

4. Northern Ireland the National Dilemma

“Bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood. There are many things more horrible than bloodshed; and slavery is one of them.”¹
(Patrick Pearse)

4. 1 Introduction

The persistence of social violence and political disagreement between Catholic and Protestant factions in Northern Ireland comes from a series of historical events stemming from the national genesis of the Irish Republic. The historiography of nationalist movements varies in every case and although repetitive patterns may coincide, the context and structure are unique. In this case, the construction of identity is defined by the historical process of the groups and by the agency of its institutions. Irish nationalism, it’s being argued, “created a mass movement before it developed an ideology.”² By analyzing Northern Ireland as a divided society we can see that the constructions of national identities were more important than establishing primordial ethnic differences.

It was social solidarity, in response to the English repression that turned the Irish people from being an ethnic category within the British Empire to a well organized national group with future plans of independence. Irish identity in this regard was constructed upon subordination, struggle and a common solidarity based in response to a specific situation –the foreign rule of the British state. In contrast, Protestant nationalism became a counter-movement to the Irish demands of emancipation, home rule, and equal opportunities. In sum, the history of Ireland is

¹ Christopher McAll, *Class, Ethnicity, and Social Inequality* (Montreal: MacGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 196.

² Sean Cronin, *Irish Nationalism* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1981), 65.

full of repetitive events that reflect the complexity of the Irish and Protestant struggles that persist until today in the XXI century.

4.2 A Brief History of Ireland

The question of the Irish identity did not constitute a matter of pure primordial national self-consciousness. It was rather a by-product of subordination and coercion which gradually exacerbated the identity of the Celtic-Gael people. From the beginnings of the British rule when in 1541 Henry VIII declared himself King of Ireland, ethnicity became politicized due to the frequent attrition that Irish communities suffered during the colonial system. The Crown had decided to make of Ireland a colony in the whole extension. Through their policy of “plantations,” England pursued the “clearing of the native Irish Population from areas of land, which would then be resettled with reliable immigrants” better cultured than the uncivilized, wild and dangerous native Irish.³

Being an instrumental system of control, plantations consisted of imported Scottish-and English skilled people to cultivate, populate and administrate the new conquest lands. Most of the early Scot traders and farmers were Presbyterians and the English who represented the gentry were Anglicans. Thus, by bringing foreign settlers to serve as stewards of the British Crown the island was altered in its composition mainly on the basis of religion. Rapidly the foreign-Protestant population started to claim property and preferential rights over the natives who lived in the islands. The further Anglicanization of Ireland under King William III and the enactment of the *Penal Codes* “secured the island to the English control, and ensure that the Irish lack any institutional basis for resistance.”⁴

³ Michael Hughes, *Ireland Divided* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 2-7.

⁴ Katherine O’Sullivan See, *First World Nationalisms* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 39.

The Penal Codes consisted of laws that:

...excluded Catholics from sitting in Parliament, holding government office, possessing arms, operating schools, acquiring land, and even from owning a horse ...those who still held land did so only under the protection of Anglicans. [Moreover] the corporate Catholic church was attacked. No mass could be performed unless the priest took an oath of allegiance to the king and Church of England.⁵

At the outset, Irish Catholics were not opposed to England. However, after the application of the Penal Codes the Irish developed a group consciousness founded on resentment. Consequently, these restrictions only increased Irish national sentiments towards Irish *emancipation*. Since then, the fight for equal rights among Catholics and Protestants would remain a constant in the history of Ireland and Northern Ireland. This means that recent discrimination in the civil service and government positions against Catholics in Northern Ireland has not been a new issue. In fact it is a reflection of the past: in 1828, for instance, “jobs and offices paid by the Crown numbered 3,033 but Catholics had only 134 of them.”⁶

4.2.1 Irish National Origins

With the advent of the French revolution Irish nationalism saw in *republicanism* the most congruent way to free themselves from its Protestant rulers. Republicanism was influenced by French ideals of liberalism and popular sovereignty. Although it appeared in Ireland in the 1790s, this idea “supported Catholic emancipation and abandoned the long-held belief that Catholics, because of their religion, were unfit for liberty.”⁷

Catholic emancipation by democratic ways was a risky proposal to the Protestant power. Instead of being a source of conflict this idea had reappeared as a solution to the sectarian

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1992), 242.

⁷ Hughes, *Ireland Divided*, 10.

problem in the minds of either Protestants or Catholic republicans members of the Society of United Irishmen.⁸ However, Protestants refused to reach a consensus, fearing revenge from their counter-parts.

“...in Ireland the [Protestant] minority contested every movement to extend the franchise, to establish local councils, to transfer to ordinary Irishmen any form of authority over any phase of national activity. Above all, they contested what they feared would be completely dismantle their position of supremacy –the grant of Home Rule to Ireland...”⁹

Before the partition of Ireland in 1921, the first serious uprising of independence exploded in 1916 as nationalism became a call for self-governance and self-determination apart from the British rule. The Anglo-Irish war (1919-1921) was the apex of the increasing claims for Irish self-determination based on territorial hegemonic goals,¹⁰ i.e. obtaining sovereignty over Ireland despite the resistance of the Protestant minority. In the view of those who wanted to keep the Union with the UK, the Irish struggle for independence was a myth derived from the “simplistic map-image, and the false dogma that there has been only one nation in Ireland.”¹¹ Unionists regarded Northern Ireland not as a colony, but an integral part of the UK and rejected the idea of seceding from it.

At this point, it is important to underline that the reason why religion had become more successful than language and almost equal to territory as a marker of the Irish identity has to do with one of the most important crisis of the Irish culture. For many historians the “Great Famine” or “Great Potato Hunger” from 1845 to 1849 was an event that devastated the Gaelic civilization, poor and sick. The Famine contributed with many deaths through the years until the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Frank Gallagher, *The Indivisible Island* (London, UK: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1957), 90.

¹⁰ Hegemony can be considered as one of the political goals of mobilized ethnic communities which entails control of the apparatus of the state...as well as efforts to expand borders...in order to redeem ethnic kinfolk and the territory they occupy from foreing rule... See Easman, *Ethnic Politics*, 220-221.

¹¹ John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 100.

demographic decline of native Irish population as much as large-scale emigration did -mainly to the United States.¹² The majority of Gaelic-speaking population had died, and since that moment the Gaelic language had lost its importance as an ethnic marker which subsequently became an ancestral language.

Nevertheless, the linguistic decline did not mean that other practices and beliefs equally changed. Instead, the decay of Gaelic language brought about the consolidation of the Irish-Catholic identity (Catholicism had been introduced by “Saint Patrick” in the V century). In words of George Dangerfield, the undergoing identity crisis and the poor agrarian economy in the late XIX century had forced the Irish “to look for a substitute language and to find it in the teachings and ceremonies of the Church. With the passing years, the devotional Catholics increased, and terms ‘Catholic’ and ‘Irish’ became virtually interchangeable.”¹³ From then on, the Catholic nationalist activity focused on the land. “The land issue had great symbolic importance: not surprisingly, it was the subject of numerous myths, in particular that of the oppressive English landlord.”¹⁴

Explaining how identities are constructed can help us understand the changing nationalist patterns of both Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. For this intention, Ronald Suny provides a definition of identity -similar to Anthony Smith’s perception of cultural continuity- according to how ethnic groups may perceive or assimilate nationalism in a determined context of history:

Identification is a multiple process that involves the historical social positions (fluid, shifting, and discursively constituted as they may be) in which people

¹² R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1989), 318-324.

¹³ George Dangerfield, *The Damnable Question* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1976), 12.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Ireland Divided*, 16-17.

find themselves, which shape influence, and limit the possibilities of identification with some others and not with others.¹⁵

The Irish case is revealing in this aspect. Irish political and social history had become extremely discursive with claims to defend the Irish territory considered an historical legacy. To nationalists, Ireland was the land where the first generations of Celts had forged the Irish culture. However, it wasn't until the Anglo-Irish war or War of Independence were militant nationalist groups started to search the "past" for lost martyrs, glorious battles, and myths to recreate a nationalist ideology. In addition to the idealist construction of the nation, the us versus them paradigm helped to confirm the Irish national identity. The years of unsuccessful Irish leadership and subordination raised by the antagonism of Britain were far more representative of their "national narrative" than the fact of being purely Irish by descent.

A sense of Irishness soon became a symbiosis of self-identification and common descent, embraced by the discourse of defiance and shaped by a colonial discontent towards the British Empire. The roots of the Irish secession, then started with claims for political autonomy formalized since the foundation of the Home Rule League in 1873 and with subsequent promulgation of the first (1886), second (1893), and third (1912) Home Rule Bill which aspired an autonomous parliament for Ireland and hence devolution of power to the Irish people from Westminster. The Home Rule was a threat to the Protestant hierarchy and the power that they had enjoyed in the past. The Bill was accompanied by land reforms and educational reforms directed to the establishment of a comprehensive Catholic participation in society.

Finally in 1916 the nationalist movements pursued their goals with the Easter Rising; an antecedent of the Anglo-Irish War. The importance of this specific event has to do with the

¹⁵ Ronald Grigor Suny, "Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations," *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (2001): 866.

ideological principles of the Irish nationalism contained in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic:

*In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom... the Irish Republican Brotherhood (1914), and through her open military organizations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army (1913) ...We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty... The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts.*¹⁶

The core of the nationalist argument referred to self-determination and not semi-autonomy. In the following years the Irish republican movement led by Eamon De Valera, negotiated a Parliament and a Constitution for Ireland under the Government of Ireland Act in 1921. This act established “bicameral parliamentary institutions for Northern and Southern Ireland with provisions for their eventual unification.”¹⁷ From this agreement the Irish Free State was created representing twenty six southern counties whereas in the north of the island, the Northern Ireland government was created with jurisdiction over the six counties of Armagh, Antrim, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Londonderry and Down.¹⁸ As has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, the division North-South of the island became to be known as the *partition* of Ireland.

However, it was not until 1949 when the Irish Free State finally seceded from the British Commonwealth and declared itself as an independent *Republic*. Furthermore, under the Ireland Act of the same year the UK confirmed its position that “Northern Ireland was part of the UK

¹⁶ Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 24 April 1916. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/pir24416.htm> emphasis mine.

¹⁷ Cunningham, *British Government Policy*, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

and would not cease to be without consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland...”¹⁹ In the eyes of nationalists the Republic of Ireland was, and until this day is incomplete; this meant territorially, politically, ideologically and culturally. However, there were no other concessions.²⁰

According to Hudson Medwell, De Valera thought of secession in terms of the complete Island; the homeland where Gaelic culture had borne and where it shall finally triumph.²¹ The fact that Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom represented an issue that the Irish Republican Army²² and Irish nationalists were to take very seriously in the future.

4.3 Unionism and Unionist Politics

In Northern Ireland the Protestant community also decided to develop its own nationalism. The Protestant national identity as represented in Unionism is the interplay of the Protestant political resistance (anti-Republican, anti-Catholic, anti-Irish reunification) and religious affiliation with the religion of the British Crown. Although being Protestant may stand for just religious devotion, in Northern Ireland Protestantism (in the secular mode) was a social marker rather than an expression of religious commitment; and although it is considered a religious marker that is used as the self-appellation, what it stands for is thoroughly political and secular.²³

¹⁹ Richard B. Finnegan and Edward T. McCarron, *Ireland* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), 83.

²⁰ “Southern Ireland was meant to receive Dominion status like Canada, with control of finances and taxation, justice, the police and defence, though there were limitations on the size of the Irish armed forces...and Northern Ireland...rights could not be abrogated except with the consent of the Belfast Parliament.” See Hughes, *Ireland Divided*, 53.

²¹ Hudson Meadwell, “Secession, Status and International Society,” *Review of International Studies* 25 (1999): 379.

²² The Irish Republican Army, the successor of the Irish Volunteers, was a paramilitary group originally formed to fight for the secessionist cause during the Anglo-Irish War. At the beginning of the Troubles in 1972 the IRA reorganized to “protect” the Catholics against Protestant attacks and discrimination.

²³ John D. Brewer and Gareth I. Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland 1600-1998* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 151-152.

The basis of *Unionism* as an ideology and as a movement is founded in the Irish Act of Union when Ireland joined the United Kingdom in 1801. Hence, for Ulster unionists, “unionism is the doctrine that Northern Ireland must stay in the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.”²⁴ From the outset the Act of Union had at least two initial purposes, to answer the “British security problems”²⁵ raised by the Spanish and French invasions, i.e. closing the possibility of annexation of Ireland to any other European powers; and secondly the extension of Imperial powers made to increase the “imperial economic and political vitality.”²⁶

One of the biggest problems in the Irish history is that the Act did not overcome the economic and social inequalities among the Irish nor did it incite a sense of British “pride” as with to the Welsh and Scots:

By adopting the ‘mother name’ of Britain...Scots and English could sink their differences and, without giving up their identities, construct and overarching British identity...Scottish supporter of the Union...urged that by sharing in the more developed character of English trade and industry, the Scottish economy and Scottish society would be modernized, so that the disabling differences between the two societies would be removed.²⁷

As a consequence, full integration of Ireland into the British economic, political and cultural standards did not occur. “Ireland continued to be treated as a province whose economic interests were to be subordinated to Britain’s and whose population was to be subjected to law and order.”²⁸ But not for the Northern Irish Protestants. The supporters of the Union, encouraged by the Orange Order were interested in keeping the ties to Britain since the long held belief that “Ulster’s economic prosperity was seen to be tied to it.”²⁹ As a consequence Irish unionists allied

²⁴ McGarry and O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 92.

²⁵ Finnegan and McCarron, *Ireland*, 21.

²⁶ *The Irish Act of Union, 1800*, Michael Brown and others, eds. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2003), 2.

²⁷ Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 136-137.

²⁸ Finnegan and McCarron, *Ireland*, 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

and favored Tory politics in Britain and in Ireland because of the fact that they “shared religious, property and class interests with the Irish Protestant Ascendancy.”³⁰ It follows that Unionist ideology in Northern Ireland describes high degrees of Catholic exclusion and therefore, overlooks the Irish people who were unworthy of receiving privileges and rights.

Keeping the Union with Britain was also a multi-dimensional process, and religion was not the exception. The fact that Unionism is very linked to the term *loyalty* means that the Union also meant keeping the religion of the Sovereign and thus remaining loyal to his mandate. But this was not a given. For example, in times of the colony Scots Presbyterians became under constant Irish-Catholic attacks that left them no option but rely in the King [Charles I] for protection despite his Anglican background:

In a covenant signed by Presbyterians throughout Ulster, the settlers proposed a conditional loyalty to preserve and defend the King’s person and authority in the preservation and defense of the true religion and liberties of the Kingdom. This agreement instituted the conditions for loyalism among the Presbyterians settlers: loyalty to the king was predicated on de facto protection of Presbyterian religious liberty and property.³¹

Accordingly, another characteristic of Unionism was its strong correlation with the Protestant religion. Being Unionist stand for Protestant and to some extent being Protestant meant to be British (in cultural terms). The strong correlation of the Protestant religion and the political preference over British political principles helped to define a British-Protestant identity. Nonetheless, it needs to be clarified that this assumption is not widely accepted by the -common-British at all. This means that British identity is too ambiguous even for the English that most of people of Great Britain do not see themselves as a broad British brotherhood.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ O’Sullivan, *First World Nationalisms*, 38.

This point has been made by McGarry and O’Leary. They explain that the use of British in Northern Ireland faces three related difficulties: they see problems in establishing *Ulster* as a nationality even meaning just Protestant Ulster; secondly, “the majority of the indisputably British, i.e. the Great British of England, Scotland and Wales, generally do not think that the citizens of Northern Ireland are British; and finally, even if one accepts, (as we do), the authenticity of unionists’ British identity that fact alone does not automatically entitle them to the unqualified continuation for the Union.”³² What it is clear from this statement, is that even though Britishness belongs to a more civic definition of nationality in terms of citizenship and membership to the United Kingdom, many Unionists see in Britishness something more than just legal belonging. For them Unionism is an integral part of an identity which includes religious, political, ethnic, and cultural aspects.

In this thesis, Unionism is considered the form of nationalist expression of the Protestant community in Northern Ireland. By saying that Unionism is a form of nationalism I mean that it is done in the civic sense previously mentioned above; but also, in its most consolidated form I consider Unionism a construction of cultural and national identity based on three general points:

- the legacy of the Protestant cultural and religious traditions to the current Protestant citizens of Northern Ireland;³³
- deference and loyalty towards the English Monarchy in all its extension;
- and the political and social preference towards policies oriented to secure the paramount role of the Northern Irish Protestants in Northern Ireland.

³² McGarry and O’Leary. *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 111.

³³ Moore and Sanders, “Loyalism in Northern Ireland,” 10.

It has been argued that Unionists or Loyalists think of Northern Ireland as an “imagined community”,³⁴ i.e. Anderson’s imagined nation. They think of a Protestant nation in terms of Northern Ireland’s six counties to which they prefer to call Ulster. A significant aspect of this definition is that it hardly speaks for the Catholic citizens that remained in Ulster after partition. Hence, the Union is an idea that could not have survived without the Catholic antagonism.

“Unionists have acted as if the Irish Republic simply does not exist. The Unionists’ cultural field of vision usually excludes the remainder of the island; instead, they locate themselves within an ‘imagined community’ that shares boundaries with the United Kingdom.”³⁵

Most of their social and political attitudes have a propensity to disregard or neglect the Catholic participation in Ulster affairs. This can be appreciated in the Unionist political discourse. Unionist politicians such as Reverend Ian Paisley usually address the Protestant nation as “the people”³⁶ (us and not them); by the “people” they only mean the “Protestants” which is a clear reflect of the “exclusivist identity” of the Unionist ideology.³⁷ The idea of the exclusive nation is therefore part of the exclusive nationalism of the Unionist/Loyal Protestants prone to be intolerant and segregate those non-members. John Daniel Cash in analyzing the study of Sarah Nelson³⁸ on Ulster Loyalism makes a detailed description of this ideological system:

[Ulster Unionist Ideology] It is oppositional and, apparently, flagrantly illogical. It makes demands, but never makes concessions. It sees the world entirely from its own point of view and fails to see that others, be they Nationalist, British or third parties, may have other points of view which are themselves, legitimate. It is zero-sum in character...It is an exclusivist construction of the world which is drawn upon in the maintenance and reassertion of the dominant and exclusivist form of Unionist identity.³⁹

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Colin Coulter, “Unionists after Unionism,” in *Peace Review* 13, no.1 (2001): 75.

³⁶ Moore and Sanders, “Loyalism in Northern Ireland,” 10.

³⁷ John Daniel Cash, *Identity, Ideology and Conflict* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 118.

³⁸ Sarah Nelson, *Ulster’s Uncertain Defenders* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1984) See esp. 9.

³⁹ Cash, *Ideology and Conflict*, 118.

From this statement we see that since Catholic is used as interchangeable with Nationalist, Republican, IRA, Sinn Fein, and so forth, unionists/loyalists reject any participation of the Irish Republic in any of its representations. On practical terms every attempt made either by a Catholic or Irish Republican to break the Union has strong consequences in strengthening the Unionist feeling. What is more, Protestants have always feared becoming a minority under a Catholic rule. As a consequence “in the long run they created unionism very largely in reaction to the new forms which Catholic nationalism was taking.”⁴⁰

Nonetheless, Unionism was not self-consciously perceived, i.e. it was not embedded in the general ascribed elements of the Protestant identity -thought it was assumed or better said, learned with the pass of the years. Unionist sentiments were supported from within Ireland mainly through pro-Union and pro-Protestant dominance groups like the Orange Order and Protestant paramilitary groups which provided a belief system that complemented culturally and religiously the Unionist political ties with Britain. In this respect Sean Farrell explains this constructivist approach: “Loyalist ideology was *Manichean* in nature, calling for Protestant unity in the face of an unwavering Irish Catholic threat.”⁴¹

After partition, Protestants became a dominant group in Northern Ireland and concentrated on keeping the Union in legitimate terms by gaining the majority in the Northern Irish Parliament. As it was previously mentioned, from 1921 to 1972 the Unionists strived to keep a Protestant Parliament for the Protestant people. By rehearsing an ethnic democracy the Protestants took Unionism to the extreme under a democratic façade. In the opinion of A. T. Q. Stewart, partition represented the success of a [Protestant] minority “in asserting its right of

⁴⁰ A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground* (London: The Blackstaff Press, 1977), 163.

⁴¹ Sean Farrell, *Rituals and Riots* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 179. emphasis mine.

dissent from the [Catholic] majority in the form of a separate administration and a constitutional boundary.”⁴² However, it did not solve the sectarian problem.

Under the new status both groups did not cease to regard themselves as enemies: “The Unionists distinguished between Loyal Ireland (themselves) and Disloyal Ireland (the Irish Nationalists).”⁴³ The Catholics far from being a majority in Ireland became a minority, and the Protestants became an influential majority with strong claims of British identity. Furthermore, both groups have been successful in recreating and manipulating the group’s national consciousness by defining themselves according to the events in the daily life of Northern Ireland. Currently, Unionism is part of the ideological platform of the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) lead by David Trimble and the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) lead by Reverend Ian Paisley.

4.4 The Troubles (1968-1998): Nationalisms in the Extreme

In March 1972 the British government dissolved Stormont because it was unable to maintain control over the increasing violence and volatility in Ulster. This act only increased the anarchy of one of the most violent stages in the history of Northern Ireland known as the *Troubles*. The importance of the violence that started in 1968 with the killings of Bloody Sunday set a precedent not only on Irish-British history but to the study of nationalist conflicts in the world and needs a brief explanation. Today the Troubles, as a distinct period of the Northern Irish conflict, are understood to have ended with the Good Friday Agreement. For the Catholic and Protestant population the years of the Troubles were more than a nightmare in part generated

⁴² Stewart, *Narrow Ground*, 160.

⁴³ Hughes, *Ireland Divided*, 71.

by the political vacuum of power left by the dissolution of the Parliament, the intervention of the British Army in the Conflict and the reorganization of the IRA.

Catholic assimilation in the north had not been successful and protestant actions towards the non-protestant population had been appalling. Certainly each group had its own burden during the conflict. “Violence in Northern Ireland, according to Unionists, has stemmed from nationalists irredentism, not from discrimination or maltreatment of the minority before 1972 or since.”⁴⁴ In contrast in the view of the Republicans the Northern state “effectively had discriminated against Catholics in housing, jobs, and political representation;” furthermore they were regarded as “a subversive minority.”⁴⁵ Eventually, the *distrust* among the groups was reinforced by a chronic segregation: “it was possible for many people from one side of the religious-political divide to live, study, pray, work, and socialize, almost completely apart from people of the other side of the divide.”⁴⁶

The beginning of the hostilities became institutionalized with a specific event: the demonstrations of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA 1967), a civil organization of Catholic citizens that demanded equal rights in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, this movement was not received with the same intention and was considered a threat to the Unionist status quo. In reality NICRA represented the change of the old republican nationalist discourse (sovereignty over the whole island) and had surrendered the evils of partition.

“The Civil rights movement differed from the previous political groups speaking for the Catholic ministry, in that it was not demanding the collective right of Irish unification. The novelty of the NICRA protest was that it sought

⁴⁴ McGarry and O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 101.

⁴⁵ Mari Fitzduff, and Liam O’Hagan, “[The Northern Ireland Troubles,](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/incorepaper.htm)” *INCORE background paper*, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/incorepaper.htm>

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

British rights -a claim that British authorities found much harder to reject than a claim of Irish unification.”⁴⁷

However, to the Protestant establishment this demonstration meant something more than just equal rights. The deep rooted Unionist mentality had associated every Catholic deed with the attempts at breaking the Union. Although the nationalist minority instead of challenging the legitimacy of the Northern state began to “demand equality within it,”⁴⁸ the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the British forces started a retaliation that triggered the beginning of the Troubles the day of Bloody Sunday:

In Ireland, for 50 years the term "Bloody Sunday" evoked a memory of November 21, 1920, when 14 British secret service men were simultaneously killed by the Irish Volunteers in their Dublin homes, and in retaliation Auxiliary police killed 12 spectators and players and injured 60 others at a Dublin football match. But since Sunday January 30, 1972 the term has been reapplied to the shooting of 26 men, 13 fatally, by the British Army in Derry following a banned march protesting against internment (imprisonment without trial). Internment was introduced in 1971. Civil rights campaigners sought to protest against the measure by organizing a march. British troops had been sent into Northern Ireland in 1969 to support the local police in a period of rising civil disturbances but their presence in itself inflamed feelings and they had become the target of attacks by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).⁴⁹

This event owes its infamy to the fact that the British army opened fire on unarmed Catholic civilians without justification. This act was followed by the subsequent reorganization of the republican paramilitarism and the Loyalists forces (Ulster Volunteer Force, Ulster Freedom Fighters) who were practically a counter reaction to the operations of the Provisional IRA.⁵⁰ What happened on that day re-configured the perception of the in-group towards the out-group of both Unionists and Irish Nationalists. That is, theoretically Bloody Sunday represented

⁴⁷ Richard Rose, “On the Priorities of Citizenship in the Deep South and Northern Ireland,” *The Journal of Politics* 38, no. 2 (May 1976): 278.

⁴⁸ Hughes, *Ireland Divided*, 82-83.

⁴⁹ “History of Ireland,” Bloody Sunday, *éire on-line*, <http://eire.shamrock.cjb.net/>

⁵⁰ McGarry and O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, 259.

a structural change, a situation in the time line which provided new information and confirmed the nationalist beliefs of both communities.

The nationalist behavior of both groups can be analyzed remembering Roger Petersen's emotional approach to whom "emotion is a mechanism that triggers action to satisfy a pressing concern."⁵¹ In this particular case a combination of instrumental emotions (fear, hatred, resentment) were in action during the peak of the Troubles which started in 1972.

Former attempts to suppress historical hatreds and forget resentment were overridden by the symbolism of Bloody Sunday. Such effects had an intrinsic value in determining nationalist violence. Like national identity, violence is a construction that derives from the *coding* of past, present and future elements in the history of a community. This approach is put forward by Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin:

The coding of the past, present, or feared future violence as ethnic is not only an analytical but a practical matter. Violence is regularly accompanied by social struggles to define its meaning and specify its causes, the outcome of which –for example, the labeling of an event as a pogrom, a riot or a rebellion– may have important consequences. [In this context] ethnic violence is perpetrated across ethnic lines, in which at least one party is not a state, and in which the putative ethnic difference is coded –by perpetrators, targets, influential third parties, or analysts– as having been integral rather than incidental to violence...⁵²

Nationalist violence in Ulster, thus, has its explanation in a instrumental logic of perceptions and emotions experienced by each group. By retaking Petersen approach we can say that Irish nationalism has been much influenced by ancient hatreds,⁵³ e.g. colonial oppression. That is, Irish nationalist attitudes are motivated "to a considerable degree by a sense of

⁵¹ Roger Petersen, "An Emotion-Based Approach to Ethnic Conflict," in *Understanding Ethnic Violence. Fear Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 19.

⁵² Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and Nationalistic Violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 428.

⁵³ Petersen, "Emotion-Based Approach," 19.

(historical) grievance, a sense of having been treated unjustly by the British, as well as the unionists since the partition of the island.”⁵⁴ Robert MacKim continues explaining that Irish nationalists feel that unionists do not belong to the island and are seen as “relic of the colonial occupation.”⁵⁵

On the contrary, loyalist/unionist nationalism has been moved by collective fears. This means that their immediate needs are defined in terms of security against the out-group that represents their biggest threat,⁵⁶ i.e. Catholics. McKim confirms the logic of the unionist rationale: “they feel that in the event of unity with the rest of Ireland they would be an outnumbered and beleaguered minority and their culture, identity, religion, and, in effect, what makes them who they are would be submerged”.⁵⁷

In sum, the interplay of nationalist emotions and national identification represent an intrinsic aspect of the Northern Ireland ethos. I will dare to say that the sectarian warfare reproduces according to what is personally and collectively perceived. However, the act of “coding” the enemy is also supported by the system of beliefs provided by the leaders and institutions of the main national groups. Religious or secular institutions can be directly or indirectly oriented to the pursue of nationalist goals. However, the success of nationalist agendas will depend largely on how the social structure interprets its social welfare. This means that no matter how well structured a belief system or a nationalist ideology/movement is, political as well as religious leaders have always work hard to associate external circumstances to the local national wellbeing.

⁵⁴ Robert McKim, “National Identity and Respect among Nations,” in *The Morality of Nationalism* ed. Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 265.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Petersen, “Emotion-Based Approach,” 25.

⁵⁷ McKim, “National Identity,” 264.

4.5 Current Political Structure in Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland (Ulster or the Province) is a small territory with a population of 1,685,267 inhabitants proportionally divided according to their religious beliefs and national identification (see Appendix 1). According to data of the 2001 census⁵⁸ in Northern Ireland 40.26% of the Population is Catholic and 45.57% are Protestants. Race nor language represents a social cleavage since 99.15% of the population is white, and English is widely spoken.

The province currently has a semi-autonomous government based on the Northern Ireland Assembly –formerly the Northern Ireland parliament, Stormont. Although the Assembly has been suspended many times since its creation, it is ruled under the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement also referred to as the Belfast Agreement (April 1998). It comprises a British-Irish Agreement and a Multi-Party Agreement to set out a peace process which was endorsed by referendums in both Northern Ireland (71 % in favor) and Ireland (94 % in favor) respectively.⁵⁹ Under this arrangement, the Assembly is organized by a “power-sharing executive” composed of a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister “jointly elected to office with the consent of a majority of unionist and nationalist Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and ten departmental heads reflecting both unionists and nationalists.”⁶⁰ It is important to highlight that this is the first executive elected by proportional representation under the Single Transferable Vote (STV).⁶¹

⁵⁸ Northern Ireland Statistic and Research Agency, “*Northern Ireland Census 2001 Key Statistics, Religion*,” <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/Census2001Output/KeyStatistics/keystatrep1.html>

⁵⁹ European Commission, “Northern Ireland Community Support Framework 2000-2006,” http://www.delni.gov.uk/docs/pdf/ni_csf.pdf

⁶⁰ Tonge, “Politics in Northern Ireland,” 182-183.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Until today political parties continue to be strongly polarized in two nationalist identifiable factions: Catholic/Nationalist parties, which claim a civic nationalism to Ireland, and Protestant/Unionist parties, which claim a civic nationalism to the United Kingdom.⁶² On November 2003 the 108-seat Northern Ireland Assembly held general elections. The results only proved the persistent sectarian divide in Northern Ireland. The hard-line Democratic Unionist Party won the majority with 30 seats, followed by the Ulster Unionist Party with 27 seats; Sinn Fein with 24 sets; the Social Democratic Labor Party with 18 seats; Alliance Party with 6 seats; and the other rest minor parties received 3 seats.

The peace process is still in progress waiting for the “act of completion,” when the IRA will disarm completely. However, after the electoral victory of the DUP, its leader Reverend Ian Paisley has insisted in the *renegotiation* of the Good Friday Agreement. Paisley has strong concerns about the secret participation of the Sinn Fein with the IRA and the Irish government. In December 2003 negotiations were formalized between the DUP, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Irish (*Taoiseach*) Prime Minister Bertie Ahern.

Currently Northern Ireland remains under direct rule from the British Government although a Secretary of State, Paul Murphy, has been appointed to represent the Province. Ulster still holds no autonomy over its policies depending on the British Government sponsoring for the internal administration. Northern Ireland has represented a high economic cost to the British Exchequer.

⁶² John McGarry, “Northern Ireland, Civic Nationalism, and the Good Friday Agreement,” in *Northern Ireland and the Divided World*, ed. John McGarry (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 127.