Terrorism and trust in Northern Ireland

K. M. Fierke

SPECIAL SECTION

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K.M. Fierke*

School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews, UK

While terrorism produces certainty that the 'other' intends to do harm, and chronic uncertainty about the potential for terrorist attack, trust requires the negotiation of uncertainty. This paper begins with a review of the existing literature on trust and terrorism, as a point of departure for analysing the usefulness of thinking about trust as the negotiation of uncertainty. The four substantive sections that follow examine the 1981 Hunger strikes, the beginnings of political dialogue, the construction of cross-border institutions, and the potential for developing emotional trust in the Northern Irish context. In each of the areas, the development of a rudimentary trust has hinged on the destabilisation of mutually exclusive identity categories, defined in conflictual opposition to the 'other', and the opening of a space for the construction of multiple and overlapping identities and the negotiation between them.

Keywords: terrorism; trust; Northern Ireland; identity; negotiation; emotions

Introduction

> At the heart of all of the problems in Northern Ireland is mistrust. Centuries of conflict have generated hatreds that make it virtually impossible for the two communities to trust each other. Each disbelieves the other. Each assumes the worst about the other. If there is ever to be durable peace and reconciliation, what is needed is the decommissioning of mind-sets in Northern Ireland. That means that trust and confidence must be built over time by action in all parts of society. (Mitchell 1996, p. 37)

George Mitchell, chair of the independent commission for the peace talks in Northern Ireland, noted that mistrust has been at the core of the political violence there. The central role of mistrust in fuelling conflict raises a question about the importance of rebuilding trust as part of a peace process. The first section of this paper will examine the existing literature on trust and terrorism as a point of departure for analysing the usefulness of thinking about trust as the negotiation of uncertainty. While terrorism produces certainty that the 'other' intends to do harm, and chronic uncertainty about the potential for a terrorist attack, trust requires the negotiation of uncertainty. This formulation then gives rise to a number of specific questions regarding the potential subjects of trust in a divided society, which is more complex than in a stable democracy. First, how are parties whose acts have been subsumed by the terrorist label transformed into political subjects capable of engaging in the open negotiation of trust? Second, how would negotiation with words and trust in politics become possible after decades of bitter violence? Third, how is trust

*Email: kf30@st-andrews.ac.uk

invested in the institutions of a divided society, particularly when one group actively seeks to redefine not only these institutions but the sovereignty upon which they rest? Finally, there is a question about emotional trust at the more individual and societal level where loss and trauma have been a staple experience of significant portions of the population.

The four substantive sections will explore these questions, demonstrating that the potential for trust has hinged on the destabilisation of mutually exclusive identity categories, defined in conflictual opposition to the other, which has opened a space for reconstituting multiple and overlapping identities and the negotiation between them. Given space limitations, I will focus on elaborating the significance of these questions in the Northern Irish context rather than in-depth empirical analysis.

Trust and terrorism

The central question that underpins the scant literature on trust and terrorism is whether terrorism increases in-group trust or leads to a shattering of trust. Chanley (2002), for instance, argues that trust in the US government increased significantly following the attacks on 11 September 2001.[1] In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, or 7/7, there was an enhanced sense of 'Americanness' or 'Britishness', respectively.[2] In a divided society, the construction of in-group trust can go in two directions. Just as acts of 'terrorism' may consolidate the identity of those who identify with a government, acts of violence by a government directed at a group within society may consolidate in-group trust among the disenfranchised. A loss of trust that the government will protect its interests and has itself become a source of harm may then give rise to increased support for violent actions directed against the powers that be.

A loss of trust of the latter kind contributed in the early 1970s to the growing strength of the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland, particularly after Bloody Sunday when 14 unarmed civil rights protesters were shot dead by British paratroopers.[3] Richard English (2003, p. 153) notes that the available evidence about Bloody Sunday in 1972 suggested that British soldiers fired on unarmed civilians, in circumstances in which there was no serious threat to the soldiers' lives. The subsequent Widgery Report, by contrast, relied heavily on the accounts of soldiers which deviated from those given in the immediate aftermath of events on that day. Thus, the loss of trust related not only to the blood that had been shed in Derry, but also the appearance of a cover-up. English (2003, p. 151) emphasises that while Bloody Sunday was a turning point, it was the culmination of a series of events in an unfolding drama, rather than decisive in and of itself. It did, however, like other examples of British violence in Ireland, generate extensive Irish nationalist sympathy, not only in Ireland but also among Irish–American opinion, leading to extensive financial support for Noraid. After Bloody Sunday the number of people ready to support the IRA increased (Bean and Hayes 2001, p. 41).

A second strand challenges the claim that terrorism leads to greater in-group trust, particularly in the context of an ongoing terrorist campaign lasting decades (Uslaner *et al.* n.d.). One of the strategic aims of terrorism is to traumatise an enemy population and to make a society ungovernable (Solomon 2008). As Rengger (1997, p. 469) notes, many of the routines we follow in going about our day-to-day business rest on a 'presumption of trust'.[4] The taken-for-granted rules and rituals of society, which underlie assumptions that we are safe and that cooperation is possible, are shattered by the terrorist attack, and replaced by fear and uncertainty. O'Neill (2002) argues that terrorism undermines the conditions for trust less because it inflicts violence than because it spreads fear. Fear and intimidation corrode

and undermine our ability to trust. Declining trust fuels pre-emptive action. 'Terror', she argues, 'is the ultimate denial and destroyer of trust' (p. 38; see also Lindsey 2002).

An ongoing terrorist campaign erodes the bonds of trust within society and, in a divided society, within in-groups as well. This is unavoidable given the degree of secrecy upon which terrorism and counter-terrorism rest, and the culture of suspicion they generate (Lyon 2003), given anyone may be a potential terrorist. The latter point was revealed in a televised discussion in 2006 on BBC 2, presided over by South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and involving Michael Stone, a Loyalist paramilitary, and the Catholic family members of one of his victims. The family claimed that the victim had not been a member of the IRA and thus was not a legitimate target. Stone responded with a personal reflection to make the point that his own family had not been aware of his paramilitary involvement. Each morning he would dress as a builder, leave as if going to a normal construction job, and, after a day of killing, would put his overalls back on, dusting them with residues of building material before returning home. The logic: if his family was unaware of his activities, then it was perfectly possible that his victim had been an IRA member. If secrecy extends into the family, the most private form of trust is eroded.

It is the secrecy and uncertainty generated by terrorism that legitimates 'extraordinary measures', such as internment or the Diplock courts in Northern Ireland, or detentions in Guantanamo Bay, in which the normal rules of habeas corpus and due process are suspended. These technologies replace the open-ended negotiation of trust, characteristic of normal everyday political and other life, with regulation by hard and fast rules, and strict legal codes (Seligman, cited in Tonkiss and Passey 2000, p. 23).

Trust is a slippery concept in the political world. Politicians are often a focus of distrust and most people would not as a matter of course trust fellow citizens who they do not know without some evidence of the wisdom of doing so. But there is a clear distinction between the healthy caution and emphasis on accountability that characterises a democracy and the mistrust that fuels on-going violent conflict. To say that normal politics involves the open-ended negotiation of trust is not to say that it is based on certainty that others can be trusted. Indeed, trust by definition rests on a degree of uncertainty and vulnerability toward the other (Booth and Wheeler 2008). In a situation of complete certainty and safety trust would be unnecessary. Thus, in 'normal' politics trust is accompanied by some notion of accountability, potential redress in the case of harm done and an entitlement to protection by virtue of one's citizenship, all of which are enhanced by the existence of cross-cutting cleavages that create some space for independent critique and debate.

These elements of 'negotiation' largely cease to exist to varying degrees for all parties in a divided society and are replaced by near certainty that the 'other' intends to do harm, distrust that the government will provide protection, at least for a portion of the population, as revealed in the Bloody Sunday example, and a lack of accountability, given the 'extraordinary measures' that are invoked in the name of security. The inability to establish the facts surrounding political murders can exacerbate the grief and prolong the trauma of individuals who are directly impacted by the violence. In so far as 'in-group' trust exists, and is solidified by a violent interaction, it tends to fix identity and narratives about the self and other in ways that reinforce divisions within society and that gravitate against negotiation between them given the near certainty that the other intends to do harm. In conclusion, mistrust in a divided society is defined by certainty that the other intends to do harm and chronic uncertainty given the possibility that harm, in the form of a terrorist attack, can come at any moment, from anyone.

The problem of building trust is thus less one of establishing complete trustworthiness than reducing the certainty of identity classification, and the assumption of harm that

comes with it, in such a way that would make negotiation of the uncertainty possible. It requires creating reasonable doubt that the other does indeed intend to do harm and that the other, like the self, is not first and foremost subsumed by a single identity classification but is rather a human being who has many possible identities. While the degree of certainty or uncertainty surrounding some notion of trust is difficult to measure, one place to analyse the negotiation process is in the use of language. In this respect, trust is not purely something in the minds of individuals but is part of a negotiation in which violent interaction is replaced by an engagement with words.

One does not have to spend much time in Northern Ireland to recognise the importance of language. The two communities have different names for the province (Ulster or Northern Ireland versus the six counties or even the six occupied counties) or for significant cities (Londonderry versus Derry) which point toward the identification of this small piece of land with the United Kingdom or Ireland, respectively. These more territorial distinctions relate to the identity of political actors and the meaning given to acts of political violence and whether they are legitimate. Until recently the Provisional IRA claimed to be a legitimate army seeking to remove an occupying force from the north of Ireland. Nationalists, while seeking the same end, reject the use of violence. The mainstream media, loyalists and the British government branded the IRA as criminals and thugs, lacking any support from the nationalist community (Rolston and Miller 1996), while British forces have claimed the legitimacy of their own violence as representatives of a sovereign state.

As part of a 'propaganda war' by both sides, language is at the core of the mistrust that has perpetuated violence in the province. This was highlighted by the recent images of Martin McGuinness, a former IRA commander and now Deputy Minister, standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with Jeffrey Robinson, the DUP First Minister, denouncing the Real IRA members who killed two British soldiers in March 2009 as 'traitors of Ireland', who had no real support. The act was an unprecedented show of unity within Stormont, supported by popular demonstrations. McGuinness, who had a decade earlier been the object of similar accusations, was now denounced by dissident republicans for betraying the republican goal of a united Ireland, and by victims of IRA violence who called on him to account for his own bloody past. As Northern Ireland's Consultative Group on the Past explores the best way to come to terms with Northern Ireland's past, the question of the relationship between language and trust (or negotiating the dividing lines) is an important and understudied area of exploration. As the following four sections demonstrate, the destabilisation of mutually exclusive identity categories has contributed to the opening of a space for imagining or constructing multiple and overlapping identities, engaged in the 'open-ended negotiation of trust'.

Constructing the political subject

While the literature on trust and terrorism highlights the role of terrorism in building in-group trust and destroying societal trust, it does not address the problem of how those who have been categorised as 'terrorists', and thus who are, by definition, outside politics, might be transformed into political subjects.[5] A central premise of the discourse surrounding terrorism is that one does not negotiate with terrorists. Seligman (Tonkiss and Passey 2000, p. 13) argues that trust assumes a recognition of actors as individual agents, responsible for their own behaviour and capable of negotiating its effect. It is only when agency plays a major role, when it emerges as a potential for shaping the nature of interaction, that trust also plays a part in defining interpersonal relations. In this respect, before trust can become a factor, the other must be recognised as an agent capable of negotiation, which

can only come about if the terrorist label – or other labels that constitute the 'other' as dangerous and outside politics – is destabilised. The terrorist label attached to the IRA went hand in hand with a mythology that they were a small group of thugs or criminals who were lacking in any kind of public support from the nationalist community (Rolston and Miller 1996).

The extensive campaign of non-cooperation by republican prisoners in the Long Kesh Prison from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s destabilised this assumption. At the core of this campaign was a contestation over the identity of the prisoners. In 1976, following a period when republican prisoners had enjoyed 'special category status',[6] the British government introduced a policy of criminalisation, which meant that all prisoners would have to wear the prison uniform and the Officer in Command would no longer engage in negotiation with prison authorities on behalf of the prisoners. This policy change made IRA prisoners 'criminals' like any other. As Prime Minister Thatcher said, there was 'no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence' (Iqbal 2008). The republican prisoners viewed themselves as Prisoner's of War (POW), that is, as having a political status and having the rights that accompany this category.

In the first stage of the protest the prisoners refused to wear the prison uniform and instead clothed themselves in blankets. The campaign later escalated to a dirty protest, in which their own excrement was smeared on the walls of their cells, and finally, to the weapon of last resort, the hunger strike.[7] Outside the prison, massive demonstrations, reminiscent of the civil rights movement, coalesced in support of the prisoners. When a nationalist MP unexpectedly died, Bobby Sands, the Officer in Command and the first to begin the 1981 Hunger Strike, was put forward for the vacant seat. After he was elected by 30 000 people, it became difficult to sustain the myth that the republicans had no support. The electoral success also made it increasingly difficult for the 'absentionists' within the IRA to argue against any kind of involvement in electoral politics, thereby opening the way for the development of Sinn Féin as a separate political and electoral voice for the Republican movement. What began as a struggle over the naming of republican prisoners, that is, whether they should be categorised as criminals or prisoners of war, was transformed over time, and particularly with the death of Sands, into a broader international question about who the criminal was: the Thatcher government or the IRA hunger strikers.

Trust involves vulnerability in so far as there is always some chance of being harmed by the other, although it usually begins with a relative certainty that this will not be the case. Terrorism rests on a high degree of certainty that trust is not warranted, given the intention of the other to do harm. As elements of a 'non-violent' strategy, the various forms of non-cooperation, by contrast, involved accepting harm to the self while refusing to do harm in response. As Padraig O'Malley (1990) said of the 'blanket men' in the Maze Prison, for every hardship inflicted on them:

> they were prepared to inflict a hardship of at least equal severity on themselves, thus devaluing the system's power to intimidate them. Their willingness to deprive themselves undermined the authority of the regime to do so. Whatever debasement or humiliation the regime might impose on them in the form of punishment was nothing compared to what they were prepared to impose on themselves in the form of protest. (pp. 22–23)

The acts of resistance were part of a struggle over the meaning to be inscribed on the suffering prisoner's body, that is, whether they were to be constituted as deviants, and

thereby depoliticised and delegitimised, or as political agents engaged in legitimate resistance and capable of negotiating over the conditions in which they lived.[8] The hunger strike was a weapon of last resort after a campaign of non-cooperation lasting over four years, and culminating in the ultimate self sacrifice of death, which was presented as proof that the hungers strikers were motivated by the strength of their convictions rather than self interest. As a result of the hunger strikes, Sands was entrusted with the representation of the people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

The hunger strike, which has a long history in Ireland,[9] began to be used as a political weapon by IRA prisoners around the time of the 1916 Easter rising.[10] Unlike its use by Gandhi in India, where the hunger strike was part of an explicitly non-violent campaign, the Irish hunger strikes were embedded in an IRA military campaign. In this respect, the tradition of non-violent hunger strikes in prison was in tension with the campaign of terrorist violence outside. The psychology of the hunger strike in the Irish context was summed up by Terence MacSwiney, Mayor of Cork, who starved himself to death in 1920: 'The context is one . . . of endurance. It is not those who inflict the most but those who endure the most who will conquer. Those whose faith is strong will endure and in the end triumph' (Witherow 1981).

Given this tension, it is perhaps not surprising that the IRA escalated its violent campaign in the aftermath of the hunger strikes rather than building on the non-violent political momentum that had developed during them. Nonetheless, a political space was opened that had not previously existed. The stance of the IRA before 1981 was that they would not be involved in electoral or constitutional politics outside a 32-county sovereign independent democracy. The hunger strikes opened a discussion among republicans about the possibility of electoral involvement, although abandoning the armed struggle was not on the table. As Martin McGuinness stated in 1984, it was the combination of 'armalite and the ballot box' that would achieve freedom, but there was no doubt, in his view, that the military was more important, since elections would not bring British withdrawal (English 2003, p. 245).

The Thatcher administration was also not prepared to think too far outside the box. It had been shamed worldwide for its policies in Northern Ireland, appearing heartless in allowing a Westminster MP to die in prison. After the death of Sands, there were significant questions in the public and international mind about who the criminal was, and whether Britain was breaking its own laws in Northern Ireland. But the problem remained the same as it had been from the beginning: any concession to the political status of the prisoners constituted an acknowledgement of IRA violence, which would have caused outrage, not least among the Protestant majority in the North. The hunger strikes were, however, one impetus to the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed by Thatcher a few years later, which gave Ireland consultative status in the North for the first time.

Constructing trust in politics

The Brighton bomb was referred to by Danny Morrison (quoted in *The Times* 2001) as 'the hunger strikes coming home to roost for Mrs. Thatcher'. It took another decade of bitter violence on both sides before there was another opening. But the existence of Sinn Féin as a distinct body, in theory if not always in practice, and the opening of consultative status with the south, were important foundations for the process that later emerged. Why Northern Ireland moved toward a peace process in the 1990s is one kind of question. The problem of trust raises a question of a different kind. How, after an extended period of tit for tat violence, would it be possible to move from talk with weapons to negotiation with

words? It is not enough for all sides to agree they are tired of war. The participants also have to extricate themselves from ingrained patterns of behaviour and a habit of mistrust.

The first such habit was the practice of refusing to speak with 'terrorists', which made any involvement of Sinn Féin politically impossible. While Sinn Féin had become a political presence, the strategy of 'armalite and ballot box' continued to pose problems for the party's inclusion. During the Hunger Strikes the inflexibility of the Thatcher administration and their unwillingness to recognise the strikers as political prisoners, even as they were dying, grew out of a belief that any acknowledgement of the republican strikers would constitute an acknowledgement of IRA violence. As Thatcher (Prime Minister's Questions 1981) said, the government could never concede political status because it would be a licence to kill innocent men, women and children. The sustained campaign of violence that followed only reinforced this logic, although there was a prevalent view among both republicans and unionists that the use of physical force had secured Sinn Féin's place at the talks that later emerged (Aughey 2005, p. 84).[11] But, as John Hume (Millar 2009, p. 19), who was already in the late 1980s advocating dialogue, said 'you can't expect anyone to sit around a table with someone who reserves the right to pull a gun if he doesn't get his own way'. While Sinn Féin's connection to politics was a precondition of the peace process, it also became one of its greatest stumbling blocks (Blair, cited Millar 2009, p. 131).

In 1990 Gerry Adams wrote what he referred to as a 'Dear John' letter to the incoming Prime Minister John Major arguing for the need for dialogue in order to find a way out of the violence. This was the point of departure for constructing a back channel for secret communications between the British government and the IRA, authorised by Major in 1990,[12] even while the armed conflict continued and even intensified in Northern Ireland. This back channel, referred to as 'the link', played a crucial role in preparing Irish republicans and the government for the direct dialogue that would come later during formal negotiations in 1997 (Cockrane 2008, p. 86). The peace process was preceded by a political dialogue between the constitutional parties which was initiated in 1991 by Secretary of State Peter Brooke. His successor in 1992, Sir Patrick Mayhew, continued the process.[13]

The second was a pattern of behaviour characterised by recalcitrance and an inability to compromise. As Aughey (2005, p. 41) notes, a sustainable and workable compromise in Northern Ireland required modifying the game of winning and losing. He identifies three related tendencies, shared by both sides, which constituted the difficulty of achieving political stability: first, a culture of non-negotiable demands, which second, resulted in an intensification of partisanship, as it became difficult to distinguish negotiable and non-negotiable demands, and third, a reductionist view of politics in which all argument was related to the ultimate and non-negotiable demand. Learning how to negotiate and compromise has been part and parcel of moving beyond the two mutually exclusive stories of unionists and loyalists, on the one hand, and republicans and nationalists, on the other. In this respect, learning how to trust is a process of learning how to negotiate and compromise.

Following 30 years of the 'Troubles', which had been defined by this culture, the Belfast Agreement attempted to shift away from a politics defined by winning and losing toward a politics defined by sharing risks and jointly managing uncertainties (Aughey 2005, p. 44). This was no small task given the two traditions in Northern Ireland were marked by two distinct ideologies, resulting in dramatically opposed interpretations of almost any event, as well as very different criteria for what counts as a fair political compromise (Todd 1995, pp. 165–164). Perhaps most important, the perspective that victory and defeat, and mastery or humiliation were the inevitable outcome of any negotiation or any politics, had to be replaced by a willingness to compromise or to identify a new way of framing possibilities that transcended the restrictions of the non-negotiable demands.

As much as actors in a conflict situation may want a change, there is a tendency to be drawn back in, not least because they have acquired a habit of mistrust. Precisely because parties to a conflict are trapped in its logic, and reproduce it through their practices, they needed to be guided out of it.[14] George Mitchell, as the chair of the peace process, created the context for this process to begin. Requiring participants to renounce the use of violence set the stage for a rudimentary trust in two respects. First, if trust relates to a perception of the other's intentions, this framework created reasonable doubt that the other intended to do harm, which was later reinforced by acts of decommissioning. Second, Mitchell became a vehicle for beginning the delicate process of talking face to face. War is a situation where trust in words has collapsed and is replaced with communication through violence. The peace talks provided a rudimentary structure of accountability and trust in politics.

A further condition for the construction of trust in politics is the willingness of key actors to take what Booth and Wheeler (2008, pp. 234–237) refer to as a 'leap in the dark'. This usually involves people of courage, conviction and vision, who act despite an awareness that they may be rebuffed, exposed or betrayed. Mo Mowlan, for instance, took a leap in the dark in 1998 when, in an effort to maintain the loyalist ceasefire and their interest in dialogue, which had begun to wane, she took the unprecedented political risk of visiting loyalist prisoners in the Maze. The act has been widely viewed as the greatest political risk taken by the Northern Ireland Secretary during her tenure, as well as a critical turning point for the negotiations that eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998 (Cockrane 2008, p. 93). Equally risky was the agreement of David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, to the Good Friday Agreement without prior weapons decommissioning by the IRA. This 'leap in the dark' resulted in a major split in the party and his eventual resignation as the UUP leader.

Constructing cross-national institutions

One can ask whether any society expects trust between politicians. Here several distinctions are useful. First, voters entrust politicians to represent them, as already discussed in the case of the hunger strikers. Second, politicians need not necessarily trust each other as individuals to trust in the institutions in which they operate. It is on this level that trust is far more problematic in a divided society. The goal of the republican movement, and nationalists more generally, has always been a united Ireland. The initial refusal to participate in constitutional or electoral politics was replaced after the hunger strikes with a willingness to stand for election, while still abstaining from sitting in Westminster. Sinn Féin now participates in the devolved government of Northern Ireland, the war has been declared over by the Provisional IRA, if not the Continuity and Real IRA, and the end of a united Ireland has taken an explicitly political path. But this institutional structure rests on a fracture, given the fundamental question of whether Irish or UK institutions will ultimately provide the foundation for politics in Northern Ireland.

Within a state centric model, the solution might be the clear identification of Northern Ireland with a state, that is, either the United Kingdom or Ireland or to seek independent status for the province. Indeed, this state-centric approach has most often informed attempts to address conflict. Following the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia, the sovereignty of the former republics was recognised, including most recently in Kosovo, which had been an autonomous region. The most frequently discussed resolution to the conflict in Israel/Palestine is a two-state solution. South Africa rewrote its constitution and the truth and reconciliation process became part of building the post-Apartheid nation.

The obvious problem in the case of Northern Ireland is that the solution cannot be the same as the problem that has driven the conflict. Nationalists and republicans could not accept the status quo, given a history of discrimination against Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland. While nationalists and republicans imagine a single Irish nation whose self-determination remains to be realised, unionists have suspected that this political project was intended to defeat, marginalise and destroy them. The latter believed that only in union with the UK could there be a proper accommodation of cultural and religious diversity (Aughey 2005, p. 40).

The question is how the conflict between these two mutually exclusive options could be destabilised, such that movement toward an alternative would become thinkable. In the late 1980s, John Hume, leader of the nationalist SDLP, articulated the problem as a failure to resolve relationships, including the central relationship between unionists and the rest of the island, the relationship between Ireland and Britain, and relationships within the North (Hume, in Millar 2009, p. 3). In this statement, Hume shifts away from the definition of endpoints to a focus on relationships and processes of negotiation. The failure to resolve relationships was inextricable from particular habits of relating and communicating, as discussed in the last section.

The seeds of a new conception of the relationship between North and South were planted with the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which was co-signed on 15 November 1985 in Hillsborough, Co. Down, by UK Prime Minister Thatcher and Republic of Ireland Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald. The agreement affirmed that Northern Ireland's status would only be altered with the consent of the majority there, while acknowledging that a majority of the Northern Irish people did not at the time want to change the status quo. It established an intergovernmental conference, which would provide a forum for London and Dublin to address a wide range of issues related to the North. The agreement meant an ongoing consultative role for the Republic in the affairs of Northern Ireland (English 2003, p. 240). Thatcher hoped the Agreement, would weaken the IRA, to the benefit of the nationalist SDLP, by strengthening cooperation with Ireland over security issues, relating in particular to the North/South border (English 2003, p. 241).

Republicans saw the agreement 'as designed to isolate and defeat republicans' (Adams 1985). While suspicious that it was a means to maintain partition, the IRA was receptive to the concessions it represented and attempted to claim that these were the result of republican actions. Nationalists and republicans believed that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would lead in the direction of joint authority between Dublin and London, removing political responsibility from Northern Ireland, which encouraged Sinn Féin in its political efforts given the promise of alienating and marginalising the unionists (Aughey 2005, p. 66). Unionists hated the Anglo-Irish Agreement and felt betrayed because they were not included in its production or even consulted (English 2003, p. 243). The Agreement appeared to them to provide the Irish State and northern nationalism with a mechanism to manoeuvre unionism into a permanently losing position. It did, however, encourage a side of unionism that was favourable to externalisation of Northern Ireland's problem through direct rule from London, reinforcing arguments that peace and stability required that Northern Ireland be governed in the same way as the rest of the UK. As the Unionist John Taylor (Millar 2009, p. 49) pointed out, the weakness of the Anglo-Irish agreement was that it only included a Dublin–London axis. Belfast, the most important player in the political scene, was totally ignored.

Further joint declarations and framework documents in following years, such as the Downing Street Declaration of 1993 and the Frameworks of the Future Document of 1995, were designed to establish the principle that the future of Northern Ireland should be

determined by consent and that the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland should be paramount in determining the future (Millar 2009, p. 91). The Downing Street Declaration of 1993 conceded the abstract principle of self determination to the Irish population (the nationalist position) while also holding to the existing principle of self determination for the 'greater number' in Northern Ireland, which was the unionist position. In this respect the self-determination of Irish people was balanced by the need for consent within Northern Ireland (Aughey 2005, p. 55). The Frameworks for the Future document of February 1995 set out a 'shared discussion and negotiation involving the Northern Ireland parties, and proposed to facilitate present and future interconnections on the Island, while calling for new North–South institutions that would lead to 'agreed dynamic, new cooperative and constructive relationships'. These initiatives represented an acknowledgement of the SDLP claim that there could be no exclusively internal solution to the Northern Irish problem and that an Irish dimension was crucial to any settlement (Aughey 2005, p. 57).[15]

The Belfast Agreement, which was signed on 10 April 1998, further expanded the web of relationships, including to the United States, given the central role played by George Mitchell and President Bill Clinton. It established a Northern Irish Assembly and Executive with a First, Deputy First and other ministers. The North–South dimension took the form of a North–South Ministerial Council involving those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish government, to develop consultation, cooperation and action on the island. An East–West dimension was represented in the British–Irish Council which included representatives from Scotland and Wales, and was 'to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands.' Commitments were made to human rights and equality in the north, a process of decommissioning paramilitary weapons, a police service that could build and sustain support from the community as a whole, and accelerated release of paramilitary prisoners. As English (2003, p. 297–298) notes, the Belfast Agreement was sold to different people on very different terms. Republicans saw it as transitional to a united Ireland. Unionist supporters saw it as a barrier precisely against such a development. This ability to interpret the document in a variety ways was central to its 'constructive ambiguity'.[16]

Since the agreement, the two more extreme parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin have increased in popularity at the expense of the more moderate unionist and national parties. The sectarian divisions within society have also hardened, which suggests that the level of societal mistrust remains high. While the fracture is being managed within a consociational structure, there remains a question about the scope for rethinking identity beyond the mutually exclusive choice of being either British or Irish, particularly since many residents of Northern Ireland are citizens of both countries. Several Irish prime ministers have situated northern identity in the context of the European Union. But it is not only that Britain and Ireland are a part of the European Union, thereby making the choice of one sovereignty over the other less significant than it would otherwise be. More importantly, the seeds of a post-nationalist identity have been planted, of becoming increasingly interconnected through cross-border initiatives and institutions. In this respect, the north of Ireland has the potential to be a positive experiment in what it means to trust in post-nationalist institutions in an increasingly interdependent world.

Constructing emotional trust

A final level of trust is more emotional. It is emotional in terms of identity, or the definition of the community to which one belongs. It is also emotional because of the legacy of suffering that accompanies war. Over 3500 people, out of a population of 1.5 million,

have since the late 1960s been killed in the context of the Northern Irish conflict. According to official statistics for the period, 40 000 people have been injured, although the number is undoubtedly higher (Morrissey and Smyth 2002, p. 3). The question is how to deal with this past so as to reduce the likelihood that it will play a role in constructing future conflict.[17] The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission is often presented as a model. The truth and reconciliation process rested on the African concept of *Ubuntu* which means humanness and an inclusive sense of community that values everyone. This sense of inclusiveness, of a society of human beings, remains problematic in Northern Ireland.

A few years ago there was a televised discussion of the potential for a truth and reconciliation process in Northern Ireland which devolved into a debate over which side had suffered more (BBC 2003). Only a few women in the audience, such as Monica McWilliams of the Women's Coalition, reinforced the importance of the humanity of all victims and the delicate process of reconstructing human relationships that had been bitterly torn apart. The otherwise divisive tone of the discussion suggested that a TRC would simply fan the mistrust underlying the conflict. This raises a question less of how Protestants or Catholics might learn to trust one another than how these categories could be destabilised such that human relationships, or the potential for trust, are no longer defined by them. Attempts to redefine divisions in terms of pro-versus anti-Agreement, as distinct from Catholic versus Protestant, have made it possible for people in the 'new Northern Ireland to come together, albeit tentatively at first, on a newly defined basis' (Morrissey and Smyth 2002, p. 16).

But the Protestant/Catholic labels overlap with another opposition, shared by both sides, which is more intractable, given its direct linkage to the emotional roots of the conflict. As Aughey (2005, p. 11) notes, unionists and nationalists have shared a feeling of victimhood which has emotionally served to displace responsibility for their own actions onto others and has politically encouraged a helpless attitude of accepting that the history of destruction was natural. According to Morrissey and Smyth (2002, pp. 4–5), Northern Ireland's culture of victimhood is characterised by two main trends: universalism and inclusivism. On the one hand, most who lived through the Troubles have been harmed by this experience of three decades, even if they were not directly the target of violence. On the other hand, a culture of victimhood drives both loyalism and republicanism. Paramilitaries in both categories make use of their status as victim to justify recourse to armed violence. In this respect, the category of victim is both interchangeable with, and in stark opposition to, that of terrorist, and this is as much an element of shared practice as the culture of winning and losing. The continuing rawness of emotions in a situation where so many people have died was reflected in the response to the proposal of the Consultative Group on the Past in 2009 to pay families of all victims of the Troubles, regardless of their political affiliations, a sum of £12 000. The proposal met with so much hostility that it had to be abandoned. One of the central concerns was that families of terrorists would be treated on equal terms with families of innocent victims.

A central question raised in the aforementioned debate regarding a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was whether the harm done by the state, for instance, in the massacre of Bloody Sunday or the collusion of security forces in loyalist violence, should be judged more harshly, given the state's obligation in international law to protect its citizens,[18] or whether the existence of a private army, i.e. the IRA, involved in terrorist activities, is a phenomenon that simply cannot be condoned in a civilized state. How one answers this question has consequences for how victims and terrorists are defined and how the hierarchy between victims is constituted. In so far as the Truth and Reconciliation

model assumes the possibility of reconstructing a singular story, albeit based on multiple voices, in which the past is acknowledged and placed in the past, it may not be the most appropriate model for Northern Ireland. One of the crucial ingredients of the Northern Irish peace process has been the acceptance and acknowledgement of the two traditions and multiple stories about the past. The structure of efforts to place this past in the past has thus necessarily emphasised the diverse needs of victims, and the construction of different venues within which people have an opportunity to tell their stories.

The report of Northern Ireland's Consultative Group on the Past (Northern Ireland Affairs Committee 2009), formed in 2007 by Peter Hain, the then Secretary of State to Northern Ireland, highlights this multiplicity along with the relationship between the mistrust of the past and the need to build trust: 'the past should be dealt with in a manner which enables society to become more defined by its desire for true and lasting reconciliation rather than by division and mistrust, seeking to promote a shared and reconciled future for all.' To this end, one the group's main recommendations was to establish an independent Legacy Commission to deal with the legacy of the past by combining processes of reconciliation, justice and information recovery, with the overall objective of promoting peace and stability in Northern Ireland. The mandate of the committee would consist of four strands of work, including helping society towards a shared and reconciled future, reviewing and investigating historical cases, conducting a process of information recovery and examining linked and thematic cases emerging from the conflict. The chair of the committee would also play an active role in promoting cross-sectoral activity relating to sectarianism, remembering activities, such as storytelling, memorialising and a day of reflection, work with young people to ensure they have the skills to ensure the past will not be repeated, the provision of improved services to deal with trauma, suicide and addiction issues attributable to the conflict, ensuring the distribution of economic benefit in post-conflict Northern Ireland to deprived areas, and ensuring a right of return for those exiled during the conflict.

The Northern Irish peace process has so far foregone the attempt to reach closure around a single story that is accepted by all. While the multiple stories and activities surrounding the Legacy Commission may seem messy, and lacking in discrete beginnings and endings, it may perhaps in the long run be more conducive to the construction of a civil society where multiplicity and diversity transcend the bitter divisions that have sustained this conflict over decades or even centuries.

Conclusions

This article has identified a common theme that has underpinned the process of moving from terrorism to a rudimentary trust in Northern Ireland, that is, the destabilisation of mutually exclusive identity categories, thereby opening a space for multiple and overlapping identities and the negotiation of uncertainty between them. First, the 1981 Hunger Strikes in the Maze Prison destabilised the characterisation of republican prisoners as 'terrorists' and 'criminals', creating a space for the political subjectivity of Sinn Féin. This recognition of republicans as political agents was a necessary condition for their later participation, albeit following a further period of violence, in the peace process.

Second, movement toward a political dialogue, and with it learning how to negotiate and compromise, destabilised patterns of interaction and habits of mistrust that rested on the mutually exclusive options of winning or losing, humiliating or being humiliated. George Mitchell, as an independent mediator, helped to construct a space where parties to the conflict could develop a rudimentary trust in politics, moving away from certainty that

the other intended to do harm, and the perpetual uncertainty of living with terrorism, toward the negotiation of political uncertainty.

Third, the attempt to construct cross-border institutions destabilised the mutually exclusive choice between the UK and Ireland as the loci of sovereignty – even while it remains formally a part of the former – shifting the focus away from sovereign endpoints toward a process of constructing relationships and negotiating uncertainty, and thus trust, within them.

Finally, the attempt to come to terms with Northern Ireland's past has begun to destabilise the mutually exclusive categories of Protestant and Catholic, as well as that of terrorist and victim. Rather than seeking the construction of a single story of the past, emphasis has been placed on the diverse needs of victims and the construction of multiple venues for addressing these. In this respect, negotiation of uncertainty in the future rests on an acceptance and acknowledgement of multiple stories and their coexistence, resisting a closure about the past which has on each side fuelled the conflict.

The Northern Irish process is interesting precisely because it defies any solution that would rest on the recognition of a singular sovereign identity. In this respect, the negotiation of uncertainty, as the basis for trust, is the only way forward. This provides both a positive experiment in post-nationalist and post-sectarian identity, and raises a question about the prevalent assumption that sovereignty can provide a more complete certainty and security. The process of reconstructing human relations and trust, arguably by definition, is always based on the negotiation of uncertainty rather than its elimination.

Notes

1. Silberstein (2002) points to a popular poster in the post-9/11 period that showed Americans of all colours united and reaffirmed in their common identity as Americans.
2. A discourse analysis of the British press in the immediate aftermath of 7/7 similarly revealed a celebration of 'Britishness', defined by openness and diversity, and which did not distinguish Muslims (Fierke 2007). The attackers were portrayed as deranged criminals, outside the community – and neither real Brits nor real Muslims. The relationship was not stable, in either context, however. Particularly by the time of the cartoon crisis, Muslims had taken a distinct place within the British discourse where they were separated into good and bad categories.
3. Originally it was 13; the 14th died a few months later.
4. While his focus is actually international norms, regimes and regulations, the point is even stronger in relation to domestic society where these are more taken for granted.
5. Edwards and Bloomer (2008) point out that the question of how communities traditionally sympathetic to paramilitarism are now making moves toward abandoning the option of 'armed struggle' has been under-explored by academics and examine related questions in the period following the Belfast Agreement.
6. Special Category status was viewed by Republicans as political status in all but name. The status granted privileges to prisoners convicted of 'scheduled offences', such as wearing their own clothing, associating with fellow prisoners, and being relieved of prison work. The officer in Command, as representative of the prisoners, was recognised by the prison administration and negotiated directly with authorities.
7. For an in-depth account of the hunger strikes, see Morrison (2006), Beresford (1994), O'Malley (1990) and O'Rawe (2005).
8. For a more in-depth analysis of this dynamic, and a more extensive discussion of this case, see Fierke (2009).
9. The mythology of the hunger strikes fuses elements of the legal code of ancient Ireland, with self-denial, which is a central feature of Irish Catholicism, and the endurance and sacrifice that has been a trademark of Irish Catholicism (O'Malley 1990, pp. 22–23).
10. The first was in 1913 by James Connolly, whose fast ensured his quick release from prison. The Republican Thomas Ashe was imprisoned after the Easter rising and refused to work or wear prison clothing. His death was immediately viewed as a martyrdom and part of the heroic

legacy of the 1916 rebels whose execution transformed the political situation in Ireland (O'Malley 1990, p. 26).

11. This was particularly true of bombs exploded at Canary Wharf in London on 4 February 1996, which caused damage estimated at £85 million. Aughey (2005, p. 33) refers to this as the 'bombs in London myth', which is associated with a claim that the IRA forced the British Government to the negotiating table. He reverses the relationship, claiming that in fact the Republicans forced their own way to the negotiating table but by the time they did, the main question was not British withdrawal, as they would have liked, but IRA decommissioning.

12. The Major Government maintained a sort of double-speak, publicly claiming its unwillingness to speak with the IRA until they implemented a unilateral ceasefire, which it was still claiming in November 1993, when the secret talks broke down, after being made public in a context of mutual recrimination.

13. Longley (1993, p. 22) claims that the Brookes/Mayhew talks failed because they lacked an adequate language, which suggests the need for a new discourse within which mutual understanding would be possible (Lee 1993, p. 25).

14. For a more extended discussion of this point, see Fierke (2005).

15. As the Irish Government had not as yet given a firm commitment to changing Articles 2 and 3 of its Constitution, which made a territorial claim on Northern Ireland, the issue of cross-border institutions became a focus of concern in the aftermath of the framework document.

16. Mitchell Reiss (2005), US Special Envoy to Northern Ireland, commented on the potential for constructive ambiguity in the Northern Irish negotiations: 'Once the negotiations come out of the shadows, "constructive ambiguity" may be a valuable tool for embedding the peace process even while violence continues. It allows the terrorist groups to tell its supporters that it has not compromised its objectives, but is instead exploring the possibility of achieving them through political as well as military means. Clever moderates in terrorist groups can use constructive ambiguity to enhance their legitimacy and widen their appeal. . . . For the government and other parties, constructive ambiguity allows the authorities to take a gesture by the terrorists – such as a cease-fire declaration – and use it as grounds for publicly dealing with former political untouchables.'

17. For an in-depth discussion of the role of memory and trauma in how the past in Northern Ireland is understood, see Dawson (2007).

18. As McKittrick et al. (2008, p. 14) note, 'Although most of the killings were the work of republican groups and loyalist paramilitary organisations, one of the deepest sources of resentment and sense of injustice was to be found among some of the several hundred families which lost members at the hands of the security forces. The perception that soldiers carried out unjustified killings, and escaped prosecution for them, has appeared to be one of the deepest well-springs of the troubles.'

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