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Young people and the legacies of conflict

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The question I'm addressing is what has the Northern Ireland conflict got to do with the challenges we face in addressing the needs, rights and opportunities of our young people today, especially those who are out of work and detached from education and training.

I'm going to tackle this by looking at what is being said locally about the legacies of the conflict and also by referring to some of the international discussion of the risk factors associated with armed conflict, peace processes and why they breakdown.

We have I believe two main narratives of how the conflict has affected Northern Ireland society. The first is a **narrative of normality**: apart from the period 1969 to 1976 which accounts for more than half of all the conflict deaths, 'the Troubles' did not disrupt the business cycle, the patterns of employment and unemployment, or the daily lives of the vast majority of people very much. As time went by, the affects were confined to smaller and smaller areas. The conflict had few consequences for, and little impact on, services, and generally people, including children, have coped well.

Secondly we have the **trauma narrative**: the idea that 'the troubles' affected everything. The whole society has been traumatised, brutalisation is common, resistance to change engrained, and depression and anxiety are widespread. It is only in recent years that the full effects are coming to light through the work of victims' groups, new demands on services and evidence of mass medication with anti-depressants, alcohol and prescription and non-prescription drugs. A public sector-dominated economy has grown up around the conflict with over-sized policing and prison sectors and generously financed health and education services. Social life remains chronically divided – with separate schooling and three-quarters of the population living in single religion neighbourhoods.

The trauma narrative has two main aspects – firstly, damage to individuals, both physical and psychological and secondly, impacts across a wide range of structures and institutions.

Two recent reports illustrate this well – the report by Robin Eames and Denis Bradley’s Consultative Group on the Past (Eames/Bradley Report, 2009); and Paul Nolan’s Peace Monitoring Report, published by the Community Relations Council in January of this year, based on research sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (Nolan, 2012). The Eames/Bradley Report is principally concerned with the needs and concerns of individual victims and survivors of the conflict, although there is a chapter devoted to the Impact on Society which includes brief sections on Socio-Economic Issues and the Impact on Young People. And here we find the idea (presented by a range of groups) that, “parents are passing on their prejudices and bitterness, wittingly or unwittingly. This results in ongoing sectarian division and even violence in society.” So here we have one pathway for why the conflict is of direct significance to post-conflict cohorts of young people – the intergenerational transmission of attitudes, beliefs, values, and indeed trauma. The Report concludes: “For young people one of the key messages of the conflict has been that life itself has little value. This is seen by some as a contributing factor to the high suicide rates now seen in Northern Ireland. The Group also heard of high rates of dependency on alcohol or drugs or both” (Eames/Bradley, 2009: 73). I’ll come back to suicide later. There are only fleeting references to the conflict’s impacts on the economy and labour market.

Not so, the Peace Monitoring Report, the first major systematic assessment of Peace coming some 14 years after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. What we have in *this* Report is an assessment of the interplay of political, economic and social factors, addressing the overarching question as to whether Northern Ireland is being transformed into a stable shared society or continuing to reproduce communal divisions with the threat of slipping back into conflict. Clearly, while we are enjoying a successful period of consociational devolved government, there seem to be major stumbling blocks in taking forward the recommendations of Eames/Bradley on how to deal with the past. As the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee put it, “We have reluctantly concluded that there is not enough cross-community consensus at present on many of the issues that the Consultative Group raised for the wide-ranging project that it recommended to succeed.” (Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, 2010)

Young people feature quite strongly in the Peace Monitoring Report as you might expect. We are a comparatively youthful society and with that comes a change in the

demographic breakdown of the Protestant and Catholic population. Among the over 60s, there are twice as many Protestants as Catholics. Below the age of 35, Catholics are in the majority. Catholics are now 59% of post primary school children. In the section on the Sense of Security the Report points out that over 45,000 (45,394) people were subject to police stop and search powers in 2010/11. Monitoring by age over a three month period in 2011 revealed that 40% of stops were of 18-25 year olds. "The degree of alienation amongst young people must be considerable" states the report (Nolan, 2012: 62). In terms of the labour market youth unemployment is slightly below the UK average and the proportion of 16-24 year olds not in employment education or training is "no better or worse than elsewhere in the UK" (DEL, 2010: 70).

Paul Nolan concludes that youth unemployment is potentially destabilizing. In so far as young people's frustrations with unemployment and social marginalization come to be violently expressed, he argues, they will probably take a different, and more sectarian, form if expressed in Northern Ireland. He writes "there is evidence of paramilitaries mobilising unemployed young people during the 'marching season', but the dynamic is more complex than that of youth acting as a reserve army for paramilitarism. Alienation from the police is at its highest in areas of high social disadvantage and the prevalence of anti-social behaviour is creating a market opportunity for those paramilitaries who wish to present themselves as 'community police'." (Nolan, 2012: 9)

I'll have more to say about young people and the Northern Ireland labour market in due course. But let's dwell for a moment on this triangle of economic marginalization, social division and violence in relation to young people. What the international literature tells us is that poverty, underdevelopment, and high levels of inequality, are all major risk factors for social disorder, and increasingly so in rich countries. As the OECD (2011: 17) report on income inequality states, "The social compact is starting to unravel in many countries. Young people who see no future for themselves feel increasingly disenfranchised. They have now been joined by protesters who believe that they are bearing the brunt of a crisis for which they have no responsibility, while people on high incomes appear to have been spared... popular discontent is spreading rapidly... uncertainty and inequality-related issues have reached the middle classes in many societies."

Armed conflict is qualitatively different. Some experts argue that most contemporary within-country *armed* conflicts are rooted in ethno-nationalism. They are about

passion and politics rather than conflicts of material interests (Horowitz, 2000; Connor, 1994). However, the evidence is that inequalities, poverty and underdevelopment are also risk factors for *armed* conflicts but here's the difference: in-country armed conflicts are much more likely when economic marginalization is combined with significant horizontal inequalities based on ethnic, religious, language, national or regional differences. If government, including the forces of law and order, lacks legitimacy, is seen as one-sided or handles social and economic grievances badly, then the risks are even greater. Some research emphasizes the lack of economic roles for young men as a particularly important motivation to join rebel movements, gaining power and status in the process (World Bank, 2011; Hillyard et al (2007)

Of course it takes the passion of a political cause and the leadership and organization of what the literature calls “conflict entrepreneurs” to spark and sustain armed conflicts. Likewise, the breakdown in peace agreements (a more common outcome than successful peace processes), rests on political leaders (“spoilers”) and their followers losing faith in reform, political institutions, delays in the delivery of social justice, security and so on. But it is the *combination* of political and socio-economic exclusion, that can be used to support narratives of social injustice and further rounds of conflict. Put another way (World Bank 2011: 18):

‘Unemployment, corruption, and exclusion increase the risks of violence—and legitimate institutions and governance that give everyone a stake in (national) prosperity are the immune system that protects from different types of violence.

Citizen security is a pre-eminent goal in fragile situations, underpinned by justice and jobs.’

Ten years ago, we carried out a survey on poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland from which we were able to associate direct experience of conflict with socio-economic circumstances (Hillyard, et al 2003).¹ Low living standards were significantly related to heavy experience of conflict in the past. Those who had experienced two or more of the four types of violence recorded by the survey had poverty rates of 43% (51% in the case of Catholics) significantly higher than the overall rate of 29%. They were disproportionately concentrated in social housing, in the 45–54 year age group, and in single households. This survey is being repeated now as I speak and we will shortly be able to measure how much progress or otherwise has been made on mitigating this relationship between socio-economic circumstances and conflict experience, and indeed what evidence we can shed on

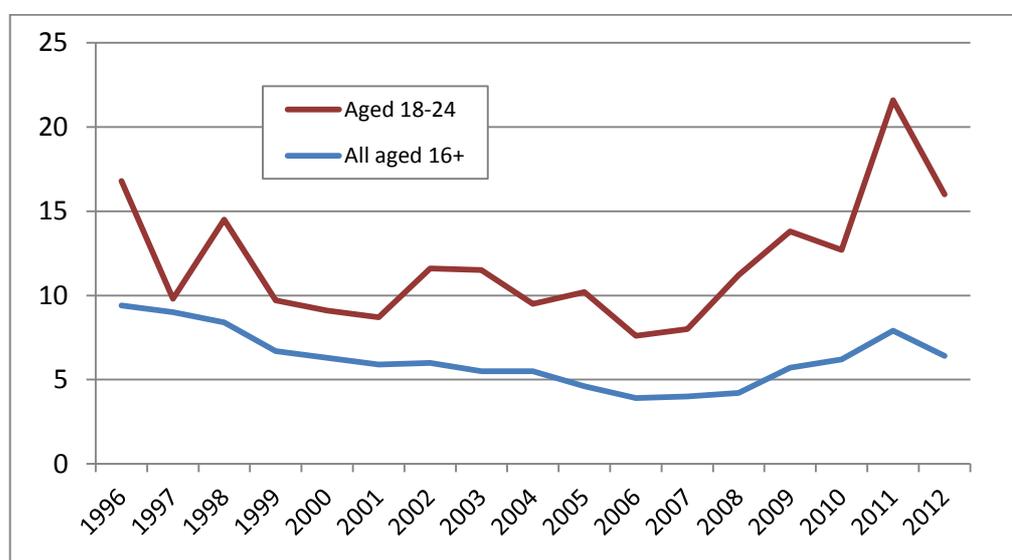
¹ This survey is currently being replicated as part of the Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK project, funded by the economic and Social Research Council. See www.poverty.ac.uk

the argument around intergenerational effects.

In short there is compelling international evidence that our high level priorities need to be focused on reducing income inequalities, on job opportunities and economic security, on the economic inclusion of young people and of course on the political legitimacy of government and our state institutions, especially those charged with the maintenance of law and order.

So let's turn to the economic and social inclusion of young people and underline the challenges we face.

Figure 1: Northern Ireland Unemployment Rates by Age



The first point is well-known: 18-24 year olds (represented by the top line) have a well-above average unemployment rate and their position has worsened in the current recession. It's a similar picture south of the border (though here we are showing 20-24 year olds compared to 35-44 year olds since 1998). The effects of the recession are more pronounced (Figure 2).

Figure 3 looks at *employment* rates by age group using labour force survey data from 1995 to the present. It illustrates two things – first that there is a steady trend upwards in the employment rate of the core working age group 25-49 year olds and a downwards trend for the younger 18-24 year old group. So the employment experience by age is diverging and it's a long-term trend. The second thing we can see is that the post-2007 recession has had a much heavier impact on the younger group.

Figure 2: Republic of Ireland Unemployment Rates by Age (Jan-Mar 1998 to Oct-Dec 2011)

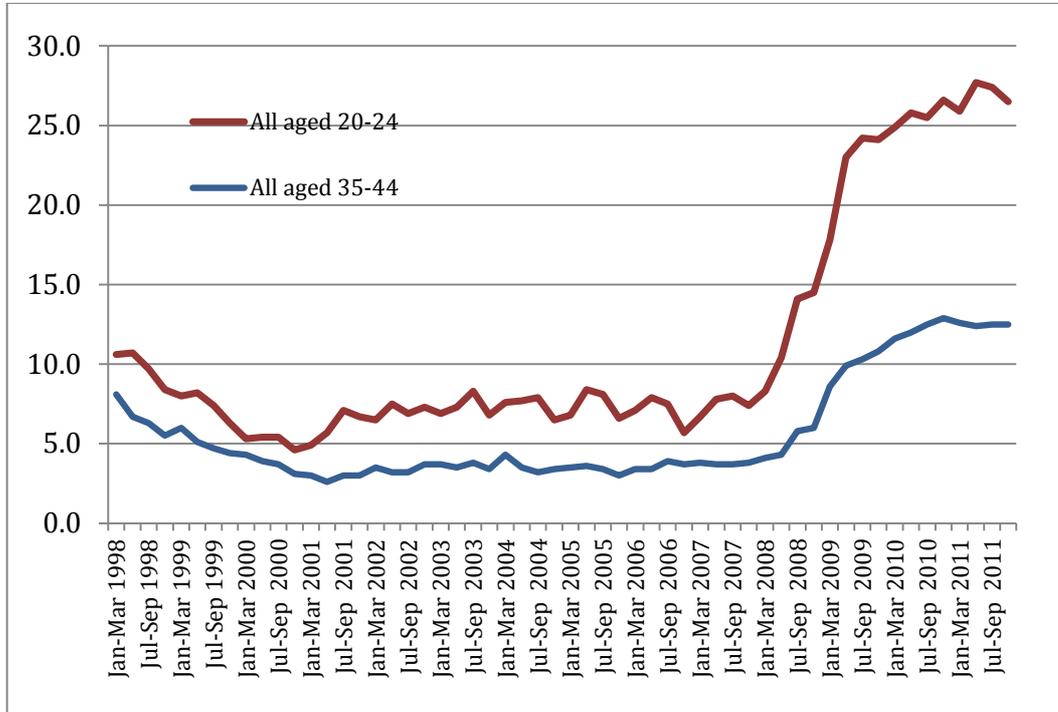
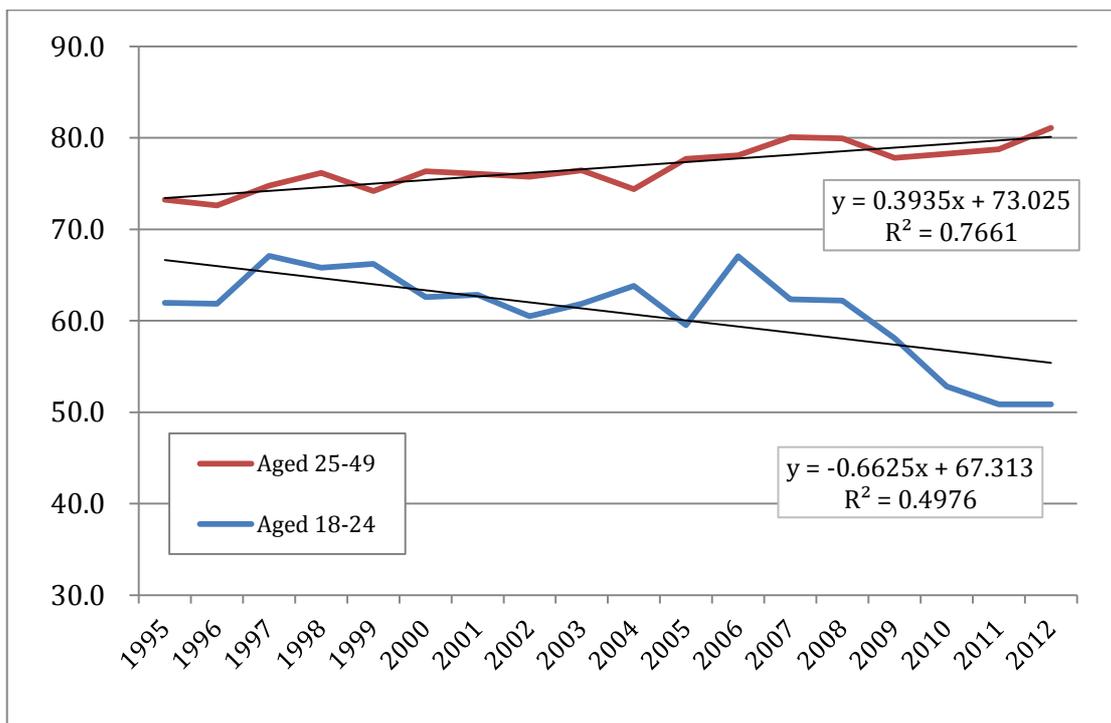


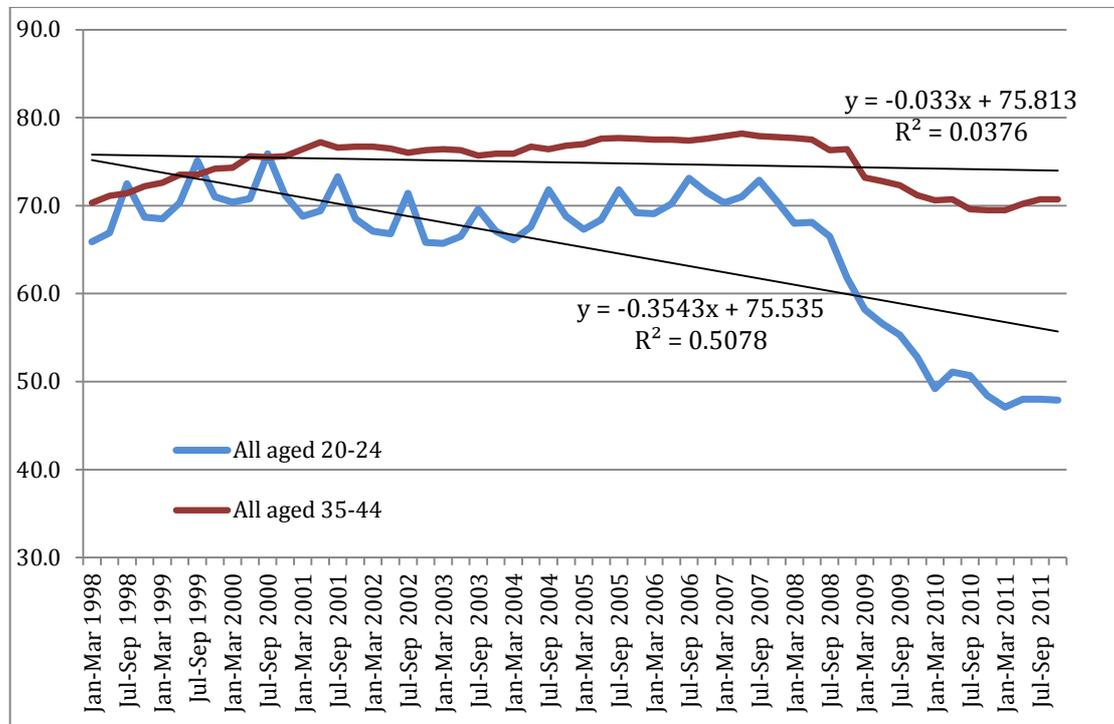
Figure 3: Northern Ireland Employment Rates by Age (16+ basis)



Source: LFS, Nov-Jan quarter

Figure 4 shows the picture for the South though not strictly comparable. We can see some divergence in the early 2000s and the clear and more serious impact of the recession. The employment rate for 20-24 year olds in the Irish Republic dropped by 23 percentage points (from 72% to 49%) between 2007 and 2011. For 18-24 year olds in N Ireland the drop over the same period was 11 percentage points, down to a slightly higher level of 51%.

Figure 4: Republic of Ireland Employment Rates by Age (15-64)



Focusing on the impact of the recession, we can see (Table 1) that between 2007 and now, the 50+ age group's employment rate has actually risen by 2.8 percentage points. The 25-49 age group took a bit of a hit but are now 1 percentage point ahead of where they were in 2007. The contrast with the younger age group is striking. I've added in the figures for men and women as the difference here is also quite marked. This is before the full effects of 14,000 job losses for women (and 4,800 for men) from the public sector kick in over the next two years.

Table 1: Recession and employment rates, Northern Ireland

Employment Rates (Nov-Jan Q, 16+) %	Age			Gender	
	18-24	25-49	50+	Men	Women
2007	62.4	80.1	33.7	65.1	50.9
2008	62.2	79.9	33.7	64.7	50.9
2009	58.1	77.8	32.6	61.4	50.0
2010	52.8	78.3	34.3	60.7	50.3
2011	50.8	78.7	34.1	60.2	50.3
2012	50.9	81.1	36.5	62.0	52.2
Change 2007-2012	- 11.5	+ 1.0	+ 2.8	- 3.1	+ 1.3

Table 2: Type of employment growth/decline, Northern Ireland

1998 to 2011			
% change	Total employment	Self-employment	Part-time employment
Men	+ 5.7	+ 18.5	+ 18.8
Women	+ 19.5	+ 64.7	+ 28.8
All	+ 11.9	+ 25.5	+ 25.7
2008 to 2011			
Men	- 4.0	+ 5.5	+ 26.7
Women	+ 1.4	+ 21.7	- 5.0
All	- 1.4	+ 7.9	- 0.6

The other trend we have to be mindful of is the increasing *precariousness* of employment. Taking the post-Agreement period and the current recession years, Table 2 shows the type of employment growth or decline. Since 1998, part-time employment and self-employment have grown much faster than overall employment. During the recession the total number of men employed declined by 4% yet the total number of men in part-time employment went up by 26.7%.

Table 3 shows what this looks like in numbers. The last column expresses how much of the net total employment change can be attributed to self-employment and part-time employment.

Table 3: Type of employment growth/decline, Northern Ireland

1998 to 2011				
<i>number</i>	A Total employment	B Self- employment	C Part-time employment	B + C as share of A
Men	+ 22,000	+ 15,000	+ 6,000	96%
Women	+ 59,000	+ 10,000	+ 30,000	68%
All	+ 81,000	+ 25,000	+ 36,000	75%
2008 to 2011				
Men	- 17,000	+ 5,000	+ 8,000	177%
Women	+ 5,000	+ 5,000	- 7,000	29%
All	- 11,000*	+ 9,000*	0*	182%

Two other points. We have some published data from the LFS Religion Report from which we can see the impact of the recession by community background. Table 4 shows that Protestant employment has declined slightly but the numbers unemployed have more than doubled (up 108% to 2010). Catholic employment has declined by 4% while the number unemployed rose by 60%.

Table 4: Recession and employment, community background

Numbers	Protestant		Catholic	
	In employment	Unemployed	In employment	Unemployed
2007	372,000	12,000	308,000	18,000
2008	374,000	13,000	313,000	16,000
2009	367,000	20,000	308,000	29,000
2010	371,000	25,000	295,000	29,000
Change 2007-2010	- 1,000	+ 13,000	- 13,000	+ 11,000
Percentage change	- 0.3	+ 108.3	- 4.2	+ 61.1

The difference in Catholic and Protestant unemployment rates – the focal point of fair employment politics over three decades – is shown in Figure 5. Figure 6 compares the unemployment rate Catholic/Protestant ratios for men, women and both sexes. The twenty year trend is that the ratios are falling. For the age group 16-25 years the unemployment rate for Catholics and Protestants is the same. For those 26 and over, the Catholic/Protestant unemployment rate ratio is 1.8 (2010).

Figure 5: Unemployment rates by community background

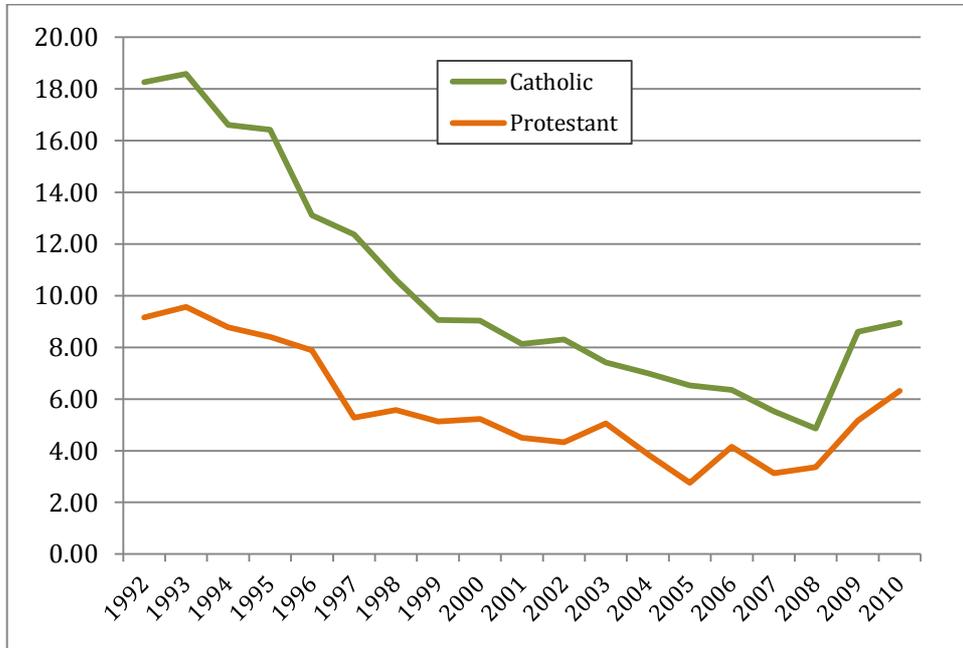
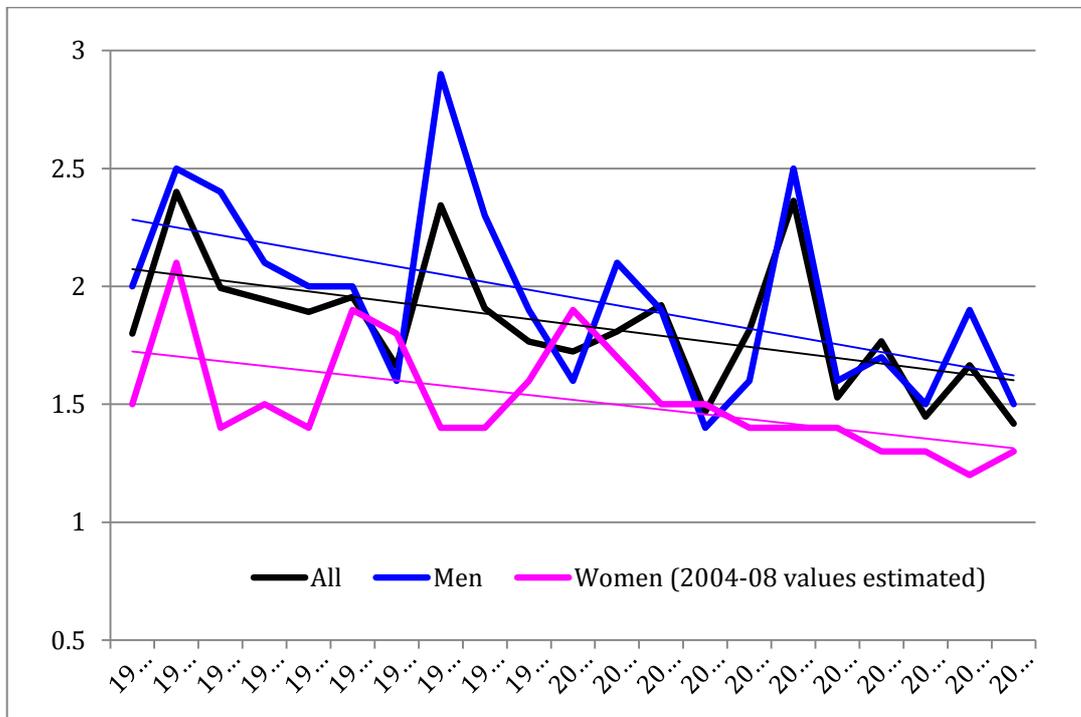
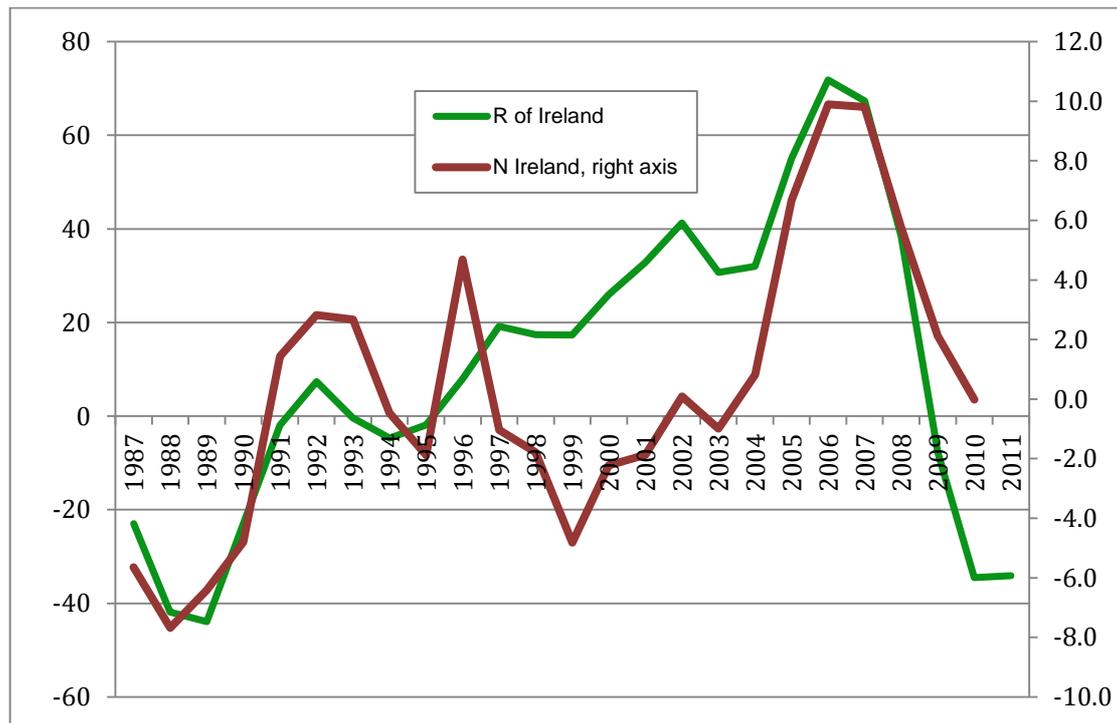


Figure 6: Catholic/Protestant unemployment rate ratios by gender



Finally it is important to consider migration for its contribution to labour supply and unemployment. This is a politically sensitive issue in Ireland given that high unemployment is historically associated with periods of high net emigration. In the 1960s for example net emigration was running at 21,000 people per year and in the last half of the 1980s, at 33,000 per year (Blanchflower and Shadforth, 2009).

Figure 7: Net migration, Ireland North and South (000s)



I said I would come back to the issue of sadness and suicide and I want to use this issue to draw to a conclusion. There are clear indications from the data on suicides and parasuicide *presentations* at hospitals that the levels of psychic distress in Northern Ireland have risen dramatically in the period of the peace. This is something of a paradox since we have just learnt that N Ireland is the happiest region of the UK.

The graph in Figure 8 shows suicide rates in Northern Ireland over the last forty years for men, women and all persons. The overall rate almost doubled between 1997 and 2008. For men it rose from 13 suicides per 100,000 of the population in 1997 to 24 per 100,000 by 2008. And it is still rising. Now, it is generally believed that this suicide increase belongs to the young and it is true that the burden of recorded suicide has shifted from older to younger people. But having studied 40 years of data

on age, gender and cause of death my conclusion is that the cohort of children and young adults who grew up in the worst years of violence between 1969 and 1977/8 now have the highest suicide rates and the most rapidly increasing rates out of all age groups. The highest suicide rate (age standardized) currently is for men aged 35-44 (38.9) followed closely by the 25-34 and 45-54 age groups (37.1 and 35.5 respectively). The highest rates do not belong to the youngest groups.

Figure 8: Suicide rates in Northern Ireland, 1967 to 2008.

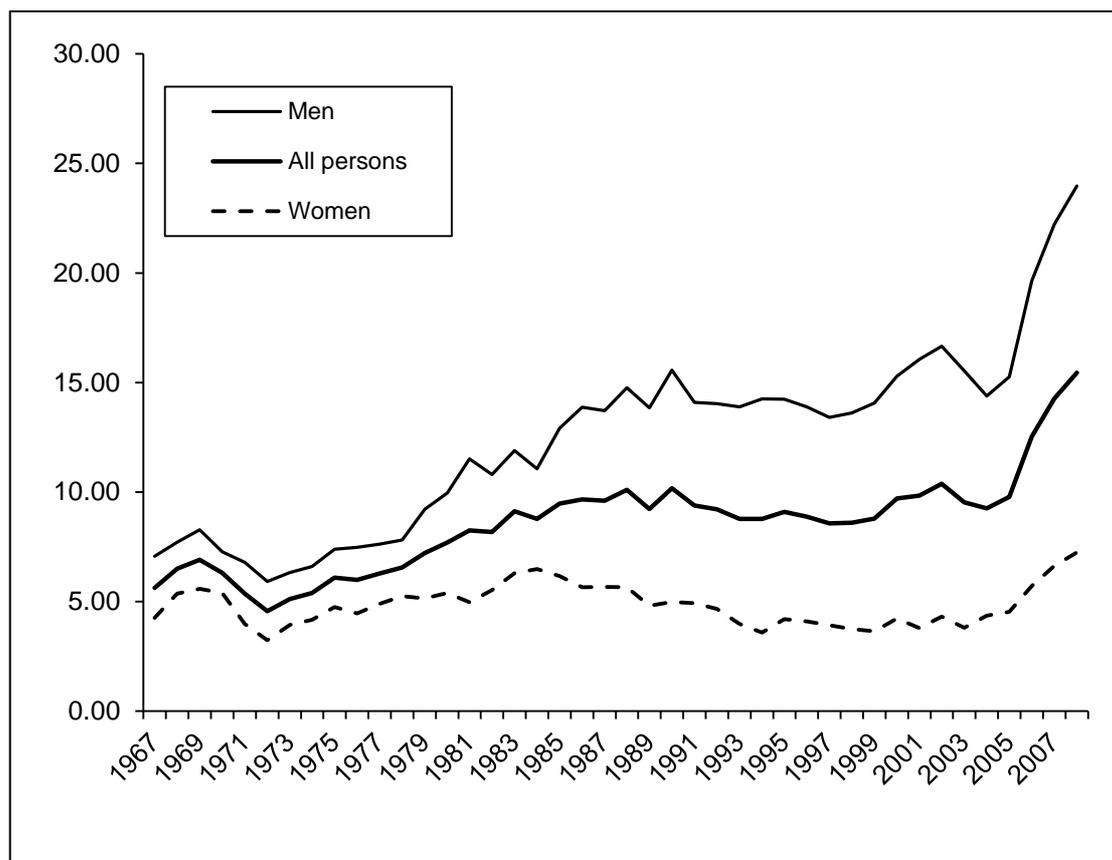


Table 5: Self-harming incident rates, hospital presentations, 2007 and 2008, per 100,000 population

	Males	Females	Total
Derry CC	604	620	611
Limerick	505	523	529
Manchester	460	587	527
Cork	430	359	394
Galway	361	385	361
Dublin	329	375	352
Waterford	324	345	335
Leeds	291	374	333
Oxford	285	342	314

Source: NI Registry of Deliberate Self-Harm, Two Year Report (2010)

Other signs of distress come from data on self-harming incidents recorded at hospitals in various parts of Ireland and England – all recorded using the same protocol (Table 5). In Derry, 15-19 year old females had a rate of self-harm hospital presentations of 1,341 per 100,000 – for 20-24 year old males the figure was 1,143, double the overall rates you see in the chart (the data is for the calendar years 2007 and 2008; more recent data is not available). Alcohol consumption is associated with around two-thirds of these presentations in the N Ireland case. And we know that alcohol consumption has risen dramatically since the 1990s, particularly in the 18-24 and 25-44 age groups: the proportion of men drinking more than the defined safe limit rose to 44 per cent by 2006/7 for 18-24 year olds. For women aged 18-24, 11 per cent were drinking over the safe limit in 1990/1 and 29 percent by 2006/7 (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009).

These indicators may seem a long way from the growing employment crisis facing younger people but I don't think they are. Those age groups with the highest suicide rates belong to the generations of people who grew up in the conflict and who experienced no other social context until the late 1990s (Tomlinson, 2012). They are the people who were the most acculturated to division and conflict, and to violence. In the period of peace, externalised expressions of violence and cultures of authoritarianism have gradually subsided and to some extent violence has become internalised. It is now much less socially and politically acceptable to externalise hatred or aggression towards the other community, so political and social frustrations are internalised instead. At present our young people are responding to the social crisis they face with the labour market, not through mass political protest or social disorder, but through private solutions (including emigration), including self-destructive tendencies. The more that young people are excluded from social and economic security, the more we will reap the consequences both as private troubles with public consequences, and as risks to the legitimacy of our political and public institutions. Enduring peace rests on the full inclusion of young people in the future of this society.

I said earlier that our high level priorities need to be focused on reducing income inequalities, on job opportunities and economic security. From the standpoint of Northern Ireland we are somewhat limited in what we can do to shape these agendas. The Executive is constrained by the consequences of the application of the Barnett formula and there appears to be little appetite for challenging this. Instead the Secretary of State is running with an agenda of rebalancing the N Ireland economy

by reducing the public sector and growing the private sector through a radical cut in Corporation Tax (Tomlinson and Kelly, 2011). The framework of economic and social policy established by the Coalition Government is in most respects deepening the unemployment problem and the precariousness of work. It is doing nothing to rebalance the British economy such as by reducing the financialisation of the economy relative to services and manufacturing; or changing the regional dominance of the South East of England; or revaluing sectoral growth in manufacturing, the knowledge economy, education and cultural industries; or gender proofing policies to rebalance the economic roles of men and women; or shifting business practice and accounting towards reduced or zero carbon emissions; and, perhaps the biggest challenge of all, it is doing little to rebalance the rewards for work as between the richest and the lowest paid.

One of the first acts of the Coalition was to set aside the ten year Investment Strategy which cemented the return to devolved government in 2007. The Strategy was explicitly described as a peace-building plan involving economic, social and environmental goals. It was designed to address the lack of investment in N. Ireland's infrastructure over many decades and the social goals of promoting 'tolerance, inclusion, equality of opportunity and the desirability of good relations', promoting 'regional balance in future development' and tackling areas of social disadvantage. The aim was to procure capital projects in order to, quote "maximise the social and employment opportunities for all our people, addressing existing patterns of socioeconomic disadvantage and using prosperity to tackle poverty." The Investment Strategy was the outworking of the St Andrews Agreement, Annex C of which stated:

"The (British and Irish) Governments are committed to working with all the parties to establish a platform for long-term economic stability and reform necessary for a newly restored Executive. In the context of restoration of the institutions, the Governments remain committed to ensuring the Executive has the capacity to... make the long-term capital investments to underpin the economic transformation of Northern Ireland, as well as bringing long-term benefits for the island as a whole"

What has happened instead is that the Coalition has removed at least £4.5 billion from the Investment Strategy capital spending programme. It is further depressing demand by removing £600m from welfare benefits by 2014-15. In an economy which is 70% reliant on the public sector, the Treasury is in the process of removing 11.3% of spending (2014-15 relative to 2010-11). We are in the process of losing 38,000 jobs, half of which will come from the public sector.

Perhaps the most polarizing aspect of the Coalition's approach is the rhetorical shift from the problems facing young people such as the lack of work, and towards the problem *with* young people whether they be described as unwilling to work, lacking the skills and capacities needed to be competitive in the labour market, described as "feral youth", or "sofa surfers". This at least is one thing we can control: treating young people with respect as the future of this society and involving them at every opportunity in shaping that future.

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