic scale suffered from a lack of control over their own affairs and believed that the only solution was for Ireland to become free from British rule.

Unfortunately for Tone, loyalist Protestants were less willing to trade their sense of British identity for a sense of class identity and regarded the United Irishmen as yet another front for Catholic schemes to drive Protestants from their lands. Protestant suspicions were only heightened by the alliance of Catholic Defenders' societies with the United Irishmen, lending a sectarian tinge to the drive for revolution. For Protestants, the culminating event of this rebellion was the "battle of the Diamond" in 1798 between a group of Defenders and a Protestant militia known as the "Peep-o-day boys." This group, which would later become the Orange Order, was successful in routing the Defenders, cementing a historical belief that Catholics presented threats and that Protestants needed to see to their own defenses rather than rely upon the forces of the state. This view of Protestant activism and Catholic threat was, at that time, actively encouraged by members of the British government who wanted to ensure that the Protestants did not; did not side with the revolutionaries side with the revolutionaries.²²

Although this historical event does not appear to be one which generated a chosen trauma for Protestants by itself, one can see how

each subsequent uprising reinforced the existing fear of extinction generated by stories of Protestant massacre at the hands of Catholics in 1641. The significance of the battle of the Diamond for Protestants was to inculcate the need for self-protection in the community and, to a lesser extent, the recognition that although Protestants were loyal to the crown, they could not always rely upon crown forces to protect them. This narrative would become important in the manifestation and maintenance of Protestant loyalist paramilitary groups to “counter” imagined or existing republican movements.

EASTER RISING & THE UVF

Our last major identity-creating event prior to the civil rights movement was the 1916 Easter rising against British rule organized by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and fought by members of the Irish Volunteers and Irish Citizen Army. Although authors like Tim Pat Coogan described the uprising as unnecessary and the actual events lasted only a week, many writers agree that this event was seminal in republican mythos and led directly to the growth of Sinn Féin as a political party.²³ The uprising itself was in response to the suspension of Westminster’s third Home Rule bill after the outbreak of the Great War. The Protestant response to the introduction of the bill was to create the Ulster Volunteer Force to resist separation with Great Britain. Members of the IRB were committed to creating an independent Irish state and felt that Britain’s involvement in the Great War provided an opportunity that they could not pass up.²⁴

A key element of this event was the development of a narrative of self-help, wherein each side justifies the creation of “volunteer” fighting forces to protect their communities from aggressive violence from the other.²⁵

NARRATIVE IMPACTS ON THE CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE

The Northern Irish Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was inspired by the U.S. civil rights movement and grew to prominence alongside a number of similar organizations seeking to address discrimination in housing in Derry/Londonderry. Unlike many prior rebellions on the part of Ireland’s Catholics, the goals of NICRA were to improve the civil rights of the working class and poor through the use of nonviolent marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, and other acts of

civil disobedience. Unfortunately for NICRA, their actions precipitated not only the expected violent backlash from security authorities, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), but also resulted in violence directed at marchers from working class segments of the Protestant population, largely loyalist followers of Ian Paisley.

It is mostly from Paisley and the Paisleyite community that most expressions of fear came, although elements within the dominant Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) also expressed similar fears. Clifford Smyth described Paisley as "the leader of extreme Protestant opinion in Ulster."²⁶ Smyth clearly articulates the existence of a fear of extinction when he notes,

Right wing loyalists, including the Unionist Minister of Home Affairs at the time, William Craig, the dissident Desmond Boal, and Paisley's Protestant Unionists, all interpreted the Civil Rights campaign as an attack on the Constitution of Northern Ireland and as an Irish Republican conspiracy.²⁷

The extreme response by Paisley and other loyalists is, in Stewart's and Smyth's assessment, a natural outgrowth of the civil rights movement. For Stewart, as soon as the movement appeared to become militant, escalation of the conflict was inevitable; and for Smyth, the reason that loyalist counterdemonstrators overreacted to the tactics of nonviolence had to do with their view of NICRA being colored by their own folk memory of persecution at the hands of Catholics.²⁸ Analytically, I agree with both assessments, but given the folk memory referring to a fear of extinction, I would suggest that even if the civil rights movement had not appeared to become militant, it would have garnered the same response from Paisley and other extreme loyalists.²⁹

Evidence for this assertion comes from other extreme politicians, namely members of the ruling Ulster Unionist Party, who argued that NICRA was either a front for the IRA or had been duped into doing the republicans' work for them. Speaking in July 1968, UUP Home Minister, William Craig noted that the IRA's new strategy was to blend violence with politics "to gain the sympathy of the minority envisaging protest and demonstrations concerning housing conditions, assistance to squatters and resistance to legal eviction."³⁰ Another prominent Unionist, Brian Faulkner, accused NICRA of being an IRA front, indicating in a September 16, 1968, news report that he felt that

"civil rights is merely the latest in a series of convenient guises behind which republicanism is to be found."³¹

Accusations of IRA direction or backing of the civil rights campaign coupled with a sense of persecution and threat emanating from the campaigners, the Republic of Ireland to the south, the UK government, and, not least, from members of Stormont who were not seen as sufficiently vigilant, all speak to a high level of fear in elements of the population, a high level that could almost be labeled as a trauma. As shown to a certain extent here and will be explicated more in the next section, this high level of trauma stemmed from the fear that giving in to NICRA's demands for civil and political equality would not only lead to a loss of power, but would lead to the extinction of the Protestant people of Northern Ireland.

RECONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES DURING THE TROUBLES

The early years of the Troubles were marked by a number of events. Initially, the violence which broke out in 1969 stemmed from the radicalization of both sides, with NICRA being upstaged by the student-led People's Democracy (PD) movement. Loyalists, viewing the PD as "another attempt to undermine the Unionist government," met them in force as they marched from Belfast to Derry in January 1969.³² The violence perpetrated on the Burntollet Bridge was the work of loyalists, including off-duty members of the "B" special police force. The demonstration was attacked again as it passed through Derry's Protestant Waterside and was followed by attacks on Catholics in the Bogside by members of the RUC, events which further polarized both communities. As Martin Melaugh notes, this march "marked the point where concerns about civil rights were beginning to give way to questions related to national identity."³³

Evidence of continuing polarization of Protestant identity and expression of their fear of extinction came more frequently following the outbreak of violence when fears that the IRA would return were realized. W. Martin Smyth's take on the PD was that they were essentially a group of youngsters who had been duped by the IRA-led NICRA organization and represented nothing more than communists and anarchists arguing that they had "seized every opportunity to inflame a tinder dry situation" that they "were not interested in Ulster's problems" and that they used them to advance their own

political philosophy, which was aimed at “the overthrow of Ulster and the setting up of a United Socialist Republic of Ireland.”³⁴

Even more strident words came from Ian Paisley in a 1974 pamphlet, published following his success with the Ulster Workers Council in derailing the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. In it, Paisley argued that Protestants in Ulster felt threatened from without and from within, noting that: “Our case is desperate. For the past five years through the treachery and weakness of those in authority, our land has become a [*sic*] prey to our traditional enemies.”³⁵ He continued in this vein, noting that, as threatened Protestants: “We cannot parley with an enemy who sees such parley as but another path in his strategy to destroy us. Peace with such a foe can only come when he has surrendered. Any other peace would have within it the seed of our destruction.”³⁶

Paisley then expanded his attack, accusing the British government of selling out unionists, particularly with the Sunningdale Agreement, which he describes as “Ulster’s Munich.”³⁷

Paisley makes clear reference to the fear of extinction when he concluded his pamphlet by asserting that “we are not struggling for fleeting or temporary interests but for our very being,” fighting “for our lives and our national identity.”³⁸

While others in unionism also spoke forcefully regarding the threat that the IRA posed to Northern Ireland, none were as vociferous, nor as influential with Protestant extremists as was Paisley, who could be described as the spokesperson for Protestant’s siege mentality. Clifford Smyth, in fact, does describe him this way, going so far as to assert that although the Paisley’s pamphlet attracted sparse attention, at the time it remained important “because it consolidated support” for Paisley and led to electoral increases for the newly formed Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).³⁹

NARRATIVES, CONFLICT, & TRANSFORMATION: CONTINUING IMPACTS OF IDENTITY

With the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and its explicit provisions for identity protection, much of the loyalist rhetoric regarding physical extinction has toned down. Instead, what we have seen is a shift in the PUL community from a focus on an impending United Ireland to the fear that the agreement itself—as well as the potential unification—means an end for Protestant traditions and culture, a lesser, if no less real, expression of a fear of extinction. These sentiments

have been expressed in a number of Northern Ireland's political and social arenas, including parades, symbols, language, art, education, leisure, sport, community relations, economic development, and the painful question of how to address the past and possibly compensate victims of the violence. Rather than skim across these many subjects, the following section will examine two in more depth: the issue of parades and protest, including the conflict over contentious symbols, and the issue of addressing the past, including the problems associated with contested victimhood.

PARADES & PROTEST

Extensive analyses of contentious parades in Northern Ireland have been undertaken by numerous scholars, most notably Dominic Bryan and Neil Jarman, who, separately and together, produced a large number of works on the subject. Jarman argues that parading in Northern Ireland provides the basis for both identities and that its performative nature represents an act of creation for social memory.⁴⁰ Bryan concurs, noting that one of three reasons for joining the Orange Order is to express and maintain Protestant cultural identity, performing that identity largely, though not wholly, through the act of parading.⁴¹ Jarman, Volkan, and Ross recognize that Orange rituals serve as key elements for the construction and maintenance of collective identity.⁴² As such, these views align well with Jenkins's notion that identity is always performed and Volkan's understanding that chosen traumas need to be kept alive through performative acts of memorialization.⁴³ Given this, we can safely classify loyalist ritual parades as performances designed to keep alive a cultural identity viewed as necessary to protect a population threatened with cultural or physical extinction.

Jarman notes that prior to the 1994 cease-fire, most Protestant parades went unchallenged by the nationalist minority, but that in following years, significant numbers of these parades were met with nationalist demonstrations and arguments that not only were "triumphal" parades offensive to their communities, but that they were also detrimental to the peace process. These demonstrations generated a backlash as Jarman notes that "a threat or challenge to a ritual tradition may well be considered a threat to the survival of the collective identity itself." Like many of our prior examples regarding the civil rights movement, Jarman indicates that members of the loyal orders

believed that nationalist residents' associations were "simply a continuation of the republican campaign toward a united Ireland."⁴⁴

The yearly Drumcree parade standoff became a flashpoint for violence between 1996 and 2003, when after making a token gesture of defiance toward police forces, who prevented the Order from marching down their traditional route, members and bystanders quietly dissipated instead of rioting.⁴⁵ Jarman's rationales for why this change took place are embedded within changing policing, policy, and political contexts, all pointing toward increasing disapproval of loyalist tactics of trying to force their way through with the threat of violence. Additional research found that editorial narratives about parades within loyalist-affiliated news sources shifted over a period of years starting in 1997, at first focusing on Protestant rights, but then chastising the Orange Order for refusing to meet with nationalist residents' associations while praising the Apprentice Boys for doing so. The thread of this narrative was part of a very small shift in identification that indicated that the wider population felt less threatened by the prospect of rerouting parades and did so by explicitly expressing the understanding that some of the residents' grievances may have been legitimate.⁴⁶

Overall, the fact that many local Orange lodges have been successful in negotiating with residents' associations, coupled with the willingness of police to confront demonstrators on both sides of the issue and the revulsion shown by many unionists at the violence following Drumcree in 1998 (when three young boys were killed by a petrol bomb) shows both a proactive and reactive stance toward the issue of parade violence.⁴⁷ It is also clear from calls to negotiate and recognition that not all parades will go through, that many unionists no longer fear that the halting of one particular parade will mean the end of unionism in Northern Ireland.

Yet, despite these advances in traditional parading—and the attempts by the Orange Order to shift their image to that of a more family-friendly organization—hot spots of protest and, at times, violence continue to mar the landscape. From the Holy Cross school protests of 2001–2002 to the more recent flag riots in Belfast in 2013, dissatisfied members of the loyalist community continue to voice displeasure at action by the government that seem, to them, to threaten their cultural identity.

The Holy Cross protests began with the loyalist community of the Glenbryn part of Ardoyne in early summer of 2001 but did not start in earnest until the school year resumed in the fall. At that point,

groups of loyalist residents stood on the sidewalks and shouted abuse, held up pictures, and otherwise protested the presence of Catholic schoolgirls walking through their neighborhood on the way to their primary school. The protests continued for ten weeks, into November, only ending when First Minister David Trimble met with the loyalist community and agreed to increase security for the area. Despite this, tensions in the community remained high with outbreaks in early 2002, 2003, and an incident in April 2013.

The Holy Cross protests are indicative of the continued sense of a fear of extinction and siege mentality on the part of loyalists in Northern Ireland. While hurling invective, and at times explosives, at primary-school-aged children, members of this community justified their actions by accusing the parents of these children of using their daily walks to prepare for or engage in attacks on members of the Glenbyrn estate. Numerous members of the community stated that the protests “were not about the children” but were about the adults, unnamed republicans, or other elements that posed a threat to the loyalists. Other complaints focused on the dwindling loyalist community and the feeling that they were being driven out by increasing numbers of Catholics.

This pattern of interaction, engaging in street demonstrations and using either violence or the threat of violence to force the government to make desired changes, fits within the pattern outlined by both Ed Moloney and Bob Purdie, a well-worn mantra of “we feel threatened, so we’re going to engage in violence until we get our security back.”⁴⁸ Other elements of the fear of extinction, such as the projection of one’s own behavior onto the other parties, were also present. Statements by several members of the community alluded to their disbelief that Catholic parents would allow their children to walk the protesters’ daily gauntlet, indicating that this must be a sign that they had ulterior motives; that they were “deliberately trying to provoke” the Protestants; or that they were using the children in order to benefit from the sympathy that this would generate.

As with other Protestant flashpoints, for the most part unionist and loyalist, politicians refrained from outright criticism of the protesters. In the case of Holy Cross, Protestant politicians stressed the sense of fear that the loyalist community feels and their desperation. Given that these were protests of a particularly ugly sort—aimed at small schoolgirls—most politicians refrained from coming out in support of the loyalist community, but also refrained from condemn-

ing them. Records of the Stormont debate on the subject showed that when nationalist and republican MLA's introduced a measure to condemn the protests, unionist and loyalist members attempted to water it down by widening the focus to all children affected by any kind of protest.

Another example of this kind of reactionary violence fueled by a fear of extinction are the 2012–2013 flag riots in response to the decision by the Belfast City Council to stop flying the Union Jack over city hall except for seventeen designated days around the year. Despite the fact that these are the same rules about flag-flying adopted by the Local Assembly at Stormont, many loyalists were enraged and subsequently held demonstrations both at city hall and elsewhere in the city. These demonstrations went on throughout much of 2013, with many incidents of rioting and violence. The underlying issues, like those of the Holy Cross protests and anger at the banning or rerouting of Orange Order parades, center around a fear of loss, and in particular for the flag riots, a loss of cultural identity. The flag, for many of these protesters, is a powerful symbol of an identity that has been “chipped away” since the passage of the Good Friday Agreement. As indicated by Rev. Mervyn Gibson on the UTV program *Insight: Flags of Inconvenience*, “The flag’s important. The flag’s a symbol of what’s going wrong. What people see, it’s an issue regarding British symbols generally, about the attacking Sinn Féin on parades, on other aspects of British culture here in Northern Ireland.” According to UUP MLA Michael Copeland, loyalists “See their parades restricted. They see a changed relationship between police, and indeed policing, and themselves. They see the continual erosion of what they see as their identity.”⁴⁹

While many of these narratives speak directly to the impact of lowering the flag on individual, and communal psyches, there were also a number of commentators who indicated that they felt disconnected from the peace process and, at times, disconnected from their political leadership. This sense of being left behind economically—even if not entirely borne out by statistical evidence—is only compounded by what they see as the symbolic shredding of identity narratives—playing into long-held fears that the Catholic/nationalist/republican community wants to get rid of the loyalists—yet another expression of the fear of extinction.

Given that both communities continue to suffer from economic deprivation and that overall Catholics still suffer from more depriva-

tion than Protestants, why are loyalists expressing these fears so strongly and directing their anger at both unionist politicians and at the Catholic community? I would have to argue that one of the main differences between those in loyalist areas and those in republican—or nationalist—areas is the sense by the former that they are lacking in agency and power, while their former enemies are much more able to navigate the postpeace process waters and, despite their being behind, are making rapid gains in economic, cultural, and electoral clout. Loyalist communities, moreover, see these gains as zero-sum and tend to focus on their own relative loss in comparison with the gains of the others. This sense of zero-sum gain is one that has a deep history and is embedded in the province's narratives. As we examine issues like the flags' protest and more recent parades disputes at Camp Twaddell, it is possible to identify a recurrent pattern of using parade and protest to assert loyalist identity and to express their fear that this identity is under attack and under threat of being extinguished.

Much as protest and marching are a part of the loyalist psyche, the belief that if Catholics gain, then Protestants must surely lose, is one that stretches back to the Plantation. Moreover, that idea has been fed by political leaders—from the English playing the Orange card in the debate on Home Rule to the DUP warning loyalists about the loss of the flag—seeking either gain or the avoidance of loss. This interaction between the fears of the loyalist community and the political fears and ambitions of unionist political leaders is also apparent as we turn to a second major area of identity contention in post-Good Friday Northern Ireland, the question of how to classify the Troubles and address the past.

VICTIMS & VIOLENCE: ADDRESSING THE PAST

Next, we analyze loyalist fears about how the Troubles will be portrayed in history, who will determine the overarching narratives for that portrayal, and how victims of the IRA, British, or unionist forces—including those injured by the RUC or loyalist paramilitaries—will be remembered and how they will have their needs cared for. Our primary example of this issue comes from the 2009 release of a report by a UK-appointed body known as the Consultative Group (CG) on the past. This group's mandate was "to seek a consensus on the best way to deal with the legacy of the past," operating from June 2007 through the release of their report on January 23, 2009.

Although they made a number of recommendations, in particular, the creation of a legacy commission to investigate the past, the most contentious was that the British government should make one-time recognition payments of £12,000 to the nearest living relative of anyone who had died as a result of the conflict.⁵⁰

The controversy stemmed from the CG's use of a legal definition of victim that focused on the acts of violence themselves without differentiating whether the victims were targeted by paramilitaries or state forces. Anger at this recommendation was widespread in the Unionist community, ranging from expressions of disappointment from mainstream and moderate unionists who publicly chastised the members of CG as misguided, to expressions of rage, anger, and accusations of betrayal from members of loyalist victims' groups. The main rationale behind much of this response was that the CG had created a "false equivalence" between those whose loved ones were "foully murdered" by IRA terrorists and those whose loved ones were IRA terrorists.⁵¹ The former are described by these loyalist groups, as well as some politicians, as innocent victims in contrast to those who "set out to kill a victim," indicating a belief that the IRA was engaged in nothing more than a lawless, murderous campaign and not a "just war," as they claimed. Hazlett Lynch, the director of the loyalist victims' group West Tyrone Voice (WTV), called the recommendation "another cynical attempt to rewrite history."⁵² This divergence of views about the nature of the conflict is part and parcel of the continued feeling of threat that unionists and loyalists hold regarding their own identities as unionists. Nowhere amongst mainstream politicians, or particularly amongst elements of the loyalist victims' community, is the recognition that members of both communities have suffered and that each community's view of the conflict may have some validity.⁵³

An analysis by John Nagle uses a combination of social movements theory and framing to show how a subset of the Protestant victims' groups have attempted to capture what Nagle describes as a "victim master frame" in order to argue that the Good Friday Agreement itself and the implementation of measures designed to redress historic discrimination against Catholics have, in fact, created a discriminatory environment for Protestants.⁵⁴ It is perhaps within this frame that we can see why some of the most vociferous of these groups are focused on issues of law and order, prosecution of IRA members, and trying to institute a hierarchy of victims by using the term "genuine" victims to try and deny victimhood to those who were

related to IRA member or who were killed by state forces or, at times, by Protestant paramilitaries. Victimhood has become another field of contestation, making it nearly impossible for the two communities to come together and create a shared narrative understanding of what took place during the Troubles, why they took place, and what, in essence, they were.

This newer narrative of Protestant victimhood not only draws from dissatisfaction with the terms and outcomes of the Good Friday Agreement but also draws upon a sense of fear rooted in the fear of extinction. As Nagle points out in a quote from the *Belfast Telegraph*, a clergyman who organized a pro-unionist victims' march indicated that "the Protestant community is battered and bruised. We feel like strangers in our own country and we feel ignored, mistreated and betrayed."⁵⁵ It is another expression of the fear that republican and catholic gains will result in Protestant and loyalist losses and that these losses will result in a loss of identity.

This sense of fear generated a great deal of mistrust on the part of some of the more vociferous victims' groups, in particular, their mistrust toward what they perceived as government efforts to suppress their concerns within any of the many official attempts to address the past in Northern Ireland. For instance, when interviewed about the activities of the Consultative Group, Hazlett Lynch expressed resigned frustration with the recommendations from their report:

If we had met with them ten times I don't think that that would have changed the result and report that they launched. The reason that I say that is because I am convinced that they were dogma-driven. That they were not interested in any data that was presented to them from our side from the side of the families of the victims of terrorism.⁵⁶

In discussing his group's inability to make their case to the CG, Lynch expressed yet another theme of victimhood, this time directed toward the nationalist community:

The difficulty that we faced was the fact that there is quite a considerable capacity gap within our community as opposed to the confidence, the training, and the increasing confidence of people within the pro-nationalist community which is where the greatest and the most violent of terrorist groups came from. So, the per-

son who is able to put across the best story and the person who is able to portray themselves as the pure downtrodden victim, a second class citizen, a person against whom the state had discriminated for 70, 80 years. They were listened to. We were saying and are still saying that they are the aggressors and the supporters of the aggressors.⁵⁷

Lynch further indicated that “the whole process in Northern Ireland is about appeasing the people who have got the motivation and the means to let off bombs in the center of the financial area of London.”⁵⁸ So in a sense we can see that some of the victims’ groups have refocused and redefined victimhood from a narrow conception in order to express a continued fear of extinction, whether at the hands of those who continue to be aggressors or by the perfidy of state institutions that refuse to acknowledge the validity of their viewpoints.

Nagle points out one important element that links this subset of the victims’ community with larger impacts across the province: these groups’ ability to connect with other social sectors such as the Orange Order and unionist and loyalist politicians. While one could argue that Orange Order might experience a continued sense of victimhood given the restrictions placed upon their marching by the Parades Commissions, it is unclear that politicians have felt more victimized by an agreement that has given them power, prestige, and perks at Stormont. Here, the question of participation must be examined in the light of the instrumental value that politicians may derive from appearing to support claims of victimhood rather than making the hard choices that could lead to long-term reconciliation.⁵⁹

The “chameleonic” quality that Cathy Gormley-Heenan uses to describe Northern Ireland’s political leadership and their responses to different pressures is alluded to by Nagle’s analysis, which indicates that not only were unionist politicians key to helping the movement gain prominence, but that when the DUP entered into government with Sinn Féin in 2007, these same politicians then withdrew their support, contributing to the reduction of influence for these groups.⁶⁰ However, this analysis, while acknowledging the anger of these groups with their former political partners, did not foreshadow the ability of groups like FAIR⁶¹ and WTV to continue to agitate and effectively prevent efforts at reconciliation and conflict transformation.

Current expressions of anger by loyalists, often spearheaded by members of these victims’ groups, underline the continuing difficulty

that Northern Ireland is having in addressing its past. For every potentially positive event, such as improved relations between the UK and Republic of Ireland governments, symbolic reconciliation such as that between former IRA member Martin McGuinness and Queen Elizabeth, and recommendations for moving forward by political neutrals like Richard Haas, there have been vocal complaints from Unionist victims that these moves are sellouts that denigrate the sacrifices made by the victims and their families and reward terrorists and those who engaged in criminal activity for more than thirty years. While these outbursts no longer express fears of physical extinction, they often express a fear of symbolic extinction, arguing that the removal of British symbols, compromise on issues like parading, and the willingness to forego prosecution of IRA members constitutes dangers to loyalist cultural identity.

CONCLUSION: IDENTITY NARRATIVES IN CONFLICT

Overall, this study has only scratched the surface of the identity narratives that are embedded in the long history of the region and that have been activated by the conflict. It is clear though, that even by examining these few narratives, the polarization that took hold of identity-relations during the Troubles has scarcely loosened its hold over the imaginations of many, though not all, in the province. Arguments by authors such as Cathal McCall that sectarian identities are becoming more subsumed into European identities or that they are weakening do not appear to have as much power as one might hope for in the face of continuing sectarian tensions during the marching season and throughout the year at interfaces between the two communities.⁶²

In describing the identity elements that led inexorably to the outbreak of the Troubles, Stewart describes Protestants as attempting to understand patterns of Catholic behavior in the civil rights campaign using “instinctively...the only source of wisdom applicable...inherited folk-memory of what had been done in the past.” He goes on to note that, in 1977, the interaction of Ulster’s Catholics and Protestants had entered a pattern “which cannot be changed or broken by any of the means” then used to address the problem.⁶³ Unfortunately, to some extent, it appears that my analysis runs the risk of repeating his admonition, by noting how repeated patterns of cultural interaction and identity fear continue to create problems for the full implementation

of the Good Friday Agreement and the willingness and ability of segments of Northern Irish society to move forward toward reconciliation.

Despite these high-profile instances of remaining violence and fear, there is still opportunity for Northern Irish society to address narratives of the past in order to fully explore and understand how historical narratives have impacted both sides' sense of self-identification and other categorization. Earlier research has found that, at an institutional level, one of the more important parts of the Good Friday process was its explicit protection of identities. When coupled with the lowering of existential threats through the cessation of most violence, this explicit guarantee for both traditions had a significant impact upon the Catholic/nationalist population's willingness to remain in Northern Ireland, albeit while continuing to work for a United Ireland via peaceful means. Equally significant were interviews with former loyalist paramilitary members who showed a willingness to accept the idea of a United Ireland, but only via democratic means.⁶⁴ As is evident from this analysis, these steps forward have not completely addressed loyalist concerns that they are being left out or left behind by the peace process. Part of the answer to this problem could lie in addressing economic and development-related needs of loyalist communities, although this may seem difficult to achieve in current economic circumstances. Other possible answers lie in the nature of identity and chosen trauma. Volkan indicates that to address traumas, groups, like individuals, need to complete the mourning process, which is part of what the CG attempted to facilitate through the creation of a Legacy Commission. As that proposal is unlikely to be adopted in the near future, work by local NGO's such as Healing Through Remembering (HTR) may be an acceptable alternative. HTR engages in a number of activities including one-off events focusing on healing and remembering, training, and projects. One project of particular interest for the problem uncovered in this paper is HTR's proposal for a storytelling project which would allow individuals across the province to tell their stories of the conflict, their lives, and the meanings they attach to them. While work is not currently being done on this project, in this author's opinion, it remains a particularly viable option for renarrating history, meaning, and identity in Northern Ireland.

Addressing the polarized narratives of identity which have their legacy deep within Northern Irish history will not be an easy task.

Nor will it be one which can be completed in a fortnight, or even a lifetime. However, it is not an impossible task, because despite the perception that Catholics and Protestants are forever divided by their identities, scholars like Nic Craith assert that there is common ground in Northern Irish identity narratives, especially if the two traditions' narratives and the idea of parity of esteem are de-emphasized in favor of narratives emphasizing the commonalities of both groups.⁶⁵ I agree with Nic Craith that this seems unlikely in the short term, less because of the durability of the divisions between the two than from the current inability of each group to examine and question their own assumptions about self and other. Currently the best, though not only, avenue for such an examination lies in the work of HTR and similar civil society organs. It is my hope, along with many others, that through such an examination, each community will begin to move beyond their own pain and recognize how their narratives of identity have contributed to creating pain in the other.

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