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Abstract

This paper analyses the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) discourses about paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland. Drawing on narrative analysis of DUP discourses reported in Northern Ireland's largest unionist newspaper, the News Letter (1998–2006), it explores the relationship between the party's identity, its discourses about republican and loyalist paramilitaries, and the impact of these words on the DUP's electoral success and on the peace process. The paper argues that these discourses may haunt the progress of peace-building, not least because the DUP will find it hard to disentangle itself from a history of scepticism and nay-saying even as it takes a leading role in a devolved Executive designed by an Agreement it long-scorned.

Keywords: *Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP), News Letter (1998–2006), Northern Ireland, peacebuilding, peace process*

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DUP DISCOURSES ON VIOLENCE AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

Amber Rankin and Gladys Ganiel

Abstract

This paper analyses the Democratic Unionist Party's (DUP) discourses about paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland. Drawing on narrative analysis of DUP discourses reported in Northern Ireland's largest unionist newspaper, the News Letter (1998–2006), it explores the relationship between the party's identity, its discourses about republican and loyalist paramilitaries, and the impact of these words on the DUP's electoral success and on the peace process. The paper argues that these discourses may haunt the progress of peace-building, not least because the DUP will find it hard to disentangle itself from a history of scepticism and nay-saying even as it takes a leading role in a devolved Executive designed by an Agreement it long-scorned.

Introduction

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and its founder, the Rev. Ian Paisley, have been controversial throughout Northern Ireland's Troubles and its current post-conflict transition.¹ In 1971 Paisley, then a young firebrand evangelical preacher, founded the party with substantial support from members of the Free Presbyterian Church, which he also had founded. Paisley, his party, and his church were often regarded as prophets of war, not of peace. In particular, the DUP had an ambiguous relationship with violence. Around the time of the DUP's founding, Paisley and other members of the party were accused of shadowy dealings with loyalist paramilitaries. Although Paisley and the party publicly disassociated themselves from loyalist paramilitaries, suspicions about their true involvement remained. Further, Paisley's fiery rhetoric was regarded as inciting paramilitaries to violence. The story of an imprisoned loyalist paramilitary bemoaning the day that he ever listened to "that man Paisley" has become apocryphal.

Paisley was once regarded as the politician who would always say "no" to compromise with Irish republicanism, particularly in the guise of Sinn

Féin. That has made the DUP's decision to share power with Sinn Féin in the Northern Ireland Executive all the more stunning. Images of First Minister Paisley laughing and joking with Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin (who has admitted that he belonged to the Irish Republican Army (IRA)) are amongst the most surprising and iconic of the recent transitional period.

Throughout the Troubles the DUP was the "second" party of unionism, trailing the long-established Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) at the ballot box and in terms of respectability. It was the UUP that claimed to speak for "mainstream" unionism, whilst the DUP was said to appeal to the fringes. The DUP's constituencies were the unlikely bedfellows of rural-dwelling evangelical Protestants and urban, working class loyalists – including, it was assumed, those who were involved in paramilitarism. It was the UUP that negotiated the 1998 Belfast Agreement, while the DUP walked out of the talks. The then leader of the UUP, David Trimble, was honoured with a Nobel Prize for his work at the negotiations, but at home in Northern Ireland Trimble and the UUP struggled to implement the Agreement. This was due in large part to the DUP, which effectively tapped in to unionist disaffection with the terms of the Agreement and the UUP's inability to convince Sinn Féin to deliver on IRA decommissioning. During most of this time the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended and the region was ruled directly from Westminster. DUP discourses about violence were prominent throughout this transitional period, when it overtook the UUP as the leading unionist party in terms of electoral success *and* respectability. Indeed, the DUP now confidently describes itself as the mainstream unionist party and its current leader, Peter Robinson, has made overtures to the UUP about forming some sort of united unionist party or movement.

This means that the way the DUP has talked and continues to talk about violence is significant. The party's discourses about violence can be placed into two broad categories: denouncing and denying. On the one hand, the DUP denounce republican paramilitaries for initiating and perpetuating the armed struggle, which the DUP regards as illegitimate. This includes a consistent linking of Sinn Féin with the IRA. Prior to the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2007, it included the claim that unionists should not share power with Sinn Féin until the IRA had decommissioned. Without IRA decommissioning, Sinn Féin would remain "unreconstructed terrorists." On the other hand, the DUP denounced loyalist paramilitaries for taking up arms, whilst at the same time denying that their party or their party's rhetoric had any impact upon loyalist paramilitaries. Loyalist paramilitaries often were reduced to criminals or thugs.

What meaning do these discourses have in what is once again being hailed as a “new Northern Ireland,” where Paisley shared tea and a power-sharing executive with McGuinness? This paper argues that there are direct relationships between the DUP discourses about violence and the party’s identity, its electoral success, and the outworking of the peace process. Drawing on narrative analysis of DUP discourses recorded in Northern Ireland’s largest unionist newspaper, the *News Letter* (1998-2006), it explores those relationships. The first part of this paper outlines how we gathered, categorised and analysed DUP discourses about violence, including the relationship of those discourses to the party’s identity and its electoral success. Here, we argue that the DUP’s use of discourses denouncing republican violence has allowed it to retain its identity as the “true” loyalist party, and the most able defender of the union with Great Britain. This was important in a context in which it appeared that the UUP was impotent to lead unionists and protect their interests. When the DUP gradually began to moderate some of its policies on power-sharing, those discourses worked as a “smokescreen” or a cover as it took previously undreamed of positions. The DUP could be said to have adopted the UUP’s positions and its policies, but it was able to present itself as uncompromising on its core principles.

In the second part of the paper, we consider how these discourses may continue to impact on Northern Ireland’s political transition. It is not clear how the DUP’s historic condemnation of Sinn Féin and the illegitimacy of the IRA’s armed struggle will affect their relationships in the power-sharing executive – and thus their ability to govern Northern Ireland effectively. Paisley and McGuinness developed what appeared to be a warm and effective working relationship, surprising almost everyone. It is not clear what sort of relationship McGuinness will have with Paisley’s successor as First Minister, Robinson. It will take time for trust to develop between the parties. It also is not clear if the DUP has developed effective, new discourses to explain its participation in the Executive to its erstwhile followers. With the DUP sniping at its heels, the UUP failed in this regard. The DUP now has a hardline (if smaller) rival, Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV), sniping at its heels. Also, it is possible that discourses that disassociate the DUP from loyalist paramilitarism may absolve their party – and the wider unionist community – from recognising and addressing their own ambiguous attitudes about violence. In such a situation, the challenges of integrating former loyalist paramilitaries in society may not be adequately addressed. The DUP’s discourses about violence may continue to haunt the party as it attempts to participate in a transition to peace.

Analysing DUP Discourses

This analysis is part of a wider project on the DUP, which includes considering its public discourses and the presentation of the party in the public sphere. There are a number of sources that could be used for this analysis, including party statements, press releases, policy documents, the party's email and text messaging services, and so on. However, we were interested in not merely how the DUP wishes to present itself (which would presumably be reflected in its own materials), but in how the party is presented in the media. An analysis of all media outlets would have been beyond the scope of this project, so we chose to focus on the presentation of the party in Northern Ireland's largest unionist newspaper, the *News Letter*. This can be justified on the following grounds. First, newspaper reports generally reproduce longer and more substantial quotations from politicians and more in-depth analysis than would be expected on television news programmes. We wished to analyse substantial discourses, not sound bites. Second, the *News Letter* is widely recognized as the region's leading unionist newspaper and would be likely to contain substantial information about the DUP. The *News Letter* is used by unionist politicians as a platform for their electoral bids and spreading their political positions. Indeed, DUP members frequently write letters to the editor and op-ed pieces. It also is interesting that the editorial tone of the *News Letter* changed between 1998 and 2006, synchronising its sympathies with whichever unionist party was in power. Finally, the letters to the editor allowed us insight into what the unionist community was thinking and feeling towards the DUP and political events. Although letters to the editor may be unrepresentative or impressionistic (as would be the comments of callers on phone-in radio programmes, or political chat websites such as Slugger O'Toole) they provide interesting contextual information about some of the emotions and events that surrounded the articulation of the DUP's discourses.

The data from the *News Letter* was gathered using the Lexus Nexus search engine and the newspaper's website. The keyword used for the search engine was "DUP." Rankin carried out this aspect of the research, June-December 2006. These articles, with dates ranging from January 1998-December 2006, amounted to nearly 8,000. Ganiel read each article chronologically, identifying "codes" for themes which were relevant to the research questions about the wider project on the DUP. For the purpose of this paper, the codes which were relevant were "paramilitarism," and "security and policing."² Re-reading the codes that corresponded with these broad themes, we identified the dominant DUP discourses about violence.

These will come as no surprise to followers of Northern Ireland politics, as they are discourses that have been prominent in the public sphere. When it came to republican violence, the party denounced violence by focusing on the immorality of “terrorists” (Sinn Féin) in government and the lack of decommissioning. When it came to loyalist violence, the DUP cast paramilitaries in the role of deviants who do not represent the unionist community, or as criminals. It should be stated, however, that there was a notable *lack* of discourses about loyalist paramilitaries. Whilst the IRA were denounced nearly every day, discourses about loyalist paramilitaries were infrequent and usually prompted by specific events, such as feuding amongst rival loyalist groups.

It is worth recording some examples of these discourses, so that their strength and vigour can be adequately grasped. The emotive nature of these words provides some insight into why, historically, Paisley and the DUP have been accused of inciting others to violence. As Northern Ireland continues its political transition, it is important to record, highlight and consider its occasionally harsh public discourses. This raises broader questions (which are beyond the scope of this article) about the role that such discourses play in political transitions, especially as parties and citizens adjust to new power relationships and political configurations. It also raises questions about why political parties continue to use such discourses. For instance, did the DUP continue to talk in such terms as a matter of principle, or because it was a strategy to overtake the UUP, or both? Or were there other reasons? Because of the nature of the data analysed in this article, we can only raise such questions, not answer them definitively. As such, the bulk of the following sections of this article are largely descriptive, and should be seen as part of a preliminary process of “making sense” of discourses about violence in post-conflict transitions.

The Immorality of the Inclusion of Sinn Féin

The DUP’s criticisms of Sinn Féin and the IRA are not new. The party’s discourses about “terrorists in government” are in continuation with what the party said for decades during the Troubles. This is an example from an article from 1998, shortly after the Belfast Agreement was approved in a referendum. The DUP, despite having opposed the agreement, decided to participate in the Assembly:

[Paisley said]: “I’m thinking of those that were maimed by his [Gerry Adams] cohorts. The families that were torn apart, the people that were smashed and turned into vegetables by IRA violence.”

Sinn Féin’s Martin McGuinness stared straight at Mr. Paisley and accused him of running away. “You refused to come into negotiations but you come trundling into this room now because you are afraid you are going to be left behind. But I’m afraid you’ve already been left behind.”

Peter Robinson shouted back at Mr. McGuinness, making loud reference to “your Semtex and Armalites” (*News Letter*, 2 July 1998)

Here, Paisley’s comments about “vegetables” and Robinson’s about “Semtex and Armalites” clearly identify Sinn Féin with the IRA. The fact that Robinson is described as shouting adds to the emotion of the words. In the following narrative, from before the agreement negotiations were completed, Robinson focuses on the immorality of even talking with Sinn Féin because of their association with the IRA. He argues that it is corrupt and obscene to even allow them to negotiate:

The [DUP] said the public was appalled at the “political corruption” and have no confidence in unionists who are attending the talks. ... Deputy leader Peter Robinson said, “the responsibility for the corruption lies with the government and those parties that support the obscenity of trading with terrorists. ... The Official Unionist³ leadership complain that Sinn Féin/IRA are active and involved in terrorist incidents yet it was the Official Unionist leadership that agreed to let them in without handing over their weapons and it is they who sit around the negotiating table with Adams, McGuinness and company in a few weeks if the Provos⁴ decide to return.” (*News Letter*, 24 February 1998)

Discourses such as this allowed the DUP to present the inclusion of Sinn Féin in talks and later in the Assembly as undemocratic and morally wrong. Indeed, the religiously devout amongst Paisley’s followers might even interpret these discourses to mean that sharing government with Sinn Féin would be against God’s will. Such discourses played well in a Northern Ireland in which Protestants increasingly believed that Catholics had benefited from the agreement, whilst Protestants had not (Mitchell, 2006, p. 32-33). This raises questions about whether people speaking for the DUP truly believed that it was immoral to include Sinn Féin in government, or

whether they saw an electoral advantage in criticising the UUP for compromising with Sinn Féin, or both.

The Lack of Decommissioning

When the IRA failed to decommission within two years of the Belfast Agreement (as had been suggested, though not required, in the negotiations and agreement), the DUP accused the UUP of being soft on terrorism. The DUP framed its discourses about decommissioning as a matter of trust: Sinn Féin and the IRA could not be trusted because the IRA had not verifiably decommissioned and the UUP could not be trusted because they had not negotiated a deal that required decommissioning. The UUP was presented as giving concession after concession to the IRA, with the IRA using its hidden caches of guns as leverage in negotiations. Even when the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) confirmed that the IRA had completed acts of decommissioning on several occasions, the DUP questioned the trustworthiness of those statements.

For example, the IRA announced an act of decommissioning in October 2003 and this was verified by retired Canadian general John de Chastelain. However, when de Chastelain's press conference did not provide substantial or, in particular, photographic detail of what he actually witnessed, the DUP immediately cast doubt on what had happened and criticised the UUP and the IRA. The comments made by Paisley in reaction to this press conference epitomise this discourse:

“The IRA has made the UUP look ridiculous with this pathetic effort. ... What on earth was David Trimble talking to Gerry Adams about? This is a demonstration of the most inept form of negotiation by the UUP imaginable. They are utterly unfit to represent unionism. Today indicated that nothing has changed in the IRA. Once again they are willing to milk the process for all they can get and make only weasel words and a hidden gesture. There is no evidence whatsoever of any reduction in the IRA capacity. This is yet another con.” Mr. Paisley said the language used by Gerry Adams and the IRA failed to state that the war is over or the IRA would disband. (*News Letter*, 22 October 2003)

Further on in this same report, Paisley criticises the “language used by Gerry Adams and the IRA” (note again the direct connection made between Sinn Féin and terrorism) for failing to explicitly state that “the war is over”. This is a neat reflection of the fact that opposing parties have been acutely aware of each other's discourse throughout the conflict and peace process.

As mentioned above, the question of decommissioning became a crucial issue of debate and competition within unionism. The DUP's refusal to accept the IMC's word on IRA decommissioning was not just a source of objection to the power-sharing Executive and Sinn Féin's position in it; it was also a strong point of contention with (and a good means of attracting votes away from) the UUP. Paisley questioned the trustworthiness and the competence of the UUP in this speech to launch the 2003 Assembly election campaign. Once again he claimed that concessions had been delivered to the IRA, and played on unionist concerns about all-Ireland structures and the possibility that Sinn Féin's Gerry Kelly (a former IRA prisoner) could be Minister for Policing and Justice:

This election offers a simple choice. Four more years of Trimble-delivered concessions to Sinn Féin/IRA or the opportunity to negotiate a new and fair deal that unionists as well as nationalists can support. This election is an opportunity to deliver a verdict on what Trimble and the "Official Unionists" have done over the past five years. They signed up to a deal, which has delivered concessions to the IRA, not just on one day in 1998, but for every day since. The pain and betrayal felt by unionists at the Belfast Agreement has not passed with time but has intensified as the terrorists have made a mockery of the democratic system. The unionist community stands at a crossroads. One path leads to implementing the current Trimble/Adams deal, which will deliver permanent terrorist representation in government, galvanising the embryonic all-Ireland structures with Sinn Féin consent required for major political decisions and Gerry Kelly as minister for Policing and Justice. The other road is a new deal, a democratic deal. (*News Letter*, 23 October 2003)

The DUP's discourses about the IRA's lack of decommissioning changed over time. When the IRA began with acts of decommissioning, witnessed first by de Chastelain and later by the IMC, the DUP questioned the integrity of the witnesses and the lack of detail in their reports. During negotiations to restore the Assembly in December 2004, the DUP demanded photographic evidence of decommissioning, which was rejected by Sinn Féin as an attempt to humiliate the IRA. Any hopes that a deal could be salvaged were put on hold days later after the Northern Bank robbery in Belfast, which is believed to have been carried out by the IRA. The DUP also talked about Sinn Féin needing a "decontamination period" after decommissioning, to allow them to become "fit" for democratic government. When Methodist minister Harold Good and Catholic priest Fr Alec Reid were invited to

witness decommissioning, the DUP even doubted their testimonies, considering them naïve. However, by the time of the negotiations in October 2006 in St Andrews, the DUP seemed to equate Sinn Féin's willingness to sign up to the Policing Board as "proof" of the IRA's decommissioning. This is how Paisley explained his decision to go into government with Sinn Féin in May 2007:

"In politics as in life, it is a truism that no one can ever have 100% of what they desire. They must make a verdict when they believe they have achieved enough to move things forward." The DUP leader said Sinn Féin's acceptance of the rule of law at its *ard fheis* [annual convention] three months ago had met that test. "Support for all the institutions of policing has been a critical test that today has been met and pledged, word and deed. ... Recognising the significance of that change from a community that for decades demonstrated hostility for policing has been critical in turning the corner." (*News Letter*, 9 May 2007)

After years of denouncing claims of IRA decommissioning as inadequate, this is, undoubtedly, a significant change. But questions remain about whether unionists accept the DUP's explanations for its decisions. In the quotation above, Paisley equated Sinn Féin's recognition of the police with IRA decommissioning, allowing the party to claim that it had succeeded where the UUP failed. It is not clear whether this is enough to satisfy all of Paisley's followers. The DUP has made little attempt to articulate sustained practical, moral or theological discourses to justify sharing power with Sinn Féin.

Denying: Loyalist Paramilitaries as Deviants and Criminals

Far fewer of the DUP's discourses engaged directly with loyalist paramilitarism. Those that did were usually in response to direct accusations about DUP links to violence; or particular events such as loyalist feuds. The lack of discourses about loyalist violence as compared to the almost constant discourses denouncing the IRA is worth considering. The DUP developed discourses about the rising crime rate, blaming it on the implementation of the Belfast Agreement – particularly the scaling down of the police and army. However, noticeably absent from those discourses was any recognition that an increasing proportion of crime and violence was now carried out by loyalist – not republican – paramilitary groups.

The following response by Minister of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Jeffrey Donaldson, a former UUP MP who defected to the DUP in

opposition to the 1998 Agreement, appeared on the Letters page. He was responding to comments made by the UUP's Dermot Nesbitt, who tried to equate the DUP with the IRA and accused Donaldson of socialising with Martin McGuinness:

Dermot's case is based on his assertion that, at one point, he observed I was standing near a table where Martin McGuinness was seated with others, a kind of "proximity socialising".

I did not speak with Martin McGuinness in the reception and, when I challenged Dermot on this point in a BBC Talkback interview, he withdrew his allegation that I was socialising with Mr McGuinness.

... In the Donegal debate, whilst I concentrated on exposing republican failure to end their terrorist activities, Mr Nesbitt continuously attacked the DUP and at one point, rather pathetically, sought to equate the DUP with the IRA. To borrow a phrase, it was rather like being savaged by a "dead sheep". It is becoming absolutely clear that, having lost the support and trust of the unionist community, people like Dermot seem determined to prevent the DUP from delivering a fair deal for unionism as it would only expose his past failings. After all, it was Dermot who promised South Down unionists that he would not sit in government with any party with "guns under the table, on the table or outside the door". He broke his word and became a government minister alongside Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brun without a single IRA bullet being decommissioned. (*News Letter*, 6 August. 2004)

Donaldson denies and dismisses Nesbitt's accusations about DUP links with violence by equating them (quoting from the famous put-down by a British Labour Party MP of his Conservative counterpart in Westminster) to "being savaged by a dead sheep." He then goes on to draw his argument back to an accusation against the UUP, once again blaming the UUP for the IRA's lack of decommissioning.

On occasion, the DUP has condemned loyalist paramilitaries. In this example from August 2005, during a feud between the Loyalist Volunteer Force and the Ulster Volunteer Force, the DUP MLA, Edwin Poots, describes loyalist paramilitaries as criminals who were oppressing their own people:

Loyalist paramilitaries claim to exist because of the republican threat against their community, but the reality is that people in the loyalist community are living in fear not from their traditional enemy but from people within their own community. The ongoing feud within elements of loyalism is causing huge damage and demoralising the unionist

community. For decades republicans have attacked and killed thousands of Protestants, but today there is a clear reality that Protestants could be attacked by so-called loyalists as well as republicans. The murder of four Protestants, by these so-called loyalists, has caused dismay and has totally demoralised the Protestant community.

Poots goes on to say that loyalist paramilitaries were now doing the work of the IRA by unleashing misery on their communities:

Why does the IRA need to continue their campaign of terrorism when so-called loyalists will do the job for them? ... The current campaign is not about defending Ulster. It has more to do with protection money, extortion and drug dealing. While the IRA are using their guns to squeeze concession after concession out of the British government, loyalists have turned their guns on themselves and have turned to criminality, extortion and drug dealing. As a public representative I appeal to these so-called loyalists who are oppressing the Protestant community to get off the backs of your own people. Instead, get involved in restoring normality to deprived Protestant areas and divert your energy to setting up programmes that will provide a better future for your children. (*News Letter*, 24 August 2005)

Paisley responded in a similar way to loyalist attacks on Catholic property in his constituency:

“My view on the attacks is a simple one. ... There are people in Ballymena who know who are doing this and they should be supporting the police and getting the PSNI on the job of bringing these people to order. These attacks have been universally condemned by all law abiding people in Ballymena.” Mr Paisley claimed there had also been a series of attacks on Evangelical and Protestant churches in the Province and said a window was smashed at his own church in recent days. He added: “On both sides there is this cancer and the only way it can be fought is by the people who know who is responsible. There are people in Ballymena who know who those people are. They don’t come in the middle of the night and go away in the middle of the night. They are people living in the area. ... They should desist at once. They have no place in the community whatsoever. If they think they can speak for the people of Ballymena then they should stand for election and see what kind of response they get.” (*News Letter*, 31 August 2005)

Paisley uses characteristically strong words: “they have no place in the community whatsoever.” The earlier comments from Poots dismiss loyalist paramilitaries as criminals who are terrorising their own people, rather than “defending Ulster.” Over the years, the DUP have consistently denied the legitimacy of loyalist paramilitary violence – as well as the possible involvement of party members in it. This has allowed the DUP to present itself as a party with “clean hands”, democratic and morally fit to exercise power. However, there are those who contend that the DUP has not satisfactorily explained its former links with paramilitaries (Brewer and Higgins, 1998; Mitchel, 2003; Moloney, 2008). Further, reducing loyalist paramilitaries to criminals and thugs may absolve the party and the unionist community from facing up to the role loyalist paramilitaries have played over the years.

Identity and Discourses about Violence

Since its inception in 1971, there have been two major strands in the DUP’s identity: loyalism and evangelicalism. The loyalist strand emphasises the DUP’s identity as a tough, straight-talking party tenaciously clinging to the link with Great Britain. It will not “sell out” at any cost, unlike the “softer” UUP. Until it overtook the UUP in the 2003 Assembly elections, this strand made the DUP appear as if it was on the edge – a party of protest that was the brash, vocal, “thought police” of unionism, as Jackson (1999) has put it. The evangelical strand emphasises the DUP’s identity as righteous and morally trustworthy (Mitchel, 2003, p. 171-212; Bruce, 1986, 2007; Smyth, 1986). Free Presbyterians and other evangelicals remain over-represented in the ranks of party representatives (Mitchell, 2008a; Bruce, 2007; Ganiel, 2006; Southern 2005).

The appeal to the party’s evangelical identity can be seen below in the way Paisley draws on Biblical themes to denounce the immorality of Sinn Féin and unionists who did business with them. The colourful language about weapons and genocide, and the venue at which it was spoken, an Independent Orange Order⁵ demonstration in Portglenone in 2001, appeals to the party’s loyalist identity:

To vote for taking into the Executive of Northern Ireland the Roman Catholic IRA/Sinn Féin with all their weaponry carefully preserved for the genocide of the next Protestant generation, is an act of darkest treason. Yet, Orangemen in the Assembly cheered after they had defeated their brother-Orangemen and fellow Protestants by joining ranks with the political representatives of the IRA murderers, thus

succeeding in that Iscariot treachery. Today, those same Orangemen, besashed, will sport themselves as defenders of the Faith and maintainers of the Union. A return to the basic principles of Orangeism is imperative. (*News Letter*, 13 July 2001)

As in Paisley's address above, discourses about the immorality of terrorists in government often included religious overtones, including the idea that the IRA should not only decommission their weapons, but that they should "repent" before Sinn Féin should be allowed to participate in government. Perhaps the most famous of these was Paisley's 2004 "sackcloth and ashes" speech to party supporters in Ballymena. Here is an example from an article describing criticism of the speech:

Ian Paisley yesterday brushed aside the "delicate" nature of the peace talks, when he reminded republicans that they were not the only ones who had suffered throughout the Troubles.

The DUP leader decided to ditch the diplomatic approach and expressed his inner feelings, when he told reporters in Downing Street that he stuck by comments he had made last weekend to party members – that the IRA should be humiliated and made "to wear sackcloth and ashes" for their crimes.

... "There is no excuse for what they (the IRA) did,' the DUP leader said. 'Every day the security forces have to wear sackcloth and ashes ... They have to do that – that is all right for the security forces (according to republicans). But as for us, we are immune to it – that is their (republicans) attitude.'" (*News Letter*, 1 December 2004)

Discourses such as these have allowed the DUP to present itself as remaining true to both the evangelical and loyalist strands of its identity.

Relationship between Discourses and Electoral Success

It is important that the DUP seems to remain true to its identity. This allows the party to present itself as vigilant and trustworthy, at the same time providing security as it makes changes that – on the surface – do not reflect its traditional loyalist and evangelical identities (Ganiel and Dixon, 2008; Ganiel, 2007). For instance, even before it agreed to share the Assembly Executive with Sinn Féin in 2007, the DUP had committed itself to power sharing and had worked with Sinn Féin at other levels of government. Beyond its tough discourses about violence, the party utilised other narratives to accomplish this. For example, the party has consistently

claimed it opposes the Belfast Agreement. So first, it justified its participation in institutions set up by the agreement on the grounds that they would destroy the agreement. Then, they justified their participation by saying that if they were the largest party, they would “re-negotiate” the agreement and get a new, “fair deal” for unionism. Now, by referring to the points agreed during negotiations at St Andrews in 2006 as “the St Andrews Agreement”, the DUP can claim that it has done just what it said (Ganiel, 2007).

Such discursive tricks have allowed the DUP to retain its appeal to traditional loyalists and evangelicals and to tap into widespread Protestant dissatisfaction with the Belfast Agreement. At the same time, the gradual shift of their policies in a more UUP-like direction has attracted moderate unionist voters. Tough discourses about violence and the agreement have provided a smokescreen for significant policy changes. These have been accompanied by discourses that contrast the DUP’s tough stance with that of the supposedly weak UUP. This can be seen in the following narrative from MLA Norah Beare, who criticised the UUP’s willingness to sit in government with former paramilitaries. This statement is from June 2006, just a few months before the St Andrews deal:

I fail to see how any unionist worth his salt could issue a statement on restoring devolved government but make no mention of the obstacle created by paramilitary and criminal activity ... I speak to many people and I know that they share my party’s desire to get down to sorting out the bread and butter issues for ourselves [...] but they also want us to make sure we get the basics right so we have a government which is truly democratic.

They do not want to go back to the old Ulster Unionist tactics of bowing the knee to republicans, entering a government prematurely, discovering republicans have still not delivered and then being forced to go back to square one and being no better off. (Beare, 20 June 2006)

Of course, words alone do not explain the DUP’s electoral success. The DUP has a much stronger grassroots presence than the UUP, and individual ministers are often regarded as hard-working on bread and butter issues. The UUP has had its own internal problems, including bitter divisions that often left the party paralysed. And the IRA itself might even be considered a key player in the DUP’s electoral success, as its ambiguity about decommissioning played into the party’s hands (Moloney, 2008; Bruce, 2007; Farrington, 2006).

That said, the question remains whether the words that have helped propel the DUP to electoral success will come back to haunt them now that they must exercise power. At a basic level, traditional loyalists and evangelicals may feel betrayed by images of Paisley and McGuinness in cosy collaboration. It is possible that the DUP could lose those voters. In December 2007 a group calling itself Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) was launched. This grouping, which claims branches in 12 of the 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland, initially described itself as a movement, not a party, and is led by former DUP member and current MEP Jim Allister. Allister resigned from the DUP in protest after its decision to sit in government with Sinn Féin. In his statement announcing the launch of TUV, Allister (2007) said: “TUV will occupy the traditional unionist ground so wantonly abandoned by others for the sake of office.” TUV contested a by-election in Dromore in 2008, splitting the unionist vote and paving the way for a UUP victory. Allister remains the most visible and vocal public critic of changes in DUP policy. Similarly, a group calling itself Concerned Free Presbyterians was established after Paisley entered government with Sinn Féin. They claimed that Paisley’s decision had compromised his Christian witness, and eventually Paisley agreed not to put himself forward for re-election as Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church – a position he had held since its inception.⁶ Further, the Grand Chaplain of the Orange Order and a prominent evangelical within the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Rev. Stephen Dickinson, issued a statement in support of TUV (Dickinson 2007). The next part of the paper considers in more detail how the DUP’s discourses about violence may impact on the political transition.

Discourses about Violence and Political Transition

With the DUP and Sinn Féin now sharing power in the Assembly, it may be tempting to look at the DUP’s discourses about violence and ask, “so what?” The past is the past, words are only words, and now it is time to move on. But to do so would be to fail to raise wider questions about issues that it may be necessary to address in post-conflict, transitional societies, such as relationship-building, truth recovery and reconciliation, and re-integrating ex-combatants into society. It also is not certain if the DUP needs, or has, alternative discourses to replace their previous discourses about violence.

First, it is not clear how the DUP’s harsh words about Sinn Féin and the illegitimacy of the IRA will affect their relationships in the Executive. Many of the DUP’s discourses about IRA violence conveyed a lack of trust.

Could the IRA be trusted to stop killing people? Could people associated with the IRA be trusted to govern democratically? Does Sinn Féin need a “decontamination period”? These discourses not only reflect a lack of trust by members of the DUP, but also reflect attitudes that are present at the unionist grassroots. The DUP and Sinn Féin are now sharing government, but it is unlikely that trust has developed overnight. Further research on political parties in Northern Ireland might concentrate on how trust was built between these parties to the extent that they agreed to enter into government. It also is worth considering further steps that might be taken to build trust. The DUP’s emotive discourses about IRA violence should also serve to remind us that people at the grassroots – especially unionists who have lost loved ones to IRA violence – may still not trust Sinn Féin or the IRA. Accordingly, grassroots confidence building measures should be considered.

Second, it is not clear that the DUP has convincing discourses to explain to its constituencies its change in direction. Thus far, the party has justified its decision to share power in the Executive by appealing to “democratic” principles and claiming that Sinn Féin’s recognition of the police can be equated to making the IRA “go away.” This can be seen in the following narrative from MLA Mervyn Storey, from June 2006. In advance of the St Andrews negotiations, Storey was explaining what it would take for the DUP to share power with Sinn Féin:

as desirable as devolution is, it must be rebuilt upon solid foundations. Previous attempts to establish devolution in the Province have failed. Why? Because basic fundamentals like a solid, unshakable democratic footing and accountability were missing ... [no other democratic country in the world] would tolerate the presence of the associates of unreconstructed terrorists and gangsters within their government.

The simple and straightforward standard that all those wishing to wield power within a devolved administration in Northern Ireland should be demonstrably committed to solely peaceful and democratic methods is not one made up by the Democratic Unionist Party. It is universal ... We know where we want to get to – democratic devolution. There is now nothing left to negotiate. Parties either sign up to the basic standards of democracy and abide by them or there can be no place in any Executive for them. (*News Letter*, 8 June 2006)

A second way that Paisley and his wife have used to justify the DUP’s decision is to appeal to Paisley’s authority as a man of God. This discourse has not been dominant in the secular public sphere of newspapers and other media, but has surfaced in the Free Presbyterian magazine the

Revivalist. Moloney (2008, p. 502-503) cites an editorial in the May 2007 issue of the magazine which claims that Paisley “was God’s ‘specially anointed’ leader,” and drew on that authority in his political decisions. In her column in the same issue, Paisley’s wife Eileen wrote: “Like the Israelites of old treated Moses so they treat today’s God-anointed leader. They refuse to believe that God is already working in the most unexpected places and in the hearts of the most unexpected people. Again, like the Israelites, they prefer to remain in the wilderness of the past than move into the promised land of a better and happier future” (quoted in Moloney, 2008, p. 503).

That said, it is not certain that either of these discourses have won the hearts and minds of dissatisfied unionists. Indeed, there have been rumblings from the unionist grassroots that people were disappointed that Paisley and McGuinness seemed to be enjoying each other’s company so much as they acted out their duties as First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The existence of TUV and Concerned Free Presbyterians indicate that the DUP’s discourses have not been entirely effective. Further research on TUV and Concerned Free Presbyterians could attempt to gauge the depth and breadth of unionist opposition to DUP-Sinn Féin power-sharing.

Third, the DUP’s denial about its relationship with loyalist paramilitaries could have implications for truth recovery and reconciliation. Most of the biographies of Paisley or analyses of the DUP from the 1980s and 1990s consider the question of the party’s relationship with loyalist violence (Bruce, 1986, 2007; Moloney and Pollak, 1986; Smyth, 1987; Cooke, 1996; Moloney, 2008). All acknowledge at least some links, although Bruce (1986, 2001) downplays them. Bruce’s (2007) later work on Paisley is even more strident in its defence of Paisley’s non-violent credentials. But Moloney (2008), Brewer and Higgins (1998) and Mitchel (2003) claim that, at the very least, Paisley’s anti-Catholic rhetoric stirred some paramilitaries to violence. More recently, O’Callaghan and O’Donnell’s (2006) analysis of materials from the Public Records Office, Northern Ireland, demonstrates that in the mid-60s, the Royal Ulster Constabulary’s Inspector General believed that what was called in the documents the “Paisleyite Movement” consisted of the following groups: the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee, the Ulster Protestant Volunteer Division, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Corps, the Ulster Protestant Action Defence Committee and the Ulster Volunteer Force. O’Callaghan and O’Donnell argue that the information in these documents contributed to the decision to ban the UVF at the end of 1966. Although this predates the formation of the DUP, Paisley’s very personal involvement with these groups bears consideration. It is likely that many nationalists do not believe the denials of

Paisley and the DUP about their involvement with or responsibility for loyalist violence. Therefore, it is worth asking to what extent should public knowledge about Paisley and the DUP's relationship with violent groups be part of a "truth recovery" process in Northern Ireland? Of course, this should be set in the context of the violence of republican and loyalist paramilitary groups and the security forces. At this stage, it is not clear what shape Northern Ireland's truth recovery process will take, so it is also worth considering how a *lack* of truth recovery may impact on the potential reconciliation of people from groups with violent histories – including Sinn Féin and the DUP.

Fourth, the DUP's denial of involvement with paramilitaries, coupled with their harsh condemnation of their current activities, raises questions about the integration of ex-combatants into society (See also Mitchell, 2008b). DUP discourses about loyalist paramilitaries have tended to cast them as people who are outside of the pale, not worthy of inclusion in the community. (Occasionally, loyalist paramilitaries are deemed worthy to re-enter the unionist fold if they become Christians by being "born again" or "saved.") These discourses may reflect a wider unionist attitude about violence, which focuses blame on a select few. This absolves the rest of the community from responsibility for violence, brushing over ambiguities about turning a blind eye to tacit support for violence, including not only terrorist atrocities and punishment beatings, but the violence associated with some Orange parades. In such a situation, the challenges of integrating former loyalist paramilitaries in society may not be adequately addressed. For instance, it is not clear if or to what extent this item is even on the DUP's agenda.

The material presented in this paper should be seen as part of a preliminary process of documenting hardline discourses about violence during Northern Ireland's peace process. It aims to raise questions about the appropriateness of such discourses as Northern Ireland transitions from physical violence to peace. It has demonstrated that the DUP has used discourses about violence to secure its own identity as a party and to overtake the UUP in electoral terms. But using discourses about violence in these ways means that the party now faces challenges in working political institutions with people it has spent years denouncing – and in justifying this change to its supporters. The party also faces challenges in coming to terms with violence in its own past and that of the unionist community. This serves as reminder that even as power-sharing is implemented, issues and attitudes around violence remain unresolved and unaddressed. Such ambivalence about violence is common in transitional societies. This ambivalence may

hinder the progress of peace building. With that in mind, political parties and other policy makers would do well to consider the public impact of continued violent discourses.

Endnotes

* We are grateful to Katy Hayward and Catherine O'Donnell for their organisation of the Peace Lines conference in Dublin in June 2007, and for the helpful comments of those who participated.

¹ It is worth initially clarifying the terms “unionism” and “loyalism.” Unionism is an umbrella term for the population of people in Northern Ireland who favour retaining the union with Great Britain. The overwhelming majority identify with the Protestant religious tradition. “Loyalism” generally refers to a population of unionists who are considered more “extreme” or “hardline” about their loyalty to Great Britain. See Todd (1987) for a fuller explanation.

² Other codes included: peace process, the surrender process, the delegitimatisation of Trimble and the UUP, morality, the security threat, victimisation, renegotiation, the Assembly, cross community relations, cultural issues, Jeffrey Donaldson (related to his transfer from the UUP), education, Europe, funding, gender, local politics, moral issues, “no” campaign, non-involvement in talks, North/ South dimension, parading, party growth, party member activity, power-sharing, protest, religion and politics, social/economic issues, unionist disunity, and US involvement. The coded data is stored at the Belfast campus of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin.

³ “Official Unionist” is another name for the Ulster Unionist Party.

⁴ “Provos” is short for the “Provisional IRA.”

⁵ The Independent Orange Order is a fraternal organisation for Protestants. It is smaller than the main Orange Order, from which it separated near the beginning of the last century. Both groups are exclusively Protestant and their main activity is organising parades throughout the summer months. The largest parades are on the 12th of July and commemorate the victory of the Protestant King William of Orange over a Catholic force at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. These parades are often contentious, especially if they pass through predominantly Catholic areas.

⁶ The Concerned Free Presbyterians group had an interactive website which disseminated their criticisms of Paisley and the DUP. But after Paisley's decision to step down in September 2007, the content of the site was taken

down. Now the visitors are greeted with the message: “This website has now been ‘put beyond use’.” <<http://www.concernedfreepresbyterians.com>> (December 2007). We downloaded and saved electronically a substantial portion of the postings on the website before they were removed.

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