

# The Viability of Novel Identities in Response to Separatist Tensions: A Comparison of French Algeria and Northern Ireland



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## Separatism: what and why?

**What?** Separatism is a social phenomenon that occurs when a given group of people, or geographic region, strives to detach from the polity to which it currently belongs.

**Why?** Explanations differ widely across each example of separatism. Even then, the same situation can be explained in a myriad of different ways. Separatist tension in Northern Ireland is often, and perhaps incorrectly,<sup>1</sup> attributed to religion alone. Yet there is debate as to whether it ought to be seen through a lens of race or ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> The Algerian conflict faces the same difficulty in definition. Often depicted as a purely colonial conflict against French rule, one tends to overlook the religious factor: “the majority of ALN combatants believed they were fighting a jihad”.<sup>3</sup>

Image 1: a model globe on which can be seen France and Algeria.



## Northern Ireland and French Algeria: the main actors

	Northern Ireland	French Algeria
Separatist Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provisional IRA (PIRA)</li> <li>Sinn Féin (political wing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN)</li> <li>Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)</li> </ul>
Anti-Separatists (sometimes 'Counter-terrorists')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ulster Defence Association (UDA)</li> <li>Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS)</li> </ul>
(State) Security Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>British Army; Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR)</li> <li>Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)</li> <li>British Intelligence Services (MI5 and MI6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Les gendarmes d'Algérie</li> <li>Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionage</li> <li>L'armée française</li> </ul>

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in the late 1960s, to call for fairer treatment of Catholics and other minority groups who had been subordinated in the majority Protestant Northern Ireland. As early as 1968, their demonstrations were resisted by the local state security force, the majority-Protestant RUC. Tensions between Northern Ireland's Protestant and Catholic communities continued to grow, reaching their apex on Bloody Sunday of 1972, at which point British Army forces had already been sent in to restore order. Hardliners of both communities set up paramilitaries with accompanying political wings. The segregation, deprivation and violence that began in the late 60s, and continued – albeit calming over time – until 1998's Belfast Agreement, belonged to the period known as 'The Troubles.'

## Northern Ireland and French Algeria: the facts

Image 2: a man stands with his leg raised beside a small heap of burning boxes.



Fukuyama evokes the Greek concept of *thymos*: “the part of the soul that seeks recognition”.<sup>6</sup> 'Thymos' remains just as relevant today as in antiquity, for as Fukuyama rightly observes, “contemporary identity politics is driven by the request for equal recognition”.<sup>7</sup> Identity politics and separatism are intimately linked (I suggest that the latter is merely an offshoot of the former), and we see in both the vitality of recognising the dignity of others' identities. This could be done by encouraging public displays of all communities' cultures, by encouraging the maintenance of indigenous languages – such as Irish, in Northern Ireland – and by educating all that “the identities dwelling deep inside us are neither fixed nor necessarily given to us by our accidents of birth”.<sup>8</sup>

Modern Algeria, in 1830, was occupied by the Turks of the Ottoman empire. The French crossed the Mediterranean in the same year, and by 1848 had established control of the centres of power; Algeria was now under French rule. This colonial act led to French governance that went largely unchallenged for 106 years, until 1954. In this time, Muslim Algerians suffered from blatantly discriminatory food rationing,<sup>4</sup> generally poor economic conditions, and a tough path to French citizenship.<sup>5</sup> Several societal leaders decided, for different reasons, that it was time for French rule to end; of all the consequent political groupings, the FLN and its military wing, the ALN, emerged on top. They led an 8 year campaign (1954-62) against both European settlers and Muslim dissidents until Algerian independence was attained in 1962.

## Possible responses to separatism



Image 3: a piece of wall art spells out the word "TOGETHER".

Social psychologist Gordon W. Allport pioneered the idea of 'Intergroup Contact' with regards to overcoming social tension and conflict between privileged and marginalised groups. Having studied different forms of contact across varying international situations of said social tension, he concludes: “Only the type of contact that leads people to *do* things together is likely to result in changed attitudes. The principle is clearly illustrated in the multi-ethnic athletic team”.<sup>9</sup> This last remark is somewhat prescient, and foresees the highly pertinent phenomenon of France's 1998 world cup-winning football team being popularly labelled “l'équipe black-blanc-beur” (literally: 'the black-white-arab team'), as a means to celebrate the diversity of France's highly successful squad.

References:  
1 – Patrick Anderson, *Britain's Algeria, France's Ireland: The War, the "Troubles" and the Faltering Liberal Voice* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), p. 154  
2 – Pamela Clayton, 'Religion, ethnicity and colonialism as explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict', in *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, ed. by David Miller (New York: Longman, 1998), pp. 40-54 (p. 53).  
3 – Anderson, p. 154  
4 – Albert Camus, *Algerian Chronicles*, ed. by Alice Kaplan, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 98  
5 – Guy Pervillé, *La Guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007), p. 13  
6 – Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: the demand for dignity and the politics of resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), p. 23  
7 – *Ibid.*, p. 22  
8 – *Ibid.*, p. 183  
9 – Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (New York: Basic Books, 1979) p. 276

Images (from top to bottom):  
1 – Photo by Christian Lue on Unsplash. Photo taken in Europe, and published 12/05/2020, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022]  
2 – Photo by Kayle Kaupanger on Unsplash. Photo taken in Chicago, IL, USA, and published 11/10/2020, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022]  
3 – Photo by Nicole Baster on Unsplash. Photo taken in Tel Aviv, Israel, and published 24/11/2018, [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2022]

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