Ontological Insecurity in a Postcolonising Northern Ireland

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Northern Ireland is undergoing a postcolonising process that, while either welcomed or successfully accommodated to by many Unionists and Nationalists/Republicans, also challenges the ontological security of those members of both communities whose political identity relies on a long-established political discourse organized in terms of the friend-enemy distinction. This discourse is a legacy of the British colonization of Ireland. Its intensity was renewed with the establishment of Northern Ireland and, subsequently, with the expansion of civil conflict from the late 1960s. With the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, Northern Ireland entered a new and more positive phase of its postcolonising process. However, the effects of this process are unevenly distributed and this is manifest in the ways in which some members of both communities continue to draw upon a friend-enemy discourse and an accompanying restricted set of political emotions to perform their political identities. In this paper I will argue that this postcolonising process threatens the ontological security of those citizens whose political identity is attached to the friend-enemy discourse that is slowly and unevenly being displaced and that is resurrected at moments of political controversy, as with disputes over flags, parades or reconciliation and the legacy of the past. Due to their reliance upon, identification with and emotional investment in Unionism and/or Loyalism and the way in which that ideology dominated political life in Northern Ireland, some members of the Protestant/Unionist community are particularly vulnerable when confronted by the changes that have slowly unfolded since 1998.

Northern Ireland is a society in which a restricted set of political emotions and a similarly restricted political mentality came to dominate intergroup relations between Unionists and Nationalists over a lengthy period, one that traced back into the colonization of Ireland by Britain. Brendan O’Leary summarises this well when he writes:

Colonialism’s importance in understanding Irish and Ulster history is simple. It helps explain the *structures of animosity* between the descendants of settlers and the descendants of natives, manifest in disputes over land rights, religion, citizenship, public and private employment and services, national identity and statehood, and, indeed, appropriate relations with the wider world. (O’Leary 2014, 153, emphasis mine).
These “structures of animosity” gained renewed intensity from the partition of Ireland and the establishment of the Northern Ireland state from 1920 on, and, again, from the Civil Rights movement and the fierce reaction it provoked in the late 1960s and thereafter. Indeed, most accounts of political and social relations in Northern Ireland since its inception find themselves drawn to the pervasive presence of such “structures of animosity”, whether explicitly thematising them, or not. In this setting it becomes immediately apparent that emotions count and need to be integrated into social and political analysis. Of course, O’Leary is referring to the full set of institutions, practices, mentalities and emotions that, together, generated and reproduced these “structures of animosity” and not solely to the political emotions themselves. However, it is telling that the clearest way of characterizing this political and social formation is to highlight the intense emotions of animosity that it draws on and reiterates. We might say that these political emotions are readily recognized, yet seldom analysed. In this paper I attempt to redress this common blind-spot by analyzing the reorganization of political emotions as the postcolonising process in Northern Ireland unfolds.

It is also readily apparent that in Northern Ireland, over much of its history, the dominant social imaginary for the construction of political identities and relations has been a friend-enemy mentality that included a very constrained emotional constellation in which a restricted set of fierce and/or intense emotions predominated; emotions structured in accord with the logic of the friend-enemy distinction. While having its origins in the domesticating logic of the British colonization of Ireland, the friend-enemy distinction also achieved predominance, by way of reciprocation, within the Nationalist-Republican community. It generated similar, if opposed, emotional repertoires in both communities, by imposing the friend-enemy distinction and its accompanying emotional constellation as proper for the performance of political identities.

During this current period of transition in Northern Ireland, two competing social imaginaries are struggling to establish their preeminence across the political assemblage, a political assemblage that is also an assemblage of desire containing the
potential for deterritorialisation and lines of flight.\footnote{While I will not develop my argument in a Deleuzian vein, the concepts of assemblage, assemblage(s) of desire, minor reality, deterritorialisation and lines of flight will be drawn into the discussion where they prove useful.} Given its virtuous intentions with regard to displacing the violence of the troubled past, an ironic effect of this transitional process is that it has introduced into Northern Ireland a new form of inequality – namely emotional inequality. Just as old political inequalities are being assuaged, a new emotional inequality is emerging as a consequence of the very success of the political transformation. Northern Ireland is experiencing an uneven opening up of access to an expanded emotional constellation for the performance of political and social identities by some, but not all, members of the society. This reorganization of the Northern Irish assemblage(s) of desire is both uneven within each political community and distributed across both communities. As a consequence, some members of both communities have escaped the damaging effects of continuing to live under the domination of the friend-enemy distinction and its accompanying emotional constellation, while others are trapped within the old dispensation. Many members of both communities, in order to organize significant aspects of their political identities and social and political relations, are now drawing upon an alternative emotional constellation, the adversary-neighbour constellation, that, previously, has lain fallow as a minor reality. However, many others are still dominated by their passionate attachment to the friend-enemy mentality and its constricted emotional constellation.

Eduardo Crespo (1986: 216-7) has characterized the elements of such a partial transition in plainer terms when reflecting that emotions are socially distributed and that this “distribution is neither necessary nor static, but constitutes an element of changing social order and disorder”. In this paper I intend to explore the characteristics, complexities and dilemmas of this changing order of political and social emotions, while highlighting how this slow postcolonising process involves, as a central feature, displacing a limited constellation of fierce and intense emotions with a more complex emotional constellation. In other words, the trajectory or line of flight of the assemblage(s) of desire in Northern Ireland is, only now, moving to bring within the postcolonising process a complex emotional constellation that had previously lain fallow on the periphery of political life. In this respect, Northern
Ireland provides a strong example of a society in which structures of animosity are slowly and unevenly being displaced by structures of civility while, at the same time, introducing a new emotional inequality.

**Established Inequalities**

Social and political inequalities have been an enduring feature of social relations in Northern Ireland since the creation of the State in 1921, inherited as they were from the prior colonisation of Ireland by Britain (Buckland 1981; Cash 2009; O’Leary 2014). After the partition of Ireland and the establishment of Northern Ireland as a continuing part of the United Kingdom, the friend-enemy structures of animosity were preserved and intensified by the very political design that they had originally inspired; namely partition as a means to maintain and re-inscribe colonial domination in the six north-east counties of Ireland, those that were the most industrialised and that held the largest Unionist and Protestant population. In this contrived setting ethno-political identifications, with Unionism or, alternatively, Irish nationalism, trumped the potential for class-based political identifications across the established ethno-political divide. While sections of the Protestant-Unionist working class constituted a labour-aristocracy, Catholic-Nationalists were systematically discriminated against in employment and in access to welfare-state provisions administered by the Northern Ireland government (Bew et al. 2002; Birrell & Murie 1980). Indeed it was such systematic discrimination in virtually all aspects of social and political life that gave rise to the Civil Rights protests and marches of 1968-69 and the emergence of “the troubles” as an on-going civil conflict in the period from 1969. (Purdie 1990; Cash 1996).

Northern Ireland’s history can be usefully characterised as one in which social and political inequality between the two main communities was consolidated and, for the dominant Protestant-Unionist community, legitimated by the zero-sum logic and the restricted emotional constellation of the friend-enemy distinction, Carl Schmitt’s (1996) criterion of the political in its fundamental form. However, although marginalised throughout this long period of British colonisation of Ireland and its aftermath in Northern Ireland, an alternative emotional constellation has been present as a minor reality that remained available as an alternative; one involving both a
qualitatively distinct mentality and a more complex set of emotions. It is this “adversary-neighbour” constellation that has gained considerable ground in recent times. As a minor reality, its cultural presence can be traced back to at least the United Irishmen in the late eighteenth century, who operated across the religious divide, although not without many sectarian “lapses” (Foster 1988; Bew 2007). Bew provides a summary of these brutal killings of Protestants by Catholic members of the United Irishmen throughout 1798 and explains that they received close attention in the Belfast press, which “laid great stress on the brutal, annihilating anti-Protestantism of the Catholic masses: ‘if the gates of hell were opened there could not come a worse enemy than our neighbours were’” (Bew 2007; 43, my emphases). By way of providing context, Bew also explains that these “Belfast reports left out the wave of brutal military repression which preceded the worst crimes of the rebels”.

The comment about opening the gates of hell is quoted by Bew from the Belfast News Letter of July 7, 1798. It nicely captures the construction of the neighbour as, potentially, the worst of enemies, even when that neighbour was a member of the United Irishmen, an explicitly non-denominational and effectively cross-denominational movement. This example highlights the hold of those “structures of animosity” on the population, even as they seek to repudiate and reform them. However, despite these internal sectarian differences and their murderous manifestations, the United Irishmen did promote a non-denominational, liberal Republicanism modelled on the precepts of the French Revolution and “The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen”. The movement promoted a model of citizenship in which the neighbour ceases to be a potential enemy and, instead, co-exists and competes as the “adversary-neighbour”. In various forms, this alternative political ethic, whose contours will be characterised below, has persisted as a minor reality that promised to establish a more inclusive mode of politics, first in Ireland and then in Northern Ireland.

Within Northern Ireland many institutions, groups and individuals have drawn upon this alternative political ethic, in either its liberal or Republican form, to organise their political and social relations. Some political parties and movements have either specialised in promoting it as the proper form of political identity, or have
done so intermittently. The Alliance Party and the Civil Rights movement are examples of such specialisation and more mainstream parties and movements, including the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP, Sinn Fein and elements within the paramilitary groupings from both communities have intermittently drawn upon and promoted the adversary-neighbour constellation (as opposed to the neighbour as enemy) as the proper form for the performance of political identities and relations. Until 1998 and the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement these initiatives routinely failed, as the friend-enemy constellation re-asserted its place as the proper mentality and emotional repertoire for the performance of political identities. Perhaps the best example of this is the way in which the modest reformism of Terence O’Neill while leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, from 1963 until 1969, generated an intense reaction against reform within Unionism and even within his own party, thereby reinscribing the friend-enemy constellation. This reaction went so far as to produce the odd situation where the Ulster Unionist Party ran anti-O’Neill candidates against its own pro-O’Neill candidates, with the result that in the fifteen “internally” contested seats eleven pro-O’Neill and twelve anti-O’Neill candidates were successful (Farrell, 253-254). O’Neill only just managed to hold his own seat against Ian Paisley and he soon after resigned as leader and Prime Minister. His forerunner as Prime Minister, Lord Brookeborough, commented: “The party is not only split in half, but split in many bits” (Belfast News Letter, 3 February, 1969). Such was the fierce reaction to a very modest attempt to displace the hegemony of the friend-enemy constellation. The “troubles” had begun in earnest.2

The signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement in 1998 was the moment when all those prior attempts to transform the political culture finally reached a moment of fruition, a moment that was further consolidated, although not completed, in 2007, with the reconciliation between Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness that enabled the government at Stormont to take up its devolved powers from Westminster. If the Agreement and the later political reconciliation between the DUP and Sinn Fein shifted the ground sufficiently to allow the adversary-neighbour culture to lay down roots, this ongoing transition is taking place on ‘the narrow ground’

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prepared by the friend-enemy constellation; to borrow a resonant characterisation of Northern Ireland. This narrow ground was prepared and preserved by the Unionist elite, who were highly successful as friend-enemy domesticators within Northern Ireland in the period from 1920 to, approximately, 1965. First of all, they successfully negotiated the establishment of a six-county Ulster as Northern Ireland, in order to guarantee a Unionist-Protestant majority. This involved the division of the traditional nine-county Ulster, so that the three counties with Nationalist-Catholic majorities were ceded to Eire, later the Republic of Ireland. Second, they succeeded in establishing a regional government at Stormont in which they held an electoral majority for so long as their system of classification according to ethno-national affiliation prevailed. Much political work, including playing “the Orange card” when it was felt necessary, went into maintaining this political ecology. They also succeeded in the creation of gerrymanders, such as that established in Derry/Londonderry, thereby ensuring that a minority Protestant-Unionist population in Londonderry would routinely win an electoral majority on Londonderry Council. The same classificatory principles were deployed within the economy as a way of keeping Nationalists in their place and rewarding a Unionist-Protestant labour aristocracy for their loyalty to Unionism. The administration of welfare-state provisions, where Nationalists-Catholics were systematically discriminated against, also followed this same classificatory logic. For instance, access to Council housing was administered in many cases, so as to ensure that Catholics/Nationalists were disadvantaged, even if their need, as regards lower level of income and larger size of family, was the greater. (Farrell, 1980). Policing, also, was organised in the same way, with both the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) and the B-Specials, an auxiliary policing force, drawing their membership, principally, from the Unionist-Protestant community. In particular, the B-Specials, which existed from 1920 to 1969 with a membership of approximately 10,000, was exclusively Protestant in composition. As John McGarry notes, “the RUC Reserve and UDR (Ulster Defence Regiment), which

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3 The reference is to the title of A.T.Q. Stewart’s The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster, 1609-1969. Stewart took the term from a description of Ireland by Sir Walter Scott, written in 1825. That description reads: “I never saw a richer country, or, to speak my mind, a finer people; the worst of them is the bitter and envenomed dislike which they have to each other. Their factions have been so long envenomed, and they have such narrow ground to do their battle in, that they are like people fighting with daggers in a hogshead. (Stewart, The Narrow Ground, 10.)
effectively replaced the ‘specials’, were also more Protestant in composition than the regular police”. To illustrate the extent of this imbalance, McGarry reports that at “the time of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, the RUC Reserve was 6.9 per cent Catholic” (McGarry, 2010; 59). A significant effect of this pattern of recruitment to the regular and reserve policing forces was that most legally held guns were in the hands of Unionists-Protestants. Through the legitimate use of force by the police and policing reserves, although its legitimacy was often challenged by Nationalists and Republicans; through the use of political authority via the ballot-box and the regional government at Stormont, an authority that was routinely challenged by Nationalists and Republicans; through the administrative practices of the welfare state; and through the practices of employment within both private enterprise and the public sector; in all these domains the same classificatory system was deployed in order to maintain Unionist supremacy and reassure Unionists that they were “at home” and in control in the political field of Northern Ireland.

Throughout this same period and up until 1998, the Republic of Ireland claimed sovereignty over the whole island of Ireland and Republicans argued strongly for the undoing of partition and the return to the Republic of the six counties that had been appropriated in order to establish the province of Northern Ireland. The Provisional IRA developed its military campaign in opposition to partition and Unionist ascendancy and sought Irish unification as its political objective. Such claims and practices prompted the Loyalist-Unionist response: “Six into Twenty-Six won’t go” (Nelson 1984, 113). This situation in which Unionists were a majority within Northern Ireland but a minority on the island of Ireland and in which Nationalists were a minority in Northern Ireland but in the majority in Ireland overall, is sometimes described as the situation of a “double-minority”. John Whyte has characterised this as an “implicitly psychological” model and writes that:

“The implication of this model is that minorities are groups which feel threatened; that threatened groups are likely to be hypersensitive; and that in Northern Ireland both groups display these characteristics”.

The “double-minority situation”, then, offers “an explanation of the intensity of feeling engendered by the cleavages in Northern Ireland” (Whyte 1991, 100, my emphasis).
Since first proposed by Harold Jackson in 1971, himself drawing on some earlier variations of the same idea dating back to Gallagher in 1957, discussion of the double-minority situation has recurred throughout the literature on Northern Ireland. And as Whyte suggests, this “model has found favour with authors of diverse views and backgrounds” (Whyte 1991, 100). In the terms that I am deploying, its broad appeal highlights that throughout the history of Northern Ireland, two competing friend-enemy constellations have confronted each other and have challenged the other communities sense of being at home in one’s own country. Together, they fused into an assemblage of politics and desire. After partition, Northern Ireland emerged as a compromise formation that distilled the intensity of political feeling into the narrow space of the six northern-most counties (leaving aside Donegal in the West). The logic of classification and the political emotions that drove and supported Unionism as the dominant force in the six counties is well-exemplified in the now infamous address by Sir Basil Brooke (later Lord Brookeborough and Premier of Northern Ireland) on the dangers of employing Catholics in Northern Ireland, as they “had got too many appointments for men who were really out to cut their throats if opportunity arose” (Fermanagh Times, July 13, 1933). The intensity of the political passions in play is also evident in the earlier and, for the establishment of Northern Ireland, foundational signing of the “Solemn League and Covenant” on “Ulster Day”, September 28, 1912, in which almost half a million Unionists pledged “throughout this our time of threatened calamity to stand by one another in defending for ourselves and our children our cherished position of equal citizenship in the United Kingdom and in using all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule parliament in Ireland”. In this history of enmity and conflict, ontological insecurity was generated for both political identities, by the double minority dilemma that confronted each of them.

With partition and the establishment of Northern Ireland, the balance of forces was re-set in order to re-establish Unionists as the dominant force. Far from a taming or moderating of emotions, this project of domination relied on legitimating as proper the intense emotions that inhabit the friend-enemy distinction. Furthermore, the very set of political classifications it instituted and policed were accompanied by anxieties
regarding the double minority dilemma and the disloyal Nationalist enemy within. As a consequence persecutory anxiety was pervasive and aggressivity, hatred and contempt were shadowed by fear and anxiety and a recurrent felt-threat to the capacity to feel at home in the world. However, due to the contrived balance of forces in favour of Unionism, for more than 40 years the Unionist project succeeded in maintaining Unionist dominance and keeping Nationalists-Republicans in their allotted place. From the 1960s, however, this consolidation began to fray, due to both internal tensions within Unionism and claims to equal civil rights by the Nationalist-Catholic community. In turn, this challenge to Unionist hegemony prompted a fierce reaction. With ontological and physical security threatened on both sides, instead of receding, the friend-enemy distinction took on ever-greater salience as the civil conflict intensified.

Changes since the Belfast Good Friday Agreement of 1998

In more recent times the hegemony of the friend-enemy distinction has been challenged on several fronts, including a peace settlement and new political institutions and various initiatives towards reconciliation (Taylor, 2009). A significant effect of these challenges and changes has been an opening-up, although unevenly, of the culturally available emotional repertoire through which identities and social relations may be performed. The friend-enemy as master signifier and as dominant emotional constellation has been unevenly displaced by an alternative adversary-neighbour constellation; a displacement that includes an expanded emotional constellation and a qualitatively distinct construction of the other. This other, now construed and related to as an adversary-neighbour, is one with whom one can negotiate and deal and is recognised as equally entitled to participation in democratic dialogue and decision-making and related social and legal processes. This adversary-neighbour, just like the self, is positioned to perform and transact emotions that escape the restrictions of the friend-enemy constellation, as will be elaborated below.  

In the period since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 there has seen a significant expansion of the emotions and representations that are now regarded as proper ways of thinking and feeling about, and relating to, Northern Ireland’s long history of conflict and violence. In particular, reparative impulses and feelings, along with an open-ness to feelings of guilt and loss and responsibility for the past, are now performed as part of the new forms of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity that can be transacted within the public domain (Ganiel, 2012). Fault-lines remain, however, and some sections of the population are threatened rather than liberated by this newly emergent emotional constellation, as they can find no satisfactory place within the new dispensation (Cash, 2009; Ganiel, 2012). Instead, they find themselves subject to an emergent emotional inequality, as their routine access to a broader range of emotions regarding their social and political identities remains restricted. Moreover, whereas in the past their identification with, and their emotional investment in the friend-enemy constellation was both normatively proper and symbolically efficient, since the 1998-2007 rapprochement and its subsequent extension, the friend-enemy constellation has become increasingly improper and has lost its symbolic efficiency. This leaves those citizens who still adhere to it doubly displaced. They find themselves stranded while remaining passionately attached to a way of thinking, feeling and relating with regard to the political, that is less and less symbolically efficient and that has lost its political and cultural authority. In particular, while many citizens of Northern Ireland have escaped the emotional constraints imposed on social and political life by the friend-enemy formation, the stranded ones remain trapped in its net and subjected to an emergent emotional inequality. Perhaps the most striking physical marker of this emergent inequality is the increase in the number of peace walls dividing communities that have been constructed in the period subsequent to the peace settlement. These indicate, as brute physical and social facts, that in some communities sectarianism and the emotions it involves have intensified, counter-intuitively, as it were, as the peace process has unfolded (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006). As a consequence Northern Ireland is experiencing an uneven opening up of access to the newly available and expanded emotional constellation for the performance of social and political identities. However, there are limits to this transformation, as is apparent when particularly
sensitive issues become salient. This process is also quite fragile and can be readily undone.

**Competing Emotional Constellations: between friend-enemy and adversary-neighbour**

It is clear that emotional states have been central to both the long persistence of the troubles and to their more recent displacement. I now want to characterise those emotional states, briefly drawing on some earlier research (Cash 1996) and with reference to other research that, I believe, validates my argument. I also want to highlight, contrary to most discussions of political emotions, that political emotions are best addressed as constellations in which several emotions interact. So, instead of isolating hatred or hope or guilt or any other likely candidate as the leading sole emotion in terms of which a political assemblage of desire can best be analysed, I draw on psychoanalytic theory, in particular Kleinian theory, to outline two qualitatively distinct ways of being, thinking, feeling and relating that foreground the significance of emotions and their internal inter-relatedness. I derive my concept of “emotional constellations” from this psychoanalytic account of psychic positions.

*The friend-enemy emotional constellation – splitting ambivalence*

The dominant emotional constellation regarding social and political relations throughout the history of Northern Ireland can be characterised as persecutory in form and as marked by paranoid-schizoid processes – to use Kleinian terminology (Klein 1986, Cash 1996, Burack 2004). This persecutory form, in which one’s own community is viewed as relentlessly threatened by the other community, irrespective of actual circumstances, constructs the political and social order through a series of splits and projections in which the friend-enemy distinction acts as master signifier and organises the dominant emotional constellation. Allegiance to group norms and adherence to a shared set of emotions becomes the measure by which the
proper position of subjects within this split world is determined. Significantly, the emotions involved constitute a restricted set with anxiety, insecurity, hatred, aggressiveness and envy prominent. In extreme cases, as with the “Belfast Butchers” (Feldman, 59-65), sadistic emotions and feelings of omnipotence are also evident. These affects are deployed to combat anxieties about the integrity or integration of both the self and the group with which the political subject identifies and in order to defend against insecurity and to maintain control. They constitute habitual and legitimated responses to challenges that are felt and experienced from within a construction of the political and social order dominated by the master signifier of friend-enemy. In Kleinian terms, this is a world of part-objects in which the emotions cluster around the two poles of the hated and the loved – the other and the self (Klein, 1986). So, there is a similarly restricted set of positive emotions that figure in the construction of one’s own political or communal identity. The nation, community or group is idealised and feelings of love, devotion and commitment prevail; exhibiting a one-dimensional and unqualified set of positive feelings towards the “friend” pole of the friend-enemy distinction.

Evidence for the predominance of such a restricted emotional constellation is readily available in the research on Northern Ireland, even when those research projects have not focussed explicitly on emotions. In his account of “telling”, or deciphering whether people encountered outside the home territory are Protestant/Unionist or Catholic/Nationalist, Burton (1978) explains that distinguishing probable friend from potential foe figured as a routine feature of everyday life. For example, when travelling by bus in Belfast most people preferred to embark and disembark at “neutral” stops that, due to their location on boundaries or in shared space (such as the city centre), did not immediately reveal one’s ethno-political identity. Burton reports his own experience when he alighted at a politically-coded bus stop. A group of Protestant lads stared menacingly at him and shouted: “Let’s see who the fenians are, get a good look at them”, and then directly to Burton they shouted, “You Fenian bastard!” (Burton, 37). Such everyday instances provide indicators of a broader social process through which a restricted set of emotions were routinely experienced and performed in order to negotiate the hazards of life in such a divided society. Fear, anxiety, aggressivity and feelings of insecurity are prominent
features of what I have termed the friend-enemy emotional constellation. The routine reiteration of these emotions across time and space established their provenance as the proper way to perform identities and to emotionally construct self and other. Similar examples of the prevalence of this restricted emotional constellation litter the anthropological and other literature on Northern Ireland, even when a focus on emotional life is incidental to the research concerns (Farrell 1980; Feldman 1991; Dixon 2001).

More recently, Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh (2006) have addressed the effects of segregation and violence on patterns of living in Belfast. Their analysis is very telling for my own argument as, beginning with a focus on patterns of residential segregation they quickly move to highlighting the emotional effects of living in segregated communities; often, also, in close proximity to the other community. In North Belfast this very proximity has promoted the construction of peace walls and interfaces that “are not merely boundaries between communities but important instruments in the definition of discursively marked space” (Shirlow & Murtagh: 57). In turn this discursively marked space generates emotional states as central aspects of conflicting identities. Shirlow and Murtagh (58) comment that the “spatialisation of fear, violent resistance and the desire to promote discourses of internal unity while under threat has redefined, rebuilt and delivered more impassioned forms of space-based identity”. Fear, anxiety, hatred and aggressiveness figure large in their account of life in Belfast. Beginning with an interest in patterns of residential segregation, their research, like Burton’s and others, supports my own argument about the restricted set of emotions that were, and, for many, remain, proper to intergroup relations in Northern Ireland. Highlighting this, as recently as 2010 Garrigan, in her study of liturgical or worship practices, has advocated that “the churches in Northern Ireland could change their liturgies and everyday practices so that they communicate to the people attending them that the people from the ‘other’ tradition are also in fact Christians, and not enemies” (Ganiel, 2012).

The adversary-neighbour emotional constellation: containing ambivalence
Recently, however, an alternative, previously eclipsed, emotional constellation has found a new propriety and legitimacy in Northern Ireland. This expanded constellation is organised by depressive position processes – to use Kleinian terminology again (Klein 1986). The adversary-neighbour emotional constellation is one where complex feeling states and ambivalence can be contained rather than split and dispelled. Anxiety and concern shifts from a focus on the preservation of an integrated self and an integrated group identity onto anxiety and concern for the self in relation to the other. We are now in a world of whole objects that are understood as having both positive and negative aspects, as complex and multi-faceted. In this mentality it is possible to learn from experience rather than remain subject to a repetition compulsion. There is an expansion of the available emotional repertoire along with a qualitative change in the ways in which the social and political field is constructed and identities are performed. Significantly, feelings of guilt are now possible as are desires for reparation. Idealisation is replaced by recognition of the limitations as well as the virtues of one’s own community. This emotional constellation allows and supports reconciliatory initiatives that have the potential to be transformative.

An Emerging Emotional Inequality

Now that the adversary-neighbour emotional constellation has achieved a significant presence within Northern Ireland, some emergent potentialities may be realised over time. The capacity of the friend-enemy constellation to trump and curtail the new freedoms to think, feel and relate differently are reduced and the slow process of working through the past by living and relating differently in the present may proceed. Central, here, is the expanded range of choice about how to be, think, feel and relate to self and other, and to the traumas and conflicted histories of the past. The emergence of the adversary-neighbour constellation has promoted, for some, a release from the haunting insecurity and hostility of the friend-enemy constellation, a constellation that remains pertinent, however, to the lived experience of many others. The dilemma is that this very pertinence to such lived experience involves and reiterates a vicious cycle in which the friend-enemy constellation creates an inertia; a dwelling in and repetition of a constellation that resists any transformation in the
character of inter-group and, even, intra-group relations. This follows from the fact that the political and social transformation in Northern Ireland has been piece-meal and that the adversary-neighbour constellation is unevenly distributed.

The political dilemma and its enabling and constraining effects

To operate effectively under the new political dispensation of consociational democracy in Northern Ireland, in which parties share power and jointly form a governmental executive, the political elite must regard and emotionally construe political representatives of the other community as an adversary-neighbour equally entitled to participate in political bargaining and negotiation (Cash, 2009). In contrast, to relate to the other through the friend-enemy constellation and mentality would render impossible the kind of cooperation that consociational democracy and power-sharing inevitably relies on. Hence, there is a strong incentive to adopt the adversary-neighbour constellation, if only for strategic reasons. To practice civility, as it were, as a means towards instituting civility as proper. The set of emotions characteristic of the expanded adversary-neighbour constellation animate such practices and interactions, even in cases in which they are only performed for the moment. This is essential in order to go on within the consociational structure of shared government. In the adversary-neighbour constellation the political and social field and the identities that populate it are construed, felt towards and evaluated as complex and multi-faceted. Identities are respected even if their political orientation is contrary to one’s own. Now, the handling of complexity, the shifting of perspective and the enactment of bargaining and compromise becomes possible. The friend-enemy constellation has been displaced by an expanded emotional constellation – one that supports accommodation between adversaries.

All this is evident in some exchanges between the, then, leaders of the two major political parties, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) when, after decades of regarding the other as the enemy, Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley agreed, in 2007, to jointly lead a power-sharing government. Describing their
relationship as a “work-in” and not a “love-in”, Paisley used terms such as “courteous, honest, straight and forthright” to describe their meetings. McGuinness, for his part, commented that there has "not been one angry word” and that they have "a cordial, civilised, positive working relationship" although for most of their lives they had "detested" each other. McGuinness continues: "He (Paisley) clearly showed himself to be someone who, along with the rest of us, had crossed the Rubicon. We are now in a new world" (Cash, 2009, note 18).

David Ervine, a transformative Loyalist leader in Northern Ireland, nicely captured a similar and earlier shift when reflecting on his experience of getting to know some members of the Provisional IRA while in prison:

[In prison] we had a relationship [with the IRA] that was cordial and respectful. I think that there may have been a couple of friendships that grew out of it. But we were us and they were them. Maybe we proved something: that “them and us” can actually cohabit, that “them and us” can get on, that “them and us” without losing one ounce of principle, can function together. That was important. Another lesson learned. And remember, these guys came from Catholic backgrounds. They came from Catholic, working class areas. They came from sectarianism, as did we in many ways, and yet we learned the capacity to cope with each other and they only had one head, two arms and two legs, just like me! (Sinnerton 2003: 66) ⁵

Both examples demonstrate that a broader emotional constellation is being drawn upon to construe and experience a relationship with an “other” who had previously been related to through the restricted register of the friend-enemy emotional constellation. These transformations of emotional experience are in no way

⁵ This quote is also used by Kapur and Campbell (2004) to illustrate the very point that I have made. As they put it: “In Kleinian terminology, part-object relationships were moving to whole-object relationships with the associated capacity for concern developing in a mutually dependent and reciprocal relationship”. While drawing on Kleinian theory in an interesting way, Kapur and Campbell do not adequately address the complex task of shifting psychoanalytic theory from couch to culture, so to speak. For the earliest use of Kleinian theory for the analysis of political discourse in Northern Ireland, see Cash (1989), “Ideology and Affect: the Case of Northern Ireland”.
epiphenomenal. Rather, the feelings of fear, anxiety, persecution, hatred and aggressivity that had been so pervasive, with such perverse effects, in the reiteration and further entrenchment of violent conflict, are, now, for some, contained and displaced from pre-eminence within the broader adversary-neighbour emotional constellation that has slowly achieved a vital presence within Northern Ireland.

A political dilemma remains, however, a dazzling blindspot in that it cannot be negotiated across the embedded ethno-political boundaries under the new political dispensation of consociational democracy. This blindspot is the constitutional question of United Kingdom or Irish sovereignty; Republicanism or Unionism and the spectre of the border. This previously fundamental issue of United Kingdom or Irish sovereignty has been silenced by the need to work cooperatively, as adversary-neighbours, in order to keep the consociational structure of government in operation and, thereby, resist a return to direct rule from Westminster and, also, to maintain the flow of power and privilege that comes from holding political office and carving up the spoils. This imbroglio, eclipsed and yet reinvigorated by the Good Friday Agreement and the power-sharing government it established, haunts the society and limits the scope of the transformative process in Northern Ireland. At the political level the majority parties from each community, the DUP and Sinn Fein, share an interest in compromise for the purpose of gaining and maintaining power and pursuing their radically different preference for the future; remaining part of the UK or joining the Republic of Ireland. Hence they draw upon the adversary-neighbour emotional constellation in a self-regarding manner in which good relations are promoted between communities that are self-contained. In this way they maintain identifications and support from their own constituency by restricting the range of the adversary-neighbour constellation. However, the political logic operates against any fuller transition to a more cosmopolitan social formation in which established identities are released from their constant re-interpellation as Unionist or Nationalist-Republican. It follows that Northern Ireland’s consociational form of power-sharing

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6 Katy Hayward develops a similar argument at length in her keenly perceptive paper entitled “Negative Silence: The Unspoken Future of Northern Ireland”. As she puts it, “the very success of power-sharing has made it difficult for parties to articulate a shared vision of Northern Ireland’s future”.

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places limits on the range of the adversary-neighbour constellation. While it supports civility and negotiation, it’s potential range remains constrained by the ways in which the political parties and other political groupings and institutions, with few exceptions, work to maintain the established political identities and identifications. The polarising effects of the long-lived and deeply embedded friend-enemy constellation and mentality haunt the political system and are reinforced by the consociational model that formally recognises Unionist and Nationalist identities. The net effect of this restricted emergence of the adversary-neighbour constellation has been to leave open, around particularly sensitive issues, the reassertion of the friend-enemy constellation as the proper way to think, feel and relate. Yet again, the claims upon political identity that the friend-enemy constellation can continue to make are differentially spread across both communities. In what follows I will discuss some examples in order to further explore this complex set of issues.

**Remembrance and Reconciliation**

A principal feature of the friend-enemy constellation is its inability to tolerate ambivalence, to accept responsibility, to accept rather than deny feelings of guilt and to make reparations. Consequently, it is unable to tolerate initiatives that wish to promote remembering and reconciliation. By way of contrast, the adversary-neighbour constellation can tolerate ambivalence and supports an acceptance of guilt and responsibility. It is open to reconciliation. The co-presence of these two competing emotional constellations in Northern Ireland has created a circumstance where initiatives towards reconciliation are desired by many, but are resisted by those who continue to dwell within the friend-enemy constellation and, also, by those others who, when sensitive issues from the past are thematised, turn back to the certainties of the friend-enemy constellation. Given that Northern Ireland has experienced significant political violence over an extended period of time and that it is now in a process of peace-building and transformation, the injuries and memories of the past, especially of the dead and disappeared, weigh heavily upon the present and limit the range of concerns that can be engaged with by drawing on the adversary-neighbour constellation. This becomes very clear when formal attempts are made to promote reconciliation.
Having conducted extensive field-work in Northern Ireland on several occasions during the height of the troubles I was pleased to return for a brief visit in June 2007, very soon after Sinn Fein and the DUP had formed a power-sharing government at Stormont. As I walked around Belfast there were many indications of the significant change that had occurred in the period since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Perhaps the most striking was the absence of British soldiers from the streets of Belfast and the less visible police presence. Instead there seemed to be a surge in property investment and renovation and in trendy cafes and the like. Major projects like the development of the Titanic Quarter, a massive urban renewal project, were proceeding.

Watching television one evening I found myself transported back in time to the period of intense conflict and dispute. There was a debate on television about the newly introduced “Day of Reflection” in which citizens of Northern Ireland, and indeed, elsewhere, were to be encouraged to set aside some time to reflect on the fate of the victims of the Troubles and the loss and grief experienced by their families, friends and colleagues. Representatives of several political groups and persuasions participated in the discussion and what quickly became apparent was that the very raising of the issue of victims of the Troubles stimulated the old hostilities and the old feelings and attachments. The moderator of the discussion tried in vain to get agreement on who actually qualified as victims of violence. Could paramilitaries who were killed qualify? What about their families? No agreement was forthcoming – except that the day of reflection should be observed privately. There would and could be no iconic public events, as there was no agreement on who or what precisely they might mourn. As I have suggested, this was an uncanny reminder of the years, indeed decades, during which political debates proceeded at entirely cross-purposes, nightly, on radio and television in Northern Ireland. At least, now, in 2007, the participants were prepared to sit together in the same studio, unlike some in the past. However, the friend-enemy emotional constellation overdetermined the public exchange, even when reflection on loss and grief in a context of aspirations towards reconciliation informed the explicit, conscious concerns of all participants. I looked in the papers the next day for coverage of this return of the repressed on television but was unable to find a
newspaper report of this television discussion of a Day of Reflection that I happened to see by chance. It too had been silenced and repressed, or maybe just taken for granted. Those alternatives may not be very dissimilar.

Here we have a glimpse of the ongoing struggle between a deeply embedded, if no longer hegemonic, friend-enemy emotional constellation and, on the other hand, a broader adversary-neighbour emotional constellation that is being drawn upon in the effort to promote reconciliation in Northern Ireland. In this instance the attempt stalled at the first hurdle, so to speak, and the subsequent history of the “Day of Reflection” is still stuck in this compromise formation. The Day of Reflection is sponsored and organised by an independent organisation titled Healing Through Remembering and that group, while hopeful of establishing, eventually, some public events of mourning and remembering, was well aware of the sensitivities that were involved. As they explained:

Our vision is of a day that is positive and inclusive, that reaches out to all, and that unites rather than divides. We think this can be aided by starting the process modestly, hence the proposal to initially observe the day privately. We hope that our specific proposals for an initial Day of Private Reflection will go some way in addressing the concerns expressed to us.

While the time may not yet be right for public events, we believe that there is scope for holding a Day of Private Reflection. Although public spaces could be used for reflection, public events would not be a feature of the Day. Instead, the Day would provide an opportunity for people to reflect individually; for example, at home or at work, and within a family or group.


In the past few years an increasing number of small events in Churches, Libraries and the like have been established, but the “Day of Reflection” largely remains a day of private reflection. Certainly, no iconic cross-community public events have been established. This is an example of the hold that the past, with its emotional commitments and investments, has on the present. It highlights the limits of the transformation process in Northern Ireland and is evidence of the resilience of the friend-enemy mentality and emotional constellation when challenged by a process of
re-organisation that is attempting to introduce a broader and more complex set of political emotions that support negotiation with the other as adversary-neighbour and reconciliation regarding the past. For instance, the most recent published Evaluation Report on the Day of Reflection lists many organised events. However, it also reports disappointingly low numbers in attendance, such as a day of music, poetry, exhibitions of photographs and masks and writers-in-attendance at the Linenhall Library in Belfast that attracted 61 visitors who signed the Visitor’s Register and some “more” who did not sign. Significantly, this report on the 2011 event still emphasises private reflection. It is titled “21 June 2011, Day of Private Reflection, Evaluation Report” (McLaughlin, 2012).

Like the dilemma facing the “Day of Reflection” debaters in my anecdote about the television debate, the government commissioned “Report of the Consultative Group on the Past” had to confront the issue of who the victims actually were. Instead of avoiding the dilemma by “privatising” it as “a day of private reflection”, in this case they opted for an inclusive criterion and included paramilitaries killed while in action along with the victims of such action. A “recognition payment” of £12,000 was recommended for families of the bereaved, whether “civilians or paramilitaries” (Eames & Bradley, 2009).

This recognition of an equivalence between civilians and paramilitaries produced extreme hostility, anger and disquiet in many sections of the community – and especially in sections of the Unionist-Protestant community. Relatives of victims from both communities characterized it as “blood money”. Some held up signs reading “Terrorism Pays apparently”. The DUP leader and First Minister, Peter Robinson, voiced his formal opposition to the proposed payments on the grounds of the implicit equivalence between paramilitaries and ordinary citizens. Gordon Brown, UK Prime Minister at the time, stated that:

"I understand why one of the recommendations has provoked such controversy in Northern Ireland. I will never forget the innocent victims in Northern Ireland".7

Eventually the proposal about paying compensation was dropped, but conflicts over who are properly regarded as “victims” continues.8

7 See “Anger over Northern Ireland ‘reconciliation’” for these three quotes above.
Step into the Future

While, as we have seen, the past continues to haunt the present and to revive the claims of the friend-enemy constellation on political identities, the present holds out the hope for a transformed future and access to an expanded and more complex set of political emotions. The peace dividend has included the opportunity to think, feel and relate differently. This has been promoted by the major political parties, which, themselves, have radically transformed their relations with political representatives of the other community. Change is also occurring in the interface working-class areas of Belfast that were subjected to some of the worst of the violence and conflict. A recent study by Smyth and McKnight on “Maternal situations: sectarianism and civility in a divided city” explores this in an innovative way by interviewing mothers from inner city working-class areas of Belfast about their experience of raising young children in the segregated city. The authors argue that civility is slowly displacing sectarianism for these women, but within a restricted range.

Civility is characterised by the authors in ways that closely match my account of the adversary-neighbour constellation. For instance, they write that “norms of civility facilitate cooperative activity between adversaries” and that “through the practice of civility, we display respect and tolerance towards those around us, signalling recognition of equal moral status, irrespective of serious moral differences” (316 & 317). However, while consistent with my own account of the adversary-neighbour constellation, this characterisation of civility hardly addresses emotional experience, even though the interviews on which the research is based are replete with emotion. For instance, Jade comments that “my partner … was walking to school with me this...
morning and he just doesn’t feel as safe as me to walk up there” (309). Wendy does cross-community work with a relatively distant Catholic community, but would not do it with neighbouring Catholics due to the bitterness she feels against them for throwing stones into the school playground where her sister’s children would play and where she expected her own children to play: “it’s not bitterness with Catholics it’s bitterness with (specific Catholic neighbourhood)” (310). Lily says that she would not risk taking her child to the “wrong” playground in a divided park: “I would just be paranoid that I would go up there and they would know I’m a Catholic, so I’m not going up there” (314). Kylie, however, confronts the issue head on and explains her reasoning in a way that draws upon the adversary-neighbour constellation: “I don’t want him (son) standing at the rock where the interface is in years to come and little ones that he went to nursery with, shouting things at them. So he’s playing with them now and that’s good” (313-314). Aoife is happy to go to a mixed mother and toddler group, yet has reservations: “sometimes you would just feel a wee bit wary, it’s hard to put your finger on it, but sometimes you can feel a bit uneasy” (315). June and Attracta are friends with shared interests in organising cross-community interactions, such as play groups, activities at community centres and the like. However, as Attracta is Catholic and June is Protestant, their friendship is constrained by the limits of civility in their communities; as June explains “we are only day friends … Mummy friends. We wouldn’t see each other at nights or nothing, just during the day. Once two o’clock comes we never hear from each other” (315). A restricted civility operates and provides new opportunities to all of these women and their children. It relies for its success on the availability of the adversary-neighbour emotional constellation, even though this availability is shadowed by the threat of the return of the friend-enemy constellation and the dangers and emotional distress that can bring with it.

**Conclusion**

The downside of the peace settlement in Northern Ireland is a newly emergent emotional inequality involving uneven access to the expanded emotional repertoire that has become available for the performance of social and political identities. While
many citizens have begun, to varying degrees, to think, feel and relate by drawing upon the expanded repertoire of this newly legitimized emotional constellation, for many others it remains foreign territory, as it offers no purchase on their past, present or future. Drawing on survey research from 2004 in interface communities displaying “an emotional landscape of fear, prejudice, loathing, the experience of violence and the more obvious marking of space through hostile imagery and graffiti”, Shirlow and Murtagh (84) provide evidence that the history of segregation, violence and the accompanying emotions of fear, hatred and aggression continued to haunt Northern Ireland, after the cease-fires were implemented and a political settlement was negotiated and agreed. This explains that otherwise counter-intuitive fact, mentioned earlier, that the number of peace walls has increased in recent years, since the cease-fires and the agreed political settlement. However, as the “Maternal Situations” article reveals, piece-meal change of significance is slowly establishing itself in some of the communities that have been most thoroughly dominated by the friend-enemy constellation.

In order to address this complex and uneven process of change, this paper has distinguished between two principal emotional constellations, the friend-enemy and the adversary-neighbour, that compete to organise the performance of social and political identities in Northern Ireland. It has argued that with the emergence into prominence of the adversary-neighbour constellation in the period since 1998, a broader emotional repertoire has become available for the performance of these identities. In particular, reparative impulses and feelings along with an openness to feelings of guilt and loss and responsibility for the past – perhaps through personal involvement or else through identification with communities and political projects - may now be performed and communicated as proper or legitimate aspects of social and political identities in some circumstances and situations. Typically, these are small-scale and relatively private. However, this positive change has generated a perverse consequence for those left trapped in the old forms of identity organised by the friend-enemy constellation. Just as social and political inequalities generated the civil conflict and the hegemony of the friend-enemy constellation, so uneven displacement of this emotional constellation has produced an emerging emotional inequality. To inhabit or be threatened with re-immersion in a world of practices and
significations animated by a restricted emotional constellation organised by the friend-enemy distinction as a splitting of complexity, both cognitive and affective, while other citizens escape this traumatising world, is to experience an emotional inequality that carries risks for all, if mainly for those who constantly encounter it and live within it. Until this emotional inequality is successfully displaced, it has the capacity to frustrate attempts at reconciliation as it haunts civility and the achievements of the adversary-neighbour constellation. Northern Ireland’s destructive past will no longer haunt its potential future when ontological security is more readily achieved across the whole society by drawing upon and performing the emotional repertoire of the adversary-neighbour constellation. When no-one is left behind!

References:


CNN.com/Europe (January 28, 2009) “Anger over Northern Ireland ‘reconciliation’”.


