Social Scientific Research on the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland: The Problem of Objectivity

RUPERT TAYLOR*
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Abstract: The growth in output of social scientific research on Northern Ireland and on the "Troubles" is described. Despite a considerable body of work the research on the "Troubles" encounters distinct problems concerning objectivity. This is drawn out in terms of the State's relationship to social scientific research and the predicament facing individual academic researchers. The problems are shown to lie in the lack of consensus for State legitimacy.

I INTRODUCTION

Central to the conflict in Northern Ireland is the lack of consensus on the legitimate form of the State; as Barritt and Carter have written, "One great issue has so far dominated all others in Northern Ireland politics, the issue of whether or not the State should exist at all" (1972, p. 35). This article is concerned to draw out the effects of this lack of consensus for State legitimacy on the pursuit of objective social scientific research that focuses on the "Troubles". In general the aim of objective research, to show things as they "really" are, has been questioned by the way in which the value commitments of the researcher may intrude in analysis. Weber's "The Meaning of 'Ethnical Neutrality' in Sociology and Economics" (1949, pp. 1-47) is the classical work concerning the problem of separating facts from values and commonly the problem has been resolved through the researcher attempting to stand

outside of individual economic interests and other social and psychological factors that may influence the research process.

This is to see the issue of objectivity in terms of how research may be compromised through personal factors; objectivity is essentially a problem for the individual researcher. Over and above this, that the pursuit of objectivity might be rendered especially problematic when the legitimacy of the State is under question, is rarely recognized — principally because much social scientific research takes place in a liberal democratic environment where a large measure of consensus can be taken for granted.

It is the extent to which the goal of conducting and presenting objective research on the "Troubles" can be upheld when the State's existence is in question that is drawn out in the following discussion, both from the perspective of the State and the individual academic researcher. First the debate needs to be informed by an examination of the output of social scientific research on Northern Ireland and the "Troubles".

II THE RISE OF SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON NORTHERN IRELAND AND ON THE "TROUBLES"

Taking the social sciences to refer to "those disciplines that deal with aspects of human society . . . As commonly understood these include, centrally, economics, sociology (and anthropology) and political science" (Dahrendorf, 1985, p. 784) and more broadly law, psychology, geography and social administration, an analysis of the output requires a consideration of the growth of research on Northern Ireland and the amount of attention given to the "Troubles" within such disciplines.

British post-war developments stimulated the growth of social scientific research in Northern Ireland and the late 1950s and 1960s saw the development of some social scentific research in economics and geography — notably, K.S. Isles and N. Cuthbert *An Economic Survey of Northern Ireland* (1957), E.E. Evans *Irish Folk Ways* (1957), Emrys Jones *The Social Geography of Belfast* (1960), and the work of the Dutch scholar M.W. Heslinga *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide* (1962). However, there was little in the social science literature of this period that revealed the sectarian divide that was to show its face with such clearness in the late 'sixties (O'Dowd, 1982, p. 23). Frank Gallagher's *The Indivisible Island* (1957), N.J. Gibson's "Partition Today: A Northern Viewpoint" (1958), Desmond Fennell's *The Northern Catholic* (1959), D.P. Barritt and C.F. Carter's *The Northern Ireland Problem* (1962) and Harris's community study of "Ballybeg" in 1952/53 (which was not published until later, in 1972), were the exceptions to this. Thus, in 1970, an article in the Belfast magazine *Fortnight* could comment that: "detailed research into community problems is in short supply for an area

that has so many of them . . . many of the questions raised by D.P. Barritt and C.F. Carter in *The Northern Ireland Problem* which was published in 1962, remain unanswered, and most of their speculations unexamined in 1970" (23/10/70).

The reasons for the lack of interest lie in the general pace of the development of the social sciences in Northern Ireland. The rise of social scientific research in Northern Ireland is a relatively recent phenomenon, a result of the rise of a generation of researchers, the increasing State involvement in economic regulation, planning and social welfare, and the provision of funding for such research.

Research in Northern Ireland has been and is primarily based in the universities. Yet the expansion of the social sciences in the Northern universities, as at other British universities, is very recent — corresponding to the rise of the welfare state and the expansion of higher education following the Lockwood Report (1965). The Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) was the only Northern university until the New University of Ulster was established at Coleraine (which admitted its first students in October 1968). It was in the older academic disciplines at QUB, like geography, that the early social scientific research was carried out. The geography department at Queen's was large and well established; by 1968-69 it had 13 full-time members of academic staff, and earlier during the 1950s the two major projects undertaken by the department were E.E. Evans's survey of land utilisation in Ulster (1959) and Emrys Jones's ecological study of Belfast (1960). In more recent years there has been the publication of F.W. Boal's "Territoriality on the Shankill-Falls Divide, Belfast" (1969), E.E. Evans's *The Personality of Ireland* (1973) and F.W. Boal and J.N.H. Douglas's (eds), *Integration and Division: Geographical Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Problem* (1982). Thus, as Jenkins has written: "When one examines the social science literature relating to Northern Ireland, the importance of social geography is immediately apparent" (1984a, p. 253). The Faculty of Economics (embracing the faculty of Commerce) was established in April 1947 and the Political Science department in 1959, but many Social Science departments were only established in the 1960s.[1] In their early years, the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Social Sciences were concerned with attempting to establish themselves as academic disciplines. Correspondingly, at this time the number of contributions from Northern Irish based academics was small. The early '70s saw outside researchers from Britain and the United States being drawn to Northern Ireland in the wake of the international media attention given to the "Troubles".

1. On the history and growth of QUB see Moody and Beckett (1959) and Taylor (1986, Chapters 1 and 6).

Figure 1 shows that there are two waves of publications on the "Troubles", the first wave peaking in 1972 and the second quite evenly spread out over the latter half of the 1970s. Whilst the first wave flowed from the work of outside researchers the same is not true of the more sustained second wave. It was the growth of the Social Sciences within Northern Ireland that worked to change this. The number of full-time academic staff in the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at QUB leapt from 36 in 1968/69 to 77 by 1982/83 and with a new generation of researchers Queen's contribution had come to represent some 38 per cent of all publications, as covered by Figure 1, in 1983.

The output of the new generation of social scientific research based in the Northern universities (QUB and the University of Ulster which was previously the New University of Ulster and Ulster Polytechnic) includes most notably amongst many others the work of Paul Arthur (1973, 1980); Frank Wright's discussion of Protestant ideology (1974); Liam O'Dowd, Bill Rolston and Mike Tomlinson's *Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights and Civil War* (1980); Henry Patterson's study of class and sectarianism (1981); Liz McWhirter and Karen Trew's research on children and the "Troubles" (1982); Edward Moxon-Browne's *Nation, Class and Creed* (1983); Robert Cormack and Robert Osborne's work on educational opportunity (eds., 1983); Robert Miller's work on social mobility (1983); John Darby's book on intimidation (1986) and Steve Bruce's analysis of Paisleyism (1986).

Social research has been influenced and promoted by the rise of the interventionist state and the corresponding expansion of State administration. Stormont in the early 1960s initiated a number of reports on economic growth and planning in order to inform government policy: such as the Hall Report (1962), the Matthew Report (1963) and the Wilson Report (1965).[2] In general, however, Stormont had little interest in empirical research as a basis for policy and the implementation of welfare measures under the regime did not bring with it much in the way of empirical research. In fact under the Stormont regime welfare measures were grudgingly implemented: there was a lack of enthusiasm for welfare state provision on the part of both the Unionists and the Catholic Church (Smyth, 1982, p. 13). Applied social research did not take off until Direct Rule was imposed in March 1972. Direct Rule brought a new desire and urgency for detailed and accurate knowledge on the part of the State (Arthur, 1987, p. 210), and here the over-riding motivation was for obtaining immediately applicable research.

Thus the early 1970s saw a wave of State-sponsored local research activity on the "Troubles". A number of client based empirical surveys were under-
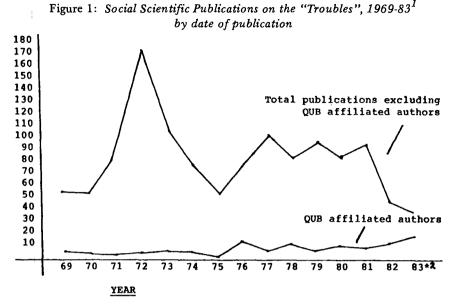
2. The earlier economic survey of Isles and Cuthbert, which was commissioned by the Northern Ireland government in 1948, finally appeared in 1957 and had a limited impact (O'Dowd, 1982, p. 19).

taken: "to provide other people with the material on which to base decisions" (Jackson, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 8/12/72) and research was undertaken by the Ministry of Community Relations and the Independent Community Relations Commission (Darby, *Fortnight*, 19/3/71). Also, with the increasing State involvement and concern with social scientific research there has been a growth of research, most significantly with the Northern Ireland Economic Council and within government departments. The Policy Planning Research Unit (PPRU) in the Department of Finance allocates around £55,000 per annum for commissioned research and consultancy (O'Dowd, 1986, p. 6). Research has also been conducted through the Fair Employment Agency and the Equal Opportunities Commission (in 1986 the government's financial commitment to the FEA was £320,000 and to the EOC it was £260,000 [*Belfast Telegraph*, 3/10/86]).

The rise of social scientific research has also been assisted by the financing of academic research. Within Northern Ireland there has been a significant injection of research funding through the Ford Foundation and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC now the ESRC). The Ford Foundation gave $250,000 in the early 1970s for research on Ireland by all-Ireland universities. The SSRC Northern Ireland Panel, established in December 1980 by an initiative within the SSRC to stimulate research in Northern Ireland for two years, had an initial budget of £350,000 and has spent over £500,000 (O'Dowd, 1986, p. 6). The initiative for the Panel "began with and rested firmly in the hands of the SSRC" (NI Panel Chairman, personal communication, 19/5/84) and primary emphasis was placed on researching issues relating to economic growth and development.

Reflecting all these trends the social science bibliography compiled by Rolston *et al.* (1983) shows that a substantial, and ever growing, number of publications relating to Northern Ireland have appeared over the years — in particular with a focus on the political conflict and on British socio-economic policies. Table 1 shows that research on Northern Ireland, in the social sciences, has been directed towards political and social issues and Figure 1 shows that the "Troubles" have certainly not been ignored: of the 5,842 entries in Rolston *et al.* this covers 1,321 citations (22.6%). However, research which focuses on the "Troubles" has encountered problems. These we discuss below by considering in turn the relationship between the State and social scientific research on the "Troubles" and the predicament facing individual academic researchers.

Figure 1: *Social Scientific Publications on the "Troubles", 1969-83*[1]
by date of publication

YEAR

[1] Refers to those entries classified under the headings of "Protestant/Catholic Division and Sectarianism", "Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency" and "General Political Analyses" in Rolston *et al.* (1983), *A Social Science Bibliography of Northern Ireland, 1945-1983*, (relating to Northern Ireland since 1921).

[2] Entries in Rolston *et al.*, for 1983 are incomplete.

Note: Much of the work cited in the bibliography of Rolston *et al.* is not academic, some works are mentioned twice, and a very broad definition of the social sciences is adopted (they are taken to cover "politics, sociology, economics, geography, education, psychology, medico-social research, socio-legal studies, social administration, demography, anthropology, urban (rural) studies, and general history" [p. i]). It should also be noted that for academic research there is often an appreciable time lag between research and actual publication.

Table 1: *Social Scientific Research on*
Northern Ireland, 1945-1983

	%
Social Issues	34
Politics	32
Economics	16
Law	5
Other	13

Source: Rolston *et al.* (1983), N = 5,842.

III THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ON THE "TROUBLES"

The State's relationship to research on the "Troubles" is dictated by its concern to protect and promote the measure of its limited legitimacy. On the one hand, it does not want to undertake or advance research that might undermine any legitimacy it has, but, on the other hand, it does not want to be seen as doing nothing and is concerned to try and establish a greater legitimacy. In particular, since Direct Rule there has been a need to counter the discriminatory practices that characterised the old Stormont regime.

First of all it is clear that, due to the particular context, the State, in order to protect itself from critical scrutiny (particularly from radical researchers) imposes constraints on researchers, most notably with regard to funding and access.

Generally, it is evident that some subject areas are better funded than others from governmental and quasi-governmental sources. Funding for sociology and politics is very low whilst for others, such as agriculture and social medicine, it is high (Darby et al., 1983). The FEA and EOC have funded some sociological research into discrimination and patterns of inequality but the bulk of government-backed research is for work of a general client nature (often involving the use of quantitative and survey methods) — where findings are used to meet the immediate operational considerations of government policy (O'Dowd, 1986, p. 6). Thus, some researchers in the fields of sociology and politics interested in doing work on the "Troubles" find that they have to turn to alternative sources, such as the Nuffield Foundation and the Rowntree Trust, for financial backing. The distance that can exist between the State and support for research on the conflict has been mentioned by Lockwood: "I wonder if I should reveal what a Northern Ireland Office official revealed the Minister has said about proposals for research on sectarianism. I decide that being a signatory to the Official Secrets Act puts me in a difficult position" (1982, p. 220). Government is extremely cautious about giving academic researchers access to sensitive data that are kept, and "there is a common feeling that the government has erred on the side of caution to an excessive degree" (Darby et al., 1983, introduction). There is an official reluctance to provide systematic information on sectarian division and the Northern Ireland Public Record Office is selective and conservative in allowing access to controversial material. Farrell, for example, in researching his book *Arming the Protestants* (1983) found that the Public Record Office in Belfast withdrew controversial files (also see Lockwood, 1982, pp. 220-221).

Access can be dependent upon the image the researcher presents and the purpose of the research: to mention sectarianism is to invite caution. In par-

ticular it is very hard to gain access to sensitive information relating to the legal/penal system and the British Army — where in any case openness is prohibited by the Official Secrets Act. Writing in 1973, Fields recounted the fact that, apart from herself "no other American mental-health professional was . . . admitted to Long Kesh . . . several outstanding British specialists had tried to gain entry but failed" (p. 23).[3]

Beyond this there are cases of apparent suppression of research by the State. In order to protect State legitimacy, reports have been delayed or remained unpublished including a number of Fair Employment Agency reports (McCullagh, 1983, p. 62). A 1973 Community Relations Commission report on population displacement in Belfast since 1969 — which Menendez has claimed was suppressed (1973, p. 201) — was in fact published after a delay. One book, Rona Fields's *A Society on the Run* (1973) was, after governmental pressure, ordered through the shredding machine — although there was widespread concern and protest, not just official, about the book's accuracy. The book argued that the British State was conducting, in Northern Ireland, a "sophisticated experiment in psychological genocide". Fields has written that: "some communication from the Director of Community Relations in the North was passed on to my publishers, Penguin, in which a request was made not to publish any book by me" (*An Phoblact*, 26/6/74).

And publication of a Northern Ireland Fair Employment Agency report on the nature of Protestant and Catholic representation in the Northern Irish non-industrial Civil Service (Northern Ireland Fair Employment Agency, 1983) has been at the centre of controversy. Due to a disagreement between Agency consultants and the Civil Service over the applicability of differing statistical techniques to the data, publication of the Report was delayed. On the recommendations of a senior independent assessor from outside of Northern Ireland the statistical analysis of the Civil Service was endorsed and the view of the independent researchers rejected. Both interpretations had very different political implications. The final Report concluded that "religion 'was not a statistically significant factor . . .' affecting the salary levels '. . . for those Roman Catholics recruited since 1968', and for senior staff, that 'between 1973-1983, the proportions of Roman Catholics amongst Principals, Deputy Principals and Staff Officers have all shown marked increases' " (Miller, 1986, p. 228). Such a conclusion supports the view that since Direct Rule the discriminatory practices of the past have been eradicated and any persisting imbalances are simply a legacy of the Stormont regime. However, the Agency consultants' analysis claimed that religion was statistically significant with regard to occupational and departmental classifications

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3. In 1973 Rona Fields was refused permission to visit prisons, this was lifted after some pressure from professional colleagues, but reimposed in 1980 (*An Phoblacht*, 28/6/80).

and level of income. In particular it was reported that there were "promotion anomalies favouring Protestants in lower, *recently* appointed grades (*Institute of Manpower Studies*,1982) as well as at higher grades, and . . . that the most significant disparities in salary level occurred among 25 to 34 year-olds and *not* among the older age categories" (Miller, 1985, pp. 118-122; Miller, 1986, pp. 228-299).[4]

It is not that Government ignores the significance of the sectarian divide. In particular the Northern Ireland Fair Employment Agency undertakes research on the sectarian division and is funded by Government, and the Policy Planning Research Unit in Stormont recognize the importance of the religious variable. The PPRU Monitors give information on religion and their Continuous Household Survey includes a question on religion. There have been developments in the area of equality of opportunity, especially in employment. For example, the Civil Service investigation has led to the implementation of monitoring (carried out by the PPRU) and the Policy Studies Institute in London have recently carried out a large-scale survey on discrimination funded by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights.[5]

Nevertheless to date State policy towards advancing equality of opportunity has had limited impact (McCrudden, 1983). The Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976 rejected the use of quotas or "reverse discrimination" and adopted a broadly defined view of "affirmative action" in which employment must rest on merit. The Act led to the establishment of the Fair Employment Agency (FEA) in 1977 but it has suffered from under-funding and lack of powers (SDLP Policy Document, 1985). The findings of FEA "pattern" investigations, which analyse the overall religious balance of a workforce, have had little impact and have not resulted in real changes (Graham, 1984). At the individual level the Agency has managed, in ten years, to bring forward only 47 cases of proven religious discrimination, and of 9 that were appealed 6 were subsequently overturned (*Belfast Telegraph*, 3/10/86).

The problem is that fair employment policy has been advanced in a hostile political environment. The limits of active engagement on fair employment have been circumscribed by the fact that principles of equality of opportunity lack legitimacy within the Protestant community. Protestant politicians have

4. Subsequently, in 1987 the FEA threatened to sue the *Journal for Social Policy* on the grounds of breaking confidentiality, if it published an article ("Evaluation Research in a Politicized Context") by a former FEA consultant, Robert Miller. The article discusses how the FEA altered large sections of the Report in order to insert the Civil Service view (*New Society*, "' 'Suppressed' Report Sparks Ulster Row", 26/6/87, letters, 10/7/87, letters, 31/7/87).

5. Also see the British Government's Green Paper "Equality of Opportunity in Employment in Northern Ireland: Future Strategy Options" (1986, Belfast: HMSO) and "Religious Equality of Opportunity in Employment: Guide to Effective Practice" (1987, Belfast: Department of Economic Development).

strongly opposed the activities of the FEA (Osborne, 1982) and "an over-active policy all too easily becomes seen in 'zero-sum' terms; if 'they' are gaining, 'we' must be losing" (Osborne and Cormack, 1983, p. 227). Thus, research findings on disadvantage and discrimination are contested on-the-ground from both sides.

As Protestants and Catholics do not share the same basic beliefs about the legitimate form of the State they do not share a view of what is wrong. With pervasive evidence of past disadvantage and discrimination (FEA annual reports; Cormack and Osborne (eds.) 1983) Catholics demand redress for the injustices. Protestants, however, insist that discrimination is exaggerated and in any event largely due to Catholic non-participation in State structures (in particular within the political process and security forces). It is because Catholics are seen, by Protestants, to be committed to undermining the State (through not wanting to work with or to be associated with the State) that Catholics are themselves seen to blame for their exclusion — as everyone has a fair chance but Catholics refuse to "play the game". Protestant attempts to downplay research findings on discrimination also place a stress on other inherent causal factors, particularly demographic differences, such as the way in which labour mobility works to the disadvantage of Catholics through their greater tendency to live in peripheral areas, and the social disadvantage that flows from the higher birthrate amongst Catholics and their tendency to have larger families than Protestants (Ulster Unionist Council, 1979).[6] Thus, in the overall context of Irish Nationalism and the lack of consensus for State legitimacy, some Protestants see "discrimination as not just natural, but justified" (Nelson, 1984, p. 71) and many Protestants refuse even to acknowledge the facts of discrimination (Rose, 1971; Nelson, 1975, 1984). Correspondingly, as Boal has written: "the crunch question to be asked is whether occupational proportionality is a realistic objective when there is a lack of consensus regarding the very state within which proportionality has to exist?" (Boal, 1983, p. 237).

In Northern Ireland discrimination has the properties of what Gallie (1964) has termed an "essentially contested" concept. That is, the universal criteria of reason cannot settle the merits of the competing Protestant and Catholic definitions; despite the body of research findings there is a lack of any criteria by which to firmly establish an objective position. This leads to a major pre-dicament for the State, as in this context an active fair employment approach is likely to lead to serious problems — yet on the other hand the State does not want to be seen to be doing nothing.

At present, liberal principles of equality of opportunity receive little

6. For an academic discussion on the significance of inherent versus external causal factors see Compton (1981, 1982), Boal (1983), Cormack and Osborne (eds., 1983) and Whyte (1983b).

legitimacy within the Protestant community and FEA reports are simply turned into political ammunition for sectarian motives. If a more active fair employment policy was pursued, for example with the introduction of quotas, it would lead to widespread protest from the Protestant community and the legitimacy of the State would be further undermined.

Yet, to do nothing is to maintain the status quo, while, as Osborne and Cormack argue: "a too cautious policy provides ground for those who query the capacity for reform to effect real social change in Northern Ireland" (1983, p. 227). Maintaining the status quo is clearly unacceptable to many Catholics as they do not fully accept the State's legitimacy or have equal life chances — in fact for some anything short of "reverse discrimination" works to support the view that meaningful reform cannot occur within existing State structures. The British Government is then in the unenviable position of trying to find a balance where no balance exists.

The predicament facing the State is that: "there is no universal agreement about the 'facts' of the Northern Ireland situation" (Taylor, 1987, p. 32), a situation which flows directly from the lack of consensus for the State. Key issues that relate to the State such as discrimination — but also social justice, human rights and democracy — come to take on the properties of "essentially contested" concepts. There is no consensus in Northern Ireland about what an objective position on such issues is.

The problem of a lack of legitimacy for an objective stance met the Government's Belfast Areas of Need (BAN) study. The BAN study was a survey of "the spatial distribution of some social problems in the Belfast urban area" and was initially undertaken through academics attached to QUB's geography department. The initial study, which took two years to prepare, ranked areas of Belfast in eight groups of varying social need (Boal et al., 1974). It "provided an accurate picture of Catholic economic disadvantage" and "informed the locating of resources to areas of greatest need" (Whyte, 1983a, p. 9) by Government. The Government used the initial study as the basis for their own survey, and following this, money was allocated to those areas that had been identified as the most deserving. However, the Government's stated objective criteria of "social need" were questioned — for which side would benefit most? The findings became perverted by a logic of sectarian arithmetic and thus the Official Unionist Rev. R. Bradford protested about the "puny amounts being offered to majority areas" in his constituency (Sunday News, 16/4/78).

The predicament goes deeper, for the State itself can also be constrained in the collection of data. This was most clearly the case with the 1981 Census. Resistance from respondents has seriously compromised the validity of the 1981 Census returns: not only did around 250,000 people refuse to answer the question on religious affiliation (which in any case was not a compulsory

question), but there was a measure of non-response — with a census enumerator shot dead in Derry. Official estimates of non-response have ranged from 19,000 to 74,000 and despite some quite sophisticated correction and reallocation work it is difficult to see how any reliable estimates can, in the circumstances, be made.[7]

Altogether the lack of consensus for the State results in crucial problems for its relationship to social scientific research on the "Troubles". First, the State in order to protect the measure of its legitimacy has to be wary of promoting and allowing certain types of critical research into the sectarian division. Secondly, whilst the State has encouraged some research into disadvantage and discrimination the findings are contested on-the-ground and attempts to actively promote equality of opportunity can be counter-productive to State legitimacy. Thirdly, the fact that the legitimacy of the State is questioned can inhibit and limit the conduct and collection of research on-the-ground — a problem which, as will be seen, is not restricted to the State.

IV THE PREDICAMENT FACING ACADEMIC RESEARCHERS

Beneath the level of the State, academic researchers find that if the "Troubles" are directly addressed through survey and field research methods distinct problems are encountered within Northern Ireland. Individual academic researchers may profess their objectivity, but on-the-ground they are seen to be inexorably tied into State structures in such a way as to seriously undermine the research process.

Much major empirical research on Northern Irish politics has been of a survey nature. The two major surveys that were conducted before the "Troubles" — Budge and O'Leary 1973 (survey of 1966) and Rose 1971 (survey of 1968) — were free of the problems that have since arisen: "Then people welcomed them. There was less suspicion. The questions were straightforward and uncontroversial" (academic researcher). Budge and O'Leary's survey was the first political survey ever undertaken in Northern Ireland: of a sample of 344 Belfast citizens in which 229 were interviewed only 13 refused. Rose's *Northern Ireland Loyalty Study* was a household survey: of a sample of 1,291 only 11 of those actually interviewed were antagonistic at the beginning of the interview (1975, pp. 18-19).

Survey researchers now encounter real difficulties, difficulties often concealed. A survey undertaken in 1978 suffered from non-response and poor representativeness: having a response rate of over 20 per cent below that of

7. "The Census coincided with the Hunger Strike and it has been estimated that 6,000 households, equivalent to 19,000 persons (the figure could be higher) did not make a return" (Compton, *Irish News*, 9/3/83), 74,000 is an estimate of the PPRU at Stormont.

Rose's survey. One academic recounted: "In retrospect I wouldn't repeat it. Many of our interviewers wouldn't go into troubled areas . . . precisely those areas where the kind of information we were after would be found . . . and we had about 10% of our completed interviews back with comments written on them, complaining about the nature of the questions, alleging Northern Ireland Office links or that we were a front for the British Army. We *did* ask some very personal questions, like 'Do you support the IRA?' ". Another survey (ESRC financed) undertaken in 1983 in Protestant East Belfast also met with some resistance: "We had a number of our questionnaires returned with written comments about the value of such surveys" (academic researcher).

Resistance from below, especially within Republican areas, seriously compromises surveys, and indeed can even make them impossible to conduct. Co-operation is dependent on the visible benefits to the community, and with research being seen as tied to the State, the political functions of such research is questioned. Given a professional commitment to objectivity such charges greatly annoy academic researchers: "It makes me very angry when people go on about us being a front for the Northern Ireland Office" (academic researcher).

In general, outside researchers come to be seen as spies where the insistence on the confidentiality of survey returns is taken as hollow. The Ballymurphy surveys of 1971 and 1973 illustrate this well (Spencer, 1973). Ballymurphy is a Catholic housing estate in West Belfast and the goal of the surveys was "to gather objective information . . . to stimulate statutory and voluntary bodies to take 'from the outside' action that would improve conditions on the estate" (Spencer, 1973, introduction). Given the introduction of Internment and the rising conflict in 1971 the survey had to be repeated in 1973. As the survey was conducted on the invitation of the Ballymurphy Tenants Association the response rate was high (99.7%). Yet in its wake an article appeared in *Republican News*, the article urged "DO NOT co-operate with ANY social surveys", for it was alleged that the security forces had access to the data. The article also stated that: "People should remember that in a war situation there is no such thing as neutrality and the academics at Queen's are not neutral" (*Republican News*, 1974) and the *Andersonstown News* stated that "most academic researchers are unaware that their work is being made available to spying agencies" (reported in *Irish Times*, 9/2/74). The then QUB professor of sociology issued an immediate denial to the press (*Irish News*, 18/2/74; *Irish Times*, 19/2/74) but the damage had been done. To avoid political controversy the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, which financed the survey, rescinded its request for a detailed report on the findings of the survey (Spencer, 1973, p. 16).

At this time a survey on residential segregation in Belfast (August 1972-December 1973) met with similar difficulties: "Many of the interviewers

were accused at various times of being Army/IRA/UDA spies. On one occasion two interviewers were threatened and ordered to stop interviewing in a particular housing estate by the local company commander of a paramilitary organization" (Boal and Pringle, 1974). For this survey very few people came forward as possible interviewers, in particular there was a very acute shortage of interviewers prepared to enter Catholic areas.

The parallels which people in Republican areas can draw between the activities of survey researchers and the intense information gathering activities of the British Army readily fuels their suspicions. In the early 1970s the Army undertook "official" mini-census surveys, "P-tests", which were essentially household surveys (Wilkinson, 1977, p. 154). The Army continues to undertake surveys, now often under the guise of unemployment surveys, as the *Guardian* reported: "over a two-month period this summer the Army carried out what they euphemistically called an unemployment survey in the Ballymurphy area of Belfast" (13/10/80). In 1974, before computerisation, some 40 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland were on card indexes built up by the Army: "Some cards even gave the colour of a family's wallpaper and a description of the pictures on the walls" (*Times*, 18/4/74). Given the connotations that are attached to the use of computers, their open use with surveys is problem laden, even with community action groups: "The way they see it is what would happen if the material got into the hands of the Brits" (Catholic community worker).

Altogether people will just not volunteer a whole range of information, particularly that which may be of most value in understanding political conflict. The resistance from below means that not only is objectivity under attack but much research suffers from a lack of depth. Even if co-operation is secured how can a researcher be sure that it is honest? How, for example, does a researcher find out why people voted for Sinn Fein? Many are hardly likely to admit to an outsider that they are voting for them because they support — let alone belong to — the IRA. It is thus that electoral opinion polls tend to underestimate the extent of support for more extreme parties. Here though rough corrections can be made: "My rule of thumb is to add a 10% to extreme views and subtract the same from moderate ones" (academic researcher). While survey research affords a low visibility to researchers (Josephson, 1970, p. 118) — they are not really in a community long enough to be targeted for attack — this is not true of all forms of research. To persistently go around asking direct questions on the "Troubles" is to ask for problems. One researcher who did so was shot: "He used to go round visiting UVF drinking clubs asking leading questions like 'Which organization do you belong to?' I thought Christ what's he up to! His wife was worried sick, she was getting three phone calls a day saying she'd be shot and the children strung up" (academic researcher).

There are limits to taking a self-declared objective approach in the conduct of research — a researcher may be tolerated because of the practical benefits research may have or promise to the community, but a researcher will not be taken into confidence: "Not being a part of it all people recognize that such a thing as a neutral is useful ... but this has its limits as a tactic" (academic researcher), "As regards the national question ... the sole role an outsider could play was that of being an advisor in terms of knowledge and skills" (Wiener, 1980, preface). Views are cloaked to meet the outsider's expectations or to meet the needs of political propaganda. The researcher who maintains an objective position faces the problem of being deceived. Alternatively, given the power relationships involved, a researcher may immediately be taken for a spy: "People come in thinking they are going to solve people's problems for them. Thinking they have the answers. They just cannot understand why they are seen as spies" (community activist). Merton has captured the problem for the outsider in a setting of heightened conflict: "Thought and its products ... become altogether functionalized, interpreted only in terms of their presumed social or economic or psychological sources and functions" (1972, p. 9).

Not surprisingly few researchers have penetrated (or wish to) the area of political conflict on-the-ground through field research. There is a lack of research into paramilitary politics. The work of Frank Burton *The Politics of Legitimacy* (1978) is the major exception,[8] and it is not without its problems. Burton's ethnographic research is based on an eight month stay in a house over 1972-73 with two student play leaders in the Ardoyne district of West Belfast. Although knowing several IRA activists Burton was only ever a "partial insider" (p. 175) and his access was mainly restricted to young activists, members of Na Fianna Eireann. Apart from Jenkins's study (1983) of "Ballyhightown" (Rathcoole) there are also "very few ethnographic studies of urban life" (Jenkins, 1984b, p. 261). And here "there was simply no way I could have carried out intensive research in Ballyhightown without establishing a comfortable *modus vivendi* with some people whom I believed to be members of paramilitary organisations" (1984b, p. 150).

To research paramilitary politics is dangerous; there can be no guarantee of success. On being asked "Are you a spy? how can you convince us you're not a spy?" there is nothing clinching that can be said. A researcher, in coming into contact with the paramilitary groups, is bound to be "checked out" (Jenkins, 1984b, p. 150). To establish sincerity a reciprocal arrangement

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8. Sarah Nelson in undertaking her interviews on the political views and self-perceptions of Protestant political, paramilitary and community groups (Belfast, January 1973 to June 1976) found a "lack of suspicion in Protestant areas about Government or army spies etc." (1984, p. 19). However, Nelson's Ph.D. (1979) does reveal several problems in approaching and interviewing members of the UVF.

has to be negotiated, which will inevitably break professional codes of ethical conduct. Such research is likely to attract the attention of the security forces. It is possible that information on a researcher in this field may be fed into the computer, and that he or she may be questioned by Special Branch and find their phone being tapped and letters opened (Lockwood, 1982, p. 221). Only the courageous, naive or insane researcher would actually want to descend into the sectarian abyss on this basis.

There are problems with, as a tactic, actually "publicly" endorsing sectarian values in the conduct of research. To be able to do this successfully an out-side researcher must not only have a considerable amount of prior knowledge but must also find a guide. Whilst inside researchers (those who are actually from the community being studied) do not face the same degree of danger, they face problems of a different sort. The researcher may be too close to the ground to be objective in analysis, and inside researchers may also be mistrusted by the community for their allegiance to outside agencies: "A Catholic research student doing research on Short Strand [a Catholic working-class area of Belfast] wanted to contribute to the community but he got no help and encountered difficulties in doing it. Nothing came of it and he jumped off a bridge" (academic researcher). There is also the problem, for the insider, that choosing to look at a problem may exacerbate it through increasing its visibility. Similarly he or she may reveal strategies that are of benefit to opposing social forces: "If I said their views are factually inaccurate I would be betraying the people I talked to. I've been sitting on my research for years. I don't know what to do with it. I'm apprehensive as I've got to live here. I don't want to get shot" (academic researcher).

In general, relating to the problem of objectivity, there is a need to sys-tematically draw out and recognise the problems that flow from the back-ground of the researcher in understanding minority groups (Protestants and Catholics). Are different things said to outsiders than are said to insiders? That the social location of the researcher may affect the research process at this level has been recognised and drawn out by Trew and McWhirter (1982), Lockwood (1982), McWhirter (1983), Jenkins (1984b) and Arthur (1987).

The problems facing research on the "Troubles" are shown in their starkest form in conflict resolution research as exemplified by the events surrounding the Northern Ireland Research Institute (NIRI) and the Stirling Workshop.

The NIRI, amongst other things, was engaged in trying to advance the radical idea of community policing in Republican areas of Belfast and Derry in the early 1970s (Boehringer, 1973a, 1973b). The Institute soon found itself being accused of operating as a front for British Intelligence. Roger Faligot in *Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland* (1983, *withdrawn*) noted, citing a *Republican News* article on "Counter-Insurgency in Andersonstown" (1973), that the researchers attached to the Institute were seen by the

Republican Movement to have counter-insurgency motives: they "favoured 'soft counter-insurgency', by way of penetrating popular structures and 'taming' the Republicans, or at least attempting to deny them the leadership of these structures" (Faligot, 1983, *withdrawn*, p. 136). These accusations were met with hostility by those he named or inferred: "His interpretation makes me very angry, he only looked at the conclusions, not at the process, our contacts were genuine . . . we were not in the pay of anyone. We were only saying what they wanted to say, we worked upwards" (academic researcher).

The earlier article in *Republican News* stated that: "they cleverly implanted the idea, making it seem as if it was coming from the group, that the area needed a 'community' police 'service' ". This article also attempted to tie the researchers into an "international network of spies" which feeds information to the British Army under the front of "peace research". The charges reached the *Sunday Times* (29/9/73). As a result of the *Republican News* article some of the researchers went into hiding, and some left Belfast for good soon afterwards. To some in the Republican Movement the question of whether or not any researcher works for British Intelligence is irrelevant: for even if they do not it is reasoned that they could be forced to reveal information.

The events surrounding the NIRI were compounded by the story of another research project being conducted at this time: the Stirling Workshop (Doob and Foltz, 1973; Alevy *et al.*, 1974; Boehringer *et al.*, 1974; Doob and Foltz, 1974). This was a nine day conference held in August 1972 with 56 participants (Protestant and Catholic community figures from Belfast — some belonging to "activist organizations") at Stirling University, Scotland. All participants were assured of confidentiality. The workshop co-ordinators used a team of five US social scientists using Tavistock and National Training Laboratory intervention techniques and the aim was rather loosely stated as being to further intercommunal co-operation "that could later be implemented back in Belfast" (Alevy *et al.*, 1974). The co-ordinators also employed two deputies, also American but based at QUB, to recruit the community figures.

The co-ordinators saw their position as one of being "neutral private outsiders" in which "we certainly could do no harm" (Doob and Foltz, 1973, p. 492). Yet the Workshop faced charges of being a CIA front (Doob and Foltz, 1974, p. 253) and an article appeared in the *Sunday News* with the title "Ulster 'conference' just a torture" (17/9/72) — the article commented on "startling allegations of mental torture and the use of brainwashing techniques". Here again the centre of controversy was over the intentions of those running the project — whose purpose did it serve? The organisers noted: "Again and again we were asked the blunt question: what motives did we have for organising the workshop, what were we getting out of it?" (Doob

and Foltz, 1974, p. 241). Beyond its controversial nature the impact of the Workshop was limited. In June 1973 Doob and Foltz returned to Belfast to assess the impact of the Workshop, but by then, as a result of mounting pressure, the two deputies had broken their association with the Workshop, refusing to hand over completed questionnaires (Boehringer *et al.*, 1974; Doob and Foltz, 1974).

Significantly those researchers who have touched most closely on para-military activity soon left Northern Ireland and are now working in England or Australia (in some cases, they were forced to leave). On the whole, even if many of their accounts need careful interpretation, journalists have been much more successful than social scientists in getting close to the paramilitaries — for example, Beresford (1987) and Clarke (1987).

V CONCLUSION

Despite the growth in output of social scientific research it is apparent from the above discussion that both the State and individual academic researchers are entrapped in major predicaments. The predicament for the State is most acute as it finds itself caught in a situation of having to preserve its limited legitimacy through constraining critical research whilst also finding itself unable to establish and act on an objective picture of the conflict in general and of disadvantage and discrimination in particular. The predicament for the individual academic researcher is that not only must the problem of objectivity be grappled with at the personal level (endeavouring to control for personal biases) but seemingly insurmountable problems are imposed from the societal level.[9] The problems originate from the lack of consensus for the State; for with the legitimacy of the State being contested the pursuit of objective research on the "Troubles" falls open to question — here objectivity cannot achieve the imposition of its implicitly assumed superior values. Simply put there is no agreement about the "facts" of the Northern Ireland situation, and as Jackson has remarked "facts . . . if they could be established, would give a starting point to a rational assessment of problems and the development of solutions" (Jackson, 1983, p. xi).

It might be reasoned that if only Protestants and Catholics could recognise the legitimacy of objective research then progress could be made. This is not

9. All this is not to say that relevant research on the "Troubles" is impossible; in particular, such research may serve an enlightening function (Bulmer, 1982) and have value to the international academic community (Whyte, 1983a).

the way the problem of objectivity is usually posed elsewhere (Weber, 1949). In Northern Ireland objectivity is a problem for society and not just the individual researcher.[10]

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10. Thus ironically objectivity may actually come to be employed as a reason for not researching the "Troubles": for how can such work be justified if it cannot be done objectively? Bernadette Devlin, as a student at Queen's, met such an objection: "In 1969 she had wanted to do her psychology thesis on police methods in minority communities and was met with the objection that she could not do such research in Northern Ireland because it would not be 'valid objective research'!" (Fields, 1980, p. 18, footnote).

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