**The Politics of Apology and the Prospects for ‘Post-conflict’ Reconciliation: The case of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement**

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Abstract

*This article analyses the Irish Provisional republican movement and the evolution of its approach to the politics of apology. The first section analyses recent scholarship regarding ‘political apologies’, and provides a challenge to the existing literature, which concentrates upon ‘official’ or state apologies, rather than examples involving non-state armed groups (paramilitary or ‘terrorist’ organisations). This section argues that it remains difficult to discern an adequate general model for establishing criteria for a ‘successful’ or ‘sincere’ political apology involving such groups. The second section considers a number of case studies, including the statements of the IRA in 2002, and after the Enniskillen bombing (1987). It is argued that the Provisional movement’s apologies have not generally proven helpful to its declared aim of post-conflict reconciliation. This article argues that attempted apologies or quasi-apologies by non-state groups may not ameliorate the sense of grievance experienced by victims/survivors, and may also serve to revivify social and political ‘framing battles’ over the past.*

Introduction

In July 2012, a front page headline in the *Sunday Business Post* read: ‘IRA prepares for historic apology to all its victims’. However, the report was immediately denied by the then Sinn Féin (SF) Deputy First Minister in the Northern Ireland Executive, and former Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA) commander in Derry during the 1970s, Martin McGuinness. The SF National Chairperson, Declan Kearney also denied the report, arguing that, ‘this is a story about which I know nothing [...] The IRA has left the stage. The IRA no longer exists. In other words, the IRA can no longer speak.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

The movement’s attitude to apology should be interpreted in the context of its broader contemporary reconciliation initiative.[[2]](#footnote-2) This has been most closely associated with SF Chair Declan Kearney’s efforts, especially since 2012, to ‘reach out’ to Protestants, unionists and loyalists within Northern Ireland.[[3]](#footnote-3) Arguably, this venture has made little real headway, in part because many unionists have been sceptical regarding the *bona fides* of republican efforts in this regard. As the perceptive unionist commentator, Alex Kane, has argued, the unpalatable truth for republicans is that the vast majority of unionists, of whatever party political affiliation, did not (and will not) support a deal that ends up smoothing the path towards Irish unity; no amount of ‘honeyed words’ about reconciliation or overcoming hurt will alter that fact.[[4]](#footnote-4) Republicans are interpreted by some unionists as utilising a discourse of ‘reconciliation’ to wrong-foot their opponents; the rhetoric masks a continuing fidelity to their traditional objectives, and ‘SF shows no genuine sign of being willing to subject its belief in the moral legitimacy of the IRA’s “armed struggle” to self-critical scrutiny’.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In turn, the prospects for reconciliation between Irish republicans and unionists/loyalists also need to be understood as part of an even wider question regarding the most appropriate means for a divided society such as Northern Ireland to tackle the complex legacies of its violent past. As Cunningham recognised, ‘the apology is only one manifestation of this disparate and cross-disciplinary phenomenon [how the past is to be represented] which includes, *inter alia*, issues of collective memory and trauma, the politics of commemoration and memorialisation, the politics of reparation and restitution, the debate over historical curricula in schools and the establishment of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions.’[[6]](#footnote-6) There has been a lively debate regarding the appropriateness or otherwise of utilising transitional justice scholarship in the context of ‘post-conflict’ Northern Ireland.[[7]](#footnote-7) In terms of public, government-sponsored policy, there has been a range of significant attempts to ‘deal with’ (or better perhaps, ‘contend with’[[8]](#footnote-8)) the past, from the Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland, the Consultative Group on the Past (Eames-Bradley), the Haass-O’Sullivan process, and the Stormont House Agreement of 2014.[[9]](#footnote-9) The politics of apology are but one piece of a jigsaw, which has remained stubbornly incomplete for almost two decades and, indeed, it remains so today.[[10]](#footnote-10) Moreover, the enduring bitterness and dispute over the *meta-conflict* (the character of the conflict itself) in Northern Ireland have been both a cause and effect of the breakdown of the devolved Executive during 2017- January 2020.

As MacLachlan argued, political apologies need to be studied in their particular contexts and circumstances: ‘the authority, the content and the addressee of a given apology are understood to be crucial in locating both its *meaning* and its *purpose*.’[[11]](#footnote-11) The article concentrates upon two particular examples of apologies issued by the Provisional movement: first, the IRA’s Enniskillen Remembrance Day bombing in 1987; second, the 2002 IRA statement which was released at the time of the thirtieth anniversary of the ‘Bloody Friday’ IRA multiple car bombs in Belfast, in July 1972. The conclusion drawn from these examples is that the Provisional movement’s apologies have been restricted and circumspect, and they have not generally proven helpful to the movement’s declared aim of post-conflict reconciliation.

**Establishing criteria for Political Apologies**

The significant body of scholarship concerning political apologies which has evolved since the turn of the century followed upon the increasing penchant for states or governments to utilise apologies for past wrongdoing. It is striking how much of this literature has been preoccupied with state or ‘official’ apologies, often delivered via statements and/or public ceremonies involving Heads of Government or State.[[12]](#footnote-12) In a wide-ranging and detailed edited collection surveying the ‘age of apology’, all but two of the twenty chapters concentrated upon the legal, ethical and theoretical dimensions of apologies, or dealt with apologies by states (either between states in the *international* arena, or *within* individual states, where the political authority was apologising for wrongdoing to a subaltern or marginalised group within its own territory).[[13]](#footnote-13)

Celermajer distinguishes between state apologies for historical wrongs which occurred in the more remote past, and transitional apologies, dealing with more recent events. She argues that, even though it may be more problematic to ‘explain the continuity of agency or basis of responsibility’ in the former cases, nonetheless they have formed the ‘vast majority’ of apologies.[[14]](#footnote-14) It is perhaps understandable that transitional apologies have been less prevalent, given that states may be concerned that a full admission of responsibility for wrongdoing, where the victims and/or survivors are still directly affected, will open the way for claims of substantive, rather than merely symbolic reparations. These victims may also hope for or demand legal redress or retributive measures, and not merely the symbolic balm of a ‘speech act’ acknowledging that they were wronged.

It is interesting that this literature has not tended to dwell in any depth on cases of sub-state or non-state actors and political apology.[[15]](#footnote-15) However, where non-state groups (whether described as ‘rebels’, paramilitaries or ‘terrorists’) have been responsible for violence and deaths/injuries, and human rights violations (sometimes, as in Northern Ireland, to a greater degree than state actors engaged in the conflict[[16]](#footnote-16)), it is incumbent on researchers to devote appropriate attention to such groups. It may well be the case that apologies have not often been forthcoming from non-state actors, but the Northern Ireland case demonstrates that it can, and does occur.[[17]](#footnote-17) If one of the key questions asked in the literature is, ‘How should states address systematic wrongdoing at the level of collective responsibility?’, then we may also legitimately ask how non-state groups or movements should respond to that question. As Verdeja has argued, to be effective or ‘valid’, apologies by institutions require a properly sanctioned speaker having the authorisation to represent the collective will of the institution: ‘an official apology does not generate its legitimacy solely from its content, it draws much of its power from the standing of the person who gives it [...]’.[[18]](#footnote-18) This is one significant issue which marks out apologies by non-state actors, as there may be ambiguity about the representative status of the individual delivering the apology. Another important distinction can be drawn with regard to the historical ‘recording’, the staging and formality of the apology. For state apologies, one criterion that has been advanced is that the apology needs to be recorded and ‘written into’ the official historical narrative.[[19]](#footnote-19) In Thompson’s terms, apologies should become ‘embedded in the official history of the nation.’[[20]](#footnote-20) For a clandestine, non-state rebel group, this injunction is problematic; there is, for example, no widely available ‘official history’ of the Provisional movement. However, in some respects, the writings of Gerry Adams (SF President 1983-2018) can be construed as providing a template or ‘master narrative’ of the Provisional movement’s interpretation of the conflict. Cunningham builds upon the literature devoted to inter-personal apology in order to put forward relevant criteria for political apology.[[21]](#footnote-21) Although there is no clear consensus in the literature on the exact elements of an ‘ideal’ apology, there are some dimensions of the political apology which feature in almost all analyses: there needs to be an identifiable act or omission which constitutes a wrong or injustice; the individual apologising must acknowledge and be responsible for the offence, and he/she needs to be authorised to speak on behalf of the political entity in whose name the apology is offered; there should be an identifiable collective body or group which constitutes the victims of the wrong, and to whom the apology is addressed or directed; the apology needs to belong to the family of apologetic speech acts (while it may be undermined by equivocation or evasion).[[22]](#footnote-22) Some scholars argue that an effective apology also needs to include a promise of future forbearance or an undertaking not to repeat/replicate the offensive action or omission, and perhaps an offer of some form of reparation (even if this be symbolic, rather than material). Muldoon has argued that there are two dimensions to judging the efficacy of a ‘political apology’: the first he terms the ‘exchange model’, in which the perpetrator orientates his subsequent action to the suffering caused to the victim or survivor, and seeks to ‘repay’ or ‘restore’ something to the victim. The second dimension is inward-looking, what Muldoon terms the ‘identity model’; the perpetrator ‘is required to return (in the sense of “retreat” or “recommit”) to their own moral norms.’[[23]](#footnote-23)

Borrowing from Celermajer, the *aftermath* of a political apology should serve ‘as a kind of reference point for on-going critical self-reflection.’[[24]](#footnote-24) He points to the potential that many political apologies have to ‘prematurely foreclose upon the work of critical self-reflection that they set in motion’.[[25]](#footnote-25) Govier and Verwoerd further argue that a fulsome acknowledgement of wrongdoing needs to comprise three elements: that the act itself is wrong, that the moral (and perhaps civic) status of the victims as equals must be recognised, and the right of these victims to harbour a sense of resentment must be understood.[[26]](#footnote-26) Muldoon endorses their argument, stating that ‘Govier and Vorwoerd leave their readers in little doubt that the critical element to the reparative work of apology is the withdrawal of the moral insult contained in the original offence.’[[27]](#footnote-27) If the apology is to open up the ‘possibility of reconciliation it is not because it “undoes” anything – the suffering caused by the offence can never be erased – but because it “unsays” the message of moral worthlessness’ of the victims; Muldoon posits that this “unsaying” is significant not just for the victims but also for the perpetrators, who, by retracting their earlier message, are serving notice that they ‘have come to see their actions differently or, to be more precise, that they have come to see them in the same light as their victims.’[[28]](#footnote-28) Dudai argues that the IRA’s apologies to families of alleged informers killed by the organisation, but subsequently exonerated after enquiries, represent an example of this ‘restoring of the good names and dignity’ of these victims.[[29]](#footnote-29) However, there is a critical distinction between intra-communal apologies of this kind, and those offered to members of the Protestant and unionist community, as we shall explore.

To the extent that authors of apology do not seek to offer mitigation or extenuation for the wrongs committed, but instead take full responsibility for the wrongdoing, it might be expected that their apologies are more likely to be met with a degree of acceptance by those to whom they are addressed. However, as Marrus notes, ‘“responsibility”, after all, can be direct or indirect, full or shared, heavy or light.’ As we shall examine, this question of acknowledgement of ‘full’ responsibility is especially problematic in the case of the Irish republican movement.[[30]](#footnote-30) On the contrary, selectivity regarding the nature of the offence (e.g. apologising for the unintended outcome of an act, rather than the act itself), or euphemistic or evasive language concerning the responsibility of the one apologising, is likely to undermine the reception of the apology in the eyes of (some) addressees.[[31]](#footnote-31) In the case of state apologies to victims’ groups, it has been argued that often the most effective instances have involved a dialogue or engagement between the state and victims. Marrus argues that apologies may aid broader processes of reconciliation, if there is a ‘transaction between victims and perpetrators – or their representatives – in which there is a mutually agreed-upon understanding of what has happened.’[[32]](#footnote-32) The article discusses whether such dialogue or engagement is likely to be more problematic when we are analysing non-state violent actors and those victimised by their violence.

However, it is important to recognise that many scholars caution ‘against being too prescriptive about what constitutes or comprises an apology’, and contingency or context is often viewed as critical.[[33]](#footnote-33) More than ten years on from the ground-breaking collection of essays by Gibney et al., it is still fair to state that ‘there is not yet a conclusive method for understanding all instances of public apologies.’[[34]](#footnote-34)

Increasingly, therefore, attention has turned towards discussion of particular cases and consideration of the light that may be shed upon the general question of how to judge the utility of political apologies. In some instances, this has also entailed the study of ‘*quasi*-apologies’ or ‘*non*-apologies’, and an effort to understand the reasons behind the apparent ‘failure’ of some attempted apologies.[[35]](#footnote-35) The remainder of this article will endeavour to provide a detailed analysis of apology in the context of Northern Ireland and the Irish republican movement.

**Public Policy towards the Past and the Role of Apologies after the ‘Troubles’**

The most comprehensive effort to ‘deal with the past’ and the complex legacies of conflict in Northern Ireland to date has been the Consultative Group on the Past (CGP; also known as Eames-Bradley after its joint chairpersons), which delivered its report in 2009. Although there were no specific recommendations with regard to apologies, it did include some general comments on reconciliation and forgiveness: ‘It is not possible to complete an act of forgiveness unless a wrong is acknowledged. In the case of the divided communities of Northern Ireland, this means that both sides must somehow be enabled to reach agreement that there was wrongdoing on both sides. This is not a matter of balancing amounts of wrongdoing but of acknowledging that wrong was done on both sides. Only then is mutual forgiveness possible.’[[36]](#footnote-36)

It is worth citing this passage at length, for it illustrates some of the core problems associated with the practices and discourses of ‘reconciliation’ as they have been interpreted in Northern Ireland. Many would, of course, dispute the notion that there were only two sides engaged in the conflict, and this betrays a fundamental absence of consensus concerning the origins of conflict. Equally, the convoluted injunction that ‘both sides’ must ‘somehow be enabled to reach agreement’ and recognise that they both committed wrongs, did not inspire confidence that there was a practical mechanism envisaged for achieving self-critical reappraisals of all of the protagonists’ responsibility for violence. The disclaimer that ‘this is not a matter of balancing amounts of wrongdoing’ is arguably a forlorn effort to depoliticise (or re-humanise) the necessarily intensely political question of reconciliation. As Schaap has argued, in zones of conflict, the practice of political reconciliation should not, and perhaps cannot, presuppose a pre-existing community of shared norms which needs to be restored. Instead, ‘whereas reconciliation turns towards harmony and resolution, politics thrive on contestability and uncertainty.’[[37]](#footnote-37) The CGP report, and the Legacy Commission it recommended, were effectively scuppered almost immediately by the furore which greeted its proposal for a ‘recognition payment’ (of £12,000) to be paid on an inclusive basis to the families of *all* those who had been killed as a result of the Troubles.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Later, in 2013, the Haass-O’Sullivan talks produced another draft proposal for policy towards the past and commemorations, as well as attempting to tackle the contemporary issues of parades and flags. In a sub-section entitled, ‘Acknowledging Past Acts’, it was argued that ‘sincere acknowledgements are a foundational step in the effort to contend with Northern Ireland’s past. They constitute powerful gestures by individuals involved in the conflict and send an important message [...] that those responsible for causing pain are prepared to accept their responsibility [...]’.[[39]](#footnote-39) There was some confusion here between *individual* responsibility for violent acts and the collective organisational level; the draft agreement went on to recognise that ‘some deaths can be attributed to state actors; the overwhelming majority, however, were caused by paramilitary organisations.’

With specific reference to apologies, there was an intriguing paragraph arguing that ‘acknowledgements should be more than apologies. Saying sorry is necessary but not sufficient. Full acknowledgements would include an *unqualified* acceptance of responsibility, express an understanding of the human consequences for individuals and society, and include a *sincere* expression of remorse for pain and injury caused.’[[40]](#footnote-40) The draft envisaged individuals, organisations and national governments working together, privately, to discuss the language and timing of ‘statements of acknowledgement’. The proposed agreement was supported by SF, but not by the main unionist parties, and in retrospect it may be argued that it would have been more beneficial to decouple the negotiations concerning parades and flags from the broader question of contending with the past.

**The Provisional Republican Movement and Apology**

Over the course of the conflict, the Provisional movement (encompassing both the IRA and SF[[41]](#footnote-41)), regularly made statements accepting or ‘claiming’ responsibility for violent acts, whether these were shootings or bombings. The IRA did on occasion issue statements ‘regretting’ the deaths and injuries caused to civilians or ‘non-combatants’. These statements were delivered in the name of ‘P. O’Neill’, a pseudonym for the organisation which obviated the danger of any individual spokesperson being prosecuted for IRA membership. However, such statements were not always forthcoming, or the IRA initially denied responsibility or obfuscated the role played by its ‘volunteers’. Only in some particularly egregious cases, often involving the unintended deaths of Catholic civilians was the statement of regret delivered soon after the violent act itself; in many others, families had to wait until after the 1998 peace agreement for a clear and unequivocal admission of IRA responsibility and a belated apology.[[42]](#footnote-42) Such strategies arguably undermined the effect of those apologies, although the addressees have not reacted uniformly to such overtures.

To take one month during the Troubles as an example, in December 1983 the IRA was responsible for the killings, among others, of Ulster Unionist politician, and Queen’s University law lecturer, Edgar Graham, of Garda Gary Sheehan and Irish Army officer, Patrick Kelly, as well as the bombing outside Harrods department store in London, which killed six and injured 91.[[43]](#footnote-43) The recently elected SF President, Gerry Adams was hard pressed to justify these violent actions: according to his biographers, he adopted the ‘defensive formulation which he was to deploy on many future occasions, replying that he regretted but wouldn’t condemn the deaths.’[[44]](#footnote-44) In one case, the killing was of a Protestant politician and the motivation appeared, to critics of the Provisionals, nakedly sectarian[[45]](#footnote-45); in another, the IRA had killed a police officer and soldier ‘serving a state which he [Adams] had said the IRA wasn’t interested in overthrowing’[[46]](#footnote-46); and finally, ‘the senseless killing of English civilians out doing their Christmas shopping.’[[47]](#footnote-47) The IRA was unrepentant regarding the targeting of Graham, arguing that he had ‘rejoiced in the assassinations of republicans, whether or not they were IRA volunteers or unarmed political activists.’[[48]](#footnote-48) As far as the killings in Co. Leitrim in the Republic of Ireland were concerned, Adams would not condemn the IRA unit’s actions; he argued that ‘it is no reflection on the IRA volunteers that were involved because they were in a position where they were doing their duty.’[[49]](#footnote-49)

In the case of the Harrods bombing, the IRA claimed that it had issued a warning, but also, unusually, added that the ‘operation’ had not been sanctioned by the organisation’s leadership, the Army Council.[[50]](#footnote-50) The IRA statement said that ‘steps will be taken to ensure there will be no repetition of this type of operation.’ In a telling recognition of the sense of outrage which greeted these killings (in both Britain and Ireland), the IRA continued: ‘We regret the civilian casualties, even though our expressions of sympathy will be dismissed.’[[51]](#footnote-51) It is also telling that there was no expression of regret for the police officers killed.

The previous month, Adams had been interviewed in the wake of the IRA’s killing of Charles Armstrong (Ulster Unionist chair of Armagh District Council and part-time Major in the Ulster Defence Regiment [UDR], married with 8 children); he was clear that such killings were ‘perfectly legitimate in a state of war.’ When asked if he himself would be willing to kill police officers or soldiers, Adams replied: ‘If my role lay within the IRA, and within an armed struggle, I would have no compunction at all.’[[52]](#footnote-52)

Although the consequences of the IRA’s violence might be ‘regretted’ if it caused civilian deaths and injuries, and especially if the popular reaction was revulsion in Catholic and nationalist communities across Ireland, nonetheless the Provisional movement always framed its resort to ‘armed struggle’ as a *reaction* to a political situation for which, it claimed, it was not primarily responsible. Therefore, in at least two significant respects, IRA statements of regret or apology have, generally, been qualified: first, even if the IRA admitted responsibility for *particular* violent acts, the organisation did not accept that it was primarily, or even largely, responsible for the *overall* political situation which made, in its view, violence inevitable. Jeffery has provided a critique of such apologies in the context of Japan’s relations with its neighbours, pointing out that apologies for specific and egregious acts have taken place within an overall framework of ‘unapologetic remembrance’.[[53]](#footnote-53) A similar critique could be levelled at Provisional practice; a persistent critic of the movement summed up its prevailing attitude in the following terms: ‘During the Troubles the defence had been, “Look what you [the British government or state] made me do.” After the violence stopped the case was basically, “Why can’t you be grateful it’s over, and besides, you are more to blame than we are.”’[[54]](#footnote-54)

Second, the IRA continued (and SF continues today) to argue for a hard and fast distinction between violence which was directed against ‘legitimate targets’ in the security forces (police, UDR and British Army, as well as those civilians aiding and abetting the ‘occupation forces’), and casualties amongst civilians or ‘non-combatants’. This is the case, as in the Harrods bombing, even where both categories of victim died in one and the same incident.

*The Remembrance Day Bomb in Enniskillen (1987)*

The IRA bombing beside the war memorial in a ‘mixed’ market town in Co. Fermanagh on Remembrance Day in November 1987 occurred as the mainly Protestant and unionist civilians were gathering to pay their respects to the British dead of the World Wars.[[55]](#footnote-55) There was widespread outrage, including among many Irish nationalists, not just because of the civilian casualties inflicted but also due to the ‘symbolic significance’ of what was interpreted widely as an attack on the Protestant unionist population at its most sacred commemorative event. Eleven people were killed on that day and 63 were seriously injured.[[56]](#footnote-56) The IRA issued a statement the following day which expressed ‘deep regret’ for the carnage, but the republican movement attempted initially to divert attention from its responsibility for the attack: it was claimed that the security forces had inadvertently triggered the explosion with an electronic scanning device. This claim was rejected vehemently by the police and British Army, and in 1995 IRA sources accepted that ‘this “explanation” was just nonsense.’[[57]](#footnote-57) The IRA also claimed that the intended target of the bomb was soldiers and/or police carrying out security checks in preparation for the Remembrance Day service. In this narrative, the bombing was a ‘mistake’; in the words of Gerry Adams, in his second volume of memoir, *Hope and History*, ‘the operation was wrong in its *conception* as well as its execution. It was a disaster.’ [[58]](#footnote-58)

In the immediate aftermath, Adams had extended ‘sympathy and condolences to the families and friends of those killed.’ As we have seen, such reactions and expressions of regret are problematic for several reasons: clearly, in light of the IRA’s own understanding of its motivations and purposes, had the bomb detonated when UDR soldiers or RUC officers were in the immediate vicinity, and had they been the sole or primary casualties, the ‘operation’ could not have been construed as a failure, but would rather have been greeted as a triumph. In this regard, it is difficult to understand the logic of Adams’ claim that the ‘operation’ was wrong in its *conception*; ostensibly, it was conceived as an attack on security force personnel whom the IRA believed were ‘legitimate targets’ for its campaign of violence. Indeed, one of those killed, Edward Armstrong, was a retired police officer while another victim, 72-year-old Georgina Quinton, had served with the British services as a nurse in the Second World War. According to the Provisional movement, the killing of these individuals could be justified on the same or similar grounds applying to those police officers killed in the Harrods bombing. However, such was the magnitude of the revulsion at the Enniskillen ‘operation’ that no such distinctions were drawn, at least in public, by the Provisionals.Moreover, the Provisional movement’s recognition that the Enniskillen attack was ‘wrong’ only embraced a narrow definition of wrongdoing.

A complex political strategy characterised the response in the aftermath of Enniskillen, whereby the Provisional movement followed an ‘apology/apologia strategy in which a wrong is acknowledged and regret expressed, but coupled with a defence of their position’.[[59]](#footnote-59) On one hand, there was an effort to circumscribe tightly republican responsibility – the organisation (eventually) did accept that it was responsible for the effects of the bombing, and renounced it, but this was not accompanied by any admission of wider culpability for the existence of conflict in Northern Ireland. Equally, there followed a concerted attempt to broaden the narrative whenever Enniskillen was discussed; Gerry Adams placed the suffering of victims and their families at Enniskillen firmly in the context of the killings of eight IRA men by a British special forces unit at Loughgall, Co. Armagh earlier in 1987.[[60]](#footnote-60) When Adams assumed the identity of the wrongdoer, and recognised that the bombing had been a ‘disaster’, he sought simultaneously to distance himself, and the wider movement, from this identity; Enniskillen was portrayed as an aberration in the republican history of violence. In Adams’ words, ‘only six years after Bobby Sands died on hunger strike and brought the republican struggle to a high moral platform, the Enniskillen bomb not only robbed eleven civilians of their lives, but it left the IRA open to accusations of callousness and indifference.’[[61]](#footnote-61)

Implicit in this comment is the claim that the ‘disaster’ (rather than, say, ‘outrage’ or ‘atrocity’) was equally a disaster for the republican movement, and also that the disgrace was not a reflection of the movement’s true moral nature. The republican ‘community’ was also suffering as a result. It could appear as if Adams were, in effect, positing equivalence between the IRA’s self-damaging *faux pas* and the devastation caused to those killed, injured and bereaved. As MacLachlan has argued in a different context, this kind of ‘statement of regret’ is best understood as a ‘graceful dance of equivocation [...]. The emphasis is self-directed, albeit critical; it does not reach out to the purported addressee.’[[62]](#footnote-62) However, the IRA and SF, in staking their claim to be accepted as sincerely apologetic for acts such as Enniskillen, are clearly not acknowledging that *they* need to embrace a *new* identity (a ‘more upstanding’ identity, as Muldoon describes it). Instead, they are implicitly demanding that others, including their victims, recognise that such actions were not representative of the authentic character of the movement.[[63]](#footnote-63) The stakes are high for political apologisers precisely because they are (or should be) putting their identities on the line, and victims can decide whether or not to accept such an apologetic stance. In the case of the Irish republican movement, this acceptance of the risk of refusal by Protestants *qua* Protestants or unionists *qua* unionists is precisely what is missing from the apologies delivered to date.

After Enniskillen, the IRA and SF were primarily concerned to limit the damage caused to their own reputation and prospects, and attempted to redeem their understanding of the ‘ideal self’ of the movement. A ‘senior IRA source’ recognised that ‘politically and internationally it [the Enniskillen bombing] is a major setback. [...] Our central base can take a hell of a lot of jolting and crises, with limited demoralisation. But the outer reaches [of supporters] are just totally devastated.’[[64]](#footnote-64) This was especially true of nationalists in the Republic of Ireland: ‘we were trying to convince people there that what’s happening in the north is a legitimate armed struggle. But the obloquy we’ve attracted cuts the ground from under us.’[[65]](#footnote-65) There was no clear acceptance that it is properly the province of the victims of the offence (those to whom any apology should be directed in such circumstances) to come to conclusions as to redemption. As several scholars have noted, many effective apologies have often involved some engagement or input in advance from victims and survivors of the wrong inflicted; this has not been the custom in Irish republican apologies apparently delivered to unionists or Protestants.[[66]](#footnote-66)

Gerry Adams argued that he had made the point immediately that ‘what the IRA did was wrong’, and maintained that ‘my human response to what happened was not affected by whether it was good or bad for Sinn Féin.’[[67]](#footnote-67) However, almost right away Adams appeared to distance himself, not to mention the wider republican family, from a full ownership of the responsibility: ‘People like me cannot be expected to take on the guilt. As we have seen [...] there is an attempt to do that in the politics of the last atrocity, by conscious attempt to guilt trip those who vote for our party. [...] I think grief, trauma, death, destruction, conflict – how do you end it? You end it by getting to the core of it.’[[68]](#footnote-68) The ‘core’ of the conflict is too obvious, in Adams’ eyes, to require spelling out: in this teleological world view, if British ‘occupation’ and partition were to end, then conflict would naturally also come to a conclusion. In Kampf’s terms, this is an example of how ‘selectivity in apologizing – that is, apologizing for one component of the transgression – can serve as a tactic for reducing the extent of responsibility and guilt for a misdeed.’[[69]](#footnote-69) In this case, Adams’ apology for the Enniskillen bombing (and, in particular, the civilian casualties that occurred) is framed within the context of a defence of the overall propriety and necessity of the IRA’s campaign of violence.

If one of the key elements of political apology, indeed, its ‘moral core’, is to convey to the wronged a ‘sincere and regretful willingness to own the consequences of one’s wrongful actions’, then the republican movement’s response to Enniskillen did not adequately fulfil this fundamental criterion.[[70]](#footnote-70) Instead, it was characterised by a strategic ambivalence, both attempting to identify the IRA’s action as wrong and seeking simultaneously to distance the movement and its supporters from any such identification. In the wake of the Enniskillen bombing, the effort to recuperate the movement’s sense of its own virtue had, it could be argued, the effect of undermining the reception of its ‘deep regret’ amongst the bereaved and survivors. In November 2017, an ex-Provisional, Tommy McKearney, was a guest on the BBC’s *Good Morning Ulster*. He was reported as saying that the ‘Enniskillen bomb was devastating as far as the IRA is concerned’, and that ‘there was never a policy of killing civilians.’[[71]](#footnote-71) It is important to note here that not all victims and survivors of the Enniskillen bombing reacted in similar fashion, both to the bombing itself and to the republican movement’s subsequent statements. There has been some misunderstanding and even bitterness between some of those characterised as ‘good victims’, willing to engage in dialogue with republicans, and those who remained full of ‘righteous indignation.’[[72]](#footnote-72) One of the key issues with regard to the IRA’s apology for Enniskillen turns on who, precisely, is to be identified as the addressee capable of accepting or rejecting the Republican movement’s *bona fides*.

*‘Bloody Friday’ (1972) and the IRA statement of 2002*

Thirty years after the Provisionals had unleashed a series of car bombs in Belfast, ‘P. O’Neill’ released a statement to the SF newspaper *An Phoblacht* on behalf of the collective leadership of the IRA. It has been argued that one of the hallmarks of a successful ‘official apology’ should be its public, ceremonial character, so that the sentiments expressed are widely available and a matter of public record. However, the IRA’s statement was released to a republican publication and was only disseminated more widely and indirectly by the mainstream print and broadcast media. [[73]](#footnote-73) The bombings on July 21 1972 killed nine people (including two British Army soldiers and four Ulsterbus workers at Oxford St. bus depot, as well as two Catholic women and a Protestant schoolboy at Cavehill Road), and injured approximately 130.[[74]](#footnote-74) The statement began by observing that, ‘while it was not our intention to injure or kill noncombatants, the reality is that on this and on a number of other occasions, that was the consequence of our actions.’[[75]](#footnote-75) The IRA offered ‘sincere apologies and condolences’ to the families of all those ‘noncombatants’ killed, and went on to recognise the ‘grief and pain’ of relatives of ‘combatants’ killed. However, despite the claim that the future would not be found in creating a ‘hierarchy of victims in which some are deemed more or less worthy than others’, the statement had already reflected the republican movement’s own version of such a hierarchy by offering apologies to families of the ‘noncombatants’ it had killed, but only a recognition of the suffering caused to relatives by what it characterised as legitimate violence directed against ‘combatants’.[[76]](#footnote-76)

As always, the specific context for the timing of this statement and the strategic objectives of the IRA and SF at this juncture, need to be analysed. Cunningham made the point that SF was under pressure to distance itself from the ‘terrorism’ of the republican movement’s past for several reasons: in the wake of 9/11 in the United States, any association with ‘terror’ was widely rejected; closer to home, SF’s participation in the Northern Ireland power-sharing Executive was under threat due to concerns over continued IRA activity (whether training left-wing guerrillas in Colombia or alleged intelligence gathering at Stormont), despite the renewal of a formal ceasefire in 1997.[[77]](#footnote-77) However, amidst this short-term calculation, Cunningham also posited a longer-term rationale for the IRA’s apology: the gradual distancing of the movement from a complete identification with IRA ‘armed struggle’ could be interpreted as preparing the Provisionals’ core supporters for eventual decommissioning of the IRA’s arsenal and the formal decision to draw the campaign of violence to a close (which eventually did transpire in 2005). Thus, there were both external *and* internal audiences to consider when deciding upon the precise timing and content of the IRA’s 2002 statement. In terms of the latter, one of the difficulties with political apologies delivered on behalf of the Provisional movement is that the members (or ex-members) of the IRA and SF may not be of one opinion as to either the necessity or motivation behind issuing any specific or more general apology.[[78]](#footnote-78) Although it is unlikely that the IRA apologies were undertaken without some effort to ‘take stock’ of the views and probable reactions of members and supporters, the internal decision-making processes within the Provisional movement are opaque, characterised as it was (and perhaps still is) by a conspiratorial culture and military discipline. It is by no means clear that there was a consensus in favour of apologising within the republican family. Whilst there may be broad acceptance of the apologies for civilian casualties at Enniskillen, ‘Bloody Friday’ and other ‘mistakes’, there would be significant resistance and disquiet amongst republicans if there were any suggestion of apologising for the IRA campaign *tout court*.

As Cunningham has argued, we should not be surprised, in the context of political apologies, if instead of one unambiguous ‘real’ or ‘actual’ apology, there is a ‘series of statements, speeches, sometimes by different actors or institutions, which comprise a diversity of partial, semi- or qualified apologies.’[[79]](#footnote-79) From this perspective, the ‘qualified nature of the [2002] apology [...] was determined, or at least influenced, by the need not to alienate grass-roots supporters and those who had made sacrifices for the cause.’[[80]](#footnote-80) It was clear to some republicans who were out of sympathy with the Provisional movement’s trajectory what was at stake in the politics of the 2002 apology. Anthony McIntyre, an IRA volunteer who served eighteen years in jail, argued that ‘the victors in this conflict [the British state] are demanding of the vanquished that we acknowledge their narrative and legitimise their stance while simultaneously hollowing out our own perspective and denuding it of any legitimacy.’[[81]](#footnote-81) He continued that there should be no problem with a ‘humane, forward looking, contemplative republicanism that is genuinely sorry for the past, offering a human expression of regret for having been hauled down the path that it did.’ McIntyre concluded by observing that, ‘if republicanism alone apologises, republicanism alone will be blamed. [...] A human apology? By all means. But to make the type of political apology some are looking for is on a par with a slave kneeling down to kiss its chains.’[[82]](#footnote-82)

This line of argument has not been confined to dissenting voices within republicanism. Volunteers who have supported the movement’s leadership and its strategy, and who welcomed the IRA’s ceasefire and declaration that the campaign was definitively over, nevertheless refused to countenance a broader ‘political apology’. Danny Morrison, erstwhile SF Publicity director, put it in the following terms: ‘It would appear to be slightly hypocritical to apologise for the killing of people who we deliberately set out to kill, because it begs the question then, “Why did you do it, what was it all about?”’[[83]](#footnote-83)

As with Enniskillen, some of the leading individuals in the Provisional movement had already addressed ‘Bloody Friday’ before the 2002 statement from ‘P. O’Neill’. The IRA Chief of Staff at the time, Seán MacStiofáin, pointed out in his memoir that ‘of the nine fatal casualties reported, two were British military, one was an RUC reservist and a fourth was a member of a militant Protestant organisation.’ However, ‘the remaining five dead were civilians, and our attitude was that it was five too many. This loss of life compromised the intended effect of the whole effort’, which had been to demonstrate that the IRA, after a short-lived truce the previous month, was capable of carrying out a ‘co-ordinated sabotage blow.’ MacStiofáin was, however, unequivocal in placing the responsibility for the deaths on the British, ‘who had failed to pass on the warnings’ issued by the IRA for thirty-five attacks across Northern Ireland that day: ‘the Republicans were convinced that the British had deliberately disregarded these two warnings [at Oxford St. and Cavehill Rd.] for strategic policy reasons.’[[84]](#footnote-84)

The 2002 statement illustrated a key issue with respect to the identity and credentials of the apologiser, and specifically the relationship between personal and collective responsibility. On this significant question, the waters are muddied by the fact that ‘P.O’Neill’ was a non-existent persona adopted by the collective entity of the IRA’s leadership. The role and position of Gerry Adams is revealing and controversial in this discussion, and especially in this specific case. In his first volume of memoirs, Adams had defended the accuracy and adequacy of the IRA’s telephone warnings on ‘Bloody Friday’: ‘at Oxford Street bus station and Cavehill Road, the RUC and the British army were either unable or deliberately failed to act on the warnings.’[[85]](#footnote-85) Adams rejected vehemently the ‘specious comparison’ between ‘Bloody Friday’ and ‘Bloody Sunday’: ‘in Derry the Paras had deliberately, knowingly and intentionally shot down fourteen unarmed civilians. In Belfast the IRA had set out to cause economic damage and had sought to avoid civilian casualties [...]. It is a moot point whether the IRA operations just stretched the British too far for them to be able to cope with the situation, or whether they deliberately failed to act [...]’. Ultimately, however, the IRA ‘made a mistake in putting out so many bombs, and civilians were killed who certainly should not have been killed. This was the IRA’s responsibility and a matter of deep regret.’[[86]](#footnote-86)

Of course, Adams continued to maintain in 1996 that he was not, and had never been a member of the IRA. He has simultaneously distanced himself from the IRA (claiming implausibly never to have joined the organisation) and identified with it (claiming the ‘armed struggle’ was necessary and legitimate). As Ireton has pointed out, Adams had a ‘strange capacity to speak for both Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA, while maintaining he had never been an IRA member.’[[87]](#footnote-87) Clearly, therefore, his statement was not intended as a *personal* admission of responsibility. It was not obvious what Adams’ credentials were for assuming the authority to make such a statement, when the IRA itself did not produce its definitive version of an apology until six years later. Many critics of the SF leader’s stance, as well as a number of erstwhile comrades, have regularly scoffed at Adams’ insistence that he was never a member (let alone an Army Council leader) of the Provisionals’ armed wing. For instance, Brendan Hughes, a veteran IRA man and close friend of Adams throughout the conflict, up until a parting of ways in the post-ceasefire period, was disparaging about his ex-comrade’s refusal to admit his real role: ‘Gerry was always the O/C [Officer commanding the Belfast Brigade of the IRA]. Even if he was not the O/C in name, Gerry was the man who made the decisions. [...] I’m disgusted by it [Adams’ denial] because it’s so untrue and everybody knows it.’[[88]](#footnote-88)

Thus, it may be the case that Adams *was* personally responsible, at least as part of the collective Brigade staff, for the decision to bomb Belfast in July 1972, but the sincerity of his ‘statement of regret’ is undermined by his continuing refusal to acknowledge his role and the opacity of his credentials.[[89]](#footnote-89) It has been speculated that the 2002 statement by the IRA may have helped to ‘divert attention’ from Gerry Adams’ personal responsibility for the 1972 bombings.[[90]](#footnote-90) As Minow has argued, apologies are problematic if they are issued by ‘persons who have no ability to actually accept or assume responsibility’ for the actions being apologised for.[[91]](#footnote-91) It is not clear that there needs to be a personal emotional dimension to a political apology, but to be accepted by the addressee(s) as authentic or sincere, the individual delivering the apology does need to have an unambiguous relationship to the organisation on whose behalf she is speaking.

Cunningham has argued that the IRA’s 2002 statement did meet the criteria to be considered as ‘valid’ or meaningful.[[92]](#footnote-92) Specifically, the acts for which the apology was made were recognised as wrong or unjust, there were identifiable victims, and these acts were carried out by the organisation doing the apologising. In addition, by its disposition, this organisation was indicating that it would refrain from similar acts in the future, thereby demonstrating the sincerity of the apology. Cunningham further argued that, since the IRA as an organisation provides a generational link between members, ‘the third criterion, that of responsibility, is also unproblematic.’[[93]](#footnote-93) As the previous discussion has shown, however, this question of responsibility is by no means settled in such clear-cut terms. Not only did the Provisional movement refuse to accept that its broader campaign of violence was illegitimate, or the primary cause of the deaths and injuries sustained in the Troubles, it continued to distinguish between different kinds of victim of the ‘Bloody Friday’ bombings, and other actions. It also sought to muddy the waters of responsibility for ‘Bloody Friday’ and Enniskillen by (initially at least) implicating the British security forces in both cases. The IRA was only able or willing to express regret for the human costs of the bombings, and not to recognise through a *political* apology that it had committed wrongs or injustices against ‘combatants’ or ‘legitimate targets’.[[94]](#footnote-94) There has not been a reappraisal of the foundational Irish republican belief that its violence was historically necessary, inevitable and legitimate. For example, in 2005, the IRA issued a statement which declared that its armed campaign was formally over. It stated baldly that its violence had been ‘entirely legitimate’.[[95]](#footnote-95) Whilst it could be argued that the Provisional movement has undertaken significant dispositional acts which underline its enduring commitment to the ‘peace process’ (such as decommissioning of IRA weaponry and co-operation with the international body responsible for locating the remains of the ‘Disappeared’), nonetheless its interpretation of this process provides little comfort to many Protestant/unionist victims and survivors of IRA violence.

**Conclusion**

Lundy and Rolston argue that, in the case of Northern Ireland, a pattern of official or state apologies has emerged, in which they ‘become a substitute for accountability, fulfilling the overarching need to avoid accountability and to placate victims.’[[96]](#footnote-96) Whilst there are important differences in the nature and motivation for some state apologies, compared to those made by non-state actors, this article argues that ‘quasi-apologies’ or ‘non-apologies’ by such groups may also intensify, rather than ameliorate, the sense of grievance experienced by victims/survivors, and may also serve to revivify social and political ‘framing battles’ over the past.[[97]](#footnote-97) The Provisional movement’s master narrative of the essential character of the conflict, and by extension its own justification for its recourse to violence, remains intact and sacrosanct. This is largely the case for both the contemporary leadership of SF and for many of the so-called ‘dissidents’. The current President of SF, Mary Lou McDonald, who is widely believed not to have an IRA background, was elected to the role when Gerry Adams stood down after 35 years in the post. However, she has maintained the insistence of her predecessor that IRA violence in the period 1970-1997 was inevitable, legitimate and just, even if the effects of such violence were on occasion ‘wrong’ or ‘regrettable’. The highly circumscribed apologies issued by the IRA since the 1990s have not always, or even often, helped to ‘enact the social dimensions of repair’; at best, they have received a mixed reception from many of the victims and survivors of IRA attacks.[[98]](#footnote-98)

However, it is certainly not obvious that the primary audience for Provisional apologies has been conceived as the Protestant or unionist civilian population, which was often victimised by the actions of the IRA, and to whom it could be considered that apologies are owed. It has still less been the case that IRA apologies have changed the movement’s historical judgment regarding those RUC or UDR personnel killed. In Govier and Vorwoerd’s terms, the Provisional movement has not, despite its apologetic rhetoric, ‘unsaid’ the ‘message of moral worthlessness’ that characterised its depiction of these individuals as ‘legitimate targets’.[[99]](#footnote-99) Rather, it might be argued that the Provisionals have used the discourse of apology to bolster the legitimacy of the movement’s historical narrative for an internal audience, promoting the supposed moral rectitude of the IRA’s campaign as a whole, through apologising for a small number of aberrant ‘mistakes’. Moreover, they have utilised this discourse to consolidate SF’s position of dominance amongst the Catholic nationalist population of Northern Ireland, and in an attempt to enhance the legitimacy of SF in the Republic of Ireland. Coicaud and Jönsson’s argument is relevant here; they recognised that the ‘recourse to apology gives “lettres de noblesse” (patents of nobility) to power and helps to establish or re-establish its legitimacy.’[[100]](#footnote-100)

In the post-1998 era, republicans and unionists have, in many cases, been talking (and, less often, listening) at cross-purposes, or past each other. To paraphrase Edna Longley, who spoke of the dangers of ‘remembering *at*’ the ‘other side’ in the context of the early years of the ‘peace process’, the Provisional movement has been apologising *at* the Protestant unionist community of victims/survivors.[[101]](#footnote-101) Of course, one might say the same of Loyalist or indeed British state discourses of apology to Catholic, Irish nationalist victims.[[102]](#footnote-102) Thompson argues that to be effective, ‘an apology must be, *above all*, a demonstration of respect for the existence, point of view and interests of the other party.’[[103]](#footnote-103) Supporters of SF’s reconciliation strategy may sincerely believe that the republican movement has engaged in apologies because it transgressed its own moral codes of behaviour on occasion, and that it genuinely wishes to reaffirm its allegiance to these norms. As Dudai has argued, the normative framework utilised by the Irish republican movement has been its own ‘code of conduct’, rather than internationally-accepted norms.[[104]](#footnote-104) By apologising for ‘excesses’ or ‘errors’, the movement has implicitly sought to reinforce the overall legitimacy and propriety of its campaign and ‘targeting’ policy. However, the resentment and demoralisation felt by many victims/survivors of IRA attacks, have not been adequately understood or addressed by the republican movement. As Denis Bradley, the co-Chair of the CGP report observed: ‘in all our consultations it is unclear if Republicans truly appreciate the depth of hurt that exists in the unionist community.’[[105]](#footnote-105) It may be agreed that political apologies should not be understood as discrete acts which are completed upon their enunciation, and that they should be conceived as steps towards reconciliation, as opposed to the achievement of reconciliation.[[106]](#footnote-106) However, in the context of the legacies of conflict in Northern Ireland, the discourse of apologies has largely fed into a sullen stand-off between those with fundamentally unreconciled understandings. As MacLachlan concludes, ‘Non-apologies or quasi-apologies teach us about the potential moral and political work of apologies, by showing us – sometimes viscerally – where and how they are unsatisfying.’[[107]](#footnote-107) As has been argued recently, whilst apology may be ‘vital for dealing with a violent past’, when it is not undertaken in a ‘transformative’ fashion it may reproduce ‘discourses, narratives, ideas and ideologies that justified the wrongdoing in the first place.’[[108]](#footnote-108) A failure to uproot ‘the logics behind violence engenders reconciliation that is not sustainable.’[[109]](#footnote-109) The ambivalent ‘post-conflict’ status of both Northern Ireland as a whole, and of the republican movement in particular, has led to a concomitant uncertainty regarding the status of the apologies offered by the movement.

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   Cited in Brian Rowan, *Unfinished Peace: Thoughts on Northern Ireland’s Unanswered Past* (Newtownards: Colourpoint, 2015), 163-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For analysis of the broader question of the potential for political and social reconciliation after ‘terrorism’, see Judith Renner and Alexander Spencer (eds.), *Reconciliation after Terrorism: Strategy, possibility or absurdity?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012); Colleen Murphy, *A Moral Theory of Political Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Kevin Bean, *The New Politics of Sinn Féin* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007): 230-237. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Newsletter,* 30 July 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Stephen Hopkins, ‘Sinn Féin, the Past and Political Strategy: The Provisional Irish Republican Movement and the Politics of “Reconciliation”’, *Irish Political Studies* 30 (1) (2015), 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Michael Cunningham, *States of Apology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See *inter alia* Cheryl Lawther, *Truth, Denial and Transition: Northern Ireland and the Contested Past* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Lauren Dempster, *Transitional Justice and the ‘Disappeared’ of Northern Ireland: Silence, Memory and the Construction of the Past* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); for a critique, see Cillian McGrattan, *The Politics of Trauma and Peace-Building* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

   See Michael Newman, Transitional Justice: Contending with the Past (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Commission for Victims and Survivors Northern Ireland was established in 2008; its website is available at cvsni.org. The Consultative Group on the Past reported in 2009: <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative_group/cgp_230109_report.pdf>. The Haass/O’Sullivan proposal: <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/newnigov/haass-report-2013.pdf>. The Stormont House Agreement of 2014: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stormont-house-agreement> (all accessed 15 September 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A UK government-appointed commission to address contentious issues such as parades, the display of flags, and the vexed question of the legacies of conflict was set up in 2016, but it has yet to report. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Alice MacLachlan, ‘The State of “Sorry”: Official Apologies and their Absence’, *Journal of Human Rights* 9(3) (2010), 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See inter alia Melissa Nobles, *The Politics of Official Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Mihaela Mihai, ‘When the State says “Sorry”: State Apologies as Exemplary Political Judgements’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 21(2) (2013), 200-220; Mihaela Mihai, and Matthias Thaler, (eds.), *On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Ernesto Verdeja, ‘Official Apologies in the Aftermath of Political Violence’, *Metaphilosophy* 41(4) (2010), 563-581. Alice MacLachlan, ‘“Trust Me, I’m Sorry”: The Paradox of Public Apologies’, *The Monist* 98 (2015), 441-456; Mark Gibney, and Erik Roxstrom, ‘The Status of State Apologies’, *Human Rights Quarterly* 23(4) (2001), 911-939. Michael Marrus, ‘Official Apologies and the Quest for Historical Justice’, *Journal of Human Rights* 6(1) (2007), 75-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Mark Gibney, Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Niklaus Steiner, (eds.) *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Danielle Celermajer, *The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For non-state armed groups see Kathleen Ireton, *Former Rebel Groups and the Politics of Apology* (PhD Thesis, Queen’s University, Belfast); Kathleen Ireton and Iosif Kovras, ‘Non-apologies and prolonged silences in post-conflict settings: The case of post-colonial Cyprus’, *Time and Society*, 21(1) (2012), 71-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For the statistics relating to deaths caused by different political groups, see David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney and Chris Thornton, *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1999), 1482-4. These figures show that republican groups were responsible for 58.8% of all deaths attributable to the conflict, and the Provisional IRA accounted for 48.7%. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The African National Congress (ANC) issued an apology for acts of ‘staggering brutality’ it had carried out in detention camps in several southern African countries; see Ruben Carranza, Cristián Correa and Elena Naughton, *More than Words: Apologies as a Form of Reparation* (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, 2015), 17. See also Ron Dudai, ‘Closing the gap: symbolic reparations and armed groups’, *International Review of the Red Cross* 93 (883), (2011), 796-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Verdeja, supra n 12, 574-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 102; Renee Jeffery, ‘When is an apology not an apology? Contrition chic and Japan’s (un)apologetic politics’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 65(5) (2011), 607-617; Matt James, ‘Wrestling with the Past: Apologies, Quasi-Apologies and Non-Apologies in Canada’, in Mark Gibney, et al. (eds.), *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 138; Tom Bentley, *Empires of Remorse: Narrative, postcolonialism and apologies for colonial atrocity* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 41-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Janna Thompson, ‘Apology, Justice and Respect: A critical defence of political apology’, in: Mark Gibney, et al. (eds.) *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cunningham, supra n 6. See also Michael Cunningham, ‘Apologies in Irish Politics: A Commentary and Critique’, *Contemporary British History* 18(4) (2004), 80-92. On inter-personal apologies see Aaron Lazare, *On Apology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Celermajer, supra n 14, 14-15; James, supra n 19, 138;; Nick Smith, *I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Marrus, supra n 12, 79; Bentley, supra n 19, 24-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Paul Muldoon, ‘After Apology: The Remains of the Past’, *Australian Humanities Review*, 61 (2017), 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid., 135. See Celermajer, supra n 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Muldoon, supra n 23, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Trudy Govier and Wilhelm Verwoerd, ‘The Promises and Pitfalls of Apology’, *Journal of Social Philosophy* 33 (1), (2002), 69-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Muldoon, supra n 23, 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See Dudai, supra n 17, 802. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Marrus, supra n 12, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Zohar Kampf, ‘Public (non-) apologies: The discourse of minimizing responsibility’, *Journal of Pragmatics* 41 (2009), 2257-2270. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Marrus, supra n 12, 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Cunningham supra n 6, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. MacLachlan supra n 11, 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Jeffery, supra n 19;; Ireton and Kovras supra n 15; Kampf supra n 31; James supra n 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Consultative Group on the Past supra n 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Schaap supra n 2, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Rowan supra n 1, 124-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Haass/O’Sullivan report supra n 9, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid., emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. The argument followed here is that the IRA and SF have been (and probably still are) inextricably linked, but that this relationship was not one of equal partners. During the conflict, SF was a ‘creature’ of the IRA, with only a limited capacity for autonomous action. See Richard English, *Armed Struggle: A History of the IRA* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 115; Danny Morrison, *Then The Walls Came Down: A Prison Journal* (Dublin: Mercier, 1999), 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ireton, supra n 15, provides a list of public statements of apology made by the IRA, mainly during the decade after the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998. Although each specific case was different, the IRA often used these ‘post-conflict’ statements to repudiate positions they had previously adopted. IRA statements available at CAIN website: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk>. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. McKittrick et al., supra n 16, 966-971. See also Gordon Gillespie, *Years of Darkness: The Troubles Remembered* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008), 161-164. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. David Sharrock and Mark Devenport, *Man of War, Man of Peace? The Unauthorised Biography of* *Gerry Adams* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Henry McDonald, *Gunsmoke and Mirrors: How Sinn Féin dressed up defeat as victory* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2008), 87-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Under IRA ‘General Army orders’ Number 8, volunteers were ‘strictly forbidden to take any military action against 26 County forces under any circumstances whatsoever.’ (cited in Martin Dillon, *The Dirty War* [London: Arrow, 1991]), 488. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. The Harrods bomb killed 3 police officers, and 3 civilians. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. McKittrick et al., supra n 16, 967. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Sharrock and Devenport, supra n 44, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. McKittrick et al., supra n 16, 970; see also Kevin Toolis, *Rebel Hearts: Journeys within the IRA’s soul* (London: Picador, 1995), 279-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. IRA statement cited in Gillespie, supra n 43, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. McKittrick et al., supra n 16, 962. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Jeffery, supra n 19, 614. See also Jennifer Lind, ‘Apologies in International Politics’, *Security Studies* 18(3), (2009), 517-556. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Malachi O’Doherty, *Gerry Adams: An Unauthorised Life* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Gillespie, supra n 43, 182-86. See also Denzil McDaniel, *Enniskillen: The Remembrance Sunday Bombing* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997) and Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the Past? Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 288-305. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. One of those injured, local headmaster Ronald Hill, remained in a coma after the bombing until his death in December 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. McKittrick et al., supra n 16, 1095; see also Sharrock and Devenport, supra n 44, 256; Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA* (London: Penguin, 2002), 341 and Eamon Mallie and David McKittrick, *The Fight for Peace: The Secret Story behind the Irish Peace Process* (London: Heinemann, 1996), 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Gerry Adams, *Hope and History: Making Peace in Ireland* (Dingle: Brandon, 2003), 55 emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Lauren Dempster, ‘The Republican Movement, “Disappearing” and Framing the Past in Northern Ireland’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 10 (1), (2016), 256. See also Colm Campbell and Ita Connolly, ‘The Sharp End: Armed Opposition Movements, Transitional Truth Processes and the *Rechtsstaat*’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 6 (1), (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Adams, supra n 58, 54-55. Gillespie, supra n 43, 179-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Adams, supra n 58, 55-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. MacLachlan, supra n 11, 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Bentley, supra n 19, 30. For discussion regarding the character and identity of Irish republicanism, see Kevin Hearty, ‘Moral Emotions and the Politics of Blame and Credit during Transitional Justice Moments’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13, (2019), 134-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Mallie and McKittrick, supra n 57, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See Newman, supra n 8, 58; Marrus, supra n 12, 93-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. McDaniel, supra n 55, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid., supra n 55, 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Kampf, supra n 31, 2264. See Cillian McGrattan, ‘“The Possibilities are Endless”: Republican Strategy to Deal with the Past and Transitional Justice in Northern Ireland’, in Jeffrey Dudgeon (ed.), *Legacy: What to Do about the Past in Northern Ireland?* (Belfast: Belfast Press, 2018), 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. James, supra n 19, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. In the *Irish News* (23 November 2017), Ken Funston of the victims’ group, the South East Fermanagh Foundation, criticised McKearney for attempting to make the bombers and the IRA the victims of Enniskillen, with ‘no thought [...] given to the real victims.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Susan McKay, *Bear in Mind These Dead* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), 231-32; 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. This stands in contrast to the ceasefire statement of the Combined Loyalist Military Command (encompassing the main loyalist groups, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association), which included a statement of ‘abject and true remorse’ for civilians killed and injured by these organisations (although there were similar misgivings about making a broader ‘political apology’). The CLMC statement was delivered in a public press conference. See Graham Spencer, ‘Loyalist perspectives on apology, regret and change’, James McAuley and Graham Spencer (eds.), *Ulster Loyalism after the Good Friday Agreement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 244-260. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Gillespie, supra n 43, 64-67; McKittrick et al., supra n 16, 229-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Cited in Neil Ferguson et al., ‘The IRA Apology of 2002 and Forgiveness in Northern Ireland’s Troubles: A Cross-National Study of Printed Media’, *Peace and Conflict* 13(1), (2007), 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Dempster, supra n 59, 266; Campbell and Connolly, supra n 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Cunningham, supra n 21, 84-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Thompson, supra n 20, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cunningham, supra n 6, 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Cunningham, supra n 21, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Anthony McIntyre, ‘Eulogy in Bellaghy’, *The Pensive Quill* (30 March). Available at <http://thepensivequill.am/2013/03/eulogy-in-bellaghy.html> (accessed 30 April 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Cited in Ireton, supra n 15, 75. See Danny Morrison, ‘IRA Apologises’ (2002). Available at <http://www.dannymorrison.com/wp-content/dannymorrisonarchive/285.htm> (accessed 30 April 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Seán MacStiofáin, *Revolutionary in Ireland* (Edinburgh: Gordon Cremonesi, 1975) , 296-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Gerry Adams, *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography* (London: Heinemann, 1996), 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ibid., 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ireton, supra n 15, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Cited in Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men’s War in Ireland* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 106-07. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Moloney, supra n 57, 117. He stated that ‘Adams did not initiate Bloody Friday, but he was involved in its organization.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. David Sharrock, ‘Why apology is a diversion tactic for Gerry Adams’, *Daily Telegraph* (17 July 2002). Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/uknews/1401612/Why-apology-is-diversion-tactic-for-Gerry-Adams.htm> (accessed 30 April 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1998), 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Cunningham, supra n 21, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Cunningham, supra n 21, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Campbell and Connolly, supra n 59, 32; Dempster, supra n 59, 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) (2005), ‘Text of Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement on the Ending of the Armed Campaign’ (28 July 2005). Available at <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira280705.htm> (accessed on 30 April 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Patricia Lundy and Bill Rolston, ‘Redress for past harms? Official apologies in Northern Ireland’, *The International Journal of Human Rights* 20 (1), (2015), 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Dempster, supra n 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Minow, supra n 91, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Govier and Vorwoerd, supra n 26, 69-70; Dempster, supra 59, 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Jean-Marc Coicaud and Jon Jönsson, ‘Elements of a Road Map for a Politics of Apology’, Gibney, M., et al. (eds.) *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Edna Longley, ‘Northern Ireland: Commemoration, Elegy and Forgetting’, Ian McBride (ed.) *History and Memory in Modern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. For a critique of UK PM David Cameron’s apology in the wake of the Saville Report into ‘Bloody Sunday’, see Bentley, supra n 19, 124-44.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Thompson, supra n 20, 42 (Emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Dudai, supra n 17, 806. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Denis Bradley, ‘Speech at the Innovation centre’, Titanic quarter, Belfast (29 May 2008). Available at the CAIN website: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/> (accessed on 30 April 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Verdeja, supra n 12, 573; Muldoon, supra n 23, 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. MacLachlan, supra n 11, 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Joram Tarusarira, ‘The Anatomy of Apology and Forgiveness: Towards Transformative Apology and Forgiveness’, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 13 (2019), 206-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Ibid., 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)