ECPR Joint Sessions
Grenoble, April 2001
Workshop on Identity Politics

Identity, Difference and
the Struggle for Recognition

Simon Thompson
University of the West of England

Faculty of Economics and Social Science
University of the West of England
Frenchay, Bristol, BS16 1QY, UK

simon.thompson@uwe.ac.uk
Introduction

The central themes of this workshop are the politics of identity and difference, at the levels of both the individual subject and the collectivity, and from the perspectives of both the state and civil society. The starting point of this paper is the claim that the idea of recognition offers an invaluable means of exploring these themes. First, recognition plays a significant role in the formation of both the individual subject and the collectivity. Individual identity is formed and sustained by ongoing processes of recognition from significant others; and a robust collective identity is one that enjoys recognition from other esteemed groups. Second, recognition is useful when exploring the character of both top-down and bottom-up processes of identity formation. It is an invaluable element of the description of groups struggling for the acknowledgement of their identities; and it also a key to understanding state policies that seek to give due weight to the differences between groups within the polity. It can be argued, then, that recognition lies at the heart of the politics of identity and difference.

In this paper, I defend these general claims about the usefulness of the idea of recognition for understanding of what Bhikhu Parekh calls the politics of 'identity-related differences' (2000: 1) by focusing on one specific case. One way of describing Northern Ireland is as a society marked by deep divisions between two major groups with very different and conflicting senses of identity. Whilst it is the case that in Northern Ireland, 'religious affiliation, ethnic identity, national identity and territorial allegiance are all intertwined in a complex way' (Hayes and McAllister 1999: 37), it is possible to say the majority of citizens fall into one of two blocs. Most are either unionist, Protestant and British or nationalist, Catholic and Irish. The political

1 8 out of 10 Protestants regard themselves as British; over 70% are unionists. 7 out of 10 British-identifiers are unionists; over 90% of British-identifiers and self-declared unionists want to maintain the union with Britain. Just under two thirds of Catholics regard themselves as Irish; two thirds are nationalists. Three quarters of Irish-identifiers are nationalists; over two thirds of Irish-identifiers and self-declared nationalists want a reunited Ireland (Hayes and McAllister 1999: 37-40).
significance of these identities has grown steadily throughout the latest phase of conflict. As Paul Arthur puts it, the civil rights campaign of the late 1960s, which precipitated the present 'troubles', focused at first on issues of 'participation' and 'distribution', but 'When these could not be delivered speedily enough the crisis became a more fundamental one of identity and legitimacy' (1996: 16-17). More recently, and certainly over the last decade or so, the British and Irish states have responded to these demands by offering a political settlement that would adequately acknowledge these identities. The Belfast Agreement of 1998 is arguably the most important statement of this strategy. As Brendan O’Leary says: 'The Agreement is based on multiple forms of recognition'. These include the Irish Republic's recognition of 'Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom', the United Kingdom's recognition of 'the right of the people of Ireland to exercise their national self-determination', unionists' recognition of 'nationalists as nationalists' and nationalists' recognition of 'unionists as unionists' (1999: 90). In my terms, then, the politics of Northern Ireland is characterised by both bottom-up struggles for the recognition of identity originating in civil society, and also by top-down state policies that aim to give appropriate acknowledgement to the relevant groups.

In order to make this a manageable topic, I focus on just one aspect of the politics of recognition in Northern Ireland. This is the idea of 'parity of esteem' that forms a keystone of the Belfast Agreement. Although it is certainly not without its critics, the idea that the two major communities or traditions should be given equal consideration or concern is now a commonplace in Northern Irish politics. The aim of this paper, then, is to try to understand what is meant by parity of esteem, to consider the criticisms that have been made of it, and to ask whether it is possible to salvage a defensible version of the idea from this critique. The argument proceeds as follows. First, I offer a brief genealogy of the idea of parity of esteem, tracing its origins, development and extension into broader political debate. Second, I show how it was received by the various interested parties in Northern Ireland, and what criticisms they made of it. Third, I begin to reconstruct the idea by exploring in some detail Norman Porter's advocacy of the rival concept of 'due recognition' (1998). Fourth, I argue that parity of esteem and due recognition are in fact complementary rather than alternative principles. While the former describes a vertical relationship between state and citizen, the latter depicts a horizontal relationship between citizens themselves. Fifth,
I conclude that, by showing how there can be a productive interaction between these two principles, it is possible to sketch the outlines of a defensible and useful politics of recognition in Northern Ireland.

The Genealogy of an Idea

It is possible to trace the idea of parity of esteem back to at least 1992 when it was used by the Opsahl Commission in its report on Northern Ireland. The report talked of 'the formal embodiment in political institutions of the concepts of equality of treatment and parity of esteem' (1993: 27). It suggested that such parity should be 'between the two communities' and it emphasised 'that if this parity of esteem is to be achieved, the legal recognition of Irish nationalism should not mean the diminution of “Britishness” for unionists' (1993: 113). In the following year, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Sir Patrick Mayhew, said that 'each of the main components of the community will need to be given recognition by the other, and in any settlement each must be accorded parity of esteem, the validity of its tradition receiving unqualified recognition' (quoted in Hennessey and Wilson 1997: section 3).

In its earliest uses, then, the principle of parity of esteem was intended to apply to the nationalist and unionist communities, and was said to involve some element of recognition of the traditions of those two groups.

---

2 I have not been able to find a reference to parity of esteem before 1992, the year in which the Opsahl Commission received most of its submissions. The closest ancestor is a reference to 'equal esteem' in the report of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights of 1990. Paragraph 12.61 reads: 'The Commission has concluded that more might be done to guarantee the equal treatment and esteem of both traditions within Northern Ireland'.

3 I put aside an alternative conception of parity of esteem which the Opsahl Commission offered, namely 'the principle that each community has an equal voice in making and executing the laws or a veto on their execution, and equally shares administrative authority' (Pollak 1993: 112), an idea it referred to as 'absolute parity of esteem' (1993: 123n2).
Shortly after this, the principle of parity of esteem found its way into official
government statements of principle and policy. The Framework Documents of 1995
issued jointly by the British and Irish governments referred to the idea several times.
The fullest statement is found in paragraph 10 of *A New Framework for Agreement*:
'any new political arrangements must be based on full respect, and protection and
expression of, the rights and identities of both traditions in Ireland and even-handedly
afford both communities in Northern Ireland parity of esteem and treatment, including
equality of opportunity and advantage'. Of the number of occurrences of the phrase
in the Belfast Agreement of 1998, one is worth quoting in full. Article 1 of the
Agreement includes the statement that the British and Irish Governments

affirm that whatever choice is freely exercised by a majority of the people of
Northern Ireland, the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction
there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people
in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the
principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural
rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem
and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos and aspirations of both
communities.

In both of these documents, the principle of parity of esteem is placed alongside a
number of other principles, including equality of opportunity, equality of rights, and
freedom from discrimination. Although the relationships between these various
principles are not always consistent or clear, it seems safe to says that, while the
various principles of equality are meant to apply to individual citizens, parity of
esteem itself is intended to apply to the two traditions or communities in Northern
Ireland.

In recent years – since around 1996 or 1997 – the idea of parity of esteem has also
entered the general vocabulary of political debate in Northern Ireland. Some of the
ways in which the idea has been used are specific applications or natural extensions of

---

4 This and the previous paragraph is indebted to the report of The Faith and Politics
Group (1997).
the original concept. For example, *The Irish News* of 26 January 1996 reported that an SDLP delegation to Dublin was 'putting forward ideas aimed at promoting parity of esteem and official status for the Irish language in Northern Ireland'. On March 3, 1998, *The Irish Times* ran an opinion column in which Brian Kennaway of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland argued that 'If the 1798 commemorations are not to degenerate into blatant sectarianism there must be “parity of esteem” in remembering those who were involved'. In these two cases, and in many others, the principle of parity of esteem has been taken up by a variety of political actors in the nationalist and unionist communities. It has been deployed in disputes not just about the status of the Irish language and the character of commemorations, but also about routing of parades and marches, the public uses of flags and symbols, the composition and character of the police and security forces, and so on. (Whether it has actually been illuminating in these disputes, or has proved useful as a guide to practical policy, is one of the questions addressed in the rest of this paper.)

There are, however, other uses of parity of esteem that show how far the idea has been stretched beyond its original domain. Consider a couple of examples. On 15 July 1997 *The Irish News* reported that 'Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA) president PA Mag Lochlainn urged MPs to ensure “parity of esteem” for homosexuals by backing the proposed vote on lowering the age of consent from 18 to 16'. In the following year, *The Irish Times* of February 12 reported as follows: 'The new chairman of the Higher Education Authority, Dr Don Thornhill, has said there must be “parity of esteem” between the universities and the institutes of technology'. In these cases, parity of esteem no longer refers to the equal consideration to be given to the nationalist and unionist communities. Instead it refers in the first case to equal rights for individual members of what could be called different sexual communities, and in the second case to the equal treatment of different types of educational institution. These examples illustrate how widely the idea of parity of esteem is now deployed in Northern Irish political debate.

Yet other interpretations of parity of esteem seem to be deliberately intended to rob it of its original meaning. For example, according to Hennessey and Wilson, when Bob McCartney, the leader of the United Kingdom Unionist Party, first 'heard the term “parity of esteem” he could not understand what all the controversy was about, since
he considered himself a pluralist, and he believed in parity of esteem for every individual'. In his own words he maintains that it means that 'every citizen, regardless of his own specific political aspirations or ambitions, should be entitled within the state to have all the same rights as everybody else and that should include liberty to express his own cultural and ethnic preferences' (quoted in Hennessey and Wilson 1997: section 4). This reading of parity of esteem reduces it to equality of individual rights – albeit including a right to cultural expression. Such an interpretation, based entirely on a notion of individual entitlement, evacuates parity of esteem of any useful distinctive meaning. In this version it contains nothing that is not already present in notions of equal rights or equal treatment. I would suggest that this final interpretation is deliberatively designed to try to silence the claim to which parity of esteem is intended to give voice – namely, the claim that the two major communities in Northern Ireland should enjoy some measure of equal consideration.

Reception and Criticism

By examining the British and Irish governments' statements of principle and policy referred to in the previous section, it is possible to see what part the idea of parity of esteem is intended to play in the process of peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. In the short term, parity of esteem offers the two communities a deal with which it is hoped that both of them can live. And in the longer term, it promises a peaceful and prosperous society in which both of the major communities can feel that they belong. As Ruane and Todd put it, the Agreement is in the first place a 'political deal' which recognises the present balance of power between the two communities and offers them a means for peaceful co-existence. At the same time, it also holds out the possibility of a 'transformative social process' which would dissolve the underlying conditions of conflict (1999b: 16-17). As a key-stone of the Agreement, the principle of parity of esteem has helped to shape the practical arrangements established by the Northern Ireland Act of 1998. These take the form of a devolved consociational assembly at Stormont, linked to bodies connecting Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic (the North-South Ministerial Council) and Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK (the East-West Council), and also including a number of organisations within Northern Ireland whose remit is to oversee specific parts of the
In 1998 the majority of the people of Northern Ireland voted in favour of the political arrangements specified in the Belfast Agreement (71%). A strong majority of Catholics supported its proposals (99%), but only a narrow majority of Protestants did so (51%). In light of this degree of support for the Agreement, and also given the widespread use of the idea of parity of esteem in Northern Irish political discourse, it may be reasonable to suppose that a majority of citizens also support the principle of parity itself. But it certainly has its critics. Some of these want to reject the idea outright, and have no interest in a politics of recognition. Others, closer to my own view, believe that a politics of recognition is appropriate for Northern Ireland, but they want nevertheless to modify or replace the principle of parity. In this section, I look at some representatives from the first group of critics. But I then put most of their criticisms aside. Starting in this paper from the premise that a politics of recognition is the appropriate form of political practice for Northern Ireland, I focus in the next section on Norman Porter's sympathetic critique of parity of esteem and his proposal to replace it with what he calls 'due recognition'.

First of all, there are members of the unionist and nationalist camps who reject the principle of parity of esteem. Anti-Agreement unionists (and loyalists) argue, amongst other things, that parity of esteem, by giving equal recognition to what is often deliberately referred to as the 'nationalist minority', paves the way toward a united Ireland. For example, Jeffrey Donaldson, of the Ulster Unionist Party, sees parity of esteem as 'a political ruse for arguing for the creation of all-Ireland or north-south institutions, the purpose of which would not be to encapsulate the Irish dimension so much as to create a dynamic towards the ultimate creation of some sort of political entity that embraces the whole of the island' (quoted in Hennessey and Wilson 1997: section 4). These critics believe that the public culture of Northern

5 For general overviews of the new political arrangements see, for example, O'Leary (1999), Ruane and Todd (1999a), Wilford (2001).

6 For more details on these figures, see Hayes and McAllister (1999).
Ireland should remain overwhelmingly British, although they support a general right to cultural expression in the private sphere.

In sharp contrast, anti-Agreement nationalists (and republicans) contend that the offer of parity of esteem is simply an insult to them and their political aspirations. To take an extreme case, Bernadette Sands McKevitt, the sister of the dead hunger-striker, Bobby Sands, condemns 'the in-phrases, nice cosy terms like “equal citizenship” and “parity of esteem”, saying that 'the last two IRA volunteers to die on active service – Ed O'Brien and Diarmuid O'Neill – did not die for parity of esteem and equal citizenship. They died for freedom'. She roundly declares that 'The campaign was for an end to British rule, not a rejuvenated partition” (The Irish Times, January 8, 1998).

Other republicans are less hostile to parity of esteem, but nevertheless want to push the principle to a point at which it appears to threaten the continuing existence of Northern Ireland itself. Here, for example, is a part of Gerry Adams' Address to Sinn Féin's Ard Fheis in 1996: 'The British need to remove all anti-nationalist symbols and appearances from the Six-County statelet by providing "parity of esteem" in that area and by eliminating as far as possible all obvious and visible difference between there and the rest of the island of Ireland'. Adams appears to be calling for strict equality of recognition in the public sphere of Northern Ireland, but in the same breath he seems to want something rather different - namely, the elimination of any cultural differences between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Other critics come from various parts of the liberal camp. Some believe there is simply no need to try to achieve parity of esteem. Here, for example, is 'An Englishman on the Union':

There are two distinct traditions in the island of Ireland. Two cultures, each of which (rightly or wrongly) finds the other alien. But is that really so wrong? People are different and they should be allowed their differences as long as they don't impinge adversely on others… If people of one culture don't wish to mix with peoples of other cultures – fine (Finney 1995: 57).

On this view, suggestive in particular of an early modern liberalism, cultural separatism and mutual toleration are all that is needed to secure political peace. Other
liberals, of a more contemporary persuasion, would share the premise that it is
unnecessary to bring the two communities together and evaluate them on the same
terms. They are likely to argue that it is possible to have a neutral public sphere
alongside a diverse private sphere. But they would argue this from a more moral and
less prudential standpoint; for example, Ronald Dworkin would contend that such a
set-up shows 'equal concern and respect' for all citizens (1985: 198). The decision in
1996 for Queen's University in Belfast not to play the national anthem at graduation
ceremonies is one example of this policy which seeks to create a neutral public
sphere.

A rather different view is taken by civic republicans of various stripes who in general
are committed to a politics of civic engagement, democratic dialogue and openness to
the other. They believe that we should try to do more than merely allow different
communities a right to express their culture in the private sphere. They believe that it
is possible to create a single public culture capable of encompassing the traditions of
both communities. Here examples could include shared marches and parades or even
a new flag combining elements of the Union flag and the Irish tricolour. Jürgen
Habermas's work on the idea of post-national identity and on the possibility of a civic
rather than cultural conception of nationality could be seen as parts of a closely
related project (e.g. Habermas 1992).

Finally there are those critics who focus on the fact that parity of esteem is meant to
be applied to the two major 'communities' or 'traditions' in Northern Ireland. Various
problems are identified with this approach. First, it neglect other traditions. These
include the so-called 'third' tradition of liberal pluralism or democracy. It is pointed
out that about a third of the citizens of Northern Ireland refuse to identify themselves
as either unionist or nationalist. It also overlooks other ethnic communities living in
the province. It is sometimes observed, for example, that there are more Chinese first
language users in Northern Ireland than there are Irish speakers. Second, this
approach accepts the myths that these communities promulgate about their own
character. In doing so it overlooks the socially constructed and contingent qualities of
the two communities' identity. It also fails to give due weight to the considerable
differences within each community. Third, the two traditions approach leads to an
impoverished politics. It reifies and homogenises community identity by encouraging
the repression of internal dissent and the expulsion of trouble-makers. In doing so it helps to harden the lines between the communities and so paralyses politics, ruling out all sorts of creative solutions. For Arthur Aughey, for example, 'the policy confusion surrounding parity of esteem has only served to activate and politicise the tensions between the communities in Northern Ireland'. He concludes that 'This incivility in society drains the life-blood of intelligent politics' (1997a: 11). On the basis of this sort of critique, radical critics contend that we should not uncritically accept the existence of two separate and discrete communities since to do so is to accept the worldview that creates and perpetuates the problem in the first place. Hence it is argued that we should seek to deconstruct the two traditions or communities which are supposed to be the partners in the relationship of parity. According to Alan Finlayson, 'we should demonstrate that both traditions are equally illegitimate'. This, he says, would be 'a move from parity of esteem to parity of contempt' (1998: 121).

Due Recognition

Every one of these criticisms is worthy of serious consideration, and all of them have insightful things to say about parity of esteem. Any fully worked-out politics of recognition would have to have answers to the important questions that they raise. But in this paper I begin from the premise that the politics of recognition can survive these (and other) critiques. My question here concerns the basic form that such a politics should take in Northern Ireland today, and in particular it concerns the fundamental principle on which such a politics should be based.

In order to answer this question, I now turn to the work of Norman Porter. In his book Rethinking Unionism Porter asks if 'is there a unionist vision of the future of Northern Ireland capable of inspiring confidence among citizens and encouraging reconciliation with non-unionists?' (1998: xvi). His answer is that a form of unionist politics that he calls 'civic unionism', one embracing a politics of dialogue, openness, reconciliation and recognition, can achieve all of this. But while Porter begins from the assumption that a politics of recognition is appropriate and necessary in Northern Ireland, he rejects the current form that this politics takes. He rejects, in particular, the principle of parity of esteem. His critique of this principle leads him to formulate
an alternative that he calls 'due recognition'. I believe that a close examination of this move from parity of esteem to due recognition leads to important insights about the necessary structures of a politics of recognition in Northern Ireland.

Porter's critique focuses on each part of the principle in turn. First, with reference to esteem, he distinguishes two possible interpretations of concept. On the first reading, people are being asked to respect the right of others to express their cultural identity. This account is not a problem, since it would be difficult to find someone who would not endorse such a principle. On the second reading, the demand is for people to affirm the worth of others' cultural identity. This, Porter suggests, is unfortunately the reading suggested by the word 'esteem' itself: to esteem is to positively value the specific character of the thing esteemed. But this is highly problematic. It requires an ethical (and psychological) step too far. How, for example, could Catholics respect Orangeism given its anti-Catholic triumphalism? (1998: 188). And how could unionists respect a nationalism that desires the destruction of the political entity with which they identify? Porter's conclusion is that the 'esteem' element of parity of esteem sets impossible high standards of reciprocal openness to others' traditions (1998: 188). (Fortunately, as I show in a moment, this is also an unnecessarily high standard.)

So far as the 'parity' half of the principle of parity of esteem goes, Porter argues that a distinction must be made between the accommodation of identities and treating them as equal in all circumstances. Once again, he believes that the first reading is unproblematic. It suggests that a polity should find a place in its public culture for the identities of all significant communities. The second reading, however, presents all sorts of difficulties. And the problem is that this is the reading suggested by the word 'parity' itself. Porter argues that in most circumstances it is simply not appropriate to treat all communities as if they were of exactly equal importance in the life of the polity. In most cases, this simply is not so. In the particular case of Northern Ireland, he believes that more is due to the British than the Irish identity (1998: 189). But one does not have to endorse this specific claim in order to go along with the general
thesis that the degree of recognition should be proportional to the significance of a particular community, and that this varies according to circumstance.\(^7\)

On the basis of this critique, Porter suggests that there is a need to substitute a due recognition for parity of esteem. 'Due' implies that there need not be strict parity between communities; there can be sensitivity to importance of particular cultures in particular circumstances. 'Recognition' is less loaded than 'esteem'. While it implies a degree of affirmation, it avoids suggesting that one need positively value the other (1998: 190).\(^8\) According to the principle of due recognition, then, each worthy community deserves respect, but this does not imply that all communities need have an equal presence in the public life of the polity.

*The Two Principles Compared*

We now have two principles before us which appear to make rival claims to be the appropriate founding principle for a politics of recognition in Northern Ireland. I now want to argue that in fact it is not necessary to choose between due recognition and parity of esteem since they are actually complementary and not alternative principles. My thesis, put very briefly, is that, while parity of esteem describes a vertical relationship between state and citizen, due recognition depicts a horizontal relationship of citizens to one another. Any fully developed politics for Northern Ireland must include accounts of both these relationships and their interaction. The principles of parity of esteem and due recognition propose particular ways in which these vertical and horizontal relationships should be regulated. To describe these principles and their interaction, then, is to outline a specific form of the politics of recognition. First of all, let us consider each principle on its own.

There are a number of clues which suggest that parity of esteem makes most sense if it is interpreted as a vertical relationship between state and citizen. First of all, one notion that frequently crops up in discussions of this principle is 'even-handedness'.

---

\(^7\) Compare Parekh's case for what he calls 'proportional' recognition (2000: 259-60).

\(^8\) In this respect it is closer to respect than esteem; see Sachs (1981).
For example, the *New Framework for Agreement* referred to earlier on states that 'any new political arrangements must … even-handedly afford both communities in Northern Ireland parity of esteem and treatment'. According to Ruane and Todd, 'The provisions for change strengthen the perception that the Agreement is genuinely even-handed between the communities' (1999b: 21). But clearly a relationship between peers would not be described as 'even-handed'. Husbands and wives do not treat each other even-handedly. Rather a marriage is a mutual or reciprocal relationship. By contrast 'even-handedness' describes that way in which a higher body treats two or more lower bodies. For example, a father should be even-handed when distributing sweets to his children. Another clue about the nature of the relationship which parity of esteem is intended to guide is to be found in Porter's critique of this idea. The psychological and ethical implausibility of the demand that the nationalist and unionist communities should esteem each other is a further indication that the principle of parity of esteem is not intended to apply to the relationship between the communities themselves.\(^9\)

The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that parity of esteem is an example of a principle which is meant to regulate the vertical relationship between state and citizen rather than horizontal relationships among citizens. In the case presently under examination, it is intended to order the relationship between the British and Irish states, on the one hand, and the nationalist and unionist communities, on the other. Consider this relationship from each party's perspective. The state, for its part, promises to treat its citizens fairly, to show them equal concern. In return citizens are expected to accept the authority of its laws and institutions. In the specific case of Northern Ireland, the deal offered is this: if the British and Irish states show equal consideration to the nationalist and unionist communities, they expect those communities to accept the legitimacy of the political arrangements of which the principle of parity of esteem constitutes a vital element.

---

\(^9\) The implication here, of course, is that quite a lot of the criticisms made of parity of esteem are misguided: they condemn it for trying to be something that it is not trying to be.
As we have seen, Porter intends due recognition to be a direct replacement for parity of esteem. One part of his argument is that it is impossible to expect the two deeply divided communities to esteem each other. Hence he proposes recognition as a less directly evaluative mode of judgement. In my terms, then, due recognition is an example of a principle that is meant to guide the horizontal relationship between citizens. In the case of Northern Ireland, it is intended to regulate the relationship between the two major communities. While parity of esteem describes a relationship which is hierarchical (between a higher and lower body) and asymmetrical (even-handedness is offered in return for loyalty), due recognition depicts a mutual or reciprocal relationship between parties who regard each other as their equals. In the case under consideration here, it is hoped that the unionists will show the nationalist community due recognition, and that the nationalists will regard the unionist community in just the same way.

If these principles are considered in isolation from one another, both appear to have serious weaknesses. Were the relationship between state and citizen to be guided by the principle of parity of esteem alone, it would resemble what Bryan Turner describes as a form of citizenship 'from above' in which 'the king is all powerful and the subject is the recipient of privileges' (1990: 207). In such a heavily top-down relationship, the danger is that the two communities will feel no sense of identification with either the principle of parity or the specific policies that follow from it. And if the principle is not securely anchored in the hearts of the two communities, then it will be highly precarious, vulnerable to changes in the balance of power between them.

The principle of due recognition, for its part, looks like an admirable proposal for guiding the relationship between the nationalist and unionist communities. It would be wonderful if each gave the other the recognition that is due to it. But unfortunately, while the goal of due recognition may be less utopian than that of mutual esteem, it is still highly idealistic. The problem is that in Northern Ireland today recognition tends to be regarded as a zero-sum game: if one community gains some recognition, the other must have lost some. More recognition for the unionist community would mean less acknowledgement of nationalist aspirations, and more
recognition of nationalists would mean less chance of survival for the union of Northern Ireland and Great Britain (Porter 1998: 151).

On this reading, then, each principle, considered without reference to the other, appears to suffer serious deficiencies. Parity of esteem, as a prudential principle of state-craft, is too pragmatic. It is unstable since it is dependent on calculations about the present balance of power. Due recognition, by contrast, as a normative principle of civility, is too idealistic. It anticipates a far-off time when the division between the two major communities no longer exists. As Aughey says in his review of Rethinking Unionism, 'Porter appears to recommend a style of politics in which unionists are no longer unionists, and nationalists no longer nationalists' (1997b: 129).

I now want to argue that, once we see how parity of esteem and due recognition interact, their deficiencies will appear considerably less significant. To be specific, I contend that there can be a virtuous circle between these two principles. Starting with parity of esteem, my argument is that, if this principle is put successfully into place, this will increase the chance that the relationship between the communities can be guided by the principle of due recognition. Moving now to due recognition, I believe that, if the relationship between communities is effectively guided by the principle of due recognition, then the support for parity of esteem will grow. And so the circle is completed.

But how might these two moves work? First, from parity of esteem to due recognition. Effective implementation of the parity principle would mean that the two communities received even-handed treatment. Furthermore they would be encouraged to interact with one another in the various institutions created by the political settlement based on the parity principle. In this course of these interactions, levels of fear and resentment will diminish as more and more of politics becomes the ordinary everyday business of transport policy, education budgets and so on. In these conditions it becomes more likely that each community can show the other due recognition. Second, from due recognition to parity of esteem. To the extent to which each community recognises the other, the less they will feel that the parity principle is a top-down imposition, and more it will appear as a reflection of their own wishes. While at first this principle may have looked like a command from the state
to its citizens, it now appears as the democratic expression of the preferences of those citizens themselves. It has become a guide to the relationship between the community-as-a-whole to the citizen-as-part-of-the-community. Thus there can be a productive interaction between the principles of due recognition and parity of esteem.

Concluding Remarks

I am committed to the claim that the politics of 'identity-related differences' is best approached using an explanatory framework and a normative theory based on the concept of recognition. Such a concept accurately describes the phenomenology of conflicts between cultural, ethnic and national communities, and it captures the character of state policies that seek to accommodate communal diversity. To defend this thesis I focused here on one aspect of the contemporary politics of recognition in Northern Ireland. Examining the idea of parity of esteem, I accepted that it is problematic if it is regarded as a proposal about the character of the relationship between the two major communities. It is better understood, I suggested, as a top-down policy that the British and Irish states have sought to impose in Northern Ireland. Such a policy on its own is clearly unsatisfactory, and in ideal conditions the relationship between nationalist and unionist communities would be one of reciprocal recognition. My principal thesis here has been that, in the present political climate, both principles are needed in conjunction. By understanding how there can be productive interaction between parity of esteem and due recognition, we gain valuable insights into the necessary features of a politics of recognition for Northern Ireland.
References


Ruane, Joseph and Todd, Jennifer eds (1999a) *After the Good Friday Agreement: Analysing Political Change in Northern Ireland*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin.


