

The 'Troubles' of Myths and Symbols

A study of the conflict in Northern Ireland

Abstract

Northern Ireland is a conflict with a long and violent history, which often focuses on the armed struggle of extremist organizations. This thesis instead asks *how is the conflict in Northern Ireland kept alive in the lives of ordinary people?* The material used comes from books and articles containing interviews and descriptions of the environment and local perceptions. The theory used is the ethno-symbolic approach and especially the combination of ethno-symbolism and symbolic politics presented by Stuart Kaufman, which focuses on myths, fears and opportunity as the necessary preconditions of ethnic war, as well as distinguishing between mass-led and elite-led conflicts. Analyzing Northern Ireland on the basis of this theory highlights the role of myths, symbols, and fears and the way Northern Ireland is scattered with references to these. There are for instance murals dedicated to Bloody Sunday, slogans such as 'Still under Siege', bonfires where effigies of the pope are burnt and curbstones painted in the colors of the flags of the Irish or British nations. Nothing is innocent, as just about everything is a 'tell' of which side you're on, even which newspaper you read, or which flowers you like.

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Myth, Fear, Ethno-Symbolism, Symbolic Politics.

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1 Introduction

There are conflicts between groups of people raging all over the world, now and forever. This means that there are numerable examples for the interested student to investigate. However, the conflict that I have always been most fascinated by I don't have to look far to find. According to McAllister this conflict is regarded as one of the bitterest and most pro-longed among the advanced democracies. It is easily the most intense violent conflict in Europe, accounting for the majority of terrorist incidents, and the paramilitary organizations that operate in the province are the most highly organized and best equipped in Europe (McAllister, 2004, p. 124). The conflict I'm referring to is the one in Northern Ireland.

1.1 Purpose and questions of study

What is the first thing you think about when I say 'the Northern Ireland conflict'? My guess is that it's the IRA. That's at least the answer I got from friends I asked. A lot of people seem to identify the conflict with the armed struggle of the paramilitary organizations. However, I believe that there is more to this conflict than the opinions and actions of extremists. How could this conflict else have survived for so many years had it not been rooted in the lives of ordinary people? This is what I decided to devote my master thesis to.

Now, during the long history of the conflict in Northern Ireland, it has fluctuated in ferocity and bloodiness, but it has never been completely resolved. It is almost hard to imagine a Northern Ireland without conflict, especially for us who have no memory of the time before the last major outbreak of 'troubles' 35 years ago. Since then it has been a common feature in news reports around the world. Another IRA bomb, another Orange Order march, another riot. People hardly seem to react anymore. We've heard it all before.

However, halfway into my thesis work, in July 2005, my choice of subject suddenly gained an unexpected air of relevance. People in my surroundings seemed to snap out of their obliviance towards the Northern Irish conflict. Something out of the ordinary had happened. That something was the historic declaration by the IRA that they from now on would pursue their goal of a united Ireland through political means (Rowan, 2005). Now, cease-fires have been broken before, so a certain amount of skepticism is natural. However, the extraordinary thing about this last declaration is that it is not proclaimed to be a cease-fire, but an *end* to the armed struggle. Does this mean that there will be no more killings? Did the Protestants win? Most people think of the IRA as a

necessary component in the conflict. If there is no more IRA, will there be no more conflict? The questions raised by this declaration were many. Of course I didn't have any clear answers to offer, apart from the obvious fact that the IRA is not the only paramilitary organization killing people in Northern Ireland. However, it certainly further convinced me that a study of how the conflict lives on in the lives of ordinary people in Northern Ireland would be interesting.

The purpose of this thesis is therefore to take a closer look at the conflict in Northern Ireland and how this conflict exists outside of paramilitary organizations in the lives of ordinary people. My question of study is thus *how is the conflict in Northern Ireland kept alive in the lives of ordinary people?*

1.2 Method

As I tend to lean towards an interpretative epistemology, my starting point in this thesis is a belief in that what matters in conflicts is not reality, but the perception of reality. Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers also seem to share this standpoint as they claim that saying that a conflict is ethnic is not to state that its causes are cultural, but only that the majority of the people involved interpret the conflict in ethnic terms (Vermeulen & Govers, 1997, p. 12). As I therefore want to explore people's subjective experiences and the meanings they attach to these, I believe, just as Fiona Devine, that a qualitative method is preferable (Devine, 2002, p. 199). I will discuss this method further when discussing the case, but first I would like to present the theory I have chosen - what I call the ethno-symbolic politics approach - and why I believe that it can be useful for my specific purpose. Then I will move on to the case I'm focusing on - the Northern Ireland conflict. I will clarify which time frame this thesis concerns, and which material I will be using. I will also present some problems I have experienced.

1.2.1 The theory

The purpose of finding out how the conflict is present in everyday lives in Northern Ireland could probably be met in a number of ways, but I have a hunch that the ethno-symbolic approach is a good place to start, because of that it focuses on myths and symbols that have meaning to the people, not just the opinions and actions of the elite or the extremists. Anthony D. Smith is in many ways considered the father of ethno-symbolism, and an important researcher in the field of ethnicity in general. For that reason, I will of course give him the attention he deserves. However, I think that there are other scholars in the ethno-symbolic field that deserve much more attention than they have been given. In this thesis I will especially use the theory presented by Stuart J. Kaufman, in his book *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Kaufman has in a very convincing and natural way combined the findings of Anthony D. Smith and Murray Edelman, who, if Smith is the father, in my opinion could be seen as the

grandfather of ethno-symbolism. Edelman published his theory on symbolic politics already in 1971, and the core assumption of this theory is that people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked, which gets their meaning from myths. This theory thus fits quite nicely with ethno-symbolism, and in Kaufman's combination, which perhaps could be called ethno-symbolic politics, it is very difficult to separate the two.

Kaufman's theory I believe is very interesting and useful for analyzing ethnic conflicts, mostly because of that gives you a clear method for analysis. It lists a number of necessary components for war, and states that if not all of these components are present, there will be no ethnic wars. These components are thus what you should be looking for when analyzing ethnic conflicts.

1.2.2 The case

As mentioned, the Northern Ireland conflict has a long and violent history. Of course I will not attempt to analyze the symbolism of Northern Ireland through all this time, but will focus on the last outbreak of 'Troubles' in the late 1960s up until present time. The reason for this is that I want to know which symbolism is present today. From this perspective I think that the recent promise by the IRA to disarm is especially interesting, because of that it shows some of the obstacles to peace in Northern Ireland that remain even without the paramilitary organizations.

Gathering the material needed first hand would obviously have been the ideal, but I will instead be using books and articles written about the Northern Ireland conflict by other researchers and journalists. There are vast amounts of books describing the course of events in the long history of the conflict. However, the most useful material for the qualitative approach in this thesis has instead been those few books and articles that focus more on describing the traditions, attitudes and physical appearance of the area, including charged symbols such as marches, murals, and flags. I would especially like to mention two of the authors I have used. First, there is Jack Santino. His book *Signs of War and Peace: Social Conflict and the Use of Public Symbols in Northern Ireland* from 2001 was a great treasure for me to find. He describes the use of murals, colors, flags, flowers, and other such symbols in Northern Ireland, as well as relates these to its historical context. His work also includes a number of interesting interviews with people in Northern Ireland, describing how they interpret these symbols. The second author I would like to mention is Malachi O'Doherty, and his book *The Trouble with Guns: Republican Strategy and the Provisional IRA* from 1998. In this book O'Doherty describes among other things his own childhood and youth in Belfast during the beginning of the 'troubles' in the 1960s and 1970s. He describes the mindset of people around him, his experiences of nationalism in school and the role of the IRA, as well as his own interpretation of what really happened. This book is fascinating and gives you a sense of an insider perspective of Northern Ireland.

Now, as Conny Svenning points out, the idea behind a qualitative research, like this thesis, is to exemplify (Svenning, 1996, p. 81). I am thus not trying to

present *all* the ways in which the Northern Ireland conflict is present in the lives of ordinary people, but *some* of the ways. Nor will I try to present *all* the relevant myths and symbols, but *some*. I believe that this is enough to give an interesting insight into the Northern Ireland conflict.

1.2.3 Problems encountered

The biggest problem encountered in this thesis is the way different authors use terms and concepts in different ways. For instance, some people see ethnicity and nationalism as separate phenomena, while others see them as basically the same thing. This means that two authors can be writing about the same course of event, but referring to different groups, something that can be slightly confusing. This terminological confusion also relates to terms especially relevant in Northern Ireland. For instance, the terms Catholic, Irish, nationalist and republican are used as names for the same group, which is not really accurate. A republican is a very specific sort of nationalist, which usually, but not always, is Catholic, and identifies with the same nation and ethnic group as the Irish. All of these terms however, nation, ethnic group, as well as Irish, nationalist etc are overlapping. I have of course tried my best to keep them separate, but just as other researchers in the field, I have at times found it difficult. A further elaboration into these group boundaries and how they relate to each other will follow later on.

Another problem encountered was balance. Even though the unionist paramilitary organizations, such as the UVF have killed about the same number of people as the nationalist organizations, like the IRA, most of the books that concern the armed struggle focus on the IRA and the nationalists. Perhaps this is natural, because of that it is the main opponent of the one side, the British army being the main opponent of the other. However, this means that less attention is given to unionist concerns and interpretations, which I think is not quite right. Therefore I have tried my best to balance this thesis as much as possible.

I also regret not having enough room in this thesis for more myths and symbols. There are so many I have had to leave out, and I am especially sorry for not being able to mention all the stereotypes in Northern Ireland.

1.3 Important terms

There are a number of general terms that are important for understanding this thesis such as *ethnic group*, *nation*, *ethnic conflict*, *myths and symbols*. Many of these will be further elaborated on later on, but as a point of departure I would like to briefly mention them here. I will focus especially on the definitions used by ethno-symbolists, but I will also occasionally supplement these with other researchers, as well as my own comments.

An *ethnic group* is according to Anthony D Smith a named group of people that have a believed common descent, common historical memories, elements of

shared culture such as language or religion, attachment to a specific territory and a sense of social solidarity (Smith, 1999, s. 191). Ethno-symbolists do not deny that both ethnic groups and nations are imagined, as Benedict Anderson perceived them. However, these groupings are perceived by their members as 'real' and 'substantial', and they demand action (Smith, 1986, p. 22, and 2003, p.22).

A *nation* is a socially mobilized group that wants political self-determination, according to Kaufman. This group can include a number of ethnic groups, as long as they feel a sense of togetherness, or an ethnic group can move towards becoming a nation, if it acquires the ambition for self-determination, a phenomenon known as ethno-nationalism (Hettne, 1992, p. 59-60). Anthony D Smith, however, believes that a nation is 'a named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members' (Smith, 2003, p. 24). I personally prefer Kaufman's definition, because I think Smith's definition refers too much to a nation-*state*, an opinion also shared by Montserrat Guibernau in the article *Anthony D Smith on nations and national identity: a critical assessment* (Guibernau, 2004)

Ethnic conflict is according to Kaufman, a conflict in which the key issue at stake, that is the express reason political power is being contested, involve either ethnic markers such as language or religion or the status of the ethnic groups themselves (Kaufman, 2001, p. 17). Personally I believe that conflicts concerning language or religion often are about the status of the ethnic groups themselves. As Cohen put it, 'people don't kill one another because their customs are different' (Cohen, 1996, p. 84). Kaufman also seems to agree with this when he claims that the language of ethnic conflicts is legitimacy, as each group tries to prove that its moral and historical claims give it legitimate right to political dominance in their own homeland (what Hettne calls ethno-nationalism). The issue in ethnic conflicts, then, is not so much specific economic, linguistic, or other specific benefits, but relative status (Kaufman, 2001, p. 26). As mentioned earlier, I personally also believe that the important thing is how the people themselves interpret the situation.

A *myth* is according to Murray Edelman 'a belief held in common by a large group of people that give events and actions a particular meaning' Edelman, 1971, p. 14). The power of the myth, according to Jerome Bruner, is that 'it lives on the feather line between fantasy and reality. It must be neither too good nor too bad to be true, nor must it be too true' (Edelman, 1971, p. 54-55).

A *symbol* is an emotionally charged shorthand reference to a myth (Kaufman, 2001, p.16).

1.4 Disposition

I will first present the ethno-symbolic approach in general, such as the approach to ethnicity and the role of myths and symbols, as well as some common themes in myths. Then I will present the symbolic politics theory that Stuart Kaufman has

built on the foundation of ethno-symbolism, with his three preconditions for ethnic wars, that is, myths justifying ethnic hostility, ethnic fears, and opportunity, as well as his distinction between mass-led and elite-led conflicts. I will also discuss the implications for the future, as well as the critique raised against these theories.

I will then move on to the Northern Ireland conflict. I will start a discussion of the dimensions of the conflict, the group boundaries relating to these dimensions, and the ways these are visible in the lives of ordinary people. I will then follow the course set by Kaufman, by discussing the three preconditions to ethnic war, and the way the Northern Ireland conflict can be seen as a mass-led conflict.

I will finish this thesis with summarizing conclusions regarding the ethno-symbolism in Northern Ireland, my own opinions about the prospect for peace and a brief evaluation of the theory, as well as a few final thoughts.

2 Ethno-symbolic politics

In this chapter I will start with a presentation of the main thoughts of ethno-symbolism in general, especially the thoughts of Anthony D Smith. This section will clarify the approach to ethnicity, the role of myths and symbols, and some examples of common themes in such myths. The purpose of this is to set the scene for the theory presented by Stuart J Kaufman in *Modern Hatreds: the Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* from 2001. I will start with the necessary components of ethnic war, which according to Kaufman are myths justifying ethnic hostility, ethnic fears and opportunity. I will also describe the differences between the elite-led and the mass-led conflicts, and briefly describe the implications for the future set out by Kaufman. I will end the chapter with a discussion of some of the critique that has been raised against ethno-symbolism and Kaufman's theory.

2.1 Ethnicity and symbolism

Psychologists argue that when people choose, and especially when they choose to act, they often do so emotionally rather than rationally (Kaufman, 2001, p. 27). The core assumption of symbolic choice theory is therefore that people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked. According to Murray Edelman, symbols get their meaning from emotionally laden myths, which as mentioned have the role of giving events and actions a particular meaning, typically defining enemies and heroes and tying ideas of right and wrong to people's identity. From this point of view, political choice is mostly about emotional expression (Kaufman, 2001, p. 28). Politicians manipulate symbols, wave flags, and refer to heroes etc in order to induce people to make choices based on the feelings evoked and the values symbolized by these expressions.

These myths, symbols and values are precisely what ethno-symbolism focuses on as well. Ethno-symbolism, through the eyes of Anthony D. Smith starts with the *ethnie*, in other words, the ethnic group. The *ethnie* has several different dimensions. First it has *a collective name*, which is used by the members of the group to distinguish themselves from other groups. It also has *a common myth of descent*, which can be both spatial and temporal. These explain the origin, growth and destiny of the community and they hold the community together through the logic that because we have the same origin, we necessarily belong together and share the same feelings. An *ethnie* also has a sense of *a shared history*, which unites successive generations, and defines a population in terms of experienced temporal sequences. The heroes and heroines whose deeds it unfolds must embody the virtues held precious by the community and conform to its

stereotypes. Ethnies are also differentiated by one or more elements of *a distinctive shared culture*, which are symbols of collective life that work as reminders of a common heritage and fate. Therefore they both help to bind the members together and to separate them from outsiders. The most common such elements are language and religion, but it can also be things like customs, folklore, food, music, art and physique. The greater the number of differentiating cultural traits, the more intense the sense of separate ethnicity. There is also *an association with a specific territory*. The ethnie does not have to be in physical possession of the territory, what matters is that it has a symbolic geographical center, a homeland. This land becomes a focus for collective dreams. The last dimension of the ethnie is *a sense of solidarity*, which in times of stress and danger can override all other divisions within a community, such as class, gender, and region (Smith, 1986, p. 22-30, 49). The conclusion thus is that an ethnie can be defined as a named human population with shared myths, memories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.

According to Anthony D Smith the core of ethnicity, and the durability of the ethnie, are to be found in the form and content of the quartet of myths, memories, values and symbols, which he summarizes as the ‘myth-symbol complex’. This myth-symbol complex defines not only who is a member of the group, but also what it means to be a member (Kaufman, 2001, p.25). According to Edelman, these important myths and beliefs also both creates supporting perceptions and blocks receptivity to incompatible information (Edelman, 1971, p. 44). In other words, the myth-symbol complex influences how you interpret your surroundings. In many cases, the myth-symbol complex includes prejudice against other groups, thus facilitating stereotyping and scapegoating (Kaufman, 2001, p. 26).

This ethnie is according to Smith were nations find their origin and cultural resources. John Hutchinson, another prominent ethno-symbolist, even goes as far as to say that nationalism is a novel form of ethnicity, ‘shaped by the polycentric vision of romanticism and by the unprecedented and unpredictable challenges of the modern world that require innovation’ (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 109). To really understand the strength and durability of nations though, one has to focus especially on the sense of the sacred and binding commitments of religion. This does not only mean actual religious content, in the form of beliefs, but also religious features such as sacred texts, prophets, rites and ceremonies, which are important in many secular nations (Smith, 2003, p. 4-5, 14). This brings us to the common themes in myths that I would like to mention below.

2.2 Common themes in myths

According to George Schöpflin, myths can be seen as having a variety of roles, functions and purposes. For instance, they can function as an instrument of self-definition, by attributing special qualities to the group, and thus creating a boundary towards other groups. The myth is also a kind of simplified representation, an ordering of the world, so as to make sense to people. The myths

do this by creating supporting perceptions and blocking receptivity to incompatible information, as mentioned above. Myths are encoded in rituals and symbols, and reference to a symbol can be sufficient to recall the myths for the members of the community (Schöpflin, 1997, p. 20, 22-23). It is also important to remember that it doesn't matter whether or not a myth as some grain of truth or not, because people still act according to them (Overing, 1997, p. 18).

Generalizations of common myths can vary immensely between authors. Murray Edelman, for instance believes that political myths fall into a small number of archetypical patterns. Either they define an enemy who is plotting against national interest and may need to be exterminated; or they define a hero leader of a popularly or divinely sanctioned social order who is to be followed and obeyed and for whom suffering or sacrifice are gratifying (Edelman 1971, p. 15). Smith, on the other hand, sees many such patterns. Some of the myths he focuses on are the myths of origin and ancestry, the myths of sacred homelands, the myths of the golden ages and the myths of ethnic election (Smith, 1986, p. 19; 2003, p. 49). I would briefly like to discuss these myths further, as well as the myths of suffering identified by Schöpflin.

The myth of origin and ancestry often sees the nation as a family. This can be dangerous if the group starts to focus on ethnic purity. References to 'motherland' and 'fatherland' are used to symbolize this myth in combination with the myths of territory, such as the one of sacred homelands.

The myth of the sacred homeland can be divided into two kinds. One is the promised land, the land of destiny and future; the other is the ancestral homeland, the land of birth and history (Smith, 2003, p. 137). This territory is sacred and can never be bargained with. Everything that symbolizes the territory, such as maps, flags and anniversaries, reinforces the myth (Schöpflin, 1997, p. 29).

The myth of the golden age is a myth of the age when the creative genius of the nation flowered and the core of the nation was revealed. This was the period of high cultural achievement, harmonizing all dimensions of human experience, when the nation was in active contact with other great centers, and making a permanent contribution to human civilization. This myth also includes the myths of heroes. They are the key to national survival and progress (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 112, 115). The hero is never solitary. He may be a 'lone genius' but in the eyes of the nationalists, he is a vessel of the community's creativity and thus the exemplification of the golden age (Smith, 1986, p. 194).

The myth of ethnic election explains and legitimates actions and situations by reference to tales about being chosen by God. This myth legitimates present needs and concerns by referring to a heroic collective past that inspires emulation (Smith, 2003, p. 49). These myths can also serve to legitimize an assumption of moral and cultural superiority over other groups (Smith, 1999, p. 267; Schöpflin, 1997, p. 31). It is myths like these, suffused with sacred elements and religious fervor and imagery that are the most intense and persistent, according to Smith (1986, p. 67).

The myth of suffering is also important. According to this myth, the suffering has been the result of history, malign forces or the will of God, thus not the responsibility of the group itself. The group has suffered for the wider world, and

the wider world therefore owes them a special debt. Especially potent are the myths of genocide. According to Schöpflin perceived genocide and similar experience of perceived collective destruction leaves deep scars and makes the communities affected ultra-sensitive towards anything real or symbolic that appears to threaten their collective existence (Schöpflin, 1993, p. 179).

2.3 Explanation of ethnic war – three preconditions

Some people explain ethnic wars by referring to ancient hatreds bubbling up from below. According to ethno-symbolism, attention to hatred is important, and these hatreds do have ancient roots, in the sense that they stem from values and myths that often go back through generations. However, this does not mean that ethno-symbolists are primordialists in the traditional sense. The hatreds themselves are not ancient, continuous and predestined but modern, in the sense that they have to be renewed and reconstructed in each generation. This reconstruction is closely related to how ethno-symbolists see the role of manipulating leaders. V.P Gagnon for instance believes that ethnic cleavages are provoked by elites in order to keep or grab power for themselves. Ethno-symbolists agree that manipulating leaders often play a major role in ethnic conflicts. However, hostile campaigns can work only by playing on hostile attitudes or prejudices that already exist; in other words, the myth-symbol complex must support such provocation. Also, Kaufman believes that focusing too much on manipulating leaders means that you misunderstand many conflicts that actually spring up more from below, than are provoked from above, that is, what Kaufman calls the mass-led conflicts, which I will discuss further down (Kaufman, 2001, p. 3-6).

Another important explanation of ethnic conflicts is the one that focuses on economic rivalry, and rational choice, who claim that people organize as an ethnic group when it seems like the most practical way to get what they want. The problem with this explanation is that it doesn't explain why people resort to war. If economic considerations were the reason to mobilize, why would they destroy the country and its economy, and provoke international sanctions, like in the Balkans?

So the conclusion of Kaufman's theory is that if the three preconditions – hostile myths, ethnic fears, and opportunity – are present, ethnic war results if they lead to rising mass hostility, chauvinist mobilization by leaders making extreme symbolic appeals, and a security dilemma between groups (Kaufman, 2001, p.34). In the following section I would like to clarify what Kaufman means with these three preconditions.

2.3.1 Myths justifying ethnic hostility

According to Kaufman, a community's myth-symbol complex must support ethnic hostility, in order for an ethnic conflict to arise. Myths justifying ethnic

hostility do this if they identify a territory as the group's homeland which must be defended and dominated politically and define a mythical enemy with which the out-group can be identified. If the myth-symbol complex includes a warrior ethos, the group is more likely to be prone to ethnic violence.

These myths can of course be recast by manipulating elites, but this process takes a very long time unless it builds on a myth-symbol complex (Kaufman, 2001, p. 30). Usually nationalists do not use fabricated new mythologies, but re-combinations of traditional, perhaps unanalyzed, motifs and myths taken from epics and chronicles. These re-combinations have to be in character, consistent with the myth-symbol complex (Smith, 1986, p.178). This is what John Hutchinson calls 'mythic overlaying'. According to Hutchinson, the creation of fresh myths by nationalists, for instance of collective sacrifice against a traditional enemy, can be presented as a renovation of a national continuum when the old myths have failed (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 121).

This defines the minimum necessary condition for ethnic war: at least one group with a myth-symbol complex justifying the pursuit of ethnic dominance and thus hostility to any who oppose it, and the existence of another group bound together in opposition against the first (Kaufman, 2001, p.31).

2.3.2 Ethnic fears

Fears are a necessary condition because 'people are much more concerned to avoid loss than to pursue gains, so they are usually mobilizable only when confronted by some threat'. This is why leaders of nations always justify their actions by claiming that it is aimed at averting some mortal danger (Kaufman, 2001, p. 32). Horowitz adds that in cases where conflicts leads to ethnic war, there is an additional motivation beyond the contest for dominance, and that is anxiety-laden fears of group extinction. The source of these fears is often the group's myth-symbol complex, in which the in-group is portrayed as under threat or victimized. For instance, when there is a history of domination, the threat of being dominated again seems more plausible, and in turn it gives the previously dominant reason to fear revenge. According to Kaufman, in most cases of ethnic war, at least one group has been historically dominated by the other. Demographic threats may also motivate ethnic fears, especially if there is an ethnic affinity problem, meaning that one group is the minority in the country, but the majority in the region (Kaufman, 2001, p.31).

The more this past victimization is emphasized, the more credible are the emotional charges of genocide. Ethnic extinction matters, even if one's personal safety is not imperiled, because the future of the kinship group is imperiled. The fears justify the hostile attitudes toward the other group and extreme measures in self-defense including the demands for political dominance. This in turn can lead to the vicious circle that makes up the security dilemma. Perceptions that the militants on one side are gaining support evoke support for militants on the other side (Edelman, 1971, p. 21). In the same way the self-defense measures of the one

side are interpreted as a threat to the other group, which cause them to take self-defense measures of their own.

2.3.3 Opportunity to mobilize and fight

The third and last necessary precondition is the opportunity to mobilize and fight. Ethnic groups must have enough freedom to mobilize politically without being stopped by state coercion. Effective policing can prevent an escalation of violence, and political repression can prevent ethnic leaders from articulating their demands. As long as a state uses an effective apparatus of repression against ethnic mobilization, large-scale ethnic violence cannot occur. However, when it is the leaders of the state who want the ethnic mobilization, they have the opportunity to provoke this as long as they are in power, like for instance in Rwanda 1994 (Kaufman, 2001, p.32-33).

Another point that concerns the opportunity to mobilize and fight in wars is the requirement of a territorial base. Both sides need to be able to organize its army, either inside a disputed territory or across a friendly border. Also important is that if one of the sides in the conflict has an overwhelming military advantage, the result is usually limited riots, ethnic cleansing, or genocides, rather than war.

Something that can change the opportunity structure is the interference of foreign patrons. They can provide money, advice and propaganda support to help extremist elites mobilize politically and promote ethnic hostility (Kaufman, 2001, p.32-33).

2.4 Mass-led or elite-led conflicts

Kaufman distinguishes between mass-led and elite-led conflicts. *Mass-led conflicts* can emerge when the two first preconditions already are significant in a community, that is, when myths, fears and hostility are already strong and nationalism therefore already is a central value of dissident politics. It is not necessary though, for strong hostility to be universal or even prevalent among the majority; it is enough if the fanatics are a substantial minority and if the rest do not rein them in. With hostility already high, mass ethnic nationalist movements can spring into being almost over night, if a new opportunity or a galvanizing event, such as a highly publicized murder occur (Kaufman, 2001, p. 36). Such movements spur politicians to seek support by making chauvinist appeals. In these mass-led disputes, leaders' room for maneuver is limited; if they try to take too moderate a line, they are likely to be displaced by more extreme, or truer nationalists.

Elite led conflicts on the other hand occur when a few powerful elites harness ethnic myths and symbols to provoke fear, hostility and a security dilemma and mobilize their groups for violence (Kaufman, 2001, p. 34). These leaders can be motivated either by ideological zeal or by opportunism to mobilize their group for

ethnic war in pursuit of their own goals. They use the propaganda resources of modern political organizations and mass media to manipulate ethnic symbols and fan ethnic hostility, and they identify out-groups with enemies from group mythology and highlight the threats they pose. Thus minor demographic changes can be redefined as mortal threats to group survival, ancient disasters can be recast as current events, and violent methods can be promoted as the only alternative to group catastrophe. In cases of elite-led violence, the initial degree of hostility can be very low: as long as leaders have myths to work with, they can create hostility and fear by provoking conflict and violence (Kaufman, 2001, p. 37, 207).

According to Kaufman, the attitude of the media can be an indicator: media opposition to ethnic mobilization implies a mass-led process whereas media support implies an elite-led process (Kaufman, 2001, p.46).

2.5 Implications for the future

Kaufman believes that the implication for identifying possible future ethnic wars is clear; the main thing we need to find out is what people are saying about each other. Popular culture is perhaps the most important indicator and where popular opinion is hard to measure, analysis of dissident speech can be revealing. To prevent ethnic wars, Kaufman believes that we should prevent extremist politics by limiting opportunity in the short run and by changing hostile myths and attitudes in the long run. Measures should therefore be taken to recast nationalist myths, and to ban ethnically offensive literature from classrooms, such as literature justifying murders. Also worthy of discouragement is literature denying other group's nationhood, and literature of national victim hood. Kaufman thinks that foreign criticism of media bias, historiography and school curricula is potentially the most effective long-term policy tool available for discouraging ethnic war (Kaufman, 2001, p. 212-213, 215-217).

2.6 Some critique of ethno-symbolism and Kaufman

Umut Özkirimli identifies a number of objections to the ethno-symbolist approach as presented by Smith. Most of these objections concern the links between the ethnic and the nation, and the differences between the two concepts. For instance, ethno-symbolists have been accused of confusing the concepts of ethnicity, ethnic group and nation. I can certainly see why this objection has been raised. I too find it hard to separate the terms, even though I think, just as Özkirimli himself points out, that this is just a typical illustration of the 'terminological chaos that bedevils the study of nationalism', and thus not only the ethno-symbolic approach (Özkirimli, 2000, p. 183). Another objection is that Smith underestimates the differences between the modern nation and the earlier ethnic communities. How

widespread the group consciousness and the deep sense of history was, is hard to know, especially among the masses, as most records from pre-modern time relates to the elite. I agree that this is very difficult to know, and big question mark in Smith's theory. However, for this thesis, the important thing is not the antiquity of the nation or ethnies, but which role these concepts play in present day conflicts. This group consciousness has to be reconstructed in each generation, and this also means that the identities are quite fluid and changeable, something that Smith also has been accused of underestimating (Özkirimli, 2000, p.184-187).

This critique can be related to the objection that leaders often seem to invent myths, raised for instance by Andrew C Janos in his review of Kaufman's book. An ethno-symbolist would most likely argue that unless these myths were just reconstructions of older myths, like the 'mythic overlaying' mentioned above, the myths wouldn't resonate. Janos also objects to the strategies for preventing ethnic wars proposed by Kaufman. He relates the strategy of banning ethnically offensive narratives from the curricula of the schools, to the strategies of Stalin and Tito, who both believed that repressing objectionable behavior was tantamount to changing attitudes (Janos, 2002, p. 592-593). I personally don't agree with this critique, and think that ethnically offensive narratives should not be allowed.

Another critique raised against Kaufman is that he hasn't set operational limits on what sort of beliefs or facts should qualify as the sorts of symbols that should be expected to cause ethnic conflict. According to Chaim Kaufmann, he doesn't seem to separate between symbol and structure, in that some grievances that he would call symbolic can actually be real material grievances, such as discrimination (Kaufmann, 2002, p. 887). I agree that Kaufman's theory would have benefited from a description of some important myths and symbols, like the one's I have mentioned above. However, I personally don't really interpret Kaufman as saying that grievances have to be purely symbolic. They can be very real, or they can be fictional. Kaufman's explanation of ethnic war lies in the meanings the participants see, how the ethnic groups understand their interests, and the important thing is thus that the grievances are *believed* to be real by the people

3 Northern Ireland

I would like to start this chapter with a discussion of the multi-dimensionality and complexity of group boundaries in Northern Ireland, meaning how the conflict can be characterized as a conflict about ethnicity, religion, and nationalism. I will discuss how these dimensions are intertwined and asserted through symbols. I will also discuss some of the important terminology that concerns the opposing parties in the conflict and clarify my opinions regarding this matter.

After this introductory section I will move on to the analysis of how the ethno-symbolic politics put forth by Stuart J. Kaufman is visible in Northern Ireland. I will especially focus on some examples of myths justifying ethnic hostility and some of the reasons for ethnic fear, as I believe these components influence the perceptions of the people the most. However, I will also discuss the opportunity to mobilize since I believe that it gives some interesting insights into how people's perceptions have been influenced by the armed forces, as well as into the possible future. I will also discuss whether the Northern Ireland conflict can be characterized as a mass-led or elite-led conflict.

For those who are interested I have included a summary of Northern Irish history and some pictures of murals in the appendices.

3.1 Religion, ethnicity, nationalism etc...

The conflict in Northern Ireland can be characterized as a conflict about ethnicity, religion, nationalism, socio-economic and political conditions, the list goes on. Different researchers see different reasons for the on-going struggle. This multi-dimensionality is precisely why I find it so interesting, and why Kaufman's theory is suitable. The myths and symbols, which this approach focuses on, can be about religion, ethnicity, nationalism, or whichever dimension that has meaning to the people. These dimensions are reflected in the group boundaries relevant to the conflict, and also in the myths and fears that influence these groups, giving them a contested and overlapping nature. Therefore I would like to discuss these dimensions and group boundaries further and how they are asserted in every day life.

Usually the protagonists are described as Protestant and Catholic. The reason for this is simple: most of the supporters of the one side are Protestants, and of the other side Catholics. Many of the historic conditions that have influenced the conflict have also been based on religious differences, such as the Penal Laws and the division of the island (see appendix 1). Religious boundaries have thus been of great importance in Northern Ireland for centuries and continue to be so, as the

segregation along sectarian lines still characterizes social life. Catholics and Protestants not only go to different churches, but they are also often residentially segregated, educated in separate schools, and marry within the group. They are also likely to participate in separate sporting activities and to patronize separate shops and services, such as doctors (Donnan, 2005, p.75-77). Furthermore, some people in Northern Ireland see the conflict as a religious conflict, and believe that the divisions between the communities are upheld by theological doctrine. According to Brewer and Higgins such sentiments were given a scriptural underpinning in the history of Protestant-Catholic relations in Northern Ireland in order to reinforce divisions between the religious communities and to offer a deterministic belief system to justify them (Brewer & Higgins, 1999, p. 235, 239).

However, others see religion simply as a significant part of the 'cultural stuff' of ethnicity in Northern Ireland (Brewer & Higgins, 1999, p. 252). Even though the two groups are hard to tell apart at first glance, the two groups can be seen as different ethnies. For instance many Catholics see themselves as descendants of the Celts, or the native Irish, and therefore identify with the Irish in the southern Republic. They share historic memories, mostly relating to oppression from the British, as well as elements of culture such as Catholicism, Gaelic folklore, music and traditions. There is an attachment to the territory of Ireland, claiming to be the native people of the island. Many Protestants on the other hand see themselves as descendants from the English and Scots settlers, and therefore identify with the British. Some even claim that these Scots settlers were merely coming home to their native Ireland after centuries of exile. This claim is based on the belief that the Scots were descendants of the ancient Cruthin, a civilization that is said to have lived in Ireland before the Celts invaded from the south. They share memories of life as a powerful minority among the hostile Irish and share culture, such as Protestantism and traditions like the 3000 or so marches every year. They feel an attachment to the territory of Northern Ireland due to centuries of habitation, and as mentioned some even see it as their native homeland. There are also those who see Ulster as the land given to the Protestants from God (Doherty & Poole, 1997, p.520; Santino, 2001, p. 20, 128; Brewer & Higgins, 1999, p. 243). The sense of solidarity is harder to identify as an outsider. Both groups do seem to feel a certain sense of togetherness, even though there seems to be more division over issues such as class, age and gender among the Protestants than the Catholics (Santino, 2001, p. 126).

This discussion of ethnicity is related to nationalism and that is also a complex matter in Northern Ireland. As mentioned, the opposing sides identify with two different nations, the Irish and the British. Many Protestants see themselves as British, and many Catholics see themselves as Irish. However, the outside world, including the rest of Britain, sees them all as Irish, whereas legally they are all British citizens (Santino, 2001, p. 6, 20). This nationalism relates closely to the political goals of the protagonists. Many of the Protestants that identify themselves as British fight to keep the union with the United Kingdom intact, and are for this reason often referred to as unionists. The Catholics, who identify themselves as Irish on the other hand, fight for a re-unification of all of Ireland, like the ones the Irish nationalists have dreamed of for centuries, and are

often therefore referred to as nationalists. Two other terms that also are important in this context are loyalist and republican. These terms are often used to describe the paramilitary extremist fractions of the nationalist and unionist sides. The members of the unionist paramilitary organizations, such as Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), are called loyalists, because of their desire to remain loyal to the United Kingdom. The members of the nationalist paramilitary organizations, such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) are called republicans, because of their desire to be reunited with the Republic of Ireland (Santino, 2001, p. 19-20).

These groups' identities are symbolically displayed throughout Northern Ireland. For instance, religious symbols are used to signify the majority identity in an area, such as the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary as one enters a Catholic neighborhood. Even more common symbols are the British Union flag, and the colors red, white and blue, which are used to signify unionism, while the Irish Tricolor, and the colors green, white and orange are used to signify nationalism. Often the curbstones of an area are painted in the relevant colors to signify whether the area is predominantly unionist or nationalists. These colors are also carried through to symbols worn on the body, or toys carried by children at festive occasions such as parades, dances or demonstrations, to signify ones identity (Santino, 2001, p. 2, 16, 45).

Not only the British and Irish flags are flown though. Some nationalists, who see themselves as an occupied and oppressed people, try to establish solidarity with other oppressed peoples. For this reason, the Palestinian flag can now be seen in nationalist areas of Northern Ireland, as well as murals dedicated to Nelson Mandela, American Indians and Jamaican Rastafarians. Of course, the Israeli flag can be seen in unionist areas, as they often draw parallels between themselves and the Israelis relating to being victims of terrorists and God's chosen people (Donnan, 2005, p. 89-90 and Santino, 2001, p. 41).

Symbols of group identity are also widely visible in less obvious ways in Northern Ireland. For instance, Santino claims that the term 'Ulster' in the names of newspapers, sports teams and other organizations signifies a pro-unionist standpoint, whereas the pro-nationalist newspapers, sports teams and organizations would use the term 'Irish'. Other such tells are for instance names and nicknames. For instance, a person named William would be called Liam if he were Catholic, and Will/Bill if he was Protestant (Santino, 2001, p. 4, 20). Malachi O'Doherty also writes that when he was little, a common remark about his name was 'sure the wee lad would be better off with a number', meaning the Irishness of the name would ensure that he would experience discrimination when he got older (O'Doherty, 1998, p.12).

As mentioned, however, in the introduction to this section, these different identities are contested and overlapping. Being Protestant does not necessarily mean the desire to keep the union with Britain. For instance, Presbyterians have also experienced discrimination by the English, and at times they have aligned themselves with the 'native' Irish, as in the United Irishmen rebellion in 1798 (Santino, 2001, p. 19). Voting records from 1989-1999 also show that there are some Protestants who vote for Sinn Féin and SDLP, the most nationalistic political parties (McAllister, 2004, p.134). A significant proportion of other

Northern Irish Protestants would accept an all-Ireland solution involving some form of shared sovereignty, according to Anderson and Shuttleworth (1998, p.188). Neither does being Catholic necessarily mean support for traditional Irish nationalism. There are Catholics that enjoy the benefits of the British health-care system and who wouldn't like to see Roman Catholic influence over politics like in the Republic (Santino, 2001, p. 133).

For this reason I personally don't approve of the use of the terms Protestant and Catholic as I believe that an interpretation of the conflict that focuses on religion can lead to the misplaced notion that the people in Northern Ireland are still fighting over theological issues that have long since been resolved elsewhere. The core issues are 'ethnonational identity and allegiance' according to Doherty and Poole, and this I agree with (Doherty & Poole, 1997, p. 520-521). Therefore I will try to refer to the opposing sides as nationalist and unionist, whenever suitable.

This does not, however, mean that I think that religion is irrelevant in the Northern Ireland conflict. Religion is and has been for centuries in Northern Ireland, a crucial issue. It is not just a matter of belief; it is a matter of ethnicity as the main signifier of communal differences. According to Santino, religion functions as a source of identity politics in the same way as race and ethnicity do in the United States and elsewhere (Santino, 2001, p. 19). However, I also agree with Anderson and Shuttleworth who state that religion is an important marker of ethnicity because of the absence and weakness of other markers (1998, p. 197). Michael Ignatieff's elaboration of the 'narcissism of small differences' supports this standpoint by implying that the smaller the differences between two groups are, the harder they try to make these differences seem crucial (Ignatieff, 1999, p. 37-69).

3.2 Myths justifying ethnic hostility

I wish to point out before I start that I will not discuss every myth that has relevance for the Northern Irish conflict. In a conflict where myths are so commonly used this would be an almost endless task. Instead I will just try to show some of the myths that are important, and how these are symbolically displayed in Northern Ireland. To be as fair as I possibly can, I have decided to discuss two important unionist myths – the Siege of Derry and the Battle of Boyne; two important nationalist myths – the Easter Rising and Bloody Sunday; and two myths that are claimed by both sides – Cuchullain and myth of the Promised Land

3.2.1 Unionist

The Siege of Derry took place in the Jerusalem of Northern Ireland, a city with great symbolic importance to both unionists and nationalists. The city was

founded by the British in the early 1600s on the site of an ancient Irish settlement called *Doire* (anglicized as 'Derrie'), and then changed the name to Londonderry. A wall was built around the city to protect the British Protestant settlers from the Irish Catholics who were forced to live in the marshy ghetto immediately outside the walls, known as the Bogside. The walled city became a defensive bastion for Protestant supporters of King William of Orange during the wars 1688-91. Catholic King James then surrounded Derry (or Londonderry) and attempted to starve the population into surrender. The governor decided to agree, but some apprentice boys waylaid him and kept the gate shut until Protestant King William of Orange arrived (Santino, 2001, p. 9).

Having withstood the siege has transformed the city into a mythical place forever memorable as an impregnable bulwark of British Protestantism. Keeping the memory of the Siege alive has been the mission of the Apprentice Boys, who parade the Derry walls every August 12 in commemoration. This ritual parading seems to try to drive home the point that despite the Catholic majority (established since 1891), Derry will remain a Protestant city (Dawson, 2005, p.158). This has also been interpreted as the Protestants still seeing themselves as surrounded by Catholics, many of whom still live in the Bogside. This myth is symbolized all around Northern Ireland with slogans such as 'Still under Siege' and 'No Surrender' (Santino, 2001, p. 45).

The Battle of Boyne took place in 1690, when the forces of Protestant William III, Prince of Orange defeated Catholic James II. This victory is said to have assured the British throne for Protestantism. Tensions run high during the celebrations of this battle, which take place every July 12. These celebrations are considered to be the high point of the unionist marching cycle. During these celebrations, seen by many as a celebration of the victory of Protestantism over Catholicism, some unionists carry lambeg drums. These are said to have been introduced to Ulster by King William's soldiers, and according to Ian Paisley, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), these drums were used to rally the troops before the battle. The drums are often painted with scenes from the Bible especially significant for Protestants, as well as adorned with flowers such as sweetwilliam and orange lilies, both representing William of Orange. These drums are also carried at other celebrations and demonstrations. Also, toys like union flag batons and flags are carried by children in the parades and festivals, something that many nationalists find offensive. The celebrations also include bonfires the night before, where effigies of the pope, flags of the Republic or Ireland and greenery symbolizing the Irish are burnt in the flames. The Battle of Boyne is symbolized by slogans such as 'Remember 1690' (Santino, 2001, p. 5-6, 23, 31-32, 65).

3.2.2 Nationalist

The Easter Rising took place on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916 and was the fourth in a series of significant nationalist revolts against British authority in

Ireland. Thousands of nationalist rebels seized control of the General Post Office, as well as several other buildings in Dublin and one of the leaders, Patrick Pearse, who identified the rebels with 'the dead generations' of Ireland, proclaimed the Irish Republic as a sovereign independent state. The rebellion was put down in one week, and did not have widespread popular support until the leaders of the rising were executed. Then, strong anti-British sentiments developed, which later led to the Anglo-Irish War of 1919, which in turn led to the partition of the island and the self-determination of the southern republic in 1921. This myth, or as English describes it, 'a nationalist Irish poem', is therefore very important in the nationalist mythology, as it represents the founding myth of the Irish state (Santino, 2001, p.10; English, 2003, p. 4-5; Hutchinson, 2004, p. 121). The anniversary of the rising is one of the most important nationalist celebrations during the year, and several murals and monuments, serve to further symbolize this myth in Northern Ireland. For instance, there is a statue of Cuchullain in the General Post office in Dublin, as a commemoration of the Easter Rising.

Because of the executions, parallels were drawn to Christ's crucifixion, and it has since been portrayed as 'a self-conscious act of religious sacrifice to redeem Irish sins' (Hutchinson, 2004, p. 121). Leaders of the rising, Pearse, as well as Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera have become regarded as heroic figures. O'Doherty testifies to the nationalist sentiments that were expressed in the Christian Brothers school where he attended. Pearse was seen as a martyr who anticipated his own blood sacrifice and he was indistinguishable from the saints in the way he was revered (O'Doherty, 1998, p. 16, 17-18).

Bloody Sunday is a more recent myth, which is central in nationalist popular memory. It refers to 30 January 1972 when British soldiers killed fourteen unarmed Irish nationalist civilians and seriously wounded several others during a civil-rights protest against the policy of internment, in Derry. Some nationalist riots broke out as the protesters were prevented from entering the city, which then was followed by arrests and assaults by the army, not only of the rioters, but also of marchers and local residents. As the crowd fled, the army opened fire. Forensic evidence, as well as civilian eyewitnesses, indicates that the soldiers opened fire on unarmed civilians. The outrage over this event was increased by the fact that no one was ever held accountable by the British government. A Tribunal was set up at the time to investigate the killings, but it totally exonerated the soldiers who claimed that they had come under sustained attack from the IRA. At the time this event stimulated a widespread shift towards a separatist national identification as 'Irish' among the Derry Catholics, many of who had previously seen the British army as 'our army' (Dawson, 2005, p. 152, 160-163).

This event is according to Dawson 'the most important single case of the abuse of state power perpetrated by the British Army in the course of its long counter-insurgency campaign in Northern Ireland' (Dawson, 2005, p.151). The local human-rights organization in Derry, called the Bloody Sunday Initiative, described the event in 1992 as 'a symbol of what Britain does in Ireland' (Dawson, 2005, p.152). The myth of Bloody Sunday is thus very important in the nationalist struggle and is kept alive in Northern Ireland, and especially in Derry in several ways. There is for instance an annual commemoration march that

follows the same route since 1972. This march attempts to challenge the official memory of what happened, and assert the innocence of the victims. There is also a Bloody Sunday monument that lists the names and ages of the victims under the inscription 'Their epitaph is in the continuing struggle for democracy'. The Free Derry Wall still bears the same slogan as it did in 1972, and is considered the most famous of all nationalist monuments to the Troubles. Set around this corner are now several other murals that commemorate the Troubles in general and Bloody Sunday especially. For instance, there is one Bloody Sunday mural calling for 'Truth Justice Healing', one depicting the fourteen people that were killed and one Father Daly 'waving a white handkerchief as he leads rescuers carrying Jackie Duddy, a dying victim through the still threatening bullets' (Dawson, 2005, p. 152, 165). Bloody Sunday has not been forgotten by political leaders either. Gerry Adams, the leader of Sinn Féin called for a new inquiry during his speech at the 1997 commemoration arguing that 'Bloody Sunday remains pertinent today because it is an open wound. Bloody Sunday is the Sunday which has never ended' (Gerry Adams, quoted in Dawson, 2005, p. 171).

3.2.3 Myths claimed by both groups

Cuchullain is known in ancient sagas as the Hound of Ulster. He has long been cast as an Irish epic hero, and by extension he has been assumed to have been Celtic, and thus the cultural property of nationalism. However, unionists claim to be the descendants of a pre-Celtic civilization, the Cruthin, who are said to have lived in the north of Ireland. Cuchullain are then seen as a Pre-Celtic resident of Ulster who tried to repel the invading Celts. One mural in Newtownards Road in Belfast, for instance, claims him as 'Ulster's ancient defender against the Irish'. Interestingly enough the mural depicts Sheppard's statue of Cuchullain that stands in the General Post Office in Dublin, as a monument to the martyrs of the Easter Rising in 1916, one of the most important events in nationalist mythology (Santino, 2001, p. 21, 39-40).

The myth of the Promised Land exists both in nationalist and unionist mythology. For republicans, to give up their ordinary lives to heroic self-sacrifice means the attainment of a promised land, a new Ireland, a new republic, which is imagined to be the restoration of a pure and ancient Ireland, uncontaminated by British influence. The goal of the promised land can only be attained through a complete rejection, on principle, of compromise. 'Compromise is defeat or surrender, it is never a path to victory'. This theme is common in Catholic mythology as well, where the promised land is one of bliss (O'Doherty, 1998, p. 20).

For the Protestants, Ulster can be seen as God's promise of land to those who are true to him, and he endorses its constitutional union with Britain. Protestantism has a divine mission in Ireland to save the country from the Roman Catholic Church, which represents Biblical evil and the enemy of Christianity. Roman Catholicism is thus a threat to Ulster and the IRA is simply the Roman Catholic Church at war (Brewer & Higgins, 1999, p. 243-244). Ulster Protestants

draw parallels between themselves and the ancient Jews and Israelites who lived their lives as God's exiled elects amidst foreigners and heathens and contemporary Ulster Unionism relies on fundamentalist Protestant perspectives for many of its rhetorical motifs. Today, the Israeli flag flies above Protestant south Armagh as a symbol in the contemporary cultural war with Republicans (who fly the Palestinian flag), resonating conveniently themselves as descendants of ancient Israelites (Donnan, 2005, p. 89-90). This myth is also symbolized by slogans such as 'For God and Ulster'.

3.3 Ethnic fears

Fears are a natural part of a conflict that has been going on for as long as the Northern Ireland conflict. The fears that I have chosen to highlight are the fear generated by violence, the fear generated by domination, and the demographic fear.

3.3.1 Fear generated by violence

On Ormeau Road in a Catholic working class area in Belfast, in February 1992, five men were killed when loyalist paramilitaries walked into a betting office and opened fire. This was retaliation for an earlier IRA attack at Teebane on contractors who were working for the British government. These kind of "tit-for-tat" killings, an eye for an eye, have characterized Northern Ireland for a long time (Santino, 2001, p. 75). Malachi O'Doherty describes this in his discussion of the Troubles of the 1960s-1970s. 'Violence generated violence. Every calamity produced the anger and hurt that would fire the next' (O'Doherty, 1998, p. 29).

In one of Santino's interviews, Mr. McMullen, a Catholic of mixed parents, who condemns the IRA, claimed that loyalists had threatened him. He had to hand over the big new construction job he had just received to them, and never be seen around there again, or he would be 'shot stone dead' (Santino, 2001, p. 55). In the interviews conducted by Donnan practically all of the seventy or so Protestant men and women in the borderlands mentioned intimidation as part of border life. Former IRA volunteer Sean O'Callaghan's recent claim that the IRA's strategic objective along the border in the 1970s was the creation of a buffer zone free of Protestants merely confirmed what many border Protestants already believed – that the aim was ethnic cleansing, genocide, and to 'drive us out' (Donnan, 2005, p. 86-87). References to ethnic cleansing are not unusual and they go both ways. On a wall next to a unionist bonfire site in Bangor it is written 'Ulster needs ethnic cleansing'. There is also graffiti saying 'All Taighs must die', Taigh being an epithet for Catholics (Santino, 2001, p. 45, 55).

For some unionists, the fact that Sinn Féin receives about 30 percent of the Catholic vote is seen as proof of the violent nature of the Catholic population generally, and as a sign of that they, even though they may seem friendly, really

want to murder Protestants. These feelings are reciprocated by some of the nationalists, who see the Orange Order's parades as being supportive of the violence of the extremists. Both groups are thus convinced of the others inherently violent nature (Santino, 2001, p. 55).

A plaque outside the building on Ormeau Road lists the names and ages of the victims, two of which were only seventeen, and states that they were 'murdered for their faith'. This sort of memorial to victims is common in Northern Ireland on both sides. Often roadside monuments or plaques are erected to commemorate the heroic dead (Donnan, 2005, p. 90). There are also memorial walls to paramilitary figures, which serve as recruitment posters. The deceased are presented as fallen soldiers, martyrs and heroes (Santino, 2001, p. 43).

3.3.2 Fear generated by past domination

As mentioned, when there is a history of domination, the threat of being dominated again seems more plausible, and in turn it gives the previously dominant reason to fear revenge. In Northern Ireland, the past centuries have been characterized by Protestant domination over Catholics, and even though this domination has decreased more and more there are still elements of it left. Census and other official survey data indicate that Catholics remain more likely to be unemployed than Protestants and are over-represented in semi- or unskilled manual occupations (Jenkins, 1998, p. 103).

More important though, is the Protestant fear of revenge. There are for instance negative stereotypes of the alleged over-arching and domineering influence of the Church in all aspects of Southern Irish politics and culture, signified by references to 'Rome Rule'. Therefore the ideal of a united Ireland is seen as a threat to the civil and political liberties. Frequently the Catholic Church is also accused of supporting terrorism, and of setting the agenda for the IRA (Brewer & Higgins, 1999, p. 245, 247, 251).

This threat is enhanced by statements such as 'If we don't win this battle all is lost. It is a matter of life and death...Ulster or the Irish Republic...freedom or slavery', which Ian Paisley declared when the Orange Order were fighting to be allowed to march down the Catholic Garvaghy Road in 1995 (Anderson & Shuttleworth, 1998, p.199). This fear of revenge also causes a fear of being left to fend for themselves. Great Britain has renounced both economic and strategic interests in Northern Ireland in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and as the republican paramilitaries will provide Great Britain with plenty of reason to dissolve the union, they will have no motivation to retain it. Thus the unionists perceive the strategy of violence as having led to victory (Santino, 2001, p. 131).

3.3.3 Fear generated by demographics

When the island was partitioned in 1921 the border was drawn with the sole purpose of securing a permanent Protestant majority in the North. Thus sectarian

head counting has been a 'built-in' feature of Northern Ireland politics from its inception (Anderson & Shuttleworth, 1998, p.188). However, Northern Ireland Protestants have always felt themselves to be an embattled community, fearful that their 60:40 majority over Catholics will be eroded by the higher Catholic birth rate and wary of incorporation into the Irish Republic (Donnan, 2005, p.72-73). The status of being part of Britain is conditional upon the majority support.

There is general agreement that the proportion of Catholics in the total population of Northern Ireland has increased significantly since 1971. Especially the 1991 census was interpreted as showing a dramatic increase in the number of Catholics and the public discourse around this census implied a decisive shift in the balance of power with Catholics gaining in numbers and territory at the expense of Protestants (Doherty & Poole, 1997, p. 522, 526, Anderson & Shuttleworth, 1998, p.188). The demographic fears are particularly strong in border areas, where Catholics outnumber Protestants by two to one. The Protestants here fear being 'bought out' or 'bred out', and thus are especially hostile to the transfer of land from Protestant to Catholic (Donnan, 2005, p. 82).

Mixed marriages are also seen as a problem, because the Catholic church tries to ensure that the children from such marriages are brought up as Catholics. This is widely interpreted by unionists as a strategy designed to eventually tip the electoral balance in favor of the reunification of Ireland (Jenkins, 1998, p. 113).

There is also an ethnic affinity problem, mentioned by Kaufman. The Catholics may be a minority in Northern Ireland, but they are the majority in the region. The fear this causes is further strengthened by the Irish constitution having claimed jurisdiction over the north, a clear sign that they haven't forgotten their fellow nationals in the north.

3.4 Opportunity to mobilize and fight

Clearly Britain has had a massive military advantage, which has often resulted in the limited rioting predicted by Kaufman. Britain has also tried to repress their adversaries, through for instance the policy of internment, and there have also been massacres, like Bloody Sunday. However, these strategies have not managed to put an end to the conflict but instead seem only to have spurred it on. One of the IRA's slogans is that 'it is not those who inflict the most but those who endure the most who prevail'. Republican strategy was never to force a military solution to the conflict, because they knew this would be impossible. Instead it was a form of armed propaganda, a way to keep the question of the constitution of Northern Ireland open and remind people that there is an unresolved problem to be dealt with (O'Doherty, 1998, p. 84, 98-99). Foreign patrons have probably played a significant role in enabling the IRA to maintain this armed propaganda. Funding and arms supplied by Irish Americans has been significant since the beginning of the century (English, 2003, p. 72, 115-117). The Republic of Ireland has also played a part in this conflict, in that many IRA training camps have been located across the border (*Dagens Nyheter*, 970425, p. A10).

The opportunity to mobilize and fight in this case has probably been more inhibited by respect than by repression. For instance, at the police training camp they have a flag that includes both the red hand of Ulster, and the Tricolor, to make sure the army understands there is respect for that aspiration even if it's not a legal reality (Santino, 2001, p. 133). 'There are some people who would say in fact that the aspirations is what many Catholics want, not the reality of a united Ireland' says Mari Fitzduff of the Belfast Community Relations Council. 'There's a lot more recognition in fact that things are not so bad for Catholics in Northern Ireland'. 'Most Protestants at some level fear that within the next 15 years, 20 years, they are actually going to be pushed into a united Ireland. Most Catholics would be horrified at this thought' (Santino, 2001, p. 133). The fear of diminishing civil liberties if the Catholic Church would receive the same influence as in the Republic of Ireland, are shared by both Catholics and Protestants.

Something that also seems to have affected the opportunity element is the war on terrorism. According to political scientist William Lafferty, the international terrorism connected to Islam has made it much more difficult for the IRA to justify using those sorts of tactics, something that probably has influenced their decision to end the armed struggle (*Dagens Nyheter*, 050728).

3.5 The typical mass-led conflict

'At higher income levels, prosperous middle-class groups in democratic states are not usually inclined to pursue ethnic violence – but in cases where ethnic myths and fears are strong, as in Northern Ireland and Spain's Basque region, they do resort to violence' (Kaufman, 2001, p. 33-34). This statement is an obvious clue to how Kaufman sees Northern Ireland. Myths, fears and hostility have been an integral part of society for centuries. This is obvious in the many rebellions that have challenged the authority of the British state. This conflict could therefore be characterized as a mass-led conflict. What further strengthen this conclusion are the galvanizing events that occurred in the late 1960s, when this last conflict can be seen to have begun. First there was the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966, which inspired a big revival of the interest in nationalism. Malachi O'Doherty describes how people hung out the Irish tricolor, and youths shouted 'Celtic! Celtic!' at the celebrations (O'Doherty, 1998, p. 23). Also important was the initiation of the Catholic civil rights movement in 1968, which was inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States (Santino, 2001, p. 10). This civil rights movement was followed by rioting during August 1969 which proved the untenability of the Northern Irish state; it legitimated protest to bring it to an end and armed organization to defend those trapped within it. 'It was, in a sense, the Big Bang which generated three decades of warfare' (O'Doherty, 1998, p. 35).

Another point Kaufman makes about mass-led conflicts is the way leaders' room for maneuver is limited; if they try to take too moderate a line, they are likely to be displaced by more extreme nationalists. This is also true in Northern

Ireland. According to The Economist this trend has been visible among both nationalists and unionists. Sinn Féin leaders Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness has marginalized moderate nationalism by exploiting the party's close relationship with the IRA, just as Ian Paisley as undermined his political rivals, like the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, David Trimble, characterizing him as 'the traitor who let terrorists into government' (The Economist, 041211, p.37).

4 Conclusions

In this section I will summarize the conclusions made in this thesis regarding the symbolism of the Northern Ireland conflict present in the lives of ordinary people. I will clarify how myths justifying ethnic hostility, ethnic fears and the opportunity to mobilize and fight can be seen in Northern Ireland, as well as the mass-led character of the conflict. I will also discuss the future of the conflict now that the IRA have turned in their weapons and ended their armed struggle, as well as evaluate the usefulness of the theory I have used.

4.1 Summary of my findings

As I have showed in this thesis, symbolism is a vital part of Northern Irish society. The environment these people live in is scattered with symbols of group identity. Nothing is innocent, not even which sports team you like, which newspaper you read, or which flowers you pick. These are all signs of which side you're on, whether intended or not. The same goes for which area you live in, or which name your parents gave you. Added to these symbols are also symbols of myths that justify ethnic hostility. There are murals depicting old battles, won and lost, thousands of parades and celebrations every year, slogans scribbled on walls, all serving to remind people of what has happened in the past. 'Remember 1690' relates to the Battle of Boyne where Protestantism is seen to have defeated Catholicism and 'Still Under Siege' serves to remind unionists of the importance of not giving up. Murals of the martyrs of the Easter Rising instills a pride of giving all you can to the nationalist cause, even at the expense of your own life, and monuments to Bloody Sunday reminds nationalists of the injustices they have had to endure over the years. There are many more such myths that are referred to through symbols in Northern Ireland. Personally I find it very interesting that both communities occasionally refer to the same myths, but in different interpretations. Not only are themes such as the promised land used by both groups, but also they actually claim the same heroes, like Cuchullain.

These myths and symbols justifying ethnic hostility are supplemented with ethnic fears, according to Kaufman's model. In Northern Ireland, these fears come in a variety of forms. There are fears spurred by the experience of violence through the years and by threats of violence still used by both sides to gain territory. There are also fears of being discriminated against and dominated. Nationalists base this fear on past experience, whereas unionists' fear revenge of past such domination and discrimination, and being dominated by the Catholic Church. The demographic fears are also significant, as the number of Catholics is

increasing in relation to Protestants, due to for instance a higher birthrate and the efforts of the Catholic Church to ensure that children of mixed marriages are brought up as Catholics. These fears are perhaps also spurred on by the ethnic affinity problem in the region.

In these myths and fears, there are traces of the common themes in myths identified by Smith and Schöpflin. The myths of origin and ancestry can be seen in the identification with different ancestral groups, such as the Celts, the Scots or the Cruthin. These myths are closely related to the myths of the sacred homeland. Both groups try to claim that they are the native people of the island, and therefore have the right to rule over it. For the unionists, the late 1600s seem to represent a golden age, when Protestantism prevailed over its enemies, and heroes such as the Apprentice Boys of Derry proved the stamina and loyalty of Protestants. The nationalists seem to feel the same way about the time of the Easter Rising and the Anglo-Irish War. This was a time when nationalists prevailed and managed to drive the British out of most of Ireland. It was also a time when nationalists proved that they were willing to give their life for the sake of the Irish nation. The myth of ethnic election can also be seen in this conflict, for instance in the Protestant myth of being chosen by God. For the Catholics the myths of suffering are more prominent, like the Bloody Sunday myth. However, the allegations of genocide and ethnic cleansing are common on both sides, something that further infuses the conflict with an element of urgency and makes the communities extra sensitive towards perceived threats.

The opportunity to fight and mobilize in Northern Ireland today is probably less than it has been. During the first decades of the last round of 'troubles' the opportunity was influenced by such things as the massive British military advantage, funding supplied to the IRA by American patrons, and the fact that the IRA could set up training camps just across the border in the Republic. Nowadays, the war on terrorism has brought a crisis of legitimacy to the IRA, as the use of terrorist tactics is associated with Muslim fundamentalists. There is also less discrimination and more respect for the Catholics in Northern Ireland, something that leaves them less inclined to fight for unification. This might also influence the mass-led character of the conflict. Through the years, the ethnic myths and fears have been strong, and moderate politicians have been outmaneuvered by more extreme ones. The conflict therefore erupted again when the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising stirred up nationalist sentiments, and the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, influenced by the African-American civil rights movement, pointed to the untenability of the situation for Catholics.

The ethno-symbolic politics approach thus teaches us that as long as there are symbols relating to myths that justify ethnic hostility, and ethnic fears, there is the possibility for ethnic war, when the opportunity presents itself. The implication for the Northern Ireland conflict is therefore that as long as these myths and symbols are such a vital part of the community, the conflict is not over. The armed struggle of the IRA, the UVF and the British army is only one part of the conflict, and not the most vital one. The conflict can still be kept alive in the hearts and minds of the people, especially if they are reminded on a daily basis of past abuse and unfair treatment. However, the end of this armed struggle is

certainly an important step in the right direction. This could hopefully lead to a diminishing fear of violence, and to negative stereotypes about the violent nature of the groups that both groups have about each other could fade.

4.2 The future of Northern Ireland

What about the future of Northern Ireland? I personally believe that Northern Ireland is not ready for a reunification now. The role of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland is too intimidating to both Protestants and Catholics, and many Catholics recognize that the situation is getting better and better for them in Northern Ireland. However, I also somehow have the feeling that the union with Britain is doomed in the long run. The nationalists have been fighting for too long to give up now. It would probably feel like a betrayal to the dead generations that have given their lives to the struggle. Hopefully though, the struggle will now go on only through political channels. Since the demographic trend indicates a shift in the make-up of Northern Ireland in favor of the Catholics, nationalists might get to their goal in the long run, at least if the Republic of Ireland becomes more secular.

Something that probably would greatly increase the chances for peace in Northern Ireland, is putting some effort into finding and emphasizing uniting myths. Since my purpose was to see some of the ways in which the Northern Ireland conflict was present in the lives of ordinary people, I have naturally focused on the confrontational myths that exist in Northern Ireland. I also believe that the myth-symbol complex of these groups focuses a lot on this kind of myths. However, that doesn't mean that there are no myths that could potentially bind the community together. As I mentioned the Presbyterians and the Catholics have both experienced discrimination at the hands of the British, and have at times joined hands against them. This could perhaps be an experience that could be turned into a uniting myth.

4.3 Evaluation of the theory

I believe that Kaufman's model for analyzing ethnic wars is a very interesting and useful theory. Not only does it shed an interesting light on how the Northern Irish conflict lives on in the lives of ordinary people, but it also offers a way to predict future conflicts around the world and also how to prevent them. What are people saying about each other? What are people scared of? This is something I think would be very interesting to investigate in further research. However, I must admit I am a bit skeptical. It sounds too easy somehow. If myths and fears are strong, is a conflict inevitable in the long run? Are people really that predictable? Furthermore, just as Kaufman's theory offers solutions to ethnic wars, it also

informs manipulating politicians of strategies to start them. The theory could be used for good as well as for evil, which is something that has to be kept in mind.

I also believe that a strength in Kaufman's theory is the way he allows for both mass-led and elite-led conflicts. Sometimes conflicts bubble up from below, and politicians just seize this opportunity, rather than create it. The theory could however have benefited from some common themes in myths, which helps you analyze why the myths are important.

4.4 Final thoughts

For the past couple of months, my world has revolved around Northern Ireland. Not only have I had books describing riots, killings and the violent history of the conflict with me at all times, even next to my bed, but I have also got into the habit of listening to songs like 'Sunday, Bloody Sunday' by U2 over and over again. One might think that I now, when the thesis is done, I would be so sick of Northern Ireland, I would be happy to never hear of it again. Quite the opposite is true. My fascination for Northern Ireland has never been greater. I can't wait to go there, to see it all for myself!

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Appendix 1. History of Northern Ireland

British involvement began in Ireland in the 12th century when a small British colony was established around Dublin, known as the 'Pale', but it was not until Henry VIII and Elisabeth I took an interest in Ireland, in the 16th century, that colonization began to increase. This colonization meant a serious challenge to Gaelic culture and religion became a further cause of division as Henry I imposed Protestantism by force. Several rebellions were sparked but the last of the great Irish chieftains, Hugh O'Neill, was defeated in the early 1600s, something which opened the way for the 'Plantation of Ulster' in 1610. The best land was then confiscated from the native Irish and given to settlers, most of whom were Scottish Presbyterians. This generated another rebellion, which was put down by Oliver Cromwell's forces that also opened up the rest of Ireland for colonization.

When James II came to the throne in 1685 the Protestant elite became fearful of a catholic ascendancy and they asked William of Orange to overthrow the king. James was defeated by William at the Battle of Boyne in 1690, thus ensuring Protestant ascendancy. A series of punitive measures against Catholics, known as the Penal Laws were established, to secure the political, economic and social ascendancy of the new Protestant settlers.

In the late 18th century there were numerous unsuccessful rebellions aimed at liberating Ireland from England. This led to Home Rule being but on the political agenda, something that the Protestants of the north greatly opposed. They feared that an Irish parliament would lead to discrimination of Protestants, and Home Rule. Therefore a Protestant militia, the Ulster Volunteer Force, was set up in 1913. In response to this, the nationalist Irish Volunteers were formed, which combined with other nationalist organization later was to become the Irish Republican Army, IRA.

Pro-Home Rule rebels seized several buildings in Dublin on Easter Monday 1916, known as the Easter Rising. The rebellion was put down by the British army and fifteen of the leaders were executed, something which inflamed nationalist opinion and led to Home Rule no longer being enough. In 1918, the pro-independence Sinn Féin won virtually every seat outside of Ulster, and the Irish Republican army began a guerilla war against Britain. The war ended in 1921, when a treaty created a 26-county Irish Free State, with dominion status, like Canada, while the remaining six counties of the north were still part of Britain. The division within Ireland over whether to accept this partition led to the Irish Civil War, which ended when the new Irish government executed IRA leaders. The Irish Free State then became a full republic in 1949.

In the north, the Protestant majority discriminated heavily against the Catholics in housing, employment and voting. Inspired by the American civil

rights movement, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) began to protest against this discrimination in the late 1960s. The association was then accused of being a political front of the IRA and Protestants counter-demonstrated which led to riots between the two groups. By the summer of 1969 the crisis in Northern Ireland had deepened considerably. Sectarian clashes at the annual commemoration of the Siege of Derry on August 14 became known as the Battle of the Bogside, and this led to direct intervention by the British army. Riots erupted also in Belfast, and several Catholic houses were burnt. The IRA were accused of failing to defend the Catholics, which led to the split in 1970 between the Official IRA, who favored political strategies, and the Provisional IRA, who turned to violence.

In 1971 the first soldier was shot dead in Northern Ireland since the troops arrived in 1969, and this was shortly followed by the policy of internment without trial. Hundreds of suspected extremists, including the present Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, were rounded up and detained over the next four years. The prisoners were subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment, which the European Court also convicted Britain for. Internment provoked riots and demonstrations, such as the one on January 30 1972, known as Bloody Sunday, when fourteen unarmed civilian nationalists were shot dead by British soldiers. Lord Widgery was appointed to conduct an inquiry, and concluded that the soldiers had been fired on first, even though there were no evidence to that effect. In March 1972 the Unionist-dominated Stormont Parliament was closed and direct rule from London was imposed. Attempts were made to improve the situation in Northern Ireland, which was reciprocated by an IRA cease-fire. However, when the British refused to withdraw from Ireland, the violence continued with a series of IRA bombs and UVF attacks over the next couple of years. In 1981, several IRA prisoners die after having hungerstriking for the right to be considered prisoners of war.

In 1985 the Anglo-Irish Agreement set up a number of cross-border initiatives, something that is strongly opposed by the unionists. However, this agreement did not put an end to the violence. Several civilians, as well as people belonging to the IRA, the UVF and to the British forces were killed over the next ten years. In August 1994 the IRA announced a cessation of violence, which was reciprocated by the loyalists. This cease-fire lasted until 1996 when the bombing campaign was resumed. There were also riots in Northern Ireland, as the Orange Order was allowed to parade down Garvaghy Road against the will of the Catholic residents. In 1997 the IRA declared another cease-fire, and in October of that year unionists, loyalists, nationalists and republicans sat down together to seek a solution to Ulster's problems. Tony Blair became the first British Prime Minister for 70 years to meet with Sinn Féin, something that angered unionists.

Riots and violence continued, and support for the peace-talks faltered among both nationalists and unionists. However, in 1998, an agreement known as the Good Friday Agreement was produced. A majority of the people in Northern Ireland approved of this agreement, as did the population of the Republic of Ireland, who amended their constitution. Instead of a claim to the territory of Northern Ireland, an affirmation of the right of all the people of Ireland to be part

of the Irish nation and a declaration of the aspirations towards a united Ireland of the Irish nation was made. Under the agreement, voters elected a new power sharing Northern Ireland assembly, where unionist leader, David Trimble, became First minister. The nationalist Social Democratic Labour Party's Seamus Mallon became Deputy First minister. The assembly faltered as disagreements continued. In the elections of 2003, Sinn Féin and DUP became the largest parties in each ethnic block and this was expected to make progress more difficult. However, steady progress has been made.

In July 2005 the IRA made a public statement ordering an end to the armed campaign and instructing its members to pursue purely political programs. In September 2005 this was followed by the announcement that the decommissioning process has been completed (Rowan, 050926; [bbc.co.uk 051003](http://bbc.co.uk/051003); BBC News 980113; Wikipedia, 051005).

Appendix 2. Examples of murals



Nationalist mural of Nelson Mandela in Falls Road in Belfast



Nationalist mural of Cuchullain in Armagh



Nationalist mural in commemoration of Bloody Sunday, Derry



Unionist mural of King William at the Battle of Boyne, in Ballycarry



Unionist mural of Iron Maiden's Eddie as an avenging loyalist, in Carrickfergus



Loyalist mural of UUVF men in Woodstock Link

(All pictures from BBC.co.uk 051005)