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Things Fall Apart: Constructing the Bridge Between Psychology and the Irish Troubles

by
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"We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love, one another." [2] Jonathan Swift

Abstract

In William Butler Yeats' brilliant play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* the old woman states, "Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet, but there is no quiet in my heart."[3] The statement encompasses the weight that rising generations of intergroup conflict-ridden nations carry on their backs. But to what extend have developing generations in nations plagued by sectarian violence been influenced psychologically? Further, what is the relationship between these psychological consequences and adolescent belief about former conflict? Using the model of Northern Ireland following the 1998 Belfast Agreement, these questions can begin to be adequately answered. The prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in adolescent generations following the conflict can be used as a tool to determine psychological implications of intergroup conflict. The objectives of this research explore the causes, etiology, and symptom outcomes for persons diagnosed with post-traumatic-stress-disorder following violent intergroup conflict. This is built on a discussion of the history and impact of the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. Finally, an analysis is carried out suggesting the psychosocial factors that have followed periods of peace in the region and the relationship to adolescent beliefs about the former conflict. It is posited that memories

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[2] Colin Leach and Wendy R. Williams, "Group Identity and Conflicting Expectations of the Future in Northern Ireland," Political Psychology 20.4 (1999): 877. JSTOR.
[3] William Butler Yeats. "The Major Works," *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 215, lines 134-5.

of fear, oppression, and animosity can become extraordinarily powerful and catalyze violence, even though in many cases the individuals have deceived themselves into believing one particular group is the enemy. Most importantly, these memories are, in many cases, passed down generationally, and can therefore inhibit the ability for society to mend its age-old wounds.

Keywords: epigenetics, the Troubles, collective memory, PTSD

Introduction

In 1727, two hundred and forty years before the outbreak of the Troubles, Irish author Jonathan Swift came to this conclusion. Swift did not experience the horrors of 1916 or the trauma of Bloody Sunday, but he obviously picked up on the animosity between Irish Protestants and Catholics that existed long before and after his lifetime. The violence in Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to 1998 was not rooted in new ideas, rather a culmination of centuries' work of fear and hatred. The Troubles were not a stand-alone piece rather the final movement of a long symphony. Although the period has been extensively analyzed from a sociological, political, and historical perspective, little attention has been given to the traumatic impact of these events on the Irish psyche.

Perhaps there is a different lens to look through to answer this question, one that is very rarely used when analyzing historical and political events; science, specifically psychology. Through the analysis of individual and collective memories along with psychological case studies, the extent of the trauma of the period can be revealed.

Historical Background

The intense animosity between Irish Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists was born long before the twentieth century, and can be traced back to the English Protestant Reformation which allowed these two distinct identities to emerge. Yet, the spark that would ignite centuries of hate occurred in Ulster in July of 1690. The Battle of the Boyne permanently cemented the distinction between what it meant to be Protestant and what it meant to be Catholic in Ireland. The battle for

Ulster was much more than two monarchs fighting over a crown, rather two religions clashing over superiority. When William of Orange (Protestant) defeated James (Catholic) the history of hatred in Ireland was born. To this day, every anniversary of this battle is celebrated, marking the defeat of Catholics over Protestants in Ulster. After the Battle of the Boyne, Irish society became polarized based on religious affiliation and provided the fuel for further chaos and rebellion.

In 1966, fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising, Ian Paisley founded the Protestant Unionist Party and the Ulster Protestant Volunteers. Just as the Nationalist cause was beginning to grow in numbers, the Unionist party was becoming stronger and more structured. It was also at this time that the Ulster Volunteer Force was created, a Protestant militant group. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was founded in 1967 demanding "British rights for British citizens," and with its creation it became clear that the sentiments of nationalists were now becoming much more far reaching. In 1968 during a civil rights march in Derry, protesters clashed with the Northern Irish police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and in 1969 another protest was met with confrontation. Yet, the first taste of the stereotypic violence of the Troubles occurred in August of 1969 when sectarian rioting in Derry and Belfast led to British troops being sent out to "protect" Catholic homes.

The introduction of internment without proper trial in 1971 sparked outcry from Catholic Nationalists, and now offenders could be sent directly to the Maze prison. Only a decade later, Bobby Sands and others died in the Maze prison while on a hunger strike, causing outcry (both in Northern Ireland and around the world) against the British, and sympathy for the republican movement. The most influential event of the Troubles occurred on January 30, 1927 when British soldiers shot down thirteen protesters during a civil rights march in Derry. This event, much like 1916, marked a turning point for the Troubles. Nationalists now had more fuel than ever to fight back. As stated in the Guardian newspaper after the shooting, "Those soldiers shot down innocent men. What on earth will happen to us now?" The sense of chaos and lack of control in Northern Ireland throughout the 1970s

created an environment that generated more sectarian anxiety, which ultimately led to more violence.

This violence and shattering of social structure did not end anytime soon after it started. Rather, it raged on for almost three decades. Although many believe the 1998 Belfast Agreement and ceasefire to mark the end of the Troubles, sectarian violence in Northern Ireland exists to this day, leaving both those living in Northern Ireland and around the world asking the same question; why?

Collective Memory

The role of the myth is fundamentally important to history; be it Cuchulainn, St. Patrick, or Brian Boru. However, the myth of Ireland itself has given the Irish people a sense of national identity. Identity and cultural memory can only flourish in a dual existence. [4] This dual existence is essential to the creation of a national history and, "maintaining the imagined community of nationhood." [5] The figure of "Mother Ireland" gave the Irish a sense of unity. The notion of the Irish spirit as a motherly figure awaiting her independence provided the Irish something for which to fight. In W.B. Yeats' play *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, a old woman meant to personify Ireland, comes knocking for help on a family's door. She proclaims, "Sometimes my feet are tired and my hands are quiet but there is no quiet in my heart." [6] Yeats' portrayal of the Irish spirit captures its long history of defeat and oppression, but also its longing to hold on to what it means to be Irish at heart. Because of this strong sense of identity, historical memory has become important to modern Irish sentiments. Walter Benjamin describes memory as, "not an instrument for exploring the past but its

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[4] Brian Conway, "Active Remembering, Selective Forgetting, and Collective Memory: The Case of Bloody Sunday", Identity: An international Journal of Theory and Research 3, no. 4 (2003): 11.

[5] James H. Liu and Denis J. Hilton, "How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics", The British Journal of Social Psychology 44, (Dec 2005): 539. ProQuest.

[6] William Butler Yeats, *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, (1902).

theater."[7] It is undeniable that the "theater" of Irish history has profoundly influenced the Troubles.

When William of Orange defeated King James at the Boyne, he secured a permanent Protestant influence in Ulster. This battle was more than a bump in the road for Irish Catholics, it was a severely traumatic event. When a traumatic event like this happens, the control over history is seemingly shattered for the "losing" group. [8] This loss of control can often times lead a population to lose their sense of collective meaning.

The "losers" more often than not are humiliated by their defeat and begin to view themselves as the victims of the actions of another group. In turn, the event is now a chosen trauma. As Pick explains, the group may not consciously see themselves as victims, rather, "it may subsequently draw the mental representation of trauma into its identity." [9] Further, because a chosen trauma so heavily influences how a group of people feel about an event, it becomes seemingly heritable, usually because of the inability to cope with or mourn a loss. Conversely, the people that emerge victorious often remembers the occasion as a chosen glory. The overwhelming sense of superiority associated with defeating another group often arouses an enemy mentality. Pick defines a chosen glory as, "a defining event in a nation's history that is singled out as a source of pride." [10]

The Battle of the Boyne represents how religious discontent in Ireland has influenced centuries of collective belief. It was the Catholic attempt to, "break the foreign yoke, to exterminate the Saxon colony, to sweep away the Protestant Church, and to restore the soil to its ancient proprietors." [11] With their hopes crushed, the influential myth of the Boyne was born. Malinkowski suggests that, "myth comes into play

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[7] Michael Mays, *Nation States: The Cultures of Irish Nationalism* (Lanham: Rowman &Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 15.
[8] Thomas M Pick, "The Myth of Trauma/ The Trauma of Myth: Myths as Mediators of Some Long-Term Effects of War Trauma" , Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 7, no. 3 (2001): 201. PsychArticles.
[9] Ibid, 202.
[10] Ibid, 203.
[11] Ibid, 212.

when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demand justification." [12] Just as Catholics demanded justification for their loss, Protestants yearned for further justification that there were the innately superior group. The trauma suffered by the Catholics at the battle and the inability to mourn their loss juxtaposed with the glorified victory of the Protestants is the perfect recipe for conflict. The collective memory of each group became so exaggerated that it not only retains the idea of the opposite being the hated enemy, it also forbids progression. For as each anniversary of the defeat of James, each group is reaffirmed of their discontent with their created, 'enemy'.

Likewise, opposing collective memories associated with 1916 have had a profound impact on the violence of the Troubles. Just as with the Boyne, Catholic nationalists were traumatized be their defeat. Once again they became the victims of the oppressive Protestant/British forces, and once again their sense of control was shattered. Although the Easter Rising was not supported by all Catholics, its leaders became idols for the Nationalist cause. The spirit of the event is for a noble cause, a cause that all Irish Catholics had to be emotionally invested in some way. The painted picture of Padraig Pearse reading the Declaration for Irish Independence in the General Post Office, of men willing to giving their lives for freedom and independence, the image of James Connolly propped up in a chair, too wounded to stand, facing the firing squad as punishment for standing up for his beliefs. [13] For Catholics it would have been almost impossible not to feel some sort of pride in nationalist causes after the event. Pearse's poem "The Mother", written for his mother while awaiting execution, embodies the pathos surrounding the rebellion. He writes that those who have died have died, "In bloody protest for a glorious thing."[14] This "glorious thing" is cause that bonded all Catholics together, and was a thing that would be used to justify violence in the future. The Catholic nationalist

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[12] Bronislaw Malinkowski, *Myth in primitive psychology,* (London:Kegan Paul,Trench, Trubner, 1926).

[13] Coogan, *The Troubles,* 19.

[14] Alan J. Ward, *The Easter Rising: Revolution and Irish Nationalism* (Wheeling IL: Harlan Davidson Inc., 2003), 158.

sentiments associated with 1916 completely fit the mold of a chosen trauma.

For many Protestants, 1916 could be considered an chosen glory. The age-old tale of right putting wrong in its place. For them 1916 was another Battle of the Boyne, proof that Protestant Unionists were superior to Irish Catholic Nationalists. Here it becomes clear that conflict that was once solely based on religion, was slowly becoming more and more political. Historically, Protestants had been viewed as above Catholics both socially and economically in Northern Ireland. The repetitive struggle of Catholics at events like the Battle of the Boyne or the Easter Rising reasserted their inferior status. Yet, inequality in housing deepened the divide between Protestants and Catholics during the twentieth century. Likewise, from 1959 to 1968 in Derry 302 houses were built for Catholics yet approximately 360 applied for housing each year, leaving 1,650 families completely homeless. [15] Even those who were lucky enough to have a home did not find their situation much better. This urged civil rights activists like Bridget Bond to expose unjust conditions in which many Catholics were forced to live. In 1967, the same year that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was created, Bond's released cases of the horrendous conditions that many Catholics were living in. One of Bond's most compelling entries is as follows:

> 1967, 1 small room. 1 bed. 1 kitchen. 1 handicapped. Children always suffering from bad colds owing to dampness. Wife expecting fifth child and suffering with nerves and depression and husband afraid of something happening [16]

There is no doubt that the discrimination that Catholics faced in housing and condition of life dramatically shaped their beliefs when it came to both Protestants and the British state. This 'charter' or means of group representation and identity catalyzed the Catholic/Nationalist civil rights movement. Liu and Hilton state that a 'charter' such as this is 'constitutional' in that it defines, "rights and obligations for a group

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[15] Diarmaid Ferrier, *The Transformation of Ireland* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, Peter Mayer Publishers Inc., 2005), 611.
[16] Ibid.

and legitimiz[e] its social and political arrangements." [17] The inequality in housing sparked a movement that represented centuries worth of pain and suppression. As Conway proposes the inferiority led Catholics to define, "their identity in opposition to the identity of Protestants thus creating a social world of two opposing identity categories of 'us' and 'them'". [18]

Discrimination in the form on internment only built upon the civil unrest sparked by the housing issue. In many cases, Catholics walked in marches as means to display their discontent with discrimination. Although some of these protests were technically "illegal," the marchers were usually peaceful.[19] However, the marches were far from void of conflict. On January 22, Unionist paramilitary troops fired rubber bullet guns and used batons to beat protesters at a peaceful march protesting internment at Magilligan Prison Camp in Derry. [20] On Sunday, January 30 in Bogside in Derry, only six days after the controversial attack by British troops, paramilitary troops once again fired into a crowd of protesters marching in opposition to internment. However, this time the rubber bullet guns were replaced by SLR rifles and thirteen people were killed. Referred to as "Bloody Sunday", this tragic event further reassured the Catholic identity as against the Protestant Unionist 'enemy'. Bloody Sunday was a pivotal moment because it legitimized the Provisional IRA use of violence. Rogelio Alonso, an ex- PIRA member, discusses the effect that this traumatic event:

> I [had] left [the movement], and it was only Bloody Sunday that I thought 'a, [expletive], we got to meet violence with violence here' [...] Bloody Sunday is a [expletive] defining moment for the IRA because like after Bloody Sunday they had complete legitimacy, before Bloody Sunday they didn't have any at all." [21]

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[17] Liu and Hilton, "How the past weights on the present", 538.
[18] Conway, "Active Remembering...", 15.
[19] Coogan, *The Troubles*, 134.
[20] Ibid, 134.
[21] Alonso, *Armed Struggle*, p. 32. Quoted in *Memory, Politics, and Identity: Haunted by History*, by Cillian McGratttan (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2013), 75.

Britain, in an attempt to quash the outcry heard across the world in response to Bloody Sunday, created the Widgery Tribunal whose purpose was to investigate and bring together a detailed report of what happened on January 30th. The soldiers who shot the protestors claimed that they had been shot upon, and the Tribunal came to the 'conclusion' that the paratroopers had done nothing malicious. [22] The Protestant Unionist belief following the event was that the protestors were throwing stones at the troops, that protesters had secret bombs hidden in their pockets, and that perhaps, "the dead may not have been killed by our own soldiers." [23] Yet, the 700 eyewitness accounts from Derry's residents combined with medical evidence that the protesters had been shot at from above persuaded many that this was nothing more than a senseless killing. In fact, the Derry coroner stated, "it was murder, gentlemen. Sheer unadulterated murder." [24] It was not until 1995 that British Prime Minister Tony Blair revisited the events of Bloody Sunday by creating the Saville Tribunal of Inquiry. [25]

However, conflicting accounts of the events of Bloody Sunday have creating opposing collective memories, making it difficult to publicly commemorate the event. Thus, without a bone fide, state approved means of commemoration, Catholics have portrayed their collective memory of Bloody Sunday through other means. The painting of street murals commemorating those that lost their lives aided in cementing the Nationalist account of Bloody Sunday. One mural in particular illustrates the victims with expressionless faces. [26] This huge commemorative mural makes connection between the horrors of Bloody Sunday and the emotions of Northern Irish Catholics. Furthermore, the thirtieth anniversary of Bloody Sunday was acknowledged through the "Remembering Quilt" which placed the Northern Irish conflict alongside other worldly violence. [27]

With each passing anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne, the Easter Rising, and/or Bloody Sunday, the emotions tied to those events

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[22] Conway, "Active Remembering...", 7-8.
[23] Coogan, *The Troubles*, 135.
[24] Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland*, 626-627.
[25] Conway, "Active Remembering...", 8.
[26] Ibid, 17.
[27] Ibid, 19.

resurface and justify the animosity between Catholics and Protestants. Even beyond the borders of Northern Ireland these anniversaries are celebrated. In 1990, Orangemen (Protestant Unionists) celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne in New York City. Two thousand showed up to parade through the streets where Supreme Grand Master Henry Stewart proclaimed,

"We want to tell these people [Catholics] who are announcing what they will get for Ireland that they will never get what they want...as long as Great Britain has a gun and a man to stand behind the gun, Ireland will never get the Independence they seek." [28]

Since the 1998 ceasefire, the conflict in Northern Ireland has dramatically decreased, sectarian violence has not completely disappeared. As each anniversary passes, the scab covering these events and collective memories is ripped off, opening a wound that has, in some cases, existed for centuries.

Individual Memory

While analysis of collective memories opens the door for a better understanding of the Troubles and conflict in Northern Ireland, it cannot be forgotten that collective memories take form from a conglomeration of individual memories. This is evident it Halbwach's assumption that, "to be sure, everyone has a capacity for memory that is unlike that of anyone else...but individual memory is nevertheless a part or aspect of a group memory." [29] The mind is what makes every humans unique, as it governs all individual emotions and behaviors. Thus, to better understand what role individual memory plays in a conflict like that in Northern Ireland, the brain must be better understood on a physiological level.

It is undeniable that every human process is governed by biology. For example, something as seemingly simple as moving the eye requires control by four distinct cranial nerves; optic, oculomotor, trochlear, and abducens. It is believed that the human brain is made of ten billion neurons, or cells that process neural information, with each

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[28] Orange Men in Parade, New York Times (July 13, 1990).

[29] L. A. Coser, *Maurice Halbwachs on Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 53.

neuron able to receive information from up to ten thousand synapses. With this being said, the number of possible neural connections in the brain is astronomical, possible outnumbering the number atoms in the universe. This gives humans infinite room to store memories. Memories are created as the result of repetitive activation of synaptic inputs from the hippocampus region of the brain, a process known as long-term potentiation. [30]

Yet, our brains do much more than process sensory information and learn, brain processes also permit emotion, the ability to associate a particular feeling with a certain event or memory. Sah states that there are three distinct aspects of emotion; behavioral (smiling or crying), cognitive (love and hate), and automatic (racing heart). The cognitive aspect is most central to the understanding of complex beliefs like religion and nationalism, specifically the emotion fear. One of the oldest studied human emotions, this common human feeling, at a simplistic level, spawns all other emotions. Happiness is the absence of fear just as anxiety is the fear of fear itself. It has been concluded that the region of the brain responsible for fear is the amygdala. It is undeniable that when one feels fear they will become defensive and, more than likely, violent.

The conflict during the Troubles had its foundation in the 'us' versus 'them' mentality, but how did this mentality come to exist? Further how did individuals us this mentality to justify violent acts. Noting the connection between the emotion fear and complex systems like nationalism, the next step in understanding how individual memory is formed and can give rise to violence is an in-depth analysis of self-deception. Self-deception can be defined as, "telling an outright lie...avoiding the truth, obfuscating the truth, exaggerating the truth, or casting doubt on the truth."[31] Likewise von Hippel and Trivers note that, "[w]hat marks all of these varieties of self-deception is that people favor welcome over unwelcome information in a manner that reflects their goals or motivations."[32] Yet, deceiving oneself does not always

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[30] Pankaj Sah, "Memory and Emotion", Australian Science 21, no.10 (Nov/Dec 2000): 22.
[31] William von Hippel and Robert Trivers, "The evolution of psychology and self-deception", Behavioral and Brain Sciences 34, (2011): 1.
[32] Ibid.

need to be a conscious action, as it has been suggested that individuals can inhibit the processing of unwelcome information as a means to dismiss information that conflicts with already known 'truths'. In this case self-deception is nothing more than interpersonal deception on a personal level. Just as one may deceive another by telling a lie, one may deceive his/herself in the same manner consciously or unconsciously.[33]

Charismatic group leaders like Ian Paisley (Democratic Unionist Party) were able to gain unwavering and unconditional support from much of the Protestant population. Through the eyes of the followers any outside information that conflicted with what the leader was stating was seen as an untruth. This self deception in the form of filtering of 'welcome' from 'unwelcome' information allowed followers to justify their actions. In a way, this behavior is a sort of destructive obedience, for whether or not the individuals knew that what they were doing was morally wrong, they felt obliged to do it anyways. As Stanley Milgram asserts, "Obedience is the psychological mechanism that links individual action to political purpose. It is the dispositional cement that binds men to systems of authority." [34]

In response to the horrific acts of the Holocaust, Milgram carried out an experiment to better study the power of obedience. "Naive" participants were informed that they were to administer a shock to a victim (not visible to the participant). The voltage levels ranging from 15 to 450 volts were described as varying from "Slight Shock" to "Danger: Severe Shock". [35] As the participants were told to increase the voltage of the shock, the victims began cream and pound on the wall separating them from the participant. The participant was not aware that the victim was an actor. Milgram wanted to observe at what point, or at which voltage level, the participants would become disobedient. Surprisingly, of the forty participants observed, only five refused to obey the command to shock the victim with 300 volts and only nine others refused the shock the victim at any higher level. It is

[33] Ibid, 2.
[34] Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology (1963): 1.
[35] Ibid, 2.

noted that all participants showed signs of nervousness and/or stress as they obeyed the commands. As Milgram concludes,
"Subjects have learned from childhood that it is a fundamental breach of moral conduct to hurt another person against his will. Yet, 26 subjects abandoned this tenet in following the instructions of the authority who has no special powers to enforce his commands." [36]
These findings are consistent with argument that individuals deceive themselves by dismissing unwelcome information (hurting the victim) as a means of completing their goal (obeying the experimenter's orders). The results from this experiment are unwaveringly applicable many violent crimes of the Troubles.

In regards to the importance of religious or political identification in self-deception, Gorelick and Shackelford build on the fact that 'insecure' societies tend to have higher rates of religious belief.[37] A strong nationalistic or religious belief, can therefore be the breeding ground for self-deception in that, "the avoidance of information that threatens or could weaken a religious or political system is ubiquitous." [38] Anthropologist Sylvia Yanagisako proposes that these identities are perhaps even necessary to social culture. At a conference in 1993 she explained that this concept of culture is important because, "[It] is the conceptual and discursive space we reserve to struggle to refine our understanding of social differences and similarities. It is that elusive abstraction we find it impossible to agree upon but one that we find it equally impossible to live without." [39]

The dual importance of religious and national identification allowed for the strict divide between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists in Northern Ireland. The art of forgetting is described by Ernest Renan as "an essential factor in the formation of a nation." [40] Understanding why religious and national affiliation were

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[36] Ibid, 8.
[37] Gregory Gorelik and Todd K. Shackelford, "The Cultures of Self Deception", Behavioral and Brain Sciences 34, no.1 (2011): 25.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Sylvia Yanagisako, "Defining Culture", Paper presentation at conference at Stanford University, (1993):10.
[40] Ernest Renan. Quoted in *Plural Identities, Singular Narratives: The Case for Northern Ireland*, by Máiréad Nic Craith (Berghahn Books, 2002), 45.

fundamental to personal identity in Northern Ireland is crucial to understanding how individual memory played a role in the Troubles.

Aside from the role of fear and self-deception, individual memory can be most dramatically influenced by first-hand experience. A 2003 survey assessed the mental health of 1694 respondents. Of those respondents 21.3% claimed that the Troubles had either "quite a bit" or a "a lot" of impact on their lives. [41] An interpretation of the findings could point to the fact that, because of the impact sectarian violence has had on individual lives, it is possible that such individual memories have fed into the larger group or collective memory. Such an assumption is backed up by the Leach and William's 1999 pilot study.

First, it is important to note that this was only one year after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and ceasefire. The study surveyed University of Ulster undergraduate students, asking them first what their religion was, and then inquiring what they believed would be the best outcome for Northern Ireland. However, instead of giving the participants only the choices of remaining loyal to Britain and joining the Republic, the experimenters provided the subjects with a third choice: gaining complete independence for Northern Ireland. Leach and Williams hypothesized that Protestants would favor remaining loyal to Britain while Catholics would believe that the most positive outcome would be joining the Republic. Yet, the researchers had not clear cut hypothesis about the third choice. The results overwhelmingly supported the original hypothesis with Protestants and Catholics heavily supporting what the other repudiated. However, the choice for independence seemed, from the results, the most obvious solution for Northern Ireland. [42] The results therefore suggest that both groups were cautious of what independence would bring, leading them to fall back on traditional allegiances.

Additionally, individual memory can also catalyze resentment within a groups. One of the biggest flaws in the 1916 Rising was that

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[41] D O'Reilly and M. Stevenson, "Mental Health in Northern Ireland: have 'the Troubles' made it worse?", Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 57, no. 7 (Jul 2003): 488.

[42] Leach and Williams, "Group Identity and Conflicting Expectations of the Future in Northern Ireland", 889-891.

those involved carried out the rebellion in the names of all 'Irishmen and women' yet neglected to face the fact that their actions were not reflective of the overall Irish sentiment. When action, particularly a violent action, is carried out in the name of the people but is not reflective of the sentiments of the people, it is likely to lead to resentment. Because the violent events of the Troubles were, in many cases, carried out by radicals, many common people (Catholic and Protestant alike) began to resent the actions of extreme Nationalists and Unionist.

Following the Provisional IRA bombing of Oxford Street (Bloody Friday), it became clear to many Nationalists that the IRA was no less sectarian than the Unionist Paramilitary Groups, leading to the gradual end to the public acceptance and legitimacy of the IRA. This is evident in the following statement:

> "I remember, whilst in a pub in Wicklow, watching the graphic TV footage of the after math of the Oxford Street bombings and feeling horror, shame, revulsion and hate for those who in my name carried out these brutal acts." [43]

Fear, self-deception, and exposure all play a role in forming a individuals memory and opinions about a particular group of people, themselves, and their situation. Ultimately each of these individual memories feed into the bigger collective memory of a group of people. However, the question remains: How is this collective memory passed down to subsequent generations and what does this suggest about the future of Northern Ireland?

Affect on Future Generations

In 1920, John Watson and Rosalie Rayner began what would become one of the most influential psychological experiments concerning human behavior. In their publication "Conditioned Emotional Reactions", more commonly referred to as the Little Albert Experiment, Watson and Rayner proposed that a child could be conditioned to be fearful of a particular stimuli. The experiment was focused around their

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[43] Author interview, SDLP party worker, Belfast October 2009. Quoted in *Memory, Politics, and Identity: Haunted by History*, by Cillian McGratttan (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2013), 78.

sole subject Albert B., a nine-month old child whose mother was a wet nurse at the Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children. [44] The researchers soon found that fear could be evoked in Albert by making a loud sound, done by striking a hammer against a steel rod located behind the child. The goal of the study was to prove that by presenting the white rat, which did not originally evoke fear in Albert, while simultaneously making the loud sound, which did originally evoke fear in Albert, the child would begin to associate the rat with the noise, and thus learn to fear the rat. After using this joint stimulation various times, Watson noted,

> "Rat Alone: *The instant the rat was shown the baby began to cry. Almost instantly he turned sharply to the left, fell over on left side, raised himself on all fours and began to crawl away so rapidly that he was caught with difficulty before reaching the edge of the table."* [45]

Interestingly, Watson and Rayner also found that Albert began to fear other objects that had characteristics similar to those of the rat, specifically things that were fluffy. Albert now exhibited the same fearful response to a dog and rabbit, and even cried at the sight of Watson dressed up as Santa Claus months after the initial stimulation.[46] The process of becoming conditioned to be fearful of things with similar characteristics as the original stimulus used to evoke fear is referred to as generalization.

It could be concluded that the repetitive nature of the violence in Northern Ireland, just as with the repetitive nature of the loud noise in the Little Albert Experiment, cemented a sense of fear in the rising generation. This fear, as stated earlier, can kindle self-deception, which could ultimately deepen the divide between the collective memories of Catholics and Protestants. In regards to this, von Hippel and Trivers assert, "Self-deception can also facilitate the deception of others in a more general sense, in that it can help us convince others that we are better." [47] Perhaps the years of instilled fear and animosity that

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[44] John B. Watson and Rosalie Rayner, "Conditioned Emotional Responses", Journal of Experimental Psychology 3, no. 1 (Feb 1920): 1.
[45] Watson and Rayner, "Conditioned Emotional Responses", 3.
[46] Watson and Rayner, "Conditioned Emotional Repsonses", 10
[47] von Hippel and Trivers, "The evolution and psychology of self-deception", 4.

Catholics and Protestants felt towards each other has created the sense that a change to group dynamics is a threat to their identities. In all, this concept is reflective of the inability of recent generations in Northern Ireland to forgive the atrocities of the past.

Recently, scientific studies have focused on establishing the link between epigenetic changes and transgenerational post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is largely caused by dysregulation the stress response pathway following exposure to a traumatic event or stimuli. Epigenetics refers to the study of regulation of gene transcription. [48] In other words, epigenetic changes are responsibly for turning genes on or off. As early as 1988, researchers began to notice that psychiatric disorder, like PTSD, tended to be increasingly prevalent in the children of Holocaust survivors. [49] Cortisol, a hormone excreted in response of stress, has been found to be decreased in individuals with PTSD.

Dr. Rachel Yehuda has published a great deal of work on transgenerational PTSD. In one of her recent studies, it was found that the children of women who experienced 9/11 subsequently developed PTSD has lower salivary cortisol levels than women who experienced 9/11 and did not develop PTSD. Additionally, this study also noted a correlation between the severity of maternal PTSD and the levels of cortisol in infants. [50] Although this the sample size of this study is small and research on this topic must be continued, the results of Yehuda's work point strongly to epigenetic involvement in familial PTSD. It does, however, bring into question the involvement of epigenetics in the course of history. To what extend are we carrying the experiences of our ancestry? More narrowly, what role could epigenetics be playing in transgenerational sectarian violence? Of course, there are a plethora of factors that are involved in a group's collective memory. Yet, there is a great deal of room for further research the biological basis of trauma and its place in the interpretation of historical events.

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[48] Rampp, Binder, and Provencal, "Epigenetics in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," *Progress in Molecular Biology and Translational Science* 128 (2014).
[49] Yehuda, "Transgenerational transmission of cortisol and PTSD risk," *Progress in Brain Research* 167 (2008).
[50] Ibid.

Conclusion

In summary, the thesis that there is an innate connection between Irish nationalism and psychology during the Troubles and the era leading up to the brutal era is supported from multiple standpoints, the strongest of which is the significance of collective memory. Understanding the rationale behind the Troubles sets the stage for understanding why such violence still persists in Ireland today.

Albert Einstein once said, "Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of mankind." This comparison of a political ideology to a crippling disease adequately depicts the effect of nationalism on Ireland in the mid to late twentieth century. From looking at the Irish troubles through the lens of psychology, not only can the sentiments of the era become more transparent, the future for Ireland can also be foreshadowed.

In 1972, during the climax of the Troubles, the *Derry Journal* concluded, "The future will not be found in denying the collective failures and mistakes or closing minds and hearts to the plight of those who have been hurt... [That] will not be achieved by creating a hierarchy of victims... The process of conflict resolution requires the equal acknowledgement of the grief and loss of others." [51] Yet, it would take twenty-six years for the Belfast Agreement to bring relative peace to Northern Ireland. Martin McGuinness, a prominent member of Sinn Fein and a former IRA member, stated that the ceasefire in Northern Ireland, "is not like going into a darkened room and turning on a light switch." [52] It is obvious that centuries of animosity cannot be completely forgiven, and definitely not forgotten.

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[51] *Derry Journal*, 14 August 1972. Quoted in *Memory, Politics, and Identity: Haunted by History*, by Cillian McGratttan (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2013), 79.
[52] Ibid., 79.

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