Flying flags of fear:

The role of fear in the process of political transition

Brandon Hamber[†]

Paper presented at the Risk, Complex Crises & Social Futures Conference

Amman, Jordan, 11-13 October 2003

Working Paper

13 September 2003

[†] Brandon Hamber is an Associate of Democratic Dialogue, a policy think-tank in Belfast, Northern Ireland. He is also an Associate of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa. He works as an independent research consultant. Correspondence to 23 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1FY, Northern Ireland, Tel: +44 (0)7810 182954, Fax: +44(0)2890220051, Email: mail@brandonhamber.com, Website: http://www.brandonhamber.com. Comments on the paper and correspondence to Brandon Hamber at mail@brandonhamber.com.

"An Israeli flag is held taut by the wind, its blue and white colours brighter as the sun breaks through a gap in the clouds. But the sky against which this flag flies is not the expanse that blazes over the Golan Heights or Galilee. This is Belfast. And the community that hoisted it up was not an Israeli community living in Northern Ireland, either. Instead, it's an emblem among all the other cultural signs that crowd this small space. This flag is in The Village, a loyalist enclave in north Belfast where Union Jacks are in plentiful supply, murals of William of Orange decorate gable walls, and the kerb stones are painted red, white and blue. Nothing seems further removed from Protestant Unionism and fiercely held Northern Irish links with Britain than the symbol of Israeli culture, but this isn't an isolated display. In certain areas across Belfast, the most potent declaration of Israeli nationalism is flying high, but so out of its original context that its significance has taken on a completely different meaning"[1]

Introduction

This essay outlines some unfolding ideas about fear, risk and social change, and their application to the process of political transition. It is about diverse forms of symbolism—as the quotation above indicates—as well as the confluence and divergence of micro (individual) and macro (political) ways of dealing with and thinking about the legacy of political violence. The essay analyses the role of fear in the political transition process, a subject seldom dealt with in the academic literature. The frame of analysis I use is a new lens of examination and application for my unfolding work on political transitions, particularly from a psychosocial perspective. To this end, what follows is a range of ideas and theoretical contemplations, which will hopefully open further academic space within political transition processes and debates in the transitional justice literature for exploring the concept of fear.

The essay draws on my experience of the peace processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa. It begins by positing some thoughts on the strange phenomenon of the flying of Israeli flags in Belfast as highlighted by the quoted at the beginning of the essay. It outlines briefly how the concept of fear (and risk) is generally dealt with in the psychological and sociological literature. Thereafter, it argues that fear and its use is an unrecognised variable operating within the popular discourses surrounding political negotiations and processes such as truth commissions. The way the concept of fear—like the suffering of victims of political

violence—is politicised and depoliticised is tackled. The essay then concludes by trying to apply some of the ideas presented to the South Africa and Northern Ireland contexts, and particularly to approaches to political risk-taking.

Flying flags of fear

As tension mounts during the build up to the Orange marching season in the summer each year in Northern Ireland, the streets of many of its cities and towns are festooned with flags. The proliferation of Union Jacks, Ulster flags, Irish Tricolours and paramilitary flags that adorn the streets symbolise loyalty and are sectarian markers of territory. In July 2002, however, something unusual happened. As if from nowhere, republicans started hoisting the Palestinian flag alongside their Irish Tricolours, and in neighbouring loyalist areas the Israeli flag suddenly appeared and fluttered alongside the Union Jack and the flags of assorted paramilitary groupings. In some areas the trend seemed short-lived, but this summer Israeli flags in particular continued to find their way onto lampposts in some loyalist estates.

To add to this strange turn of events, in early April 2002, as United States tanks entered Baghdad and British troops apparently took control of Basra, George W. Bush flew into Northern Ireland for a War Summit with Tony Blair.   The issues principally on the agenda were the fate of post-war Iraq, as well as informal talks about the state of the Northern Ireland peace process, including Mr Bush's endorsement for it. The two leaders met at Hillsborough Castle, where, according to a British spokesman, the two leaders tried to recreate a "Camp David" atmosphere.[2] It is difficult not to approach the reasons for this meeting cynically, as one commentator put it: the meeting was "a piece of theatre: a nice gesture to Tony Blair, a peace-making photo-opportunity to counterpoint the images of war on Fox News".[3] Needless to say, few fell for this naked propaganda, and in terms of the Northern Ireland peace process the meeting had no effect.

What is the significance of these stories? Firstly, they highlight how the issue of security has become globalised—albeit in a seemingly confused, overlapping and multi-layered way. Secondly, and for the purposes of this essay, they say something about the concept of fear and its role in political transition, a subject which, to my knowledge, has not been explored thoroughly before.

On one level, the republican flying of the Palestinian flag could simply be a gesture of solidarity with a cause they support and have always supported. It could also be, although no one has stated this publicly, an attempt to compare the two situations. Although any claims by republicans that they share a similar level of hardship as many Palestinians, or loyalist claims that they experience the same level of threat many Israelis feel seems questionable. On a more frivolous level, the flying of the different flags could simply be a symbol of division, a way of trying to outdo your adversary. As David Ervine, leader of the Progressive Unionist Party, the political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force and a minor player in the Good Friday Agreement talks, commented: "It becomes a badge that's meant to upset the others…All I want to say is that if one side put a Tamil flag up, the other would put up a Sri Lankan one".[4]

On a more serious note, the flying of the flags could symbolise a range of conscious or perhaps subliminal fears. Speculatively: for some republicans the Palestinian flag symbolises the place from where they feel they have come (oppression) and what they do not want to go back to (conflict). This is why their constituents are urged to continue to support the Agreement of 1998. Perhaps for some loyalists the Israeli flag represents the opposite, i.e. a perceived fear of what might happen if they continue to support the Agreement, namely tha they may become hemmed in and surrounded by a hostile other.

Political transition and fear

The concept of fear is central—albeit fairly silently—to many of the general themes of modern social and political thought.[5] Despite its centrality to growing sociological thought on risk, which presupposes different senses of fearlessness and fearfulness in a 'risk society', it is in fact generally untheorised.[6] From a psychological perspective, although there is an ever increasing literature on fear (and phobias), this is generally dealt with through the prism of the clinical and biological, and largely acontextually. It is a subject which is dealt with in criminology and social policy largely in terms of fear of crime and a question concerning security and uncertainty, but it is hardly a central tenet.

Fear as a concept, and its relationship to the political and social context, has received little, if no, academic attention. The role of fear—and to a degree risk —is seldom theorised about or dealt with in relation to the concept of political transition.[7] This is not to say the

concept never comes up. Fear is often discussed in terms of how it maintains and creates division in conflicted political environments. For example, from what Crawford Young calls a primordial understanding of ethnicity where groups divide into "we" and "they" categories because of the human need for belonging, fear is considered a singularly powerful emotional field that helps the negative stereotype to mutate into apprehensions of the hostile behaviour on the part of the ethnic other.[8] This maintains and can escalate conflict.

In Belfast in Northern Ireland, it has also been found that a mental map of what is a 'safe' and 'unsafe' area for different communities in conflicted zones has been a persistent part of the conflict.[9] The extreme result of this *real and perceived* threat has been the construction of "peace walls". In themselves the "peace walls" have become "the malevolent face of the people who live on the other side".[10] The gradual acceptance of this ethno-sectarian apportionment nurtures the belief that the 'other' community is committed to harm.[11] In essence, the fear of "the other" is a reason for and perpetuates division that lingers in the peace process today.

The political appropriation of fear is also an issue that receives mention in conflict situations, especially its misuse by politicians (not to mention the public, professionals and institutions). It is fairly commonplace nowadays to hear the analysis that US foreign policy on Iraq and the "fight against terrorism", for example, is designed to "keep people's attention away from what you're doing *[on domestic matters]" (author's emphasis)*.[12] The fear of foreigners and immigrants manifesting in xenophobia has also become a populist fear-based issue in many countries. The issue is routinely used to win votes on a bedrock of perceived (and generally exaggerated) fears of being swamped by outsiders supposedly eager to take the jobs of locals and dilute local culture.

In South Africa, crime has also been used as a political issue grounded in the politics of fear. All parties contesting the second democratic election in June 1999, for example, used the issue of crime as a major political rallying point. Political rhetoric such as "Hang Murderers and Rapists" (New National Party slogan), "Fight Back" (Democratic Party slogan) and the Democratic Party's haunting election radio adverts that listed endless acontextual statistics about individuals chances of being victimised being cases in point.   Most of these campaigns exploit the fears of the population that crime is spiralling out of control.[13]   This feeds the already rampant fear that permeates much of the current South African mindset. Crime rates are genuinely high, but the general population's fear of victimisation is on the

whole out of proportion to the real threat.[14]   The fear of crime is used as code for political unease[15] and sometimes racism towards African-dominated governance[16] insofar as some white South Africans use crime rates as a way of arguing (with racist overtones) that the current government is incompetent, or themselves somehow linked with crime.

Fear can also be used in other ways—ostensibly more "positive" ways. Underpinning all political transition processes is a range of social and individual fears both real and imagined.   These are built on the experience of the past (as well as collective transgenerational memories and myths of the past); embedded in the present and mediated through the local and global context; and are constantly being held up against the uncertainty of what might happen in the future. Arguably, peace agreements and mechanisms born through them such as truth commissions, are profoundly shaped by this process and the discourses of fear.

The discourse of risk and fear are central to most peace processes—the need to take risks, set aside fears and build trust, are frequently heard in South Africa and Northern Ireland, as well as elsewhere. But, more directly, and for the purposes of this essay, it is the discourses of fear (justified as having a positive outcome) underpinning peace processes that are of interest. That is, the threat that if peace is not made, further conflict would ensue. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was, on one level, justified using a (reversed) form of the politics of fear. A popular justification of the TRC was that if a reconciliation mechanism was not put in place and amnesty granted, the country would have disintegrated and sunk back into conflict.   Archbishop Tutu, Chairperson of the TRC is famously quoted as saying:

> If the security forces had thought that they were going to be up for the high jump
> we would not have had a negotiated settlement, that is the price that had to be
> paid, and yes, the victims and survivors are probably asked a second time and to
> be willing—if this high price had not been paid this country would have gone up
> in flames.[17]

At the same time, it was constantly reiterated (mainly to conservative whites) that they had nothing to fear from the process—there would be 'no witch hunts'. Although conflict may well have been perpetuated had various compromises not been made, it is interesting to

consider how the *no alternative* discourse to amnesty has become entrenched within discussions about the formation of the TRC. In fact, most negotiated political transitions are spoken about in this way, that is: "they represent the moment of interaction at which all major stakeholders realise they are at risk—there is no returning to the previous system and power needs to be carefully used in order to secure the future".[18]

In *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution,* Alister Sparks eloquently expresses the essence of the no alternative understanding of the South African peace process:

> For this was always a crisis-driven process. From the moment De Klerk made his fateful announcement on 2 February 1990, there could be no turning back. There was no way he could ban the ANC or any other black movement again, return Mandela to prison, or revert to apartheid again. With his political opponents in the same boat, he had embarked on a one-way voyage, and they could either arrive at a new shore together or sink together. There were no other options. So as each new crisis reminded these squabbling voyagers afresh of their mutual dependency, they leaned on their oars with renewed effort and pulled for the shore.[19]

Of course, there is some truth in this and the earlier statements. There is also the reality of the fear created by years of repression, not to mention that in most societies coming out of conflict there is a often a genuine desire to move away from conflict and prevent very real threats of further violence. To this end, many would argue that the 'compromises' and assurances in South Africa, particularly concerning amnesty, were merely pragmatic.[20] But, the point here is that it was pragmatism built on the back of the fear of what *might* happen.

The need at all costs to avert the potential future threat of violence was constantly conveyed to the general population in South Africa by the principle negotiators, and that we should be fearful of its return and that it may spiral out of control. However, this highlights a curious state of affairs. The polemic statements heard at times of transition (i.e. without compromise there is no peace or without amnesty there will be more conflict), imply that conflict exists separately from the political context, i.e. it stands completely outside of the control of the politicians who are making the very statements about the potential for more conflict.

In the transitional justice literature the role of real and imagined fear in shaping transitional justice mechanisms—or a meta-analysis of the way risk and fear are used during political transition—has received no attention to date. In fact, if one reads most academic works focusing on transitional justice and mechanisms such as truth commissions, what is evident is that fear and anxiety of further conflict, is treated as a real and existing phenomenon that can only be dealt with through new political arrangements. Seldom is politics and political forces (many of whom are at the negotiating table) named or recognised as the source and panacea of the fear.

Fear, politics and the contemporary

Corey Robin in writing a conceptual history of fear argues that fear is largely, in the modern world, constructed as standing outside of the realm politics.[21] Drawing on Judith Shlkar,[22] he concurs that one of the cardinal assumptions of contemporary liberalism is that fear arises in the absence of laws, moral principles and institutions. Politics may well incite fear or fear may even intrude upon politics, but fear's basic characteristics are generally not thought to be political creations.[23] In short, he argues that in our conception of fear there has been a shift from politics to psychology and culture, and this makes it difficult to understand the sources of fear. He writes:

> Instead of analysing the ways in which the state and elites throughout civil society actively foster and maintain fear, they look to the realms of culture and social psychology for the clues to our current predicament.[24]

This has intersected (or perhaps is part of the same process) with the growth of expressive, psychologically minded individualism,[25] particularly within the Western world. This, in turn, is integrally linked into the steady embrace of the concept of 'victim' rather than it being something which is shunned.[26] Controversially, Ian Buruma argues that across the world—as different societies try to compete with Holocaust—an "Olympics of suffering" has developed.[27] Others too have used the phrases "Olympics of genocides"[28] and "moral Olympic games between competitors claiming superior status for their particular psychic suffering".[29]

It appears as if the cultural icon of the strong, silent hero has been replaced by the vulnerable antihero.[30]   Sensitivity has replace stoicism, and voicing pain and outrage is said to be "empowering" as well as therapeutic.[31]   Holding pain in is considered dangerous. We are encouraged to express our fears, whilst being on our guard for all sorts of risks from serial killers to invisible diseases and germs spreading rampantly through society.

Fear, like suffering, has become increasingly linked with psychopathology. 'Trauma' has become a catch-all phrase that moves with ease between the realms of the clinical (typified by the common diagnosis of post-traumatic stress[32]) and the everyday 'trauma' of living espoused by television talk shows. At a collective level, a culture of victimization has emerged from identity politics, with groups defining themselves largely in terms of their claim to special identity and suffering.[33]

Politics is person

Although the rights of victims of political violence in the transitional justice debate remain underdeveloped morally, ethically, legally, and in practice,[34] the 'victim' of political conflict has become fairly central to political negotiation processes. Or more precisely, the suffering of so-called victims has steadily become—as it has in society in general—a bargaining chip, a means to entitlement, and a moral issue used to score points against one's adversaries. Victims become political capital for politicians who seek to use their suffering as an example of how the other side has wronged their political faction.   This is certainly the case in South Africa and Northern Ireland.

It is commonplace in Northern Ireland, for example, to hear people talk about a "hierarchy of victims". Several reports[35] have found that there has been a continued hijacking of the so-called victim issue both in terms of individuals, but also in terms of defining one "community" or the other as the "real" victims. At a collective level, the net with regard to who can be considered a victim is also continually widened by politicians in terms of their political grouping (and narrowed for their opposition). In some cases whole communities are referred to as victims.

The result of this at the individual level is that people who have suffered terrible losses are often left feeling abused and that they are merely part of a wider political agenda. There is evidence that victims are being targeted by all parties seeking to make various claims of protection and assistance to victims as part of a political agenda in Northern Ireland.[36]

The result of this is that the individual simply becomes defined as the 'victim', or more typically gets referred to in the media only in reference to their murdered loved one, e.g. 'the wife of…'. They can also get very quickly labelled as belonging to one or other political tradition (e.g. a Protestant or Catholic victim), even though this may not be their own personal way of understanding their identity, or their perceived reason for their victimisation. Ironically, although their suffering finds voice in the political arena (through the words of politicians or maybe even in a public truth-recovery process), the context and reasons for their suffering, their 'real' personal experience of it, and the political framework which lies at the root cause of their suffering, is often sidelined, misrepresented and conflated with multiple agendas. Instead of debating social justice, the debate becomes about their *perceived* personal psychological state of affairs (which is important in its own right, but perhaps less important in terms of macro politics) and its relationship to the broader political context (read: how best it can be used and abused by others).

Fear—like suffering—can consequently have a relatively depoliticised instrumental role in then trying to make peace. The participation of victims in truth commissions is a case in point. Victims participating in public truth-recovery processes are engaging in a profoundly political process, but the social and personal meaning of why they are there (their suffering) is difficult to convey.[37] Generally it is the wider social meaning of the testimony (and that they are victim of a specific type of human rights violation at the hands of specific individual) that receives prominence. This leaves an inevitable disjuncture between the personal and collective.

Michael Humphrey argues that the centerpiece of most recent truth commissions is individual suffering: the source of truth is largely stories of victims' suffering; the power of the words is empathetic and not legal, and the sharing of truth has a moral implication in that it is supposed to engender acknowledgement and collective responsibility.[38] In addition, the testimony of the victim is used as an example of the negative consequences of the political ideologies of the past. The victim symbolises the dangers of maintaining or returning to conflict, perhaps even tapping into everyday fears that, without compromise, we all could become the damaged (sic) victim parading our wounds for all to see.

To this end, the narrative of the victim and what it can be used for (in this case the social benefit of reconstruction and peace) may well become more important than the individualised suffering of the individual. Plainly stated—the victim themselves and their

participation in the process, by its very nature, means that they individually come to signify or embody a social purpose that stands (at least to some degree in every case) outside of their own experience.

Of course, this is not a simple linear process and the process may have some benefit for the individual. Many victims have a strong desire to testify, and speaking out is often identified by victims themselves as beneficial and desired. Truth commissions have a healing psychological potential for individuals and can be beneficial to those participating in them from a psychological perspective, although the process is hardly sufficient and the impact not *necessarily* psychologically beneficial.[39] That said, the social purpose of participation, and the contingent benefit of testimony (and perhaps getting the truth), will seldom overlap with the social or collective meaning of their participation at a political level. It can even result in their individual needs being socially and politically marginalised.

Thus we see, through the prism of the truth commission in this case, that the personal has, in contemporary society, become linked with the political—albeit in a fairly confusing way. The person is not only political, but the political is the person.[40] Political and social solutions are sought through the individual and in some cases "communities" are spoken about as if they were individuals—the individual (or the community as individual) and political almost become one.

The fear of politics

We need to be wary of collapsing the individual with the collective or political process, or speaking about political processes and society as if they have psyches and exist in a similar way to individuals. Political situations should not be embodied with a sense of collective emotionality, identity and psychology, and in so doing avoiding the political essence of the situation. To expand and to return to the issue of Israeli and Palestinian flags in Northern Ireland, I would hypothesise that if you interviewed a number of people, especially in largely Protestant areas, and asked about the symbolism of flying an Israeli flag, at some point, the discussion would come back to the need to deal with a perceived threat from "the other". This will very quickly turn to a discussion on the questions of Protestant identity and specifically that "Protestants feel that their identity is under threat". Their community, or so it is commonly articulated, feels like they are now a community of "new" victims, i.e. "victims"

of the compromises of the peace process. This will be put in sharp distinction to "Catholic identity", which is viewed as positive, on the rise, confident and articulate—they are moving from victim to survivor.

For want of a better way of putting it, there is a dominant perception that as things have started to change in Northern Ireland, many, specifically those living in largely working-class Protestant areas, have been left in a state of *anomie* as the familiar crumbles, social bonds break down, and old stable identities, power relations and norms are challenged.   The purpose of this essay is not to debate whether these views are correct or not, but rather to try and understand the consequence of it. This is also an area of much needed research, which could confirm or challenge the hypotheses in this essay.

That said, in Northern Ireland, it appears that the response to the situation has been fairly clear. A debate has started about how to deal with this situation (largely how to deal with Protestant mainly working-class and 'loyalist' *anomie*). At the core of the debate is whether funding agencies who support the peace process should fund "single-identity work" (i.e. work in communities made up of one ethnic group aimed at building up their confidence, strengthening their sense of identity, so they can ultimately engage on an equal footing with the other) or "cross-community work" (i.e. work which aims to bring different groups together).   Questions have been asked whether supporting "single-identity work" will have the desired outcome of ultimately ensuring mutual engagement and cultural diversity, or whether supporting such work will merely make divisions worse. Recently the *Community Relations Council* or *CRC[41]* of Northern Ireland wrote:

Often the only visible safe space is identified as 'single identity', meaning a context in which the community background of all participants can be presumed. CRC believes that safe but exclusive space can be an essential part of a process which ultimately ends in engagement and meeting. However, single-identity projects can too often be excuses to avoid reality, building up a false, aggressive or bombastic confidence which does little to prepare people for real confidence in real relationships across cultural lines. Projects which are described as cross community projects in the 'long term' become in effect projects in which any real relationship is put on the long finger.[42]

This is interesting because it brings the discussion back to the issue of the relationship between politics and fear. On one level, perhaps the desire not to form relationships with the "the other" following conflict, or to be anxious about the power implicit in the relationship (say one party is more confident than the other or has a stronger sense of self), makes perfect sense. However, on another level, the "single-identity" and "cross-community" debate highlights the degree to which the context of politics (say, the nature of the state, institutional power and democracy) are becoming increasingly mixed with politics and language of the individual. Why should, asks Stanley Cohen, 'self-understanding', 'identity' and 'meaning' even be public issues?[43] He goes on (agreeing with Habermas) to say that the state is not a religion and so it has not to give meaning and identity to the citizenry by means of nationalism or patriotism.

To this end, what we are dealing with, symbolised by the flying of different flags in Belfast, is not a problem concerning free-floating problems of identity for specific individuals, groups or so-called communities, but rather a serious political issue about power and control in a new political dispensation. The problem is about the uncertainty of the future political arrangements in Northern Ireland and who has access to power in the present, as well as the past and present-day meaning of this. It is profoundly linked to the way that the fears of certain sections of society (spoken about continuously as if they are a homogenous whole) are stoked as a way of manipulating the political outcome. The fear I have referred to being symbolised by the flags—perhaps even in the way I introduced this essay—highlights how fear is largely seen today as a psychological, biological or cultural, but certainly not as a political issue,[44] or representing a conflict over access to power.

When thinking of fear in a political context, contemporary intellectuals tend to rather focus on the problems of *anomie* and alienation from civic spaces, than the way state officials, political elites, and economic and cultural leaders instil fear,[45] and what the meaning of it is. As such, Corey Robin goes on to argue that local institutions and associations (civil society) are seen as the way to stave off the anxiety of isolation and fear. This point bears out the Northern Ireland focus on "single" and "cross-community" work. It is civil society structures, Corey Robin argues, that many think can assist us to develop secure identities, and to "act confidently and without fear, exercising a more robust and purposive form of agency". But in doing this, he adds, we do not rectify or deal with problems of power and institutional authority.[46] Anomic anxiety becomes the substitute for political fear.[47]

Of course, building civil society structures are integral to participative democracy, but by obsessively debating how civil structures can serve as site of personal security, or a place were identities can be "housed" and nurtured (say, through building a single-identity group), misses the meaning and essence of the political fear at work and the political problems underlying the situation.

Risk-taking in the north and south

In the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process, goals such as 'national unity' and 'reconciliation' could easily be interpreted as liberal ways of avoiding the real underlying political fears of white South Africans who feared majority rule and the fears of black South Africans who had anxieties about continued economic exploitation. Space does not permit a discussion on the merits of the 'nation building' exercise in South Africa, and elsewhere I have argued[48] that from the start, the TRC process was saturated with flawed assumptions and multiple meanings. Implicit in the notion of 'national unity' is the supposition that its pursuit is a unitary and coherent process, and that individual and national processes of dealing with the past are largely concurrent and equivalent. The entire discourse of nation building was imbued with the pseudo-psychological construction of national healing, incorrectly implying that nations have collective psyches. The problematic results were that individual needs such as long-term healing and the desire for justice were, to a degree, subordinated to the collective drive to 'reconcile'.[49]

However, despite the criticism I raise above, what is remarkable in the South African context is how many people actually fully embraced the nation-building discourse and the concept of reconciliation, at least at the level of hegemonic political rhetoric.[50] In Northern Ireland, despite the relative successes of the peace process and the efforts of many people to build peace, not to mention the rather stable socio-economic situation, the opposite seems to be true. Reconciliation is seldom spoken about. In fact it is a word seldom heard. There are many reasons for this. For example, reconciliation is often understood as being about assimilation and therefore entails an unwelcome request for citizens to consent to the political marginalization of difference[51]—not to mention the fact that it is the issue of difference that perpetuates politics in Northern Ireland because voting still happens almost exclusively along

sectarian lines. It is no wonder that the cry that there is no vision, political leadership, or anyone really pushing a reconciliation agenda, is a common one in Northern Ireland.

It is interesting to compare the different reception of "reconciliation" in South Africa and Northern Ireland. One would predict, given the dire socio-economic situation and the blatant oppression in South Africa, that broadly embracing a concept such as reconciliation (for better or for worse) would have remained a distant possibility immediately following the first democratic election in 1994. In Northern Ireland (not to minimise the huge impact of the conflict on the relatively small population)[52] given the relative stability and prosperity of society, and narrowing wealth gaps between ethnic groups, one would expect that reconciliation would be an attractive option if for no other reason than an economic one.

This is not to say that in the South African context there was no fear at the time. On the contrary, it is important to remember that prior to the 1994 election, many whites hoarded food and sent money out of the country in expectation of a final bloodbath as their centuries-old fears of the *swart gevaar* (black danger) would be realised in retaliation for the oppression they had meted out.   However, the real threat (and experience to a degree) of complete social breakdown in South Africa ultimately facilitated the embracing (by many) of a future of uncertainty and risk, at least in the period immediately following the 1994 election.   In contrast, in Northern Ireland, it could be argued that the higher levels of social and economic stability, as well as smaller community networks and the dominance of a Western cultural framework (e.g. individualism is prized over cultural integration), has meant (almost ironically) that there is less political risk-taking.

Uncertainty and conservatism

Sociological, economic and political science research on the theory of conservatism has routinely asserted that people adopt conservative ideologies out of self-interest.[53] However, a recent review of the literature argues that although self-interest is a motive capable of influencing attitudes and behaviour, and it may well be motives to overcome fear, threat, and uncertainty that are associated with increased conservatism.[54] Furthermore, the review argues that although the economically advantaged may gravitate toward conservatism out of self-interest, for the disadvantaged it may be the desire to reduce anxiety, dissonance, uncertainty and instability that results in the embracing of right-wing ideologies.[55]

Although there is no necessary link between conservatism and a lack of enthusiasm for a concept such as reconciliation—one could reasonably assume some correlation if one is equating reconciliation with a genuine desire to tolerate difference and celebrate diversity, for example.[56] Given this, the first simple conclusion is that in South Africa, the political élites had more to gain by suing for compromise and adopting a reconciliatory tone than is currently the case in Northern Ireland.[57] That is, there was a close correlation between *real* possibility of political, economic and social annihilation and the *real* threat of more conflict.

Either way, and there are many possibilities in-between, this meant that the political leaders, especially when addressing the majority of the disadvantaged, had to really talk up the certainty of the future—hence the birth of the "rainbow nation" discourse in South Africa. This allowed the majority to overcome any conservative desires related to the uncertainty, fear and threat of the future. The risk of an uncertain future was embraced (and to a degree painted over).

In Northern Ireland, where political power is predicated along sectarian voting lines, and the absence of conflict may, for parties mean assimilation into 'normal' politics in the Republic of Ireland or the United Kingdom as minority political parties, self-interest can only be assumed (for the political élite) to lie with maintaining the current system. This is also physically possible given the relative levels of political and socio-economic stability, and that society collapse is not evident. For nationalists, however, the situation is not as clear-cut. Political elites might have some self-interest in maintaining sectarian politics, but at the same time their entire ideology is based on embracing the "uncertainty" of a united Ireland. Perhaps this is one reason why their entire approach to the peace process seems more positive.

For unionism, however, the result is that politicians have to continually talk down the process to maintain their political position. This, unlike South Africa, means that the disadvantaged are fed a constant diet of uncertainty, fear and potential threat. The Israeli flag fluttering in a loyalist estate starts to make sense—to those living there it is a conservative symbol, it represents a reaction to uncertainty, threat and fear exacerbated by political rhetoric. The result is that some hard-line loyalists have retreated to a simple message.[58] What is needed for them, to counteract the political fear they feel, is "a government here like the Israelis. They don't mess, and they don't care about world opinion."[59]

Conclusion

This essay is a preliminary analysis aimed at beginning a process of exploration and theorising about the relevance of the concept of fear in the transitional justice literature, and in debates about resolving political conflicts. It does not seek to draw a neat conclusion, but rather aims to serve as a springboard to further debate. Having said that, it is important, in conclusion, to reiterate that fear in this essay is dealt with through the prism of the political. The essay argues that fear is more a product of the political and social context, than a real and objective entity that exists in and of itself. We need to pay attention to political fear in transition and peace processes, and treat it primarily as a political and not a psychological or cultural problem. This is important, because only once fear during times of political transition is dealt with in this way can solutions to its manifestation be sought. These lie in a political context that strives for social justice and democracy in a contested environment, and not in the quest for individual healing, secure identities, self-understanding or anxiety reduction as ends in and of themselves.

Endonotes

[1] Quote from Dwyer Hogg, C., "Raising the standards ; Israeli flags are hoisted in one part of the city while, in another, Palestinian colours fly. But this isn't the West Bank", The Independent, London (UK), June 18, 2002, pg. 6.

[2] O'Clery, C. & Moriarity, G.. "Post-war Iraq will top agenda at Hillsborough summit talks", Irish Times. Dublin, April 8, 2003, p.1.

[3] O'Toole, F., "Meaning in a historical footnote", *Irish Times*, Dublin, April 8, 2003, p. 18.

[4] Dwyer Hogg, C., "Raising the standards; Israeli flags are hoisted in one part of the city while, in another, Palestinian colours fly. But this isn't the West Bank", The Independent, London (UK), June 18, 2002, pg. 6.

[5] Tudor, A., A (macro) sociology of fear? *The Sociological Review 2003*: 238:256 (2003).

[6] Tudor, A., 2003.

[7] Space does not permit a thorough discussion of the concept of transition. There are multiple meanings. For the purposes of this paper, transition is generally defined as something more than mere 'regime shift', something less than transformation and certainly not merely a shift from authoritarian to democratic rule (interview with Jackie Cock interview, Department of Sociology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 15 June 2000 cited in Brocklehurst, H. N. Stott, B. Hamber & G. Robinson. Lesson drawing: Northern Ireland and South Africa. *Indicator SA* 18(1): 89:94 (March 2001). As Freidman states "…if there is a reasonable expectation among a significant section of society that the basic rules governing society could change, then that society is still in a period of transition." He argues that 'transition' involves a change from one set of rules to something else and that policy, therefore, is therefore made in conditions of uncertainty. Cited in Brocklehurst, H. N. Stott, B. Hamber & G. Robinson. Lesson drawing: Northern Ireland and South Africa. *Indicator SA* 18(1): 89:94 (March 2001).

[8] Young, C., Explaining the Conflict Potential of Ethnicity. In: Darby, J., and Mac Ginty, R. (Eds.), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes,* Palgrave MacMillan, Houndsmillm Basingstoke, UK, 9-18, 2003.

[9] Burton, F., *The politics of legitimacy: struggles in a Belfast community,* London: Routledge, 1978 cited in P. Shirlow, B. Murtagh, V. Mesev, A. McMullan, Measuring and Visualising Labour Market & Community Segregation: A Pilot Study, Research Report, undated. www.science.ulst.ac.uk/geog/part%201.doc

[10] Feldman, A., Formations of violence: the narrative of the body and political terror in Northern Ireland, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, p.37.

[11] P. Shirlow, B. Murtagh, V. Mesev, A. McMullan, Measuring and Visualising Labour Market & Community Segregation: A Pilot Study, Research Report, undated. www.science.ulst.ac.uk/geog/part%201.doc

[12] King, Micahel, "An interview with Noam Chomsky: It's Extremely Easy to Frighten People", *The Austin Chronicle* 22(7). http://www.austinchronicle.com/issues/dispatch/2002-10-18/pols_feature3.html.

[13] See Hamber, B. Have no doubt it is fear in the land: An exploration of the continuing cycles of violence in South Africa. *South African Journal of Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 12(1):5-18 (2000), for a more detailed analysis of the relationship between crime and fear in South Africa.

[14] Victim surveys in South Africa suggests, however, that fear of crime does not necessarily match the risk of victimisation and that issues related to fear of crime, see Camerer, L., Louw, A., Shaw, M., Artz, L. and Scharf, W. Crime in Cape Town: Results of a City Victim Survey, Monograph No 23 (April 1998). www.iss.co.za/PUBS/MONOGRAPHS/No23/. That said, other data suggests that fear of crime is not necessarily irrational, but often based on actual experiences and should therefore be taken seriously, see Institute for Security Studies, Monograph 47, Poor Safety: Crime and Policing in South Africa's rural areas, May 2000. http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Monographs/No47/Chap4.html

[15] Cohen, Stanley. Crime and politics: spot the difference. *British Journal of Sociology* 47(1): 1-21 (1996).

[16] Saul, John, S., Cry the beloved country: The post-apartheid denouement. In: Jacobs, S. and Calland, R. (Eds.), *Thabo Mbeki's world: The politics and ideology of the South African president*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 27-52, 2002.

[17] Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Interview with Michael Ignatieff, "Getting Away with Murder", *Special Correspondent Programme*, BBC2.

[18] Anstey, M. Case Study: South Africa. In: Harris, P. and Reilly, B. (Eds.), *Democracy and Deep-Rooted Conflict: Options for Negotiatiors.* Stockholm: Sweden: International IDEA, 1998, 51-58, quotation at p.52.

[19] Sparks, A., *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution*. London, UK: Arrow Books, 1997, p. 178..

[20] See, amongst many others, Boraine, A., *A Country Unmasked: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000; Tutu, D., *No Future without Forgiveness*, London: Rider, 1999.

[21] Robin, Corey, Fear: A Genealogy of Morals, *Social Research* 67(4): 1085:1116 (Winter 2000).

[22] Shklar, J., The Liberalism of Fear. In: Rosenblum, N.L., *Liberalism and Moral Life*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989 cited in Robin, Corey, 2000.

[23] Robin, Corey, Fear: A Genealogy of Morals, *Social Research* 67(4): 1085:1116 (Winter 2000).

[24] Robin, Corey, 2000.

[25] Summerfield, Derek. The invention of post-traumatic stress disorder and the social usefulness of a psychiatric category, *British Medical Journal*, 322: 95-98 (2001).

[26] Novick, P. *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*. Great Britain: Bloomsbury, 2001. See also Ian Buruma's controversial essay, The Joys and Perils of Victimhood, *New York Review of Books*, April 8, 1999. Interestingly, a recent editorial of the *American Journal of Psychiatry* also commented that it was rare to find a psychiatric diagnosis that anyone liked to have but post-traumatic stress disorder was one cited in Derek Summerfield, 2001.

[27] Buruma, I., The Joys and Perils of Victimhood, *New York Review of Books*, April 8, 1999.

[28] Novick, P. 2001.

[29] Cohen, S., 1996, p.19.

[30] Novick, P., 2001.

[31] Novick, P., 2001.

[32] Space does not permit a discussion about the concept and usage of post-traumatic stress disorder. However, it is interesting to note that many victim groups with whom I have spoken in Northern Ireland, and other countries, share this view. One several actions, people who are 'seen as victims' have come to me perplexed and asked me what this 'post-traumatic stress thing' is they have heard about. Generally, it has never been their personal main concern or their way of understanding what happened to them. This is not to minimise people's suffering, but concepts such as PTSD often change the local language or communal way of talking about suffering—this further disempowers so-called victims as now they have an 'illness' and the solution lies somewhere in a clinic or therapy room, rather than in the hands of society, or even themselves.

[33] Cohen, S., 1996.

[34] See Hamber, B. Ere their story die': truth, justice and reconciliation in South Africa. *Race and Class* 44(1): 61-79 (July to September 2002), for a more detailed discussion on the issue of victim rights during times of political transition.

[35] Deloitte & Touche. Evaluation of services to victims and survivors of the troubles. Summary Report. Deloitte & Touche: Belfast, 2001; Morrissey, M. and Smyth, M., *Northern Ireland After the Good Friday Agreement: Victims, Grievance and Blame* (London: Pluto Press), 2002.

[36] Cap Gemini Ernst & Young. Summary of the evaluation of the Memorial Fund, 2001.
http://www.nio.gov.uk/press/011206vlu.htm

[37] Space does not permit a thorough exploration of this point. But what I mean by is that the genuine impact (and a psychological and cultural level) of political violence is seldom grasped by policymakers and politicians. It is easier to think about extreme political violence as having a beginning, middle and end (and the development of mechanisms that deal with it like testimony and counselling as direct and outcome driven interventions), than to consider its profound impact. To truly understand the impact of large-scale political violence, and find ways of preventing it in the future, the analysis needs to be grounded in the inner psychic processes of individuals, as well as the social and cultural contexts of large-scale violence and trauma. See Robben, A.C.G., & Suárez-Orozco, M.M.,*Cultures under Siege: Collective violence and trauma*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

[38] Humphrey, M. *The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation: From terror to trauma*. London: Routledge, 2002.

[39] Hamber, B., The Burdens of Truth: An Evaluation of the Psychological Support Services and Initiatives undertaken by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *American Imago* 55(1): 9-28 (Spring 1998); Hamber, B., Does the Truth Heal: A psychological perspective on the political strategies for dealing with the legacy of political violence. In: Biggar, N. (ed), *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil Conflict*, Washington, USA: George Town University Press, 2000.

[40] This comment draws on the analysis of Stanley Cohen (1996), highlighting how the personal has become the political.

[41] The Community Relations Council was set up in 1990 as an independent charity to promote better community relations between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and, equally, to promote the recognition of cultural diversity. It is one of the major funders and channels for government and European Union monies supporting the peace process in Northern Ireland, see http://www.community-relations.org.uk

[42] Community Relations Council, A Shared Future: a consultation paper on improving relations in Northern Ireland Response by the Community Relations Council, 2003. http://www.community-relations.org.uk

[43] Cohen, S., 1996.

[44] Robin, Corey, 2000.

[45] Robin, Corey, 2000.

[46] Robin, Corey, 2000.

[47] Robin, Corey, 2000.

[48] Hamber, B. Ere their story die': truth, justice and reconciliation in South Africa. *Race and Class* 44(1): 61-79 (July to September 2002).

[49] Hamber, B. and Wilson, R., Symbolic closure through memory, reparation and revenge in post-conflict societies, *Journal of Human Rights* 1(1):1-19, 2003.

[50] This point does not imply that everyone in South Africa supported the "reconciliation" approach, but is rather an analysis of the overall and dominant perspective. Different groups had very divergent understandings of reconciliation. There were some groups, like the far right wing, and the Inkatha Freedom Party to a degree, who never fully championed the "reconciliation" agenda.

[51] Porter, N., *The Elusive Quest: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2003. Porter also highlight a range of other reasons, including, for example, that reconciliation and forgiveness are often equated creating a range of confusions theoretically and politically for different groups on the basis of the benign marriage between religion and politics such a view implies.

[52] There have been over 3,600 people killed in last 30 odd years in Northern Ireland and injuries to at least ten fold of this in population of about 1,5 million people. Although, comparatively speaking, this is typical of a 'low intensity conflict' with an overall death rate of 2.25 per 1000 population. This death rate is higher than Argentina (0.32 per 1000), about the same as South Africa or the Middle East, but substantially lower than El Salvador (20.25 per 1000) or Cambodia (237.02 per 1000). Figures from Morrissey, M. and Smyth, M., *Northern Ireland After the Good Friday Agreement: Victims, Grievance and Blame* (London: Pluto Press), 2002.

[53] Jost, J.T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A.W. and Sulloway, F.J., Political Conservatism as Motivated Social Cognition, *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(3): 339-375, 2003.

[54] Jost, J.T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A.W. and Sulloway, F.J., 2003.

[55] Jost, J.T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A.W. and Sulloway, F.J., 2003.

[56] This is assuming a somewhat genuine grasping of the concept to imply the tolerance of difference and celebration of cultural diversity. Of course, there is an argument that the popularisation of the concept of reconciliation globally is another way that power relations can be asserted under a benign guise, see Porter, N., 2003.

[57] Elsewhere I have examined the complexities of the debate about whether the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, was a radical process of trying to address the past, or from a more cynical perspective, whether the notion of "reconciliation" is a complex modern foil used to market unfavourable compromises made during political negotiations. See Hamber, B., Rights and Reasons: Challenges for truth-recovery in South Africa and Northern Ireland, *Fordham International Law Journal*, 26(4): 893-906 (2003); and Hamber, B. Ere their story die': truth, justice and reconciliation in South Africa. *Race and Class* 44(1): 61-79 (July to September 2002).

[58] The word *some* is used deliberately as this essay is a general analysis. It is does not presume all people in certain communities or areas would share the views hypothesised about here. In fact, research still needs to be done on how many people actually support the flying of different flags. The impression is that this is actually a very small proportion of the local community. This points to yet another level of fear—that is, the fear of people in certain communities to challenging those responsible for flying certain flags. This is beyond the present scope.

[59] This opinion is not one which has been mentioned publicly by any politicians to my knowledge. This quote comes from a newspaper piece where the journalist interviews a shopkeeper who sells Israeli flags for £7 an item in a fairly loyalist area of Belfast. See Addley, Esther. "Riot city: For 15 months Belfast has been riven by riots, with hundreds of people out on the streets within minutes of even the most trivial of incidents. This violence has gone largely unreported, dismissed as the work of a few 'bad eggs'. But is something more sinister going on?", *The Guardian*. Manchester (UK), June 11, 2002, pg. 2.