

An Analysis of Bloody Sunday

Scott M. Woods

This essay explores the conflict that has occurred in the past and continues to occur today in Northern Ireland. A short history of Northern Ireland and Ireland is provided. The environment for conflict in this region has been present for over 400 years, however it is my contention that one of the primary causes of continued conflict in the region results from the transgenerational trauma and storytelling associated with the events of January 30, 1972, referred to as “Bloody Sunday.”

A case study exploring the events leading up to the day of violence and the climate following the conflict will be provided through the lens of the British government and the Catholic residents of Northern Ireland. The majority of the literature available regarding “Bloody Sunday” presents the Catholic or Republican perspective. However, as previously mentioned, this event is an important part of the conflict and must be resolved prior to a lasting peace in the country.

The case study is applied to the model designed by Jay Rothman of AIRA group. This model provides conflict resolution consultation and training to the public and private sectors. In search of a lasting peace, this case study encourages further research and exploration of transgenerational trauma and the events of Bloody Sunday.

History of Ireland

By the late 1600s, William of Orange had been successful in the battle of Boyne and had removed the Irish nobility from power and established an era of Protestant dominance through the 1692 Penal Laws (Byrne & Carter, 1996). By 1703, less than 5% of the lands of Ulster were in the hands of the Irish Catholics (Darby, 1995). By a generous offer of land, the Plantation of Ulster had become home to many Protestant colonists from England, Scotland, and Wales. The native Irish had lost most of the land they once owned, and Protestant colonists now occupied the once predominantly Catholic area. This was the beginning of the conflict and the creation of two hostile groups.

The Irish felt their land had been taken from them, and the colonists believed they were under the threat of rebellion. “They lived in separate areas and identified these differences as religious, cultural and territorial” (Darby, 1995, p 43). The Penal Laws of 1692 allowed the Protestant community to force the majority of Catholics outside the socioeconomic and political system. Catholics were not permitted to hold political office, speak the native Gaelic language in public, or bequeath property unless the heir converted to Protestantism (Byrne & Carter, 1996).

During the next two centuries many uprisings occurred. By 1801, the Act of Union abolished the Irish parliament and government and Westminster assumed responsibility. The Irish were hell bent on the principle of self-determination and the

ability to control one's own life (Jeong, 2000). In pursuit of this self-determination, several attempts to overthrow the union occurred during the 19th century. The 20th century saw the election of the Sinn Fein party and the re-establishment of the Irish parliament (Darby, 1995).

In 1920, the Government of Ireland Act created a partitioned Ireland (Byrne, 2001). The settlement of 1921 forced the Catholics into isolation, precipitating a civil war in the 26 southern counties between those who accepted the agreement and those who felt it was a betrayal. Through a demographic compromise, a 6-county area was given the name of Northern Ireland (Darby, 1995). A bicameral legislature was established along with a subordinate government in Belfast. The Belfast government had authority over policing, education, and local government, however England retained ultimate authority (Darby, 1995). The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), still seeking an independent united Ireland, was willing to use any means necessary including violence. In an effort to maintain and enforce the 1921 agreement, an almost exclusively Protestant police force was introduced to the northern counties resulting in socio-economic Catholic discrimination (Darby, 1995).

During the 1950s, the population of Northern Ireland was a little over 30% Catholic. Social changes implemented by England in the 1950s led to the introduction of free secondary education for all and the emergence of a Catholic middle class (Darby, 1995). Unfortunately, the Catholics went to Catholic school and the Protestants attended state-run schools helping to create and maintain a separate society and culture, and the founding of the Northern Irish Civil Rights Association.

Bloody Sunday-Antagonism Stage

Rothman (1997) describes the antagonism stage as positional framing among the disputants. In this framing, polarization occurs between "us" and "them." During this process, each side blames the other for the events that are occurring and sets unreasonable demands on the other side (Rothman, 1997).

It was a 4-year period of increased violence that began in 1968 and led up to the bloody events of January 30, 1972. On October 5, 1968 in Derry Northern Ireland, police turned what was a peaceful civil rights demonstration into a small riot. Overwhelming evidence points to an unprovoked attack by the police on the demonstrators with batons. The demonstrators retaliated with stones and petrol bombs (O' Dochtartaigh). In 1969, England sent in troops to quell riots that had erupted over the inequality (Hughes & Carmichael, 1997). By 1970, a resurrected PIRA was carrying out attacks against the British troops (Byrne, 2001). It is important to note that this escalation in Irish Republican Army (IRA) violence preceded the events of Bloody Sunday.

In July 1971, the IRA began open armed opposition to the British troops. It is alleged that the British troops shot and killed two unarmed "nationalist youth" during the summer of 1971. These shootings prompted a public outcry within Derry, forcing withdrawal of the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) from the parliament. In

reaction to the increased violence and political unrest, the government began internment without a charge or trial and banned demonstrations (O' Dochtartaigh). Leading up to this period the Republicans, or Catholics, sought a unified Ireland with no control or intervention by the British. The British in turn were not about to give up part of their country, but felt they were making concessions toward civil rights. Favoritism was still present for Protestants in housing, wages, and government.

By 1971, increased dissatisfaction among the Catholic middle class over civil rights and the unjust internments had a unifying effect on the nationalist community. The Catholics were willing to give up the quest for a united Ireland in exchange for civil liberties.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) showed resistance to the public's desire to protest, and a new group, the Northern Resistance Movement (NRM), emerged with the support of over 400,000 households (O' Dochtartaigh). The NRM organized a rent and rates strike. It could be argued that the Catholics were attempting to move beyond the antagonistic stage by concessions to the British government. In turn, the British government made some effort toward concessions as well. The British changed the voting procedures and reformed the RUC. However, they also made changes to the political structure that increased empowerment and intervention by the British government with decreased local or Northern Ireland involvement (Cain).

The increased nationalism among the Catholics continued to grow. A march in December of 1971 brought attention to the world of the continuing British oppression. The march proved to be an embarrassment to the British army that was tasked with preventing marches. The British increased the size of the military operation in order to prevent future embarrassment.

A march was planned for January 30, 1972. In response to the planned march, the British government made it clear they would take action to stop the illegal march. The IRA and the PIRA, in an effort to prevent any violence, agreed to a period of disarmament. The following are accounts of various parties: Catholics involved in the march, onlookers, the British government, and neutral third parties. This storytelling by the involved parties points to increased "us" and "them" dichotomies during the antagonistic phase of the conflict.

In response to the anticipated march, the British had a large troop presence with armed personnel at several strategic locations, however, the demonstrators felt comfortable with the planned nonviolent march. In a consolidated account of the Nationalist the following occurred.

The British troops fired C.S. gas into the crowd. The soldiers shot a young boy and man for no reason. They threw a young man to the ground and began beating him with the butt of a rifle. "As I was leaning over to pick up a rubber bullet I heard a shot, then felt a pain in my knee, I had been shot with live bullets." At the end of the day, 13

people were dead and countless others injured (Bloody Sunday Trust). The young age of several victims caused outrage within the community and throughout Ireland.

According to the British government the following occurred: “We came under attack from nail bombs and under fire from 50 to 80 shots.” “We were only protecting ourselves through the retaliatory action.” The British explained that the soldiers only fired shots at those identified as gunman or bombers. Forensic tests on those killed or arrested failed to produce any evidence of bombs or firearms. No charges were brought against those arrested (O’ Dochtartaigh). A letter to the commander of the action from Brigadier Peter Barclay states, “How proud it made one feel to see the way, on TV, on which your lads went into action against those blighters last Sunday” (O’ Dochtartaigh, p.1).

Italian reporter Fuvio Grimaldi, who was in Derry to report on the much-publicized march, supports the accounts of the Irish. “There hadn’t been one shot fired at them. There hadn’t been one nail bomb thrown at them. They jumped out and, with unbelievable murderous fury, shot into the fleeing crowd.” Grimaldi witnessed a father and son crossing the street with their hands on top of their heads. The son was gunned down by a soldier (13 Dead In Derry, p1). Regarding the events of Bloody Sunday, the Irish believe it was the ongoing goal of the British to “terrorize and break the resistance of the minority community and to placate the growing strength of the loyalist far right” (O’ Dochtartaigh, p. 5).

Reflexive Frame

Reflexivity is the next process in the Rothman model. As described by Rothman (1997) being reflexive necessitates that the parties look at their priorities prior to acting or reacting. Reflexivity necessitates that the parties ask why: Why this situation is so important to me? Why do I care so much? What have I done to contribute to the problem? What might be done to contribute to its resolution? (Rothman, 1997, p.37). Reflexivity is very similar to attribution theory and how people make casual explanations and answer questions beginning with “why?.” Attribution looks toward the self and how people understand the impact of events and how people frame the causation (Brown, 1999). Reflexivity moves beyond the self and introduces the relationship between self, other and context. In other words, it looks at how an individual is not in complete control of a situation and must consider outside factors and influences.

In answering these “why” questions for the Irish, we must look back to the time of colonization and why the oppression began. The Irish were looking, and continue to look, for safety, dignity through equal rights, unity, and identity through the acceptance of their culture by the British, as well as control of their own destiny or respect of their self-determination. The British government and the Protestant citizens seek some of the same rights. They have a desire for a safe society, dignity by maintaining control of Northern Ireland, unity and identity with the “homeland,” and being in control.

The numerous peace negotiations in Northern Ireland have used reflexive dialogue. The failed Sunningdale agreement in 1973 was a move toward power sharing between the parties. While the agreement was to provide power sharing within the government, it failed because it went too far for the Unionists and not far enough for the Irish. A number of efforts were made toward peace from 1974 through 1988.

In 1988, the Brooke/Mayhew Talks were introduced in an effort to protect the self-determination of the Irish. This was a 3-strand process. The proposal included relationships within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between the British and Irish Governments (Cain). Because of conflicting goals, these talks failed to bring peace to the region. Though both parties made a number of attempts at peace between 1988 and 1998, doubt was always present in one party or the other and resulted in continued violence. These peace proposals all looked at how to unify the people of Northern Ireland with one another. I see the key problem as one of not maintaining self-identity and rather than unifying the parties should look toward a peaceful coexistence with mutual respect and recognition.

Invention Frame

The failed peace proposals over decades brought fourth the “Good Friday” agreement in April of 1998. Throughout the year this agreement met opposition from minority groups within both parties. The violence continued as did expressions of the displeasure and celebrations of previous events such as the formation of the IRA in 1916. I attribute this to transgenerational trauma. While inquiries and trials regarding the events of Bloody Sunday continue, there has been no progress toward admission or findings of guilt and an apology for Bloody Sunday has never occurred.

Monica McWilliams addressed the Irish Association in September of 2000 concerning the Good Friday agreement. This agreement utilized many modern approaches to peacebuilding (McWilliams, 2000).

It questioned the majoritarianism as a form of government, and moved toward an electoral system. The electoral system would allow involvement of more diverse political views; The active involvement of a wider range of sectoral interest; interest groups and civic society in policy making; and finally admission that it is a severally divided and contested society (McWilliams, 2000, p.1).

By 1999 much of the agreement had been implemented and power sharing was still limited but was occurring. The agreement did not allow for a unilateral police force nor did it allow for cultural expression, thus maintaining a separatist society resulting from the ongoing trauma from Bloody Sunday. A portion of the agreement required decommissioning of the IRA. This decommissioning did not occur because the IRA felt the British needed to remove or reduce its troop presence in Northern Ireland. In February of 2000, a return to direct rule by Westminster occurred because of the failure

by the IRA to decommission. Peace talks have continued on again and off again all within the sometimes-violent climate.

Conclusion or Action Plan

It can be argued that colonization brings benefits and advantages to those under colonial rule. The residents of Northern Ireland never experienced any of these benefits. They have lived under the grasp of oppression by the British government for the past 500 years. The centuries of oppression have resulted in a strong desire for self-determination among the Catholics. This, combined with generations of storytelling and transgenerational trauma, has created an environment of continued violence. It is the author's contention that the transgenerational trauma from several acts on both sides of the dispute, including Bloody Sunday, will continue to perpetuate a violent society.

The British continue to maintain the separatism between the North and the South. Because of United Kingdom policy and control, Northern Ireland continues to use the Pound Sterling, while Ireland has moved to the Euro Dollar. While this is a small issue, it relates directly to the issue of power on the part of the British. For the most part, the schools continue to be segregated, Catholic and Protestant, allowing for more one-sided storytelling and the growth of another generation of hate and misunderstanding.

The time for truth is now or, in Gaelic, "*Uair Na Finne*" – let the parties admit their wrongs and move forward toward peaceful coexistence. One could argue that maintaining identity is imperative to both parties and that a unified Ireland will only create more conflict. Support for the ideas of Johan Galtung would empower both parties and allow a cultural melting pot. Galtung proposes that Northern Ireland become a part of the European Union as a separate entity. This would recognize the heritage of all parties (Galtung, 2001). This however still leaves the fact that the British government has yet to provide satisfactory explanations to why they had live ammunition rather than rubber bullets and why no bullet or bomb fragments were ever located following Bloody Sunday.

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Scott M. Woods holds an MBA and is in his final semester of doctoral study in conflict analysis and resolution with Nova Southeastern University. Research and

dissertation interests are in the area of treatment of trauma in areas of civil war through the use of Neuro Linguistics Programming (NLP) processes. Additionally, for the past five years, Scott has been an adjunct faculty member with the University of Phoenix instructing in the areas of business and social sciences.