treatises and documents
Journal of Ethnic Studies

razprave in gradivo
Revija za narodnostna vprašanja

June / Junij 2023

Special issue
Twenty-Five Years on
And the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement

Table of contents / Kazalo

ARTICLES / ČLANKI

Seán Byrne, Brett Mallon

Introduction – Twenty-Five Years on And the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement: Some Critical Reflections

Uvod – Petindvajset let po velikonočnem sporazumu: nekaj kritičnih premislekov

1. Introduction

Internal issues and rival actors with identity ties to the same territory and natural resources often escalate ethnopolitical conflicts institutionalizing division and violence (Chandler 2017). In addition, the external international dimension like postcoloniality, global capitalism and security, and neoliberal peacebuilding attempt to re-engineer states like Northern Ireland striving to emerge from a violent and painful past (Mac Ginty 2008; Maiangwa et al. 2022; Thiessen & Byrne 2017). It is challenging, therefore, to create peace in societies with deep demarcating social cleavages and political disconnections where the fear of violence shapes communities' perceptions and behavior with "representative violence and communal deterrence" fortifying deep divisions in societies such as Northern Ireland trying to transition to peace through ethnonational elite accommodation and powersharing governments (Guelke 2012).

Twenty-five years ago, in the early hours of April 10, 1998, longstanding and bitter political opponents opted for peace in Northern Ireland with the multiparty signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA).[1] Just over six weeks later, following a contentious campaigning period, the B/GFA was approved by Northern and Southern Irish voters, officially ushering in an end to direct violence of the 30-years Troubles and the beginning of a post-peace accord Northern Ireland (Belloni 2010). The B/GFA marked a critical juncture in negative peace or ending the physical violence as consociationalism, and powersharing became the political *modus operandi* across Northern Ireland (McGarry & O'Leary 2017).

In the intervening years, the B/GFA has been the subject of scrutiny as Northern Ireland travels along its peacebuilding sojourn. With two and a half decades in the history books, time and experience has revealed much about

the B/GFA successes and challenges and the impact on the people of Northern Ireland. For many peacebuilders working at the social level to build positive peace or social justice and reconciliation, these lessons are hard reminders of the tenuous peace that exists in post-accord Northern Ireland (Thiessen et al. 2010; White 2014).

This special issue commemorating the 25th anniversary of the B/GFA takes a critical eye to explore the social-economic, cultural, and political impact. Ten insightful essays survey critical issues like the nature of powersharing, the impact of the B/GFA and the peace process on marginalized communities (women, disabled people, youth, LGBTQIA+ citizens, dissidents, the very poor, and survivors of the physical violence), gender inclusion, reconciliation, legacy and remembrance, contested spaces and everyday peace politics, and civil society organizations (CSOs).

2. A Cold and Frosty Peace by Pieces

Northern Ireland's peacebuilding processes include several critical ingredients like large-scale social-economic restructuring aimed at reducing horizontal inequalities, a reorganized police force, and an institutionalized consociational powersharing government (Clark 2022). However, despite significant political progress in terms of addressing negative peace or the absence of direct violence, Northern Ireland's urban areas and their communities continue to remain divided by peace walls, peace lines, and interfaces, many of whom were built after the B/GFA (Grattan 2020; O'Neill 2023). In the wake of the Brexit and Northern Ireland Protocol debacle, Northern Ireland's non-functioning and dysfunctional powersharing government, increased unemployment, a resurgence of dissident violence, and reconciliation challenges due to the ongoing culture war that has fragmented working class communities continue to plague the people of Northern Ireland (Holland 2022; McGlinchey 2019).

For example, the Union Flag had flown every day at city hall, yet controversy arose from Belfast City Council's ruling on December 3rd, 2012, to restrict and reduce the time the flag would be flown. Immediately following this decision, protests emerged outside city hall every Saturday that escalated into violence that lasted into 2013 (Bryan 2015). Abandonment and exploitation claims from the Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist (PUL) community have intensified since the B/GFA. The flag controversary heightened divisions in the PUL community between political Unionism and working class PUL community members' complete rejection of these political elites (Hearty 2015). There are tensions, therefore, between those who adhere to a more contemporary and more moderate Loyalism that is connected to retaining and re-energizing culture, and more adversarial and anti-Republican forms of Loyalism that are embedded in historical legacies and traditions (Long 2018).

In addition, the border issue became a central component of post-Brexit negotiations because Britain and Northern Ireland wished to negotiate a similar deal and ensure similar conditions. Alternatively, the Catholic Nationalist Republicans (CNR community), the Irish government, and the European Union (E.U.) wanted to prevent a hard border emerging on the island and to maintain the peace process so that Brexit in Northern Ireland was characterized more by its impacts on the peace process than it was on immigration and sovereignty (Doyle & Connolly 2019). In the 2017 elections, for the first time in history, the anti-unity parties received less than the majority of seats, as Scotland and Northern Ireland also voted to remain in the E.U. A border was created on the Irish Sea to prevent the island's land border from being closed. That said, the PUL community perceives itself as left behind discerning the sea border as further separating the community from Britain.

Political parties aligned along sectarian lines on the Brexit issue with Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP) favoring remaining in the E.U., while the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) supporting leaving the single market (McCann & Hainsworth 2017). A consent mechanism in relation to the hard border was part of Britain's withdrawal agreement, so that by 2024, Northern Ireland's Assembly could vote by simple majority to choose to continue or not with Northern Ireland Protocol's arrangements concerning goods and customs relating to the border (Harvey 2020).

The devolution of Northern Ireland's powersharing government that restricts any one party's capacity to make decisions alone has need of the political party's consensus to form a somewhat fragile government that was suspended on a few occasions between 2000 and 2007. This brittle dynamic represents and is impacted by a lack of conflicting objects, different interpretations of agreements, policy differences, and a lack of trust and political maturity. The 2017 collapse of the executive occurred with the late Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness resignation in protest of former First Minister Arlene Foster's handling of an energy scheme, and with votes of no confidence. Ms. Foster resigned in April 2021 (Heenan & Birrell 2021). Thus, the post-Brexit February 27, 2023, Windsor Framework, developed to address the movement of goods between the E.U. and the U.K. and approved by London's parliament, is meant to assuage DUP fears, and to restart the powersharing executive. However, at this time of writing, the DUP continues to reject the Framework and refuses to participate in the powersharing executive at Stormont.

Thus, the peace is not sacrosanct as Northern Ireland continues to experience ongoing political tensions contributed by Brexit including disputes over culture and identity politics, the exclusion of marginalized communities, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges of reconciliation and the Border poll that have estranged working class Loyalists and the DUP over the potential reunification of the island as a result of the Brexit fiasco (Byrne et al. 2022).

For example, a recent LucidTalk polling for the *Belfast Telegraph* found that the majority of PUL participants would vote against the 1998 B/GFA today clearly highlighting the fragility of Northern Ireland's peace process (Breen 2023). Only 35 % of PUL participants would vote in favor of the B/GFA, compared to 95 % of CNR, 96 % of Alliance Party voters, and 97 % of Green Party voters (Breen 2023). The poll also found that most participants believed the DUP should re-enter Stormont's powersharing Executive regardless of ongoing talks between the U.K. and the E.U. over the Northern Ireland Protocol, and the Windsor Framework and Stormont brake.

Both the U.K. and the E.U. agreed to protect the B/GFA as part of the Brexit withdrawal agreement preventing a hard border on the island in effect allowing Northern Ireland access to both the E.U. and U.K. markets (Edgington & Kovacevic 2023). As a result, the DUP continues to refuse entering Northern Ireland's power-sharing government unless its seven non-negotiable criteria are addressed so that a political vacuum and sectarian divisions remain with little political stability that continues to negatively impact day-to-day politics (Edgington & Kovacevic 2023; McCormack 2023). As a result, the Northern Ireland Assembly elections are postponed to January 18, 2024, while the DUP desires further E.U. concessions before a new deal can be struck and the devolved institutions restored while the Northern Ireland protocol bill is on hold in the House of Lords (O'Carroll 2023).

That said, President Joe Biden's April 11, 2023 "do no harm bi-latte visit" to Northern Ireland to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the B/GFA promised economic investment from United States (U.S.) companies while gently persuading and encouraging the restoration of the Assembly and the Executive's functioning powersharing government that was met with a cool reception by British mainland Unionists and the DUP who feel under siege (Balz 2023). Prime Minister Rishi Sunak also met with President Biden during his trip to Belfast as well as with Northern Ireland's political parties emphasizing that Northern Ireland's place in the union is safe while outlining the benefits of being able to access U.K. and E.U. markets (Dennison 2023).

3. Organization of the Special Issue

The essays in this special issue offer critical reflections on the B/GFA, providing key perspectives on a wide range of issues influencing peace in Northern Ireland. Tim White approaches the question of Irish unity, examining the realities of the consociational powersharing arrangement birthed from the GFA, in the article titled, The Challenges of Powersharing in Implementing the Good Friday Agreement: Twenty-Five Years of Intermittent Shared Governance. Highlighting the struggles of Stormont and the full implementation of true consociational frameworks as well as the constructive ambiguity of the Agreement, White con-

nects past challenges with present challenges spawned from the 2020 Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. With the Brexit fate of Northern Ireland continuing to be in flux, CNR leaders are eyeing a more robust shift towards Irish unity in their approach to governance. Yet, as Brendan O'Leary (2022) succinctly points out PUL and CNR politicians as well as the British and Irish governments need to get behind the political 8-ball working in tandem with the U.S. and the E.U. to plan for the immediate need to reimagine Irish reunification in terms of a political prism that accommodates PUL citizens into a new Ireland with four devolved provinces as the PUL community maintains their cultural, social-economic, and political links to Britain.

In contrast, Siobhan Byrne and Allison McCulloch, in their article Stories of Gender Inclusion, Power-Sharing, and the Good Friday Agreement, bring to light feminist considerations when examining the influences of the B/GFA. Specifically, the authors note a significantly mixed legacy of gender equity. Despite the initial powerful influence of the Women's Coalition early in the peacemaking efforts (Hancock et al. 2010), women's voices have been increasingly sidelined in the peace process.

That said, Duncan Morrow's article titled Transformation or Truce: Tracing the Decline of 'Reconciliation' and Its Consequences for Northern Ireland Since 1998 outlines the depth of the post-peace accord reconciliation challenges in Northern Ireland. While the B/GFA included several frameworks and opportunities for genuine cross-community reconciliation to flourish, the reality of the last 25 years has proved to be frustrating. Despite the opportunities, key components and reconciliation practices have still failed to be realized, infusing doubt into the prospects of positive peace truly taking hold.

In addition, Curtis Holland's article titled Class, Identity, Integration, and the Two-Tiered Peace Process, identifies further community level challenges to building a cross-community, inclusive peace in Northern Ireland. Highlighting the persistent ethnopolitical identity clash involving very poor PUL and CNR communities, Holland calls attention to the plight of economically deprived areas. It is within these marginalized zones, where the peace dividend has been all but absent, that ethnonational identity issues are most prominent in providing some kind of connection and hope for marginalized and alienated youth left behind by the peace process, and peacebuilding becomes most challenging.

In the midst of shifting demographics in Northern Ireland, Marisa McGlinchey reflects on the attitudes across the CNR community in the essay titled, Irish Nationalist and Republican Attitudes to the Good Friday Agreement: Sell-Out or Stepping Stone? Pulling from in-depth interviews over the past decade, McGlinchey's empirical data offers critical perspectives on the evolving views of CNR politicians, civil society leaders, and dissident Republicans, culminating in a reflection on the possibilities of future Irish unity or the re-emergence of political violence.

10

Consequently, measuring successes of the B/GFA in terms of peace can be challenging, particularly when considered against the backdrop of flashpoint interface areas and contested spaces in Northern Ireland. For example, Seán Brennan and Branka Marijan emphasize these realities in their essay titled, Contested Spaces and Everyday Peace Politics in Northern Ireland. While much has been accomplished in terms of de-escalating active conflict levels, the everyday nature of peace, rooted in grassroots communities, still leaves much to be desired. Brennan and Marijan note the importance of embracing everyday peacebuilding opportunities and practices in progressing Northern Ireland further along down the road of peace.

At the same time, however, legacy and remembrance aspects of the Troubles continue to impede and plague political and reconciliation progress, as Joe Robinson discusses in his article titled Derry, Bloody Sunday, and the 'Great-Sea Change'. The battle over conflict and peace narratives in Northern Ireland continues to split communities and emotions as the traumas of the past continue to impact most people as they still ring painfully present in the minds of many throughout Northern Ireland. As official inquiries grind along slowly and begrudgingly (or fail to ever start in the first place), legacy issues like Derry's 1972 Bloody Sunday remain intricately tied to the possibility of peace and progress in Northern Ireland.

Similarly, Robert Mizzi, Seán Byrne, Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, and Nancy Hansen in their essay titled Marginalized Voices and the Good Friday Agreement: Inclusion and the Northern Ireland Peace Process highlight other marginalized voices, including those within the LGBTQIA+ and disability communities. The selective inclusion, or perhaps more aptly, the broad exclusion of many marginalized groups in Northern Ireland's peace process has isolated important voices within communities, prevented them from active participation in policymaking, and separated them entirely from any locally owned version of peacebuilding.

Another key demographic, youth, is the focus of Cadhla O'Sullivan's empirical qualitative essay titled, Artesanos de Paz: Promoting Everyday Peacebuilding Among Children and Youth Through Participatory Theatre-Based Intervention in Colombia: Lessons for Northern Ireland. Drawing upon experiences from participatory arts-based peacebuilding mechanisms employed with youth in Colombia, O'Sullivan offers critical reflections on the importance of embracing the inclusion of youth within Northern Ireland's peacebuilding processes. Specifically, O'Sullivan offers innovative approaches in the use of art-based methods to encompass youth within the everyday peacebuilding framework.

That said, Seán Byrne, Brett Mallon, and Mehmet Yavuz's longtitudinal qualitative essay titled, Civil Society Organizations, the Good Friday Agreement, and the Northern Ireland Peace Process, explore the specific experiences of civil society leaders and their successes and challenges building peace in the shadow

11

of the B/GFA. Tracing the experiences and perceptions of civil society leaders over the last decade, it becomes clear many grassroots peacebuilders and civil society leaders have become frustrated with the pace of peace and the intransigence of some political leaders that continue to play the sectarian political card, with many also lamenting design flaws and implementation shortcomings in the implementation of B/GFA and its translation into effective policies as well as the inclusion of local grassroots communities. Patience, optimism, and future hope are running lean for those most responsible for maintaining the thin veil between peace and conflict.

Consequently, an enduring theme throughout this special issue is the call for increasingly turning toward local everyday peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland. In other words, "Internationally supported peacebuilding as an everyday encounter between people in a specific local context," essentially consists of cross-cultural interactions with local and international actors (Boege & Rinck 2019, 217). Local actors are those directly impacted by or involved in a protracted ethnopolitical conflict in some way. They have wisdom and local peacebuilding practices to resolve local conflicts, and that local wisdom, epistemologies, and know-how allows local people to effectively engage in cross cultural communication and effective conflict transformation (Byrne 2023; Stanton & Kelly 2015). Local wisdom refers to "knowledge, philosophy, and a set of values possessed and shared by particular members of a given society as a result of interactions with their surroundings, natural, and social alike" (Eko & Putranto 2019, 347).

Alternatively, Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) take "local" to mean the range of local agents that are aimed at identifying and creating necessary peace processes. Thus, a local peace is built around an emancipatory and everyday framework that is an expansion of the representational capacity of a more formalized peace architecture (Autesserre 2014). In other words, the local shift brings into focus the local voices and practices that are typically suppressed in the overtly bureaucratic, hierarchical, and technocratic processes like the universal liberal peace framework (Marijan 2017).

Embracing a bottom-up peacebuilding approach assists in ensuring that local needs are not only recognized, but more importantly, are genuinely understood and met (Hilhorst & Van Leeuwen 2005; Kanol & Kanol 2013). This practice assists in creating an organic peacebuilding form rather than the highly formatted and structural Western/liberal process (Stroschein 2013). There is certainly complexity in shifting between the international and the local (Mitchell 2011), yet the opportunity for unique understandings and methods from a dialogical standpoint (Oloke et al. 2018) and a methodological perspective (Mac Ginty et al. 2019) drive home the flexibility of the hybrid approach (Mac Ginty & Richmond 2013). Yet Paffenholz (2015) warns against the bifurcation of the local and the international that comprise a myriad of multi-modal actors,

processes, ideas, and contentions at multiple levels. It is also important to decon-
struct, interrogate, and examine the impact of liberal thinking on peacebuilding
(Randazzo 2021).

4. Conclusion

As previously mentioned, the B/GFA ushered in a new peace era in Northern
Ireland; there is no question in that regard (Ahmed et al. 2012). And yet, North-
ern Ireland's peace process has not fully failed, as much as it has been unable,
after decades of vigorous mainstream grassroot support, to genuinely succeed.
This special issue, marking the quarter century birthday of the B/GFA, offers
some significant critical reflections on the successes enjoyed over the last two
and a half decades, and the continuing frustrating challenges everyday peace-
builders face daily in their noteworthy peacebuilding efforts in local grassroots
communities to build the social peace.

References

Ahmed, K., Byrne, S., Karari, P. & Skarlato, O., 2012. Meeting Rising Expectations of Hopes for
Pace in Post Accord Northern Ireland: The Role of the Good Friday Agreement and the
Implication for External Economic Aid. *Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ehtnic Studies*
68 (4), 9–35.

Autesserre, S., 2014. *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of Intervention.*
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Balz, D., 2023. Biden in Northern Ireland: A Quick Mission to Do No Harm. *Washington Post*,
15 April 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2023/04/15/biden-good-
friday-agreement/ (accessed 4 May 2023).

Belloni, R., 2010. Northern Ireland: Civil Society and the Slow Building of Peace. In T.
Paffenholz (ed.) *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment.* Lynne Rienner,
Boulder (CO), 105–128.

Boege, V. & Rinck, P., 2019. The Local/International Interface in Peacebuilding: Experiences
from Bougainville and Sierra Leone. *International Peacekeeping* 26 (2), 216–239.

Breen, S., 2023. A Majority of Unionists Would Vote Against 1998 Good Friday Agreement
Today. *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 January 2023, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/
politics/a-majority-of-unionists-would-vote-against-1998-good-friday-agreement-
today/43633102.html (accessed 11 March 2023).

Bryan, D., 2015. Parades, Flags, Carnivals, and Riots: Public Space, Contestation, and Trans-
formation in Northern Ireland. *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 21 (4),
565–573.

Byrne, S., 2023. *Local Experts' Practical Knowledge, Wisdom, and Practices: Civil Society,
Peacebuilding, and Economic Assistance in Northern Ireland.* Routledge, Basingstoke.

Byrne, S., Levasseur, K. & Reimer, L. E., 2022. Building Peace in Northern Ireland: Hopes for
the Future. *Humanity and Society* 47 (1), 49–68.

Chandler, D., 2017. *Peacebuilding: The Twenty Years Crisis, 1997–2017.* Palgrave Macmillan,
London.

Clark, S., 2022. 'The 'Local-Visual Turn': Understanding Peacebuilding in Post-Conflict Societies
Using Photo-Elicitation. *Peacebuilding*, 1–23, DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2022.2085941.

Dennison, L., 2023. Sunak: Northern Ireland in 'Unbelievably Special Position' with Access to EU and UK Markets. *ITW News*, 28 February 2023, https://www.itv.com/news/2023-02-28/sunak-ni-in-unbelievably-special-position-with-access-to-eu-and-uk-markets (accessed 4 May 2023).

Doyle, J. & Connolly, E., 2019. The Effects of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. In C. A. Baciu & J. Doyle (eds.) *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities*. Springer, New York, 79–95.

Edgington, T. & Kovacevic, T., 2023. Brexit: What is the Northern Ireland Protocol and Windsor Framework? *BBC News*, 12 April 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53724381 (accessed 11 March 2023).

Eko, B. S. & Putranto, H., 2019. The Role of Intercultural Competence and Local Wisdom in Building Intercultural and Inter-religious Tolerance. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 48 (4), 341–369.

Grattan, S., 2020. Northern Ireland Still Divided by Peace Walls 20 Years After Conflict. *The World*, 14 January 2020, https://theworld.org/stories/2020-01-14/northern-ireland-still-divided-peace-walls-20-years-after-conflict (accessed 11 March 2023).

Guelke, A., 2012. *Politics in Deeply Divided Societies*. Polity, Cambridge.

Hancock, L. E., Weiss, J. N. & Duerr, G. M. E, 2010. Prospect Theory and the Framing of the Good Friday Agreement. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 28 (2), 183–203.

Harvey, C., 2020. The Irish Border. In F. Fabbrini (ed.) *The Withdrawal Agreement*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 148–168.

Hearty, K., 2015. The Great Awakening? The Belfast Flag Protests and Protestant/Unionist/ Loyalist Counter-Memory in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 30 (2), 157–177.

Heenan, D. & Birrell, D., 2021. Exploring Responses to the Collapse of Devolution in Northern Ireland 2017–2020 through the Lens of Multi-Level Governance. *Parliamentary Affairs, 1–20*, DOI: 10.1093/pa/gsab013.

Hilhorst, D. & Van Leeuwen, M., 2005. Grounding Local Peace Organizations: A Case Study of Southern Sudan. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 43 (4), 537–563.

Holland, C., 2022. *Inequality, Identity, and the Politics of Northern Ireland: Challenges of Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation*. Lexington, Lanham (MD).

Kanol, B. & Kanol, D., 2013. Roadblocks to Peacebuilding Activities in Cyprus: International Peacebuilding Actors' Handling of the Recognition Issue. *Journal of Conflictology* 4 (2), 39–47.

Long, S. A., 2018. Online Loyalist Resistance: Struggles for Recognition in Contested Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 33 (1), 43–67.

Mac Ginty, R., 2008. *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Mac Ginty, R. & Richmond, O. P., 2013. The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace. *Third World Quarterly* 34 (5), 763–783.

Mac Ginty, R., Joshi, M. & Lee, S. Y., 2019. Liberal Peace Implementation and the Durability of Post-War Peace. *International Peacekeeping* 26 (4), 457–486.

Maiangwa, B., Essombe, N. & Byrne, S., 2022. The Banality of Infrastructural Racism through the Lens of Peace and Conflict Studies: The Subaltern-Settler Products of Coloniality. *Peacebuilding* 10 (3), 242–264.

Marijan, B., 2017. The Politics of Everyday Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland. *Peacebuilding* 5 (1), 67–81.

McCann, G. & Hainsworth, P., 2017. Brexit and Northern Ireland: The 2016 Referendum on the United Kingdom's Membership of the European Union. *Irish Political Studies* 32 (2), 327–342.

13

14

McCormack, J., 2023. Northern Ireland Stormont Stalemate: When Will We Next Go to the Polls? *BBC News*, 19 January 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-63902927 (accessed 11 March 2023).

McGarry, J. & O'Leary, B., 2017. Power-Sharing Executives: Consociational and Centripetal Formulae and the Case of Northern Ireland. In A. McCulloch & J. McGarry (eds.) *Power-Sharing: Empirical and Normative Challenges*. Routledge, Basingstoke, 63–86.

McGlinchey, M., 2019. *Unfinished Business: The Politics of 'Dissident' Irish Republicanism*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Mitchell, A., 2011. *Lost in Transformation: Violent Peace and Peaceful Conflict in Northern Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

O'Carroll, L., 2023. Northern Ireland Assembly Election to be Delayed Again. *The Guardian*, 9 February 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/feb/09/northern-ireland-assembly-election-to-be-delayed-again (accessed 11 March 2023).

O'Leary, B., 2022. *Making Sense of a United Ireland: Should It Happen? How Might It Happen?* Sandycove, Dublin.

Oloke, I., Lindsay, P. & Byrne, S., 2018. The Intersection of Critical Emancipatory Peacebuilding and Social Enterprise: A Dialogical Approach to Social Entrepreneurship. *Treatises and Document, Journal of Ethnic Studies* 81, 67–86.

O'Neill, J., 2023. NI Troubles: 'I Would Love to See That Wall Coming Down.' *BBC News*, 29 January 2023, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-64431132 (accessed 11 March 2023).

Paffenholz, T., 2015. Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment Towards an Agenda for Future Research. *Third World Quarterly* 36 (5), 857–874.

Randazzo, E., 2021. The Local, the Indigenous and the Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15 (2), 141–160.

Stanton, E. & Kelly, G., 2015. Exploring Barriers to Constructing Locally Based Peacebuilding Theory: The Case of Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution* 3 (1), 33–52.

Stroschein, S., 2013. Organic Versus Strategic Approaches to Peacebuilding. In R. Mac Ginty (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding*. Routledge, Basingstoke, 276–286.

Thiessen, C. & Byrne, S., 2017. Proceed with Caution: Research Production and Uptake in Conflict-Affected Countries. *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 13 (1), 1–15.

Thiessen, C., Byrne, S., Skarlato, O. & Tennent, P., 2010. Civil Society Leaders and Northern Ireland's Peace Process: Hopes and Fears for the Future. *Humanity and Society* 34 (1), 39–63.

White, T. (ed.), 2014. *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (WI).

Notes

[1] The (1998) Agreement is typically called the Agreement, the Belfast Agreement (BA), the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA), the Belfast Good Friday Agreement (BGFA), and the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), and the authors will use these terms throughout their essays.

Timothy J. White

The Challenges of Powersharing in Implementing the Good Friday Agreement: Twenty-Five Years of Intermittent Shared Governance

The attempts to implement the Good Friday Agreement have often been frustrated by Unionist parties' reluctance to share power given their discontent with the difficulties in achieving decommissioning and more recently the Northern Ireland Protocol that was part of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. Given the continuing difficulties in operationalizing the institutional framework negotiated in 1998, Nationalist and Republican parties, especially Sinn Féin, have begun a discussion on a joint referendum that would bring Irish unification. This paper explores the changing narrative of Northern Ireland politics from peaceful powersharing to a transition toward Irish unity.

Keywords: Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland, powersharing, Irish unity, Brexit.

Izzivi delitve oblasti pri izvajanju Velikonočnega sporazuma: Petindvajset let občasnega deljenega upravljanja

Poskusi izvajanja Velikonočnega sporazuma so bili zaradi nepripravljenosti unionističnih strank na delitev oblasti, ki izhaja iz njihovega nezadovoljstva s postopkom razorožitve in nedavnim severnoirskim protokolom k sporazumu o izstopu iz EU, pogosto neuspešni. Zaradi nenehnih težav pri operacionalizaciji institucionalnega okvira, dogovorjenega leta 1998, so nacionalistične in republikanske stranke, zlasti Sinn Féin, sprožile razpravo o skupnem referendumu za združitev Severne Irske z Republiko Irsko. Prispevek obravnava spremembe v stališčih severnoirske politike od mirne delitve oblasti do združitve irskega otoka.

Ključne besede: Severna Irska, delitev oblasti, združitev Irske, brexit.

Correspondence address: Timothy J. White, Xavier University, 3800 Victory Parkway, Cincinnati, OH 45207, USA, e-mail: white@xavier.edu.

1. Introduction

The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA) envisioned powersharing as a means to govern a highly divided society. Historically, unionists benefitted from a demographic advantage facilitated by gerrymandered boundaries of constituencies that ensured Protestant control of the Stormont Parliament from the 1920s through the 1960s. To overcome a system that privileged the Protestant majority the 1998 Agreement, built on a parity of esteem for both political traditions in Northern Ireland (Ruohomäki 2010), sought to guarantee Catholics access to power without disempowering the unionist community. Inevitably, an agreement that asked a group who historically had all the power to share power was going to be difficult to establish and sustain. Several political issues have emerged over the past twenty-five years that have made the institutions of governance only intermittently operational. Unionist parties have undermined the powersharing system established in the GFA first because of their frustration with the difficulties in achieving decommissioning and more recently with the uncertainty associated with Brexit and their anger with the Northern Ireland Protocol that was part of the Brexit Withdrawal Agreement. Given the continuing difficulties in operationalizing the institutional framework negotiated in 1998, Nationalist and Republican parties, especially Sinn Féin, have begun a discussion on a joint referendum on Irish unification. This article explores the changing narrative of Northern Ireland politics from promising peaceful powersharing to more serious and proximate calls for Irish unity.

2. The Good Friday Agreement

The promise of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement was that it would transform Northern Ireland's highly divided politics. Blackbourn (2015) claims that the Agreement has failed to normalize politics in Northern Ireland, and Mitchell (2015) contends that a lack of reconciliation has led to difficulties governing Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, we have not witnessed a return to large scale and continuous cross-community violence. Even though the GFA has reduced intercommunal violence and fostered elite level cooperation, sectarianism remains and grassroots peace has not been achieved (Mitchell et al. 2018). The era of the Troubles from the late 1960s through the 1990s demonstrated that failed political institutions led to violence and political instability. Political scientists have long decried the failure of political institutions as the cause of political disorder and decay (Huntington 1968). The lack of effective institutions in Northern Ireland led to direct rule from Westminster with the collapse of the Northern Ireland Parliament and local executive in 1974. The failure of the local police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), to maintain order led the British government to place British troops on the streets of Northern Ireland in 1969. While

initially welcomed by Irish Nationalists, British policies of internment and army action that supported the RUC and in some instances Loyalist paramilitaries quickly led to Catholic anger and resentment of the British military presence. It seemed to justify the Irish Republican Army's (IRA's) use of violence to some as a means of defending the Catholic community. As the Troubles evolved from the late 1960s through the 1990s, both the British government and the IRA came to learn that there was no way to defeat completely the other side. Thus, both sides confronted what Zartman (2008) identified as a "hurting stalemate".

The negotiated settlement of April 1998 had to be ratified in referenda in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The inclusive and public nature of negotiations leading to the Agreement was critical in developing support for the referenda (Amaral 2018). Due to the promise of peace and the expectation that powersharing would provide a fairer distribution of resources in Northern Irish society, Nationalists in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly to ratify the Agreement. The unionist community in Northern Ireland was more divided regarding the merits of the Agreement. Ian Paisley and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) opposed the Agreement as they saw no guarantees of decommissioning and believed the Agreement was a concession to terrorists, the IRA. David Trimble and his more moderate unionist party, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), had to convince Protestants that they had no better option. The alternative to this Agreement presented to wavering unionists was a return to violence that no one sought. Hence, the Agreement was the best one could hope for under the circumstances. This convinced a slight majority of Protestants to vote to ratify the Agreement (Hancock 2011). The success of the referenda provided democratic legitimacy to an elite driven peace process (Filardo-Llamas 2011; McEvoy 2018).

After the vote to ratify in June of 1998, opposition to the Agreement and the powersharing institutions it created was most visible when dissident Republicans detonated a bomb in the center of Omagh on August 15th, 1998. As McGlinchey (2019) has detailed, there is a continuing threat of violence from Republicans who never accepted the GFA. The overwhelming support for the Agreement in the Nationalist and Republican communities suggests that the threat from dissident Republicans is not for a return to large scale cross-community violence but random acts of terror that seek to undermine continued cooperation between Unionists and Nationalists. The near unanimous condemnation of the Real IRA and Continuity IRA for the Omagh bombing led to many in the dissident Republican movement to cease the use of violence. During negotiations and after the Agreement was signed, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness worked diligently to convince fellow Republicans of the need to eschew violence and take the road to peace promised by the GFA (Owsiak 2017). Thus, Goddard (2012) claims that the presence of "brokers" was critical to undermining spoilers in the Northern Ireland peace process. Despite the effective marginalization of po-

18

tential spoilers in the Republican community, it is important to recognize that the threat of future violence has not been eliminated. Disgruntlement with the need to accept something short of a thirty-two-county republic means that at least some remain dissatisfied with the failure to realize the ultimate goal of Irish unity. The prospect of Irish unity coming sooner rather than later after Brexit has undermined the long-term threat to peace and political stability posed by dissident Republicans.

While the opposition in the Republican community to the peace process and the political institutions created by the GFA has been minimal in the past twenty-five years, there has been much more antipathy toward the Agreement expressed among Unionists. For most of the past twenty-five years, Unionist leaders have often found it advantageous to play to the fears and sense of loss in the Unionist community rather than affirm a positive future for Unionists. Given that the GFA guaranteed Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom (U.K.) as long as a majority in Northern Ireland continued to support this constitutional position, Unionist political elites have failed to re-imagine their identity in a way that supported powersharing and political stability (White et al. 2016). In the initial five years after the Agreement, Paisley and the DUP gained support in the Unionist community for their opposition to the Agreement. Even after agreeing to share power in 2007, the DUP has proven willing to suspend or not participate in Stormont powersharing when they believed it is not in their interest. Increasingly, many have come to criticize the veto the DUP has employed to protest developments they find unacceptable, especially in the wake of Brexit. Thus, initial hesitancy to support the Agreement and the institutions it created in 1998 has only increased over time with political developments that Unionists find alarming and not in their interests.

The political arrangements created by the 1998 Agreement that provided for institutionalized powersharing in Northern Ireland built upon a logic that had been attempted by the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973. This Agreement had called for powersharing between Catholics and Protestants, but the Ulster Workers Strike of 1974 prevented this effort at powersharing from being realized. Coakley (2011) and McGarry and O'Leary (2016) have identified the institutional powersharing among Nationalists and Unionists created by the GFA as consociational. Dixon (2005) has contended that the logic of the political arrangements in Northern Ireland may not fit the strict requirements in Lijphart's (1977) definition of consociationalism. Those who negotiated the Agreement have testified that they did not seek to construct a "consociational" settlement (Dixon 2018). Bew (2006) contends the politicians devised a negotiated settlement not based on a complex theoretical framework but from diplomatic exchanges and a search for an agreement acceptable to all.

A strict consociational interpretation of the Northern Ireland peace process fails to appreciate the fundamental dynamic of identity development and change

over time, including those of Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland. Todd (2016, 92) argues "ethnic distinctions in Northern Ireland are not only embedded and polarized, but also fluid and permeable". The different groups involved in negotiating the GFA not only modified their negotiating positions but redefined their long-term goals and near-term strategies based on the negotiation process. Hazleton (2013) has stressed how different leaders learned different lessons, and Dixon (2019) contends that the negotiators of the Agreement learned to coordinate their policy and negotiation positions based on the positions of the other actors in the peace process. In the twenty-five years since the signing of the GFA, politicians and parties have learned to advance their community's interests whether in the institutions of Stormont or by refusing to agree to operate within these institutions and allow the British government to govern Northern Ireland directly. Therefore, the most recent scholarship has moved beyond consociationalism to explain powersharing more generally in the Northern Ireland context (McEvoy 2015; 2019).

The GFA addressed three critical relationships that needed institutional means to resolve conflicts. First, the institutions of the executive and Assembly at Stormont were designed for Unionists and Nationalists to share power. The second strand of the Agreement developed a North-South Ministerial council to facilitate cooperation between those living in the north and south of Ireland. The third strand of the GFA created a Council of the Isles to address issues of common concern with those living on the islands off the west coast of the continent of Europe. While the Agreement created political institutions designed to address these three relationships, it did not settle all issues that parties identified in the negotiations. Nationalists complained about the history of one-sided and faulty policing by the RUC. Unionists did not get a specified process of decommissioning in the Agreement. Both of these contentious issues were ultimately dealt with by Independent International Commissions that successfully if slowly were able to reform a police force and oversaw a process of delayed decommissioning (Walsh 2017). The success of these international commissions has been critical in supporting the peace process and allowing the institutions of powersharing to focus on less contentious issues. While the issue of decommissioning has been more or less resolved, its delay allowed paramilitaries to police their own communities (Gallaher 2017). This has left the reformed police organization, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), in a liminal state significantly different from the RUC but not completely reformed in a way as to establish a completely new and different identity (J. Murphy 2019).

3. Powersharing Institutions

One of the continuing refrains of criticism toward the institutions created by the GFA has been their inflexibility. Going back to the work of Huntington (1968),

20

political scientists have stressed the need for institutions to be flexible and adaptable in order to survive and provide stable governance. The difficulty of altering the institutions in order to address what many perceive as common-sense solutions to governance prevents reasonable reforms that would make government work more easily and efficiently (Wilford 2015). The powersharing arrangements provided in Northern Ireland often fail because party elites have little incentive to allow for necessary reforms (Doyle 2021). While there have been minor reforms of the institutions and processes of governance since 1998, the fundamental logic of powersharing and the need for leaders and parties from both communities to cooperate remains intact.

Recent research has stressed that the powersharing arrangement in Northern Ireland is based on the continuing consent and cooperation of the different parties (White 2021). There have been several interruptions in the process of shared governance in the twenty-five years since the signing of the Agreement. This has been primarily based on Unionist concerns. These have varied over time, but they indicate a continuing discomfort for sharing power among a political group that long dominated politics in Northern Ireland. One could argue that it was likely if not inevitable for the group who historically monopolized power to be reluctant in sharing power. In these circumstances the political elites leading the group who historically held power must demonstrate leadership and provide a vision that compels this reluctant group to share power.

The golden age of powersharing and political stability in Northern Ireland after the GFA was the period from May of 2007 through January of 2017. It was in this period that two unlikely political enemies came to share power, Martin McGuinness and Ian Paisley. Even after Paisley's retirement in 2008, McGuinness successfully shared power with Paisley's two successors as leaders of the DUP, Peter Robinson and Arlene Foster. The ability of the leaders of the two extreme parties to share power and work under the institutional framework created by the GFA seemed to validate the effort to create institutions that would bring peace and stability to Northern Ireland after decades of violence through a powersharing arrangement.

In the years immediately after the ratification of the Agreement, the moderate and largest parties in each community, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and UUP, lost electoral support. The more extreme parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin, became the largest parties in the Protestant and Catholic communities respectively. This happened for different reasons. In the case of the SDLP, its demise was based on the retirement of its two principal leaders, John Hume and Seamus Mallon. They had worked most of their adult lives to achieve powersharing and gain better rights and policies for Catholics in Northern Ireland. Once they had achieved the Agreement and Mallon served initially as Deputy First Minister, both leaders retired from politics. This left a void of experienced leadership in the SDLP. In addition, Nationalist voters came to see

Sinn Féin as increasingly legitimate as they had supported the Agreement and gradually played a role in promoting IRA decommissioning. This made Sinn Féin appear to be the strongest party advocating for Nationalists' interests. The leaders of Sinn Féin, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, were reaching their prime as political leaders and had evolved from their days either in the IRA or linked to the IRA violence of the 1970s and 1980s.

Similar to the mainstreaming of Sinn Féin, the DUP became seen as an effective vanguard party for Unionists. Its leader, Ian Paisley, had opposed the GFA, but the DUP worked within the institutions created by the Agreement (Mustad 2019). In the late 1990s and early 2000s as the IRA failed to decommission, Unionists became increasingly reluctant to share power. The UUP and its leader, David Trimble, appeared to be duped and not a strong enough advocate for the Unionist position. As a result, by 2003 the extreme parties had become the largest parties in each community as a process of intra-ethnic outbidding had taken place (Moore et al. 2014).

The political ascent of the two extreme parties appeared to make the process of powersharing and compromise more difficult. However, if the extremes could come to a deal to share power, the operation of the political institutions created by the GFA would be more enduring. The institutions of Stormont remained closed from October of 2002 through May of 2007, but the ultimate deal struck first in the St. Andrews Agreement in October of 2006 and in early May of 2007 led to a decade long period of peace and successful powersharing in Stormont. As we look back on this period, we can identify several factors that facilitated this powersharing. By 2007, Bertie Ahern and Tony Blair, as the Taoiseach of Ireland and the Prime Minister of the U.K., had a decade of collaboration. They had worked tirelessly to achieve the Agreement, and both of their reputations and positive legacies are built on this Agreement. After signing and ratifying the GFA, Ahern and Blair relentlessly pursued implementation of the Agreement by overcoming obstacles such as the delayed decommissioning. The close and effective diplomatic relations not just between these heads of government but their cabinets and civil service had created mutual respect and effective cooperation in pursuing the realization of peace based on the powersharing arrangements of the GFA. In the spring of 2007, Blair's threat to jointly rule Northern Ireland with Ahern precipitated Paisley to accede to powersharing.

4. Anglo-Irish Relations, Brexit, and the Border

Historically, Anglo-Irish relations have not always been so close and collaborative as that achieved by Blair and Ahern. Historically, British governments saw Ireland through a colonial lens that tended to discount the impact of British policies on domestic developments in Ireland (O'Leary 2014). In the period since Brexit, the British government and its several leaders have not only sought to

22

achieve separation from the European Union (E.U.), but their single-minded pursuit of a Brexit deal led to policies that jeopardized the peace in Northern Ireland. As a result, Brexit served to undermine British-Irish diplomatic and governmental cooperation in facilitating peace and shared governance in Northern Ireland (Laffan & O'Mahoney 2021; M. C. Murphy 2019).

The majority in Northern Ireland had voted to remain in the E.U. in the Brexit referendum of June 2016. Nevertheless, the British government had indicated it was seeking to withdraw all the U.K. from the E.U. This reawakened fears of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Historically, the partition of Ireland in 1921 had huge ramifications. Crossing the border meant invasive checks. After partition, the jurisdictions moved further and further apart in terms of governance and policies, and cultural differences persisted and grew overtime due to little contact across the border (Ferriter 2019; Moore 2019). Thus, partition had been a major complaint of Irish Nationalists ever since the signing and ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. The border separating Northern Ireland and the Republic had become seamless after the GFA as the territory on both sides of the border was part of the E.U. In these circumstances, the border did not function as a physical separation of people or goods as it had before both the U.K. and Ireland joined the E.U. in 1973. Moreover, with the abatement of violence and especially the disarming of the IRA, the border no longer represented a security threat to the British government's administration of Northern Ireland. The free flow of goods and people across the border satiated Irish Nationalists' aspirations for Ireland to no longer be divided. Thus, as Goddard (2006) posited, the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was a social construction whose meaning could change over time. Because the border could be re-imagined by Irish Nationalists during the peace process, Coakley (2017) claims the Irish irredentist claim to Northern Ireland transitioned to a norm of consent.

The Agreement allowed actors in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to transcend the fundamental challenge of the border and partition. Cross border cooperation, including economic activity, was a tangible sign of the peace that had been achieved (Hayward et al. 2011). However, Brexit re-awakened concerns over the Irish and thus Brexit has clearly destabilized the politics of Northern Ireland and the U.K. As British governments began to negotiate with the E.U. regarding the terms of its departure, the complex and difficult case of Northern Ireland would have to be at the center of such negotiations (M. C. Murphy 2018). Within the context of British politics, Nicolaidis (2019) claims that Brexit means not only the departure from the E.U., but a reckoning that may well require sacrifice for British citizens. O'Toole (2018) depicts Brexit as the failed effort of a collapsing empire to attempt to assert itself.

The collapse of powersharing in Northern Ireland in January of 2017 was based on the desire by Martin McGuinness to have the DUP leader and First

Minister, Arlene Foster, temporarily step aside to investigate the Cash for Ash scandal (McBride 2019). Foster's reluctance to have an independent investigation into claims of corruption among DUP operatives in the government forced the resignation of McGuinness. While this scandal was the proximate cause of the collapse of powersharing, the shadow of the Brexit vote that had come just seven months prior to the scandal had created an uncertainty over the future of Northern Ireland. Cochrane (2020) refers to Brexit as an external shock to the peace that had been created by the GFA. After the collapse of Stormont powersharing in January of 2017, parties increasingly blamed each other across the sectarian divide for the problems preventing a resumption of powersharing. The uncertainty of the implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland while the British government negotiated the terms of withdrawal with the E.U. coincided with increased support for Nationalist parties. This led to increased reluctance of Unionists to share power (Birrell & Heenan 2017). Todd (2017) stressed the lack of specificity and agreement on the governing arrangements and the need for British-Irish cooperation to restart powersharing at Stormont.

The political impasse in restoring Stormont continued in 2018. Repeated attempts to restore devolution failed and deadlines established by the British to restore powersharing were ignored by the political parties in Northern Ireland, especially the DUP. Birrell and Heenan (2018) contended that a lack of trust, poor leadership, and limited consequences for the political parties caused the political stalemate and collapsed Stormont to continue. After the resignation of David Cameron who had opposed Brexit and staked his future as Prime Minister on the referendum, Teresa May sought to negotiate an agreement to withdraw the U.K. from the E.U. as the new British Prime Minister. Her proposed agreement called for a backstop that guaranteed that there would be no hard border on the island of Ireland. The E.U., heavily influenced by arguments of the Irish government had insisted that the U.K. withdrawal process not jeopardize the peace achieved by the GFA. This included open borders between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Meanwhile, May had to balance simultaneously the need to find a negotiated agreement with the E.U. and retain Unionist support for her government as she relied on Unionist support to hold her majority in the House of Commons. May had trouble satiating the Unionists, E.U. negotiators, and critics in her own Conservative Party. Led by Boris Johnson, Brexiteers in the Conservative Party failed to support their own party's Prime Minister and opposed May's proposed withdrawal agreement with the E.U. This led to Teresa May's resignation. Boris Johnson succeeded May as leader of the Conservatives and Prime Minister. He quickly called for an election in which his party won a large majority in the House of Commons. With expanded support, he was able to quickly negotiate a Withdrawal Agreement with the E.U. that included the Northern Ireland Protocol. This Agreement thus guaranteed that Northern Ireland would de facto remain in the E.U. in terms of trade, and

24

that the border between the U.K. and the E.U. would be the Irish Sea and not on a land border in Ireland.

While extremely unpopular with Unionists, the Withdrawal Agreement stabilized politics in Northern Ireland enough for devolution and powersharing to be temporarily restored. In early 2020, the Irish and British governments brought increasing pressure and a common approach to convince the parties in Northern Ireland to re-start powersharing in Stormont. This was a rare example of effective British-Irish diplomatic cooperation and engagement regarding Northern Ireland in the aftermath of Brexit. Tánaiste and Foreign Minister Simon Coveney and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Julian Smith worked closely together to coordinate the resumption of powersharing which was restored on January 10, 2020, with Arlene Foster serving as First Minister and Michelle O'Neill as Deputy First Minister. The agreement that re-established powersharing – New Decade, New Approach – introduced institutional reforms which make powersharing more sustainable and limited the often abused "Petition of Concern" in the Assembly (Haughey 2020). The United States (U.S.) supported the re-opening of Stormont and continuing efforts to operationalize the GFA. In September 2020 the U.S. Speaker of the House at the time, Nancy Pelosi, spoke to the Irish Dáil emphasizing the continued American support of peace in Northern Ireland. Along with the Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee at the Time, Richard Neal, Pelosi stressed that Congress would not support a U.S.-U.K. Trade Agreement if it in any way threatened the Northern Ireland Protocol or the GFA.

By early 2021, dissatisfaction with Foster's leadership within the DUP and as First Minister led to her resignation as leader of the DUP in May and as First Minister in June of 2021. The frustration with Foster reflected dissent within the Unionist community regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol which had been negotiated by Boris Johnson. The realization that the Irish Sea separated Northern Ireland from the U.K. became a continuing source of frustration. Edwin Poots succeeded Foster as leader of the DUP in late May of 2021, but he only lasted a month in power. On June 30th of 2021, Jeffrey Donaldson became leader of the DUP and has based his leadership on opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol and the need to renegotiate the terms of British withdrawal from the E.U. as it effects Northern Ireland. Rather than seeking less restrictive economic flows between all of the U.K. and the E.U., Donaldson and the DUP want to end the division of the U.K. in the Irish Sea and appear willing to reinstitute a hard border on the island of Ireland. This is a non-starter for the E.U. and the Republic of Ireland. The most likely outcome of negotiations regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol would be to ease all trade flows between the E.U. and the U.K. and thereby minimize the barriers to trade across the Irish Sea.

Further Unionist frustration came with the May 2022 elections for the Northern Ireland Assembly. As the DUP lost four seats, Sinn Féin held their

27 seats and became the largest party represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly. This would mean that Michelle O'Neill as parliamentary leader of Sinn Féin, the largest political party in Northern Ireland, would become First Minister. Paul Givan, the parliamentary leader of the DUP in the Assembly would become Deputy First Minister. However, the DUP refused to share power due to their dislike of the election outcome and continuing frustration with the Northern Ireland Protocol (Tonge 2022). This has prevented the re-establishment of powersharing. Murphy (2023) contends that the DUP's losses were primarily caused by the loss of moderate voters to the Alliance Party. Simultaneously, the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) squeezed away some more extreme voters. The result was that the DUP faces a threat from the middle and far right as it seeks to recapture its position as the largest single party in Northern Ireland. The rise of these middle voters and those who do not identify with traditional unionism or traditional nationalism may hold the balance in the future of Northern Ireland, including potential future referenda for Irish unity, as the percentage of Nationalists and Unionists is not likely to form a majority in the near future (Diamond & Colfer 2023).

The stalemate between the U.K. and the E.U. regarding the implications of the Withdrawal Agreement and the Northern Ireland Protocol has led to the DUP continuing its refusal to accept powersharing and operationalize the Stormont Assembly. In order to address the DUP concerns, the British have drafted a U.K. Internal Market Bill that the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen claims violates Article Five of the Withdrawal Agreement and contradicts the Northern Ireland Protocol. However, von der Leyen has stressed that practical issues regarding the facilitation of trade to and from Northern Ireland and the remainder of the U.K. can be resolved as long as new policies do not create a hard border on the island of Ireland. The Biden administration has signalled increased interest in both political stability and economic investment in Northern Ireland by choosing Joseph Kennedy III as Special Envoy to Northern Ireland on December 19, 2022. This position had remained unfilled after Mick Mulvaney resigned on January 6, 2021. The U.S. has historically supported the peace process as it was an important priority under President Clinton, and successive Presidents selected envoys to attempt to promote the implementation of the GFA. American efforts to promote democracy and human rights globally has led American diplomacy to cooperate with the Irish and British governments as well as with local parties and groups in Northern Ireland to achieve these goals. The recent American effort supports the new British government under Prime Minister Rishi Sunak that has been intensively negotiating with the Irish government to overcome the current impasse and re-open Stormont. However, the DUP remains reluctant to do so.

5. Conclusion

26

While Unionists have had trouble coming to grips with the changes brought by the GFA and Brexit, Nationalists and Republicans have perceived developments in Northern Ireland's politics as trending toward their desired ultimate goal of a united thirty-two county republic (Humphreys 2018). Increasingly, a narrative is emerging that Brexit has led to a more serious and proximate discussion of Irish unification (Connolly & Doyle 2019). This discussion is most prominent among long-time Republicans and Sinn Féin but extends to more mainstream politicians in the Irish context. For example, when Micheál Martin was Taoiseach, he promoted a policy of shared futures on the island. There has also been increasing discourse north and south of the border in the media and the public. Specific details of what kind of government system would operate in a unified Ireland and how institutions that operate separately north and south of the border would evolve in a united Ireland remain (Coakley 2022), but the aspiration for a thirty-two county republic is more realizable than in any time in the last century. The institutions created by the GFA may prove to be transitional moving Northern Ireland away from its Protestant past in the U.K. to a powersharing arrangement for Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland, and toward a Northern Ireland integrated into or part of an Irish republic.

References

Amaral, J., 2018. Do Peace Negotiations Shape Settlement Referendums? The Annan Plan and the Good Friday Agreement Experience Compared. *Cooperation and Conflict* 53 (3), 356–374.

Bew, P., 2006. Myths of Consociationalism: From Good Friday to Political Impasse. In M. Cox, A. Guelke & F. Stephen (eds.) *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 57–68.

Birrell, D. & Heenan, D., 2017. The Continuing Volatility of Devolution in Northern Ireland: The Shadow of Direct Rule. *The Political Quarterly* 88 (3), 473–479.

Birrell, D. & Heenan, D., 2018. Between Devolution and Direct Rule: Implications of a Political Vacuum in Northern Ireland. *The Political Quarterly* 89 (2), 306–312.

Blackbourn, J., 2015. *Anti-Terrorism Law and Normalising Northern Ireland.* Routledge, London.

Coakley, J., 2011. The Challenge of Consocation in Northern Ireland. *Parliamentary Affairs* 64 (3), 473–493.

Coakley, J., 2017. Resolving International Border Disputes: The Irish Experience. *Cooperation and Conflict* 52 (3), 377–398.

Coakley, J., 2022. A Farewell to Northern Ireland: Constitutional Options for Irish Unity. *The Political Quarterly* 93 (2), 307–315.

Cochrane, F., 2020. *Breaking Peace: Brexit and Northern Ireland.* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Connolly, E. & Doyle, J., 2019. Brexit and the Changing International and Domestic Perspectives of Sovereignty over Northern Ireland. *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 30, 217–233.

27

Diamond, P. & Colfer, B., 2023. Irish Unification after Brexit: Old and New Political Identities? *The Political Quarterly* 94 (1), 104–114.

Dixon, P., 2005. Why the Good Friday Agreement Is Not Consociational. *The Political Quarterly* 76 (3), 357–367.

Dixon, P., 2018. What Politicians Can Teach Academics: 'Real' Politics, Consociationalism, and the Northern Ireland Conflict. In M. Jakala, D. Kuzu & M. Qvortrup (eds.) *Consociationalism and Power-Sharing in Europe: Arend Lijphart's Theory of Political Accommodation.* Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 55–83.

Dixon, P., 2019. *Performing the Northern Ireland Peace Process: In Defence of Politics.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Doyle, J., 2021. Power-Sharing in Divided Societies. In O. P. Richmond & G. Visoka (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Peacebuilding, Statebuilding, and Peace Formation.* Oxford University of Press, Oxford, 459–472.

Ferriter, D., 2019. *The Border: The Legacy of a Century of Anglo-Irish Politics.* Profile Books, London.

Filardo-Llamas, L., 2011. Discourse Worlds in Northern Ireland: The Legitimisation of the 1998 Agreement. In K. Hayward & C. O'Donnell (eds.) *Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution: Debating Peace in Northern Ireland.* Routledge, London, 62–76.

Gallaher, C., 2017. Under the Gun: Northern Ireland's Unique History with DDR. In T. J. White (ed.) *Theories of International Relations and Northern Ireland.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 55–73.

Goddard, S. E., 2006. Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy. *International Organization* 60 (1), 35–68.

Goddard, S. E., 2012. Brokering Peace: Networks, Legitimacy, and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. *International Studies Quarterly* 56 (3), 501–515.

Hancock, L., 2011. There Is No Alternative: Prospect Theory, the Yes Campaign and Selling the Good Friday Agreement. *Irish Political Studies* 26 (1), 183–203.

Haughey, S., 2020. Back to Stormont: The *New Decade, New Approach* Agreement and What it Means for Northern Ireland. *The Political Quarterly* 91 (1), 134–140.

Hayward, K., McCall, C. & Damkat, I., 2011. Building Peace and Crossing Borders: The North/South Dimension. In M. Power (ed.) *Building Peace in Northern Ireland.* Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 191–208.

Hazleton, W., 2013. 'Look at Northern Ireland': Lessons Best Learned at Home. In T. J. White (ed.) *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process.* University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (WI), 3–33.

Humphreys, R., 2018. *Beyond the Border: The Good Friday Agreement and Irish Unity after Brexit.* Merrion Press, Dublin.

Huntington, S., 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies.* Yale University Press, New Haven (CT).

Laffan, B. & O'Mahoney, J., 2021. British-Irish Relations: How Brexit Unsettled What had been Normalised. In M. Holmes & K. Simpson (eds.) *Ireland and the European Union: Economic, Political and Social Crises.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 137–151.

Lijphart, A., 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration.* Yale University Press, New Haven (CT).

McBride, S., 2019. *Burned: The Inside Story of the 'Cash for Ash' Scandal and Northern Ireland's Secret Elite.* Irish Academic Press, Dublin.

McEvoy, J., 2015. *Power-Sharing Executives: Governing in Bosnia, Macedonia, and Northern Ireland.* University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

28

McEvoy, J., 2018. Letting "the People(s)" Decide: Peace Referendums and Power-Sharing Settlements. *Democratization* 25 (5), 864–881.

McEvoy, J., 2019. Power Sharing and the Pursuit of Good Governance: Evidence from Northern Ireland. In A. McCulloch & J. McGarry (eds.) *Power Sharing: Empirical and Normative Challenges*. Routledge, London, 211–228.

McGarry, J. & O'Leary, B., 2016. Power-Sharing Executives: Consociational and Centripetal Formulae and the Case of Northern Ireland. *Ethnopolitics* 15 (5), 497–519.

McGlinchey, M., 2019. *Unfinished Business: The Politics of 'Dissident' Irish Republicanism*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Mitchell, D., 2015. *Politics and Peace in Northern Ireland: Political Parties and the Implementation of the 1998 Agreement*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Mitchell, D., Tannam, E. & Wallace, S., 2018. The Agreement's Impact on Political Cooperation. *Irish Political Studies* 33 (3), 283–310.

Moore, C., 2019. *The Birth of the Border: The Impact of Partition of Ireland*. Merrion Press, Dublin.

Moore, G., Loizides, N., Sandal, N. A. & Lordos, A., 2014. Winning Peace Frames: Intra-Ethnic Outbidding in Northern Ireland and Cyprus. *Western European Politics* 37, 159–181.

Murphy, J., 2019. Leading in Liminal Space: The Challenge of Policing in Northern Ireland. In P. Ramshaw, M. Silvestri & M. Simpson (eds.) *Police Leadership: Changing Landscapes*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 193–208.

Murphy, M. C., 2018. *Europe and Northern Ireland's Future: Negotiating Brexit's Unique Case*. Agenda Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Murphy, M. C., 2019. The Brexit Crisis, Ireland and British–Irish Relations: Europeanisation and/or de-Europeanisation? *Irish Political Studies* 34 (4), 530–550.

Murphy, M. C., 2023. The Rise of the Middle Ground in Northern Ireland: What Does it Mean? *The Political Quarterly* 94 (1), 95–103.

Mustad, J. E., 2019. From Protest to Power: The Rise of the DUP. In C. I. Armstrong, D. Herbert & J. E. Mustad (eds.) *The Legacy of the Good Friday Agreement: Northern Irish Politics, Culture and Art after 1998*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 73–85.

Nicolaidis, K., 2019. *Exodus, Reckoning, Sacrifice: Three Meanings of Brexit*. Unbound, London.

O'Leary, B., 2014. The Shackles of the State & Hereditary Animosities: Colonialism in the Interpretation of Irish History. *Field Day Review* 10, 149–185.

O'Toole, F., 2018. *Heroic Failure: Brexit and the Politics of Pain*. Liveright, London.

Owsiak, A., 2017. Issues, Leaders, and Regimes: Reaching Settlement in Northern Ireland. In T. J. White (ed.) *Theories of International Relations and Northern Ireland*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 36–54.

Ruohomäki, J., 2010. Parity of Esteem: A Conceptual Approach to the Northern Ireland Conflict. *Alternatives* 35 (2), 163–185.

Todd, J., 2016. Northern Ireland in a Balkan Perspective: The Cultural Dynamics of Complex Conflicts. In É. Ó Ciardha & G. Vojvoda (eds.) *Politics of Identity in Post-Conflict States*. Routledge, London.

Todd, J., 2017. Contested Constitutionalism? Northern Ireland and the British-Irish Relationship since 2010. *Parliamentary Affairs* 70 (2), 301–321.

Tonge, J., 2022. Voting into a Void? The 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly Election. *The Political Quarterly* 93 (3), 524–529.

Walsh, D., 2017. *Independent Commissions and Contentious Issues in Post-Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

29

White, T. J., 2021. Power-Sharing and Political Stability: Accommodation and Commitment to a Shared Future in Northern Ireland. In L. Lelourec & G. O'Keeffe-Vigneron (eds.) *Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement: Building a Shared Future from a Troubled Past?* Peter Lang, Oxford, 57–74.

White, T. J., Wiedenhoft Murphy, W. A. & Peden, M., 2016. Redefining Unionism: The Role of the Diaspora? *The International Journal of Conflict & Reconciliation* 2 (2), 1–20, https://www.scribd.com/document/334017784/Redefining-Unionism-The-Role-of-the-Diaspora (accessed 10 May 2023).

Wilford, R., 2015. Two Cheers for Consociational Democracy? Reforming the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive. *Parliamentary Affairs* 68, 757–774.

Zartman, I. W., 2008. The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments. In J. Darby & R. Mac Ginty (eds.) *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence and Peace Processes*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 22–35.

Siobhan Byrne, Allison McCulloch

Stories of Gender Inclusion, Power-Sharing and the Good Friday Agreement

Marking the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, we review the gendered legacy of power-sharing and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. The participation of an all-women's political party in the 1996–1998 peace talks and world-class commitments to human rights and equality enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement suggested that Northern Ireland would stand as a conflict resolution and institutional design model par excellence. While the intervening years have been largely peaceful, and women's political representation has improved, years of political stalemate and poor equality and human rights protections for women suggest a mixed legacy of gender inclusion and power-sharing. In this paper, we chart the ups and downs of Northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions in the context of feminist peace activism over two and a half decades and offer a set of feminist reflections on the promise and peril of power-sharing in Northern Ireland.

Keywords: gender inclusion, equality, human rights, power-sharing, social justice, Good Friday Agreement.

Vključevanje spolov, delitev oblasti in Velikonočni sporazum

Ob 25. obletnici Velikonočnega sporazuma je bil opravljen pregled zapuščine delitve oblasti in vzpostavljanja miru na Severnem Irskem z vidika spola. Sodelovanje politične stranke, katere članice so bile izključno ženske, v mirovnih pogajanjih v letih 1996–1998 ter zaveze k spoštovanju človekovih pravic in enakosti, zapisane v sporazumu, so nakazovale, da bi Severna Irska lahko postala zgleden model reševanja sporov in institucionalnega oblikovanja. Čeprav so bila leta po sporazumu večinoma mirna in se je politična zastopanost žensk izboljšala, pa dolgoletna politična stagnacija in pomanjkljiva zaščita načela enakosti in človekovih pravic za ženske kaže na mešano dediščino vključevanja spolov in delitve oblasti. Prispevek prikazuje vzpone in padce severnoirskih institucij za delitev oblasti v kontekstu feminističnega mirovnega aktivizma v obdobju petindvajsetih let ter ponuja nabor feminističnih razmišljanj o obljubah in pasteh delitve oblasti na Severnem Irskem.

Ključne besede: *vključevanje spolov, enakost, človekove pravice, delitev oblasti, socialna pravičnost, Velikonočni sporazum.*

Correspondence address: Siobhan Byrne, University of Alberta, 10-16 Tory Building, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, e-mail: siobhan.byrne@ualberta.ca; Allison McCulloch, Brandon University, 270 18th street, Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, e-mail: mccullocha@brandonu.ca.

1. A Beginning

In the conflict resolution canon, the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) is power-sharing par excellence, bringing together deeply divided Irish Nationalist and British Unionist communities in a shared government and closing out 30 years of Troubles. For power-sharing critics, the GFA is a fractious political arrangement that has failed to deliver peace and political stability in the intervening years, cementing divisions rather than bridging them. For feminist peace scholars, the GFA is an exemplar of gender inclusion, with the election of a women's political party to the peace talks and the adoption of robust human rights and equality instruments in the final peace agreement. For feminist critics, it is a cautionary tale of women losing political representation and access to power after the Agreement, leaving feminists and social justice activists to fight for the next two and a half decades for access to abortions, marriage equality and other basic rights. Whether celebratory or cautionary – or some combination thereof – these are the stories told of Northern Ireland's peace.

Our aim in this article is to reflect on some of the stories of the GFA told over the last 25 years, not to shape and then settle on a singular perfect narrative, either one of success or one of failure. As feminist scholars of peace activism and power-sharing, our goal is to capture the storied post-Agreement years, focusing on feminist and social justice political concerns, interventions, and activism in Northern Ireland, in order to highlight the dynamism, evolution, and complexities of peace and power-sharing over time. We are particularly interested in how the stories of the peace are told and what such accounts mean for how we think about the lessons of the Northern Ireland peace process for other cases and, indeed, for Northern Ireland too.

We are conscious of the risk of beginning our story of the peace with the GFA – memorializing not just an (imperfect) Agreement but freezing in time a period that is still very much unfolding. In this way, we argue that settling on whether to celebrate or shelve power-sharing with a feminist reading of the GFA misses the way the Agreement does not fix power-sharing in place (for good or bad). Rather, the peace is negotiated, renegotiated, venerated, contested, and made anew in the years of political crisis since its signing, offering up opportunities for improving political inclusion and meeting feminist peace goals as articulated by the women's rights movement and social justice activists, but also foreclosing such opportunities as the two-community dynamic dominates the political narrative.

In what follows, we chart some of the many page-turning events that have shunted the peace through political crises to new resolutions, from multiple suspensions of the power-sharing executive to new, renewed, and sometimes failed political agreements. Power-sharing was not done on that Good Friday in April 1998, just as the women's movement did not settle human rights and equal-

ity protections at the peace table. Power-sharing has instead been renegotiated time and again, from the Agreement at St. Andrews (2006), the Hillsborough Agreement (2010), the failed Haass and O'Sullivan talks (2013), the Stormont House Agreement (2014), the New Decade, New Approach (2020), and – a new cliff-hanger at the time of writing – the impending Windsor Framework (2023), which may yet restore the power-sharing institutions and find a Brexit compromise. Agreements like the GFA are never settled but instead are often followed by instances of what Pierre du Toit calls "post-settlement settlements" (du Toit 2003) or what Christine Bell and Jan Pospisil call "formalised political *un*settlement" (Bell & Pospisil 2017, 577). The story of the GFA, we suggest, is also told through these sequels. Each attempt to settle the sharing of power has both opened and closed opportunities for feminists working to improve political inclusion, human rights and equality in Northern Ireland.

From the perspective of power-sharing and conflict resolution, renegotiation is necessary in part because peace agreements are often written from the perspective of constructive ambiguity, whereby "actors deliberately adopt language that is vague and can simultaneously mean different things to different people" (Bell & Kavanaugh 1998, 1356). While such language may elicit agreement, translating it into practice can give way to serious implementation problems. This is where du Toit's concept of the Post-Settlement Settlement (PSS) is important. A PSS "can focus on improving and fine-tuning a working agreement or salvaging an eroding one, and on dealing with specific shortcomings and obsolete arrangements rather than on staving off outright political or social collapse" (du Toit 2003, 116). This approach, beyond fleshing out vague clauses, can also address any unanticipated consequences of the original settlement, help to respond to new political circumstances and exogenous shocks, and can facilitate the accommodation of new constituencies. A PSS approach asks us to see the initial settlement as "one episode in an ongoing series of events" (du Toit 2003, 106), in keeping with recent conceptualizations of the power-sharing lifecycle (McCulloch & McEvoy 2020).

From the perspective of feminist activism, a much more contingent assessment is required. The process by which a peace agreement or a post-settlement settlement comes into being represents a critical juncture, but one in which women's inclusion is not guaranteed and which must be revisited time and again. Peace talks may serve as "windows of opportunity" in that they can be "catalysts for changes to gender roles" (Anderson 2015), but this can work both ways. PSS talks may broaden inclusion, but they may also result in an "attrition of inclusivity" (Rouse & O'Connor 2020, 13). This is where Bell and Pospisil's approach to the "political unsettlement" is instructive, suggesting that:

> in practice, formalised political unsettlement creates a post-agreement landscape characterised by ongoing radical and extraordinary institutional reform as a 'way of

34

life'. […] Within it, pragmatic approaches to elite inclusion interact in complex ways with more normative arguments for social inclusion and create situations of constant institutional flux. Formalised political unsettlement is not a 'bump in the road' on a peace process road to liberal peace, but it becomes the new normal (Bell & Pospisil 2017, 585).

For our purposes, Bell and Pospisil's language of political unsettlement helps us to recognize the opportunities and challenges for building a more inclusive peace in Northern Ireland and beyond for the women's rights and social justice movements – in times of unsettled peace.

2. Begin at the Beginning: Accidental Activism, Accidental Inclusion

In her autobiography, *Stand Up, Speak Out*, Monica McWilliams (2021) – co-founder and elected representative of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition party – writes of the post-Agreement negotiations as such: "like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*: 'Down, down, down. Would the fall never come to an end […]. There was nothing else to do, so Alice began talking again.' The story provided the solution – more dialogue was needed" (McWilliams 2021, 257). Told to "shut up and sit down" (McWilliams 2021, *ix*) as a representative at the 1996–1998 peace talks leading to the GFA, McWilliams's memoir records the power of continued dialogue in the face of sectarianism where "exclusive narratives, honed by inherited tales and stories, seemed to justify acts of destruction as a distorted way of protecting each side's heritage […]" (McWilliams 2021, 247).

Indeed, such sectarianism and intercommunal conflict, as well as police and military violence, defined the Troubles from the late 1960s onward, stemming from deep poverty, employment discrimination, social inequality, and political exclusion (for a gendered history, see Fairweather et al. 1984; Aretxaga 1997; Her Loyal Voice 2022). To be sure, beginning in the early years of the conflict, the United Kingdom (U.K.) government introduced measures designed to monitor and address discrimination and eventually promote equality, including the annual reporting of the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (for a list, see McKenna 2022), a Fair Employment Act (1989), and the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment (1993) requirements for broad-based equality (Committee on the Administration of Justice 2006, 3–5). And by the 1990s, socio-political conditions were improving under the cautious optimism of successive British-Irish negotiations like the 1993 Downing Street Declaration and the 1994 loyalist and republican paramilitary ceasefires. For Elizabeth Meehan, new legislation, which required employers to report to and be subject to the Fair Employment Commission, foreshadowed further advances in equality and human rights at the GFA talks (Meehan 2006, 37–38).

35

While there were important anti-discrimination and equality changes underway in Northern Ireland before the GFA, we should not overstate the changes taking place. Of the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment, Bronagh Hinds estimates that it had little impact overall (Hinds 2003,185). Rupert Taylor's assessment is that while instruments like the Fair Employment Act were positive, they ultimately failed to tackle what he called "the full weight of past systemic sectarianism" (Taylor 2009, 315). Overall, though, equality legislation showed that there was, in the estimation of John Coakley and Jennifer Todd, "a sense that the trajectory was moving towards greater communal equality" (Coakley & Todd 2020, 339).

It was in this context of slow moves towards equality, but also stubbornly persistent systemic sectarianism, that power-sharing between the two communities was proposed, from the early days of the Sunningdale process (1973–1974) through to the final adoption of the GFA in 1998.[1] It was also in this context of poverty, discrimination in employment, and poor social services in working-class neighbourhoods that women-led community-based initiatives emerged to fill the gaps. Women's activism in Northern Ireland had been expanding during this period of the 1970s and 1980s, especially in the form of women's centres to deliver services in working-class communities and to share knowledge, offer support and discuss issues such as domestic violence and education (McWilliams & Kilmurray 2017, 548–549).

As Avila Kilmurray and Monica McWilliams detail, following the 1994 ceasefire by the paramilitary groups, the women's rights movement was already beginning to strategize about how to gain access to the political process and to avail of European Union (E.U.) peace funding for women's community groups and other civil society representatives that were interested in participating in the peace process (McWilliams & Kilmurray 2017, 549). In 1995, McWilliams organized a conference titled Women, Politics and the Way Forward, which included about 200 women from across Northern Ireland who were interested in getting included in the peace process (McWilliams & Kilmurray 2017, 548–550). They were inspired by and reflecting on their experience at the 1995 United Nations (U.N.) Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing. McWilliams recalls:

> Bringing Beijing back home was really important. We took two aims: to get more women into politics and to strive for workable solutions. We kept the policy positions simple and avoided producing loads of papers – we stuck to the three simple aims of working for human rights, equality and inclusion. We were a diverse group of women from different backgrounds: Protestant and Catholic as well as women of no religion, working in the home, professional and unemployed, from urban and rural areas (McWilliams 2010, 74).

Initially, there was no consensus on the path forward, with debate on whether to organize a women's party or to advocate for women from within the existing par-

36

ties as they stood. Ultimately, it was the experience of the women-led organizing and the creation of the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue that set the groundwork for the creation of Northern Ireland's all-women political party – the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) – and a distinctly feminist intervention in power-sharing.

The Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue was itself an innovative approach to negotiating peace in that it required elections as the criterion for entry to the peace talks. Held in 1996, the elections utilized a unique electoral formula, which combined 90 constituency-based seats on a closed-list system along with 20 top-up seats for the 10 best-performing parties and was designed to support the inclusion of smaller parties in the negotiations (Coakley & Todd 2020, 344; for election results, see Whyte 1998). A group of women, including McWilliams – a leading figure in the movement – seized the opportunity to form a party in the weeks leading up to the Forum elections in a bid to get a seat at the table. McWilliams and Kilmurray write:

> The Women's Coalition was deliberately structured in a bi-communal manner, with two leaders, one drawn from the Catholic/Nationalist identity and the other from Protestant/Unionist. Refusing to adopt a position on the constitutional question, the Coalition strategized a politics that promoted the greater presence of women, as well as a forum for active citizenship during the political transition (McWilliams & Kilmurray 2017, 550).

Incredibly and improbably, the NIWC managed to get two top-up seats in the election – thus establishing themselves as the only women at the talks. McWilliams (1995, 21; 2021, 78) adopts the term "accidental activism" to describe the way in which Northern Ireland women initially and accidentally became political agents through early experiences in grassroots organizing. As Hinds emphasizes, it was also women's experiences of political exclusion that informed the demands that they made at the peace table, including, for example, calls for the creation of a Civic Forum to represent civil society; the naming of women directly in the GFA – beyond the two communities; the creation of an Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; a proposal to create a Bill of Rights; and statutory duties to address inequality beyond the two communities, including race, sexual orientation, age and more (see Hinds 2003, 187–189, 198). In this way, Elizabeth Meehan writes that the NIWC had a vision for Northern Ireland that moved beyond a narrow desire to stop the conflict. The goals were for an inclusive peace, as well as legislation that would reflect a commitment to human rights and equality – goals and demands informed by women's community activism (Meehan 2006, 41–42).

The story of the NIWC, from its origins in accidental activism to the party's rather accidental inclusion in the peace talks, offers a complicated reading of the peace process. On the one hand, it offers important insights both into how ro-

bust equality measures and innovative inclusion mechanisms informed the final text of the GFA, but also it exposes the precarity of inclusion. The inclusion of women in the Forum was not by any feature of power-sharing that required the representation of women. Instead, it was a quirk of the electoral formula that allowed activists to find and forge their own pathway for participation.[2] The story of the NIWC also tells us that the push for the kind of equality and inclusion measures described above can also complement power-sharing processes in important ways. The experience of the NIWC shows how power-sharing is compatible with other kinds of inclusion, beyond the two communities in the Northern Ireland case, both to the talks and in the agreements that follow. Yet, equally, such inclusion must also be actively fought for even after it is won.

3. Begin Again, Post-Agreement

In his comprehensive three-volume compendium on the history of Northern Ireland from colonialism to consociation, Brendan O'Leary refers to the two decades post-GFA as "the long negotiation". Tracing the fraught negotiations that restored power-sharing in 2007 under the terms of the St Andrews Agreement (SAA) through to the negotiations that sought to restabilize power-sharing under the terms of the Fresh Start Agreement in 2015, O'Leary writes:

> The public could have been forgiven for thinking they had seen this film before. Even the timing of crises and their resolution now looked wearily familiar: crises building up in the spring and summer, to trouble the executive; all party-talks chaired by the two governments in the autumn, sometimes in parallel with other executive and assembly activity; and then, just before Christmas, the reaching of an agreement about an agreement, and a review of outstanding business from previous agreements, all published on an elegant PDF posted on a government website (O'Leary 2019, 280–281).

Whereas power-sharing critics might see this as a fundamental weakness – after all, power-sharing arrangements "do not lend themselves to renegotiation. Most agree that consociational institutions, once established, are sticky" (Horowitz 2014, 12) – for many power-sharing advocates, like O'Leary, "the long negotiation" is what power-sharing is all about. Renegotiation – in the spirit of the original agreement and according to its agreed-upon amendment formula – is precisely what is often required to keep peace on track when faced with the kind of political impasse that sometimes emerges in situations of co-governance. By working through issues one at a time rather than undertaking wholesale revision to the original settlement, a post-settlement settlement keeps parties committed to the peace agreement while attempting to fix dysfunctionalities; it can also serve as a potential space to bring new parties in, widening the basis for inclusion (Papagianni 2010). Moreover, small-scale reforms can also have a knock-on ef-

fect, directly impacting political behavior and changing institutional incentive structures over time; the dramatic decline in veto usage after the reforms to the Petition of Concern in the New Decade, New Approach provides an important instance of this effect (McCulloch 2022).[3]

While renegotiation and PSSs might be par for the power-sharing course, much can be gained or lost in these moments of unsettlement. Take the SAA, which is rightly seen as a power-sharing success story: it restored the institutions after nearly four years of direct rule, made the formation of an executive easier by no longer requiring the two communities to support one another's candidates for First Minister and deputy First Minister, saw Sinn Féin pledge support for the Police Service, and brought the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) – now the largest unionist party – into the GFA fold. Yet, there is another reading of St Andrews. The restoration of the power-sharing institutions did not include the Civic Forum, which has never been revived. The Civic Forum, a novel political institution designed to bring civil society voices, including from the women's sector, into formal political decision-making, was a NIWC innovation proposed during the peace talks. The fact that the Civic Forum has not met since 2002, and that even its successor, a much-scaled-down compact civic advisory panel agreed as part of the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, has not convened, suggests "the relative ease by which a consociational structure can neglect its sole civil society element" (Pierson & Thomson 2018, 110). The NIWC lost its two assembly seats in the 2003 elections (Whyte 2003), and quietly dissolved in 2006. With the NIWC disbanding during the years of power-sharing suspension, it also highlights how the loss of its biggest promoter at the table meant the Civic Forum could be more easily shelved at St Andrews and thereafter.

Which PSS provisions get implemented and which are relegated to the margins also tells us something about what issues are valued by the power-sharing partners. As Cera Murtagh details,

> after the GFA's more broad-based, inclusive process, the SAA and subsequent agreements also saw a narrowing of the agenda and actors, with the focus shifting toward securing sufficient consensus between the DUP and Sinn Féin […]. As the focus shifted to crisis management and maintaining power-sharing between the two main players, broader inclusion and equality agendas, such as gender, slipped down the agenda (Murtagh 2021, 154).

The St Andrews text outlines a host of promises on Human Rights, Equality, Victims, and Other Issues, though many remain unimplemented, not least of all a Bill of Rights (O'Leary 2019). The promise of a Bill of Rights was a key element of the GFA. After the GFA and the loss of NIWC assembly seats, McWilliams was appointed chief commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in 2004. As chief commissioner, McWilliams drafted a preamble for the proposed Bill of Rights that drew on the language of U.N. Security Council Reso-

39

lution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, passed in 2000, which mandates the inclusion of women in all aspects of conflict resolution and peacebuilding: "The Bill of Rights must value the role of women in public and political life and their involvement in advancing peace and security" (McWilliams 2021, 291–192). McWilliams laments in her memoir that the Bill of Rights was a proposal in the GFA rather than a constitutional guarantee (McWilliams 2021, 207).

Indeed, while the SAA commits to establishing "a forum on a Bill of Rights," this promise is walked back in subsequent PSSs: Hillsborough makes no mention of a Bill of Rights at all, the Stormont House Agreement and Fresh Start suggest that there is "not at present consensus on a Bill of Rights" and it is not until the New Decade, New Approach Agreement that an "ad hoc assembly committee to consider the creation of a Bill of Rights" is even considered. Though the ad hoc committee was established and eventually issued a report and recommendations in 2022, the 5-person panel of experts intended to assist the committee's work pledged in the NDNA was never established. The committee's recommendation was that it supported "the creation of a bill of rights in principle […] subject to prospective advice from the panel of experts" (Ad Hoc Committee for a Bill of Rights 2022). This later allowed the DUP to disagree with the creation of a Bill of Rights because of the lack of advice forthcoming from the expert panel, leading again to a political impasse. In this way, this round of GFA resettlement led to the unsettling of the commitment to a Bill of Rights.

There are, of course, also stories of success when reflecting on the legacy of inclusion and the GFA. Twenty years on from the demise of the NIWC, the difference in women's inclusion in the power-sharing institutions is stark, with women carving out political space in the unsettlement. Women either currently helm or have helmed most of the major parties, including Sinn Féin, the DUP, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), Alliance, and the Greens. The 2022 elections saw a record-breaking 35 % of Assembly seats won by women. Most of the parties have also changed positions on abortion and marriage equality (save the DUP); indeed, Sinn Féin even made marriage equality a key condition for the resumption of power-sharing after it stepped away from the institutions in 2017 (Smith 2019). New equality rights in these areas cannot be attributed to the GFA or to any of the PSSs – indeed, they come about despite the power-sharing institutions, not through them. It was renewed and new intersectional activism (including across the island of Ireland and at Westminster) and feminist law work (Enright et al. 2020) that made these rights a reality via legislation at Westminster, introduced by Labour MPs, during a period of power-sharing dormancy (Coulter 2020). Yet, the second part of the story is a familiar one. Abortion decriminalization has not necessarily secured safe access for all; in the absence of a region-wide policy, "abortion services across the six counties are piecemeal and patchwork sewed together by activists and healthcare providers" (McVeigh 2022). Unsettlement often means inconsistent implementation.

40

The story of the long negotiation is both one of promise and peril for inclusive politics. Most pressingly, political unsettlement means that inclusion and equality issues need to be revisited during moments of impasse between power-sharing partners and that even when rights are won or promises are made, each new negotiation and agreement can still portend the possibility of failure.

4. To Be Continued […]

In lieu of a conclusion, we suggest that the story continues to unfold, with the 25 years following the signing of the GFA best characterized as the serialization of a peace process, not the afterword. This, of course, accords with how we tend to tell stories about political negotiations in post-agreement transitional periods: that is, as peace processes that are more formally structured as a result of an agreement, but which are nonetheless transitional and very much ongoing. Institutionally, in Bell and Pospisil's (2017) words, it is helpful to characterize post-agreement periods as times of persistent political unsettlement as opposed to the fulfillment or realization of a settlement. Understood in these terms, we are not so much recalling a story of settlement from 25 years ago in this article, as Northern Ireland continues to move through varied chapters of negotiation, renegotiation, stability, instability, feminist coalitional activism, and more.

As much as the GFA remains the definitive statement of Nationalist-Unionist relations in Northern Ireland – it is after all the GFA's anniversary being celebrated in this special issue – it is also more than this. It is a story of inclusion and exclusion, negotiation and renegotiations, a success story and a cautionary tale. It entails both steps forwards and steps back and steps forward again (Murtagh 2021). Alongside the GFA, the post-settlement settlement has also had an integral role in keeping the peace process going. Each PSS has responded to moments of crisis and deadlock and has aimed to soften the edges of serious sticking points between the power-sharing partners. Such settlements have addressed a range of issues, including support for the police service, devolution of justice, the creation of an official opposition, the reduction in the number of legislative seats and changes to the Petition of Concern, even as they allow for the persistence of political unsettlement. While there are attendant risks when agreement to a PSS is unforthcoming, such an approach allows for more dynamism in power-sharing performance, and, it is anticipated, greater institutional functionality over time. Yet, each new set of all-party talks and the PSSs they proffer are also moments where decisions on inclusion and exclusion are made.

In terms of lessons for those cautiously engaging feminist scholars of power-sharing like us: Northern Ireland shows us there are real, important institutional mechanisms that can be developed and included in power-sharing processes. And a peace agreement – like the GFA – is not the only place to intervene. Indeed, agreed-upon provisions will be renegotiated, back on the table, threatened and

more as the story of an agreement unfolds. From both the literature on women's inclusion in peace negotiations and post-conflict political institutions broadly (Shair-Rosenfield & Wood 2017; Bell 2018; McAuliff 2022) and from the direct experiences of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition in particular (Murtagh 2008; McWilliams 2022; Waylen 2014), we have seen the difficulties women face in securing seats at the table, in being taken seriously as legitimate political players at that table, and in having their issues and concerns enshrined in peace settlements and prioritized for implementation thereafter. But those same processes have also delivered the innovative, inclusive politics of the NIWC, world-class human rights provisions, and ongoing feminist organizing.

When women's rights are missing, either because they were not included in the original peace agreement or because they were negotiated away in the intervening years, it can be difficult to realize gender equality and the promise of inclusive politics. We are thinking here of gender electoral quotas, commitments to equality, human rights mechanisms, and more. Power-sharing, with an emphasis on realizing peace through shared, representative governance, has offered important and potentially unique pathways to include rights and equality. But power-sharing, as it is developed in the literature, does not spell out how to build in these kinds of inclusions and how to secure them during the political unsettlement. The lesson of 25 years of the GFA is that beyond getting women to the table, sustained feminist solidarity activism is necessary to seize opportunities and respond to constraints in the intervening years, no matter the plot twists. This is the story of abortion activism and LGBTQ+ rights still unfolding in Northern Ireland today (Deiana et al. 2022).

Like any good series, we end this article with a real cliff-hanger: at the time of writing, the U.K. and the E.U. have struck the Windsor Framework, designed the solve the Brexit-induced fiasco of needing to fix a trade border for Northern Ireland, and which may yet get power-sharing up and running again after another period of dormancy. Once again, feminist coalitions are readying to protect the gains of reproductive rights when the power-sharing executive returns. Likewise, there may be unforeseen challenges or potential opportunities if the executive should fail to form or collapse once again. The story may yet pivot in a different direction: the prospect of Irish unity – and with it another new and difficult "long negotiation" – may yet be on the horizon (O'Leary 2022). Ultimately, there is no singular narrative that encapsulates the story of peace and power-sharing in Northern Ireland, other than to recognize that what was gained in previous settlements can be lost; what was missed out on in earlier iterations can be gained. Settlements are never really settled, and wherever the story heads next, feminist intersectional coalitions will remain integral for peace and inclusive politics.

References

Ad Hoc Committee for a Bill of Rights, 2022. *156/17-22 Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Bill of Rights*. Northern Ireland Assembly, 4 February 2022, http://www.niassembly. gov.uk/globalassets/documents/committees/2017-2022/ad-hoc-bill-of-rights/reports/ report-on-a-bill-of-rights/report-of-the-ad-hoc-committee-on-a-bill-of-rights.pdf (accessed 6 March 2023).

Anderson, M., 2015. *Windows of Opportunity: How Women Seize Peace Negotiations for Political Change.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Aretxaga, B. A.,1997. *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism, and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland*. Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ).

Bell, C., 2018. Power-Sharing, Conflict Resolution and Women: A Global Reappraisal. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 24 (1), 13–32.

Bell, C. & Kavanaugh, K., 1998. 'Constructive Ambiguity' or Internal Self-determination? Self-determination, Group Accommodation, and the Belfast Agreement. *Fordham International Law Journal* 22 (4), 1345–1371.

Bell, C. & Pospisil, J., 2017. Navigating Inclusion in Transitions from Conflict: The Formalised Political Unsettlement. *Journal of International Development* 29 (5), 576–593.

Coakley, J. & Todd, J., 2020. *Negotiating a Settlement in Northern Ireland, 1969–2019*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Committee on the Administration of Justice, 2006. *Equality in Northern Ireland: The Rhetoric and the Reality*. CAJ, Belfast.

Coulter, P., 2020. Same-Sex Marriage Now Legal in Northern Ireland. *BBC News*, 13 January 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-51086276 (accessed 12 March 2023).

Deiana, M.-A., Hagen, J. J. & Roberts, D., 2022. Nevertheless, They Persisted: Feminist Activism and the Politics of Crisis in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Gender Studies* 31 (5), 654–667.

du Toit, P., 2003. Why Post-settlement Settlements? *Journal of Democracy* 14 (3), 104–118.

Enright, M., McNeilly, K. & de Londras, F., 2020. Abortion Activism, Legal Change, and Taking Feminist Law Work Seriously. *Northern Ireland Legal Quarterly* 71 (3), 7–33.

Fairweather, E., McDonough, R. & McFadyean, M., 1984. *Only the Rivers Run Free: Northern Ireland: The Women's War*. Pluto Press, London.

Her Loyal Voice, 2022. Unheard Voices: Stories of Loyalist Women Growing Up in Northern Ireland, https://herloyalvoice.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/HLV_UnheardVoices_v4.pdf (accessed 10 March 2023).

Hinds, B., 2003. Mainstreaming Equality in Northern Ireland. In A. Dobrowolsky & V. Hart (eds.) *Women Making Constitutions: New Politics and Comparative Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 185–199.

Horowitz, D. L., 2014. Ethnic Power Sharing: Three Big Problems. *Journal of Democracy* 25 (2), 5–20.

McAuliff, A., 2022. Peace Negotiations as Sites of Gendered Power Hierarchies. *International Negotiation,* 1–25, https://brill.com/view/journals/iner/aop/article-10.1163-15718069-bja10072/article-10.1163-15718069-bja10072.xml?rskey=ZrOfhm&result=1&ebody=pdf-63199 (accessed 5 May 2023).

McCulloch, A., 2022. Getting Things Done? Process, Performance, and Decision-Evasion in Consociational Systems [Paper]. At *The Workshop on Comprehensive Conflict Resolution*, Queen's University, Kingston, 13–14 October 2022.

McCulloch, A. & McEvoy, J., 2020. Understanding Power-Sharing Performance: A Lifecycle Approach. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 20 (2), 109–116.

McCrudden, C., 1998. Mainstreaming Equality in the Governance of Northern Ireland. *Fordham International Law Journal* 22 (4), 1696–1775.

43

McKenna, F., 2022. Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) – List of Publications. CAIN – Conflict and Politics in Northern Ireland, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/organ/docs/sachrpubs.htm (accessed 12 March 2023).

McVeigh, E., 2022. Abortions Are Legal in Northern Ireland, but That Doesn't Make Them Easy to Access: Activists Still Plug the Gaps. *Novara Media*, 21 October 2022, https://novaramedia.com/2022/10/21/abortions-are-legal-in-northern-ireland-but-that-doesnt-make-them-easy-to-access/ (accessed 10 March 2023).

McWilliams, M., 1995. Struggling for Peace and Justice: Reflections on Women's Activism in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Women's History* 6 (4) / 7 (1), 13–39.

McWilliams, M., 2010. *From Peace Talks to Gender Justice.* Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego, https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=lecture_series (accessed 5 May 2023).

McWilliams, M., 2021. *Stand Up, Speak Out: My Life Working for Women's Rights, Peace and Equality in Northern Ireland and Beyond.* Blackstaff Press, Newtownards.

McWilliams, M. & Kilmurray, A., 2017. Northern Ireland: The Significance of a Bottom-up Women's Movement in a Politically Contested Society. In N. R. Cahn, D. F. Haynes, F. Ní Aoláin & N. Valji (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Conflict.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 546–557.

McWilliams, M. & Kelly, L., 1997. Taking on the Dinosaurs. *Trouble and Strife* 35, 7–15, http://www.troubleandstrife.org/articles/issue-35/taking-on-the-dinosaurs (accessed 5 May 2023).

Meehan, E., 2006. The Experience of a Single Equalities Commission in Northern Ireland. *Scottish Affairs* 56, 35–56.

Murtagh, C., 2008. A Transient Transition: The Cultural and Institutional Obstacles Impeding the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition in its Progression from Informal to Formal Politics. *Irish Political Studies* 23 (1), 21–40.

Murtagh, C., 2021. Towards Inclusive Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back. In S. Keil & A. McCulloch (eds.) *Power-Sharing in Europe: Past Practice, Present Cases, and Future Directions.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 141–169.

O'Leary, B., 2019. *A Treatise on Northern Ireland. Volume 3: Consociation and Confederation.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

O'Leary, B., 2022. *Making Sense of a United Ireland: Should it Happen? How Might it Happen?* Penguin, London.

Papagianni, K., 2010. *Power-Sharing, Transitional Governments and the Role of Mediation.* Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Geneva.

Pierson, C. & Thomson, J., 2018. Allies or Opponents? Power-Sharing, Civil Society and Gender. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 24 (1), 100–115.

Rouse, M. & O'Connor, K., 2020. Lost in Transition: Governing Northern Ireland. In H. Sullivan, H. Dickinson & H. Henderson (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of the Public Servant.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 1–15.

Shair-Rosenfield, S. & Wood, R. M., 2017. Governing Well after War: How Improving Female Representation Prolongs Post-conflict Peace. *Journal of Politics* 79 (3), 995–1009.

Smith, R., 2019. Sinn Fein: No Power-Sharing Deal without Equal Marriage in Northern Ireland. *PinkNews*, 30 July 2019, https://www.thepinknews.com/2019/07/30/sinn-fein-equal-marriage-northern-ireland/ (accessed 10 March 2023).

Taylor, R., 2009. The Injustice of a Consociational Solution to the Northern Ireland Problem. In R. Taylor (ed.) *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Routledge, London, 309–330.

Waylen, G., 2014. A Seat at the Table – Is It Enough? Gender, Multiparty Negotiations, and Institutional Design in South Africa and Northern Ireland. *Politics and Gender* 10 (4), 495–523.

Whyte, N., 1998. The 1996 Forum Elections and the Peace Process. ARK: Access Research Knowledge, 3 June 1998 / last updated 7 May 2003 Tineke Vaes, https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/ff96.htm (accessed 6 March 2023).

Whyte, N., 2003. The Northern Ireland Assembly Elections 2003. ARK: Access Research Knowledge, 7 December 2003/ last modified 6 January 2004, https://www.ark.ac.uk/elections/fa03.htm (accessed 6 March 2023).

44

Notes

[1] Indeed, Christopher McCrudden finds that equality and human rights were peripheral to the management of the conflict in Northern Ireland – but that they did move into central focus with the GFA (McCrudden 1998, 1697–1698).

[2] To be sure, as detailed elsewhere (see, for example, Murtagh 2008), it was not easy going for women at the peace talks. McWilliams recalls the verbal abuse women faced, describing the atmosphere as such: "It's been sexist and sectarian […]. They threaten us, stand and shout at us, they prevent us from having our emergency motions heard. Whenever I'm speaking, I have to make sure that the chairman calls order because I can't hear myself talking […]. We've invaded their space, space that they feel belonged to them. We frighten them" (McWilliams & Kelly 1997, 11).

[3] While the petition of concern, a veto right allocated to both Nationalists and Unionists, was used sparingly early on, its use had skyrocketed by the 2011–2016 period, when it was deployed 118 times. Following the reforms in the NDNA, no petition was enacted between January 2020, when power-sharing was restored, and May 2022, when the formation of a new executive stalled in the face of a DUP boycott (cf. McCulloch 2022).

Acknowledgement

Duncan Morrow

Transformation or Truce? Tracing the Decline of "Reconciliation" and Its Consequences for Northern Ireland Since 1998

Reconciliation and consociation were at the core of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (BGFA) in 1998. Analysis of the politics of the last 25 years in Northern Ireland (NI), however, reveals that many presumed aspects of reconciliation – integrated education, desegregated living, the disbandment of armed groups, cultural rapprochement, linguistic and cultural diversity, safe and secure shared public space, an approach to the past which puts the suffering of victims at its core – remain unaddressed or are deeply disputed. The article explores how consociational government in Northern Ireland has gradually decayed under pressure from this weakness. Since 2016, reconciliation has been a second-order consideration for the shaping partnership between the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Ireland which made the Agreement possible, leaving the Agreement at risk from the repeated exercise of the veto and dependent on the absence of any alternative, rather than proactive commitment.

Keywords: reconciliation, Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, consociation, peacebuilding.

Preobrazba ali premirje? Zmanjševanje pomena sprave in posledice za Severno Irsko po letu 1998

Čeprav sta sprava in konsociacija bistvo Velikonočnega sporazuma, sprejetega leta 1998, analiza politike na Severnem Irskem v zadnjih 25 letih kaže, da številni vidiki sprave – integrirane šole, bivanje v mešanih skupnostih, razpustitev oboroženih skupin, kulturno zbliževanje, jezikovna in kulturna raznolikost, varen skupni javni prostor, pristop k preteklosti, ki v središče postavlja trpljenje žrtev – ostajajo nerešeni ali pa so zelo sporni, kar ima za posledico oslabitev konsociacijskega vladanja. Od leta 2016 naprej je za partnerstvo med Združenim kraljestvom in Irsko, ki je temelj Velikonočnega sporazuma, vprašanje sprave drugorazrednega pomena, sporazum pa je, namesto da bi predstavljal proaktivno zavezo, zaradi pogoste uporabe veta in odsotnosti kakršne koli alternative vse bolj ogrožen.

Ključne besede: sprava, Velikonočni sporazum, konsociacija, vzpostavljanje miru.

Correspondence address: Duncan Morrow, Ulster University, Belfast BT15 1ED, Northern Ireland, e-mail: dj.morrow@ulster.ac.uk.

1. Introduction: Containment

Until partition, conflict over the legitimacy of Britishness in Ireland polarised British and Irish politics. Thereafter, as the trauma of civil war gradually dissipated, the Irish Free State evolved into an unusually homogeneously Catholic Republic, reducing the immediacy of conflict between the Free State and Britain. But the lasting effect in the North (powerfully reinforced by NI's arm's-length neither independent nor fully integrated distance from the rest of the U.K.) was not to remove conflict but to corral the most toxic legacy of the wider struggle into this place apart. Beneath its formally democratic mechanisms, the 1920s version of settlement bequeathed a Unionist monopoly of political power relying on a permanent state of emergency *vis-à-vis* a permanently alienated minority.

The creation of NI contained conflict, but never achieved anything that could be called reconciliation. Unresolved antagonism and the potential for violent confrontation was the substrate on which NI grew. There was no history before contest and no halcyon time without division. NI incubated a political culture in which the existential issues at stake were the legitimacy of its existence and the extent to which violence was legitimate in that struggle. Far from shifting the inherited axis of politics, fifty years of a Belfast parliament institutionalised the foundational division into every aspect of life. Politically, culturally and religiously, NI developed as a deeply divided them and us polity defined by antagonism over the state.

2. Reconciliation in Politics

After demands for civil rights for Catholics escalated into confrontation with the police and violence escalated beyond the control of the Unionist government in the 1960s, the political and security elites of Britain and the Irish Republic were reluctantly forced to re-engage in the day-to-day affairs of NI. But by 1972, shared interest in containing violence to NI encouraged both London and Dublin governments to accelerate practical collaboration. When both states joined the European Economic Community in 1973, additional opportunities to recalibrate relations, and even for historically unexpected common cause, began to emerge.

With notable exceptions, the conviction of armed groups in NI of the legitimacy of their mutually exclusive struggle for Irishness and Britishness was successfully contained within the six counties. Violence, and indeed NI, was treated as a native problem, rooted in anachronistic local sectarian religious obsessions rather than the consequences of an unstable settlement. Yet military deployment came at the cost of over 3,000 deaths, direct confrontation, persistent accusations of systemic human rights abuses, and profound polarisation lasting

47

thirty years. Efforts to establish a basis for devolved government at Sunningdale in 1973 and through rolling devolution in the 1980s foundered on the, by now explosive, hostility between Unionists and Nationalists.

Significant change within NI required a step-change in wider British-Irish co-operation heralded in the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) in 1985. Desperate for an exit from conflict, London and Dublin now proactively advocated a solution that could command cross-community support, bypassing objections in Belfast to reconfigure their bilateral relationship into a political-security partnership. The Irish government gained a consultative role in the affairs of NI in exchange for security co-operation. NI was reconceived as a British-Irish legacy to be solved through "continuing efforts to reconcile and to acknowledge the rights of the two major traditions", the "mutual recognition and acceptance of each other's rights" and a "total rejection of any attempt to promote political objectives by violence or the threat of violence" (Anglo-Irish Agreement 1985).

Reconciliation was the ethical alternative to the carnage of the zero-sum game. Intercommunity cooperation and the end of political violence nonetheless demanded an unprecedented reversal of the structure and dynamics of NI politics since 1920. Initially, the most obvious consequence of the AIA was to set the British government into bitter confrontation with political Unionism while achieving little to bring republican violence to an end. Yet within ten years, and sometimes only for fear of further radical intergovernmental action, unstoppable force of the governments backed by a unanimous diplomatic coalition had brought the immoveable objects of Unionism and Nationalism into talks to bring political violence to an end and revisit the totality of political relationships.

3. Reconciliation Postponed?

The charter for peace and reconciliation in Ireland known as the Downing Street Declaration in 1993, explicitly plotted a path towards the inclusion of Sinn Féin (SF) in all-party talks. The British government re-emphasised that they had "no selfish strategic or economic interest in NI", and committed to fostering "agreement and reconciliation, leading to a new political framework founded on consent". Jointly, the governments declared that their "primary interest was to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement" (Joint Declaration 1993).

The commitments were reiterated in the intergovernmental Framework Documents of early 1995. The governments called for collective effort "to create, through agreement and reconciliation, a new beginning founded on consent", envisaging an Agreement, "developing and extending their co-operation, reflecting the totality of relationships between the two islands, and dedicated to fostering co-operation, reconciliation and agreement in Ireland at all levels" (Governments of UK and Ireland 1995).

48

Reconciliation was already becoming future-aspirational rather than present-preconditional. In 1996, Unionist demands that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) decommission weapons in advance paralysed negotiations, prompting the IRA to end its ceasefire. In what became known as the Mitchell Principles of parallel decommissioning after their primary author, U.S. Senator George Mitchell, parties were asked to declare their **commitment to** exclusively peaceful means of resolving political disputes and to the **principle** of disarmament of all paramilitary groups rather than to specific **actions** (Mitchell 1996). After heavy U.K. government pressure on David Trimble, this balance (or fudge) enabled talks to begin (Phoenix 2019). Indeed, when Mitchell was named as chair of talks in 1997, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) walked out and negotiations between Ulster Unionists and SF were conducted without direct interface. More intentional collaboration (socioeconomic reconstruction and relationship-building) was left to civil society and local partnerships, largely funded by international donors, above all the European Union (E.U.'s) Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Lagana 2021).

4. A Fine Balance?

In the second paragraph of the Agreement's Declaration of Support the signatories dedicated themselves to "the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all" based on "partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within NI, between North and South, and between these islands" (The Belfast Agreement 1998).

Nonetheless, the core political institutions of the Agreement were primarily designed to stabilise existing ethnic anxieties by recasting the balance of power rather than driving visionary transformation. Drawing on the influential work of Arend Lijphart (1977) modified locally in the work of Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry (Taylor 2009), consociation was built on mandatory coalition between the elites of groups separately designated as Unionists and Nationalists. Regulated distribution of power and position was the viable institutional form of peacebuilding, relying as little as possible on reconciliation, and as much as possible on self-interested communal balance and an intricate system of mutual checks including a right to veto unpalatable legislation.

It is striking in retrospect that those elements of the Agreement which explicitly undermined binary segregation – the civic forum, integrated housing and education, intercommunity relationship-building and support for victims – remained dependent on vague voluntary enthusiasm. The practical limits to agreement became quickly evident in legal and cultural disputes over disarmament, the release of prisoners, human rights, equality legislation, cultural parity of esteem, and reform of policing. Often progress was only possible through direct governmental action independent of consensus in NI. Nationality was

devolved to personal choice: people born in NI could to be "Irish or British or both, as they may choose", in perpetuity (The Belfast Agreement 1998).

Co-operation could not be entirely eliminated, of course. At the apex of the system stood the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), where the leaders of Unionism and Nationalism were to act in tandem as equals, providing a platform for negotiation and collaboration on socioeconomic interests. But if consociation was, above all, a method to re-balance and contain division by balance, the obvious risk was that transformative change towards reconciliation posed a direct threat rather than an opportunity.

49

The immediate challenge lay in the demobilisation of non-state armed groups, which relied primarily on voluntary decommissioning. Disputes over whether the decommissioning of IRA weapons was a prerequisite or consequence of powersharing eroded the political capital of the political axis of 1998 and especially the Ulster Unionists. By 2002, devolved government had collapsed and, in elections a year later, Trimble's Ulster Unionists and Hume's Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) were outflanked by their radical rivals in the DUP and SF.

In the face of this implosion, the British government made moves to translate reconciliation from vague aspiration into tangible public policy. Declaring that "separate but equal are not an option" they published a new strategy promoting intercommunity relations entitled A Shared Future (OFMDFM 2005). The PEACE programme commissioned two academics to clarify what reconciliation might mean in a secular context, identifying five critical areas for change:

– a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society;
– acknowledging and dealing with the past;
– building positive relationships and addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance;
– significant cultural and attitudinal change especially around suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence; and
– substantial social, economic and political change in the structures which gave rise to conflict (Hamber & Kelly 2004).

In retrospect, it is striking how accurately Hamber and Kelly identified the areas of least progress over the next decades. It is also striking that repeated promises for radical change like removing peacewalls, integrated education, and housing were never matched by mainstream action. Intercommunity work was outsourced to (sizeable) EU PEACE II and International Fund for Ireland grant-making to pilot projects (McCall & O'Dowd 2008) where Hamber and Kelly's ideas were treated as a funding formula. As a consequence, the impact of civic work for peacebuilding, which continued on a broadly anti-sectarian pattern, was increasingly detached from the direction of wioder politics, and its ability to act as a pilot for change limited to localised or sectional outcomes.

50

London and Dublin's direct route to success ran through renegotiated consociation. Social transformation was desirable: NI managing its own intractable issues without absorbing governments was essential. The narrower yet more achievable negative peace goals of managing violence and establishing institutions were, officially, the route not the alternative to reconciliation (what Johan Galtung might have called positive peace) (Galtung 1969). After 2003, the reestablishment of the institutions was treated as synonymous with peace itself.

Revising the BGFA bargain with the newly dominant parties to this end entailed a twin strategy of reinforcing the limits to collaboration with SF to make powersharing more palatable to the DUP and, following the major act of IRA decommissioning in 2005 while reducing further obstacles to powersharing to a credible SF commitment to the rule of law through participation in the NI Policing Board (Powell 2010). Under the St Andrews Agreement signed by the governments in 2006, the requirement for cross-community collaboration in selecting a First and Deputy First Minister was removed by allocating the First Minister position to the largest party. SF took up seats on the NI Policing Board, although SF demands that justice be devolved to the Assembly were delayed for up to a year in the face of continuing DUP hostility. After five months, both SF and, specifically, the DUP approved the amendments (Agreement at St Andrews 2006).

5. Peace without Reconciliation?

The restoration of devolution in May 2007 seemed to the world to be the inauguration of a new era. Images of arch-enemies Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness laughing together defined a remarkable sea-change in NI unimaginable only months previously. Despite the Agreement, 120 people were killed in NI in conflict-related violence between 1998 and 2007 (Nolan 2018), including 29 in a single bomb in Omagh. In the decade following restoration 24 died, by far the lowest total in any decade since the 1960s.

With governments everywhere facing into a global financial crisis, the residual leadership required to process peace in Ireland was handed back to Belfast. The new Executive agreed a Programme for Government, signed off on further E.U. PEACE funding (PEACE III) and began considering a Single Equality Act with perhaps surprising speed. The British government convened a Consultative Group on the Past (Consultative Group on the Past 2009), a Commission to design a new process for managing the contentious issue of Parades (Hamilton 2008) and a Bill of Rights Forum including all parties in NI to consider additional rights beyond the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Bill of Rights Forum 2008).

For as long as consociation gave the appearance of functioning and intercommunity tension was contained in NI once more, there was no obvious need,

and certainly no desire, for interference over subordinate issues. But while they remained unaddressed, the potential for the many unresolved and profoundly emotive issues (ranging from policing and the past to parades, flags or indigenous languages) to undermine consociational balance remained. One by one, the issues associated with reconciliation became arenas of inter-party impasse or delay.

Failure to develop community relations policy was an early warning. Prior to 2007, the DUP was actively hostile to cultural pluralism or religious ecumenism and had no immediate electoral incentive to change. OFMDFM emphasised equality and diversity and legitimate aspirations rather than interdependence and shared future. Although the new Executive promised to refresh inherited strategy, an NIO-sponsored economic study on the costs of division was suppressed. A Shared Future was publicly repudiated by the responsible SF Minister (An Phoblacht 2007). Asserting that the good relations duty in the NI Act (Northern Ireland Act 1998) (Section 75(2)) was subordinate to the equality duty (Section 75(1)), SF attacked good relations as a reactionary subversion of fundamental equality, rather than its guarantor. With the international architects of agreement leaving the stage, Hamber and Kelly's definition of reconciliation was consigned to another era.

With A Shared Future frozen and no enthusiasm for re-establishing any Civic Forum, the efforts of the Bill of Rights Forum chaired by the South African Chris Sidoti were frustrated by more acrimony (Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission 2008). In the face of Unionist opposition to its recommendations, the British government shelved the report (NI Assembly Research and Information Service 2020), despite promises and even agreements to revisit the issue.

If anything, the DUP were more suspicious of the Republican equality agenda, approaching proposals for a Single Equality Bill as an effort to distort the balance of power more than a vehicle to simplify and standardise legislation. If equality transferred resources from Unionists to Nationalists, it appeared to many Unionists as dangerous code for a new iteration of NI's historical zero-sum game. The easiest way to distinguish equality from a trojan horse was to insist on a consociational (one for my side, one for yours) model.

When Westminster passed an Equality Act harmonising most equality legislation and bringing protection levels up to E.U. standards, NI was not included (NI Assembly Research and Information Service 2011). As devolution evolved, it became clear that Unionist general suspicion of equality and direct opposition to specific aspects, especially in relation to sexual minorities, meant that no new Bill could be agreed.

None of these issues yet interrupted the functioning of the Executive. The unfinished business of devolving responsibility for policing and justice to NI or dealing with the consequences of past violence might. Although the timetable

52

and details were left vague in 2007, devolving Justice was regarded as non-negotiable by SF. When, in 2009, DUP figures suggested that devolution might be delayed until 2011, SF threatened to collapse the Executive.

Events were overtaken in early 2010 when the First Minister Peter Robinson was forced to step down to address a storm over his wife's affairs, leaving the DUP keen to avoid an election. The Prime Minister and Taoiseach again flew into Hillsborough to convene emergency talks. Although they left empty-handed, the parties resumed negotiations with other Ministers under intense public pressure, finally agreeing a new deal after ten days (BBC News 2010).

The Hillsborough deal set two important precedents. The outcome demonstrated that justice issues could not be resolved by consociationalism. Neither the DUP nor SF could accept the jurisdiction of the other. Justice was exempted from *d'Hondt* proportionality and devolved by agreement to the Alliance Party as the only available representative of intercommunity neutrality. Second, the sustainability of devolution on contested issues remained dependent on the mediation of the governments.

Issues of injustice in the past posed a potentially deeper threat. The Consultative Group under a former Church of Ireland Primate of all-Ireland, Robin Eames and the first nationalist Deputy Chairman of the Policing Board, Denis Bradley was directed "to find a way forward out of the shadows of the past" by enabling "our society to do this together […] through the widest possible consultation" (Consultative Group on the Past 2009, 14). Declaring that existing processes created "a tendency to re-fight the conflict through the courts; to pursue truth through litigation; to deal with the past without a perspective for the future" (Consultative Group on the Past 2009, 124), Eames-Bradley proposed a time-limited Legacy Commission to replace existing processes for most historic cases, establishing a new Historic Investigations Unit, with a separate information recovery process, the potential to establish various thematic inquiries into contentious themes such as paramilitary activity or collusion and "make recommendations on how a line might be drawn at the end of its five-year mandate so that NI may best move to a shared future" (Consultative Group on the Past 2009, 40).

On the day of its launch, however, the report was dramatically torpedoed by a group of ultra-Unionist activists, including victims' rights campaigners. They objected to a proposal, leaked days before the official launch, that a one-off *ex-gratia* recognition payment of £12,000 to "the nearest relative of someone who died as a result of the conflict in and about NI, from January 1966" (Consultative Group on the Past 2009, 31) could include relatives of terrorists. Although Denis Bradley observed that "politicians have found a political accommodation but, yet they are preventing society from finding a human accommodation" (Kelly 2009) parliaments in London, Dublin and Belfast baulked and shelved the report. No report ever came closer to creating a new basis for addressing issues emerging from this past, which now became a source of recurrent recrimination.

53

Nonetheless, by 2011, most were persuaded that the successes of devolution outweighed any shortcomings. Violence was measurably reduced, Justice was devolved, SF supported policing and the 2007 Executive saw out its full electoral term. Commenting to politicians on the content of his first independent NI Peace Monitoring Report (Nolan 2012), Paul Nolan commented that

> […] the first thing to be said about the situation in NI at present is that the political institutions are secure […]. If NI gets mentioned at all now, it is to say that NI is the example of what had been seen to be an intractable conflict that has moved to a point at which it can be deemed successful.

Any reconciliation deficit seemed a minor detail.

6. Culture Wars

Celebrations were premature, however. After 2012, unresolved issues of reconciliation gradually undermined first, powersharing and, then, the Agreement's supporting British-Irish architecture in almost annual sequence. The first Christmas crisis was in 2012. Months of serious Loyalist rioting broke out after Nationalists supported an Alliance Party amendment in Belfast City Council proposing to fly the Union flag on Belfast City Hall to a number of designated days (McDonald 2012).

When protesters targeted Alliance Party offices with fire-bombs and elected representatives received death threats it exposed an emerging fault-line in NI between the liberal cosmopolitan middle classes in Alliance and elements of loyalism over a wider range of issues (Melaugh 2013). Over the next few years, divisions over attacks on newly-arrived people of minority ethnic background, often living in largely Loyalist areas, and the use by the DUP of the Petition of Concern (the veto rule designed to protect minorities in the Assembly) to prevent, first marriage equality and then liberalisation of NI's nineteenth century rules prohibiting abortion recreated the same division. Further, the DUP's approach contrasted most obviously with the modern Irish Republic where gay marriage and abortion reform were approved by referendum.

United States (U.S.) Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's presence in Belfast as flag protests broke out drew unwanted attention to NI's underlying fragility. Committed to hold the global G8 summit in Fermanagh in 2013 (ironically to celebrate the success of the peace process), the U.K. government put pressure on the NI Executive to re-establish unity and agree its long-promised refresh of A Shared Future before the scheduled arrival of the global elite.

Stung by the criticism, political parties met police leaders in Cardiff in an effort to repair relationships. A policy on community relations (Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) (NI Executive 2013)) was hurriedly pushed

54

through the Executive by DUP and SF Ministers, reiterating the new orthodoxy that "Peace is now firmly established with stable political structures that are delivering for local people." T:BUC was presented as "a clear choice to move away from division, and instead establish a new, reconciled and shared society" promising remarkable transformative change – the removal of all peace walls by 2023 (albeit with community consent) and a locally-sponsored independent process to resolve critical identity issues of Parades, Flags and the Past by the end of 2013.

The G8 summit proceeded without incident. Yet while high-profile aspirations calmed high-profile visitors, there was little detectable appetite in the core of either the DUP or SF to actively persuade anyone to remove peace walls or change position on flags or parades. T:BUC finance was allocated to largely single-community economic initiatives under the banner Urban Villages, or micro-projects in shared Housing. Commitments to "shared educational campuses" marked an increasingly obvious avoidance of integrated education. Other programs, such as buddy up schemes for primary schools relied on voluntary partners (NI Executive 2013).

The summer saw renewed confrontations over parading and when the DUP retreated from commitments to build an international peace centre on the site of the former Maze-Long Kesh prison, relations with SF strained further (Irish Times 2013). Despite the efforts of skilled international diplomats, Richard Haass and Megan O'Sullivan, the promised interparty negotiations on the past, flags and parades extended through and past Christmas but broke up without agreement (Rowan 2014).

Tensions over cultural and legacy issues spread into issues of lawfulness and legitimacy. Unionists reacted angrily when an Old Bailey court case revealed that IRA escapees from prison (so-called on-the-runs) had been given immunity from arrest or prosecution by the British government in 2007 without public debate. British government proposals to extend the jurisdiction of the new National Crime Agency to NI were rejected by Nationalists. Nationalists also refused to vote through welfare reform measures passed at Westminster to be applied in NI. After yet another summer of parading tension, relations had ebbed to the point that the Executive could not continue (Moriarty 2014).

Eleven weeks of talks culminated in the Christmas Stormont House Agreement (Stormont House Agreement 2014). Having secured £2bn from the U.K. Treasury, the parties agreed to pass welfare reform and reduce the size of the NI Assembly and the number of NI Ministries. Measures were introduced to allow for an official opposition. Yet in retrospect, Stormont House was longer on promise than action. A new Historical Investigations Unit to investigate Troubles-related crimes was agreed, without a timetable. Commitments to the Irish Language were reiterated, without binding action. A Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) was agreed but under political veto-power. Responsibility for parading was to be devolved, as was local Corporation Tax, but without a timetable.

The stop-start pattern was becoming engrained. When, in August 2015, the police declared that the killing of an IRA-dissident, Kevin McGuigan, had been carried out by elements within the Provisional IRA, pressure on Unionists to withdraw from the Executive escalated again and the governments were forced to convene further talks.

In another deal, entitled A Fresh Start (NI Executive 2015), the parties promised "a resolute commitment" to end paramilitarism "once and for all" by challenging "paramilitary attempts to control communities", "supporting the rule of law unequivocally", working together "to achieve the disbandment of all paramilitary organisations and their structures" (NI Executive 2015, 15). They pledged to appoint a Civic Advisory Panel and implement the commitments of the previous year's deal, while the British made further financial commitments.

7. Brexit, Borders and Boycotts

Assembly elections in May 2016 confirmed the dominance of the DUP and SF. New rules allowing opposition left the two parties alone in government, save for an independent Justice Minister. Hopes for bilateral stability were raised by the early establishment of the Commission on Flags, Identity and Cultural Traditions (FICT) and a Tackling Paramilitarism Programme (TPP).

Perhaps the apartness of Northern Ireland politics obscured the emerging consequences for the whole BGFA system of the U.K.'s referendum decision to leave the E.U. (Brexit). NI's parties initially seemed united on the need to limit damage. Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness co-signed a letter underlining NI's uniqueness in relation to Brexit, its vulnerability to a hard border and its dependency on E.U. funding and expressing appreciation for the "stated determination that the border will not become an impediment to the movement of people, goods and services" (First and deputy First Minister 2016). "As far as possible" they petitioned to retain "the ease with which we currently trade with E.U. member states […]" (ibid. 2016).

Domestic divisions still seemed most dangerous. In December (again), the reluctance of the First Minister to step aside to facilitate an investigation into allegations of corruption around a Renewable Heating Initiative (RHI) escalated into another bitter stand-off, this time over undelivered Irish Language rights. When Martin McGuinness died suddenly, SF's decision to withdraw from the Executive marked a historic watershed. In the resulting Assembly elections, SF almost outpolled the DUP and Unionism lost its numerical majority in a NI Assembly for the first time since 1920.

For most Nationalists a unilateral hard border seemed akin to the repartition of the island: not so much a textual breach of the Agreement as a fundamental breach of trust. Not only would the cross-border agricultural economy unravel, but it risked re-opening the security crisis on the border by requiring British en-

forcement against unwilling local majorities. Prompted by the Irish government, the E.U. agreed that "in view of the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland, flexible and imaginative solutions will be required, with the aim of avoiding a hard border" in April 2017 (European Council 2017). NI was now the biggest obstacle to any clean Brexit.

A snap U.K. General Election in June 2017 provided the DUP with an unanticipated opportunity for electoral recovery. After winning 10 of NI's 18 seats, they found themselves holding the balance of power in the House of Commons, the only available allies for a Conservative government charged with negotiating Brexit. With talks to re-establish an Executive going nowhere and an alternative arena for influence, the DUP entered a confidence and supply arrangement maintaining the Conservatives in office in exchange for a generous financial settlement.

SF, with their own ambitions to govern in the Republic, turned their attention towards the Dail and European Parliament. Despite repeated assurance that their commitment to the Agreement was unchanged, the capacity of both or either government to act as mediators or honest brokers in disputes within NI while negotiating their own vital interests was increasingly implausible. Without a mediator or champion, the NI political system ground to a halt, leaving administration but no government for three years.

Intercommunity divisions were being both reinforced and subtly recast (Morrow 2019). As nationalists began openly campaigning for a referendum on Irish unity as a means to rejoin the E.U., the DUP increasingly identified with the hardline pro-Brexit European Research Group (ERG). Brexit was reinforcing the split between liberals and conservatives, emerging since 2012. But whereas, before 1998, the consensus against violence had left SF isolated from the mainstream, now an emergent anti-Brexit coalition of parties with a majority of votes but no parliamentary presence faced a minority pro-Leave DUP, holding the balance of power at Westminster.

The border was again at the centre of politics and there was no escape from the conundrum. Boris Johnson set the tone at the DUP party conference:

> If we wanted to do free trade deals, if we wanted to cut tariffs or vary our regulation then we would have to leave NI behind as an economic semi-colony of the E.U. and we would be damaging the fabric of the Union with regulatory checks and even customs controls between GB and NI […]. No British Conservative government could or should sign up to anything of the kind (Steerpike 2018).

But without a deal over Ireland, the U.K. would leave the E.U. without any deal. The only remaining answer was special arrangements for NI. With deadlines looming, Johnson concluded the outlines of a Protocol in bilateral talks with the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar. NI would remain within the single market for goods

requiring checks on goods in transit from Britain at sea ports, despite Johnson's assurances. Although the NI Assembly could vote to continue or discontinue the Protocol after four years, it would not require cross-community consent (Collins 2022).

Armed with a supposedly oven-ready deal, Johnson won a landslide victory in England with the promise to Get Brexit Done. Losing their leverage at Westminster and facing growing popular anger at three years without government, the DUP now faced recrimination from other Unionists for negotiating a border in the Irish Sea. Unionists won less than half of NI's Westminster seats. For the third time in 2019, up to a fifth of the population voted for parties outside the blocs, boosting the anti-Brexit, anti-consociation and socially liberal Alliance Party.

With the governments regrouped to act as brokers, negotiations to restore devolved government produced New Decade, New Approach, reaffirming "commitment to the Declaration of Support contained in the [BGFA] and successor agreements" and proposing reform to ensure greater stability in the Executive, deals on the Irish and Ulster-Scots language and commitments to increase police numbers, support integrated education and build roads (New Decade, New Approach 2020).

Yet nothing was as it had been. While the DUP was on the defensive, SF emerged from the Irish general election in February as the largest party by votes, and ambitions to lead the government. As Unionists took fright at the Protocol after January 2020, nationalist agitation for a referendum on Irish unity grew (Teague 2019). Greater turmoil was probably delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which, even in NI, dominated popular, political, and media attention. As the pandemic waned, however, the profoundly destabilising effects of Brexit immediately resurfaced.

In May 2021, Arlene Forster was deposed as leader of the DUP and First Minister, only for her vanquisher to be deposed a month later in a counter-coup. Elections in 2022 brought further bad news to Unionism, however, when SF emerged as the largest party for the first time. While the DUP boycotted NI's institutions in protest against the Protocol, SF claimed the right to nominate the First Minister of a place they had fought to destroy. Meanwhile, Alliance made further gains, leaving both Nationalism and Unionism as minorities and threatening to interrupt consociation itself.

8. Conclusions

Peacebuilding in deeply divided societies is concerned with transformation from endemic conflict to social and political systems that command legitimacy and protect all citizens. The NI peace process since 1985 was a paradigm example. Central to its conceptual framework was a commitment to reconciliation

58

through political agreement and the repudiation of violence as the antithesis of everything that preceded it.

In 2003, Hamber and Kelly defined the policy domains in which post-conflict reconciliation might be made concrete, concluding that these necessarily included a developing vision of a shared future, dealing with the consequences of past violence, less polarisation in cultural attitudes, desegregated social relationships and reduced economic and social inequality. Far from defining the politics of the peace process, however, this agenda of transformed relationships rather than hostile antagonism became the story of what did **not** happen.

Despite the foundation of the Agreement in an experiment in inter-ethnic reconciliation, and the explicit commitment of all parties to pursue it as the basis of partnership government, Northern Ireland evolved after 1998 as a system for peacebuilding without reconciliation. Devolved government became a mechanism to reduce violence through consociational trade-offs based on an implicit reliance on balance, dependent on the reinforcing authority of the British and Irish governments acting together in emergencies.

Any review of events since 1998 demonstrates that pursuing interethnic balance without radical policy accommodation has not produced political stability but four distinct phases of growing instability: the crisis over disarmament and the rule of law before 2007, reinforced consociation between 2007 and 2012, annual crises between 2012 and 2017, and the post-Brexit collapse of consociation and intergovernmental partnership.

What the Agreement did become was a political vehicle to move away from failed strategies relying on political violence. The transition in the landscape of force and violence is unmistakeable. The transformation of policing and the primacy of international human rights and equality of treatment have (so far) provided a stabilising framework for public policy, criminal justice and employment. Since 1998 unresolved issues produce lengthy stalemate, veto and impasse rather than deaths. Socioeconomic inequalities and the Unionist monopoly of power of the 1960s have altered substantially. The unique secularisation of nationality in Northern Ireland (Irish or British or both as they may choose) made the state a protector of plural equality while the traditional identification between religion and political identity in Northern Ireland has loosened and formal equality in areas of gender, race, and sexual orientation has progressed in ways that were once unimaginable.

The price of indifference to reconciliation, including the continued existence of armed groups, however, has been the progressive erosion of the ethical pillars of 1998 – reconciliation, tolerance and mutual trust. None of the outstanding issues of law and order, the past or culture have been progressed by bilateral negotiation. Some matters – policing, equality and human rights – were progressed by early direct rule. Others – notably justice – progressed with cajoling from governments. But since Brexit, much of the Conservative party seems

59

to regard the collaborative nature of the Agreement as an impediment to taking back control, a deal about Ireland not Britain. With British-Irish partnership weakened, there is persistent concern that neither Unionists and Nationalists are interested in making an intercommunity NI work. Proposals in the U.K. to abandon the ECHR or render the Common Travel Area more awkward by differing approaches to immigration will further erode the Agreement's pillars.

It may be that the political era of reconciliation has now passed, although the rise of the Alliance party since 2016 suggests that alienation from the failures of consocilation and Brexit is also growing. Equally clear, however, is that, despite demographic change, antagonism offers no other mechanism for social stability. For as long as transformative change is off the agenda, the management of antagonism will remain the central challenge under any constitutional settlement, and the potential for unexpected escalation the central risk. Be careful what you wish for.

References

Agreement at St Andrews, 13 October 2006, https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/northernireland/st-andrews-agreement.pdf (accessed 31 January 2023).

An Phoblacht, 2007. A Shared Future: British Government Proposal Flawed. *An Phoblacht,* 7 June 2007, https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/16944 (accessed 15 May 2023).

Anglo-Irish Agreement: Agreement between the Government of Ireland and The Government of the United Kingdom, 15 November 1985, https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/northernireland/Anglo-Irish-Agreement-1985.pdf (accessed 18 May 2023).

BBC News, 2010. Timeline: Devolution of Policing and Justice. *BBC News,* 5 February 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/8457650.stm (accessed 30 January 2023).

Bill of Rights Forum, 2008. *Bill of Rights Forum: Final Report.* Bill of Rights Forum, https://wrda.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bill-of-Rights-Forum-final-report.pdf (accessed 17 May 2023).

Collins, S., 2022. *Ireland's Call: Navigating Brexit.* Red Stripe Press, Dublin.

Consultative Group on the Past, 2009. *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past.* Consultative Group on the Past, Belfast, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative_group/cgp_230109_report.pdf (accessed 15 May 2023).

European Council, 2017. *European Council (Art. 50) Guidelines for Brexit Negotiations* (Press release). European Council, 29 April 2017, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/04/29/euco-brexit-guidelines (accessed 30 January 2023).

First and Deputy First Minister, 2016. Letter to the Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP. *The Executive Office*, 9 August 2016, https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/Letter%20to%20PM%20from%20FM%20%26%20dFM.pdf (accessed 30 January 2023).

Galtung, J., 1969. Violence, Peace and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3), 167–191.

Governments of UK and Ireland, 1995. *A Framework for Accountable Government in Northern Ireland.* 22 February 1995, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/fd22295b.htm (accessed 15 May 2023).

60

Hamber, B. & Kelly, G., 2004. *Reconciliation: A Working Definition.* Democratic Dialogue, Belfast.

Hamilton, M., 2008. *Report of the Strategic Review of Parading in Northern Ireland: Views of Key Stakeholders.* Strategic Review of Parading, Belfast, https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/77101/1/ Strategic_Review_of_Parading_Views_of_Key_Stakeholders_June_2007_.pdf (accessed 17 May 2023).

Irish Times, 2013. DUP Withdraws Support for Peace Centre on Maze Prison Site. *Irish Times*, 15 August 2013, 1.

Joint Declaration 1993 (Downing St. Declaration), 15 December 1993, https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/northernireland/peace-process--joint-declaration-1993-1.pdf (accessed 15 May 2023).

Kelly, T., 2009. Eames-Bradley Launch an Exercise in Naivity. *Irish News*, 4 February 2009, 15.

Lagana, G., 2021. The European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland. In G. Lagana (ed.) *The European Union and the Northern Ireland Peace Process.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 133–158.

Lijphart, A., 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies.* Yale University Press, New Haven (CT).

McCall, C. & O'Dowd, L., 2008. Hanging Flower Baskets, Blowing in the Wind? Third-Sector Groups, Cross-Border Partnerships, and the EU Peace Programs in Ireland. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 14 (1), 29–54.

McDonald, H., 2012. This Article is More than 10 Years Old – Belfast City Hall Attacked by Loyalist Demonstrators Over Union Flag Vote. *The Guardian*, 3 December 2012, 1.

Melaugh, M., 2013. Note on the Protests Related to the Union Flag at Belfast City Hall, December 2012 – January 2013, 8 February 2013. *CAIN Archive*, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/identity/flag-2012.htm (accessed 30 January 2023).

Mitchell, G., 1996. The Mitchell Principles for Peace Negotiations (1996). *Alpha History*, 20 January 1996, https://alphahistory.com/northernireland/mitchell-principles-peace-negotiations-1996 (accessed 16 May 2023).

Moriarty, G., 2014. Peter Robinson Calls for Stormont Crisis Talks. *Irish Times*, 10 September 2014, 1.

Morrow, D., 2019. *Sectarianism: A Review.* Sir George Quigley Foundation, Belfast.

New Decade, New Approach, 9 January 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856998/2020-01-08_a_new_decade_a_new_approach.pdf (accessed 30 January 2023).

NI Assembly Research and Information Service, 2011. *Equality and Human Rights Legislation in Northern Ireland: A Review* (Research paper). Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast, http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2011/ofmdfm/7511.pdf (accessed 16 May 2023).

NI Assembly Research and Information Service, 2020. *Key Issues for a Bill of Rights* (Briefing Paper). Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast, http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017-2022/2020/ad-hoc-committee-on-bill-of-rights/1220.pdf (accessed 16 May 2023).

NI Executive, 2013. Together: Building a United Community Strategy. *The Executive Office,* 23 May 2013, https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/ofmdfm_dev/together-building-a-united-community-strategy.pdf (accessed 30 January 2023).

NI Executive, 2015. *A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan.* Northern Ireland Executive, Belfast, https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/nigov/a-fresh-start-stormont-agreement_0.pdf (accessed 30 January 2023).

Nolan, P., 2012. *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number One.* Community Relations Council, Belfast.

61

Nolan, P., 2018. The Cruel Peace: Killings in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement. *The Detail.* 23 April 2018, https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/the-cruel-peace-killings-in-northern-ireland-since-the-good-friday-agreement (accessed 29 January 2023).

Northern Ireland Act. 1998, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/47/contents (accessed 18 May 2023).

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, 2008. *A Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland: Advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.* NIHRC, Belfast.

OFMDFM – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 2005. *A Shared Future.* OFMDFM, Belfast.

Phoenix, É., 2019. State Papers: New Light on Major, Trimble and Peace Process. *BBC News,* 30 December 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-50919057 (accessed 16 May 2023).

Powell, J., 2010. *Great Hatred, Little Room.* Random House, New York.

Rowan, B., 2014. How Haass Talks Got Stuck in the Political Mud: Wordplay, Toxic Issues, Arguments and Despair. *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 January 2014, 12.

Steerpike, A., 2018. Boris Johnson's Speech to DUP Conference: 'We Are on the Verge of Making a Historic Mistake'. *The Spectator*, 24 November 2018, 8.

Stormont House Agreement, published 23 December 2014, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390672/Stormont_House_Agreement.pdf (accessed 30 January 2023).

Taylor, R., 2009. *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O'Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict.* Routledge, New York.

Teague, P., 2019. Brexit, the Belfast Agreement and Northern Ireland: Imperilling a Fragile Political Bargain. *Political Quarterly* 90 (4), 690–704.

The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland, signed on 10 April 1998, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1034123/The_Belfast_Agreement_An_Agreement_Reached_at_the_Multi-Party_Talks_on_Northern_Ireland.pdf (accessed 18 May 2023).

Curtis C. Holland

Class, Identity, Integration, and the Two-Tiered Peace Process

This article critically examines the extent to which increases in socio-economic equality between Protestants and Catholics over the post-Agreement period has corresponded to a gradual de-centering of ethnopolitical identity in social relations and political processes. I argue that, while there has been an increase in social integration and moderate growth in the political middle ground, such trends are not experienced equally across class contexts. On an everyday basis, ethnopolitical identity is most strongly felt in relatively deprived and religiously segregated communities who have experiencing very little by the way of peace dividends and suffering disproportionately and intergenerationally from conflict-related trauma and an ongoing sense of sectarian threat.

Keywords: class, identity, inequality, integration, Northern Ireland, peace, poverty.

Družbeni razred, identiteta, integracija in dvotirni mirovni proces

Članek kritično presoja, v kolikšni meri povečana družbena in ekonomska enakost med protestanti in katoličani v obdobju po podpisu Velikonočnega sporazuma sovpada s postopnim upadanjem etnocentrizma v družbenih odnosih in političnih procesih. Po avtorjevih besedah je družba sicer bolj povezana in politika nekoliko bolj sredinska, a to ne velja za vse družbene razrede enako. V vsakodnevnem življenju je etnopolitična identiteta najbolj izražena med razmeroma prikrajšanimi in versko ločenimi skupnostmi, ki so od mirovnega sporazuma imele bolj malo koristi in se že več generacij nesorazmerno spopadajo s post-konfliktnimi travmami in stalnim občutkom ogroženosti.

Ključne besede: družbeni razred, identiteta, neenakost, integracija, Severna Irska, mir, revščina.

Correspondence address: Curtis C. Holland, Sociology Department, State University of New York at Old Westbury, 223 Store Hill Road, Old Westbury, NY, 11568, USA, e-mail: hollandc@oldwestbury.edu.

1. Introduction

In the early period of the peace process, key authors on the conflict in Northern Ireland (NI) argued that the mutually opposed national and religious identities constituting Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL) communities would gradually be diluted through economic development and increased social equality (Douglas 1997; Elliott 2002). Politically, leaders were aware that a promise of economic growth and material prosperity would be essential to increase the appeal of the Good Friday Agreement (hereafter the Agreement), especially among the poor and working-class communities of Belfast, which experienced a disproportionate share of the violence during the Troubles (Coulter 2019, 124). Proponents in the British, Irish and U.S. governments argued that the Agreement would provide sufficient security to attract foreign investment and usher in a new era of cooperation wherein Unionist and Nationalist leaders could agree to disagree on ethnopolitical issues and work together to promote the shared social and economic interests of their constituencies. Since, the same leaders continue to applaud the Agreement as a model of effective peace that should be followed by other societies emerging from conflict, ignoring the stark inequalities that continue to blight Northern Irish society (Coulter et al. 2021, 1–4, 11–12) and constitute ongoing patterns of conflict and disorder (Creary & Byrne 2014; Holland & Rabrenovic 2017).

Certainly, evidence of increased tolerance and integration among the historically polarized ethnic blocs continues to mount. For instance, Nagle's (2009) analysis suggests that "multiculturalism" was advanced as a result of urban renewal schemes promoted by the NI Executive. Ethnographic work by Drissel (2007, 177) details how newly constructed public spaces in Belfast "have been utilized by youth to effectively blur schismatic distinctions and at least partially transform their collective identities." Overall, when the Assembly functions, the Unionist and Nationalist parties struggle to cooperate on most meaningful legislation, and disputes over policing and the past have consistently divided government along ethnonational lines (Coulter et al. 2021, 44–49, 70–103; Nolan 2014, 12–14; Lawther & Hearty 2021). Nonetheless, on a day-by-day basis, gradual shifts in civil society reveal a notable degree of flux in the identities and agencies of the NI citizenry. Statistical analyses by Coulter et al. (2021, 164–203) suggest an increased variability of identities among NI residents. Todd (2018, 315) reveals the capacity of NI citizens to "stretch the conventional boundaries of nation and group," signaling "everyday potential for quite radical revision of conventional constructions of the nation." The 2018 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey even showed that "more people than ever in the province, 50 %, say they are 'neither unionist nor nationalist'" (Lowry 2019).

Further, over time improvements in economic equity outcomes have continued, despite the political logjams in Stormont. The narrowing disparities in

employment rates between Protestants and Catholics is frequently cited as evidence of the overall growth in equity and integration resulting from the Agreement (Coulter et al. 2021, 11). By 2014, at least 60 % of entrants to higher education were Catholic, and 60 % were female, leading to a significant redistribution of the communal shares of professional occupations (Nolan 2014, 13). Such trends suggest that the predictions of prominent authors writing in the ceasefire period and shortly thereafter has, to some extent, come to fruition. Douglas (1997, 171–172) predicted that, as a result of the "new social structures" that emerged in the 1990s, "the greater diversity of social behavior" would facilitate the emergence of "more subtle definitions of the Self and the Other." In a similar vein, others suggested that the expansion of private housing markets, and concomitant processes of suburbanization and increased social mobility would steadily reduce Catholics' emotive attachment to Irish Nationalist ideology, as material concerns gradually outflank those of ethnopolitical identity (Elliott 2002, 181).

Indeed, as the subsequent pages illuminate, the peace process has facilitated social mobility and intergroup integration between Catholics and Protestants. However, this dynamic has been evident primarily among the middle-classes. In poor and working-class CNR and PUL communities in Belfast suffering most from the legacy of conflict, the "peace dividend" promised to them in the ceasefire period (1994–1998) has failed to materialize (Knox 2016). Drawing from a systematic literature review of scholarship on class, inequality, identity, and the peace process in NI over the last 25 years, I argue here that a two-tiered peace process is shaping processes of identity formation in distinct ways in middle-class versus poor and working-class communities. To sufficiently contextualize the analysis, though, it is important to first provide a brief historical overview of the emergence of the current class structure in NI.

2. National Identity and Class Formation: Past to Present

In the mid-20th century, a sectarian state intent on maintaining political alliance between the Unionist bourgeoisie and working-class Protestant communities heavily favored Protestant workers over their Catholic counterparts for decent paying, blue-collar jobs in the shipbuilding, manufacturing, and engineering sectors (Bew et al. 2002). The decline of these industries in NI began shortly after the second World War, intensifying over subsequent decades. Between 1950 and 1994 manufacturing employment declined by 58.4 %; and between 1971 and 1991, the unemployment rate increased 14.6 %, and outmigration rose by 12.2 % (McGovern & Shirlow 1997, 188). Their favored position in blue-collar sectors, rather than educational attainment historically marked working-class Protestant males' socio-economic advantage over their Catholic counterparts and women, and was key to their political alignment with middle-class Unionism.

66

However, as the Troubles continued into the 1980s, and the neoliberal project of the Thatcher and Reagan regimes effectively undermined the power of labor, "traditional heavy industry closed its doors," to be replaced by service industries and a flexibilized work force that displaced "the male, and mainly Protestant, industrial worker" (Smyth & Cebulla 2008, 176).

Throughout the period of Direct Rule from 1972 to 1998, the British state would attempt to address Northern Ireland's struggling economy and undermine the Republican insurgency by investing heavily in the province's white-collar public sector. Nearly 90 % of the funds invested by the British state in NI primarily benefited the middle and upper classes (McGovern & Shirlow 1997, 192). While the fruits of this investment were initially concentrated among privileged Protestant communities, middle-class Catholics would eventually come to benefit as well, as anti-discrimination legislation (such as the Fair Employment Acts of 1976, 1989 and 1998) gradually improved equity in hiring (Mitchell 2006, 63). Today, a much larger portion of workers (one in four) in NI work for the state compared with the United Kingdom (U.K.) average (although this is down from over one in three in the early 1990s) (Gunson et al. 2018, 7), many of whom are well educated professionals. Considering that public sector wages are on par with the U.K. average, and the cost of living in NI is lower than in other U.K. countries (Coulter 2019, 133), middle-class professionals in NI enjoy a relatively high standard of living.

Some research also suggests that the private labor sector has improved significantly. Recent reports indicate an unemployment rate in NI which is at "a record low," comparing favorably to the U.K. average (Duncan et al. 2021, 1). This trend is attributed in part to a growing tourism industry that has generated over £2 billion in output and created 52,000 jobs over the past two decades (Gray et al. 2018, 12). The Joseph Roundtree Foundation (2022, 3) documents measures of poverty that "are generally lower than elsewhere in the U.K.," due largely to the province's "relatively affordable housing costs, compared to other parts of the U.K." As these same authors indicate, however, interpreting such figures at face value obscures the reality of stark class and spatial disparities in socioeconomic outcomes and quality of life in NI. For instance, a significant share of the population – "almost one in five people" – still live in poverty, including 24 % of children (Joseph Roundtree Foundation 2022, 5). Across the whole of NI, the growth in food banks reflects an increasing food insecurity crisis which will likely be exacerbated by the gradual implementation of Westminster's "welfare reform" measures (Coulter et al. 2021, 260–269). "Cuts in the real value of working-age benefits are expected to reduce the real incomes of poorer households and housing costs are expected to increase for low income households as a consequence of rising rents" (Gray et al. 2018, 146).

Moreover, despite gains in the rates of private sector employment, wages in NI are 16 % below the U.K. average. Praise of the gains made in Northern Ire-

land's labor market tends to be based on a metric which only includes "those who are seeking employment but excludes those who are not" (Coulter 2019, 126–127). In 2018, the rate of "worklessness," which estimates employment as percentage of the entire working age population (not only those actively seeking work), indicate that economic activity in NI was 7 % lower than the other U.K. countries (Gray et al. 2018, 23). This is due in part to the relatively high percentage of the population (1 in 7) suffering from conflict-related trauma. About one-third of those categorized as economically inactive are people claiming long-term sickness benefits, and many of these individuals suffer from trauma because of being a victim or perpetrator of violence, or of living with a relative who was (Coulter et al. 2021, 4–5; see also, Tomlinson 2016). Disproportionately, such problems are concentrated in those under-served neighborhoods in North and West Belfast where most of the killings in the city during the Troubles occurred (Mesev et al. 2009).

Labor market problems are also the result of a highly unequal education system, in which pupils from poor and working-class families – especially boys – struggle to learn. Working-class Protestant boys hold the lowest school "attainment" levels in the U.K. after Roma youth, with working-class Catholic boys fairing only marginally better (Nolan 2014, 98). Consequently, young working-class males in NI have economic inactivity rates of over 20 %, higher than the other U.K. countries and Ireland. Many others are forced into part-time jobs "and relatively insecure forms of employment (such as zero hours contracts)" (Gray et al. 2018, 23, 152). Borooah and Knox (2015, 84) report that in 2013, there was a "56 percentage point gap between Northern Ireland's grammar and secondary schools in the proportions of their pupils obtaining good GCSEs and, as worryingly, this gap has shown little sign of reducing over time." The same authors indicate that an "absurdly small" number of socially and economically disadvantaged students enroll in grammar schools, which have greater capacity than secondary schools to prepare their pupils for university (Borooah & Knox 2015, 87). Various quantitative analyses indicate that "the gap between the lowest and highest skilled [in NI] was higher than any OECD country" (Duncan et al. 2021, 1; see also Magill & Mc Peake 2016; Bradshaw et al. 2018). Educational outcome measures, like labor market metrics, illuminate the spatial concentration of disadvantage. The 2017 NI Multiple Deprivation Report found over two-thirds of pupils in the Shankill, Falls and New Lodge areas of West Belfast "under-achieve" at school (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency 2017). Findings by Hughes and Loader (2022, 1) suggest that the "cross-community class interests animating" the grammar school system "not only perpetuate inequalities within respective communities but may also present a significant barrier to peacebuilding efforts in education, and ultimately impede progress towards a more socially cohesive society." Social immobility and stark levels of socio-economic inequality across working-class and middle-class Unionist and Nationalist communities

68

contribute to generalized feelings of discontent which may be channeled by op-
portunistic leaders in ways which fuel interethnic distrust and resentment (Hol-
land & Rabrenovic 2017; Holland 2022, 52–55).

3. Segregation, Class, and Ethno-National Identity: Evidence from Belfast

Jennifer Todd explains how, as day-to-day patterns of social interaction change
in accordance with shifts in social structures, gradual alterations of identity may
occur, diluting the power of rigid social and political boundaries (Todd 2005;
2018). In Belfast's more privileged sites of interaction, avoidance of discussion
about, and displays of ethnopolitical identity facilitates formation of relation-
ships across the traditional communal binaries which, to some extent, cross over
into multiple social spheres, and persist due to the few spatial and economic bar-
riers imposed on agents within these social environments. In the increasingly
ethnically "mixed" grammar schools, universities, professional workplaces, and
other "middle-class" sites of interaction, cultural mechanisms of social regulation
which institutionalize codes of silence on issues of ethnonational and ethnoreli-
gious identity, underscore the growth of cross-communal integration (Holland
2022, 27–50). In Belfast specifically, the increased residential "mixing" in private
housing markets (Gray et al. 2018, 177; Shuttleworth et al. 2020) and workplac-
es (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006, 118) among the middle-classes especially, coupled
with this social milieu's greater access to cosmopolitan shared spaces facilitates
a process of de-ethnicization that is less evident among poor and working-class
residents. On the contrary, in under-served communities, greater levels of seg-
regation and isolation across the institutional contexts of housing, education,
and even leisure centers in some areas (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006; Herrault &
Murtagh 2019) obstruct the extent to which contact translates into long-term
relationships with outgroup members.

This is not to say that much good work dedicated to facilitating dialogue, tol-
erance and trust between PUL and CNR communities does not occur. On the
contrary; the author met various community leaders from relatively deprived
neighborhoods in Belfast who engage in projects which bring at-risk Protes-
tant and Catholic youth together for play and to discuss difficult issues of iden-
tity. Others have identified broader, community-level intergroup cooperation in
some areas of the city historically most susceptible to sectarian violence and dis-
order (Knox 2010; Byrne 2011). Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest
that poor and working-class families are less willing than their more privileged
counterparts to enroll their children into officially integrated schools, which
guarantee proportional representation of students who identify as Protestant,
Catholic, or Other. Integrated schools, serving less than 10 percent of NI pupils,
include lessons intended to build dialogue and trust across religious and national

69

boundaries, and show a stronger capacity than non-integrated schools to facilitate close cross-ethnic friendships (Blaylock et al. 2018). Even for those who attend integrated schools or engage in other cross-communal relation building work, constructing an environment more broadly conducive to multiculturalism is quite challenging. Many young people from working-class communities located near sectarian interface areas still fear being identified as an outgroup member when traversing ethnosocial boundaries and struggle to maintain mixed friendships outside the safe spaces provided by integrated schools or community-based organizations (Holland 2022, 36–37). Although the city center provides some refuge from the threat of sectarian intimidation, accessing this part of Belfast is often difficult for relatively poor young residents from segregated neighborhoods and single-community estates, who face potential intimidation from paramilitaries, and must travel far distances across sectarian interfaces while lacking access to quick and reliable transportation (Harland 2011, 423; Shirlow & Murtagh 2006; McAlister et al. 2014).

These combined challenges to mobility throughout the city undermine the frequency of intergroup contact that can facilitate "mixed" friendships and subordinate ethnopolitical loyalties to supranational identifications (Hughes et al. 2007). Research from the early post-Agreement period showed a high proportion of 18–25-year-olds (68 %) living in Belfast neighborhoods separated by "peace lines" had never had a meaningful conversation with an outgroup peer (McAuley 2003, 64; Shirlow 2002). Although segregation has declined in NI overall (Gray et al. 2018, 177), the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (2016) reports that 94 % of those residing in social housing in Belfast live in segregated or "single communities," where over 80 % of residents are from the same ethnoreligious group. It is unlikely, then, that integration among youth in such communities – often Republican and Loyalist strongholds – has risen substantially.

In these segregated and relatively deprived neighborhoods, memories of the Troubles remain particularly central to processes of collective identity reproduction. These neighborhoods experienced disproportionate levels of the political and sectarian violence of the Troubles, and thus struggle most acutely with the consequences of political leadership's inability to uncover the truth behind the crimes from which they or their loved ones continually suffer (Coulter et al. 2021, 70–103, 4–5). A systemic sense of collective threat from neighboring outgroup communities, and periodically escalating tensions emerging from political mini-crises simultaneously provide a locus of community activity where young people (or, young men) can perform valued roles as protectors of their communities. Although young men risk being criticized and excluded from communities when exercising agency in this way, some continue to follow such scripts, as they are provided with other pathways to identity formation (Harland 2011; Holland & Rabrenovic 2017). Findings from Creary and Byrne's (2014, 221) survey of 120 community group leaders in NI suggest that ongoing disadvantage,

70

low self-esteem, and low self-image "continue to fuel youth interest in violence, thereby raising the potential to harm the peace process." Polls conducted earlier in the peace process indicate a greater resistance to integration among young people than older adults, especially among Protestant youth, who, in many instances, perceive a decline in the status of their families and communities to the benefit of Nationalists (McAuley & Tonge 2007, 43–47; Byrne 2011, 11). Just five years after the Agreement, McAuley (2003, 64) described a fragmentation within Unionism over support for the peace process, and the polarization of working-class CNR and PUL communities in particular "over a range of contentious issues, including, among others, the chosen routes of parades by the Orange Order, the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, [and] the nature of policing." Nearly two decades later, political entrepreneurs' "manipulation of socio-political symbols […] ultimately compromises the power of class-based discourses" to transform NI politics (Holland 2021, 9). Community leaders quoted in Holland and Rabrenovic (2017, 234) describe how a "scarcity mindset" continues to fuel ethnopolitical tensions at the street level. Some in underserved Belfast communities "are still poor […] and they believe that they still have to fight" over resources along sectarian lines. Such a scarcity mindset among young men, in particular, coupled with feelings of ennui and fear, provides fertile ground for recruitment by paramilitary groups aligned with the ethnopolitical objectives that contributed to the escalation of the Troubles in the first place. While evident to some extent in CNR communities, this phenomenon is especially apparent in working-class PUL neighborhoods experiencing an increasing "disconnect" from middle-class political Unionism (Holland & Rabrenovic 2017, 234). Many residents, of all ages, hold disdain for paramilitarism. Yet, for some young people, joining a paramilitary group not only is expected to bring status, but a "sense of community" (Holland 2022, 40). For a greater number of individuals, attachment to ethnopolitical symbols and ideologies take more subtle forms yet can still powerfully connect them with insular constructions of identity that impede cross-ethnic social integration.

4. Class Dimensions of De-Ethnicization

Collective emotive attachments to ethnopolitical entities rooted in the legacy of conflict is less apparent in middle-class and upper-class networks. Recent survey research documents a decline in ethnonational identification in some relatively privileged sections of the society. Hayward and McManus's (2019, 148) analysis, for example, shows a higher proportion of those identifying as neither Nationalist nor Unionist tend "to be either in full or part-time employment or in education, compared with Unionists and Nationalists – a finding which correlates with this group tending to have higher educational qualifications." In addition, the gap between the proportion of individuals identifying with neither

ethnonational tradition "in paid employment compared with Unionists and Nationalists […] has grown steadily in the past 20 years" (Hayward & McManus 2019, 147).

As early as the mid-20th century, the improvement of living standards for upwardly mobile Protestants brought with the creation of planned suburban communities, such as Glengormley, "while not displacing traditional [ethnopolitical] fixations […] drained them of some of their emotional centrality" to middle-class life, and ultimately "weakened traditional allegiances with the Unionist party" (Patterson 2006, 182; cited in Legg 2018, 59–62). More recently, in Belfast and beyond, other cultural differences are emerging within the broader Protestant community. For instance, Protestantism functioned to culturally bond middle-class Unionist and working-class Loyalist communities and was integral to the constitution of a shared Protestant/Unionist political consciousness (Morrow 1997; Bruce 1986). However, religious observance, while declining faster among Catholics in recent years, is overall lowest among Protestants (Coulter et al. 2021, 170), especially the Protestant middle-classes (Brewer 2013). In addition, research shows that Protestants tend to identify with a wider range of identities than Catholics (Loyalist, British, Northern Irish, and even, to a lesser extent, Nationalist) (Muldoon et al. 2007), and "ethno-nationalism has become less important in predicting vote choice for Protestants, but not Catholics" (Tilley et al. 2019, 1). Apparently, a decline in perceived group status satisfaction resulting from socio-structural changes associated with the peace process (increased Catholic mobility, for instance) has led some Protestants to explore alternative identifications (Goeke-Morey et al. 2016). The past two decades have witnessed a steady increase of both Protestants and Catholics (especially young people in these groups) disassociating from Northern Ireland's ethnopolitics and religious institutions (Coulter et al. 2021, 164–203). Affluent Protestant areas of NI have recorded lower voter turnouts than privileged wards in the other U.K. regions (Evans & Tonge 2009, 1027). More recently, Peter Shirlow, who leads research on voting trends in NI at Liverpool University's Institute of Irish Studies, comments that "a large section of the 18–40 Protestant electorate appears at the very least to be indifferent to politics at Stormont, especially on the unionist side" (quoted in Delargy 2017). Alliance, an historically middle-class party unaligned with Unionism or Nationalism (Tonge 2008, 64) has seen modest electoral gains in recent years (Hayward 2020). Yet, a greater number of those disenchanted with the dominant ethnonational parties, from across the communal divide, simply avoid the polls (Coulter et al. 2021, 44).

Non-voting is not only an issue in privileged Protestant wards, however. Working-class Protestant communities in Belfast have generated the lowest voter turnout in some post-Agreement elections (Brewer 2013), as many feel unrepresented by middle-class political Unionism and perceive the power sharing structure to have furthered a Nationalist agenda. Many in the same com-

72

munities have expressed an emotive attachment to Unionism and Loyalism, not through voting, but rather, an alternative grassroots politics, demonstrated most recently in the widespread Loyalist street protests over the terms of U.K. withdrawal from the E.U. and perceptions of pro-Nationalist "two-tiered policing" (BBC News 2021). Thus, considering its various forms, emotive Unionist ethnopolitical energy is especially lacking in more privileged Protestant communities. Yet, detachment from ethnopolitics is also apparent among the upwardly mobile Catholic community, especially young middle-class Catholics who have little experiential connection to the Irish Nationalist struggle. Indeed, since devolution, young Catholic "professional types" have turned out to the polls in relatively low numbers (Delargy 2017).

Of course, the "middle-classes," like any socially constructed group, contain members who display various dissonant attitudes and behaviors, and this is certainly the case in NI (Graham & Shirlow 1998). For example, both Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) – the self-described representatives of working-class Republicanism and Loyalism, respectively – have put forward an increasing number of middle-class party candidates. Moreover, some middle-class Catholics continue to connect with the collective identity of a minority Nationalist community who rose in resistance to a sectarian state. Involvement with the church in cultural activities also helps maintain a Catholic/Nationalist collective identity that transcends class position to some degree (Goeke-Morey et al. 2016). Nonetheless, the compartmentalization of ethnonational, religious, and class identities is evident among a sizable segment of the Catholic middle-class. For instance, Catholic grammar schools across the North devised their own private transfer exams as a result "of pressures from middle-class Catholic parents," and despite Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labor Party's (SDLP) opposition to the grammar school versus secondary school structure. Even as most would never vote for a Unionist candidate, middle-class Catholics overall seem to be "with the Unionists in wanting to maintain the grammar/secondary school divide" (McDonald 2009).

5. Brexit: A Re-Centering of Ethnopolitical Identity?

Divisive ethnopolitics is, of course, nothing new in post-accord NI, but the wake of Brexit brought rising fears of a re-escalation of conflict and reversal of the progress made toward democratization and integration of the PUL and CNR communities over the preceding quarter century (Cochrane 2020). Certainly, Brexit has had a divisive political impact, and changed the political views of some Catholics and Nationalists who were previously content with the constitutional status-quo. The percentage of Catholics who would consider voting for a united Ireland increased following the Brexit vote (Garry et al. 2018), as Sinn Féin escalated rhetoric calling for a referendum vote on unification (Reuters 2017). At

the same time, while those aligned with the brand of hardline Ulster Unionism embodied by the DUP were galvanized to resist the prospect of unification, the broader Protestant and Unionist community has been quite divided over Brexit related issues. Forty percent of Protestants voted "Remain" in the 2016 Brexit referendum, compared to a vast majority of Nationalists (88 %) and Catholics (85 %) who voted the same (Garry et al. 2018). In the subsequent 2019 General Elections, the social and economic anxieties over Brexit galvanized the middle ground to show up at the polls to an extent not witnessed in NI for over a decade (Hayward 2020, 55), and some from the Unionist "business class" even indicated an openness to at least discussing the prospect of a united Ireland (Mallie 2018). Many who voted Alliance were "motivated by their pro-remain stance and by frustration at DUP-Sinn Féin ability to hold the region in limbo […]" (Hayward 2020, 55). The Alliance Party and SDLP gained seats in the Executive as "previous DUP and Sinn Féin voters change[d] their minds" (Hayward 2020, 55). While Alliance gained a modest degree of support from young, Catholic, and working-class voters, two-thirds of those who voted for the party were, nonetheless, middle-class (Tonge 2020, 463).

Indeed, "Brexit has complicated, if not transcended, the traditional unionist/nationalist binary that defines political positions" (Hayward 2020, 49), yet this dynamic is most evident among middle-class constituencies. Despite the increased turnout of the "middle ground" to the polls in 2019 compared to previous post-devolution elections, low turnout, especially among young voters, is an ongoing issue. Not coincidentally, the more "hardline" Nationalist and Unionist parties – Sinn Féin and DUP, respectively – still receive the largest shares of votes overall (Coulter et al. 2021, 14–16, 35).

It is important to note that although disassociation from ethnopolitical positions is more apparent among the middle-classes, this is not to say that middle-class voters are necessarily more politically enlightened than their working-class counterparts. As McAuley (1997, 170) recognized, there has always been a willingness, "by at least some sections of the Protestant working class, to reassess their own position, and to challenge the authority of the established Unionist political leadership." In the post-Brexit era, Holland (2022) documents cases of Loyalist rejection of divisive DUP politics over the Withdrawal deal. However, while progressive segments of the PUL community continue to challenge established Unionist leadership, they generally still hold ideological commitment to conventional brands of Ulster Loyalism, having been more directly affected by the Troubles and thus more committed to preserving the Union they, or those close to them, risked their futures to defend. Rather than turning to the political center, then, many Loyalists simply avoid the polls altogether. In addition, material interests at stake with regard to Brexit and the NI Protocol for other sections of Unionism, who feel threatened vis-à-vis potential economic losses from E.U. withdrawal, are of less concern in working-class Loyalist strongholds,

74

which have received little by the way of peace dividends. In Republican working-class communities, historically most committed to the unification agenda and core base of support for Sinn Féin, a re-escalation of constitutional politics in the wake of Brexit has only further re-centered the intersubjective meanings constituting collective ethnonational identity (Holland 2022, 97–98, 155–160).

6. Conclusion

In the ceasefire period Coulter (1997) examined how a withdrawal of a large segment of the Unionist middle-class from NI politics during Direct Rule undermined the trajectory of peacemaking and development of a more generative Unionist politics. A quarter century later, significant sections of both the Unionist and Nationalist middle-classes are withdrawing from local NI politics. While facilitating cross-communal interactions which ease the development of a broader range of relationships, disassociation from issues of ethnopolitical identity may also undermine efforts at inculcating a willingness and ability to engage across communal lines about issues that continue to politically divide the broader Unionist and Nationalist communities and ameliorate the pains of conflict for those without the option to simply turn away from them. In a sense, class difference increasingly cuts-across ethnoreligious lines, resulting, in certain instances in the de-centering of the traditional binary identities in shaping social and institutional relations. However, twenty-five years after the Agreement, such a dynamic is more notable in middle-class communities. In relatively deprived Republican and Loyalist communities the concomitant, coercive forces of ethnopolitical identity on the one hand, and poverty and inopportunity, on the other, continue to shape attitudes and agencies in ways which impede cross-communal integration. Ultimately, Northern Ireland's peace process remains at risk so long as it follows a developmental trajectory fractured along class lines.

Much could be done to ensure the working-class comes to benefit from the peace dividend more meaningfully. The British government could invest in the creation of decent paying jobs for those without a college education, reverse entitlements cuts and, in the longer term, work with local leaders in NI to create a more equitable education system that provides better prospects for youth from under-served communities with disproportionate levels of special needs. To mitigate the capacity of local political entrepreneurs in NI to manipulate the ethnonational and religious anxieties exacerbated by Brexit and the NI Protocol, the Irish and British governments, in cooperation with more moderate Nationalist and Unionist leadership in NI, should enhance efforts countering the divisive rhetoric of hardline Nationalist and Unionist leadership, be more ardent in their work to sustain key provisions of the Agreement and work more diligently to promote inclusive constructs of citizenship in a post-Brexit world. More must also be done to make working-class PUL and CNR communities

feel included in ongoing British-E.U. negotiations and enhance their felt sense of citizenship. In addition, the British and Irish governments, elected officials in NI and international donors should increase financial and political support for integrated education and community-based organizations with histories of success at bringing at-risk PUL and CNR youth together for meaningful dialogue and relation building, and increase investment in shared housing and public transportation systems connecting segregated neighborhoods to anonymous urban spaces undefined by sectarian territoriality. More generally, the NI, British, and Irish governments should listen to what representatives from relatively deprived PUL and CNR communities have to say about how they could be better served socially and economically by the peace process and devise policy accordingly.

References

BBC News, 2021. NI Assembly To Be Recalled over Loyalist Violence. *BBC News*, 6 April 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-56649459 (accessed 7 October 2022).

Bew, P., Gibbon, P. & Patterson, H., 2002. *Northern Ireland, 1921–2002: Political Forces and Social Classes.* Interlink Publishing Group, Northampton (MA).

Blaylock, D., Hughes, J. E., Wolfer, R. & Donnelly, C., 2018. Integrating Northern Ireland: Cross-group Friendships in Integrated and Mixed Schools. *British Educational Journal* 44 (4), 643–662.

Borooah, V. & Knox, C., 2015. *The Economics of Schooling in a Divided Society: The Case for Shared Education.* Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills.

Bradshaw, J., De Lazzari, G. & Andrade, J., 2018. *Performance in TIMSS 2015 of Disadvantaged Pupils in Northern Ireland.* NFER, Slough.

Brewer, J., 2013. Culture, Class and Protestantism in Urban Belfast. *Discover Society*, 5 November 2013, https://archive.discoversociety.org/2013/11/05/culture-class-and-protestantism-in-urban-belfast-2/ (accessed 7 October 2022).

Bruce, S., 1986. *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Byrne, S., 2011. *Economic Assistance and Conflict Transformation: Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.* Routledge, London.

Cochrane, F., 2020. *Breaking Peace: Brexit and Northern Ireland.* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Coulter, C., 1997. The Culture of Contentment: The Political Beliefs and Practices of the Unionist Middle Class. In P. Shirlow & M. McGovern (eds.) *Who are the 'People'? Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland.* Pluto, London, 114–139.

Coulter, C., 2019. Northern Ireland's Elusive Peace Dividend: Neoliberalism, Austerity, and the Politics of Class. *Capital and Class* 43 (1), 123–138.

Coulter, C., Gilmartin, N., Hayward, K. & Shirlow, P., 2021. *Northern Ireland a Generation Good Friday.* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Creary, P. & Byrne, S., 2014. Youth Violence as Accidental Spoiling? Civil Society Perceptions of the Role of Sectarian Youth Violence and the Effect of the Peace Dividend in Northern Ireland. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 20 (2), 221–243.

75

Delargy, J., 2017. Vote? Young People in the North Don't See the Point. *The Irish Times*, 9 October 2017, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/vote-young-people-in-the-north-don-t-see the-point-1.3248904 (accessed 10 October 2022).

Douglas, N., 1997. Political Structures, Social Interaction and Identity Change in Northern Ireland. In B. Graham (ed.) *In Search of Ireland*. Routledge, London, 151–173.

Drissel, D., 2007. Urban Schism, Social Strains: Exploring the Collective Identities of Youth in Contemporary Belfast. *The International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations* 7 (4), 177–186.

Duncan, P., Sheehy, F. & Scruton, P., 2021. Life in Northern Ireland V the Rest of the UK: What Does the Data Say? *The Guardian,* 2 May 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/02/life-in-northern-ireland-v-the-rest-of-the-uk-what-does-the-data-say (accessed 15 August 2022).

Elliott, M., 2002. Religion and Identity in Northern Ireland. In M. Elliott (ed.) *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland*. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.

Evans, J. & Tonge, J., 2009. Social Class and Party Choice in Northern Ireland's Ethnic Blocs. *West European Politics* 32 (5), 1012–1030.

Garry, J., McNicholl, B., O'Leary, B. & Pow, J., 2018. Northern Ireland and the UK's Exit from the EU: What do People Think? *UK in a Changing Europe*, 20 May 2018, https://ukandeu.ac.uk/partner-reports/northern-ireland-and-the-uks-exit-from-the-eu-what-do-people-think/ (accessed 17 November 2022).

Goeke-Morey, M. C., Taylor, L. K., Merrilees, C. E. & Cummings, E. M., 2016. Predictors of Strength of In-group Identity in Northern Ireland: Impact of Past Sectarian Conflict, Relative Deprivation, and Church Attendance. *Journal of Community Applied Social Psychology* 25 (4), 283–295.

Graham, B. & Shirlow, P., 1998. An Elusive Agenda: The Development of a Middle-ground in Northern Ireland. *Area* 30 (3), 245–254.

Gray, A. M., Hamilton, J., Kelly, G., Lynn, B., Melaugh, M. & Robinson, G., 2018. *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number Five.* Community Relations Council, Belfast.

Gunson, R., Murray, C. & Williamson, I., 2018. *The Skills System in Northern Ireland: Challenges and Opportunities*. Institute for Public Policy Research, Edinburgh.

Harland, K., 2011. Violent Youth Culture in Northern Ireland: Young Men, Violence, and the Challenges of Peacebuilding. *Youth and Society* 43 (2), 414–432.

Hayward, K., 2020. The 2019 General Election in Northern Ireland: The Rise of the Centre Ground? *The Political Quarterly* 91 (1), 49–55.

Hayward, K. & McManus, C., 2019. Neither/Nor: The Rejection of Unionist and Nationalist Identities in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland. *Capital and Class* 43 (1), 139–155.

Herrault, H. & Murtagh, B., 2019. Shared Space in Post-conflict Belfast. *Space and Polity* 23 (3), 251–264.

Holland, C., 2021. Identity, the Politics of Policing, and Limits to Legitimacy in Northern Ireland. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 34 (1), 44–68.

Holland, C., 2022. *Inequality, Identity, and the Politics of Northern Ireland*. Lexington, Lanham, (MD).

Holland, C. & Rabrenovic, G., 2017. Social Immobility, Ethno-Politics, and Sectarian Violence: Obstacles to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 30, 219–244.

Hughes, J., Campbell, A., Hewstone, M. & Cairns, E., 2007. Segregation in Northern Ireland. *Policy Studies* 28 (1), 33–53.

Hughes, J. & Loader, R., 2022. Is Academic Selection in Northern Ireland a Barrier to Social Cohesion? *Research Papers in Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2022.2135016.

Joseph Roundtree Foundation, 2022. *Poverty in Northern Ireland 2022.* Joseph Roundtree Foundation, https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-northern-ireland-2022 (accessed 18 November 2022).

Knox, C., 2010. Peace Building in Northern Ireland: A Role for Civil Society. *Social Policy and Society* 10 (1), 13–28.

Knox, C., 2016. Northern Ireland: Where is the Peace Dividend? *Policy and Politics* 44 (3), 485–503.

Lawther, C. & Hearty, K., 2021. Through the Looking Glass: Memory, Myth and Policing the Past. *Policing and Society* 32 (7), 896–910.

Legg, G., 2018. *Northern Ireland and the Politics of Boredom.* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Lowry, B., 2019. The Politics of Neither: How Northern Ireland is Shunning Unionism and Nationalism. *The Guardian*, 25 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/25/northern-ireland-unionism-nationalism-tribalism (accessed 10 August 2022).

Magill, M. & Mc Peake, M., 2016. *An Anatomy of Economic Inactivity in Northern Ireland: Working paper.* Ulster University Economic Policy Centre, https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/526046/UUEPC-Inactivity-Discussion-Paper-Final-Report1.pdf/_nocache (accessed 28 September 2022).

Mallie, E., 2018. Some Unionists Are Thinking the Unthinkable about Living in a United Ireland. *The Irish Times*, 9 December 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/some-unionists-are-thinking-the-unthinkable-about-living-in-a-united-ireland-1.3725241 (accessed 10 November 2022).

McAlister, S., Scraton, P. & Haydon, D., 2014. Childhood in Transition: Growing Up in 'Post conflict' Northern Ireland. *Children's Geographies* 12 (3), 297–311.

McAuley, J., 1997. 'Flying the One-Winged Bird': Ulster Unionism and the Peace Process. In P. Shirlow & M. McGovern (eds.) *Who are the 'People'? Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland.* Pluto, London, 158–175.

McAuley, J., 2003. Unionism's Last Stand? Contemporary Unionist Politics and Identity in Northern Ireland. *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 3 (1), 60–74.

McAuley, J. & Tonge, J., 2007. For God and the Crown: Contemporary Political and Social Attitudes amongst Orange Order Members in Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology* 28 (1), 33–52.

McDonald, H., 2009. 11-plus Returns in Northern Ireland. *The Guardian,* 6 February 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2009/feb/06/northern-ireland-11-plus (accessed 18 November 2022).

McGovern, M. & Shirlow, P., 1997. Counter-Insurgency, Deindustrialization and the Political Economy of Ulster Loyalism. In P. Shirlow & M. McGovern (eds.) *Who are the 'People'? Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland.* Pluto, London, 176–198.

Mesev, V., Shirlow, P. & Downs, J., 2009. The Geography of Conflict and Death in Belfast, Northern Ireland. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99 (5), 893–903.

Mitchell, C., 2006. *Religion, Identity, and Politics in Northern Ireland.* Ashgate, Burlington (VT).

Morrow, D., 1997. Suffering for Righteousness' Sake? Fundamental Protestantism and Ulster Politics. In P. Shirlow & M. McGovern (eds.) *Who are the 'People'? Unionism, Protestantism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland.* Pluto, London, 140–157.

Muldoon, O., Trew, K., Todd, J., Rougier, N. & McLaughlin, K., 2007. Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. *Political Psychology* 28 (1), 89–103.

Nagle, J., 2009. The Right to Belfast City Centre: From Ethnocracy to Liberal Multiculturalism? *Political Geography* 28 (2), 132–141.

Nolan, P., 2014. *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report: Number 3.* Community Relations Council, Belfast.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive, 2016. *Community Cohesion Strategy 2015–2020.* NIHE, Belfast.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2017. *Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measures 2017.* NISRA, Belfast.

Reuters, 2017. Sinn Fein Wants Vote on Northern Ireland Leaving UK 'as Soon as Possible.' *Reuters*, 13 March 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-nireland/sinn-fein-wants-vote-on-northern-ireland-leaving-uk-as-soon-as-possible-idUSKBN16K28M (accessed 18 November 2022).

Shirlow, P., 2002. Segregation in Belfast since the Peace Process [Paper]. At *The Royal Geographical Society Conference*, Belfast, 5 January 2002.

Shirlow, P. & Murtagh, B., 2006. *Belfast: Segregation, Violence, and the City.* Pluto, London.

Shuttleworth, I., Foley, B., Gould, M. & Champion, T., 2020. Residential Mobility in Divided Societies: How Individual Religion and Geographical Context Influenced Housing Moves in Northern Ireland 2001–2011. *Population, Space and Place* 27 (2), DOI: 10.1002/psp.2387.

Smyth, J. & Cebulla, A., 2008. The Glacier Moves? Economic Change and Class Structure. In C. Coulter & M. Murray (eds.) *Northern Ireland after the Troubles: A Society in Transition.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 175–191.

Tilley, J., Garry, J. & Matthews, N., 2019. The Evolution of Party Policy and Cleavage Voting Under Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland. *Government and Opposition* 56 (2), 226–244.

Todd, J., 2005. Social Transformations, Collective Categories, and Identity Change. *Theory and Society* 34 (4), 429–463.

Todd, J., 2018. Everyday Narratives, Personalized Memories and the Remaking of National Boundaries. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 32 (3), 315–330.

Tomlinson, M., 2016. Risking Peace in the 'War Against the Poor'? Social Exclusion and the Legacies of the Northern Ireland Conflict. *Critical Social Policy* 36 (1), 104–123.

Tonge, J., 2008. From Conflict to Communal Politics: The Politics of Peace. In C. Coulter & M. Murray (eds.) *Northern Ireland after the Troubles: A Society in Transition.* Manchester University Press, Manchester, 49–72.

Tonge, J., 2020. Beyond Unionism versus Nationalism: The Rise of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland. *The Political Quarterly* 91 (2), 461–466.

Marisa McGlinchey

Irish Nationalist and Republican Attitudes to the Good Friday Agreement: Sell-Out or Steppingstone?

This article examines attitudes across Irish republicanism and nationalism to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The research draws on qualitative interviews conducted between 2009–2018, throughout the nationalist and republican spectrum, charting evolving attitudes across this green base. Interviewees include GFA negotiators, including the SDLP, a key architect of the Agreement, and Sinn Féin, the party that went on to claim ownership of the GFA. Interviews were also conducted with dissident Irish republicans who have never accepted the GFA. This article puts a particular focus on nationalist and republican attitudes to armed actions in pursuit of Irish unity. Further, it examines attitudes across the Irish republican/nationalist spectrum to a potential border-poll, resulting from the central principle of the GFA (consent); and analyses positions on the required 50 % plus one for Irish unity.

Keywords: Irish republicanism, IRA, Irish nationalism, Sinn Féin, SDLP, dissident republican.

Stališče irskih nacionalistov in republikancev do Velikonočnega sporazuma: Izdaja ali priložnost?

Članek obravnava stališča irskih republikancev in nacionalistov do Velikonočnega sporazuma iz leta 1998. Raziskava temelji na kvalitativnih intervjujih, opravljenih med pripadniki vseh republikanskih in nacionalističnih strank med letoma 2009 in 2018, in prikazuje, kako so se stališča te zelene baze sčasoma spreminjala. Med intervjuvanci so tudi stranke, ki so sodelovale v pogajanjih o Sporazumu, med njimi SDLP kot ključni arhitekt sporazuma in Sinn Féin, ki si zanj pripisuje največ zaslug. Intervjuji so bili opravljeni tudi z disidentskimi irskimi republikanci, ki sporazuma nikoli niso sprejeli. Poseben poudarek je na odnosu nacionalistov in republikancev do oboroženih akcij za doseganje irske združitve. Članek preučuje stališča celotnega spektra irskih republikancev in nacionalistov glede morebitnega referenduma o združitvi, ki temelji na osrednjem načelu sporazuma (soglasje), ter glede zahtevanih 50 odstotkov plus en glas za irsko združitev.

Ključne besede: *republikanci, IRA, nacionalisti, Sinn Féin, SDLP, disidentski republikanci.*

Correspondence address: Marisa McGlinchey, Institute for Peace and Security, Coventry University, IV5 Innovation Village, Cheetah Road, Coventry, CV1 2TL, United Kingdom, e-mail: ab3628@coventry.ac.uk.

1. Introduction

One of the most enduring images of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) period emerged at a rock concert in the Waterfront Hall in Belfast on May 19, 1998. The aim of the concert was to promote a yes vote in the upcoming referendum on the Agreement.[1] On stage, Irish rock star and leader of the music group U2, Bono, stood between then Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) leader John Hume (McLoughlin 2010) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) leader David Trimble (Godson 2011), and lifted their hands into the air to cheers from the crowd. Hume and Trimble had jointly won the 1998 Nobel peace prize "for their efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland" (The Nobel Prize 1998). Hume stood there as founder and party leader of the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland, the SDLP. It would be another 3 years before the more hard-line Sinn Féin would electorally surpass the SDLP (Murray & Tonge 2005; McGlinchey 2019b).[2] As a key architect of the Agreement, Hume and the SDLP did not anticipate that the electorate would swing more in favour of their nationalist rival, rather believing that the electorate would reward them for their part in reaching the historic Agreement. Therefore, the two decades since 2001, have witnessed the nationalist community in Northern Ireland being led by Sinn Féin (Maillot 2015; Bean 2007), which has been viewed as the greener and stronger representative of nationalist interests in the post-Agreement era.

Twenty-five years on, the core principles of the Agreement have not changed, regarding consent and power-sharing. However, changes were made to the Agreement in 2006 by the St Andrews Agreement. A key change was made regarding the mechanism for electing the First and deputy First Ministers. In 1998 the Ministers were appointed on a cross-community basis. St Andrews resulted in the First Minister coming from the largest party within the largest designation, and the deputy First Minister was drawn from the largest party within the second largest designation (Agreement at St Andrews 2006). Therefore subsequent elections have been dominated by a race to be First Minister (despite the legal status of the two posts). A system under which the SDLP has lost out to Sinn Féin, the party perceived as greener and a more stringent defender of nationalist interests. One of the SDLP architects of the 1998 Agreement, and subsequent party leader (2001–2010), Mark Durkan, has proven a critic of changes at St Andrews: "I resent the changes that were made at St Andrews. I predicted it would lead to tribalism" (Durkan 2018). But despite changes to the allocation of the First Minsters, the Agreement has remained largely unchanged and has therefore come under criticism for being treated as a relic, rather than a living document. This has opened up an interesting debate around the extent to which the Agreement, which constitutes an international treaty between the British and Irish governments, can or should be altered. Against this backdrop, this article examines nationalist and republican attitudes to the Agreement at the time of its inception, as well as twenty-five years on.

2. Methodology

This work addresses the following research questions: 1) What attitudes exist throughout the republican and nationalist spectrum to the GFA?; 2) To what extent is the GFA viewed as a sell-out of traditional republican principles, or alternatively as a pragmatic steppingstone to achieving the ultimate objective of Irish unity? In answering these questions this article draws on the author's archive of primary interviews conducted with several individuals across the spectrum of nationalism and republicanism between 2009–2018, bringing together the range of views which exist throughout.

Interviewees include politically elected representatives from Sinn Féin and the SDLP, including the former deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland Seamus Mallon (1998–2001), who was SDLP Deputy Leader (1979–2001). Also interviewed is John Hume, SDLP founder member and party leader (1979–2001); whose vision greatly informed the GFA. Interviewees also comprise other members of the SDLP negotiating team during the GFA talks, including Mark Durkan who was SDLP party leader from 2001–2010 and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland from 2001–2002. Further, this article draws on interviews conducted with Gerry Adams, who was the Sinn Féin President from 1983 to 2018; and Danny Morrison who was Sinn Féin's Director of Publicity from 1979–1990. Finally, this article includes primary interviews with dissident republicans, reflecting the diverse spectrum of opinion that exists throughout the green constituency. In drawing together attitudes of the SDLP, Sinn Féin and dissident republicans, this article offers a uniquely holistic examination of nationalist and republican attitudes to the GFA.[3]

The fact that interviews were conducted between 2009 and 2018, has allowed for the charting of evolving attitudes within nationalism and republicanism. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and a thematic analysis was conducted on the data collected. The data which emerged provides insight into the range of opinion across the nationalist and republican family regarding the GFA, its implementation and the future of the Agreement regarding a potential border-poll on Irish unity; with a particular focus on the required 50 % plus one for constitutional change.

Beyond the aforementioned primary interviews, this work engages with academic secondary literature on Irish republicanism and nationalism, as well as wider literature on social movements and peacebuilding. It also cites primary material from republican organisations, correspondence between Sinn Féin and the SDLP in 1988 (Linen Hall Library, Northern Ireland Political Collection 1988), the Oireachtas report on unionist concerns over a united Ireland produced by Senator Mark Daly in 2019, the Building Peace conference at Queen's University Belfast in 2018 to mark 20 years since the GFA, and media sources. Therefore, primary interview material is contextualised and triangulated within this wider range of sources.

3. Armed Struggle in the Pursuit of Irish Unity: Nationalist and Republican Attitudes

The GFA dramatically transformed the political landscape in Northern Ireland, largely ending the latest period of violence, which had taken place since 1969. Coulter et al. (2021, 2) have stated: "It is important to mark at the very outset, then, that the single greatest achievement of the GFA has been the (almost complete) 'removal of the gun from Irish politics'". Throughout the last 150 years, armed violence in the pursuit of a sovereign united Ireland has re-occurred, during the 1916 Easter Rising (McGarry 2011; O'Donnell 2008), the Irish Civil War (1922–1923) (Hopkinson 1988; Murray & Sagarra 2022; Pakenham 1992), the IRA border campaign (1956–1962) (Bowyer Bell 1997; Flynn 2009), the post 1969-period (Provisional IRA) and sporadically since 1994 from dissident republicans. Notably, at each point in time, a line has been drawn (by those involved) regarding the legitimate use of violence. Fianna Fáil, the party which comes from the anti-treaty tradition, would regard violence as legitimate until approximately 1923. The Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) regards violence as legitimate until its ceasefires of 1994 and 1996. Whereas, dissident republican groups continue to argue that violence remains legitimate in the pursuit of Irish sovereignty, as Ireland is still partitioned. Each position provides a justification for armed actions within that particular context; and decries violence after that period as unjustified and illegitimate.

In 1998 Sinn Féin and the leadership of the Provisional Movement attempted to draw a definitive line under armed violence in the pursuit of a united Ireland. The party has strongly condemned ongoing dissident violence. Prior to the Agreement (and subsequently), the Sinn Féin leadership argued that the process needed to be managed carefully to prevent splitting the republican movement; as reflected in Jonathan Powell's (2008) diary *Great Hatred, Little Room*. The Provisional leadership aimed to carry with them as much of the movement as possible; and limit those breaking off to form or join dissident organisations (McGlinchey 2019b; White 2006; Whiting 2015; Currie & Taylor 2011; Frampton 2011; Horgan 2013; Morrison 2013; Tonge 2012). They were largely successful in this regard as Sinn Féin, and the Provisional Movement maintained most of its base.

Accepting the GFA, was a historic step for Sinn Féin, as until that point the party had been completely opposed to any idea of consent.[4] However, the Agreement was presented by the leadership as transitional on the road to a united Ireland. As pointed out by O'Leary, "There was a core bargain at the heart of the Agreement. Nationalists endorsed it because it promised them political, legal, and economic equality now, plus institutions in which they have a strong and proportionate stake, with the possibility of Irish unification later, provided simple majority consent emerges in both jurisdictions" (O'Leary 2019, 217). Given

that acceptance of consent was a major step for Sinn Féin, it is worth noting some of the factors which influenced then party President Gerry Adams during that process. Adams has recalled:

83

> Personally, I was re-enforced in my view by organisations like the African National Congress. We were taking decisions and then when we went to meet with them, when we went to meet with Mandela, to meet with the ANC leadership, and we were swapping experiences, we discovered that it's an issue of strategic compromise […]. So if you are asking me whose experience did we draw upon, it was probably, of all the different forces, it was the ANC (Interview 7).

A key point is that when the GFA was reached, political positions and aspirations were not eradicated, they were accommodated. As Jonathan Powell, Prime Minister Tony Blair's Chief of Staff, noted: "the Good Friday Agreement was an agreement to disagree. The two sides couldn't even agree on its title" (Powell 2008, 108).[5] The pursuit of respective political positions would continue, non-violently. Sinn Féin has clearly argued that the Agreement was not a settlement. A decade after the GFA was reached, Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams commented: "The Good Friday Agreement is an accommodation, you know. The Good Friday Agreement isn't a settlement. It's an Agreement on a journey without agreeing on the destination" (Interview 7). SDLP negotiator, and party leader (2001–2010) Mark Durkan has recalled the time of the talks leading to the Agreement:

> When we were in negotiations, I remember using the term collective ambiguity. Everybody now always talks about the Agreement as constructive ambiguity or whatever, but they did say at the time that there would be a use for a degree of collective ambiguity, but it's ambiguity in a very honest sense (Interview 1).

Durkan has emphasised the fact that there were only two possible constitutional options, a United Kingdom or a United Ireland. Therefore, there was no ambiguity regarding the constitutional options. Durkan continued:

> You knew that the Agreement was one that unionists were going to have to hold up to their people and be able to show certain things about it and I can remember in the talks actually comparing it with the sort of holograms that you get on a bank card. You know that you hold it up to different light and so you see a different thing in it, but you're honest about the fact that both things are there (Interview 1).

Unionists were able to tell their base that the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom (U.K.) would remain unchanged, and nationalists were able to tell their base that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland could be changed to being part of a united Ireland, if most of the population of North-

ern Ireland voted for constitutional change (the consent principle contained in strand One of the GFA). Ultimately, this roadmap forward, provided nationalism and republicanism with a non-violent path through which to pursue the political objective of a united and sovereign Ireland.

4. Fifty Percent Plus One: A Lack of Nationalist Consensus Around Consent?

The Consent principle is a key element of the GFA and was arguably the most difficult part for Irish republicans to accept, as it was opposed to a cornerstone of traditional Irish republicanism, which stated that the right of Irish sovereignty is inalienable and does not need to be put to a vote (Bowyer Bell 1997; McGlinchey 2019b; White 1993; 2006). In 1997 Sinn Féin took the historic decision of accepting consent, resulting in some members of the party or the Provisional Movement breaking away and forming the dissident organisation the 32-County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM).[6] At a debate in 2018 in Queen's University Belfast, marking 20 years since the GFA, Sinn Fein's Conor Murphy provided an insight into the party's acceptance of consent in 1998:

> There were a lot of players involved in creating the space that culminated in 1998. From a republican perspective it was a big, big challenge for us. The idea of signing up to the consent principle was a very significant challenge. A huge psychological challenge. We had prepared the ground for some time back. To change that mind-set took a long number of years. There has to be a reconciliation. That debate began a long way back within republicanism. We were dealing with difficulties in engaging republicans. People who had suffered at the hands of the state (Author's notes).[7]

Sinn Féin's historic acceptance of consent, altered the party's strategy to one of persuading unionists (and the middle ground and wider population) of the benefits of a united Ireland, in the hope that demographic change would eventually contribute to conditions being met to hold a border-poll on Irish unity. With both nationalist parties, Sinn Féin and the SDLP, espousing consent since 1997 (along with the PIRA ceasefires), the distinctive message of the SDLP was lost (Murray & Tonge 2005). Both parties were singing from the same hymn sheet. Sinn Féin progressed to espousing ownership of the Agreement, becoming a stringent defender of it. Meanwhile the party's electoral fortunes continued to grow north and south, as their message increasingly emphasised equality, rather than unity.

4.1 Brexit: A Changed Landscape and a Potential Border-Poll?

The Northern Ireland political landscape was transformed once again in 2016 with Brexit. The constitutional winds shifted as Northern Ireland was forced out

85

of the European Union (E.U.) with the rest of the U.K., despite a majority in Northern Ireland voting against Brexit (98.9 % voted to remain in the E.U.). The result is a middle ground which will consider whether their interests are better served remaining in the U.K. but outside the E.U., or in a united Ireland within the E.U. Amidst the post-Brexit fall-out, momentum has gathered around a potential border-poll. This is also because demographic change has heralded a nationalist majority in Northern Ireland for the first time since the foundation of the state in 1921. Interestingly, in 2018, at a debate in St Mary's University College in West Belfast, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood (2015–present), remarked that: "A border-poll will be about re-joining the EU" (Author's notes).[8]

In the years since Brexit, debate has opened up within nationalism regarding a potential border-poll and what form it should take. Sinn Féin has held to the position that a vote for Irish unity requires 50 % plus one (and no more) as defined by the GFA. However, there are others within nationalism who have questioned the viability of 50 % plus one, stating that such a result would be highly divisive. Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (1997–2008) voiced his wariness of 50 % plus one when addressing an Irish parliamentary committee meeting in Dublin regarding his role as an architect of the GFA:

> There are a whole lot of questions. How would you bring together An Garda Síochána and the PSNI, how would you bring together the Courts? How would you bring together local authorities? How would you bring together the National Health Service and the HSE? They're big questions. But they're doable […]. I'll tell you what the result of the election will be now, and I won't charge anything for the advice. It wouldn't have a hope in hell of passing (Devane 2022).

Sinn Féin has argued that more than 50 % plus one is desirable, however that is all that is required to maintain Northern Ireland within the U.K. and therefore it is all that is required for Irish unity, as agreed in 1998.

Seamus Mallon was a member of the SDLP negotiating team in 1998, Deputy Leader of the SDLP (1979–2001) and deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland (1998–2001). Mallon voiced his scepticism of 50 % plus one and has even gone so far as to suggest change. It is interesting that one of the key architects of the Agreement has advocated altering this mechanism; a point that is sure to provoke backlash from elements within nationalism and republicanism, particularly Sinn Féin. In his memoir with Andy Pollak, Seamus Mallon stated:

> Some mechanism needs to be devised that would ensure the support of what I will call a 'sufficient plurality' of both communities, unionist, and nationalist, for a united Ireland. My goal is to see if a way can be found to measure the support for unity in both communities that is more facilitative and generous than the simple 50 percent plus one majority vote currently required by that Agreement (Mallon & Pollak 2019, 167).

86

Interestingly, Mark Durkan, SDLP Good Friday negotiator, deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland (2001–2002), and leader of the SDLP (2001–2010) has articulated a different view to Seamus Mallon's on a referendum. Whilst Durkan stated: "The Good Friday Agreement shouldn't just be looked at as a treasure to be protected" (Durkan 2018) he has been clear on the consent principle and what it means:

> The consent principle has to be equal. If you have parity of esteem in the Agreement there on the basis of democratic equality all votes have to be equal in a referendum. Under the Agreement consent has to be exercised by Agreement North and South, so it's not just the people of the North have to vote for it, the people of the South as well. So, it needs a majority North and South, but it only needs a majority. I don't want to achieve Irish unity on the basis of mere 50 % plus one but if it was 50 % plus one for staying in the United Kingdom we stay in the United Kingdom and if its 50 % plus one for a united Ireland then we have a united Ireland. That's what the Agreement provides. You can't have a weighed majority required in a referendum like that because then the votes are not equal, and you do not have parity of esteem in that situation (Interview 1).

Durkan continued: "People forget that the principle of consent is itself a compromise you know and now people are looking for a compromise on a compromise so that people are now trying to adulterate the terms of the principle of consent" (Interview 1). Coulter et al. (2021, 20) have observed: "Even the fact that it had to be revised and amended on five separate occasions seems to have been unable to persuade most politicians and commentators to regard the peace accord as something other than a sacred text that brooks no alteration." Legitimate questions have been raised about the viability, and ethics, of changing the terms of the Agreement 25 years after its inception, and when it appears that the nationalist position may prevail in a vote. It is likely that debate within nationalism and republicanism will increasingly focus on the terms of a border-poll, what questions should be asked, and whether 50 % plus one should be maintained.

5. Dissident Irish Republicanism and the GFA

When expressing their opposition to the GFA, and the consent principle in particular, dissident republicans argued that the goalposts would inevitably change and that 50 % plus one, as a requirement for Irish unity, would be altered (McGlinchey 2019b). Recent calls from figures such as Ahern or Mallon appears to confirm to dissidents that their predictions were correct. Geraldine Taylor (Belfast) is a founder member of Republican Sinn Féin (RSF) (McGlinchey 2019a; 2019b; White 2006) and was Vice-President of the organisation from 2009–2013. When asked about the GFA and the fact that it was endorsed in a referendum by most people in the North of Ireland, Taylor responded:

The right question wasn't asked, and the question should've been do you want the Brits to go home, and do you want a 32-county united Republic and that would have been a yes. I don't think anybody would deny that would have been a yes' (Interview 6).

87

Taylor reflects a common criticism of the referendum throughout the dissident base regarding the options that were put to the voter. Concerning mandates and the fact that Sinn Féin, a supporter of the GFA, commands most of the nationalist support in the North, a spokesperson for the alleged military wing of RSF, the Continuity IRA in North Armagh has said:

Votes isn't gonna drive the Brits out you know. I don't believe a mandate does matter. No, I would argue with them that the voting is just propping up the British government. It's just propping up the puppet Parliament here. The only thing we need to make clear is that an armed campaign will continue until the withdrawal (Interview 2).

Fifteen years after the Agreement, during a focus group in Derry comprising dissident republicans, a well-known independent dissident republican, Councillor Gary Donnelly,[9] stated:

My view is that the Good Friday Agreement has made the union with Great Britain, it's concreted it. It's made it safe. And the unionists will say that, and I believe their analysis is right, that British rule has never been stronger and more cemented. And yet the Provisionals are telling their people that it's a steppingstone to a united Ireland (Interview 4).

Donnelly does not support an armed campaign at present in the pursuit of Irish unity. Similarly, former Provisional IRA prisoner Anthony McIntyre (Drogheda/from Belfast) does not support the campaign of the armed republican groups but is critical of the GFA and Sinn Féin's support for it. Regarding his departure from the Provisional Movement, McIntyre stated:

I left because I felt the Good Friday Agreement was a major capitulation of republicanism. That it would necessarily involve the acceptance of the partition principle, which is the consent principle, and it certainly wasn't what any volunteer had died for. The Provisionals, in my view stood poised to becoming incorporated into the structures of the state, rather than being in opposition to that state (Interview 5).

Danny Morrison, the former Director of Publicity for Sinn Féin has countered dissident arguments by stating that:

The bulk of prisoners supported the change […]. I know for a fact, because I was in jail with hundreds of people, that 80 plus percent of the former prisoners support the change and what a minority are saying is, 'You don't have a right to change, you are sellout bastards' (Interview 3).

Many dissidents do not describe themselves as anti-GFA as dissident republicanism was not formed in response to the Agreement but existed prior to 1998. However, the dissident base collectively opposes the Agreement, regardless of their opinion on the PIRA ceasefires. The main points of opposition to the Agreement (and consent), to emerge in interviews within the dissident base were: 1) the inalienable right of Ireland to be united and free. A vote is not needed to determine this right; 2) the traditional republican rejection of a unionist veto over Irish unity; 3) a border-poll will be called by the British Secretary of State who will decide when the time is right; 4) the fact that a border-poll will take place solely in the six counties of Northern Ireland, rather than the 32 counties; and 5) distrust that a referendum on unity would be a fair process and that 50 % plus one will remain sufficient (McGlinchey 2019b). In this context, independent dissidents, such as McIntyre, continue to argue their anti-GFA (and anti-political process) position, and the armed dissident groups, namely the Continuity and New IRAs, continue with their campaigns (McGlinchey 2019a).

6. Repression Breeds Resistance: Republican Armed Struggle

Sociologist Donatella Della Porta has described a repertoire of repression regarding social movements, stating:

> Political violence throughout the world is intertwined with state responses to social movements in a sort of macabre dance […]. Policing was in fact perceived as tough and, especially, indiscriminate, and unjust; transformative repressive events contributed to justifying violence and pushing militant groups toward clandestinity (Della Porta 2013, 33).[10]

In the Irish republican context, highlighting and challenging state repression has remained a constant. Regarding the PIRA, Richard English has noted: "State repression through military force was, for some, the crucial dynamic behind their involvement" (English 2012, 123). It has been widely acknowledged that for many, the catalyst for them joining the PIRA was in reaction to the activity of the British army and security services (English 2012; Bowyer Bell 2000). Historically, state repression against Irish republicans has inevitably increased support for republican organisations. Following the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin, support for the Rising soared after it was supressed, and the rebels were executed (Laffan 1995; Lee 2014). In the post-1969 period in the North of Ireland support for the PIRA grew (as did membership) after internment (1971), the Falls Curfew (1971), the Ballymurphy massacre (1971), and Bloody Sunday in January 1972.

Today, a critical discourse analysis of the main messages from the dissident groups, Republican Sinn Féin and Saoradh, reveals a heavy emphasis on repres-

sion against group members from the security services, including house raids, stop and searches, and arrests, particularly in social media.[11] Highlighting and emphasising security activity experienced by members and supporters, enhances comradeship amongst dissident republicans across the base, regardless of organisational affiliation or attitudes to a current armed campaign. Opposing the targeting of republicans by the security services forms part of the tradition of resistance in Irish republicanism. Robert W. White has commented on the importance of events such as commemorations in this tradition of resistance and has argued: "The state's response to dissident events reinforces commitment and solidarity" (White 2021, 87). Today, emphasising attention from the security services, appears to be an important bonding mechanism between dissident republicans, but is also important regarding efforts to mobilise support for the groups.

But the landscape has altered and whilst dissident republicans continue to emphasise their imprisonment (on occasion without charges), it is largely failing to gain traction amongst the wider nationalist or republican community. This may be in part due to the perception that dissident republicans have not articulated a viable strategy for going forward. In the past, Irish republicans have combined their ideology, message, and strategy, alongside criticism of the state response. It appears that the main message from dissident republican groups is regarding their treatment by the security services, rather than articulation of a vision or strategy for going forward (as relevant to the contemporary context in which they are operating).

However, in the contemporary sense, armed dissident republican groups (The Continuity and New IRAs) are regarded as posing the biggest threat to peace in Ireland today. Drew Harris, Commissioner of An Garda Síochána (Police service of the Republic of Ireland), said in his first press conference: "'Dissident' republicanism remains 'the biggest threat on the island of Ireland'" (BBC News 2018). Mainstream political actors are united throughout the spectrum in Northern Ireland against dissident republicans, mainly the New IRA and Continuity IRA. After the killing of two British soldiers at Massereene barracks in 2009 by the Real IRA,[12] Sinn Féin's Martin McGuinness, then deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland came out very strongly against the dissident republicans who undertook the attacks, calling them traitors to Ireland whilst standing alongside then PSNI Chief Constable Hugh Orde on the steps of Stormont. After the killing of journalist Lyra McKee by the New IRA in Derry in 2019, Sinn Féin was united alongside all other mainstream political actors in Northern Ireland in their condemnation of the killing and of the people behind it. Criticism of the New IRA and Continuity IRA's armed actions has also come from within the dissident republican base, mainly from independent dissidents (McGlinchey 2021).

Condemnation of dissident actions appears to be the one thing that strongly unites actors across the political spectrum, and Sinn Féin has played a leading

role in that. Sinn Féin's condemnation of dissident republicans has been viewed as of particular significance in combating support for the dissident organisations. Therefore, while the constitutional nationalist SDLP has been consistently and vociferously vocal in its opposition to political violence, and to the dissident groups, Sinn Féin's opposition has been viewed as more impactful on a traditionally republican base who may have some sympathy for the reasons behind the dissident campaign. Within this context, the SDLP once again appear sidelined, as was the case with PIRA decommissioning when Sinn Féin was seen as the party that could deliver, or act as a persuader for, decommissioning, not the SDLP.

7. The SDLP: As Distinct from Sinn Féin?

As documented by Murray and Tonge (2005), since the PIRA ceasefires and Sinn Féin's transformation into a constitutional party, the SDLP has struggled to retain voters and emphasize its unique selling point. One significant point of difference between the two parties is that Sinn Féin continue to refuse to take their seats in Westminster, whilst the SDLP take their seats. Twenty years after the GFA was reached, SDLP leader Colum Eastwood, whilst addressing a Féile event on the Falls Road in the republican heartland of West Belfast, stated: "My strong view is that nationalism needs to be represented in Westminster."[13] Whilst Sinn Féin has undertaken various changes along its journey (such as entering Stormont or acceptance of the police in Northern Ireland) taking seats in Westminster has not been on the agenda. Despite calls from nationalist leaders, such as Eastwood, Sinn Féin has continued to argue that it will remain abstentionist in Westminster; and in some respects, it may be benefitting from this policy (particularly amongst its more hard-line base) by appearing greener by refusing to sit in Westminster. Sinn Féin continues to receive most nationalist votes in the North of Ireland, over its rival the SDLP; therefore, Sinn Féin can rightly claim that people are voting for them in the full knowledge that they are abstentionist.

At the 2018 debate in St Mary's College in West Belfast, the SDLP also suggested that a key difference between Sinn Féin and the SDLP concerns the parties' relationship with unionists. Sinn Féin's strategy of persuading unionists of the merits of a united Ireland is evident in the recent Ireland's Future events. However, unionism has not appeared particularly receptive to this message. In fact, unionist leaders have refused to engage in debate about what a united Ireland would look like. Irish government Senator Mark Daly addressed this 2018 debate and spoke about the report which he had been tasked with producing on unionist concerns and fears over a united Ireland. After consultation with representatives from the unionist and loyalist communities Senator Daly concluded that their fears of a united Ireland include a loss of identity; triumphalism; retribution on members of the police, British army and prison officers; that land

would be taken off unionist farmers; a return to violence; concerns around the E.U.; health; welfare and the economy (Daly 2019).[14] At various points in the process, such as the flags protests, loyalists and unionists have claimed that their British identity is being undermined/eroded in Northern Ireland; with some loyalists believing that this is the ultimate design of the political process in place since the GFA. In this context Eastwood and SDLP representatives have argued that the SDLP, rather than Sinn Féin, are better placed to lead the process of persuading unionists of the merits of Irish unity. However, this argument from the SDLP doesn't appear to be winning over the nationalist electorate, the majority of which continue to vote for Sinn Féin; with Sinn Féin receiving 29 % of the votes (27 seats) in the May 2022 Northern Ireland Assembly elections, in comparison to the SDLP's 9.1 % (8 seats).

8. Conclusion

Sinn Féin's acceptance of the 1998 GFA, and in particular the principle of consent, shifted the political landscape within which nationalism and republicanism were operating. The traditional republican position that consent constituted a unionist veto, was overturned in favour of support for consent as a democratic way forward that could herald constitutional change through a referendum (border-poll). Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams (1983–2018) has argued:

> Armed struggle was always only viable and defendable, and that isn't to say that every part of it was defendable or justifiable, but in terms of the broad principle it was always only viable if there was no alternative. Once there is an alternative anybody sensible would have to embrace the alternative (Interview 7).

Armed dissident republican groups (and their alleged political wings) have vehemently rejected the Sinn Féin position and have continued to argue that as long as Ireland is partitioned, the fight for Irish freedom will continue and the use of armed actions remains justified.[15] However, dissident republican groups are failing to gain traction amongst the wider nationalist population in the North and South of Ireland, whilst Sinn Féin continues to command a majority of support from nationalist communities.

It took only 3 years after Sinn Féin's acceptance of consent for the party to overtake its nationalist rival, the SDLP, as the largest representative of the nationalist constituency in Northern Ireland. A pertinent question twenty-five years on is, does the Agreement mean the same thing to nationalism today that it did in 1998? Sinn Féin remains steadfast in its support for the Agreement and continues to call for its full implementation; rejecting calls to alter the 50 % plus one vote required for Irish unity. Fifty percent plus one has been adequate to maintain Northern Ireland's position within the union, therefore Sinn Féin re-

92

presentatives have argued that it is also adequate to affect constitutional change and herald a united Ireland.

Interestingly, some key architects of the Agreement, including the SDLP's Seamus Mallon, have called for revision of the 50 % plus one mechanism, instead advocating parallel consent, arguing that it is less divisive. However, former and current SDLP leaders, Mark Durkan and Colum Eastwood, have expressed a different opinion, supporting maintaining 50 % plus one. Therefore, no consensus has emerged within nationalism regarding the terms of a border-poll, even at a party level within the SDLP (a key architect of the Agreement). There does appear to be growing momentum around calls for a Citizen's Assembly, most notably from Sinn Féin, particularly at the Ireland's Future events which have been held in the North and South of Ireland, comprising a variety of speakers including politicians, academics, individuals in the arts (notably actor James Nesbitt) and those from a Protestant background who are now open to Irish unity (Ireland's Future, N/D).

It is clear that in the post-Brexit context, the constitutional winds have shifted, and momentum has built around demographic change in the North and a potential border-poll. Post Brexit, the term Irish unity has entered the public discourse in a way that wasn't anticipated before the 2016 referendum. The Irish nationalist message has shifted from emphasising equality, to talking more readily about Irish unity. Twenty-five years after the GFA was reached, the conversation in Irish nationalism/republicanism is likely to be dominated by 1) attempts to open up broader conversations amongst all stakeholders regarding potential unity, and 2) discussions around what form a united Ireland will take, including the role of the existing institutions of Stormont and Leinster House.

Interviews

Interview 1 – Mark Durkan, Derry, April 24, 2018.

Interview 2 – Continuity IRA, North Armagh, January 2014.

Interview 3 – Danny Morrison, Belfast, May 7, 2014.

Interview 4 – Dissident focus group, Derry, August 21, 2013.

Interview 5 – Anthony McIntyre, Drogheda, April 3, 2013.

Interview 6 – Geraldine Taylor, Belfast, October 14, 2012.

Interview 7 – Gerry Adams, Belfast, March 5, 2009.

References

32CSM.org, 2021. New Year Statement 2021–2022. *32CSM.org*, 31 December 2021, https://www.32csm.org/post/newyear-statement-2021-2022 (accessed 15 June 2023).

Agreement at St Andrews, 13 October 2006, https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebsitemedia/ourrolesandpolicies/northernireland/st-andrews-agreement.pdf (accessed 31 January 2023).

BBC News, 2018. Drew Harris: Dissident republicans 'biggest threat to Ireland.' *BBC News*, 4 September 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45410151 (accessed 20 January 2023).

Bean, K., 2007. *The New Politics of Sinn Féin*. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.

Bowyer Bell, J., 1997. *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916–1979*. The Academy Press, Dublin.

Bowyer Bell, J., 2000. *The IRA 1968–2000: Analysis of a Secret Army*. Frank Cass Publishers, London.

Coulter, C., Gilmartin, N., Hayward, K. & Shirlow, P., 2021. *Northern Ireland a Generation after Good Friday: Lost Futures and New Horizons in the 'Long Peace'*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Currie, P.M. & Taylor, M., 2011. *Dissident Irish Republicanism*. The Continuum International Publishing, London.

Daly, M., 2019. Unionist Concerns and Fears of a United Ireland, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/govirl/Daly_2019-07-18_Unionist-Concerns.pdf (accessed January 20, 2023).

Della Porta, D., 2013. *Clandestine Political Violence*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Devane, M., 2022. Border Poll Would Not Have a 'Hope in Hell' of Passing, Says Ahern. *Breakingnews.ie*, 20 October 2022, https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/border-poll-would-not-have-a-hope-in-hell-of-passing-says-bertie-ahern-1380411.html (accessed 20 January 2023).

Durkan, M., 2018. Panel Discussion Building Peace: The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement – Designing the Agreement, Queen's University Belfast, 10 April 2018, https://www.qub.ac.uk/Research/GRI/mitchell-institute/events/EventsArchive/Mar-Apr18Events/BuildingPeaceTheBelfastGoodFridayAgreement-DesigningtheAgreement.html (accessed 26 May 2023).

English, R., 2012. *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Macmillan, Oxford.

Flynn, B., 2009. *Soldiers of Folly: The IRA Border Campaign 1956–1962*. The Collins Press, Cork.

Frampton, M., 2011. *Legion of the Rearguard: Dissident Irish Republicanism*. Irish Academic Press, Dublin.

Godson, D., 2011. *Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal of Ulster Unionism*. Harper Perennial, London.

Hennessey, T., Braniff, M., McAuley, J. W., Tonge, J. & Whiting, S, A., 2019. *The Ulster Unionist Party: Country Before Party?* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hopkinson, M., 1988. *Green Against Green*. Gill & Macmillan, Dublin.

Horgan, J., 2013. *Divided We Stand: The Strategy and Psychology of Ireland's Dissident Terrorists*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Ireland's Future, N/D. Events, https://irelandsfuture.com/events (accessed 26 May 2023).

Laffan, M., 1995. *The Resurrection of Ireland: The Sinn Féin Party 1916–1923*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Lee, J. J., 2014. *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Linen Hall Library, Northern Ireland Political Collection – Papers and correspondence from Gerry Adams and Sinn Féin to SDLP. P3394 [18. 03. 1988].

Maillot, A., 2015. *In the Shadow of History: Sinn Féin, 1926–70*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Mallon, S. & Pollak, A., 2019. *A Shared Home Place*. The Lilliput Press, Dublin.

McCluskey, F., 2011. *Fenians and Ribbonmen: The Development of Republican Politics in East Tyrone, 1898–1918*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

94

McGarry, F., 2011. *The Rising: Ireland: Easter 1916*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

McGlinchey, M., 2019a. Does Moderation Pay in a Consociational Democracy? The Marginalisation of the SDLP in the North of Ireland. *Swiss Political Science Review* 25 (4), 426–449.

McGlinchey, M., 2019b. *Unfinished Business: The Politics of 'Dissident' Irish Republicanism*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

McGlinchey, M., 2021. The Unfinished Revolution of 'Dissident' Irish Republicans: Divergent Views in a Fragmented Base. *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 32 (4/5), 714–746.

McLoughlin, P. J., 2010. *John Hume and the Revision of Irish Nationalism*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Morrison, J. F., 2013. *The Origins and Rise of Dissident Irish Republicanism: The Role and Impact of Organizational Splits*. Bloomsbury, London.

Murray, F. & Sagarra, E., 2022. *The Men and Women of the Anglo-Irish Treaty Delegations 1921*. Laurelmount Press, Dingle.

Murray, G. & Tonge, J., 2005. *Sinn Féin and the SDLP: From Alienation to Participation*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

O'Donnell, R., 2008. *The Impact of the 1916 Rising: Among the Nations*. Irish Academic Press, Dublin.

O'Leary, B., 2019. *A Treatise of Northern Ireland: Volume 3. Consociation and Confederation: From Antagonism to Accommodation?* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Pakenham, F., 1992. *Peace by Ordeal: The Negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Treaty*. Pimlico, London.

Police Service of Northern Ireland, N/D. *Security Situation Statistics*. PSNI, https://www.psni.police.uk/official-statistics/security-situation-statistics) (accessed 26 May 2023).

Powell, J., 2008. *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland*. The Bodley Head, London.

Tonge, J., 2012. 'No One Likes Us; We Don't Care': 'Dissident' Irish Republicans and Mandates. *Political Quarterly* 83 (2), 219–226.

The Nobel Prize, 1998. Presse release. The Nobel prize, 16 October 1998, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1998/press-release/ (accessed 26 May 2023).

White, R. W., 1993. *Provisional Irish Republicans: An Oral and Interpretive History*. Greenwood Press, London.

White, R. W., 2006. *Ruairí Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary.* Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

White, R. W., 2021. Why "Dissident" Irish Republicans Haven't Gone Away: A Visual Study of the Persistence of "Terrorism". *Contention* 9 (1), 63–96.

Whiting, S. A., 2015. *Spoiling the Peace? The Threat of Dissident Republicans to Peace in Northern Ireland*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Notes

[1]   Simultaneous referenda were held in the North and South of Ireland. The North voted on the GFA whilst the South voted on the removal of articles 2 and 3 from the Irish Constitution, which claimed territorial sovereignty over the whole island of Ireland.

[2]   Similarly in 2003 the UUP was electorally overtaken by the DUP (Hennessey et al. 2019).

[3]   Throughout the article interview denotes an interview with the author.

[4]   Correspondence during the Hume-Adams talks 1998–1992 reveals Sinn Féin's complete rejection of consent. See an exchange of letters between Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

[5] Nationalists and republicans generally refer to the Good Friday Agreement, whilst unionists and loyalists refer to the Belfast Agreement.

[6] The 32CSM is believed to be the political wing of the REAL IRA, although it denies this.

95

[7] Conor Murphy at the Panel discussion Building Peace: The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement – Designing the Agreement, Queen's University Belfast, 10 April 2018. (Author's notes).

[8] Colum Eastwood at a debate in St Mary's University College in West Belfast, 2018. (Author's notes).

[9] In 2019 Donnelly topped the poll in the Moor District electoral area in Derry and Strabane District Council.

[10] The case studies examined in Della Porta's Clandestine Political violence include the following social movements: left-wing in Italy and Germany, ethno-nationalist in Spain and religious fundamentalist (in Islamist clandestine organisations).

[11] For levels of armed activity in Northern Ireland annually, as well as arrests, see the Police Service of Northern Ireland Security Situation Statistics.

[12] A significant portion of the Real IRA moved into the New IRA, formed in 2012.

[13] Authors notes, St Mary's University College, August 7, 2018.

[14] This report made 17 recommendations and was adopted unanimously by the all-party Joint Oireachtas Committee on the implementation of the GFA.

[15] There are several independent dissident republicans who are opposed to the campaign by the Continuity and New IRAs. Also, see the 32CSM New Year's Statement (32CSM.org 2021).

Seán Brennan, Branka Marijan

Contested Spaces and Everyday Peace Politics in Northern Ireland

In 2022, the United Kingdom downgraded the security threat in Northern Ireland from "severe" to "substantial", first set in 2010. The latter means that an attack is likely but not highly likely. For many analysts and political observers, the twenty-five years of peace that followed the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA) though interspersed with periods of political stalemate, have led to an overall external sense the conflict has ended. This downgrading of the security threat in Northern Ireland appears to confirm this sense of a settled peace. Still, the type of peace that has been achieved, and particularly the political dynamics regarding contentious spatial issues, continue to shape the quality of peace experienced by the local population. In turn, it is precisely this everyday quality of peace that reflects the real success, or failure, of various peacebuilding efforts as such practices produce the empirical evidence of sustainable reconciliation or continue sectarian divisions in a post-conflict space.

Keywords: contested spaces, everyday peace politics and practices, peacebuilding.

Sporna področja in vsakodnevna mirovna politika na Severnem Irskem

Leta 2022 je Združeno kraljestvo oceno varnostne grožnje na Severnem Irskem s stopnje "resna", ki je veljala vse od uvedbe ocene leta 2010, znižala na "znatna". Slednje pomeni, da je napad sicer verjeten, ne pa zelo verjeten. Za mnoge analitike in politične opazovalce petindvajset let miru, ki je sledil podpisu Velikonočnega sporazuma, kljub vmesnim obdobjem političnega zastoja vsaj navzven vzbuja splošen občutek, da je konflikt končan. Ta občutek še dodatno krepi omenjeno znižanje ocene varnostne grožnje. Kljub temu pa vrsta doseženega miru in zlasti politična dinamika v zvezi s spornimi področnimi vprašanji še naprej vplivata na kakovost miru, kot ga vsakodnevno doživlja lokalno prebivalstvo. Ravno v kakovosti miru se kaže dejanski uspeh oziroma neuspeh posameznih prizadevanj za vzpostavitev miru, saj tovrstne prakse ponujajo empirične dokaze bodisi o spravi bodisi o nadaljevanju sektaških delitev tudi v post-konfliktnem času.

Ključne besede: *sporna področja, vsakodnevne mirovne politike in prakse, vzpostavitev miru.*

Correspondence address: Seán Brennan, 73 Monagh Road, Belfast, BT11 8EF, North Ireland, e-mail: jbrennan07@qub.ac.uk; Branka Marijan, Project Ploughshares, 140 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G6, Canada, e-mail: bmarijan@ploughshares.ca.

1. Introduction

Peacebuilding literature has increasingly highlighted the importance of the everyday practice of peace (Mac Ginty 2021) and over the past decade significantly more focus has been paid in the literature on the way in which ordinary people impact on peace processes beyond the control of political and civil society elites. This article builds on this literature, as well as the "spatial turn" in peacebuilding (Brigg & George 2020) to further highlight how continued political uncertainty in post-conflict contexts shapes the experience of peace at the everyday level: both for the population and their quality of life long after peace agreements are signed.

This article draws on decades of participant observation, engagement in local civic space and interviews with key informants and residents of different communities to highlight how they work together on functional matters in which they have a common interest, which helps build up enough trust to deal with the more divisive issues. In building on the spatial turn, the article follows the literature in moving beyond the post-liberal approach to peacebuilding towards developing a better understanding "of what causes negative and positive forms of peace to arise, in hybrid forms, and of how local individuals, actors, and organizations engage intersubjectively with the question of producing a positive peace connected with a progressive form of politics" (Richmond 2016, 7)? In taking this spatial turn the article aims for the analytical focus in peacebuilding to move beyond the critique of (geo)political and civil society elites towards the experiences of the people and places in Northern Ireland attempting to build the peace at the everyday level. With this shift in focus, from the geopolitical to the biopolitical, to the everyday "politics of life", this article adopts key insights from post-structuralist theory to world politics thus producing an analytical orientation, in the sense that all reality is structured first by language with discourses then creating a coherent system of knowledge, objects, and subjects (Guerra-Barón 2017, 1). Establishing this system of knowledge on the post-conflict subject then develops biopolitical insights on how peacebuilding can begin to do what it was conceptualised for, to develop an associative and multi-sectoral peace framework that can sustainably reduce direct violence and structural violence by addressing a lack of basic human needs (Galtung 1976). Developing this biopolitical insight on post-conflict peacebuilding, through the rhizomatic realism of the everyday, and its subaltern agency, then opens a new analytical space, to deepen understanding on what helps build a positive peace formation that emancipates and sustains transformative peacebuilding at the everyday level.

2. The Northern Irish Peacebuilding Model

Norther Ireland is often seen as a successful model of peacebuilding in policy making circles and one to be emulated by other post-conflict contexts. However,

there remains a tension between the top-down political engineering of the society and the everyday life in the post-Agreement Northern Ireland. The peacebuilding process that emerged in Northern Ireland from the B/GFA, in 1998, was a consociational model of power-sharing (McGarry & O'Leary 2003). However, with the ethnic extremes of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin challenging its governance structures, the St Andrew's Agreement, in 2006, amended the B/GFA governance structure on how to select a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister. Moving from cross-community consent to the ethnic party with the most elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), the DUP leader Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley, who opposed the B/GFA, was made First Minister and Martin McGuinness, from Sinn Féin, made Deputy First Minister. Under a power sharing Executive led by both ethnic extremes, this new Assembly aimed to make the Northern Ireland "peace process" a global success despite the initial setbacks. Having received almost $2 billion from "global foreign investment" this new Executive determined a focus on economic transformation would take precedence over "community relations" (Nagle 2009). At first this approach appeared successful and under the political leadership of the DUP and Sinn Féin, between 2007–2010, the Northern Ireland Executive completed the Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration process with all the main paramilitary groups who had been violently active during the conflict. Then, with a focus on economic regeneration, spatial dimensions began to transform the everyday territorial spaces for those people, and places, that suffered the most from the violence. As Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) increasingly changed the built environment so too did its neoliberal practices transform the politics of life for those attempting to take opportunities arising from the peace at the everyday level.

With the peace process in Northern Ireland governed both by the United Kingdom (U.K.) and the Irish Republic, mediated by membership of the European Union (E.U.), Roger Mac Ginty describes the peacebuilding experience of the polity as "an example of liberal peace-lite" (2011, 13). Namely, that Northern Ireland, unlike many other so-called post-conflict states, was reintegrating into, rather than rebuilding, a democratic system of government. One that linked the Northern Ireland Assembly into other systems of government, in London, Dublin, Brussels and Washington. The E.U. in providing funding for various peace projects, shaped the approach to the projects carried out through its policies and norms (Hughes 2009). Implementing its monitoring and evaluation processes, E.U. policies in Securitization, Governance, Democratization and Development transformed contested spaces, and ethno-national power imbalances, across Northern Ireland and the Border Regions within the Irish Republic.

As the B/GFA provided a balance of views on the status of the polity, either as part of the U.K. or a part of Ireland, the place of Northern Ireland within the E.U. became a seemingly less contested space. This allowed for the possibility, if the majority wishes it, to hold a referendum and vote on the region joining Ire-

100

land. This unclear resolution formed the "constructive ambiguity" of the Agreement (Dixon 2002, 736). It also formed the transition of Northern Ireland from a 1970s British Welfare State model of government into a twenty-first century global neoliberal marketplace.

As Roland Paris (1997) established, within this global system of liberal internationalism, peacebuilding would have its limitations. While not under United Nations governance, the B/GFA followed the liberal international model of peacebuilding by regenerating people, place and property through the market. This neoliberal approach appeared successful as, with the restoration of power sharing in 2007, a functioning government was in place, the paramilitaries decommissioned and, despite the 2008 collapse in the Global Banking system, between 2010–2015 the number of millionaires in Northern Ireland increased by 40 % (Barclays 2016). And yet, despite the peacebuilding funding and programs, research demonstrated that 28.5 % of the population, that is 213,000 people, out of a population of 1.82 million, were suffering mental illness as a direct result of the conflict, some of it transmitted transgenerationally (O'Neill et al. 2015). This type of transgenerational trauma, which epidemiological studies identified as "a lifetime prevalence of mental health disorders" (Bunting et al. 2012) then contributed towards a form of societal PTSD, where "a substantial proportion of the adult population continue to suffer the adverse mental health effects of chronic trauma exposure" (Ferry et al. 2014). Therefore, and not surprisingly, the rates of suicides doubled after 1998, placing Northern Ireland among the 15 countries with the highest suicide rates in the world (Yeginsu 2019). Within this contested space, through the double transition to peace and neoliberalism, old identity tags, of Catholic or Protestant coexist in a new contested space between haves and have nots. And in Loyalist communities, the rise of a growing Catholic technocracy reinforced feelings of loss, and betrayal as working-class Protestant boys were increasingly identified as educational under-achievers (Shirlow 2012).

Within this neoliberal internationalist model, with its *mentalité* of "peace as conflict management", after 1998, Audra Mitchell observed the creation of two "political worlds," the Nationalist world led by Sinn Féin, and the Unionist world led by the DUP (Mitchell 2012, 202). The emergence of the two worlds reflected the constructive ambiguity of the B/GFA and allowed government to function, to promote peace and reconciliation, and to attract further FDI and global capital accumulation. However, as Mitchell (2012) noted, rather than produce a shared space and a positive peace this neoliberal model produced a "violent peace." That is, through the double transition a new space opened into peace and neoliberalism, where the new political and peace industry elites got wealthy while those people and places that suffered the most from the violence were increasingly demonised, as spoilers (Stedman 1997; McCabe 2013), thereby failing to attract their share of the peace dividend. With the ability to control civil

101

society in the Nationalist world through the distribution of both governmental and peace funding, Sinn Féin used the DDR process to transition former political prisoners through the contested space of Northern nationalist politics from violent paramilitaries to elected politicians.

As one former Loyalist ex-combatant described it, this process was "like a conveyor belt, from prison to parliament" (Personal Communication, October 2014). From policing the sectarian interfaces and stopping recreational rioting between local youths to overseeing the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin ensured what had been a violent and contested Nationalist world remained stable and peaceful. However, due to the divisions between the DUP, who had opposed the B/GFA, and the Loyalist paramilitaries who had supported it, there was no conveyer belt from prison to parliament in the Unionist world. Instead, and despite emerging as a grassroots "party of protest" (Tonge et al. 2014) the DUP employed a British class-based *mentalité* to governing their post-conflict Unionist world. While using the peace dividend, and the neoliberal marketplace, to increase capital accumulation through acts of public malfeasance (McBride 2019), in a bid to establish a new order, the DUP used DDR to reimagine loyalist ex-combatants as paramilitary peacekeepers who could maintain internal order in marginalised working-class Unionist communities in return for peace funding to keep local Loyalist paramilitary leaders in paid employment. To the outside world, with political stability, an absence of overt paramilitary violence, growing FDI and reconciliation, this liberal internationalist model of peacebuilding was valorized (White 2013). Yet, as John Nagle (2009) discovered, with closer inspection at the everyday level the neoliberal model of peacebuilding emerging in Northern Ireland looked more like a Potemkin Village rather than a positive peace.

3. Political Transformations in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland

Crucially, the two political worlds that emerged did not provide the resolution of long-standing issues among the local population. For many Nationalists, with Sinn Féin in power, it was hoped they would hold the British to account and deliver a peace dividend that would help heal the hurt from centuries of colonization and 70-years of ethno-sectarian domination by Ulster unionists. Similarly, for many Unionists, with the DUP in power, they too planned for a peace dividend that would usher in a more just British society: where all British citizens in Northern Ireland would experience the same quality of life as any other part of the U.K. Based on this ethnonational power sharing paradigm, of conflict managing a series of geo-spatial transformations, through an international liberal peacebuilding program, both the DUP and Sinn Féin aimed to maintain their dominant electoral positions, and post-conflict political stability, at the local

102

level. However, managing this space, between the needs of ethno-national party politics and the needs of people, at the community level, proved challenging, particularly in Loyalist communities where questions were increasingly asked, "where is the peace dividend" (Knox 2016)? As the peace stabilized, after 2007, those neighborhoods with high rates of unemployment and poverty that had experienced the most violence remained the most deprived despite the peace-building efforts to transform these areas. And, with the failure to transform the quality of life of those people, and places, who suffered the most from the violence rather than experiencing positive conflict transformation the double transition meant that some segments of society felt left out of the top-down peace process. This was also reflected in the lived landscape where communities in disadvantaged areas had prominent markings of space, through flags, symbols and walls or barriers separating them from the other community.

Therefore, and not surprisingly, in 2012, "the Flags Dispute" erupted as Loyalists objected to Belfast City Council restricting the flying of the Union Flag on U.K. government buildings to the minimum of 18 days (Nolan et al. 2014). Once again, the symbolic marking of space reflected identity dynamics as the council's Nationalist councillors supported the change and the Unionist councillors opposed the move. Moreover, the Flags Dispute reinvigorated many groups and activists in Unionist communities who were dissatisfied with the failure of the peace process to deliver the health and security of a safe living space many had been promised in 1998. As this dissatisfaction grew, a series of scandals involving the DUP exposed issues of malfeasance in Public Office, from the Red Sky social housing maintenance scandal to the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) property sell-off and the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme (McBride 2019). Cast in this negative light, and attempting to regain political control and moral authority, the DUP saw the upcoming Brexit Campaign, in 2016, as a means to re-establish their Loyalist credentials at both the local and national level. Viewed, by many, as a calculated move, this DUP strategic development exposed a wider space, of more challenging territories ahead.

As the issue of Brexit developed between the U.K. and the E.U. the DUP played a central role in taking the U.K. out of Europe, first through the formal agreement to support the Theresa May Government between 2017–2019 and then by supporting the European Research Group (ERG) to have Boris Johnston elected Prime Minister and get Brexit done, in January 2020. However, following Brexit, the DUP discovered an internal border between Great Britain and Northern Ireland was the only way to resolving the legal withdrawal of the U.K. from the E.U. and meet the international commitments given by London in the B/GFA. Rather than re-militarize the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland as many DUP supporters hoped, Unionists now found the DUP had led them into a dead-end. The ensuing Windsor Framework (2023) concluded that the U.K. withdrawal from the E.U. ensured Northern Ireland would remain outside Brexit Britain and still within the European Single Market.

With Sinn Féin historically, and ideologically, opposed to the E.U., the 2016 Brexit vote was seen as an "internal" British matter and the party did not campaign for the vote. Embroiled in its own scandals, where, following the murders of two former Provisional IRA members, in 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive's Fresh Start report (Alderdice et al. 2016) confirmed that all republican and loyalist "paramilitary groups continued to exist" despite claims they had disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated back into the community. The report also noted that, in assessing those groups on ceasefire, while they were no longer engaging in "retaliatory cycles of sectarian attacks" they continued to "engage in violent activity to intimidate and exercise control in communities where they operate" (Alderdice et al. 2016, 8). In addition, the report noted that such is their standing within their communities the police regularly "engage with the individuals concerned to ensure peaceful outcomes to parading disputes and other issues, including flags and anti-social behaviour even though they are members of proscribed organisations" (Alderdice et al. 2016, 10). Then, in 2017, the Sinn Féin Deputy-First Minister Martin McGuinness resigned due to the DUP First Minister Arlene Foster refusing to step aside and allow an inquiry into RHI and the Northern Ireland power sharing Assembly collapsed. In the absence of local government, Sinn Féin changed position on the E.U. and opposed Unionist attempts to have the whole U.K. Brexit from the E.U. As this local crisis developed into an international issue, Sinn Féin entered a new space as it positioned itself to become "a government in waiting" following the 2022 Assembly election which saw it overcome the DUP and become the largest ethno-national party and eligible to become First Minister in accordance with changes made in the St. Andrews Agreement (2006).

However, while the conflict management of these ethno-national parties dominated the news cycle what went un-reported was the biopolitical impact this political uncertainty produced for the post-conflict population at the everyday level. In December 2019, for the first time in British history 20,000 health and social care workers, including about 15,500 nurses, went on strike in Northern Ireland (Carrol 2019). This outcome exposed the limits of neoliberal peacebuilding and threatened to undermine the ethno-national conflict management *mentalité* employed to govern people, property and peace after 2007. Having suffered a significant decrease in electoral support in the December 2019 Westminster election, which saw Boris Johnston elected Prime Minister, in January 2020, both DUP and Sinn Féin leaders were forced to recognise they were losing their core ethnic base and announced they would be reforming the Northern Ireland Executive. However, soon after, the global COVID-19 pandemic descended to transform the political landscape and Sinn Féin re-established their electoral support and emerge, in 2022, as the biggest ethno-national party in the Assembly and therefore eligible to make their leader in the Assembly First Minister (designate). As the DUP continued to oppose any Brexit settlement between

104

the U.K. and the E.U. the Assembly was not re-formed at the time of writing in Spring 2023, the differing political goals between DUP and Sinn Féin has meant the Executive remains suspended once again and showing little resolve to move towards a reconciled and shared future.

The latest dysfunction has prompted some Belfast residents to express their frustration with the political stalemate and the concern that violence could erupt again. In an interview for the *Globe and Mail*, a West Belfast resident notes that "If things keep going the way they are and nothing happens, I think people will come out on the streets again," she said. "I think paramilitaries are going to be given the chance to come back. That's the worst thing" (Waldie 2023). This sense of potential violence, and wishes to avoid it, do shape the types of practices that individuals engage in and particularly, the efforts to mark spaces with symbols of their own communities.

3.1 Everyday Peace Practices and Spatial Tactics

As such, the everyday and spatial turns in peacebuilding literature provide important insights into the quality of peace that has been achieved in Northern Ireland. Extant literature on the Northern Irish context provides important insights into the way the local population navigates through these lived spaces, of neoliberal peacebuilding and paramilitary peacekeeping. Oliver Richmond and Audra Mitchell (2012) draw on Michel de Certeau's tactics to point to what they term "everyday agency" in response to dominant peacebuilding approaches. They note that the tactics are an appropriation of the different strategies by ordinary citizens. Thus, these tactical negotiations of everyday spaces are shaped by the lived experiences of these communities and reflect their understandings of the spaces and their communities within these spaces. As such, external peacebuilding strategies that attempt to impose particular understandings of these spaces, or to transform them according to their own imaginings or interests, are often disconnected from local practices of meaning-making that the local population finds most relevant in their everyday life. Yet this is not to suggest that these everyday spaces are completely disconnected from the national, regional or global processes. In post-conflict societies, national, regional and global dimensions also shape the local context. Dominant peacebuilding mentalities, like neoliberal peacebuilding, attempt to embed a particular vision of the polity, its institutions and symbols, into the daily lives of the population. However, these dominant peacebuilding approaches tend to depoliticize the everyday, overlooking the importance of contestation and the agency of the local population (Richmond 2011; Richmond & Mitchell 2012). This dominance is visible when examining citizens' mental maps of the territory that at times contradict the official maps and boundaries. For example, in Belfast the actual spatial activity of ordinary citizens is shaped by perceptions of the areas as safe, or not, to members of their

group. Individuals largely stay in areas deemed safe or acceptable for that community.

However, peacebuilding strategies that aim to transform spaces traditionally seen as the domain of one group to more inclusive spaces are in turn faced with subtle ways of maintaining the previous divisions. Mitchell and Kelly (2011) assess the extent to which the focus on creating "peaceful spaces" in Belfast have impacted the spatial sense of the conflict. They found that the various peacebuilding initiatives aimed at transforming conflictual spaces have, in fact, created "bubble spaces" that often remain removed from the issues in surrounding areas. Indeed, sometimes they are designed in ways that allow those using the spaces to remain oblivious to the "conflictual" spaces that surround the "bubbles." Nonetheless, these spaces are impacted by the local patterns of social divisions and thus contest the vision of these spaces as peaceful or integrated. In some areas of Northern Ireland, there are very clear barriers or walls signifying division. Scholars of political geography exploring the significance of such divisions note that walls can represent both "conflict infrastructures" as well as "infrastructures of peace" (Till et al. 2013, 52). As such they emerge as part of the struggle between the communities for "control of the symbolic landscape" (Dowler 2013, 60), yet also as responses to the broader goals of transformation. The negotiation of such contested spaces is contrasted in two examples that follow the Girdwood Regeneration Project and the Cathedral quarter, both located in Belfast. Both are attempts to provide transformations of local dynamics but are interestingly subsumed by everyday political life in a context where there remains an incomplete sense of peace.

3.2 Girdwood Regeneration Project and the Cathedral Quarter

Situated in North Belfast, which experienced the worst of the sectarian violence (Shirlow & Murtagh 2006), the Girdwood Regeneration project attempted to impose a new structural space not just onto a local territorial patchwork quilt of abutting and violent sectarian interfaces but onto the whole Northern Ireland peace process itself. Following "the Holy Cross dispute" in 2001 the Northern Ireland Executive commissioned the Dunlop Report (Dunlop et al. 2002), which authorised the a cross-departmental body, to consult and co-design a community regeneration project that would transform both the built and social environment of North Belfast and Northern Ireland. Based on a former British military installation, adjacent to Crumlin Road gaol, the Girdwood Project aimed, not only to regenerate that part of North Belfast which included some of the worst derelict sectarian interfaces but produce an exemplar project that would become a global visitor attraction. While Crumlin Road gaol, under government ownership, was transformed into a global visitor attraction the surrounding territorial expanse of Girdwood remained a work in progress. From the outset, the space

106

was contested as it offered the local Nationalist population an opportunity to build new houses, a key priority. However, with an aging and decreasing Unionist population, many local unionists saw any building of housing more as a loss of their territory rather than a social prerequisite in establishing a just society.

Therefore, work with the local communities became problematic and with "vested" interests struggling to gain political power, and financial control, "the Girdwood Hub" project emerged more as a necessity to either spend or lose E.U. Peace funding. Managed by Belfast City Council (BCC), "the Hub" followed international models of "best practice" to co-design and co-produce a "shared space" on one of Northern Ireland's most dangerous interfaces (BCC 2011). This expansive facility provided a diversity of sports, health and community facilities, spread between the divided ethno-sectarian areas of unionist Lower Oldpark and nationalist Cliftonville. However, while the Hub received much publicity, and did attract visitors and users, the prevailing and underlying socio-economic conditions of the local community did not change.

Rather than experience peace and an economic benefit, local residents saw the regenerated space become another meeting place for gangs of young people to confront each other, often violently. While this neoliberal regeneration project did transform a derelict space, empirically, it did not transform the quality-of-life for those who lived there and instead of transforming the everyday quality-of-life of local people, local community groups who had co-designed and co-produced the Girdwood Hub were now faced with new challenges. Having agreed to the physical regeneration of the area these groups were now tasked with securitizing the shared space and received government funding from the Department of Justice Peace Walls Programme to employ interface workers and implement community peacebuilding approaches to reduce sectarian violence at the interface. With much of the local Unionist community refusing to take ownership of the Girdwood Hub, at the everyday level, the project appears to have stalled in its neoliberal objective to kick-start the regeneration process of North Belfast. This failure of the Girdwood Hub to transform both the direct violence and structural violence that impoverishes those living there demonstrated the contested mentalities of peace shaping the regeneration process, from the E.U. objective of market-led entrepreneurialism to the community objective of emancipatory peacebuilding that would improve their quality-of-life through the production of basic human needs.

In contrast, the Cathedral Quarter, situated a half mile down the Crumlin Road from Girdwood, is an increasingly recognised vibrant area full of pubs and restaurants and has become a shared space for both the local and the global community. In addition, and through an overspill of arts and cultures in the Cathedral Quarter, a new space, of alterity, has also opened for the LGBTQ+ community just across the road from the Cathedral Quarter. With this growing shared space linking into the relocated Ulster University, and its 15,000 students, now

positioned on the regenerated land of old Sailortown and the Docks, the Cathedral Quarter has become a shared space for all Northern Ireland communities.

With this international, and local, success the Cathedral Quarter appears to have broken down many of the old barriers that once prohibited the sharing of space in Northern Ireland society. The area shows possibilities for neutral zones in highly contested cities and communities. These areas offer ordinary people places to interact with different communities and individuals of different backgrounds. However, the challenge is that aside from a select group of relatively young, urban individuals, most ordinary people return to live in areas that are segregated. Still, the neutral zones are important buffers to constant division and can be important for those who strive to establish a more inclusionary view of their community. The Cathedral Quarter also portrays an interesting engagement with the scalar analysis of space (Hameiri & Jones 2018), in the way the space is tied to global identity. Yet rather than simply a top-down imposition, this allusion to globalism is a way for some local actors to reassert agency over identity that is often reinforced through the official politics and local activities presented as divisive. This imposition can be seen on the edge of the Cathedral Quarter where the nationalist Carrick Hill area, existent since the 1700s, has seen vacant land allotted for social housing to meet local community needs being redesignated for property developers to construct high rise student accommodation that will destroy a historic neighbourhood and its vibrant community spirit. Here is to be found the everyday juxtaposition of the (neo)liberal peace where the needs of the local and international political elites to develop such entrepreneurial activities over-riding the everyday needs of the local community seeking the basic human need of affordable housing and a supportive community in which to live in peace.

4. Conclusion

The article sought to highlight the enmeshed ways that political decisions, economic realities and local practices interact and offer ways of coping for the ordinary citizens. Rather than seeing the everyday as removed from the party politics and the broader geopolitical context, we aimed to show that the everyday is entangled with the broader transformations that are occurring. Further study and examination of this entanglement in Northern Ireland is necessary. Observing the spatialized everyday peace politics shows the limitations to peacebuilding efforts that do not account for localized understandings of different communities. At the same time, it is important not to view these everyday practices in isolation from the governance of the post-Agreement polity.

Simply, local practices of demarcating spaces through use, such as walking in certain areas and avoiding others or using one entrance and not another, need to be examined within wider dynamics. Practices of place-making can provide

108

a sense of security and predictability in contexts where there is a high degree of uncertainty about the future of the polity. They can also be enforced sometimes through discrete or invisible ways by local strongmen and community norms. As such, the practices are not necessarily emancipatory. Indeed, some of the everyday peacebuilding practices can promote injustice and be manipulated by various actors (Ware & Ware 2022). The practices are just one way to negotiate the everyday life in these contexts. In supporting Séverine Autesserre (2021), and her global assessment of peacebuilding, we believe, if it is to move beyond the current "crisis" a new "spatial turn" is required, towards biopolitical peacebuilding (Brennan 2022), one that builds peace from the body up rather than trickles down to those most in need. Ultimately, a focus on these everyday practices and the ways in which communities engage with the peacebuilding process is critical to examining the condition of the peace that has been achieved and the peace agreements that have been key to the process. Overlooking them provides and incomplete picture of the realities on the ground.

References

Alderdice, J., McBurney, J. & Williams, M., 2016. *Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Executive, Belfast.

Autesserre, S., 2021. *The Frontlines of Peace, an Insider's Guide to Changing the World*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Barclays, 2016. All Regions of UK More Prosperous Than Last Year, 30 September 2016, https://home.barclays/news/2016/08/all-regions-of-uk-more-prosperous-than-last-year/ (accessed 11 March 2023).

BCC – Belfast City Council, 2011. The Girdwood Community Hub – A New Beginning, September 2011, https://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/s33560/Appendix%20 2%20Girdwood%20Community%20Hub.pdf (accessed 11 March 2023).

Brennan, S., 2022. Biopolitical Peacebuilding. *Peacebuilding* 10 (1), 1–16, DOI: 10.1080/ 21647259.2021.1895610.

Brigg, M. & George, N., 2020. Emplacing the Spatial Turn in Peace and Conflict Studies. *Cooperation and Conflict* 55 (4), 409–420.

Bunting, B. P., Murphy, S. D., O'Neill S. M. & Ferry, F. R., 2012. Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders and Delay in Treatment Following Initial Onset: Evidence from the Northern Ireland Study of Health and Stress. *Psychological Medicine* 42 (8), 1727–1739.

Carroll, R., 2019. Northern Ireland Nurses Strike Over Pay and Patient Safety. *The Guardian*, 18 December 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/dec/18/northern-ireland-nurses-strike-over-pay-and-patient-safety (accessed 11 March 2023).

Dixon, P., 2002. Political Skills or Lying and Manipulation? The Choreography of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. *Political Studies* 50, 725–741.

Dowler, L., 2013. Cracks in the Wall: The Peace-Lines of Belfast, Northern Ireland. *Political Geography* 33, 60–61.

Dunlop, J., Adams, R. & Toner, T., 2002. *North Belfast Community Action Project: Report of the Project Team*. Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, Belfast.

109

Ferry, F., Bunting, B., Murphy, S., O'Neil, S., Stein, D. & Koenen, K., 2014. Traumatic Events and Their Relative PTSD Burden in Northern Ireland: A Consideration of the Impact of the 'Troubles'. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 49 (3), 435–446.

Galtung, J., 1976. *Peace, War and Defence, Essay's in Peace Research Volume II*. Christian Ejlers, Copenhagen.

Guerra-Barón, A., 2017. Biopower and International Relations. *International Studies: International Studies Association and Oxford University Press*, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.80.

Hameiri, S. & Jones, L., 2018. Against Hybridity in the Study of Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. In J. Wallis, L. Kent, M. Forsyth, S. Dinnen & S. Bose (eds.) *Hybridity on the Ground in Peacebuilding and Development: Critical Conversations*. ANU Press, Canberra, 99–112.

Hughes, J., 2009. Introduction: The Making of E.U. Conflict Management Strategy –Development through Security. *Ethnopolitics* 8 (3/4), 275–285.

Knox, C., 2016. Northern Ireland: Where Is the Peace Dividend?. *Policy and Politics* 44 (3), 485–503.

Mac Ginty, R., 2011. *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Mac Ginty, R., 2021. *Everyday Peace: How So-called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

McBride, S., 2019. *Burned*. Merrion Press, Kildare.

McCabe, C., 2013. The Double Transition. *Social Justice Review*. Trademark, Spring Belfast.

McGarry, J. & O'Leary, B., 2003. *The Northern Ireland Conflict, Consociational Engagements*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Mitchell, A., 2012. *Lost in Transformation, Violent Peace and Peaceful Conflict in Northern Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Mitchell, A. & Kelly, L., 2011. Peaceful Spaces? "Walking" through the New Liminal Spaces of Peacebuilding and Development in North Belfast. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 36 (4), 307–325.

Nagle, J., 2009. "Potemkin Village: Neo-Liberalism and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland?" *Ethnopolitics* 8 (2), 173–190.

Nolan, P., Bryan, D., Dwyer, C., Hayward, K., Radford, K. & Shirlow, P., 2014. *The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a Protest*. Queens University, Belfast.

O'Neill, S. et al., 2015. *Towards a Better Future: The Trans-generational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*. Commission for Victims and Survivors, Belfast.

Paris, R., 1997. Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism. *International Security* 22 (2), 54–89.

Richmond, O. P., 2011. *A Post-Liberal Peace*. Routledge, London.

Richmond, O. P., 2016. *Peace Formation and Political Order in Conflict Affected Societies*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Richmond, O. P. & Mitchell, A., 2012. *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*. Palgrave Macmillan, Lomdon.

Shirlow, P., 2012. *The End of Ulster Loyalism?* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Shirlow, P. & Murtagh, B., 2006. *Belfast – Segregation: Violence and the City*. Pluto Press, London.

Stedman, S., 1997. Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes. *International Security* 22 (2), 5–53.

Till, K. E. et al., 2013. Interventions in the Political Geographies of Walls. *Political Geography* 33, 52–62.

Tonge, J., Braniff, M., Hennessey, T., McAuley, J. W. & Whiting, S. A., 2014. *The Democratic Unionist Party from Protest to Power* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Waldie, P., 2023. Northern Ireland Sees Growing Angst about Sectarian Strife and Brexit. *The Globe and Mail*, 2 January 2023, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-northern-ireland-election-brexit/ (accessed 20 February 2023).

Ware, A. & Ware, V. A., 2022. Everyday Peace: Rethinking Typologies of Social Practice and Local Agency. *Peacebuilding* 10 (3), 222–241.

White, T. J. (ed.), 2013. *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison (WI).

Yeginsu, C., 2019. "I Wanted to Die:" Northern Ireland Confronts a Suicide Crisis. *New York Times*, 2 December 2019, https:// www.nytimes.com/2019/12/01/world/europe/northern-ireland-suicide.html (accessed 20 February 2023).

Joseph S. Robinson

Derry, Bloody Sunday, and the "Great Sea-Change"

In 2010, 13 of the 14 victims of Bloody Sunday were publicly exonerated by the Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry after the lengthy struggle of the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign (BSJC). By 2011 however, the BSJC publicly fractured over the impact of the Report and whether to continue the annual Bloody Sunday March. This article argues the split in the BSJC is a proxy for a broader struggle between divergent "spatial stories" (de Certeau 1984) of the city of Derry itself. Will Derry be narrated as a city transcending its difficult past or will the original struggle remain perpetually present?

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Derry, Bloody Sunday, spatial stories.

Derry, krvava nedelja in "velika sprememba"

Po večletnih prizadevanjih gibanja Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign (BSJC) je bilo leta 2010 z objavo poročila uradne preiskave dogodkov na krvavo nedeljo 13 od 14 žrtev javno oproščenih. Le leto kasneje pa so se mnenja znotraj gibanja BSJC glede ugotovitev poročila in glede vprašanja, ali naj še naprej vsako leto organizirajo protestni pohod, razdelila. Članek ugotavlja, da razkol v gibanju BSJC na nek način simbolizira "nasprotujoče si razlage" (de Certeau 1984) omenjenega dogodka v samem mestu Derry. Vprašanje je, ali se bo Derry v zgodovino zapisal kot mesto, ki je preseglo breme preteklosti, ali pa bo prvotni konflikt za vedno prisoten v zavesti ljudi.

Ključne besede: *Severna Irska, Derry, krvava nedelja, nasprotujoče si razlage.*

Correspondence address: Joseph S. Robinson, 1621 Goode Place, Woodland, CA, USA, e-mail: jsrobinson2311@gmail.com.

1. Have We Overcome?

On June 15, 2010, in front of a crowd of over 10,000 people in Derry's Guildhall Square (Campbell 2012), the Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry was finally revealed. The Report exonerated thirteen of the fourteen victims[1] of the original massacre and placed the blame for Bloody Sunday squarely on 1st Battalion, Paratroop Regiment of the British army. After nearly 40 years of being portrayed by the official 1972 Widgery Report and elements of the British media as gunmen and nail-bombers (McLaughlin & Baker 2015), the Report concluded: "None [of the victims] was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury" (Saville et al. 2010a, Ch. 5.5).

The original Bloody Sunday (1972) atrocity has been commemorated since 1973 by an annual Bloody Sunday March (BSM) near the anniversary of the massacre. The BSM re-traces the route of the original march that ended on the killing ground in the centre of Derry's Bogside neighbourhood. Six months after the celebratory release of the Report, the largest local newspaper, the *Derry Journal,* carried an editorial penned by Tony Doherty (2011) entitled Come March with Us – For the Last Time. Doherty is the son of Patrick Doherty, one of the fourteen victims of Bloody Sunday. In his editorial, Doherty claimed that the 2011 BSM would be the "end of an era." "The family-led struggle" had been successful, the victims "vindicated." "We have overcome," he argues. However, Doherty's desire to end the BSM was and is not universally shared.

For the first time in the BSM's history, the supposed last 2011 BSM would not culminate at the local landmark of Free Derry Corner, mere metres from where many of the original murders occurred, rather in Guildhall Square, where the Report was issued. The spatial symbolism was obvious. The original BSM, kettled in the Bogside before the paratroopers descended, had been prevented from reaching its intended destination of the Guildhall, the symbolic governing centre of Derry. The 2011 BSM would do what none of its predecessors had done, it would complete the original BSM, thus inscribing a triumphant conclusion of the struggle for Bloody Sunday justice. The essence of that story was powerfully contained on the single word of the banner that fronted the supposed last March: "Vindicated" (Figure 1).

However, as the BSM headed for the Guildhall, a small number of people broke away in protest. The protesters rejected, in part, the Report itself, but their breakaway in 2011 was more a protest against the attempt to end the BSM. And it is no coincidence that the protesters returned to Free Derry Corner, to the place where the spatial story of Bloody Sunday remains unfinished and incomplete.

There are several compelling studies of the public memory of Bloody Sunday, however, all were published before June 15, 2010 (Conway 2008; 2010; Dawson 2005; 2007; Herron & Lynch 2007), excepting Bentley's (2021) excel-

lent intervention. Yet even before the issuance of the Report, Herron and Lynch (2007) were already warning that any attempt to impose narrative uniformity through the Report was dangerous. They caution:

> It is often asserted that the establishment of a final and singular truth of what happened on [Bloody Sunday] will allow for a process of closure and resolution […]. But there is a danger that what is being pursued is something which will ultimately smooth over the actual and very real inconsistencies, partialities and blank spots of an event such as this (Herron & Lynch 2007, 71).

The academic and journalistic literature written after the Report suggests that this warning has not been adequately heeded (e.g., Aiken 2015; Petropolous 2022). Approaches that uncritically accept the temporal assumptions that Doherty and others attempted to impose ignore the vocal minority who view the Report as insufficient and the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign (BSJC) as radically incomplete (Bentley 2021). This article avoids relegating the BSJC to the completed past. Rather, I consider the contested politics of inscribing Bloody Sunday into the ongoing story of Derry itself.

Figure 1: Vindicated, 2011, Bloody Sunday March, Derry.

©CAIN and ©Martin Melaugh (Used with permission).

Drawing on de Certeau's (1984) concept of "spatial stories," I contend that June 15, 2010 is uniquely situated within a particular theatre of action, the city itself. June 15, 2010 represents the key plot point in a transcendentalist Great Sea-Change narrative of Derry, one in which the victorious arc of the BSJC does not

merely reflect the vindication of the victims of Bloody Sunday and their families, but the city itself.

114   The Great Sea-Change interweaves three major strands. The first is June 15, 2010, the second Derry's experience as the inaugural (UK) City of Culture in 2013, the third a supposed Derry Model of difficult yet fruitful inter-communal peacebuilding. I employ the "Great Sea-Change" moniker after Seamus Heaney's *The Cure at Troy* (1991).

> So hope for a great sea-change
> On the far side of revenge.
> Believe that further shore
> Is reachable from here.
> Believe in miracle
> And cures and healing wells.

To challenge any of the three mutually entangled strands of the Great Sea-Change becomes a challenge to the idealised futurity of Derry itself. It undermines the story of a city and its residents who have been vindicated, who have overcome, who have a new story to tell. Thus, when some marchers broke away from the supposed last BSM in 2011, they went beyond merely disrupting the supposed triumphant social catharsis of June 15, 2010. This disruption ultimately provokes the major question of this article: Who gets to narrate the story of not only Bloody Sunday, but post-Report and post-culture year Derry itself?

To help answer this question, I utilised a mix of archival, discursive, and in-situ qualitative methods. Between 2016 and 2019, I interviewed 27 different "memory curators" (Robinson 2018, 13) of Bloody Sunday. These included family members of those murdered and others directly affected by the massacre as well as activists within the former Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign (BSJC) and the current Bloody Sunday Trust (BST) and Bloody Sunday March Committee (BSMC), respectively. I have given all memory curators directly referenced in this text unique pseudonyms. I also created a digital archive of news articles, political leaflets, campaign posters, and other digitised material to assist my analysis of Bloody Sunday memory politics from 1972–2015. Finally, from 2016–2019, I personally attended the Bloody Sunday Week in Derry, taking detailed ethnographic notes and photographs.

2. Spatial Stories of Derry

Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that narrative activity structures, organizes, and renders intelligible human representations of territory, order, and mobility. In the case of Belfast, O'Dowd and Komarova use the idea of spatial stories to describe a city: "Structured by interweaving ontological narratives that reflect attempts by organised groups to impose order and coherence on a fluid and often incoherent urban reality" (2013, 526–527).

115

Thus, spatial stories are attempts to impose narrative order on space, generally in the form of an intelligible sequence of events strung together to promote a shared understanding of what space in this context fundamentally represents. Yet, the ultimate power of a spatial story is both an extension of existing power-dynamics and a function of how well it adheres to the conventions of culturally-learned genres (Polletta et al. 2011). Doak (2014; 2020) attempts to position post-Culture Year Derry at the intersection of a "new" and "old" dominant spatial story of the city. The old story is that of a "loser city" (Rousseau 2009), a distinction that generally refers to post-industrial cities struggling with issues such as demographic decline, persistent unemployment, and high rates of urban violence. Loser cities suffer two inter-related deficits, economic and symbolic, the latter a persistent bad image. These deficits motivate local politicians and civic boosters to build a counter-image rooted in creative urban regeneration and neoliberal gentrification.

In Derry specifically, this old story is that of Derry as Northern Ireland's distant second city, dwarfed by its larger neighbour of Belfast. It is bound up in the decline of textile production, Derry's persistent deprivation, and in the stereotype of Derry's mostly working-class residents as possessing a "whining and whingeing" collective mentality (Boland et al. 2019, 252). The material fabric of the city remains saturated with the imagery of past violence in the form of large murals, places of paramilitary commemoration, transient graffiti, and violence-justifying sloganeering (Robinson 2018). Derry also has a reputation as an on-going hub of "dissident" Republicanism (Morrison & Horgan 2016). In short, Doak's old story is that of a post-industrial backwater still trapped in the shadow of its past and populated by a people eternally dependent on public welfare, a city deeply in need of a Great Sea-Change.

3. The Trajectory of Bloody Sunday Memory

The main commemorative space for Bloody Sunday in the city has always been the Bloody Sunday Weekend, a series of events leading up to the annual BSM. The Weekend has had four recognisable chronological phases (Conway 2010; Dawson 2007). The first encompasses the direct aftermath of the atrocity, 1972–1974, when the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) umbrella and Provisional Sinn Féin competed for the right to stage the story of the atrocity through duelling marches. The NICRA march was a silent march and participants were asked not to bring flags or banners or engage in any activities that would "discredit" the memory of those killed (Conway 2010, 81). NICRA made a formal request to Sinn Féin to yield the commemorative space but were rebuffed, and the latter march was highly militarised, framing Bloody Sunday as another atrocity in the bloody history of British imperialism.

116

The decline of NICRA left Sinn Féin as the only political actor with both the ability and willingness to curate the memory of Bloody Sunday in public space. In the second stage, 1975–1992, Bloody Sunday became "a Republican issue; its memory at once sustained and also limited by Sinn Féin's support and commitment" (Dawson 2007, 154). However, as the Northern Ireland Peace Process emerged in the late 1980s, Sinn Féin may have sensed a need to step back from their central role in organising the BSM and weekend. Republican curatorship of the weekend alienated potential allies, especially nonviolent nationalists on both sides of the border and insulated British and Unionist false narratives of the victims as gunmen and nail bombers (Ó Dochartaigh 2010). As Dawson notes, "Bloody Sunday was becoming a *historical* event of the past rather than a living memory with real relevance to continuing politics" (2007, 154).

Sinn Féin's slight public step-back helped create the space for the BSJC, publicly organized and led by key family members of the victims. The BSJC was formed around three central demands: 1) The British government acknowledge the unambiguous innocence of those killed and injured on Bloody Sunday, 2) the official repudiation of the Widgery Report, and 3) the prosecution of those responsible (Campbell 2012). Under the BSJC, Bloody Sunday became an internationalist humans-rights issue which Dawson (2007) and Conway (2010) claim widened the net of people and institutions that could safely support the BSJC. This third stage dovetailed with the publication of exhaustively researched reports (McCann 1992; Mullan 1997) and searing popular films (Herron & Lynch 2007; Pötzsch 2012) that further impressed the injustice of Bloody Sunday, especially on British and North American audiences.

By 1997, the BSJC's three demands seemed to have crystallized into one demand: a second Inquiry. Some within the BSJC, such as Liam Wray, objected to this: "We did *not* campaign for a new inquiry. It was not one of the campaigns three aims" (quoted in Campbell 2012, 130). Yet, in January 1998, a new U.K. Labour government announced a new Bloody Sunday Inquiry (BSI) to supersede Widgery. The BSI proceedings were interminable, lasting nearly six years (1998–2004). The BSI would then take another six years to issue its report. During this time cracks began to appear in the consensus presented to the public by the BSJC. In addition to members disassociating the BSI from the original goals of the BSJC, the Weekend became a forum for controversy between the historically Republican aspects of the weekend and its new human-rights framing. It also became a forum to question Sinn Féin's ongoing legitimacy to represent Irish Republicanism in the city.

In 2006, with the St. Andrew's Agreement, Sinn Féin accepted the legitimacy of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Irish Republicanism has long refused to be policed by state forces that they consider illegitimate (Bean & Hayes 2009) and Sinn Féin's new stance was approved by its *Ard Fheis* (party conference) on January 28, 2007, the exact same day as the annual BSM. The decision provoked rioting during the 2007 BSM although the connection was

117

denied by Sinn Féin MLA Martina Anderson: "If anyone thinks these actions were a reaction to the historic vote being held at the same time then they're sadly mistaken. These young people are devoid of anything remotely political." For leading justice campaigner John Kelly, "These people have tarnished the memory of those who died on the original march […]. The march is a dignified and peaceful act of protest" (both quoted in McLenaghan 2007). Both adopt similar language to NICRA's circa 1973 regarding Sinn Féin's parallel commemoration. The public politics of Bloody Sunday memory had come full circle.

Finally, on June 15, 2010, the long-awaited Report issued its findings in Derry's Guildhall Square. Television screens carried the live feed of British Prime Minister David Cameron's Commons' speech. Cameron said he hoped that the Report would "close this painful chapter on Northern Ireland's troubled past" (BBC News 2010). Like Tony Doherty would in his editorial the next year, Cameron explicitly positioned the RBSI as the end of the era, as a line under the public politics of Bloody Sunday memory.

The Report was initially framed as an unqualified victory for the BSJC, however, cracks emerged in that framing after the initial afterglow had worn off. The narrative framing of the Guildhall on June 15, 2010, in the respondents' memories below, becomes a key plot point in a new spatial story, the day everything changed, the clean temporal break with the past.

> When we walked out through that doorway and into the Guildhall and you seen the mass of people-like. It was incredible. Seeing all those happy smiling faces and that blue sky (James, family member, Interview with author).

> When I stepped out and the sun was shining, my initial thought was it was shining down [from] Heaven [on] us […] and you would nearly have seen a black veil lifting over the heads of the Derry people (Mia, family member, Interview with author).

> And coming down off that stage they had made, a little boy, who would have been the same age as I was when me daddy was killed […] he just […] looked up at me, and he put his hand out and I shook it. And then the petrol station man just looked at me and he said, "I'm so proud of you" (Una, family member, Interview with author).

These accounts of the day contrast sharply with the memories of those who would later reject the Report, whole or in part. For them, the day was choreographed by the Northern Irish Office and the BST. Perhaps the loudest voice condemning the supposed choreography of June 15, 2010 is the Derry-based socialist activist and journalist Eamonn McCann (2010; 2012; 2016). He writes:

> In exchange [for Cameron's apology], there would be no more Bloody Sunday Marches – and no attempt to push for prosecutions […] the British authorities were trying to put together an overall deal by which the past would be put in the past and we'd all 'move on' (McCann 2016).

118

The following testimonials, again from the place of the Guildhall on June 15, 2010, work to concretise an alternative spatial story by evoking a narrative starkly at odds with the transcendental story.

> It was choreographed; I was aware that people were trying to orchestrate a certain portrayal of the day. It would have been very difficult for me to go out onto the Guildhall and say to the people of Derry […] to rain on their day, in a sense (Colin, family member, Interview with author).

> I remember when I seen all the platforms, I had seen them getting built the night before when I called down, and I remember thinking to myself, this is all getting staged! So we were just pawns in it (Finn, family member, Interview with author).

> I felt we were just absorbed in the whole furore of the event […]. I think it suited some people that 15 June appeared to be the end of [the BSJC] (Cillian, family member, Interview with author).

While certainly underwritten by the divergent political opinions on the Report, the split in the BSJC spilled into the open over the Trust's attempt to end the annual BSM. Colin here details his perspective:

> I can't prove it, but there was a political drive to stop the March, and that was even just before the Report came out. I was very vocal […] that the March would continue. And quite a lot of pressure was applied, they put it out in the paper. (Colin, family member, Interview with author).

What Colin refers to is an open letter placed in the *Derry Journal* in January 2012 (Duddy et al. 2012, 34). The letter is collectively signed by various family members of the original casualties purportedly representing the "vast majority of family members and wounded." The letter positions June 15, 2010 as the "end of an era," and attempts to position the BST as the only legitimate curator of Bloody Sunday public memory.

Colin argues that the attempt to end the BSM was spearheaded by Sinn Féin, because Sinn Féin could no longer exert a behind-the-scenes discipline or control over the public performance of the BSM (also McCann 2016). In addition to this, Colin also implicates Sinn Féin's larger role in the Northern Irish legacy process. He argues:

> The reason people don't want to grasp the nettle [of pursuing justice for past violence] is not for any other reason besides they're the very people who are in government and are vulnerable if that process continues, because they might be [vulnerable], the cry might come out, what about you, what about you? (Colin, family member, Interview with author).

Colin's argument must be seen in the context of Sinn Féin's sometimes contradictory and evolving stance on legacy of violence issues in Northern Ireland (Hopkins 2015). Politically, Sinn Féin seeks simultaneously to retain its anti-imperial armed revolutionism credentials whilst simultaneously transforming into a palatable mainstream Irish political party. As Colin notes, Sinn Féin is in a difficult spot when it comes to demanding justice for the perpetrators of State violence as it simultaneously faces justice campaigns for the victims of IRA violence (Robinson 2022).

But the question of stopping the BSM cannot be reduced to alleged Sinn Féin machinations. People who wish to stop the BSM also possess deeply-held emotional investment in the transcendentalist spatial story of the BSJC. Ben, a justice advocate, argues that the meaning and resonance of the BSM is intimately bound up in a time and space that has passed.

> The March is **over** [original emphasis] […]. This thing [the March] couldn't just be allowed to peter out […] there was always a fear it would end up as 400 people trickling down the Southway […] (Ben, a justice advocate, Interview with author).

For Ben, the continuing BSM reflects badly on not only the legacy of BSJC, but on Derry itself. The triumphant plot arc of tens of thousands of people on the 2011 BSM is at risk of devolving into a story of a few old crotchety leftists and Republican dissidents marching lamely down a hill. Likewise, Ilsa (family member) grieves at the divergence between what the BSM has become and what it used to mean "for the people of Derry:"

> On the day of the Saville Report, everyone besides the Donaghys[2] (which I didn't know about until a couple hours later), everyone was happy with their lot and thinking, 'Oh my God, see what we've done […]!' It was just all of a sudden they didn't believe in the **entire** Report, **which called into question everything that** [**they**] **had worked for**[…]**!** [original emphasis]. [They] kept [the March] family-led […] a thing for the people of Derry (Ilsa, family member Interview with author).

For Ilsa, the grand arc of the BSJC has to culminate in the celebration of June 15, 2010 because of what the spatial story says about Derry and Derry-people. In her eyes, the BSJC is populated by heroes, small, plucky individuals who were willing to stand up against the might of the British establishment. To have the BSJC tarnished by the lack of a triumphant conclusion, a clean temporal break, diminishes not only the BSJC and the accomplishments of her loved ones, but the larger spatial arc of the city itself.

4. Derry City of Culture 2013

120

Less than a week after June 15, 2010, The Derry city Culture Steering Group presented the city's bid to be the inaugural UK City of Culture. Boland et al. (2019, 250) write: "For seasoned commentators and local people, securing [the City of Culture] was a direct response to [the Report]". Gordon-Nesbitt (2013) alleges the Culture Year decision-makers chose Derry over better bids from Birmingham and Sheffield because June 15, 2010 was so fresh in their minds. Regardless of how and why the city came to be chosen, the Culture Year represented a unique opportunity to decisively cement a new story of the city.

The Steering Group presentation included an official short film entitled *Voices* (Peto 2010). The film begins with Seamus Heaney himself reading the Great Sea-Change stanza cited above. After a montage of images of Derry's people and places, Heaney returns to finish the stanza before yielding to the final scene, a young girl in a white dress who walks towards the camera. She smiles and supplicates the viewer (and the Culture Year decision-makers): "I have a new story to tell. I **need** to tell a new story."

The UK City of Culture, inspired by other European Capital of Culture designations, is intended to celebrate, showcase, and incentivise cultural production within a given locality. Presumably, the designation can stimulate local economic development and tourism, attract external investment, and increase residents' senses of belonging to a city or a region (Garcia et al. 2010). Consider how Emma, a former local politician and both a supporter of the BSJC and local driver of the Culture Year, frames June 15, 2010.

> I think that day, there was a relief across the city, and like a black cloud has lifted, and it was nearly like a new beginning for the entire city […]. And as a city, I think we have a new story to tell, which was the theme for the City of Culture in 2013, and I think the new story started the day Cameron gave that apology. There's new confidence back in the city […] our pride instilled back in our city that day (Emma, local politican, Interview with author).

There is a clear disagreement within the small literature on the Culture Year (compare Doak 2014; 2020 and Boland et al. 2019; 2020). This disagreement concerns how both the material and intangible legacies of the Culture Year should be understood, however, they converge over how the narrative legacy of the Culture Year is felt in Derry. The Culture Year comprehensively failed to deliver on its admittedly grandiose promises of socioeconomic transformation. To cite one youthful respondent (Boland et al. 2020, 802): "It's like a depression. To come back to the legacy, it's a depression […] a massive event, once that left and everybody went […] it's just back to reality then." After a brief flirtation with the promise of a new spatial story of the city and all the new opportunities it promised, the old story returned once more to prominence. Yet Boland et al. (2019,

259) argue that we must not only consider the "limp" material and economic legacies of the Culture Year, but rather its legacy as a "peace resource." The legacy of the Culture Year as peace resource dovetails with final strand of the Great Sea-Change, the Derry Model.

121

5. The Derry Model

The Derry Model refers broadly to a particular methodology designed to steer cities away from urban intercommunal violence and hostility supposedly pioneered in the city of Derry beginning in the 1990s (Bentley 2021; McClements 2018). Crucially, this methodology is presented as a successful and exportable model, one that other places plagued by intercommunal hostility can emulate. It is also the title of a project run under the auspices of the BST.

The Derry Model (the project) puts it this way: "Derry has addressed many of the difficult issues which remain unresolved elsewhere in the North and aims to share, reflect upon and debate the learning from the 'Derry Model' of dialogue and reconciliation" (Museum of Free Derry, N/D). The Derry Model (generally) is structured on the alleged cessation of intercommunal hostilities after the 1998 Belfast Agreement due to direct, face-to-face, negotiation between the Apprentice Boys, the largest Protestant-Unionist parading group in Derry, and a community-based organisation, the Bogside Residents' Group (BRG). It is important here to note that the BRG is widely understood in Derry to have been a group with close ties to Sinn Féin (Cohen 2007).

Cohen (2007) argues that the parade negotiations represented a unique opportunity for the Apprentice Boys to re-brand their external reputation. If they could secure the parade route as well as access to the walls and city centre through a negotiated settlement, they could present themselves as an organisation at the forefront of cross-community peacebuilding. While the Apprentice Boys may not have altered this perception of all Loyal Orders, Cohen (2007, 962) convincingly argues they "undertook a reworking of their public persona, their needs, and the meaning of the parade."

At the time of these parade negotiations, 1998–2001, Sinn Féin was not in government and was not considered to be a central party to the Northern Irish peace process, but rather a potential spoiler of that process. Thus, not only could the BRG negotiate a removal of many of the most contentious aspects of the parades for their erstwhile local constituency, they could also assist Sinn Féin's legitimation efforts by demonstrating that a residents' group with close ties to Sinn Féin could successfully and peacefully negotiate with a Loyal Order (Cohen 2007, 963). Thus, both parties to the negotiation had a vested interest in re-branding themselves through the Derry Model.

The Derry Model, while certainly mentioned prior to the Culture Year, gained added symbolic weight during the year itself. Several high-profile events

within the Culture Year programme were explicitly positioned as "peacebuilding resources" or vehicles to promote "intercultural tolerance" (McDermott et al. 2016). The Culture Year thus, in addition to its many other facets, also represented a coordinated attempt to entrench the Derry Model narrative of difficult yet fruitful intercultural cooperation and tolerance.

This narrative fed directly into the larger Great Sea-Change narrative through downward social comparison with Derry's larger neighbour Belfast. There is a widespread belief in Derry that Northern Ireland is essentially a Belfast city-state that chronically deprives Derry and the Northwest of investment, employment, and regeneration opportunities (Bradley 2018). Yet in better-resourced Belfast, deeply contentious parades and flags protests, among other flashpoints, routinely provoked violent clashes and explosions of sectarian and paramilitary imagery. Derry, in contrast, undertook successful parades negotiations and ushered in over a decade of relative political normalcy. Thus, the Derry Model strand of the Great Sea-Change positions Derry as successfully overcoming the worst of Northern Ireland's ostensibly intractable political and sectarian issues, despite its chronic under-resourcing by the Belfast-Centric Executive (Doak 2014).

But the central catalyst of the Great Sea-Change in Derry remains June 15, 2010. While the role of June 15, 2010 in promoting peace and intercultural tolerance is minimized in the subsequent literature, my conversations with some of the days' main curators reveal it was a central concern of the BST, especially regarding the days' subsequent reporting by international media (Campbell 2012). Ryan (family member, BST), is very clear on how the day was meant to be positioned within the DM of intercommunal peacebuilding.

> In the days running up we [the BST] had basically sent out signals to the Protestant community sector in the city that we wanted to talk to them. And at the same time they were sending stuff to us that they wanted to talk to us. And I think some of them saw it as an opportunity to reconcile differences. Because the city was divided and very, very much so [over] what happened on [Bloody Sunday] (Interview with author).

6. There Is No British Justice

This article argues that the trajectory of Bloody Sunday memory must be understood as embedded in larger spatial stories of the city of Derry itself. The Great Sea-Change hinges on the triumphant vindication of the victims of Bloody Sunday, which inexorably leads to Seamus Heaney yielding the city's future to a young girl with a new story to tell. If we accept that the Culture Year should be examined more as a peacebuilding resource than an economic resource (or even a cultural one), then Culture Year becomes a key instantiation of the supposed Derry Model. However, it is nearly impossible to countenance the Culture Year even occurring or some distinctly Derry Model of peacebuilding gaining the

traction that it did absent the triumphant climax of June 15, 2010, when it was finally possible to believe a farther shore was reachable from here in Derry.

123

Yet the Derry Model intertwined with the peacebuilding legacy of the Culture Year has not "solved" urban violence in the city, as the weeklong July 2018 riots surrounding a Loyal Order parade in the city proved acutely. Rather, it now appears that the dominance of the Great Sea-Change has been pierced, forced open to competing spatial stories, including those claiming that the old story of Derry was never meaningfully transcended and the Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry offered scant justice for the original atrocity.

The Great Sea-Change's comparatively brief narrative ascendancy was underwritten by a particular form of political temporality that binds or constricts the discursive and material space of political action. It both reflects and contributes to powerful political programs that often depend, for their very authority, on the bracketing of past violence, a severing of the continuity between past violence and present conditions (Bevernage 2012; Robinson 2022). For many people and institutions in Ireland and Britain, including many justice campaigners, particular moments in space and time such as June 15, 2010 represent a narratologically appropriate juncture in which to publicly perform an "over" or an "end," to impose transition away from past violence as an open wound into a reconciled catharsis (Bentley 2021). Yet two issues remain, first, how these urges buttress the transitional programs of state and sub-state actors often cynically over-invested in bracketing a contentious past, and second, how the bracketing of past violence works to deafen and delegitimise those who view keeping the past alive as inseparable from any possibility of meaningful political change.

In places and cities saturated by memories of political killing, "overing" (Bentley 2021) a march is also an attempt to impose a particular temporality of grief, mourning, and commemoration. A refusal to comply with this imposed temporality not only threatens the idealised transcendental arc of justice struggles, it also functions as a stark reminder that for many in Derry, the city has failed to meaningfully transcend. Herron and Lynch's (2007) warning thus seems prophetic; organised attempts to impose a clean break with the past, not only regarding Bloody Sunday, but Derry itself, are misguided, exclusionary, and bound to be resisted.

In 2020, the U.K. government of Boris Johnson introduced the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Bill that proposes a sweeping amnesty for all Troubles-related killings and other crimes. The Bill would end the ongoing trial of the only person ever to be prosecuted for Bloody Sunday, a former paratrooper codenamed Soldier F. While Johnson is no longer in power, current PM Rishi Sunak continues to support the Bill. The 50th anniversary (2022) BSM's official theme, There is no British Justice, thus seems an acknowledgment that 30 years of seeking British Justice under the third demand of the BSJC is moribund. Not only is there no British justice, the theme implies, there

never was. All that is offered now are official acts of recognition like Cameron's apology undergirded by increasing pressure to move on and draw a line under the past, platitudinous sympathy in exchange for the enforced end of the BSJC.

And this closely parallels what is on offer for the city of Derry, creaking and groaning under the weight of Brexit, economic recession, and the cascade of austerity and spending cuts levelled at it: Symbolic acknowledgment of the city's deep cultural and political import on these islands, but no substantive change to its impoverishment or marginalisation. The Great Sea-Change seems more and more like a fable designed to conceal perpetual confinement in the old story of the city, interlocking with perpetual legal impunity for the perpetrators of Northern Ireland's most well-known atrocity.

References

Aiken, N. T., 2015. The Bloody Sunday Inquiry: Transitional Justice and Postconflict Reconciliation in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Human Rights* 14 (1), 101–123.

BBC News, 2010. "Bloody Sunday: PM David Cameron's Full Statement." *BBC News*, 15 June 2010, https://www.bbc.com/news/10322295 (accessed 14 November 2022).

Bean, K. & Hayes, M., 2009. Sinn Féin and the New Republicanism in Ireland: Electoral Progress, Political Stasis, and Ideological Failure. *Radical History Review* 104, 126–142.

Bentley, T., 2021. When is a Justice Campaign Over? Transitional Justice, 'Overing' and Bloody Sunday. *Cooperation and Conflict* 56 (4), 394–413.

Bevernage, B., 2012. *History, Memory, and State-Sponsored Violence: Time and Justice.* Routledge, London.

Boland, P., Murtagh, B. & Shirlow, P., 2019. Fashioning a City of Culture: 'Life and Place Changing' or a '12 Month Party'? *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 25 (2), 246–265.

Boland, P., Murtagh, B. & Shirlow, P., 2020. Neoliberal Place Competition and Culturephilia: Explored through the Lens of Derry~Londonderry. *Social and Cultural Geography* 21 (6), 788–809.

Bradley, S., 2018. Why is Derry so Poor? Part II – The Reasons. *Slugger O'Toole* [Blog], 10 March 2018, https://sluggerotoole.com/2018/03/10/why-is-derry-so-poor-part-ii-the-reasons (accessed 27 January 2023).

Campbell, J., 2012. *Setting the Truth Free: The Inside Story of the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign.* Liberties, London.

Cohen, S., 2007. Winning while Losing: The Apprentice Boys of Derry Walk Their Beat. *Political Geography* 26 (8), 951–967.

Conway, B., 2008. Local Conditions, Global Environment and Transnational Discourses in Memory Work: The Case of Bloody Sunday (1972). *Memory Studies* 1 (2), 187–209.

Conway, B., 2010. *Commemoration and Bloody Sunday: Pathways of Memory.* Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Dawson, G., 2005. Trauma, Place and the Politics of Memory: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972–2004. *History Workshop Journal* 59 (1), 151–178.

Dawson, G., 2007. *Making Peace with the Past?: Memories, Trauma, and the Irish Troubles.* Manchester University Press, Manchester.

De Certeau, M., 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life.* University of California Press, Berkeley (CA).

Doak, P., 2014. Beyond Derry or Londonderry: Towards a Framework for Understanding the Emergent Spatial Contradictions of Derry-Londonderry – UK City of Culture 2013. *City* 18 (4/5), 488–496.

Doak, P., 2020. Cultural Policy as Conflict Transformation? Problematising the Peacebuilding Potential of Cultural Policy of Derry-Londonderry – UK City of Culture 2013. *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 26 (1), 46–60.

Doherty, T., 2011. Come March with Us – for the Last Time. *The Derry Journal.* 26 January 2011, n.p.

Duddy, G. et al., 2012. Clarity on Marking the Bloody Sunday Anniversary. *The Derry Journal*, 20 January 2012, 34.

Garcia, B., Melville, R. & Cox, T., 2010. *Creating an Impact: Liverpool's Experience as the European Capital of Culture.* Impacts08, University of Liverpool, Liverpool.

Gordon-Nesbitt, R., 2013. Misguided Loyalties. In *Conflict, Community, Culture Published on the Occasion of UK City of Culture*, 2013, [21–39], https://shiftyparadigms.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/conflict_community_culture_a4.pdf (accessed February 2020).

Heaney, S., 1991. *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes.* Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, New York (NY).

Herron, T. & Lynch, J., 2007. *After Bloody Sunday: Ethics, Representation, Justice.* Cork University Press, Cork.

Hopkins, S., 2015. Sinn Féin, the Past and Political Strategy: The Provisional Irish Republican Movement and the Politics of 'Reconciliation.' *Irish Political Studies* 30 (1), 79–97.

McCann, E., 1992. *Bloody Sunday in Derry: What Really Happened.* Brandon Books, Brandon (MB).

McCann, E., 2010. Cooking the Bloody Sunday Report. *The Guardian*, 24 February 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/feb/24/bloody-sunday-report-retained (accessed 14 November 2022).

McCann, E., 2012. The Differences between Saville and Hillsborough. *The Derry Journal*, 18 September 2012, n.p.

McCann, E., 2016. "Bloody Sunday Paras & On the Runs." *The Pensive Quill* [Blog], 10 August 2016, https://www.thepensivequill.com/2016/08/bloody-sunday-paras-on-runs.html (accessed 14 November 2022).

McClements, F., 2018. 'Derry Model' May be Used in Conflict Resolution. *The Irish Times*, April 30 2018, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/derry-model-may-be-used-in-conflict-resolution-1.3478145 (accessed 14 November 2022).

McDermott, P., Nic Craith, M. & Strani, P., 2016. Public Space, Collective Memory, and Intercultural Dialogue in a (UK) City of Culture. *Identities* 23 (5), 610–627.

McLaughlin, G. & Baker, S., 2015. *The British Media and Bloody Sunday.* Intellect, Bristol.

McLenaghan, L., 2007. 'Rioters Tarnished the Memory of Those who Died on Bloody Sunday' – John Kelly. *The Derry Journal,* 2 February 2007, 4.

Morrison, J. F. & Horgan, J., 2016. Reloading the Armalite? Victims and Targets of Violent Dissident Irish Republicanism, 2007–2015. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 28 (3), 576–597.

Mullan, D., 1997. *Eyewitness Bloody Sunday: The Truth.* Wolfhound, Dublin.

Museum of Free Derry, N/D. Introducing – The Derry Model, https://museumoffreederry.org/introducing-the-derry-model (accessed 14 November 2022).

Ó Dochartaigh, N., 2010. Bloody Sunday: Error or Design?. *Contemporary British History* 24 (1), 89–108.

O'Dowd, L. & Komarova, M., 2013. Three Narratives in Search of a City: Researching Belfast's Post-Conflict 'Transitions.' *City* 17 (4), 526–546.

Peto, J. (director), 2010. *Voices* [Film]. A Nerve Centre Production for Derry City Council, Ilex, NI Screen, and Strategic Investment Board, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAdeXkZZLiU&t=2s (accessed 9 June 2023).

126

Petropolous, N., 2022. Emotion, Place and Weaponisation of Truth: The Bloody Sunday Trust and the Search for Justice. *History* 107 (375), 356–369.

Polletta, F., Chen, P. C. B., Gardner, B. G. & Motes, A., 2011. The Sociology of Storytelling. *Annual Review of Sociology* 37 (1), 109–130.

Pötzsch, H., 2012. Renegotiating Difficult Pasts: Two Documentary Dramas on Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972. *Memory Studies* 5 (2), 206–222.

Robinson, J. S., 2018. *Transitional Justice and the Politics of Inscription: Memory, Space, and Narrative in Northern Ireland.* Routledge, London.

Robinson, J. S., 2022. 'We Have Long Memories in This Area': Ulster Defence Regiment Place-Memory along the Irish Border. *Memory Studies* 15 (5), 995–1010.

Rousseau, M., 2009. Re-Imaging the City Centre for the Middle Classes: Regeneration, Gentrification, and Symbolic Policies in 'Loser Cities.' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33 (3), 770–788.

Saville, M., Hoyt, W. & Toohey, J., 2010a. *Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry: Vol. I.* The Stationary Office, London.

Saville, M., Hoyt, W. & Toohey, J., 2010b. *Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry: Vol. VII.* The Stationary Office, London.

Notes

[1] The Report did not exonerate 16-year-old victim Gerard Donaghy, claiming he was "probably in possession of nail bombs when he was shot" (Saville et al. 2010b, Ch. 145.25).

[2] See Note 1.

Robert C. Mizzi, Seán Byrne, Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, Nancy Hansen

Marginalized Voices and the Good Friday Agreement: Inclusion and the Northern Ireland Peace Process

This article explores building transnational queer and disabilities communities, disability-queer peace, and disability-queer activism in post-peace accord Northern Ireland (NI). Through in-person and virtual interviews with activists, staff, and leaders who are disabled, queer, and/or in allyship, it became clear in the data that respondents were ashamed, frustrated, and sad that ableism and queerphobia continues in NI. Attacks on disabled and LGBTQIA+ people have escalated as a result of the Brexit fallout and the COVID-19 pandemic that negatively impacted marginalized communities that are targeted by legal exclusion, discriminatory, and hateful practices as well as structural and interpersonal violence. Dialogue, diversity, and inclusive practices and policies and a political system that benefits all NI citizens are crucial to building sustainable peace in NI.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+ and disabilities, marginalization, inclusion and peacebuilding, Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland peace process.

Marginalizirane skupine in Velikonočni sporazum: Vključenost in severnoirski mirovni proces

Članek obravnava oblikovanje transnacionalnih kvir in invalidskih skupnosti, invalidska in kvir gibanja za mir ter invalidski in kvir aktivizem na Severnem Irskem po podpisu mirovnega sporazuma. Podatki, zbrani z osebnimi in spletnimi intervjuji z aktivisti, osebjem in voditelji, ki so invalidi, kvir in/ali njihovi podporniki, kažejo, da so anketiranci razočarani in žalostni ter da jih je sram, da so na Severnem Irskem še naprej prisotni predsodki do invalidov in kvirfobija. Napadi na invalide in osebe LGBTQIA+ so se dodatno okrepili po brexitu in pandemiji covida-19, ki sta še posebej negativno vplivala na marginalizirane skupnosti, deležne pravne izključenosti, diskriminatornih in sovražnih praks ter strukturnega in medosebnega nasilja. Za vzpostavitev trajnostnega miru na Severnem Irskem so ključni dialog, raznolikost, vključujoče prakse in politike ter politični sistem, ki deluje v korist vseh državljanov.

Ključne besede: LGBTQIA+ in invalidi, marginalizacija, vključevanje in vzpostavljanje miru, sporazum iz Belfasta, severnoirski mirovni proces.

Correspondence address: Robert Mizzi, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 71 Curry Place, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada, e-mail: robert.mizzi@umanitoba.ca; Seán Byrne, Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada, e-mail: sean.byrne@umanitoba.ca; Tara Sheppard-Luangkhot, Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada, e-mail: sheppart@ myumanitoba.ca; Nancy Hansen, Disability Studies, University of Manitoba, 71 Curry Place, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada, e-mail: nancy.hansen@umanitoba.ca.

1. Introduction

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement (GFA) has brought changes in Northern Ireland (NI) in specific ways as "former enemies share power in government, an internationally supported decommissioning process has ensured that most weapons are beyond use and the police service has undergone reform and become more representative of the population" (Marijan 2017, 77). NI has experienced the dominant liberal peacebuilding approach through external funding from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union (E.U.) Peace and Reconciliation Fund as well as through E.U., British, and Irish government practices and norms (Hyde & Byrne 2015). As Roger MacGinty writes, the limitations of a generalized liberal democratic peacebuilding paradigm is that it lacks creativity and does not fit all societies and intersections of identities within those societies (MacGinty 2008, 33). There remain competing perspectives among working class communities where both the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) communities live separately and consider each other as benefitting untowardly from the peacebuilding process (Byrne et al. 2022).

Ordinary citizens, and not just local elites and international actors, shape the peacebuilding process through everyday practices (Marijan 2017). This can range from participating in events and organizations that aim to build peace, to learning the bigger picture of what led to the conflict, to practicing civility, respect, and understanding in daily interactions. Everyday life in NI and the Border Counties can both "constrain and enable the emergence of a more locally rooted and legitimate peace process" (Marijan 2017, 82). Forms of precariousness and unease remain. Creating opportunities to enhance civic engagement is paramount to the success of peacebuilding because political participation "is a satisfier for a range of psychosocial needs, which include identity, dignity, role-defense, self-determination or self-actualization" (Hancock 2017, 264). Inclusive, locally owned peacebuilding is essentially a "call for increased agency for locals in post-conflict peacebuilding settings" (Hancock 2017, 268).

We agree with Hancock: people desire belonging and to believe that their contributions and their perspectives are appreciated for a peace process to succeed. In response, we focused on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community and disabled people because their voices are often excluded from peace processes. By exploring these perspectives and identities, we hope to uncover gaps and traps in peace processes often masked and upheld by heterocisnormativity and ableism. A peace process can be helpful to some, but it can function as a double-bind for groups on a social periphery because once again they need to justify their existence, advocate for inclusion, and demonstrate that violence continues for them.

The focus on marginalized perspectives on peacebuilding is gaining momentum in the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) literature (Mizzi & Byrne 2015;

Senehi et al. 2023). Marginalized perspectives include the experiences of youth, women, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, Black and people of colour, and disabled people. Marginalized perspectives provide an account of how peacebuilding impacts their lives, and whether inclusion/exclusion patterns prior to the conflict carried forth into the peace process, or if there was some form of transformative social change because of the conflict. These perspectives enrich a peace process; they can decentralize violence from being strictly connected to only one cause (e.g., ethnonational conflict), suggest alternatives to violence, and conceptualize a truly inclusive society. Marginalized groups have important local experiences, knowledge, practices, and wisdom from everyday experiences with conflict and violence that are crucial to building sustainable and comprehensive peace (Byrne et al. 2017).

In addition to these important perspectives, recently, there has been a turn away from positioning communities in silos. Since 1993, there has been a focus on the importance of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993). Intersectionality is the lived experience of many overlapping identities, membership in many communities, and intersections of oppression such as queerphobia,[1] xenophobia, ableism, sexism, and classism that cut across identity differences and restrict access to rights and privileges in civil society (Crenshaw 2012). Social action is also a part of intersectionality, which means that there must be some kind of activism or direct intervention to alleviate one-dimensional conceptualizations of identity, oppression, and human experience (Collins 2019).

Considering this turn to intersectionality and of the focus on marginalized perspectives in the peace process, this article focuses on the disability and LGBTQIA+ communities and their treatment and peacebuilding efforts after the 1998 GFA in NI came into effect. More specifically, we researched the lives of individuals who are primarily disabled and/or are LGBTQIA+, and those with demonstrable allyship to these communities. We sought to understand their relationship with the conflict and invited their perspectives on the peace process, Brexit, COVID-19 and intersections among each of these developments.

2. Context

Women, youth, and LGBTQIA+ and disabled people feel excluded by the GFA and the NI peace process, as cultural wars like the flags protest continue to rage on (Byrne et al. 2022). Adding to this complexity are the developments of Brexit and the NI Protocol, political dysfunctionality, the COVID-19 pandemic, and a new census showing that NI is majority CNR. Brexit and the Protocol created a border in the Irish Sea to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland that led to ongoing tensions arising, such as protecting the Irish language and same-sex marriage (Doyle & Connolly 2019). The Protocol's preamble stresses its commitment to maintain the GFA and subsequent agreements that are embedded

130

in North-South cooperation, underpinned by E.U. law, and supported by E.U. rights frameworks (Harvey 2020). The Protocol also outlines that discrimination should not occur in NI because of U.K. withdrawal from the E.U. This is because human rights and equality bodies functions were created within NI (Harvey 2020).

NI remains part of the U.K.'s customs territory having access to its internal markets, yet customs checks are also required between NI and the U.K. that are subject to E.U. law (Harvey 2020). The Protocol places emphasis on preserving the GFA and a commitment to the E.U.'s human rights and equality frameworks, maintaining funding under future U.K. and E.U. funding programs, and continuing with the Common Travel Area that prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland (Harvey 2020). Brexit hardliners within the Conservative party and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) opposed the interests of politicians in the Republic of Ireland that wanted to preserve the peace process and the single economic market (McEwen & Murphy 2022). The issue divided people and political parties across sectarian lines in NI, highlighting the socio-economic division within the PUL community, where the working class voted "Leave" compared to the business and middle classes (McGovern 2018).

Obstacles preventing women's inclusion in the civil society and political arenas in NI include a conservative culture, resistance from PUL political parties to recognize the influence of patriarchy in politics, and an electoral system that benefits conservatism (Galligan 2019). Brexit negotiations, in particular, negatively impacted NI's political stability (Cochrane 2020) and destabilized multiple political relationships and institutions. Brexit poses the largest economic and political challenge for NI and the constitutional question, since the 1921 partition of the island, challenges that will persist for the next century (Cochrane 2020). Cochrane (2020) argues that Brexit is a second phase of partition, this time from the E.U., that will have long lasting impacts on the political and economic relationships on both islands, and the relationship of NI with Britain. As a result of Brexit, women's rights progressive legislation has ground to a halt, with few formal channels as outlets for women's voices including workplace rights and the protection of part-time workers and flexible work, protection of pregnant women and new mothers, and abortion (Galligan 2019). Women noted that losing the E.U.'s vibrant human rights laws have unleashed conservative patriarchal viewpoints that support male dominance and perpetuate violence against women, leaving fewer outlets to articulate women's concerns and interests (Galligan 2019).

Consequently, the focus on shared politics in NI didn't spill over into people's everyday lives that were evidenced throughout the 2012–2013 union and Irish flag protests that divided the political parties along sectarian lines (Goldie & Murphy 2015). The flag issue became a powder- keg that reopened ethnonationalist wounds and reignited political frictions in NI. The flying of the union

flag was reduced from 365 days to 18 in 2008, which the PUL community perceived as a threat to their identity, and as a culture war levelled against British and Loyalist symbols (Mastors & Drumhiller 2014). The stark contrast between the peace process's infrastructure with its emphasis on equality and shared power, and informal local community networks harboring distrust and fear were divisive with little emphasis on collaborative powersharing (Goldie & Murphy 2015). Yet bottom-up micro and local level peacebuilding sometimes can be exclusionary, partial, sectarian, and removed from emancipatory peacebuilding (Maiangwa et al. 2022).

Diverse, public, and shared spaces are favorable to build a sustainable peace process yet managing them became even more antagonistic and combative within NI (Bryan 2015). For example, the changing coordination of the Lord Mayor's Show and St. Patrick's Day celebrations were efforts to generate and renegotiate more inclusive public spaces that were quarrelsome and violent sites like rebranding both events as carnivals, embracing Pride Parade, reclassifying Orange Parades as Orangefest, and composing policies to authorize more inclusive public spaces (Bryan 2015). While these developments show some promise, the disability and LGBTQIA+ communities have also been largely omitted from the peace process, and the progressive nature of the GFA. Section 75(2) of the 1998 NI Act ensures that public agencies protect all citizens equally (Shea-Irvine & Hansen 2019). For example, NI's disability community were always behind in terms of the U.K.'s development of human rights as disabled groups remained hidden and protected (Hill & Hansen 2011). As we explore further, the GFA has had minimal impact for LGBTQIA+ and disability rights at the local level as the NI powersharing government excluded rights issues at the macro level as they remain a low priority and both communities are forced into silos (Byrne et al. 2017).

3. LGBTQIA+, Disability, and Inclusion

Chronic surveillance and a natural lack of trust exist in society whereby disabled and LGBTQIA+ people were subject to social and individual discipline as their bodies and minds were perceived as out of control (Foucault 1977). Disabled and LGBTQIA+ people were seen as having a defect, weak, and extraordinary rather than naturally occurring part of the human condition and those elements of the individual were ignored because to draw attention to them would be regarded as pathological and abnormal (Foucault 1977).

As disability and LGBTQIA+ identities are also intersectional and apart of the ethnic and social politics in Northern Ireland, the scant and existent literature points to the importance of considering the impact of the peace process, along with an analysis of their ongoing experience with structural and interpersonal violence (Byrne et al. 2017). Both groups are disenfranchised in society, and so

132

therefore they are structurally separate (i.e., one can be gay or disabled, but never both) and yet both groups are socially aware and connected to one another through discourses of human rights and equity struggles (Byrne et al. 2022). As described below, both groups have been subjugated to human rights violations, violence, and injustice in NI. The problem is that both groups are considered as abhorrent or unnatural in some way by military and paramilitary figures, which is often made worse when people hold membership to both groups (i.e., LG-BTQIA+ and disabled).

3.1 LGBTQIA+ People

LGBTQIA+ people live in politically hostile and discriminatory societies wherein they have historically not been treated as equals under the law or in society (Yavuz & Byrne 2022). Similar to how there is an increase of violence that target women (Handrahan 2004), there is also an increase of violence that target LG-BTQIA+ people as a means to assert social control and regulation (Mizzi 2009). Queerphobia has limited LGBTQIA+ people to be open about their identities and affected their sense of belonging. The latter has affected opportunities for change and collaboration and restricted changing the *status quo* that privileges heterosexuality and cisgender people (Breitenbach 2004; Mizzi & Byrne 2015). For example, in an earlier survey conducted in NI, Breitenbach found that more men (2/3) than women (1/2) perceive homosexual sex as wrong, yet younger, single women were demonstrating a trend of women's acceptance of homosexuality and resistance to discrimination based on sexuality orientation. This data mirrored similar findings from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), which showed that rates of homophobic harassment were higher in NI compared to Irish and British rates (Breitenbach 2004). The study also showed pervasive patterns of homophobia in media, police, and government institutions.

3.2 Disability

Approimately 15 % of the global population are disabled, however, disabled people are significantly marginalized and under-researched (Hill & Hansen 2011). Disabled people are indeed heterogenous and may have complexities, heightened by violent conflict. For example, bombings of NI's civilians caused disabled people to be stranded while others fled for safety so that violent conflict endangers disabled people and can create more disabilities (Hill & Hansen 2011; Kerr 2013). For example, Hill and Hansen (2011) describe how there were exclusions of disability needs in relief agencies and emergency planning. Throughout the Troubles, politically motivated violence created barriers to safety. In the 1960s, Loyalists clashed with civil rights marchers and in the ensuing violence

Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries emerged as civilians and state forces were targeted during the Troubles (McGlinchey 2019). The sectarian and military violence caused 30 years social strife for disabled and non-disabled people alike.

Hill and Hansen (2011) explained that the Troubles disrupted social infrastructure that affected the daily life of disabled people trying to navigate bombed roads, strict parking violations due to fear of car bombs, and difficulty fleeing during bombings, due to hearing, mobility, and visual impairments. This led to pervasive social isolation of disabled people, who were forced to become isolated, infantilized, and dependent on others, while trapped in their homes, and unable to access transport. During the Troubles, disability support workers attempting to help people were also attacked or ambushed, due to Northern Irish hypervigilance about outsiders. People with hearing or mobility impairments experienced verbal taunting, or were physically attacked at checkpoints, when trying to communicate with state forces. Disabled people continue to struggle to this day in NI while the peace process has been based on ableist values (Byrne et al. 2017). The common feeling amongst the larger nondisabled population is that disabled people are vulnerable and in need of charity, care and protection as the medical model functional limitations approach remains dominant (Flaherty & Hansen 2015). The social model in NI is key to reconciliation and emancipation for people with disabilities. Disabled people's voices must be part of the remembering processes of conflict and social breakdown, for inclusive reconciliation to occur within the post-peace accord period (Brichtova 1998, cited in Hill & Hansen 2011).

3.3 Inclusion

Historically, there are parallels as both groups were disadvantaged, and stereotyped, and suffered from post-traumatic stress as a result of the violence that faces them daily. Little is known on the intersection of disability and the NI conflict (Hill & Hansen 2011; Kerr 2013; Flaherty & Hansen 2015) and similarly, very little is known on LGBTQIA+ perspectives of the NI conflict (Curtis 2014; Hoewer 2014; Livingston 2003). Current efforts in this regard are relatively tokenistic and there is no serious consideration around centralizing disability and LGBTQIA+ issues in structural and social engagement. This lack of effort sustains normative perceptions of peacebuilding that excludes disability, sexuality, and gender diverse experiences at the fore, and results in very little substantial change towards disability and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Inclusion of these perspectives means that a peacebuilding process is inclusive and diverse as well as promoting the notion of peace to finally provide some political and legal considerations to marginalized and underrepresented groups.

In NI, equality discourses emerged in the 1990s. Disability, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity have begun to be discussed instead of a hyperfocus on

134

nationalist and religious ideologies. This shift in values were integrated in the 1998 GFA. The NI Act includes Section 75, which is a statutory requirement to care for people within nine categories. These categories include disabled and non-disabled people, age, gender, religious belief, political opinion, people of diverse sexual orientations, married or unmarried people, people with dependents or not and ethnic origin. While these political changes are fundamental to peacebuilding, a nuanced understanding of how these changes are actually making an impact on LGBTQIA+ and disabled peoples' lives is necessary to understand if the GFA is building peace and equity for these communities.

4. Methods

This research project remaps NIs social and political post-peace accord landscape by exploring and centralizing the perceptions and experiences of people from both disability and LGBTQIA+ backgrounds. The research questions for this study were: 1) How do LGBTQIA+ people and disabled people envision life in post-peace accord NI? 2) What does the peace accord and recent developments around the pandemic and Brexit mean to both communities? The research aims were to: 1) gain an understanding of minority perspectives and experiences on peacebuilding processes and 2) create new knowledge around peacebuilding processes in NI and its effects on minority communities.

Qualitative data was generated through semi-structured, in person, interviews with LGBTQIA+, disabled, or ally activists, politicians, community leaders, and adult educators from September-December 2022 in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. The method of in-depth interviewing used in this research is semi-structured or focused interviewing (Bogdan & Biklin 2006). Semi-structured interviews allowed us to be flexible and adjust to the insights and experiences being shared with us, seeking clarification when necessary and probing to understand the participants' realities. We contacted the organizations directly to disseminate our study poster, and individuals (clients or staff) reached out to us if they chose to participate in the study. There was no renumeration provided to the study participants, thus increasing the likelihood of trustworthiness and commitment to the research.

The questions were centred around participants'experiences during the creation or aftermath of the NI Protocol, the impact of Brexit, and their LGBTQIA+ or disabled identity and experiences. As we demonstrate below, some participants identified as both having a disability and being LGBTQIA+ and expressed a sense of exclusion from the peace process due to these identities, which underpins the importance of exploring intersectional experiences. Some participants were too young to reflect on the Protocol, and so spoke more broadly about their familial experiences with the conflict and its impact, electing to concentrate a greater amount of the interview on Brexit. Other participants who

lived through the Troubles described their experiences with paramilitary police, raids, and other forms of violence. This diversity enriched the study to allow for a more comprehensive and intergenerational understanding of the problem.

5. Data

We recruited 15 participants from a wide range of gender, sexuality, and disability backgrounds (Table 1). These interviews and group sessions were conducted either in-person in Northern Ireland or virtually. The participants were diverse in the sense of ranging from rural and urban backgrounds, careers (community workers, organizational leaders, politicians, civil servants, unemployed), age differences, and various religious and non-denominational backgrounds.

Table 1: Participant demographic

Participant	Gender Identification	Sexuality	Dis/Ability
James	Cisgender Man	Gay	Disabled
Aiden	Cisgender Man	Gay	Non-Disabled
Emilia	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Erin	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Andrew	Cisgender Man	Gay	Disabled
Ailbhe	Non-Binary	Bisexual	Disabled
Cathleen	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled
Alistair	Cisgender Man	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled
Bridget	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Caitlin	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Ethan	Cisgender Man	Gay	Non-Disabled
Nicola	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled
Roberta	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Disabled
Saraid	Cisgender Woman	Queer	Non-Disabled
Sheila	Cisgender Woman	Heterosexual	Non-Disabled

Source: Own research and data.

As we read through the interviews, we coded the texts, such as coding evidence of different understandings of conflicts, as a means to identify recurring concepts. Codes were then organized into categories, such as expressions of risk and safety, to enhance data organization and interpretation and to develop themes from them, such as changed understandings of identity or inclusion (Bogdan & Biklin 2006).

6. Findings

136

From the list of dominant codes emerged four distinct themes in the data: (1) frustration, (2) targeting, (3) appreciation for diversity, and (4) community education. Each are explained below, with sub-themes offered to enhance analysis.

6.1 Frustration

Frustration became a dominant theme for nine participants. Frustration means there was expression of sadness towards ongoing LGBTQIA+ and disabled persecution, shame that queerphobia and ableism continues in NI, embarrassment that NI has not progressed beyond the Troubles and therefore continues to negatively attract international attention, and complications caused by political stalemates, Brexit and the cost-of-living crisis. For example, James shared, "It is a shame to feel like it's [social exclusion caused by Brexit] still there. It's [poor treatment towards LGBTQIA+ people] still happens." In contrast Aiden believed that the legacy of the Troubles looms over the current peacebuilding process as the conflict is framed within an ethnonational narrative:

> But my generation, which is the majority of my generation who weren't involved, don't have any connection to it and want to move on. When someone brings up the Troubles, a lot people just stop listening. My whole life has been surrounded by the Troubles. Why are we still talking about it? Why can't we just move on?

Aiden went onto say that the Conservative government's legislation and policies don't protect NI's LGBTQIA+ community because the Tories aren't compassionate or understand the real needs of the community:

> I don't trust a Conservative government led by a TERF [Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist] to make sure my community are safe under law. A lot of people think that if you pass a bit of law that protects LGB people, then that's great. We can start working on it to get the T involved, get the Q involves get the I and A involved. But actually, while that legislation doesn't protect us all, that's really dangerous for all of us, mostly for those who it doesn't protect at all.

The Conservative government's withdrawal from the E.U. has negatively impacted marginalized communities and has undermined the GFA. Ethan highlighted the need to both protect and reform the GFA:

> In relation to Brexit and the Northern Ireland protocol, we must protect the Good Friday Agreement. That is true, but why can't it be updated? Whether they don't see why isn't essentially reviewed and updated to some degree, because it was a mechanism at the time to bring peace and stability.

The GFA is not a finality to the conflict as it is a living organic document. In contrast, Cathleen's narrative focused on how the DUP's actions are maintaining divisions in society. She noted that, "It's become "them" and "us." I keep on talking like I hate DUP, that's because I hate the DUP." The DUP's refusal to take part in the powersharing executive is negatively impacting marginalized communities that need access to government resources.

6.2 Targeting

All participants reflected on the Troubles and how their first-hand or second-hand experiences emerged from the Troubles, such as neighbours raising children who lost parents, violence and harassment towards Catholics or Protestants, and parents choosing to stay neutral during the Troubles. All participants expressed a deep social connection to the Troubles in some way, suggesting the conflict influenced their way of life (c.f. Byrne et al. 2017 for similar reflections). Perhaps the most troublesome finding is how LGBTQIA+ and disabled people continue to be systemically and socially targeted, through purposive policy and legal exclusion or through violence. Nine participants described how LGBTQIA+ and disabled persons are being targeted for violence. The lack of political commitment to advance respectful treatment for LGBTQIA+ and disabled persons during and after the peace process may have permitted continued targeting of them, which we argue is rooted in queerphobia and ableism.

The GFA may indeed have equality provisions, but that has not led to a culture shift towards inclusion, resulting in ongoing violence towards disabled and LGBTQIA+ people. This violence is largely based on value and social differences that view both groups as outsiders and inferior. Aiden, in describing his life as a gay politician, noted that he was trolled and gaslighted by people attacking his political party:

> I got sort of attacked online by Loyalists, which was quite significant and very, very public. There hasn't come up to the same degree for any other LGBT reps. I think for me, it was very much like, we can attack his party through him because he's such a high profile. Well, here we can use this gay man as a scapegoat.

Drawing on Crenshaw (2012), an intersectional analysis could suggest that Aiden's sexuality is violating patriarchal, heterocentric rules for political spaces (Foucault 1977). Loyalist colonial power only allows white, heterosexual Loyalist men to hold political and gender power, and that a white, gay politician with a Loyalist background is violating the rules of both Loyalism, race, and patriarchy, and therefore should be punished and excluded as an exercise of power (Foucault 2010).

137

Ailbhe articulated how the instabilities created by COVID-19 created spaces for ableists and queerphobes to attack disabled and transgender people.

138

> I would say been disabled more so and more so in the last couple of years, especially with the pandemic has been concerning, and obviously coming out as queer, or you know, genderqueer, gender variant is scary, and you don't know how people are going to react. And sometimes people are very good at keeping those kinds of homophobic/transphobic opinions to themselves until you're in their face.

Crenshaw (2012) writes that intersecting identities vary in society in terms of power and advantages. For Ailbhe, being a disabled, gender variant, queer person, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, meant they received less opportunies for power and advantage, given that both their workplace and Northern Ireland's colonial, patriarchal society tendcrensh to preserve power and advantage for able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual identities who may more easily request and be granted remote work opportunities. The nature of Ailbhe's disabilities physically required remote work, causing Ailbhe to challenge normative human resources systems to receive work accomodations during the pandemic.

That said, Bridget mentioned how the double minority status of being a political and disabled minority allowed online ableists to post virulent hateful messages targeting disabled people:

> It's like double disadvantage if you're coming from a minority community within a minority community [Unionist Community]. I've seen some of the stuff that has been posted [online] and it's horrific. They're basically being told they're not worthy, and question why you communicate and what you know, what do you think you have to contribute to society to the point that disabled people actually posted everything that they had contributed and their life. That's a terrible situation where someone feels they have to justify their very existence.

Further, Brexit has fueled social divisiveness, with 13 participants commenting how this has led to financial insecurities for LGBTQIA+ and disabled peoples. Brexit functions as a form of structural violence in the data, where those most vulnerable are feeling increasingly isolated and with diminished support. There is little responsive leadership to address their concerns. Without access to E.U. grants and a broader E.U. market, the cost-of-living crisis largely connected to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a current political paralysis in Stormont, there is greater reliance on Westminster to fund crucial support programs and health care. For example, Ailbhe shared that it takes five years to receive gender affirming care, and Saraid discussed ongoing barriers to abortion access. While there has been some investment from Westminster to supplement loss of the E.U. funds, this dependency is not unproblematic given the political and military history in the region. Alistair noted that the political challenges in forming the

powersharing executive has complexified issues for marginalized communities in NI:

> I would say political tension, lack of government and some economic, just complexities, and obstacles around the provision of goods are the three things you would really notice on a day-to-day basis. But those who are quite serious because it can't get the government back up at all.

Participants who are more familiar with LGBTQIA+ realities often commented on pervasive queerphobia, and participants who are more familiar with disabled people were fluent on discriminatory and hateful practices towards disabled people. Participants with multiple marginalizations were able to fluidly shift their discussions between ability, sexuality, and gender differences throughout our interviews. For example, nine participants discussed systemic sexism such as the continued political exclusion of women and the fear of misogynistic and transmisogynistic violence. A broader understanding of social and systemic exclusion was commonly expressed among all participants, but perhaps most deeply articulated by those participants who are members of either the LGBTQIA+ or disability communities, particularly disabled women.

6.3 Appreciation for Diversity

Fourteen participants highlighted that diversity is a cornerstone to social development and peace dialogue, and this realization is lacking among political leaders in NI. This theme included participants' historical or contemporary connections to a broader social diversity (race, class, religion) in addition to discussions about ability, sexuality, or gender identity. This appreciation led to participant reflections on inclusive practices and broader conversations about how addressing queerphobia and ableism are part of a larger peace movement. For example, Nicola articulated that many newcomer communities as well as the LGBTQIA+ and disabled communities are diversifying the cultural and political landscape, thus challenging the ethnonational identity framing of the conflict.

> In contrast what has happened is that NI is a more outward looking place and is getting more diverse populations including LGBTQIA+ and disabled people. There is more to life than the sectarian and ethnic divide […]. An inclusive peace accord must continue to engage underrepresented groups.

Similarly, Alistair noted that certain political groups hijack identity politics for their own particular political agenda:

> I certainly had more conversations in recent years, arising from the question of use of pronouns and things like that. I think we're in a situation where it's hard because what's

transphobic on one side is usually the retort is this is legitimate conversation on the other side. So it's always creates a complex environment.

140

The diversity of cultures and identities has created a new political climate that is creating new conversations and a healthy political discourse that is not solely encapsulated within divisive ethnonationalist rhetoric and politics.

6.4 Community Education

Twelve participants highlighted, in some part, how community education has both improved their sociopolitical situations or community organizations, or, at least, has demonstrated some potential for change. Education in this context means queer or disability education, awareness, and dialogue for the broader NI community. Participants, particularly those from an older generation, commented how education has led to important changes over time, whereas participants from a younger generation shared how community education has historically benefitted them, and seek to continue this strategy for social transformation.

James avowed that disability and queer education would broaden the public's awareness of the issues impacting the communities and make them more understanding and compassionate about their needs:

> It would be really nice if more teaching and education and awareness was made necessary or made available to people. Just to broaden their awareness and make them a bit more considerate, or that where it can sometimes feel like the idea of both disability and queer identity are still very foreign or not thought of by people who aren't affected by them.

Caitlin was also of the opinion that the COVID pandemic had made it possible for the public to become more aware of disabled citizens and their needs but governmental institutions need to do more to include disabled people:

> I think it's government bodies, organizations and companies that need more an understanding of disabilities. […] But I think the like of COVID has maybe had a bit of a better understanding for people because of COVID because of lockdown.

Alternatively, Roberta averred that religious communities either supported or prevented the LGBTQIA+ and disability rights communities from advocating for social change:

> Thankfully, within the Catholic community, they're a bit more open. I think religion played a key role in gay rights here in Northern Ireland and of disabilities. The disabled community would have been seen as very much I think third class or fourth class citizens or even being disabled myself. I think we do still get treated as second class citizens.

Overall, the data suggested that more change is needed to advance disability and LGBTQIA+ rights and advocated for integrated education from a young age. The struggle for social justice is supported by most of the younger generation many of whom have rejected the dominant ethnonationalist narrative in exchange for a narrative centred around pluralism and respect.

141

7. Conclusion

The GFA has not significantly implemented disability and LGBTQIA+ rights or inclusion, which Brexit reconfirmed from its onset. Brexit has escalated the NI conflict and intensified sectarian relationships as progressive politics becomes marginalized by a hyperfocus on ethnonationalist politics. According to our data, queerphobia and ableism has limited disabled and LGBTQIA+ people's sense of belonging and increased their lack of security as they continue to deal with stress. Interpersonal and structural violence target disabled and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Whereas there may be have been some optimism for peace as a result of the GFA, for our study participants, social peace and equity remains an elusive concept. Perhaps the potency of this research is how intersectionality cuts across different identities, thus creating spaces for social activists to challenge heterocisnormative, ableist, sexist/misogynist, transmisogynist, and sectarian discourse and patriarchal structures and work for all genders. Marginalized communities, in collaboration with each other, have crucial and critical insights and perspectives of how peacebuilding affects their everyday living. Their political inclusion and insights will undoubtedly build a sustainably equitable, diverse, peaceful and inclusive society in NI.

References

Allen, L., Cowie, L. & Fenaughty, J., 2020. Safe But Not Safe: LGBTTIQA+ Students' Experiences of a University Campus. *Higher Education Research & Development* 39 (6), 1075–1090.

Breitenbach, E., 2004. *Researching Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Northern Ireland*. OFMDFM Equality Directorate, Belfast, https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.577.9218&rep=rep1&type=pdf (accessed 12 May 2023).

Bogdan, R. C. & Biklin, S. K., 2006. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theories and Methods*. Pearson, New Delhi.

Bryan, D., 2015. Parades, Flags, Carnivals, and Riots: Public Space, Contestation, and Transformation in Northern Ireland. *American Psychological Association* 21 (4), 565–573.

Byrne, S., Mizzi, R. C. & Hansen, N., 2017. Living in a Liminal Peace: Where Is the Social Justice for LGBTQ and Disability Communities Living in Post Peace Accord Northern Ireland? *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 27 (1), 24–51.

Byrne, S., Hansen, N., Mizzi, R. & Sheppard-Luangkhot, T., 2022. Economic Aid, Marginalization, and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* 10 (1), 287–304.

Cochrane, F., 2020. *Breaking Peace: Brexit and Northern Ireland*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

142

Collins, P. H., 2019. Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas. *Annual Review of Sociology* 41, 1–20, DOI: 10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142.

Crenshaw, K., 1993. Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6), 1241–1299.

Crenshaw, K., 2012. Thinking Intersectionality about Women, Race, and Social Control. *UCLA Law Review* 59, 1418–1472.

Curtis, J., 2014. LGBT Advocacy in Northern Ireland. Allegra Lab, November 2014, http://allegralaboratory.net/lgbt-advocacy-in-northern-ireland (accessed 12 May 2023).

Doyle, J. & Connolly, E., 2019. The Effects of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. In C. A. Baciu & J. Doyle (eds.) *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities*. Springer, Berlin, 79–95.

Flaherty, M. & Hansen, N., 2015. (Dis)ability, Gender, and Peacebuilding: Natural Absences Present but Invisible. In M. Flaherty, S. Byrne, T. Maytok & H. Tuso (eds.) *Gender and Peacebuilding: All Hands Required*. Lexington, Lanham (MD), 375–389.

Foucault, M., 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage, New York.

Foucault, M., 2010. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison. In P. Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader*. Vintage, New York, 188–205.

Galligan, Y., 2019. Brexit, Gender and Northern Ireland. In M. Dustin, N. Ferreira & S. Millns (eds.) *Gender and Queer Perspectives on Brexit*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 363–385.

Goldie, R. & Murphy, J., 2015. Belfast Beyond Violence: Flagging Up a Challenge to Local Government? *Local Government Studies* 41 (3), 470–488.

Hancock, L. E., 2017. Agency and Peacebuilding: The Promise of Local Zones of Peace. *Peacebuilding* 5 (3), 255–269.

Handrahan, L., 2004. Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction. *Security Dialogue* 35 (4), 429–445.

Harvey, C., 2020. The Irish Border. In F. Fabbrini (ed.) *The Withdrawal Agreement*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 148–168.

Hill, M. & Hansen, N., 2011. Disability and Conflict: Untold Stories from the North of Ireland. In T. Matyok, J. Senehi & S. Byrne (eds.) *Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy*. Lexington Books, Lanham (MD), 97–114.

Hoewer, M., 2014. *Crossing Boundaries During Peace and Conflict: Transforming Identity in Chiapas and in Northern Ireland.* Palgrave MacMillan, New York.

Hyde, J. & Byrne, S., 2015. Hybrid Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties: The Impact of the International Fund for Ireland and European Union's Peace III Fund. *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution* 3 (2), 93–115.

Kerr, S., 2013. Disability and Conflict: Exploring How the Peace Process in Northern Ireland Assesses and Addresses the Needs of Persons with Disabilities. *Disability and Society* 28 (6), 826–838.

Livingston, M., 2003. Out of the "Troubles" and into Rights: Protection for Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals in Northern Ireland through Equality Legislation in the Belfast Agreement. *Fordham International Law Journal* 27 (4), 1207–1263.

MacGinty, R., 2008. *No War, No Peace: The Rejuventation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords.* Palgrave Macmillan, London, 33–57.

MacMillan, A., 2008. Non-Normative Gender and Sexual Identities in Schools, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/26728642/non-normative-gender-and-sexual-identities-in-schools-schools-out/2 (accessed 12 May 2023).

Maiangwa, B., Ndedi Essombe, C. & Byrne, S., 2022. The Banality of Infrastructural Racism Through the Lens of Peace and Conflict Studies: The Subaltern-Settler Products of Coloniality. *Peacebuilding* 10 (3), 242–264.

Marijan, B., 2017. The Politics of Everyday Peace in Bosnia Herzegovina and Northern Ireland. *Peacebuilding* 5 (1), 67–81.

Mastors, E. & Drumhiller, N., 2014. What's In a Flag? The Protestant Community's Identity, Symbols, and Protests in Belfast. *Peace & Change* 39 (4), 495–518.

McEwen, N. & Murphy, M. C., 2022. Brexit and the Union: Territorial Voice, Exit and Re-entry Strategies in Scotland and Northern Ireland After EU Exit. *International Political Science Review* 43 (3), 374–389.

McGlinchey, M., 2019. *Unfinished Business: The Politics of "Dissident" Irish Republicanism*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

McGowen, L., 2018. Maintaining Europe: The View from Northern Ireland. In M. Egan, N. Nugent & W. E. Paterson (eds.) *Preparing for Brexit: Actors, Negotiations and Consequences*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 87–107.

Mizzi, R. C., 2009. When the Down-Low Becomes the New High: Integrating Sexual Dissidence into Community Education Programs in Kosovo. In R. Hill & A. Grace (eds.) *Adult Education in Queer Contexts: Power, Politics, and Pedagogy*. Discovery Association Publishing House, Chicago, 241–253.

Mizzi, R. C. & Byrne, S., 2015. Queer Theory and Peace and Conflict Studies: Some Critical Reflections. In M. Flaherty, S. Byrne, T. Matyok & H. Tuso (eds.) *Gender and Peacebuilding*. Lexington Press, Lanham (MD), 359–374.

Senehi, J., Scott, I. M., Byrne, S. & Matyok, T. G. (eds.), 2023. *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding and Ethnic Conflict*. Routledge, London.

Shea-Irvine, R. & Hansen, N., 2019. Missing Discourses: Recognizing Disability and LGBTTQ2 in Conflict Transformation. In S. Byrne, T. Matyok, I. M. Scott & J. Senehi (eds.) *Routledge Companion to Peace and Conflict Studies*. Routledge, London, 189–200.

Yavuz, M. & Byrne, S., 2022. Violence Against the Queer Community in Turkey. *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* 30, 102–125.

Notes

[1] Queerphobia is an umbrella term that includes hatred, fear, and discomfort against all LGBTQIA+ people based on their non-normative sexualities and/or genders (Allen et al. 2020).

Acknowledgement

Cadhla O'Sullivan

Artesanos de Paz: Promoting Everyday Peacebuilding among Children and Youth through a Participatory Theatre-based Intervention in Colombia: Lessons for Northern Ireland

There is increasing attention being drawn from the literature to build peace from the ground up. Critical studies expose the inadequacies of liberal peace regimes advocating for an everyday peace in the peacebuilding regime. Peacebuilding is future orientated and thus calls for a focus on children and youth in the research. Qualitative, participatory, arts-based methods allow for creativity, hope, and change for the future. This article presents qualitative data from 75 children and youth between the ages of 7 and 18 across three urban settings in the post conflict state of Colombia, highlighting potential implications for Northern Ireland 25 years on from the Good Friday Agreement.

Keywords: children, youth, peacebuilding, performing arts, sustainability.

Artesanos de Paz: spodbujanje kolumbijskih otrok k izgradnji trajnostnega miru prek gledališkega udejstvovanja: Lekcija za Severno Irsko

Strokovna literatura vse več pozornosti namenja izgradnji miru od spodaj navzgor. Študije namreč kažejo na neustreznost liberalnih mirovnih režimov in poudarjajo pomen vzpostavljanja trajnostnega miru. Ker je izgradnja miru usmerjena v prihodnost, se morajo raziskave osredotočati zlasti na otroke in mladino. Metode, ki zajemajo aktivno sodelovanje udeležencev na umetniškem področju, spodbujajo ustvarjalnost, ponujajo upanje in omogočajo spremembe in napredek. Članek predstavlja kvalitativne podatke o 75 otrocih, starih med 7 in 18 let, iz treh urbanih okolij post-konfliktne Kolumbije. Ugotovitve so lahko pomembne tudi za Severno Irsko ob 25. obletnici sklenitve Velikonočnega sporazuma.

Ključne besede: *otroci, mladi, vzpostavljanje miru, uprizoritvene umetnosti, trajnost, Irska.*

Correspondence address: Cadhla O'Sullivan, Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, e-mail: cadhla.osullivan@anu.edu.au.

1. Introduction

Sixty percent of ethnic conflicts going through a peace process are set to re-lapse highlighting that the seeds for future violence are being produced at present (Gates et al. 2016). Thus, there is a need for research into sustainable approaches to peacebuilding in the sojourn to reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Such peacebuilding approaches have been grounded in Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace involving more than the absence of violence, and what Lederach (1995) has termed as bottom-up approaches, involving those local actors that have previously been neglected. This demonstrates the need to build sustainable peace as advocated through the bottom-up approach (Galtung 1969; Lederach 1995). This approach has been catalysed by the involvement of children and youth in peacebuilding practices and further reinforced by United Nations Resolution 2250 (2015), UN Secretary-General Report (2018), and Resolution 2535 (2020), recognising the essential role of children and youth in peacebuilding practices especially in countries like Colombia trying to transition out of a violent past.

Colombia is a country that has experienced over fifty years of conflict and is now a state in transition from conflict, following the signing of the Havana Peace Accord (2016). Colombia's Law 1732 (2014) enforced the mandatory establishment of a peace core subject in every educational institution in the country. The research has shown the disconnect in its implementation advocating for further research into the expansion of peace education with children and youth to create a culture of peace founded within the everyday and bring about sustainable peace in settings of protracted conflict (Caro 2020). Colombian children and youth have some involvement in theatre projects.

Therefore, this article extends the growing body of research that is arts-based methods for peacebuilding. Increasingly, research is demonstrating the transformative power of children and youth in building peace, challenging the dichotomy of youth as victims or preparators (Pruitt & Jeffrey 2020). Engaging children and youth through arts-based methods, allows for participatory meaningful research through the acknowledgment of their agency as actors. Valladares and Berents (2022) highlight how children and youth are mobilising in the everyday to promote peace in society. Often these acts go unnoticed for their larger societal impact. There is a need to acknowledge the active role children and youth are already playing in promoting peace in the everyday as well as the need to invest further in peace interventions with children and youth to bring about peace dividends.

The article builds upon the growing research involving children and youth in the peacebuilding process, both in the immediate post peace accord environment as well as on an ongoing basis. This research involved adopting performing arts-based methods across three disadvantaged areas of Bogotá (capital city of

Colombia) and Soacha (a neighbouring municipality to Bogotá). Consequently, this article presents the findings of a creative peace education program from both the views of the children and youth and the adult stakeholders involved, as well as the possibilities of implementing effective actions for peacebuilding through the performing arts. Young people are also neglected and excluded from the Northern Ireland peace process so the article also draws some conclusions that are relevant to youth involvement in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

1.1 Children, Youth and Peacebuilding

The literature demonstrates that a dichotomy often exists between the view of the child as a victim or perpetrator of violence (Pruitt & Jeffrey 2020). A view reinforced by youth bulge theory (McEvoy-Levy 2011). Marijan (2017) highlights a similar finding, as youth workers in Northern Ireland stated that young people are misrepresented and judged, not viewed for their possibility to contribute to the peace process but instead seen as posing a risk to it. It is this very concept that solidifies a continuation of a culture of war as the youth workers discussed the resulting lack of opportunities for youth resulting in their antisocial behaviours ultimately caused by disillusionment with the state (Marijan 2017).

On the contrary, child and youth involvement offers the best means for sustaining peace, because "a peace agreement's endurance depends on whether the next generations accept or reject it, how they are socialized during the peace process, and their perceptions of what that peace process has achieved" (McEvoy-Levy 2011, 5). Taylor (2020) highlights the future orientation of peacebuilding and calling for the involvement of children and youth in the peacebuilding agenda, allowing children and youth to be seen as part of the solution instead of contributing to the problem. That is why it is important to know the perspectives of a group of children and young people who are committed to a program of peacebuilding and reconciliation through the arts, such as *Artesanos de Paz*.

The ways children and youth contribute to building and sustaining peace are multifaceted like finding work to feed their families, looking after elderly citizens among othersand, in many cases, ignored for their contribution and impact on building sustainable peace. Ideas of local ownership, peace from the bottom up and child and youth involvement, while widely accepted in theory continues to be neglected in practice (Donais 2009). Yet, studies have and are continuing to show that children and youth play a vital part in building and maintaining peace. They may be involved politically in the peace process (McKeown & Taylor 2017). Alternatively, Taylor's (2020) Developmental Peacebuilding Model (DPM) suggests a psychosocial aspect to the involvement of children and youth in peace processes. While Berents and McEvoy-Levy (2015) promote the ways children and youth contribute to building peace in the everyday resistance they adapt in the face of adversity.

148

This intervention adapts both the DPM as well as the Everyday Peace Theory to explain how the use of theatre-based intervention can contribute to building peace in Colombia, and how the results could offer food for thought in the Northern Ireland context. Examples of child and youth involvement have been gaining traction in Northern Ireland's peace process (see Marijan 2017; McEvoy-Levy 2011; McKeown & Taylor 2017; Taylor 2022). Yet, as witnessed by newer studies mentioned below, division continues to be a problem in Northern Ireland, as Marijan (2017) found that while there may be peace, the communities of Northern Ireland remain divided. This finding relates to Mac Ginty's (2006) argument of "no war, no peace". This article aims to discuss the findings of a performing arts-based intervention in the immediate post war context of Colombia, discussing implications for Northern Ireland 25 years post peace agreement.

1.2 Performing Arts and Peacebuilding

The relationship between the arts, peacebuilding and educating for peace is established within the literature (Foy 2018; Lopes Cardozo et al. 2015; Moschou & Anaya 2016; Pruitt & Jeffrey 2020). For over fifty years, theatre and the performing arts have been used around the globe to promote peace. In the 1960s, for example, Agusto Boal founded a community theatre to give a voice to the oppressed. Peacebuilding itself, has been described as an art (Lederach 1995). Grassroots, locally produced plays, poetry, and pictures inspired and informed the formal peace process in Mozambique in the 1980s (Mitchell 2020). An increasing number of scholars are recognising the potential of the creative arts for contributing to peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes (Mitchell 2020). The performing arts have been cited as forming or transforming messages in a unique social space, where people learn through doing and may at the same time confirm or transform their identities, views on the world, and connections with others (Moschou & Anaya 2016). The arts are a potent tool for communication across psychological, emotional, and physical boundaries. The creative acts involved in the arts hold the potential to break the silence, mainstream the voices of the voiceless, and give full expression to the moral imagination of divided communities (Arai 2011).

Freire (2010) believed in the political dimension of art and aimed to unify the audience and the actors through addressing oppression with the intention of leading to greater social change (cited in Moschou & Anaya 2016). However, McGrath (1981) stated that theatre can never cause social change, it can only circulate pressure towards change, help people celebrate their strengths and build their self-confidence, above all it can be the way people find their voice, their solidarity, and their collaborative determination (cited in Burbridge & Stevenson 2020). Viewed through this lens, the arts can be seen as contributing to the peace education paradigm. Freire believed in the pedagogical aspect of

theatre (Burbridge & Stevenson 2020), promoting the idea of arts as education. This is further reinforced in the policy as UNESCO highlighted the crucial role of alternative means in peace education (Falt 2021). Learning is "intended to prepare the learners to contribute toward the achievement of peace" (Reardon 1982, 38). The parallels between theatre, pedagogy and creating a culture for peace can be seen when viewing the performing arts as giving a voice to the oppressed, providing them with a space to address the psychosocial aspects of war and conflict, and acting as a transformative space. This considered, the arts are not without its critique in its efforts to contribute to the peacebuilding field. Premaratna and Bleiker (2016) argue that the arts can be regressive as well as progressive fuelling conflict while also solving it. It is about a process to engage conflicting parties and provide a space to overcome the conflict. Adopting the use of performing arts for peacebuilding involves a slow process of building peace sustainably, it is not a quick fix often resulting in critique of this approach.

That said, research into the transformative power of the arts is needed in the current post COVID-19 climate, as studies indicate the fragility facing the arts and culture sector as well as the uncertainty of funding directed toward this sector in the future (McCallion 2020). Arts-based interventions are capable of nourishing capacities required for everyday peacebuilding. These capacities involve empowering children and youth by giving them a voice and providing them with necessary life skills to promote prosocial behaviour.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted theatre-based methods as a form of peace education, providing the children and youth the space to engage creatively with their emotions, with their communication and conflict resolution skills, to furnish them with life skills in the hope of creating a culture of peace both now and in the future. This study involved four months of ethnographic fieldwork in Colombia's capital of Bogotá. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in *Projecto de Vida* foundations located in three barrio communities on the outskirts of Bogotá-Usaquen, Cuidad Bolivar and Soacha. Qualitative data was gathered in the form of observations, notetaking, focus groups with the children and youth, informal conversations with the children and youth recorded by the researcher, as well as taking photographs and videos, and conducting semi-structured interviews with the adult stakeholders involved in the intervention. Access to the theatre teachers and researchers was granted through a memorandum of understanding between the theatre group and Konrad Lorenz University in Bogotá. Findings were produced through a process of thematic analysis (Cohen et al. 2018).

2.2 Methods and Data Generation

150

The *Artesanos de Paz* performing arts-based intervention was conducted over a nine-month period with the final show presented in April 2022. This article focuses on semi-structured interviews conducted with children, youth and adults involved in the theatre-based intervention. The theatre-based workshops were conducted three days a week across the three municipalities of Usaquen, Soacha, and Cuidad Bolivar. Toward the end of the intervention, interviews were conducted with five key adult stakeholders that included one male and one female theatre teacher, one male and one female auxiliary researcher, as well as one female foundation leader. Ethical consent was received through the bioethics committee at Konrad Lorenz University. Interviews were also completed with 20 children and youth ranging from seven to 18 years of age. Consent forms were provided to the parents of the children that were signed and returned to the foundation to allow the children to participate.

2.3 Procedure

Data was gathered three days a week over the four-month period, that is one day a week for each foundation. Each day spent in the foundation involved partaking in the theatre-based workshop and focus groups, taking photographs, videos, recording observations and taking detailed notes on the conversations and interactions with the children and young people. Semi-structured interviews with key adult stakeholders were concluded toward the cessation of the intervention. These interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The plurality of methods used and recorded allowed for the researcher to return to the data on numerous occasions, and analyse it as needed. Each stand of data was intertwined, informing, and complimenting each other rather than following a linear data analysis (Berents 2013).

2.4 Data Analysis

A process of thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the interviews. Cohen et al. (2018) argued that analysis for this type of data should involve organizing and describing the data before developing an understanding of the participants perspectives by noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities. The data analysis involved reflecting on the data, listening to the interview recordings, transcribing, and making notes on emergent themes. An inductive approach was utilized by the researcher when analyzing this data. This approach aims to generate meanings from the data set collected to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory (Creswell & Creswell 2017). This path is closely aligned with qualitative and interpretive methods, as is the intention of this research design. It involved making specific observations throughout the fieldwork to identify

recurring themes and patterns, as well as listening, transcribing, and making detailed notes of the interviews conducted in a process of identifying recurring themes. A process of manual thematic analysis (Cohen et al. 2018) was adopted, to identify emerging themes as well as the clustering of themes and subthemes. Initially, preliminary themes were decided upon and grouped into a table format, before deciding on final themes relating to peace.

151

3. Results and Discussion

This study investigates the role of the performing arts for peace education in Colombia, which can provide useful insights for the Northern Ireland context. Qualitative analysis revealed a perspective of theatre as a form of peace education, shifting the narrative from those formal practices often associated with traditional forms of peace education and instead advocating for what Reardon and Snauwaert (2015) highlighted as the informal sites of education. Second, the theatre workshops allowed for the emergence and further development of an everyday peace among children and youth, showcasing their resiliency and ability to navigate the challenges in their everyday lives, demonstrated by their hope for change. Finally, this study revealed implications for the contribution to the sustainable peace agenda through the engagement and empowerment of youth viewing them as active agents in the peacebuilding agenda both now and in the future.

3.1 Educating for Peace

The findings from the study highlight implications for peace education, through providing the children and youth with vital life skills and prosocial behaviour. Peace education is central to the building and sustaining of peace in countries affected by conflict and becomes further nuanced in countries emerging from conflict as highlighted by law 1732 in Colombia. Despite this, the research is demonstrating the disconnect in its implementation, highlighting the need for the expansion of peace education to include those informal sites of education as well as the expansion of the means in which we educate for peace (Bajaj 2015; Caro 2020; Reardon & Snauwaert 2015). Implementing creative means to peace education, such as *Artesanos de Paz*, in both schools and community organisations, showcases how the performing arts can be used as a vehicle for peace education. Countries such as Colombia and Northern Ireland have experienced periods of prolonged war and violence. Advances in the field of neurobiology demonstrate the intergenerational impact of such adversity on the individual so that any peacebuilding efforts need to be constantly engaged with to maintain and sustain peace in the everyday and for the future (Taylor 2022). It was evident at the beginning of this intervention that the child and youth participants presented with challenging behaviour.

152

> There are some days when I leave so completely destroyed you know. These kids have so much energy and it is difficult (Theatre teacher 2).

> Everyone comes here, and they just give up, because it is difficult, the kids can be difficult (Foundation leader 1).

Yet, the theatre provided the children and youth with an environment to transform their energy and frustrations into something powerful.

> And at the same time their enormous capacity for resilience bringing to humour his personal, family and community tragedies. That is HIS POWER to transform and not replicate in their lives the harmful (Theatre teacher 1).

The findings from this study are consistent with the literature suggesting the need to broaden the scope of research on peace education. This was evident in the sample as the children portrayed negative narratives of their schooling experience.

> We are only educated in obedience (Luis, 11, Cuidad Bolivar).

Instead, they viewed the theatre methods as giving them a space to learn skills to help them develop positive behavioral attributes in their everyday lives.

> [The theatre] is teaching us to understand ourselves. Teaching me to be the best person (Andres, 12, Cuidad Bolivar).

> The theatre is teaching me to respect my friends and family and other people, which is important to know forgiveness (Paula, 13, Cuiadad Bolivar).

> It is not necessary to truncate the cognitive training of the child […] to isolate him from a reading because it is difficult for him to read, rather we must motivate him and give him confidence so that he can practice freely in the workshops what is difficult for him (Theatre teacher 1).

Many studies suggest that often peacebuilding efforts fail because they don't provide meaningful avenues for agency by their participants (Hancock 2017). Agency, rather than just the more limited idea of local ownership, is key because it is a satisfier for a range of psychosocial needs, which include identity, dignity, role-defense, self-determination, or self-actualization (Hancock 2017).

A clear dichotomy was presented between the type of learning they were exposed to through the theatre as opposed to the learning in their schools. The children and youth were aware of the learning they were experiencing throughout the intervention, helping them to develop their prosocial skills. When comparing this to past research by Taylor (2020), it is possible to see how prosocial

behaviour as a form of peace education for children and youth with wider societal implications can be. Thus, these findings have potential implications for policy, particularly concerning peace education in post accord societies. The literature calls for the need to expand our understanding as well our acceptance of where peace education can occur, something reflected among the view of the children and youth in this study. The children and youth were aware of the learning they were experiencing about themselves and their relationships, helping them to become better people and to claim their voice, empowering them, and allowing them to claim their agency resonating with Reardon and Snauwaert's (2015) theory of peace education as human rights education.

3.2 Everyday Peace

This findings from this study supported previous research advocating for an understanding of peace located in the everyday (Berents 2013; Mac Ginty 2021). The findings demonstrated the children and youth's ability to acknowledge the everyday violence in their lives but contest them and hope for better in the future, highlighting ways children and youth are already engaging in peacebuilding processes. The children and youth emersed themselves in a process of change and transformation, often feeling shy but engaged none the less to inspire change in their surroundings.

> The children found in very difficult to speak at the start because they live in an environment where they don't speak much (Theatre teacher 1).
>
> Laura, she was too shy, she would stand in the corner and even though she would come to the workshops she wouldn't partake (Theatre teacher 2).

Studies such as Berents (2013), found that children in Colombia often navigate many challenges in their everyday lives, demonstrating resilience and a form of resistance to survive. This from of peace may often go neglected as it is founded in those bottom-up approaches toward peace and in the local context of their communities and foundations (Mac Ginty 2021). Parallels between Colombia and Northern Ireland can be drawn from Halliday and Ferguson (2016), as they discuss the hope amongst the young people in Northern Ireland. One youth talked about this hope being within them all stating:

> I want to be a beacon, a lighthouse, so I can save all the others (Ruis, 15, Soacha).

Yet it is important to note the perils of finding a state of contentment with everyday peace, especially in the context of the in betweenness of war to peace (Marijan 2017). While it is important to acknowledge everyday peace in a post accord

154

context, the question of quality must be addressed. Marijan (2017) discusses participant comments stating, "we live in peace, but we live apart." An outlook of everyday peace could be founded in this comment, yet it brings into question the meaning of true peace or an inclusive peace (Taylor 2022), whereby integration occurs, and peace can be sustainable. As argued by Marijan (2017) everyday divisions can be interpreted as peaceful but are they truly transformative and that is where the theatre can come in. Again, similarities can be drawn between the two contexts as the child and youth participants in the Colombian study voiced their frustration with their surroundings and the levels of inequality and corruption present in their lives.

> There is a lot of violence in our community, and sometimes I am scared (Janet, 10, Soacha).
>
> You know us youth, here, we have a lot of problems, no water, drugs, sexual abuse, drinking and violence (Christopher, 12, Cuidad Bolivar).
>
> The police they are corrupt in this country, but is that ok, what can we do about it? (Jon, 12, Cuidad Bolivar).

These reflections from the children and youth bring into question the durability of the current state of peace. The natural optimism and hope present within children and youth needs to be listened to, invested in, and encouraged otherwise there is a risk that they too become disillusioned with the process and resort to disengaging with the peace process.

3.3 Sustainable Peace

This article addresses the topic of sustainable peace, engaging with the literature that necessitated children and youth's involvement in bottom-up peacebuilding approaches. Previous research has suggested that the post accord generation are in a key position to carry forward the sustainable peace agenda (Taylor 2020). Despite the post accord branding of children and youth in Colombia, the findings demonstrate that they are still facing the repercussions of a tumultuous past. Studies in Northern Ireland showcase similar findings (Marijan 2017; McKeown & Taylor 2017). This demonstrates the need for continuing forms of peace education in Northern Ireland, as stated by Taylor (2022) because war that last decades takes decades to heal.

> You can see the change in them, and you want to help the change and maybe in 15 years […] I hope they will have the memories and they will be strong, because theatre is a long process, but I hope it will stay with them. […] we can see the change without own eyes (Theatre teacher 1).

> The problems that these kids have – we cannot solve these problems overnight – it is a process (Theatre teacher 2).

> Time is a great healer (Anna, 15, Usaquen).

155

Previous research has suggested that in a post accord society the everyday violence's of poverty, drug abuse, sexual violence, and lack of infrastructure remain evident threatening the longevity of peace (Scheper-Hughes & Borgois 2004). It is necessary to engage all members of society including those most marginalised to achieve long lasting peace (Lederach 1997), and to find ways that allow these members to address and challenges the status quo as suggested previously in the findings. This considered, Donais (2009) argues that local perspectives are more often viewed as hurdles to be overcome or obstacles to be avoided than as potential sources of sustainable solutions, becoming further complicated when involving children and youth. This perspective needs to be challenged for sustainable peacebuilding to be fully implemented.

The study addressed the topic of sustainable peace in two ways. First, it engaged in bottom-up approaches with children and youth, acknowledging them as key actors in the peace process. The findings showcase the ability of the theatre to create a safe space for the children and youth to claim their voice and know they were being listened to and respected. These findings demonstrate important implications for the implementation of the United Nations peace agenda, highlighting that sustainable peace is only possible if children are provided with a safe space promoting their agency and respecting their decision-making abilities. Moreover, this study supports previous research which claims that young people's exclusion from negotiated peace processes is therefore counterproductive to sustaining peace, since the frustration associated with this exclusion is "one of the principal reasons groups resorts to violence and protests" (Paffenholz 2015, 1). Youth are transgenerational guarantors of the durability and transformative potential of peace agreements and the arts can be a favourable factor in this sense as art can be fundamental for a transformative education, not only in academics, but also in socioemotional aspects, since it favours people to see the world in new ways, and it also contributes to the development of empathy and compassion, as well as facilitating the expression of deep feelings (Chapman & O'Gorman 2022). Others also suggest that arts-based interventions can favour the development of emotional self-regulation (Williams et al. 2020).

Second, this study sought to build the prosocial peaceful behavior of its participants. The findings indicate the positive developments in the sample's behavior from both the narratives of the children and the adult stakeholders.

> What we have learned […] that helps us to become better people (Christopher, 9, Cuidad Bolivar).

The theatre has helped me to talk about pain in a positive way (Sophie, 9, Soacha).

I have more respect for my friends and my family […] I learned to put myself in their shoes from the theatre classes (Anna, 15, Usaquen).

You can see the change in them, and you want to help the change and maybe in 15 years […] I hope they will have the memories and they will be strong, because theatre is a long process, but I hope it will stay with them. […] we can see the change with our own eyes (Theatre teacher 1).

This study empowered children and youth, providing them with skills that better allowed them to manage emotions, dream of better futures, and challenge the sites of everyday adversity in their lives. This study demonstrated the ability of children and youth to address and challenge the injustices in their environment, while providing them with the necessary skills to deal with this in creative ways which can contribute to building sustainable peace. This is consistent with the literature which suggests that the development of children and youth's prosocial behavior on the micro level can have wider societal impact and thus contribute to sustainable peace (Taylor 2020). This finding has important implications for the Northern Ireland context, as the theme of issues remaining unresolved and festering 25 years on is ongoing.

As argued by Wallis (2017), relative peace is not enough. For peace to be truly sustainable attitudes and legacy of the past also need to be dealt with more effectively than is currently the case. More time is needed for old wounds to heal and reconciliation to take place, as found in Marijan's (2017) research, participants stated that it would be difficult to change perceptions in one generation, with their belief that it would not happen in 30–40 years. These perceptions then contribute to the sense of what one local community worker describes as an "interim peace" and constant worry about how long this peace will last (Marijan 2017). This study has demonstrated the power of the arts for its contribution to peace education, which is vital in the current post COVID19 climate that has witnessed considerable funding cuts to this sector (McCallion 2020).

A limitation of this study is its lack of ability to test the longitudinal impact of such an intervention. Such a limitation relates to critique of performing arts in peace education, as it is future focused and necessitate process (Taylor & Lederach 2014). Therefore, immediate effects for peacebuilding cannot be guaranteed. Yet Donais (2009) highlights the preoccupation of peacebuilding outcomes advocating instead for peacebuilding processes. In other words, the goal of peacebuilding should not be simply to erect the central institutional pillars of a liberal democratic state as rapidly as possible in the aftermath of conflict, but rather to ensure that these pillars rest upon solid foundations, are adjusted to local conditions, and develop not only through a genuine and collaborative partnership with war-affected communities, but also in ways that are supportive of the broader goals of sustainable peace (Donais 2009; Taylor & Lederach 2014).

4. Conclusion

The topic of peace remains ambiguous and multifaceted. The importance of the local in each context proven by the imminent failings of the neoliberal peacebuilding approach. This research has highlighted implications for peacebuilding and peacekeeping using creative arts-based methods. However, Donais (2009) writes that to be sustainable, post-conflict settlements must be firmly rooted in domestic social realities. Therefore, while lessons can be taken from this research it does not seek to reach an unambiguous or definitive solution to building and sustaining peace. Further, no amount of training or institutional development will produce positive results where domestic actors are not really interested in changing the status quo. Each war context and pathway to peace is different. Yet, there are lessons to be learned that should be applied in any peace pathway and that is the agency of children and youth, as they continue to be an underexploited peace resource. Their contribution to peacebuilding regimes has been proven in a range of contexts throughout the globe and in this research's findings. As shown in this study a combination of empowering children and youth to claim their agency, acknowledging their contribution to everyday peace and investing in creative means of peace education in both education and community facilities is needed for children and youth to be meaningfully engaged in peacebuilding processes.

As demonstrated in both theory and practice, the psychological impact of war and violence remains deeply entrenched in a population. Therefore, parallels can be drawn between Colombia and Northern Ireland, both states suffering through decades of internal conflict. Taylor (2022) draws attention to the fact that generations of war take generations to heal, and this needs to be considered in the context of Northern Ireland despite it now entering its 25th year anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA). The research based in Northern Ireland, as well as the tensions that arise in news reports every year, demonstrate the fragility of peace in any post accord milieu.

As an international community, we continue to make mistakes when approaching the topic of peace. New and continued wars remain an imminent threat, with old wars threatening to relapse with mounting tensions (Gates et al. 2016). Yet rather than adopting a what works approach much of the literature remains focused on what has failed in peacebuilding efforts (Donais 2009). Colombia is in the early stages of forging a pathway to peace compared to the Northern Ireland context that now finds itself 25 years down the road of a post peace agreement. Therefore, it remains an impossible task to foresee the path that Colombia will take to peace. This considered, the involvement of children and youth in building and sustaining peace is an essential component of this journey and is becoming better established within the research and literature, offering potential learnings to the context of Northern Ireland.

157

158

While this series focuses on the successful 25-year anniversary of the GFA, it is evident that tensions still exist across Northern Ireland (Marijan 2017). Adding to this, Northern Ireland is no longer split between a Catholic/Protestant divide, but now hosts a multitude of cultures and ethnicities. Therefore, peace education efforts need to be ongoing to deal with the structural root causes of violence that continue to permeate the generations, as well as the new tensions that could arise. If we are to see another 25-year anniversary of the GFA, time and investment will have to be directed toward children and youth with their ongoing and potential contribution to the success of peacebuilding more widely acknowledged.

References

Arai, T., 2011. Afterword: Reflecting on the Intersection of Art and Peacebuilding. In C. Cohen, R. G. Varea & P. O. Walker (eds.) *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict (Vol. II)*. New Village Press, Oakland (CA), 235–238.

Bajaj, M., 2015. Pedagogies of Resistance and Critical Peace Education Praxis. *Journal of Peace Education* 12 (2), 154–166.

Berents, H., 2013. *From the Margins: Conflict-Affected Young People, Social Exclusion, and an Embodied Everyday Peace in Colombia*. Doctoral Dissertation. School of Political Science and International Studies, The University of Queensland, https://www.academia.edu/5090204/From_the_Margins_Conflict_Affected_Young_People_Social_Exclusion_and_an_Embodied_Everyday_Peace_in_Colombia (accessed 8 June 2023).

Berents, H. & McEvoy-Levy, S., 2015. Theorising Youth and Everyday Peace(Building). *Peacebuilding* 3 (2), 115–125.

Burbridge, P. & Stevenson, G., 2020. Peacebuilding and the Theatre Arts. In J. Mitchell, G. Vincett, T. Hawksley & H. Culbertson (eds.) *Peacebuilding and the Arts*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 375–393.

Caro, M. R., 2020. *Developing Peace Education in Colombia: A Qualitative Enquiry of School Practice.* Doctoral Dissertation. University of Manchester, https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/173346930/FULL_TEXT.PDF (accessed 7 November 2021).

Chapman, S. N. & O'Gorman, L., 2022. Transforming Learning Environments in Early Childhood Contexts through the Arts: Responding to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. *International Journal of Early Childhood* 54, 33–50, DOI: 10.1007/s13158-022-00320-3.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2018. *Research Methods in Education*. Routledge, London.

Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D., 2017. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage, Thousand Oaks (CA).

Donais, T., 2009. Empowerment or Imposition? Dilemmas of Local Ownership in Post Conflict Peacebuilding Processes. *Peace and Change* 34 (1), 3–26.

Falt, E., 2021. Placing Peace at the Heart of Education. UNESCO, https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/placing-peace-heart-education (accessed 8 June 2021).

Foy, S. H., 2018. *Toward the Heart and Art of Peacebuilding: The Role of Engaged Theatre in Post-Conflict Transition in Northern Ireland*. Master's Dissertation. Trinity College Dublin, School of Religions, Theology & Ecumenics. Irish School of Ecumenics, http://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/85196 (accessed 7 January 2023).

Galtung, J., 1969. Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research* 6 (3), 167–191.

Gates, S., Nygård, H. M. & Trappeniers, E., 2016. Conflict Recurrence. *Conflict Trends* 2, Peace Research Institute Oslo, https://www.prio.org/publications/9056 (accessed 8 June 2023).

Halliday, D. & Ferguson, N., 2016. When Peace Is Not Enough: The Flag Protests, the Politics of Identity & Belonging in East Belfast. *Irish Political Studies* 31(4), 525–540.

Hancock, L. E., 2017. Agency and Peacebuilding: The Promise of Local Zones of Peace. *Peacebuilding* 5 (3), 255–269.

Lederach, J. P., 1995. Conflict Transformation in Protracted Internal Conflicts: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework. In K. Rupesinghe (ed.) *Conflict Transformation*. St. Martin's Press, New York (NY), 201–222.

Lederach, J. P., 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington (DC).

Lopes Cardozo, M. T., Higgins, S., Maber, E., Brandt, C. O., Kusmallah, N. & Le Mat, M. L., 2015. *Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding, and Education*. Research Consortium Education and Peacebuilding, University of Amsterdam, http://learningforpeace. unicef. org/wpcontent/uploads/2015/05/Youth-Literature-Review-May15. pdf (accessed 2 April 2013).

Mac Ginty, R., 2006. *No War No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords.* Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Mac Ginty, R., 2021. *Everyday Peace: How So-Called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict.* Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Marijan, B., 2017. The Politics of Everyday Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland. *Peacebuilding* 5 (1), 67–81.

McCallion, K., 2020. *Impact of COVID-19 on Arts and Culture in Northern Ireland* (Research and Information Service, Research Paper). Northern Ireland Assembly, http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2017–2022/2020/communities/8320.pdf (accessed 6 November 2022].

McEvoy-Levy, S., 2011. Children, Youth, and Peacebuilding. In T. Matyok, J. Senehi & S. Byrne (eds.) *Critical Issues in Peace and Conflict Studies: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy*. Lexington, Lanham (MD), 159–176.

McKeown, S. & Taylor, L. K., 2017. Intergroup Contact and Peacebuilding: Promoting Youth Civic Engagement in Northern Ireland. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 5, 415–434.

Mitchell, J., 2020. Peacebuilding through the Visual Arts. In J. Mitchell, G. Vincett, T. Hawksley & H. Culbertson (eds.) *Peacebuilding and the Arts*. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 35–70.

Moschou, C. & Anaya, R. R., 2016. The Formation of Citizenship through Community Theatre: A Study in Aguascalientes, Mexico. *Journal of Social Science Education* 15 (4), 22–31.

Paffenholz, T., 2015. Unpacking the Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment towards an Agenda for Future Research. *Third World Quarterly* 36 (5), 857–874.

Premaratna, N. & Bleiker, R., 2016. Arts and Theatre for Peacebuilding. In O. P. Richmond, S. Pogodda & J. Ramović (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York (NY), 82–94.

Pruitt, L. & Jeffrey, E. R., 2020. *Dancing through the Dissonance*. Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Reardon, B. A., 1982. *Militarization, Security, and Peace Education: A Guide for Concerned Citizens.* United Ministries in Education, Valley Forge (PA).

Reardon, B. A. & Snauwaert, D. T., 2015. *Betty A. Reardon: A Pioneer in Education for Peace and Human Rights*. Springer, New York (NY).

160

Scheper-Hughes, N. & Bourgois, P. (eds.), 2004. *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*. Mountaineers Books, Seattle (WA).

Taylor, L. K., 2020. The Developmental Peacebuilding Model (DPM) of Children's Prosocial Behaviors in Settings of Intergroup Conflict. *Child Development Perspectives* 14 (3), 127–134.

Taylor, L. K., 2022. Helping Kids! Studies "Quality Peace" in Northern Ireland [Podcast]. UCD Institute for Discovery, 4 August 2022, https://www.ucd.ie/discovery/storiesofdiscovery/helpingkidsstudiesqualitypeaceinnorthernireland.html (accessed 4 August 2022].

Taylor, L. K. & Lederach, J. P., 2014. Practicing Peace: Psychological Roots of Transforming Conflicts. *Global Journal of Peace Research and Praxis* 1 (1), 12–31.

UN Secretary-General, 2018. *Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace: Report of the Secretary- General*, 18 January 2018, A/72/707-S/2018/43, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SG%20report%20on%20peacebuilding%20and%20sustaining%20peace.As%20issued.A-72-707-S-2018-43.E.pdf (accessed 13 June 2023).

United Nations, Security Council, 2015. *Resolution 2250 (2015) [on Youth, Peace, and Security]*, adopted by the Security Council at its 7573rd meeting, on 9 December 2015, S/RES/2250 (2015), https://www.refworld.org/docid/56ebfd654.html (accessed 10 November 2022).

United Nations, Security Council, 2020. *Resolution 2535 (2020), adopted by the Security Council at its 8748th meeting, on July 14, 2020*, S/RES/2535 (2020), https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/182/94/PDF/N2018294.pdf?OpenElement (accessed 8 November 2022).

Valladares, I. & Berents, H., 2022. Seeing 'Youth' Issues as Shared Issues. Australian Institute of International Affairs, 10 June 2022, https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/seeing-youth-issues-as-shared-issues/ (accessed 3 November 2022).

Wallis, J., 2017. Is 'Good Enough' Peacebuilding Good Enough? The Potential and Pitfalls of the Local Turn in Peacebuilding in Timor-Leste. *The Pacific Review* 30 (2), 251–269.

Williams, K. E., Savage, S. & Eager, R., 2020. Rhythm and Movement for Self-Regulation (RAMSR) Intervention for Preschool Self-Regulation Development in Disadvantaged Communities: A Clustered Randomised Controlled Trial Study Protocol. *British Medical Journal Open* 10 (9), 1–11. DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-036392.

Seán Byrne, Brett Mallon, Mehmet Yavuz

Civil Society Organizations, the Good Friday Agreement, and the Northern Ireland Peace Process

A qualitative methodology was used to interview 120 participants from 2010 and 29 participants from 2020 who shared their experiences and perceptions about the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and their peacebuilding work. Longitudinal findings reveal that the participants were critical of the Agreement and the disconnect between politicians and the grassroots as well as recognizing that the Agreement has brought about relative peace in Northern Ireland. While the participants attest to the relative success of the GFA, they also note several criticisms including sectarian politics, new paramilitaries, Brexit, legacy of the past, continuing divisions in Northern Ireland, and the disconnect between politicians and local community peacebuilders. The participants' criticisms are significant as they attest that while the social peace at the grassroots level is moving forward the political peace is not as evidenced by the recent Unionist backlash against Brexit.

Keywords: economic aid, civil society organizations, peacebuilding, Good Friday Agreement.

Organizacije civilne družbe, Velikonočni sporazum in severnoirski mirovni proces

Avtorji so na podlagi kvalitativne metodologije opravili intervjuje s 120 udeleženci raziskave iz leta 2010 in 29 udeleženci raziskave iz leta 2020, ki so predstavili svoje izkušnje in stališča glede Velikonočnega sporazuma ter svoje delovanje na področju vzpostavljanja miru. Ugotovitve kažejo, da so intervjuvanci kritični tako do samega sporazuma kot tudi do razkoraka med politiko in javnostjo, obenem pa se zavedajo, da je sporazum Severni Irski vendarle prinesel določeno stopnjo miru. Intervjuvanci sicer priznavajo relativni uspeh Velikonočnega sporazuma, težave pa vidijo v sektaški politiki, oblikovanju novih paravojaških enot, brexitu, dediščini preteklosti, nadaljnjih delitvah ter razkoraku med politiki in lokalnimi akterji, ki si prizadevajo za mir. Njihovi odgovori so pomembni, saj potrjujejo, da družbeni mir sicer napreduje, politični pa ne, kar dokazuje tudi nedavno nasprotovanje unionistov proti brexitu.

Ključne besede: gospodarska pomoč, organizacije civilne družbe, vzpostavitev miru, Velikonočni sporazum.

Correspondence address: Seán Byrne, Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada, e-mail: sean.byrne@umanitoba.ca; Brett Mallon, Department of Applied Human Sciences, College of Health and Human Sciences, Kansas State University, 119 Justin Hall, 1324 Lovers Ln, Manhattan, KS 66506, e-mail: bmallon@ksu.edu; Mehmet Yavuz, Arthur Mauro Institute for Peace and Justice, St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba, 70 Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2 Canada, e-mail: yavuzm3@myumanitoba.ca.

1. Introduction

Besides international actors, local people also influence the peacebuilding process through their practices (Marijan 2017). Everyday activities through which average citizens exercise their agency include "place-making, symbolic practices, and the production of competing narratives and performances" (Marijan 2017, 69). Therefore, this article explores how the leaders of Northern Ireland's Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), funded by the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) and the European Union (E.U.) Peace Fund, understand and experience the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and the larger peace process. The 1998 GFA, a multi-party agreement brokered by the British and Irish governments, and the United States (U.S.) and the E.U., ended the Northern Ireland Troubles creating a powersharing executive at Stormont and a raft of institutions to broker politics that are viewed negatively and positively across both communities. Today, there remain competing perspectives among the Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) and Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR) working class communities regarding the peacebuilding process (Marijan 2017). Segregation also persists within communities, where invisible boundaries remain across streets in Belfast which people know to avoid (Marijan 2017).

Considering local people's agency in peacebuilding and the persistent social problems in Northern Ireland, it is important to examine how CSO peacebuilders in Belfast, Derry, and the Border Area of the Irish Republic perceive the GFA. Two samples of CSO leaders from 2010 and 2020 discuss how the GFA has impacted Northern Ireland's peace dividend. Following the context is the findings section, which discusses continuing divisions in Northern Ireland like Brexit, legacy of the past, new paramilitaries, and sectarian politics as well as the disconnect between politicians and local community peacebuilders. The methodology and the findings sections are then outlined. Collectively, these findings lead us to the conclusion that politics in Northern Ireland are in flux while grassroots peacebuilding has been relatively successful.

2. Context

We begin our analysis of the GFA with a discussion of the nature of the external funding, the flag controversy, and the border issue because it illuminates the participants' reflections on its effectiveness and assists in appreciating the significance of its failures. Northern Ireland offers a long record of economic and political initiatives aimed at de-escalating the conflict. In 1985, the British and Irish governments established the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) after signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The IFI provided $895 million in support of close to 6,000 CSO projects over a 25-year period (Skarlato et al. 2013). In 1996, the E.U. created the Peace and Reconciliation Fund to support local cross-community engagement, inclusivity, and reconciliation (Fissuh et al. 2012).

From 1995–1999, PEACE I provided €500 million with the British and Irish governments adding an additional €167 million (Byrne & Ayulo 1998). PEACE II (2000–2006) allotted €531 million with both governments allocating an extra €304 million (Buchanan 2014). PEACE III (2007–2013) set aside €225 million and the E.U. structural funds earmarked €108 million to peacebuilding (Byrne et al. 2009). PEACE IV (2014–2020) allocated €270 million and both governments providing €41 million, and the E.U. Regional Development Fund including an additional €229 million (Hyde & Byrne 2015). The total external resources from both funds committed to peacebuilding on the island is over €3.3 billion.

Despite the decades-long financial investment in the Northern Irish peace process, there have been occasional flare ups in tensions, such as the union flag controversy. The ruling in Belfast City Council on December 3, 2012, restricted the flag flying policy and reduced the time the flag would be flown. Immediately following there were PUL protests outside Belfast City Hall that escalated into violence, that lasted into 2013, happening every Saturday as public spaces became more divisive, and more shared at the same time (Bryan 2015).

The PUL community perceived the challenge as a continuation of the larger scale threat to their British identity, and throughout the process PUL leaders and political parties played roles in provoking and organizing protests, and online through social media (Goldie & Murphy 2015). PUL youth felt in a culture war perceiving that everything was being taken from them, such as parades and bonfires, and the flag was another step in that direction (Halliday & Ferguson 2016). The banning of the union flag was interpreted as Sinn Féin (SF) attempting to erode the Britishness of Northern Ireland, and fears arose that shared and neutral spaces would soon become CNR spaces as a siege mentality took over (Hearty 2015). Thus, the idea of siege can be applied to the flag protests as Britishness and Unionist identity is seen as diminishing and under threat (Guelke 2014).

That said, the union flag controversy was also exacerbated by communities disproportionately affected by poverty during the Troubles continuing to face marginalization and exclusion and failing to benefit from the economic dividend and the "transformational promises" of a post-GFA Northern Ireland (Holland 2022). Another lingering issue in Northern Ireland besides the union flag culture war that the GFA also hasn't eradicated is the inequality and poverty that exist in post-peace-accord Northern Ireland in the poorest segregated working-class communities as young men especially from the PUL community continue to be left behind by the peace dividend (Holland 2022). These young men are reengaging and reinvesting in their ethnocultural identities and some are attracted to new Loyalist and Republican paramilitaries. Thus, Brexit and the border, culture wars, dysfunctional politics, and sectarian violence continue to challenge cross community peacebuilding and the peace process especially among those from deprived, underprivileged, and underserved working-class communities (Holland 2022).

Allied to inequality, poverty, and the flag controversy, the border also became a central issue in post-Brexit negotiations, as Britain and Northern Ireland were concerned with negotiating a similar deal and ensuring similar conditions, and Republicans, the Republic of Ireland, and the E.U. were concerned with preventing hard borders and maintaining the peace process (Doyle & Connolly 2019). In early January 2021 goods from the rest of the U.K. to Northern Ireland had to clear customs so that they could then be transported anywhere on the island. A border was effectively made on the Irish sea to prevent the land border from being closed. The Northern Ireland Protocol places emphasis on preserving the GFA and a commitment to the human rights and equality frameworks of the E.U., as well as maintaining funding under future funding programs from both the U.K. and E.U. and the continuation of the Common Travel Area, avoiding a hard border (Harvey 2020). However, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) resistance and Boris Johnson's attempt to shore up the support of his base led the British government to renege on its international commitment and scrap portions of the post-Brexit trade deal with the E.U. in the Northern Ireland Protocol. The DUP's continual refusal to sit in Stormont and rejection of the February 27, 2023, Windsor Framework compromise between Britain and the E.U. does not bode well for Northern Ireland's political future. We now turn to the research methods engaged to generate data for the study.

3. Methods

Qualitative data was generated through semi-structured interviews in 2010 in Derry and the Border Area, and in 2020 in Belfast and Derry. The interviews focused on the participants experiences and perceptions of how the economic aid contributed to community development, reconciliation, trust building, and peacebuilding. The first data set from 2010 includes interviews with 120 CSO leaders, IFI and PEACE III development officers and civil servants located in Derry and the Border Counties of Armagh, Cavan, Derry, Donegal, Fermanagh, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, and Tyrone. The second data set includes highly in-depth interviews with 29 civil society leaders based in Belfast and Derry. Pseudnyoms are used to protect the respondents identities.These participants engage directly with the Northern Ireland peace process in varying ways including, grassroots leaders, peacebuilding organization leaders, project leaders, and community developers. Themes of negative and positive peace views of the GFA emerged inductively from the data.

4. 2010 Study

The respondents have different experiences and perceptions of the GFA, and the following are their viewpoints of their negative and positive views of the GFA and the peace process.

4.1 Negative View of GFA and the Peace Process

The politicians and locals were locked in conflict. Local communities were initially way ahead of the politicians that were now beginning to catch up and become more engaged in the peacebuilding process. The politicians' political will was necessary to sustain grassroots sustainable peacebuilding in the long term, yet, as per our interview with Odhran, partisanship and the divergent vested interests of Assembly men and women prevented them from making the necessary compromise.

165

In other words, politicians had to toe the party line while political tensions spilled down into local communities as people became frustrated with the intransigence of their political representatives. Politicians seeking re-election canvassed constituents and were vocal and visual within their local communities. They went back into their constituencies seeking community support regarding making hard decisions about budget cuts in health care and education.

At the same time, however, Members of the Legislative Assembly's (MLAs) divisive politics severely hindered local peacebuilding activities as the middle ground disintegrated and people moved back into their sectarian enclaves. Local MLAs were part of the party whip and had to follow their party colleagues. As Fionnuala relayed, when MLAs squabbled like children, everyday people decoded the wrong messages, which predisposed the community to further tensions. Young people especially are impacted as they mobilize in reaction to political crises because they are socialized by and have ready access to print and social media (Alaminos & Penalva 2012).

Thus, conflict politics had a serious negative impact on local communities and seriously disrupted grassroots peacebuilding efforts. Tensions escalated especially during the marching season as the media highlighted certain events like the parades through the Garvaghy Road in Portadown and the Ormeau Road in Belfast.

In other words, there was a fracturing between the macro and the micro levels as well as fragmentation within the PUL community. These relationships were disjointed as a political vacuum existed as politicians failed to listen to local communities' concerns. There was some work, therefore, that needed to be done to MLAs to dialogue with local people working across both communities about reconciliation, remembering the past, and the disempowerment of the PUL community. As a participant, Eleanor, notes,

ELEANOR: The grassroots level feel that the politicians aren't listening to them […]. There are those who are obviously happy with the GFA and there are those at the extremes that are very unhappy because of the prison release. They felt that the past hadn't been dealt with effectively and that the reconciliation isn't there […]. It's very important that the voices of both sides of the community are listened to especially the victims […]. I think building capacity within the Protestant community […] because

from their perspective they see the money going to the Catholics. So, they have lost the power. They have lost their voice.

The depravation, changing power differential, and the monies coming into CNR areas meant that the PUL community was really frustrated and felt that their political representatives weren't voicing their concerns.

As a CSO member, Liam, recognizes, there is an apparent disconnect between the Unionists who viewed the political system as working during the Troubles and the Nationalist community who had to create a new system. Yet, there is possibly a third category who might consider the system as efficient but in need of enhanced human effort and commitment.

People also had mixed feelings with regards to the overall impact of the GFA that was evidenced by the low electoral turnout because people mistrusted politicians. Local people had a poor choice in terms of the progressive politicians that they could vote for. Although the GFA has procured relative peace, people are generally disappointed by the polarizing figures running for office and its failure to deliver a Civic Forum, where people could be freely expressive. Oonagh succinctly depicts this disappointment, noting that:

> OONAGH: There was a euphoria about yes, the Troubles have stopped, yes, we have found a sort of peace, and yes, we must sit people down and learn to live together, and what are we going to do today […]. But there seems to be a ground swell of deception and a ground swell of disillusionment, and a ground swell of being disenfranchised and isolated.

Local people had lost confidence in the politicians' ability to translate and deliver the benefits of the GFA like the Civic Forum to their local constituents. The grassroots pushed these politicians to sign an agreement and when it arrived, they weren't ready for it. Many groups were benefiting from the GFA while other disadvantaged and marginalized groups were not.

There was also a clear lack of trust and understanding between the PUL and CNR political parties, and an unwillingness among some extremist politicians to take small incremental steps to move forward as it was important for the people to see that the working political structures were providing beacons of hope and light for the people like Prime Minister David Cameron's apology over Bloody Sunday and the shooting of innocent civilians by the army that articulated a different vision of politics. Annmarie reported on the significance of the event in the following manner:

> ANNMARIE: I mean all the years they were denied the legitimacy of their stories. So, when the state is involved in that […] [it] is very, very powerful and the hurt of that must be huge […]. Those people now have an opportunity to tell their story and to tell it in different formats.

Yet she recognized that there continued to be a gap between the politicians and the grassroots in terms of having an overall mainstream peacebuilding strategy. Both governments weren't really embracing grassroots peacebuilding efforts, and what they were doing on the ground. She also articulated that the funding process was competitive and some CSOs were replicating peacebuilding work on the ground.

4.2 Positive View of GFA and the Peace Process

The 1998 GFA is out of sync with grassroots peacebuilding as one could probably realistically expect given the difficulties of getting the political system in Stormont to function stably. For example, Ian Paisley's DUP and Martin Mc-Guinness' SF coming out of a 30-year war situation made good progress in addressing difficult issues such as policing.

For example, Tadhg noticed that there was a sea of political change as Northern Ireland became more stable, yet he also recognized that threats by Loyalist and Republican fringe paramilitary groups will necessitate future external intervention to keep the peace. There continues to be ongoing security problems with the Loyalist Communities Council representing the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Red Hand Commandos and a resurgent Real IRA and New IRA. Yet, he also recognized that children lived in safety in local communities and didn't have to go through British army checkpoints anymore.

Local everyday people needed to build peace with each other and get back to their relationships that existed before the Troubles broke out in the late 1960s. Hence, local disputes were dealt with through local grassroots community conflict resolution, and they weren't addressed through policy. In contrast, Harry acknowledged that the PUL community agreed to support the GFA so that both communities could peacefully coexist together but that didn't mean surrendering their culture and history. He accepted that both communities must be tolerant and accept each other and work together to build an inclusive society that includes creating a bill of rights to be fully implemented by the government.

According to Hannah, local citizens had input into the development of the 1998 GFA that was written in ambiguous language so both communities could interpret it differently. The DUP and the SDLP signed the 1998 GFA yet the 1998 election brought SF and the DUP into powersharing government that reduced the violence and empowered grassroots peacebuilders to be more effective. She believed that the PUL community came on board with the current peace process, yet many DUP supporters weren't ready for Ian Paisley changing his political position from opposition to supporter of the GFA. She notes that it was important for Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness to constructively lead at the political level "because the breaking of the trust at that level very quickly ripples down to the breaking of the trust at the local level."

168

Consequently, the synergy between politicians and the grassroots depended on people's own direct experiences and possibly where they lived and who represented them at Stormont. For example, Aisling reported that local CSOs had travelled up to Stormont to engage with the powersharing Assembly and that was something that didn't occur under direct rule. She notes that there were still major gaps that need to be addressed like involving the youth that didn't experience the violence of the Troubles and are disenchanted with politics.

> AISLING: With that growth of an Assembly things are going to change […] and people will begin to see changes and politics will become less Nationalist, Loyalist or Republican […] and more centered on bread-and-butter issues […]. There is a whole piece of work to engage young people and […] to get them interested in the communities […] for changing the attitude […]. At the community level […] we must influence the government.

Aisling remembered that much of the community development work accomplished over the last 35 years grappled with addressing the challenges of the past, and the government didn't seem to agree with the CSOs peacebuilding efforts to meet those challenges head on rather than storing them up to be addressed in the future.

Five findings emerged from these narratives. First, the key political issue was sovereignty and how some PUL community members believe that the British government wanted to abandon them and create a united Ireland by the back door. The PUL community perceives that it has to have a voice in deciding whether Northern Ireland would join a future united Ireland or remain within Britain. Their voices were important, and they need to be heard. The PUL and CNR communities must be confident in their own identities if they are going to build trusting relationships and take a risk and be clear that their motives are to work together for the greater good. As part of that paradigm shift, local communities are learning to follow a different path about how to solve problems through learning by doing.

Connected to the sovereignty issue, the PUL community interprets decommissioning as getting rid of paramilitary weapons while the CNR community reads it as doing away with paramilitary and security forces arms. Initially, PUL politicians refused to enter negotiation with SF to weaken its position on decommissioning weapons. SF disbanded its armed wing, the Provisional IRA, so that the decommissioning process could begin while DUP politicians refused to negotiate with SF because they perceived that the PIRA was still carrying out punishment beatings.

In addition, the U.S., and the British and Irish governments ensured that SF's political position wasn't weakened any further by putting pressure on the DUP to enter the powersharing Assembly otherwise joint authority by the British and Irish governments would have been introduced into Northern Ireland, and Ian Paisley wouldn't have been able to sell joint authority to the DUP grassroots.

Second, there was a disassociation and in some sense a parting of the way with local community groups when Stormont began to function as the politicians began making the decisions. Disadvantaged communities felt neglected and abandoned by the politicians while the PUL community felt deceived and disillusioned by the GFA. The GFA has lost steam and an escalation of some violent acts in the future could reignite the conflict. There is also a certain level of bitterness remaining in local communities that needed to be worked on through the social peace process to keep bigotry at bay especially when poverty and exclusion are a problem and there is someone else to blame for the social dimension.

Third, the picture is mixed as the macro and micro levels often run parallel and are separate. The political peace is about protecting the GFA to change the political circumstances of how people live their everyday lives. Political structures were put in place to ensure political representation based on equality so that government delivers to all the people that it represents. There is also tremendous change with the democratic process working through the first and deputy first minister representing the polarized SF and DUP parties that provides some hope and confidence to local people.

Sometimes there is also a positive cooperative interaction between CSO projects and initiatives, and the Stormont executive. CSOs are more concerned with doing things without thinking about where they fit in at the political level. They take the lead in terms of building trusting relationships that encourage the political parties to move forward constructively. Alternatively, MLAs and ministers often go directly into their districts to explore issues that need to be resolved so that the results benefit those communities.

Fourth, the work been done at the grassroots level is also limited because the CSOs can't force people into reconciliation. Peacebuilding must be done on a voluntary basis, and some critics contend that the people involved in reconciliation aren't the people who really need reconciliation. Survivors from the Troubles era also feel alienated from the peace process because there is no tangible reconciliation process built into it. The conflict has also impacted people living in highly marginalized areas that are damaged by inequality and poverty so that the external funding must target the very poor's social and economic needs.

Fifth, in some contexts, the macro and the micro levels aren't working well together because the GFA and the political arrangements being played out in Stormont aren't built into the refusal to discuss, engage with, and take responsibility for the past. Some politicians pay lip service and aren't willing to go digging it up because they can't agree on a shared narrative of what it is so that it has become a recipe for sectarian division. Rather than cooperating on addressing the past, the political parties often pull so far in the opposite direction that problems magnify and become cumbersome when they are weaponized by different community groups.

5. 2020 Study

170

The following are the viewpoints of participants with regards to their negative and positive views of the GFA and the peace process, generated in 2020.

5.1 Negative View of GFA and the Peace Process

While much has changed in Northern Ireland over the last decade, many grievances with the political atmosphere remained as familiar as ever from the chorus of CSO leaders. Despite a decade's worth of time passing, concerns of local voices being ignored by politicians remain. For example, David notes that the delivery and ownership of GFA institutions and polices was contested between the political parties and the people even though the powers codified in the Agreement remain limited, they are embedded within the political binary of Nationalist and Unionist. Moreover, he believes that "twenty years later, the institution has, probably by most people's reasonable measurements, failed."

This was a searing indictment of a peace agreement that was often lauded as the "golden example" among peace scholars (Fenton 2018). The fact that these same sentiments were echoed in CSO leadership, a decade apart, indicates the GFA continued to be found wanting. The lack of genuine engagement and participation from outside of the political sphere kept Northern Ireland trapped in a liminal peace.

In many ways, it was the direct out workings of the GFA, the institutions themselves, that continued to be a source of frustration and exasperation for Northern Ireland's leaders. Coupled with those frustrations was a recognition that many issues were still left unresolved, or even unaddressed in the decades following the signing of the GFA. For example, Calum articulates that people suffer from the upheaval resulting from Brexit as well as continuing trauma from the Troubles "which still goes on and you can still touch it and feel it".

The issue of remembrance and trauma were an area of the Troubles that the GFA left largely unattended. Remembering and addressing the past was ignored in favor of focusing on reforming institutions and policing. Yet, two decades later, the issue had magnified, and its burden had evolved to be closer to an anchor, weighing the peace process down. Thus, Northern Ireland was left with faulty institutions and a quagmire of unresolved trauma swirling in the political and grassroots spheres. As Calum noted, these challenges have amplified in recent years with the introduction of Brexit.

As tensions have continued to rise following the 2016 Brexit referendum, Northern Ireland has been thrust into the spotlight as a particularly thorny issue in the Brexit equation. Being pulled between Europe and Britain is certainly not a new experience for Northern Ireland, yet the recent Brexit debate and process has enflamed many of those lingering embers that are centuries old. This is even

more the reason that strong, local institutions are critical, so decisions for Northern Ireland can be made in Belfast, rather than London, Brussels, or Dublin. Frustratingly though, that was a reality that simply didn't exist in Northern Ireland. Saorise notes that disenfranchised, disgruntled, and marginalized people squeezed by those in power in politics, the media, and local communities means there is no incentive for them to change the self-sustaining political system that isn't "reflective of representative democracy".

> SAOIRSE: Everybody is complicit in maintaining [the system], as long as political leaders and community leaders and the media, or social media, continue to actively reinforce the underlying ignorance-based fears of the other, through the promotion of stereotypes, misinformation, and downright overt lies, that ensure that I remain constrained to vote one way, and one way only.

The reinforcing of societal divisions was very much antithetical to the intended goals of the GFA. As the post-agreement years continue to pile up, the lack of significant movement when it comes to reducing societal divisions and sectarianism, continues to paint a less than rosy picture of the true verdict of the GFA's effectiveness. James feels that the peace process isn't a panacea as Northern Ireland is "a very frustrating place to live […] in terms of the politics [and peace]".

The GFA was seen as an opportunity to change the narrative in Northern Ireland and tell a new story, divergent from the divisive and sectarian rhetoric of the past. And while the level of direct violence had markedly declined, 2020 still, in many ways, echoed the same story of 1998 or 2010 as divisions, leadership vacuums, the lack of local voices, and the conflict itself most certainly remained. The GFA was effective in its time, but it had also proved to be ineffective for all-time. Thus, Northern Ireland found itself adrift at sea, lacking a captain. Aisling reports, for example, that she doesn't have the same expectations that she held 15 years ago.

> AISLING: I thought, to come through that conflict and move into this and there was a lot of energy and a lot of pride and a lot of engagement going on, which kind of ground to a halt right around 2010 and 2011, before the flag protests, but it was stable. Then the flag protests was a negative and since then it's just been a ship with no rudder or anything. It's been drifting.

The disconnect between political leaders and the grassroots remained, just as it existed a decade ago. And in turn, the frustrations have continued to grow as CSO leaders faced the brick wall of engagement and communication that towered over the peacebuilding sector, much like the peace walls continue to physically divide and prevent progress in local communities.

171

5.2 Positive View of GFA and the Peace Process

172

As we near the quarter century mark in the GFA's lifespan, it is important to note areas where growth has indeed occurred in Northern Ireland. Reflections of the agreement shouldn't happen in isolation of the present but must also include an honest comparison to the realities of Northern Ireland before the signing of the agreement in 1998. Niamh notes that "even what we have now is still beyond better than what we've had before" as the present generation doesn't realize how bad the violence was pre-GFA, and they have a sense of failure when they don't witness a normal functioning government.

An entire generation in Northern Ireland has now grown up removed from the height of the direct violence experienced during the Troubles. The challenges faced by Northern Ireland's youth when it came to ineffective institutions or political leadership, paled in comparison to the challenges of active warfare that dominated the headlines. This was an important realization of where the GFA did make a significant and positive impact at a societal level.

Inadvertently, the GFA also provided a catalyst for the strengthening of civil society. Faced with decades of inept political leadership and failing national institutions (inside and outside of Stormont), CSO leaders faced an immediate sink or swim conundrum in the years following the signing of the GFA. This led to a subtle thread of optimism shared by numerous CSO leaders. Even though the society is in a constitutional flux, Finn is optimistic that peacebuilders "have navigated over the last 10 years, all of the cumbersome obstacles and difficulties that manifest in post-conflict societies to get to [meaningful] change, with […] communities".

This strength and optimism in the face of GFA failings was a common theme in both CNR and PUL communities and CSO leadership. Despite what is happening at the political level, Grainne is also optimistic that CSOs using a kinder peacebuilding practice with people "can start creating a different story within our own work. Within our own organizations, within our own family units, within our own communities".

As communities were left to pick up the pieces from the Troubles and fill in the gaps left by the GFA, a recognition of capability and self-sufficiency was born. Recognizing they couldn't turn to a trusted political sector, CSO leaders turned inward to their own communities to find the strength to seek out progress in the face of a litany of challenges. This also drew communities together, even across PUL and CNR lines, as grassroots peace work took on a life of its own in the years following the GFA.

Another reality is that progress simply takes time. Constitutional and identity issues in Northern Ireland have existed for centuries, and no agreement could possibly untangle those issues with any consistent haste. As Oisin reported, the key was that progress was still being made, however slowly that might be, in the peacebuilding endeavor.

OISIN: I think if, politics here moves forward, you will see a more proactive civil society that's saying, we're not going to go back there. It takes time to bring about fundamental change. Somebody like me who lived through the civil rights movement and the conflict, I thought we would have been further on at this stage, but I'm still not disillusioned, I still think we're moving in that direction.

It is this dedication towards progress which protected the tenuous optimism that ran through many CSO leaders. The GFA managed to carve out explicit appreciation for inclusivity which led to a more cohesive atmosphere in the post-agreement period. This was most certainly a victory of the GFA and something that had led to significant successes at the grassroots level of peace work. Patrick also notes that CSOs are aware of the GFA and the outreach they're doing in communities.

PATRICK: […] in terms of impacting on the ordinary person across Northern Ireland, and their psyche. That explicit legal provision for inclusivity of all those diversities is something that, whether people agree with it or not, their awareness and understanding of it was never greater than was achieved through the [GFA].

This progress shouldn't be overlooked amid the numerous GFA shortcomings. Peacebuilding was a process without end and thus it required unwavering support for inclusivity, trust, and recognition. The GFA set Northern Ireland on this path and emboldened the civil society leaders to take up the mantle of peace and progress.

Five key findings were revealed from a reflection of the CSO leaders' perceptions that were generated in 2020. In many ways, these findings follow closely to the themes and key findings identified from the 2010 data. First, as with the previous three plus centuries, the constitutionality question of Northern Ireland was still on many minds. One key change over the last ten years was the introduction of Brexit into the already complicated equation. Many CSO leaders expressed concern at the complexities coming into reality with the U.K.'s decision to withdraw from the E.U. This also renewed conversations around the constitutional future of Northern Ireland, as Brexit fans with fires of those same border poll murmurings also highlighted with the 2010 data.

Second, like ten years ago, CSO leaders revealed deep schisms between the political sphere and the grassroots level. Distrust and skepticism continued to dominate many CSO leaders' minds as they commented on the politicians and political sphere. In some communities, trust had entirely broken down as CSO leaders took the reins of community progress from the politicians that they saw as out of touch and inept. The gulf between those at Stormont (when it is a functioning institution) and those in communities were seen deteriorating over the last decade as leadership continued to falter.

174

Third, many challenges continued to plague the peace process as the GFA institutions clashed with vision and opportunity at the grassroots peacebuilding level. Though necessary for the goals of 1998, the rigidity of the GFA-spawned institutional changes left many CSO leaders fighting continual uphill battles to break down barriers within their communities. A plurality of CSO leaders argued the GFA set up inherently divided institutions and processes that stubbornly kept the peacebuilding endeavor fractured and hampered. With two plus decades in the rearview mirror, for many, as the warning notes, the sight of the 1998 starting line was, distressingly, closer than expected in their journey along the peacebuilding pathway.

Fourth, the deep divisions within Northern Ireland created a plethora of community peacebuilding efforts, exasperated by the GFA's ineffective relics and failures of implementation, even over two decades into the GFAs life span. This became particularly true in funding efforts within the peacebuilding sector as well. Many groups working with marginalized communities (e.g., ex-combatants) were constantly wrapped up in bureaucratic red tape as they attempted to access key peacebuilding monies from sources such as the E.U. PEACE IV and the PEACE PLUS program. And, frustratingly across the entire scope of civil society, many opportunities were tantalizingly close (like the Civic Forum), but just out of reach due to failures of full GFA implementation.

Fifth, the GFA proved useful for its time, but its usefulness for all time, was far less obvious. While momentum still existed in peacebuilding efforts from CSO leaders, the structure of the GFA continued to provide roadblocks in critical ways. Whether from a lack of implementation or rigidity in those institutions that were realized, little wiggle room was left for CSO leaders pursuing the peacebuilding path. Optimism certainly still existed, perhaps holding on now simply through the collective willpower of CSO leaders, but times were tough in the shadows cast by the two plus decades of the distinguished GFA.

6. Conclusion

This article used two qualitative datasets from 2010 and 2020 to explore CSO leaders' understandings and experiences of the GFA. It highlighted how these peacebuilders perceive how the GFA is buttressing the peace process. The respondents noted six key issues in their stories. First, the bureaucratic and competitive nature of the funding process limited CSO peacebuilding activities. Second, sovereignty over the border accentuated by Brexit has reignited protests by the PUL community against their perceived marginalization by the British government and the E.U. Third, while paramilitary weapons were decommissioned as part of the GFA, new paramilitaries threaten the security situation. Fourth, disadvantaged communities feel abandoned by politicians and GFA institutions that are not in sync with CSOs peacebuilding vision and activities. Fifth, CSOs

can't force some individuals into reconciliation if they chose to opt out of cross community peacebuilding. Sixth, it is painful and controversial to remember the past as the wounds remain raw.

Consequently, Northern Ireland remains frozen in a liminal stasis that is complexified by Brexit, the Northern Ireland Protocol, and COVID-19. Identity issues, inequality, segregation, siege mentality, and the national question continue to drive a wedge between both communities. Yet as Senator George Mitchell mediator of the GFA process speaking at a peace conference at Queen's University Belfast on April 17, 2023 to mark the GFA's 25th anniversary reminded those in attendance, the GFA was a compromise that wouldn't resolve all the issues and now people needed their political leaders to have the courage, desire, grace, and wisdom to again step up and "root peace down deep in the soil where it can, once again, grow" (Mitchell 2023).

References

Alaminos, A. & Penalva, C., 2012. The Cognitive Mobilization Index: Crises and Political Generations. *Sage Open* 2 (1), DOI: 10.1177/2158244012440437.

Bryan, D., 2015. Parades, Flags, Carnivals, and Riots: Public Space, Contestation, and Transformation in Northern Ireland. *Peace and Conflict Journal of Peace Psychology* 21 (4), 565–573.

Buchanan, S., 2014. *Transforming Conflict through Social and Economic Development: Practice and Policy Lessons from Northern Ireland and the Border Counties.* Manchester University Press.

Byrne, S. & Ayulo, M., 1998. The Role of External Economic Aid in Protracted Ethnopolitical Conflict: A View from Northern Ireland's Grassroots. *Security Dialogue* 29 (4), 421–434.

Byrne, S., Skarlato, O., Fissuh, E. & Irvin, C., 2009. Building Trust and Goodwill in Northern Ireland: The Impact of Economic Aid on the Peace Process. *Irish Political Studies* 24 (3), 337–364.

Doyle, J. & Connolly, E., 2019. The Effects of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process. In C-A. Baciu & J. Doyle (eds.) *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities.* Springer, Berlin, 79–95.

Fenton, S., 2018. *The Good Friday Agreement.* Biteback Publishing, London.

Fissuh, E., Skarlato, O., Byrne, S., Karari, P. & Ahmed, K., 2012. Building Future Coexistence or Keeping People Apart: The Role of Economic Assistance in Northern Ireland. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 23 (3), 248–265.

Goldie, R. & Murphy, J., 2015. Belfast Beyond Violence: Flagging Up a Challenge to Local Government? *Local Government Studies* 41 (3), 470–488.

Guelke, A., 2014. Northern Ireland's Flags Crisis and the Enduring Legacy of the Settler-Native Divide. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 20 (1), 133–151.

Halliday, D. & Ferguson, N., 2016. When Peace Is Not Enough: The Flag Protests, the Politics of Identity and Belonging in East Belfast. *Irish Political Studies* 31 (4), 525–540.

Harvey, C., 2020. The Irish Border. In F. Fabbrini (ed.) *The Withdrawal Agreement.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 148–168.

Hearty, K., 2015. The Great Awakening? The Belfast Flag Protests and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist Counter-memory in Northern Ireland. *Irish Political Studies* 30 (2), 157–177.

Holland, C., 2022. *Inequality, Identity, and the Politics of Northern Ireland: Challenges of Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation.* Lexington Books, Lanham (MD).

Hyde, J. & Byrne, S., 2015. Hybrid Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties: The Impact of the International Fund for Ireland and European Union's Peace III Fund. *International Journal of Conflict Engagement and Resolution* 3 (2), 93–115.

Marijan, B., 2017. The Politics of Everyday Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Northern Ireland. *Peacebuilding* 5 (1), 67–81.

Mitchell, G., 2023. George Mitchell: Former US Senator and GFA Negotiator Queen's Speech in Full. *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 April 2023, https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/george-mitchell-former-us-senator-and-gfa-negotiator-queens-speech-in-full/1435991603.html# (accessed 21 April 2023).

Skarlato, O., Fissuh, E., Byrne, S., Karari, P. & Ahmed, K., 2013. *Peacebuilding, Community Development, and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: The Role of the Belfast Agreement and the Implication for External Economic Aid. In* T. White (ed.) *Lessons from the Northern Ireland Peace Process.* University of Wisconsin Press, Milwaukee (IL), 198–226.

Acknowledgement

176

Guidelines for Contributors

General — The editorial board of **Treatises and Documents**, **The Journal of Ethnic Studies** welcomes the submission of scholarly articles in the field of ethnic and minority studies, especially on racial and ethnic relations, ethnic identity, nationalism, xenophobia, the protection of (ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, and other) minorities, migration, multiculturalism and related subjects. The journal is particularly interested in discussions regarding ethnic and minority issues in the so- called Alpine-Adriatic-Panonnian area and all comparative studies, which include – only partially or as a whole – this geographic area. This area comprises the Alpine arc, the hinterland of the eastern Adriatic and Panonnian Basin. More technically, this area includes the following countries: Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Italy, Germany (especially the southern part), Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia. Also Macedonia and Bulgaria may be interesting cases.

Two issues of the journal are published every year, usually in June and December.

Articles that are submitted must be original, unpublished material and should not be simultaneously under consideration – either in whole or in part – for publication elsewhere.

The journal encourages the submission of articles in English, since this enables authors to present their ideas and work to a broader public. However, articles in other languages – with a special emphasis on the Slovenian language – are also welcome. The abstracts of the articles are always published in the language of the article in English and in Slovenian.

Authors who do not have native or equivalent proficiency in English must prior to submission have the article read by someone with this proficiency. This step ensures that the academic content of your paper is fully understood by journal editors and reviewers. Articles which do not meet these requirements will most likely not be considered for publication.

Manuscripts should be submitted in electronic form and must include:

- the submitted article, with the title in the language of the article and in English;
- an abstract of the article in the language of the article and in English; this should include a brief presentation of the issues discussed, the methodology used, the main findings and the conclusions;
- 3 – 7 key words in the language of the article and in English.

The length of the title, the abstract and the key words in one language should not exceed 1,100 characters (including spaces). More detailed information about the form of submitted manuscripts is presented in the prescribed template, available at the journal's website (https://sciendo.com/journal/TDJES).

In a separate document please submit: the author(s) name, the title of the article, any acknowledge-ment of research funding and a brief biographical note on each author with full contact information (for publication in the journal). Please refer to the template (at the journal's website) for further detailed information.

All submitted manuscripts are subjected to peer-review procedure by at least two reviewers. The review procedure is double blind. Authors may be asked to revise their articles bearing in mind suggestions made by the editors or reviewers. The final decision on publication rests with the editorial board.

Manuscripts should be submitted through our journal's website https://sciendo.com/journal/TDJES.

Format and Style — The preferred **length for articles** is between 30,000 and 45,000 characters, including spaces (between approx. 4,500 and 6,500 words). Longer articles may be accepted at the discretion of the editorial board. A limited number of endnotes are permitted, if they are used for explanatory purposes only. They should be indicated serially within the article.

Authors should take into careful consideration also the **style and format requirements** of the journal, which are presented in the template (available at https://sciendo.com/journal/TDJES) in more detail. Particular attention should be paid to the formatting of references, single spacing throughout and the inclusion of keywords and abstracts. Articles that do not meet these requirements will be returned for modification before being read and reviewed.

Referencing Style — The **Harvard author-date system** of referencing must be used for bibliographical references in the text and in the alphabetical list of references at the end of the article. Authors should ensure that all and only those references cited in the text appear in the list of references. General bibliographies should not be provided. Authors must also follow the requirements regarding referencing style and format as presented in the table of examples, available at the journal's website (https://sciendo.com/journal/TDJES).