Sociology Scholarship   Sociology

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Michele M. Dillon

University of New Hampshire, Durham, Michele.Dillon@unh.edu

Recommended Citation

Perceptions of the Causes of The Troubles in Northern Ireland

MICHELE DILLON*
University of California, Berkeley

Abstract: This paper uses data collected in the Irish Mobility Study (1973) to explore intra-Catholic patterns of differentiation, and differences in the attitudes of Catholics and Protestants, towards the causes of The Troubles. It also documents different perceptions of the national identity of people living in the North. On the basis of these findings, the paper notes the added complexity involved in understanding the Northern Ireland problem when the unit of analysis is extended to include the whole island. It suggests that using a Gramscian approach, as has been proposed by Fulton (1988), who argues that the conflict should be conceptualised in terms of an all-Ireland Catholic-nationalist bloc in opposition to a Protestant-loyalist bloc, is not as straightforward as it appears. The paper also suggests that any analysis of Ireland needs to be sensitive to the importance of jurisdictional location in culturally differentiating the Catholic population.

I INTRODUCTION

In a comprehensive appraisal of the varying explanations of the Northern Ireland problem, Whyte (1988) finds four alternative, though not mutually exclusive, interpretations: the nationalist; the unionist; Marxist interpretations; and internal conflict theories. Whyte sees the latter as the dominant interpretation, and suggests that its popularity may be indicative of a developing consensus on the Northern Ireland problem. While Whyte (1983) acknowledges the important contributions of Marxist analyses to the study of Northern Ireland, he argues, none the less, that "Religious and national identities carry with them an emotional load which class difference by itself seems unable to evoke" (1983, p. 15). In an earlier article, Whyte argued that the intensity of emotions which the Northern Ireland conflict stimulates is partly due to the fact that there are tensions within the two Northern communities (1978,

p. 278). Accordingly, his preference is for internal-conflict theories, in par-
ticular a social-psychological approach, and one which studies intra-ethnic
tensions (ibid.).

More recently, Fulton (1988), using a Gramscian perspective, has extended
the unit of analysis to include the whole of Ireland. Rather than treating
Northern Ireland as a self-contained entity separate from the rest of Ireland,
it is his position that the whole island of Ireland should constitute the focus
of any analysis. While Fulton acknowledges the institutional separation and
the development of separate social structures within the two jurisdictions,
nevertheless, drawing explicitly on Gramsci, he argues that:

> Viewed from a Gramscian perspective, Roman Catholicism can be seen
> as part of the hegemonic culture of the Republic and of the Northern
> Catholic-nationalist remnant, along with republicanism, nationalism and
> welfare capitalism (1988, p. 18).

Opposing the Catholic-nationalist historical bloc there is a Protestant-loyalist
bloc, and according to Fulton, these two blocs constitute the underlying
structures of the Northern Ireland conflict. Fulton discusses what he terms
Catholic monopoly politics in the Republic of Ireland, and notes that given
the minority status of Protestants in the whole of Ireland (20%),

> . . . the Protestant loyalists of Ulster are right and not wrong about the
> Catholic monolith, and the Catholic structuring of the Southern state
> culture (1988, p. 17).

The extension of the unit of analysis to include the whole of Ireland under-
scores the complexities involved in analysing the Northern Ireland problem.
In adopting a Gramscian perspective, however, we are alerted to a further
complexity which has its source in the cultural differences within the Irish
Catholic population. Whether or not we agree with Fulton that a Catholic
monolith exists in Ireland, research findings indicate that there are significant
differences within the Irish Catholic population. It is these findings which
constitute the main focus of this paper.

The paper will show that for Irish Catholics, living in separate legal juris-
dictions (however artificial the initial drawing of the boundaries may have
been) appears to result in significant attitudinal differences. We will see that
despite their shared ethnicity and religious affiliation, the attitudes of Irish
Catholics to the causes of The Troubles were differentiated in accordance
with their being members of one of the two legal jurisdictions in Ireland. Living
in separate jurisdictions also appears to give rise to different perceptions of
the national identity of people living in Northern Ireland.

The purpose of the paper is to suggest that given the existence of intra-
Catholic attitudinal differences, we may need to exercise caution in applying

Gramsci's (1971) theoretical construct of an historical bloc to Irish Catholicism-nationalism. We recognise that Gramsci's conceptualisation of an historical bloc is not that of a homogeneous and unified group, but connotes the collaboration of various classes or social fractions which can then serve as an alliance against an external threat. In the case of Ireland, can the intra-Catholic differences be assimilated or sufficiently tailored to persuade them to collaborate together in opposing Protestant domination, or in challenging the legitimacy of the British State in Northern Ireland? Are Irish Catholic perceptions too divergent to enable the negotiation of a single commonsense view of the Northern Ireland conflict among Northern and Southern Catholics?

II DATA AND METHOD

This paper uses evidence collected from a sample of males in Ireland during the winter of 1973/74. The data come from the Irish Mobility Study which was a survey of the male labour forces of the Republic and Northern Ireland, based on personal interviews of economically active males aged 18 to 64. The sample was drawn so as to be self-weighting and a response rate of 78.9 per cent was achieved (Ó Muircheartaigh and Wiggins, 1977). This was a relatively non-violent period in Northern Ireland, following one of its most violent years (1972). However, given that the survey was not conducted in the aftermath of a major violent incident, the responses to the questions asked appear to be more indicative of a general underlying attitude towards The Troubles, than of a transitory reactive disposition.

Using data collected in 1973/74 raises problems of recency. This issue, however, is minimised in a study where the primary focus concerns patterns of differences among the two Catholic groups rather than current perceptions of the causes of the conflict.

The mobility study provided information on occupational histories which have been extensively analysed elsewhere (see Hout (1989) for example). It also included a range of behavioural and attitudinal items. For present purposes, this paper uses a set of questions which sought respondents' attitudes towards the main causes of The Troubles, and perceptions of national identity. Given the small number of Southern Protestants interviewed (N=89), we omitted these and confined the statistical analysis to the remaining three groups — Southern Catholics (N=2,180), Northern Catholics (N=849), and Northern Protestants (N=1,523).

III FINDINGS

Most Frequently Endorsed Items
When we look at the most frequently endorsed causes of The Troubles we

see that for each of the two Catholic groups certain items tended to cluster (see Table 1). Northern Catholics most frequently endorsed Internment (90%), and the existence of the Special Powers Act (86%) as causes. Employment discrimination (82%) and housing discrimination (76%) also received strong endorsement, providing support for the argument that the grievances of the Catholics in the North of Ireland have a socio-economic dimension. The government at Stormont (77%), the influence of the Orange Order (76%), and the activity of the UVF (74%) were also perceived as causes. It is note-worthy that 70 per cent of the Northern Catholics expressed the opinion that the activity of the IRA was a cause.

Table 1: *Perception of the Causes of The Troubles*

Agreement	All Ca	NC	SC	NP
		Percentage		
Religion	62	48	72	58
Partition	54	49	56	57
British army	65	54	69	13
IRA activity	68	70	67	97
Schools	47	45	48	57
Orange Order	89	76	94	27
Disloyal Catholics	39	33	42	70
Housing	89	76	94	35
Employment	92	82	96	18
Neighbourhood	47	58	46	55
Special Powers Act	86	86	85	34
Stormont government	74	77	74	42
Labour party 1969	31	27	33	85
Dublin government	40	41	40	93
Catholic Church	27	23	28	49
UVF activity	93	74	87	43
Internment	92	90	92	45
N =	3,029	849	2,180	1,523

Note: NP=Northern Protestants; All C=All Catholics; NC=Northern Catholics; SC=Southern Catholics.

From the perspective of the Southern Catholics employment discrimination was the most frequently endorsed item (96%). Closely following this was housing discrimination (94%), and the influence of the Orange Order (94%). Internment (92%), the activity of the UVF (87%), and the existence of the Special Powers Act (85%) were also perceived as primary causes. It is signifi-cant that Southern Catholics more frequently stated the Stormont government

(74%), religion (72%), and the British army (69%), rather than the activity of the IRA (67%), as causes of The Troubles.

Differences between Southern and Northern Catholics

It was evident that Southern Catholics (SC) and Northern Catholics (NC) significantly differed from each other in their perceptions of causes. This was true with regard to employment discrimination (SC 96%:NC 82%), housing discrimination (SC 94%:NC 76%), the Orange Order (SC 94%:NC 76%), the activity of the UVF (SC 87%:NC 74%), religion (SC 72%:NC 48%), the British army (SC 69%:NC 54%), neighbourhood segregation (SC 46%: NC 58%), and the disloyalty of Catholics (SC 42%:NC 33%).

When a number of sociological variables were controlled for, using the SPSSx crosstabs procedure with the chi-square test of statistical significance — education, type of lifestyle (as measured by number and type of consumer goods owned by the respondent), urban/rural location, subjective social class, religiosity, mass media patterns, and whether or not respondent was affiliated with a political party — the differences between the Southern and Northern Catholics were maintained (see Table 2). There were exceptions on two items. Regarding the British army, the North/South difference between Catholics disappeared for those who had completed second level education, and for those who lived in an urban area. The North/South difference disappeared with respect to neighbourhood segregation both for those who were politically affiliated, and for those who lived in a rural area.

It also emerged that the responses of the Southern Catholics to the causes of The Troubles were not significantly differentiated in accordance with membership of a particular political party, even though the political parties in the Republic have varying philosophies regarding the Northern Ireland problem. Overall, therefore, the data indicated significant differences between Southern and Northern Catholics.

We may postulate, however, that the cultural unity of Southern Catholics was somewhat artificial, reflecting the relative arbitrariness of the boundary drawn between the Republic and Northern Ireland. We can ask, therefore, did Southern Catholics who lived closer to the conflict in Northern Ireland, that is, in the border counties, have a view of the conflict more in tune with Catholics in the North than with their fellow citizens in the Republic? Does living in the vicinity of where the conflict is played out on a daily basis alter these individuals' perceptions of the causes of that conflict? Perhaps the actual physical distance of the majority of Southern Catholics from The Troubles was accompanied by a social-psychological distance which made them perceive the causes of the conflict differently.

Table 2: *Catholics' Perceptions of the Causes of The Troubles Crosstabulated by a Number of Variables*

Agreement	Educ		Life		Loc		Pol		Rel		SC		News		TV	
	Pr	Se	Tr	Mo	Ur	Ru	Po	Np	Re	Nr	Mc	Wc	Ny	Nn	Ty	Tn
								Percentage								
Religion																
SC:	74	70	73	71	65	75	73	68	71	73	73	73	71	76	72	75
NC:	47	50	50	46	41	52	49	47	47	49	48	49	46	56	48	51
British Army																
SC:	76	62	74	63	59	73	71	59	66	72	64	74	67	76	68	72
NC:	52	57	59	48	64	49	60	42	47	59	45	57	57	44	57	39
Orange Order																
SC:	95	94	94	94	94	95	95	94	95	94	94	95	94	95	95	93
NC:	74	78	78	72	87	69	80	66	73	77	75	77	80	56	79	56
Catholics																
SC:	41	43	41	43	46	41	42	43	43	42	45	40	42	41	42	42
NC:	33	33	34	32	30	35	35	29	37	31	38	32	33	32	33	34
Housing																
SC:	94	94	92	95	94	94	94	94	95	93	93	95	94	93	93	94
NC:	77	78	79	75	82	75	80	74	78	78	72	79	79	73	78	77
Employment																
SC:	97	96	95	97	96	96	96	96	97	95	97	96	97	95	96	96
NC:	81	83	85	79	82	75	85	77	83	82	76	84	83	81	83	76
Neighbourhood																
SC:	41	52	56	50	47	56	45	55	55	52	54	54	52	60	52	60
NC:	48	35	45	38	65	54	42	44	43	42	45	42	61	45	60	44
UVF activity																
SC:	91	84	89	84	84	89	88	82	86	88	86	89	86	91	87	88
NC:	75	73	76	72	76	73	78	66	74	74	76	74	75	72	74	74

Note: Educ: Educational level; Pr=Primary; Se=Secondary;
Life: Lifestyle, Tr=Traditional; Mo=Modern;
Loc: Location; Ur=Urban; Ru=Rural;
Pol: Politically affiliated; Po=yes; Np=no;
Rel: Religiosity; Rel=very; Nr=not religiou;
SC: Subjective social class; Mc=middle; WC=working;
News: Read newspaper regularly; Ny=yes; Nn=no;
TV: Watch television regularly; Ty=yes; Tn=no.

In order to test this question we subdivided the Southern Catholics according to whether or not they lived in a border county, and we then compared their attitudes to the causes of the conflict. This analysis shows that for the most part the differences between Southern and Northern Catholics remained, with the exception of a select number of causes where Southern Catholics living in non-border counties differed significantly from those living in the

border counties (see Table 3). The latter had a significantly greater tendency to endorse religion, the presence of the British army, the failure of both the NI Labour government and the Dublin government to control the IRA, and Catholic disloyalty, as causes.

Table 3: *Attitudes towards the Causes of The Troubles Crosstabulated by Southern Catholics, Border and Non-border counties, and Northern Catholics*

Causes	Southern		Northern Catholics
	Non-border	Border	
		Percentage	
Religion	71	80*	48
Partition	55	58	49
British Army	68	80*	54
IRA activity	67	68	70
Schools	48	45	45
Orange Order	94	96	76
Disloyal Catholics	41	50*	33
Housing	94	94	76
Employment	97	89	82
Neighbourhood	47	42	58
Special Powers Act	85	91	86
Stormont government	75	67	77
Labour party	30	51*	27
Dublin government	39	52*	41
Catholic Church	27	31	23
UVF activity	86	93	74
Internment	92	97	90
N =	1,957	223	849

*Indicates chi square significant at the .05 level when comparing border and non-border Southern Catholics.

What is noteworthy about this finding, however, is that contrary to our expectation, Southern Catholics in the border counties were more distant on these items from Catholics in the North, than were the Southern Catholics who lived in non-border counties. Notwithstanding this deviation, overall, there were fewer attitudinal differences between border and non-border Southern and Northern Catholics.

Southern Catholics, Northern Catholics, and Protestants
    Just as Northern and Southern Catholics significantly differed from each other in their perceptions of the causes of The Troubles, it was also evident

that they both disagreed with Northern Protestants. Oneway analysis of variance with the Scheffe multiple comparison test (using the SPSSx procedure), indicated statistically significant differences between the three groups in their perceptions of the causes (see Table 4).

Table 4: *Analysis of Variance of the Causes of The Troubles for Northern Protestants, Northern Catholics, and Southern Catholics*

Cause	Groups 1 NP	2 NC	3 SC	F Test*	Scheffe Test 1v2	1v3	2v3
Religion							
Mean	3.2	2.8	3.7	99.02*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.7	1.7	1.5				
Partition							
Mean	3.2	3.0	3.2	6.18*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.7	1.6	1.6				
British Army							
Mean	1.6	3.1	3.6	893.03*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.1	1.6	1.5				
IRA activity							
Mean	4.8	3.5	3.5	530.75*	*	*	
Standard Deviation	0.7	1.5	1.5				
Schools segregation							
Mean	3.2	2.8	2.9	23.13*	*	*	
Standard Deviation	1.7	1.7	1.6				
Orange Order							
Mean	2.1	3.8	4.4	1,724.49*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.4	1.4	0.9				
Disloyal Catholics							
Mean	3.6	2.4	2.8	243.04*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.4	1.5	1.5				
UVF activity							
Mean	2.6	3.6	4.1	557.47*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.6	1.4	1.2				
Internment							
Mean	2.7	4.4	4.4	889.95*	*	*	
Standard Deviation	1.6	1.1.	1.0				
Housing							
Mean	2.4	3.8	4.5	1,303.13*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.4	1.4	0.9				
Employment							
Mean	1.8	4.1	4.6	3,173.44*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.3	1.3	0.8				

Table 4 continued

Cause	Groups 1 NP	Groups 2 NC	Groups 3 SC	F Test*	Scheffe Test 1v2	Scheffe Test 1v3	Scheffe Test 2v3
Neighbourhood							
Mean	3.2	3.3	2.8	24.93*		*	*
Standard Deviation	1.7	1.7	1.6				
Special Powers Act							
Mean	2.4	4.2	4.0	859.02*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.5	1.2	1.2				
Stormont government							
Mean	2.7	4.0	3.8	292.24*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.6	1.4	1.5				
Labour party							
Mean	4.2	2.2	2.5	908.73*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.3	1.4	1.3				
Dublin government							
Mean	4.5	2.6	2.7	936.46*	*	*	
Standard Deviation	1.0	1.5	1.5				
Catholic Church							
Mean	3.0	2.0	2.2	142.82*	*	*	*
Standard Deviation	1.6	1.4	1.5				
N =	1,523	849	2,180				

Note: NP=Northern Protestants; NC=Northern Catholics; SC=Southern Catholics;
F test: * indicates signifiance at the .05 level;
Scheffe test: * indicates significant inter-group differences at the .05 level.

It was evident that Northern Protestants differed from the two Catholic groups with respect to religion, the presence of the British army, the IRA, schools segregation, the Orange Order, disloyal Catholics, the UVF, internment, housing discrimination, employment discrimination, the Special Powers Act, Stormont, the failure of the British Labour party which was then in government to control the IRA, the failure of the Dublin government to stop the IRA from operating across the border, and the position of the Catholic Church in the South.

Northern Catholics and Protestants differed on all of the causes with the exception of neighbourhood segregation. Northern Catholics assigned a higher score to the presence of the British army, the Orange Order, the UVF, internment, housing discrimination, employment discrimination, the Special Powers Act, and Stormont. Contrasting with this pattern, the Protestants assigned a higher score to religion, partition, the IRA, schools segregation, disloyal Catholics, the failure of the Labour party, the failure of the Dublin government, and the position of the Catholic Church in the South (see Table 4).

The Southern Catholics differed from the Northern Protestants on all the causes with the exception of partition. They gave a higher score to religion, the British army, the Orange Order, the UVF, internment, housing discrimination, employment discrimination, the Special Powers Act, and Stormont. In contrast, they assigned a lower score than the Protestants to the IRA, schools segregation, disloyal Catholics, neighbourhood segregation, the failure of the Labour party, the failure of the Dublin government, and the position of the Catholic Church in the South.

The Southern and Northern Catholics differed from each other in that the former assigned a higher score than the latter to religion, partition, the presence of the British army, the Orange Order, Catholic disloyalty, the UVF, housing discrimination, employment discrimination, the failure of the Labour party, and the position of the Catholic Church in the South. In contrast, Southern Catholics assigned a lower score than their Northern counterparts to neighbourhood segregation, the Special Powers Act, and Stormont. The two Catholic groups assigned a similar score to the activity of the IRA, schools segregation, internment, and the failure of the Dublin government to control the IRA, as causes.

National Identity; Unification of Ireland

Leaving aside for the moment the respondents' differentiated perceptions of the causes of The Troubles, we can consider a broader question — perceptions of national identity in Ireland. These findings highlight not only the differences between Northern Catholics and Protestants, but they also accentuate a difference in perception among people living in the Republic compared to those in the North. From the Mobility Study data, Northern Catholics saw their national identity as Irish (81%) rather than British, and as Irish (77%) rather than Ulstermen. The findings here thus supported Rose's argument that "an Irish identity is natural to [Northern] Catholics" (Rose, 1971, p. 208). In opposition to this, Northern Protestants considered themselves British (84%) rather than Irish, and Ulstermen (86%) rather than Irish.

Unfortunately, parallel questions were not asked of respondents in the Republic. However, a survey in 1987 of a representative quota controlled sample of respondents in the Republic, found that 33 per cent considered the people of Northern Ireland as Irish, 15 per cent them as British, and 42 per cent considered them as both Irish and British (MRBI, 1987a, p. 50). While account should be taken of the possible effects of time, sample, and question format differences on these responses, nevertheless, it does appear that respondents in the Republic do not perceive the people of Northern Ireland as unequivocally Irish to the same extent that Northern Catholics perceived themselves.

Furthermore, in the Republic, while 67 per cent see a united Ireland as

"something to hope for", and 56 per cent consider the Irish nation as constituting 32 counties, almost half, 49 per cent, believe that Northern Ireland will never be reunited with the South (ibid., pp. 47-50). One possible implication of this relative pessimism in the possibility of a united Ireland, may be a lack of motivation among the population in the Republic (at least among this 49%) to collaborate with Northern Catholics in opposing British domination.

Moreover, in a later poll in the Republic in 1987, only 20 per cent of those interviewed expressed the opinion that the Extradition Act should "be scrapped completely" (MRBI, 1987b, pp. 1-2). Given that Extradition would disfavour those who committed crimes in pursuit of Catholic/nationalist ideals, the fact that only a small minority were against the Act suggests at least a certain amount of ambivalence among people in the Republic regarding State control of violence in Northern Ireland. It also indicates their latent support for official co-operation between the Republic and British States, and their tacit acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the British State in Northern Ireland. This is so notwithstanding the fact that, as we discussed above, so few Northern Catholics identify with their official British identity.

IV DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this paper draw our attention to the way in which politico-religious location differentiated attitudes in Ireland. The overall distribution of responses among the Catholic population to the causes of the Northern Ireland conflict and to the identity and unification questions, indicated that their attitudes were differentiated in accordance with their politico-legal jurisdiction. We saw that there were significant differences between Northern and Southern Catholics with respect to housing discrimination, employment discrimination, the Orange Order, the UVF, religion, the British army, neighbourhood segregation, and the disloyalty of Catholics, as causes of The Troubles. Moreover, this pattern of intra-Catholic differentiation was maintained when we broadened our analysis to include findings which related to national identity and the unification of Ireland.

We also observed that the two Catholic groups differed from the Northern Protestants in their perceptions of the causes of the conflict. Northern Catholics and Protestants differed on all of the causes except neighbourhood segregation. With the exception of partition, Southern Catholics perceived all of the causes differently from the Northern Protestants. Notwithstanding such Protestant/Catholic differences, however, the intra-Catholic differences illustrate the added complexity in understanding the Northern Ireland problem when the unit of analysis is extended to include the whole island.

The findings also suggest that conceptualising Irish Catholics as an historical bloc is not as straightforward as it may appear on the surface. The findings

support the argument that the attitudes of Catholics in the South are divergent from their Northern counterparts, a distinction which may prevent them from forming a bloc, and jointly negotiating opposition to Northern Protestantism and/or the British State. Is it appropriate, therefore, to refer to an Irish Catholic culture which encompasses both North and South, or are there two distinct Catholic cultures which are sufficiently divergent that their joint opposition to Protestantism or the British State cannot be orchestrated?

On the basis of these findings, we suggest that in any analysis which includes the whole island of Ireland, whether it is a study of Catholicism, of nationalism, or of Irish culture in general, the researcher needs to be sensitive to the intra-Catholic cultural differences which have appeared to coincide in accordance with the two jurisdictions in Ireland. We cannot establish whether such intra-Catholic differences are of such magnitude that they will continue to prevent Irish Catholics from negotiating some alliance against Protestant or British domination in Northern Ireland. However, the existence of such differences should at least make us aware of the complexities involved in conceptualising Irish Catholics as constituting a Catholic-nationalist bloc.

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