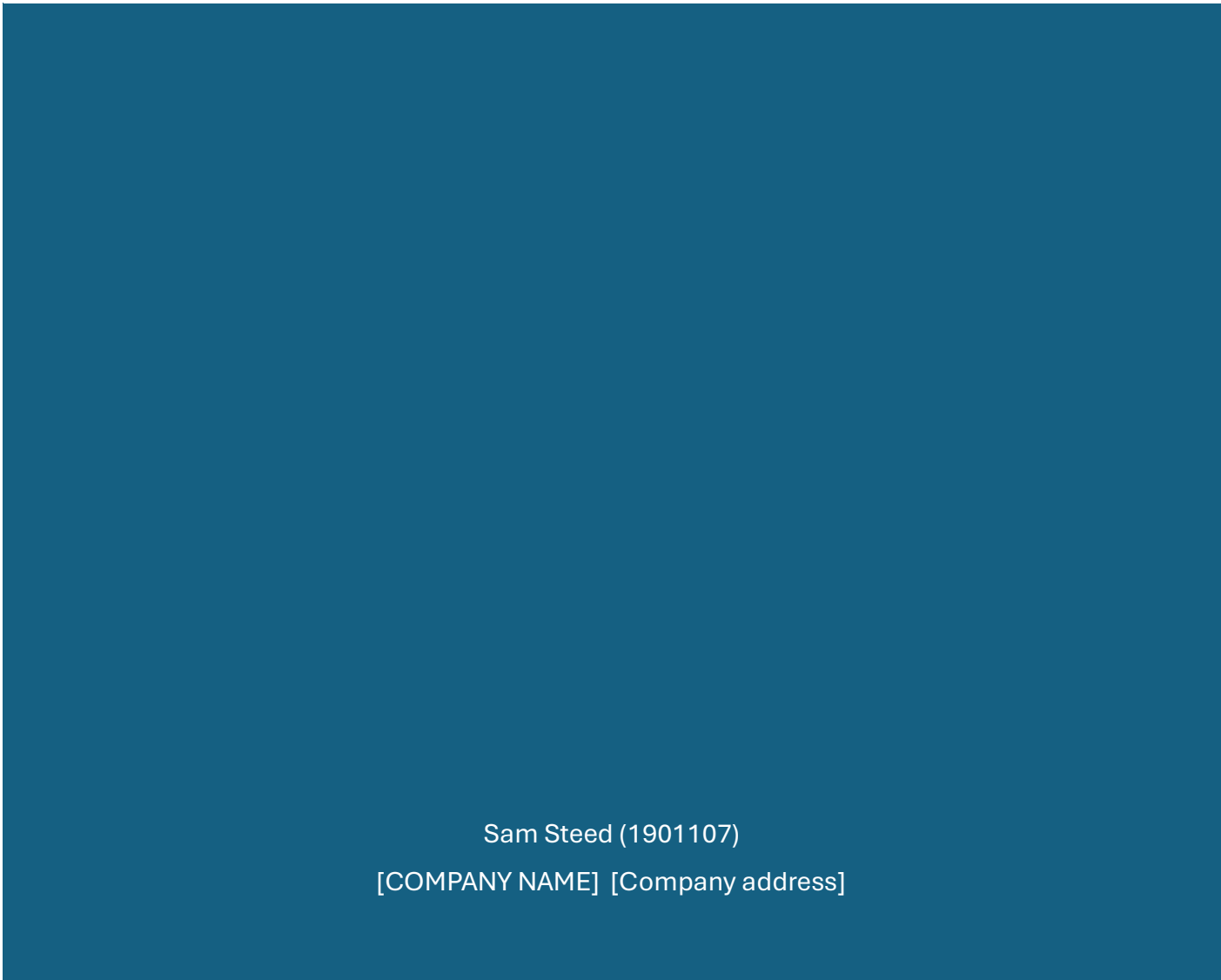




A CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORY APPROACH TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

Sam Steed (1901107)
[COMPANY NAME] [Company address]



Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Name: Samuel Charles Astley Steed

Date: 17th September 2024

2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Historical Studies

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Date: 17th September 2024

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Abstract

In 1998 the signing of the historic Belfast Agreement began a new phase of peace building in Northern Ireland following decades of conflict. In a time when other conflicts are still ongoing in the world, the process of achieving peace in a protracted conflict such as the Troubles in Northern Ireland requires fresh examination so that the lessons are not lost and perhaps can be applied in the service of conflict resolution elsewhere. Using a conflict resolution theory approach, an analysis of the negotiations in the period leading up to the signing of the agreement, close scrutiny of the agreement itself and a study of the twenty-six years following its signing has demonstrated how a number of factors have contributed to the success of the peace process. In particular, the peace process was greatly facilitated by enabling a discreet negotiation process between leaders, the participation and engagement of civil society as key stakeholders in the peace, the recognition and participation of women in the process both before and after the signing of the agreement, and the support of the wider international community in all stages, enabled the creation and sustainment of peace.

Introduction

This dissertation offers analysis of the Northern Ireland peace process with sections focused on both the attempts to make peace prior to the Good Friday Agreement, the Good Friday Agreement itself and its various strands, and the period following the signing of the Belfast Agreement commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement. There is a particular emphasis on the work of agencies representing civil society and women's groups and the potential threats facing the peace process through events such as the results of the UK's Brexit referendum. The paper offers a fresh look at the protracted conflict known as the Troubles and seeks to apply a conflict resolution theory approach in its analysis of the peace process and of the Belfast Agreement itself.

Conflict resolution theory examines the barriers to peace and the ways in which they can be broken down to provide an environment conducive to peace. The events of the Northern Ireland peace process are examined using a conflict resolution theory approach with a view to understanding the path to peace and how it has been sustained in the years following the Belfast Agreement. Also covered is the outlining of the history of conflict resolution theory and its development over the decades in which it has been practised as an academic discipline.

This dissertation is not intended to take sides or controversially direct more blame at one party or another but to highlight and discuss the work of the many agencies involved that was crucial to the ending of one of the darkest periods in British and Irish history. This shall include the work of not just the British or the Irish but also the crucial work and support of international entities and organisations and how they aided in the success or contributed to the failure of the peace process. This dissertation is aimed at not just focusing on the individual people that were in positions of power in the peace process but on the power of the individual on the street to exercise that power with their fellow citizens to bring about peace and desired change.

The achievement of peace in Northern Ireland is not insignificant given the bitter and protracted nature of the conflict. While Northern Ireland has achieved peace there are many other violent conflicts currently ongoing across the world that also need resolution. Understanding the processes of peace is therefore extremely important and it is the hope of this writer that this work may contribute, however little, to the growing body of conflict resolution literature that is at present emerging.

This dissertation examines scholarship on the Northern Ireland Conflict and peace process covering a period from 1969 to the present day through the lens of Conflict Resolution Theory. The analysis is presented in two key sections the first being the peace negotiations up to the signing of the Belfast Agreement. The second section examines activities, both in Ireland and beyond, post signing of the Agreement which work to consolidate and maintain

the peace and also events which threaten it. The discussion centres on lessons learned and best practise regarding conflict resolution with a view to identifying what can be best applied in ongoing conflict around the world.

Literature Review

Conflict Resolution is the overarching approach employed in this paper and the inspiration for this has been the work of Ramsbotham et al, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*. This work has provided a thorough and detailed analysis of the development and evolution of conflict resolution theory over the last hundred years. Of particular interest was the discussion of Johan Galtung's contribution to the field through his theory on structural violence. Structures of violence can contribute to conflict particularly to a sustained conflict such as existed in Northern Ireland. The role of this work in this dissertation was to provide crucial context and explanation to the world of conflict through the framework of conflict resolution theory.¹

Another work that focuses on the theory of conflict resolution is *The Evolution of Conflict Resolution* (2009) by Louise Kriesberg. This provided a useful big picture viewpoint of the four extant eras of conflict resolution activities from the First World War to the present that helped to provide context as to the wider existence of conflict resolution theories and to their development over the course of a century and to its changes in this time.²

As a topic that is controversial, universally recognised and possessing wide ranging effects, there is a veritable deluge of scholarship available for consultation on the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The scholarship provides a wide range of viewpoints and focuses on a variety of topics. One area is the complex negotiation process that led to the Good Friday Agreement and many of these adopt a top-down approach to discussing the peace process; in other words, they focus on the key actors and leaders and their role in the negotiation.

The Longest Negotiation: British Policy, IRA Strategy and the Making of the Northern Ireland Peace Settlement (2015) by Niall O'Dochartaigh is one such work. In this work the author focuses on a period of over twenty-years. He covers the more shadowy topics such as the covert negotiations between the leadership of the IRA and the British as well as the structure of the IRA as a more nebulous organisation than a single entity, arguably, a more accurate assessment of the nature of the IRA. O'Dochartaigh covers the peace process from

¹ Oliver Ramsbotham, Hugh Miall, and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Polity, 2011).

² Louis Kriesberg, 'The Evolution of Conflict Resolution', in *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, ed. by Jacob Bercovitch, I. William Zartman, and Victor Kremenyuk (SAGE, 2008), pp. 15–32
<<https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/4913686>> [accessed 4 July 2024].

a unique angle in which he examines the ideological differences between the key actors and in essence attempts to explain the challenges and realities of trying to reach a peace settlement between the two parties that come from very incompatible positions. As a Professor of Political Science and Sociology at the University of Galway and having written extensively on the back-channel negotiations he is well placed to comment on the topic. He skilfully makes use of interview data amongst other materials such as memoirs and is able to give an almost intimate insider view of the complicated choreography of the negotiation.³

A theme across the Troubles is the often-underrepresented role of civil society in the scholarship of the conflict and most especially in the peace process. Adrian Guelke's 2003 work, *Civil Society and the Northern Irish Peace Process* explores the role of civil society and seeks to answer the question of whether the peace making of the Troubles can be best understood as a top-down or a bottom-up process or even a combination of the two. He examines how the changing mood of the population of Northern Ireland and the changing atmosphere of the wider region affected the peace process. He focuses on the activities of the politicians and the community leaders that had the most influence over the developing peace process. In particular he discusses the role of the Opsahl Commission in exploring ways forward in the peace process including grassroots and community approaches and the "Yes" campaign for the referendum that was developed by those from the voluntary and community sectors rather than by party officials. This work relates to conflict resolution theories regarding the social environment of the conflict that have an impact.⁴

Also under consideration in this Analysis is Neil's Jarman's *Another Form of Troubles: Parades, Protests and the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (2007). This covers some of the religious elements evident in the Northern Ireland conflict especially the conflict between the two main religious denominations in the region, Protestantism and Catholicism. He focuses especially on the activities of the Protestant Orange Order and most especially on their traditional parades. The long-standing history of the Orange Order made it a relatively powerful organisation in influencing the views and beliefs of the Protestant population of Northern Ireland.⁵ As the title suggests he writes about the history of the Orange Order protests and marches stretching all the way back to the nineteenth century. He examines its effects over two centuries and back into an era where the entirety of Ireland was under the control of the British Government and was ruled by the loyalist Protestant minority. This was a reality that was only starting to change during the Troubles in Northern Ireland and would

³ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'The Longest Negotiation: British Policy, IRA Strategy and the Making of the Northern Ireland Peace Settlement', *Political Studies*, 63.1 (2015), pp. 202–20, doi:10.1111/1467-9248.12091.

⁴ Adrian Guelke, 'Civil Society and the Northern Irish Peace Process', *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 14.1 (2003), pp. 61–78, doi:10.1023/A:1022992905795.

⁵ Neil Jarman, 'Another Form of Troubles: Parades, Protests and the Northern Ireland Peace Process', in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Matthias Reiss, Studies of the German Historical Institute London (Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 255–72.

be fully realised within the peace process itself when power sharing finally began in Northern Ireland in 2007, and different sections were better represented.

What was interesting for the purposes of this research was how Jarman shows that territory in this conflict is not held in the traditional sense of one side having taken it by force and the other trying to take it back, but by the use of religion and mood. Jarman explains how areas within Northern Ireland that were previously held by Protestants have changed as the Catholic population has increased and begun to control new areas. Some of these areas are either part of or are situated on the traditional routes of the parades and marches by the Orange Order which further inflame tensions due to the obvious fact that the Catholic population do not want thousands of Protestants marching through their areas whilst the Protestants view it as a key part of their cultural heritage.

The works of Neil Jarman have been a source of invaluable information, and two works have been particularly informative. In *Another Form of Troubles: Parades, Protests and the Northern Ireland Peace Process* Jarman focuses on the grassroots level of activities in which he covers topics such as the Orange Day Parades and marches in Northern Ireland that heighten sectarian tensions between the Catholic and Protestant communities. He highlights how such tensions on the ground effect the willingness of the two communities to work towards a peace agreement and accept solutions. He describes how changes in the demographics of the Catholic and Protestant populations in the region have affected the negotiations. Jarman's work gives insight in the role of civil society in the conflict.

Jarman's 2016 work *The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation: A Case Study of Northern Ireland* focuses on the post peace agreement period. In it he, as the title suggests, focuses not on the actual peace negotiations but on the process of peace building and the transformation of the conflict following the Good Friday Agreement. He recognises how Northern Ireland has become a model for conflict resolution on the world stage picking up the baton from South Africa following their successful transition from an apartheid state. In this work, Jarman explores how Northern Ireland has worked to maintain and sustain a fragile peace. Conflict Transformation is a key theme in conflict resolution and literature and Jarman's works have helped present the picture of the conflict in the community and the ways in which ultimately the communities were able to draw together towards a common goal of peace.⁶

A particularly valuable source for this research was a 2013 article by Marianne Elliot, *The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Resolution: The Opsahl Commission in Northern Ireland, 1992-93*. Elliot was a member of the Opsahl Commission and therefore provides unique insight into its work. The article was crucial to understanding the concept of the public ownership of a peace process. This article has to be the gold standard for primary information with

⁶ Neil Jarman, 'The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation: A Case Study of Northern Ireland', *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, 0.2 (2016), pp. 129–46, doi:10.18523/kmlpj88597.2016-2.129-146.

regards to the ideas of a fully independent effort from the civil society of Northern Ireland to try and end the conflict.⁷

Conflict Resolution Theorists have recognised the important role that women play in achieving and maintaining peace following conflict. Maxwell Adjei has been important in this respect, particularly for his work on the participation of women in peace processes not just for achieving peace but in moulding the peace and most vitally in sustaining the peace following the agreement. His work entitled, *The Participation of Women in Peace Processes: A Review of Literature*, provides important coverage of the scholarship on women's roles which can account for the significant presence of women in the wording of the Good Friday Agreement. Further work by Gilmartin, *Gendering the Post-Conflict Narrative in Northern Ireland's Peace Process*, gives an account of the ways in which women have participated politically and their participation and performance in elections pre and post Agreement. This has been a significant influence on contextualising the realised and targeted role of women that the Good Friday Agreement would ultimately outline.⁸

In the period following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland faced a number of challenges to the ongoing peace process, none greater than Brexit. Eileen Connolly and John Doyle address the issue of Brexit and its effect on the ongoing peace process showing that the work of maintaining peace is an important and enduring one. In their view there needed to be healing post-conflict and great care must be taken that fragile relations are nurtured and not undermined. Their work, *The Effects of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process*, was able to provide material for the analysis of how external factors can have an effect on the peace process.⁹

A source that has been especially useful has been Dawn Walsh' *How a Human Needs Theory Understanding of Conflict Enhances the use of Consociationalism as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism: The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland*". This has linked the basic human needs of those involved to the goals and strands of the Good Friday Agreement itself and was able to provide an understanding of consociationalism and of the Human Needs Theory as it can be applied in the Northern Ireland Conflict.¹⁰ Shahid Bukhari and Yasmin Roofi provided a more in depth look at Human Needs Theory in their work, *Resolving Balochistan Conflict: A Human Needs Approach*; this has been able to further explain Human

⁷ Marianne Elliott, 'The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Resolution: The Opsahl Commission in Northern Ireland, 1992–93', *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, 17.2 (2013), pp. 86–102.

⁸ Maxwell Adjei, 'Women's Participation in Peace Processes: A Review of Literature', *Journal of Peace Education*, 16.2 (2019), pp. 133–54, doi:10.1080/17400201.2019.1576515.

⁹ Eileen Connolly and John Doyle, 'The Effects of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement and the Northern Ireland Peace Process', in *Peace, Security and Defence Cooperation in Post-Brexit Europe: Risks and Opportunities*, ed. by Cornelia-Adriana Baciú and John Doyle (Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 79–95, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-12418-2.

¹⁰ Dawn Walsh, 'How a Human Needs Theory Understanding of Conflict Enhances the Use of Consociationalism as a Conflict Resolution Mechanism: The Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland', *Ethnopolitics*, 15.3 (2016), pp. 285–302, doi:10.1080/17449057.2015.1024012.

Needs Theory more generally and has provided key specifics such as cultural security, freedom and participation.¹¹

In addition, the *Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation* provides details pertinent to the policing of Northern Ireland in this era and especially the casualties that the RUC suffered in the course of the conflict. It gives details of the awards for gallantry that they were awarded. Such data gives insight into the realities of the policing of Northern Ireland from the view of the police and insights into the mindset of the men and woman who served in the RUC during the Troubles.¹²

A key primary source for the analysis of the actual peace agreement or Good Friday Agreement is the Command Paper 3883, a British Government command paper that was presented to the British Parliament by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It outlines the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. This has been an essential source for analysis of the application of Conflict Resolution Theory in the Northern Ireland Conflict. It provides a direct look at what the leadership of parties agreed to at the time of the signing of the Agreement.¹³

Chapter One- The Northern Ireland Conflict and Peace Process from 1969 to the Signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998.

The Belfast Agreement, more commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement, was signed in 1998 over a quarter of a century ago. It took decades of negotiations through a period of violent conflict to achieve a peace that many thought impossible. Since the signing of the agreement Northern Ireland has endured both political turbulence and enjoyed peace that fortunately has held fast.

For the purposes of this discussion the Northern Ireland Peace Process can be roughly split into two main periods, the Pre-Good Friday Agreement process (pre-1998) and the Post-Good Friday Agreement process (post-1998). In this section the former shall be discussed within the framework of a conflict resolution approach which examines the positioning and the decision making that made peace possible.

It has taken many years for the development of conflict resolution theories, and they have been born out of experience in real conflicts and in response to global changes in the

¹¹ Shahid Bukhari and Yasmin Roofi, 'Resolving Balochistan Conflict: A Human Needs Approach', *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 35.1 (2015), p. 383.

¹² 'Background | Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation -' <<https://www.rucgcfoundation.org/background/>> [accessed 25 August 2024].

¹³ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, 1998, p. 36 <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/619500728fa8f5037d67b678/The_Belfast_Agreement_An_Agreement_Reached_at_the_Multi-Party_Talks_on_Northern_Ireland.pdf> [accessed 25 April 2024].

political, technological and economic landscape. The initial development of such theories began after the horrors of the Great War (First World War) and can be seen in the creation of the League of Nations which sought to limit or stop war. Sadly, they failed, as the Second World War stands in testament to this. It is of note that the Irish War of Independence occurred during the post-World War One attempts to create peace and given the difficulties of the peace process of the later Troubles, was perhaps a foreshadowing of things to come.

Conflict Resolution Theory has evolved through several distinct phases. Kriesberg describes four eras in which conflict resolution theory developed.¹⁴ The First era runs from 1914-1945 and includes the post-First World War era and the interwar years. The goal was to prevent the outbreak of further conflicts by reducing the potential causes of future wars and sought to foster collective security to reduce the ability to go to war.¹⁵ This led to the creation of the League of Nations, a concept that would prove successful in the second era of Conflict Resolution with the founding of the United Nations.¹⁶ This is noteworthy as collective security is a term that often comes up in modern circles through organisations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or NATO as it is more commonly known as.

The second era of Conflict Resolution Theory ran from 1945-1969 and includes the aftermath of the Second World War¹⁷, the Korean War¹⁸, the Vietnam War up to 1969¹⁹, the Cuban Missile Crisis²⁰ and ends in the same year that Operation Banner began in Northern Ireland.²¹ This era was focused on the creation of transnational organisations such as the United Nations and on fostering reconciliation between nations.²² This seems to be built on the hope of correcting the flaws of the First Era in which Europe was challenged to come to terms with the horrors of the First World War.

The third era of Conflict Resolution Theory was from 1970-1989 and is the second shortest of the four eras. It was focused on the expansion and institutionalisation of the practice and on growing relations between the two main Superpowers of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union. This era also saw increased relations and normalisation between the US and the People's Republic of China, another communist state and on paper a natural enemy of the US.²³

¹⁴ Kriesberg.

¹⁵ Kriesberg, p. 18.

¹⁶ Kriesberg, p. 18.

¹⁷ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars', *Imperial War Museums*
<<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/timeline-of-20th-and-21st-century-wars>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

¹⁸ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

¹⁹ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

²⁰ 'Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations - Office of the Historian'
<<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/cuban-missile-crisis>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

²¹ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

²² Kriesberg, p. 18-21.

²³ Kriesberg, p. 21.

This era was important for conflict resolution theory as a whole as after the many disappointments of the 1950's and 1960's many of the pioneering conflict resolution theorists saw an era of rapid progression and institutionalisation in the field. This was in the context of the greater civil rights movement and the rise of non-governmental organisations as a whole through groups dedicated to the women's rights movement, opposition to the Vietnam War, student protests and environmental groups. These groups operated with an anti-violence policy that fitted in perfectly with the concepts of conflict resolution theory.²⁴

The fourth era of Conflict Resolution Theory was from 1990-2008, the year in which her article was written. Kriesberg captures it as being focused on the diffusion and differentiation of ideas.²⁵ This era starts around the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and as such the United Nations was in a position to prevent the escalation of conflicts that broke out and to limit their destructiveness. Kriesberg lists other causes for the spread of Conflict Resolution Theory such as the increased integration of global economies as well as vast improvements in global communications networks.²⁶ This era includes notable conflicts such as the First Gulf War²⁷, the Yugoslav Wars²⁸, various conflicts in Africa²⁹, the Chechen Wars³⁰, the beginning of the War on Terror and the subsequent 2001 US Invasion of Afghanistan³¹ and the 2003 US-led Invasion of Iraq³² and the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.³³

The Troubles fall into the third era of Conflict Resolution (1970-89) and the peace process that actually led to the Good Friday Agreement was in the fourth era of Conflict Resolution thereby taking place in what is the most developed era of conflict resolution. Northern Ireland was the focus of one of a series of workshops on conflict resolution carried out in this era by John W Burton, Leonard Doob, Herbert C. Kelman, Edward E. Azar, Ronald J. Fisher and other members of the conflict resolution community.³⁴

Conflict resolution theorists such as Ramsbotham et al note that 'Conflict is an intrinsic and inevitable aspect of social change.'³⁵ This acknowledges the changes that occurred in Northern Ireland during the Troubles and in its aftermath, such as rising sectarian violence and the deployment of troops under Operation Banner. Conflict as an aspect of social

²⁴ Kriesberg, p. 21.

²⁵ Kriesberg, p. 24.

²⁶ Kriesberg, p. 24.

²⁷ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

²⁸ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

²⁹ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

³⁰ Ralph Zuljan, 'Chronological Index of Wars and Conflicts from 1990 to 1999' <<https://onwar.com/chronology/index.html>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

³¹ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

³² 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

³³ Peter Dickinson, 'The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin's Green Light', *Atlantic Council*, 2021 <<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/>> [accessed 5 September 2024].

³⁴ Kriesberg, p. 22.

³⁵ Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse, p. 17.

change is unsurprising as conflict often leads to changes especially in a society either through adaptations to the conflict or in an attempt to achieve a favourable outcome to the conflict.

Conflict comes about whenever there is social change. Ramsbotham et al say 'It is an expression of the heterogeneity of interests, values and beliefs which arise as new formations generated by social change come up against inherited constraints.'³⁶ This can be put down to a large number of differing interests, viewpoints and beliefs that are bound up with concepts of identity whereby people feel threatened when challenged by change. Inherited constraints remind us that the historical roots of conflicts often go far back beyond the present and this can certainly be said of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

An unwillingness to end the conflict earlier was perhaps because "Parties to conflicts are usually inclined to see their interests as diametrically opposed"³⁷, and to a certain extent that was true. The most extreme elements of the Republican Movement wanted a United Ireland compared to the Loyalists who wanted the exact opposite and for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom.³⁸

Peacemaking attempts during the Troubles began almost from the beginning of Operation Banner and were especially active in the early 1970's. Operation Banner was the code name for the overarching British Army deployment in Northern Ireland³⁹. Then, the way to negotiate between the British Government and the Provisionals was through the use of an intermediary to carry messages between each other.⁴⁰ This method of communication does make sense when one considers that making direct contact had the risk of being found out or leaked by someone from either side who did not support the peace process. The difficulty with these sorts of delicate negotiations when the two parties are positioned in such polar opposite ways, is that they cannot be seen to be conceding or cooperating as any concessions would make one look weak and attract harsh criticism from supporters. However, without dialogue and a willingness to compromise there can be no progress towards peace. Ó Dochartaigh describes how this was managed.

The point made repeatedly by the intermediary in 1975, that the Provisionals would accept a compromise peace settlement, but that they needed to secure visible gains, had direct implications for the role of the British government. Peace would require active cooperation and coordination between the two parties. It would require a kind of partnership.⁴¹

³⁶ Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse, p. 17.

³⁷ Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse, p. 20.

³⁸ Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse, p. 20.

³⁹ 'Timeline Of 20th And 21st Century Wars'.

⁴⁰ Ó Dochartaigh, p. 216.

⁴¹ Ó Dochartaigh, p. 216.

The barriers to peace often lie in the unwillingness of the two parties to coordinate and cooperate. This is understandable in many ways, as revealing even a small part of your willingness to cooperate could weaken your position. In the case of the Northern Ireland negotiation, Britain used the threat of disengagement from talks with the Provisionals as a hard bargaining tool, recognizing that a peace settlement was what the Provisionals ultimately wanted.⁴²

The initial peace talks were made much more complex by the reality that in this era communication was different in many ways from how it is today. Intermediaries were useful as phone lines could be easily intercepted, and mobile phones were not as widespread as they are today. This itself was at least a mark of trust between the two main actors as they would have had to agree on an intermediary to actually carry messages between the two, like the armies back in the old days of conflict.

The peace process must first be placed in the wider context of conflict resolution in this era as the 1970's, 80's and 90's was an era in which the Cold War started to end and a number of peace and conflict resolution entities across Europe and the United States were created to aid in this process.⁴³ Kriesberg writes that faith in conflict resolution was restored by the successes of the United States in mediating between the nations of the Middle East and that in this time "professional associations in the social sciences disciplines established sections related to peace and conflict"⁴⁴ which shows that conflict resolution was a rising force in peace seeking circles during this era.⁴⁵

The peace achieved in Northern Ireland was part of a hoped-for wave of post-Cold War peace-making. South Africa had ended apartheid and after the end of the Cold War and the relatively peaceful breakup of the Soviet Union, there was reason to be optimistic with much work still to be done. Northern Ireland took the torch of peace from South Africa and has been trying to hand it over to other countries seeking inspiration to end their conflicts.⁴⁶

On the surface peace seemed virtually impossible with such polar opposite positions, animosity and violence on the streets. The presentation of the conflict in the media made it difficult to imagine any sort of compromise or finding of common ground. However, behind the scenes there was an ongoing dialogue between the leadership of both parties that was at least considering and discussing tentative steps forward. O'Dochartaigh gives a good account of this "From the beginning this process necessitated a degree of choreography and partnership, most importantly in the ongoing cooperative project to conceal secret contacts from other parties." In an era before aids such as mobile phones were commonplace this degree of choreography would have been necessary as negotiations could not have been held openly and would have had to be held under wraps to avoid inflaming the situation.

⁴² Ó Dochartaigh, p. 217.

⁴³ Kriesberg, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Kriesberg, p. 22.

⁴⁵ Kriesberg, p. 21-22.

⁴⁶ Jarman, 'The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation', p. 130.

While in the open it appeared as if a peace deal was a forlorn hope the possibility was kept alive.⁴⁷

An additional difficulty regarding negotiations was that the Republican Movement was not a discreet entity like the British Government. The Provisional Republican Movement emerged as a result of complex historical factors; its particular character was rooted in the history of the conflict. O'Dochartaigh takes time to analyse the character of the Provisional Republican Movement as one of the two key actors and how their particular character influenced the negotiations. He contends that it is important to understand the nature of the IRA and its structure and goals. He recognizes it had a realistic and pragmatic approach towards its own goals and what was possible and had strong connections to local republican networks and support.⁴⁸

The IRA more generally was not a singular organisation and was a far more nebulous entity than it first appeared. It included the Provisional IRA, the Real IRA and various other splinter groups⁴⁹. Altogether they had many different goals that they sought to achieve, some of which they did and others they still have not, such as a United Ireland. O'Dochartaigh describes the IRA as "a politically astute actor focused on achievement, ready to make major concessions in order to achieve a settlement and quite logically focused on the British state as the key actor it was necessary to influence in order to achieve this"⁵⁰ This view portrays the IRA as more than just a terrorist organisation, it recognises it as an actual political force that was even willing to make political concessions to the Loyalists and the British Government to try and achieve their political goals and their dream of a United Ireland.

The era of the peace process and the push to peace was not without its international inspirations as the 1990's was an era of international peace making and a determination to escape the status quo. Guelke mentions that there were several examples of this such as

The examples of the Oslo peace process and of the South African transition, the election of Clinton as President of the United States of America in 1992 and his commitments to the Irish-American lobby, and the approach of the government in the Republic were all factors that played a part in persuading the IRA to call its first crucial cease-fire in August 1994⁵¹

These are examples of external factors that had an impact on the peace process by helping create a hopeful environment for peace. Hope can have a significant effect on a population as one must consider that even more important than a desire for peace is the hope of the people to actually achieve it. Hope can be seen as the start of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Once the work of the various groups such as the Opsahl Commission started to take effect, and the interest of certain parts of the international community was sparked,

⁴⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, p. 202.

⁴⁸ Ó Dochartaigh, p. 214.

⁴⁹ Holly Fletcher, 'IRA Splinter Groups (U.K., Separatists) | Council on Foreign Relations', 2008 <<https://www.cfr.org/background/ira-splinter-groups-uk-separatists>> [accessed 7 September 2024].

⁵⁰ Ó Dochartaigh, p. 215.

⁵¹ Guelke, p. 67.

especially that of the United States, peace began to be perceived as achievable and a real possibility. Guelke highlights the strength of the Irish-American lobby in political circles within the United States and its links to the Republican Movement.⁵²

A crucial part of the peace process to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland was the role played by civil society. It is easy to imagine a peace agreement consisting solely of men and women of high office sitting around a table ironing out details of an agreement that will run for thousands of pages that can be summed up in only a few, but this peace process was not akin to a normal peace process. The quest for peace in Northern Ireland was buoyed on by the people of Northern Ireland and the role of civil society in this was key to the eventual signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Guelke defines civil society as including “voluntary and nonprofit organizations but also including business and trade union leaders and some churchmen” and argues that this sector has had an important role in the politics of Northern Ireland. What Guelke does not specifically mention are the many women’s organisations that were influential in bridging the sectarian divide between the Catholic and Protestant communities. Although to be fair these come under the category of voluntary and nonprofit organisations it is perhaps important to mention the role of women within civil society-based peace-making efforts. It is understandable that these sections of society would be key to a peace process as trade unions and business leaders already held positions of authority in society as do some members of the clergy while voluntary and nonprofit organisations exist to make themselves known so they can bring attention to their work and what they are fighting for.⁵³

The power of civil society comes from its community embedded nature. Its members are representative of the society at large and therefore they are highly motivated stakeholders in the peace process. According to Guelke, there are different ways in which one can define civil society but a useful way to frame it is to see it as a bottom-up influence rather than a top down approach to resolving conflict. This approach makes sense as the various groups within civil society are in essence at the bottom of the power structure in Northern Ireland and were providing a bottom-up impetus and putting added pressure from below onto the province’s leadership. It was this ‘bottom up’ approach that made the peace process so dynamic. So often peace processes are credited to individuals or just a few people at the apex of decision making and the role of the populace is often understated.⁵⁴

Jarman supports this view that civil society was a key part of the peace process even if underappreciated in the main media and neglected in the scholarship. He makes the case that the involvement of civil society has been underestimated in the peace-making process. “More frequently, Northern Ireland is presented as a model of how local participants, with the support and assistance of international actors and institutions, can transform a long-standing armed conflict into a viable, sustainable peace” Is this an accurate framing of the peace? This can be seen as being more on the side of truth than fallacy as no one entity or sector can be solely credited with the success of the peace process. The actions of those in civil society such as the various women’s organisations and Ophsahl Commission were key to the peace that would eventually be reached. The international community was also

⁵² Guelke, p. 67.

⁵³ Guelke, p. 68.

⁵⁴ Guelke, p. 69.

involved in the creation of the peace process either directly or indirectly through factors such as international pressure in the form of political and social pressure to end the conflict.⁵⁵

A key part of the formation of what would become the Good Friday Agreement was the work of Ophsahl Commission of 1993. "The Opsahl Commission was an independent public inquiry, entirely separate from government and state authorities. It was headed up by Professor Torkel Opsahl, the highly respected Norwegian human rights lawyer". The appointment of a man such as Opsahl to head such as commission was a strong move towards peace as he was a prominent human rights lawyer who years earlier had "acted as the European Commission of Human Rights rapporteur on the Irish government's case against Britain for the ill-treatment of internees in 1971."⁵⁶ The decision to form an independent commission free of state or government control and the naming of a human rights lawyer that the British Government could have rightly said had a bias towards the Republican Movement was an inspired choice and respect should be aimed at the British for accepting its work as legitimate.

The commission consisted of seven members including Marianne Elliot, an historian and she lists her fellow members as,

Lady Lucy Faulkner, the widow of Brian Faulkner (the prime minister of Northern Ireland, 1971-72); Rev. Dr. Eric Gallagher, former president of the Methodist Church in Ireland; Eamonn Gallagher, the former European Community Director General for Fisheries; Professor Padraig O'Malley, a prominent political scientist; and Professor Ruth Lister, a leading academic in social policy.⁵⁷

The membership of this board is curious as it consists of the widow of a former Northern Irish Prime Minister, a churchman who was previously the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, a former European Community Director for Fisheries and a political scientist and an academic specialised in social policy. The make-up of this committee is also key in terms of gender, four men and three women; a significantly higher proportion of women were part of this commission than was the norm in other Northern Ireland-based authorities at the time. Overall, the membership of this commission is rather unique and is very interesting as it really is a motley collection of different people on paper. But that could have been its strength; this unique make-up provides differing personalities to those that would be found in your standard political circles and with the greater prevalence of women it could provide new viewpoints and opportunities.

The context in which we must place the work and existence of the Opsahl Commission is key and can explain the unique make-up of the commission. In 1991 and 1992 the all-party talks had collapsed twice in the space of just two years, and this was the reason that the idea of this commission had been thought of. The idea of the "Public Ownership" of the peace process originated from the work of this commission as there was considerable frustration

⁵⁵ Jarman, 'The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation', p. 130.

⁵⁶ Elliott, p. 86.

⁵⁷ Elliott, p. 86.

at this lack of ownership.⁵⁸ This could be seen as understandable when one considers that despite the efforts of groups within civil society the general views and actions of the people of Northern Ireland were rather apathetic towards anything to do with politics. It can also be seen that prior to the work of the Opsahl Commission the peace process negotiations were mainly carried out by members of the Republican Movement and the British Government or the more formal entities rather than being pushed by members of the public who after all would be most affected by any possible peace.

The ideas of the Opsahl Commission were to give a voice to the ordinary person in the potential ending of the conflict. According to Elliot, the idea came from a brainstorming session with the then editor of *Fortnight Magazine* Robin Wilson and Simon Lee, a Professor of Jurisprudence at Queen's University Belfast in 1991 and led to the creation of Initiative 92, a citizen's inquiry. They managed to gather the funding, a total of 220 patrons and its own team of researchers. This is a true example of a civil society coming together to try and take a new approach to achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict as a whole.⁵⁹

Elliot states that they sought to find the disenfranchised that had basically stopped trying to engage politically and discover their viewpoints; this group included "most notably women, working-class Protestants, republicans, and the young" This group was a mixed group as it included women, who were somewhat undervalued in the peace process while a couple were something of a surprise in particular the Republicans and working-class Protestants as these on paper would appear to be the two groups most involved in the conflict. This can also hint that the conflict and those in each of these respective social groups had morphed beyond a true struggle between the two sections of these groups that felt that they were not being heard on a political level.⁶⁰

The commission encouraged people to submit their thoughts on the peace process and by its end over 3,000 individuals and groups had submitted answering the call of "Your Chance to Speak". This was criticised by several politicians but was praised by the Press of Northern Ireland. By its end, every party from Sinn Féin to the loyalist Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party had supported the commission.⁶¹ This is very notable as despite some politicians not supporting its activities even the various competing political parties of Northern Ireland supported it by the end and given the amount of disagreement in this era and between these parties in general it is very impressive that they managed to get the political parties to agree to anything full stop.

The commission was working with their backs against the wall and continued to function despite a lack of funding, having to work in church halls, schools and anywhere that they could find and afford. The commission had to work for up to twelve hours each day to produce their 450-page report by the end of April, just three months after it was started on the 19th January and this report was made public on the 9th June.⁶² This was indicative of the

⁵⁸ Elliott, p. 86.

⁵⁹ Elliott, p. 87.

⁶⁰ Elliott, p. 87.

⁶¹ Elliott, p. 87.

⁶² Elliott, p. 88.

power of civil society in doing their part in bringing an end to protracted social conflicts and the grit and determination that is required for this to be achieved.

The Opsahl Commission did not have a formal agenda underpinning its work and was intended to serve as a platform for open discussion between the various groups of Northern Ireland on their political views, views on a peace settlement and generally the state of Northern Ireland itself. These meetings also provided the opportunity for the various groups such as Protestants, Catholics, Nationalists, Loyalists and others to come together and clarify what their individual views were and how they were all not as powerless as they had believed and that they were not as unreasonable as they had initially believed that they were. This would be enshrined in the later Good Friday Agreement as a key strand of its own and shows that the inclusion of these groups was viewed as effective.⁶³ This lack of an agenda was a breath of fresh air to a people who had been forced to basically have one foot either willingly or unwillingly in one of the conflicting camps for so long and encouraged honesty and openness among those who chose to take part.

The Commission had seen it as their role to listen in a way almost reminiscent of a therapist only for a society rather than an individual. They did not wish to make any recommendations of their own at all but when they did, they made recommendations that came from the submissions that the people had given them. This cross-sectioning of society was a shining beacon of amateur conflict resolution and was revolutionary to the Northern Irish Peace Process and given the rapid pace of progress after the Commission it can be said that it succeeded in its role.⁶⁴

Elliot also states that the commission discovered a cultural problem in the political participation in Northern Ireland. She wrote that “ We were struck, on the Opsahl Commission, by how ignorant people were about the very basics of democracy in operation”⁶⁵ This is sadly unsurprising as to this day many within the United Kingdom seem to be relatively unbothered, apathetic and unengaged in the political spectrum and it appears that this came to the forefront in Northern Ireland at an earlier stage than the rest of the UK. This is also logical given the level of political violence and repression that existed in Northern Ireland during this era, publicly expressing any real political views put one at risk of persecution or even death depending on the views held and whether anyone in the more violent opposing elements viewed the person as a target for harm.

This culture of political apathy needed to change if the peace process was to continue as the “dependency culture”.⁶⁶ As Elliot exclaims

We saw a tendency to complain without making any input themselves—a terrible circularity in which the people blamed the politicians, without making their opinions known to those politicians, and the politicians reciprocated with resentment when any individual or group broke out of

⁶³ Elliott, p. 88.

⁶⁴ Elliott, p. 88.

⁶⁵ Elliott, p. 88-89.

⁶⁶ Elliott, p. 89.

the dependency culture and reminded them that they are, after all, public servants. Yet people are not as powerless as they seem to think.⁶⁷

This was part of the Northern Ireland issue, the culture of disinterest and the lack of openness in political circles as well as the relative distrust between the people and the political elites. It is true that politicians in democratic societies are public servants but in a situation like the Troubles and with this contest the politicians were also in a bit of a bind as negotiating for peace would cause some to turn against them while continuing the conflict would anger others and of course to a politician, what is right comes after what will win votes.

Running concurrently to the activities of the Opsahl Commission was the creation of the Agenda for Peace report of the United Nations. The Agenda for Peace was a report compiled in early 1992 at the request of the United Nations Security Council at their 3046th meeting, the first at the level of Heads of Government and State. The agenda of this meeting included "The responsibility of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security" which highlights the intentions and plans of the United Nations at this time.⁶⁸

This report was to be created for circulation to the members of the UN and was intended to cover the "analysis and recommendations on ways of strengthening and making more efficient within the framework and provisions of the Charter the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, for peace-making and for peace-keeping"⁶⁹ which shows on the international level, an era of peace-making was ongoing. While this was more aimed at peace-making in areas of more active conflict such as areas of Africa and the Middle East it does provide crucial context to the overarching global situation and the climate of democracy and diplomacy that the peace process was part of.

Overall, the situation in Northern Ireland prior to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement can at best be described as complicated and at worst as possibly unsalvageable. Fortunately, the combined efforts of the people of Northern Ireland and the work of the British and Irish Governments was able to reach a reality whereby the people of Northern Ireland were able to unify and end this violent part of their history.

This section examined the peace process up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. It considered the decision making and negotiations through the lens of Conflict Resolution Theory. Conflict Resolution Theory has been developed and refined over many years through several phases in response to ongoing conflicts and tensions in the world. The early phase of conflict resolution theory saw the creation of the League of Nations, later the United Nations and a period in which transnational organisations were developed to build cooperation and communication. During the Cold War in the 1970's there was a focus on the institutionalisation of relatively peaceful relations between the two superpowers. Since the

⁶⁷ Elliott, p. 89.

⁶⁸ Chapter VIII, 28. "The responsibility of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security" (1992), P-813,

⁶⁹ Ibid

breakup of the Soviet Union, conflict resolution efforts have been focused on building communication networks and integrating the world's economies.

The Troubles emerged from a period of discontent into violent conflict in 1969 when Operation Banner raised tensions in Northern Ireland. Opposing interests and social change were a recipe for sustained conflict. Following unrest peace making attempts began immediately through the use of intermediaries. Though this would take time there was inspiration and momentum from the success of South Africa in ending Apartheid. Barriers to peace included the unreconciled positions of the Republicans and the Loyalists and the disjointed structure of the Republican Movement and of the IRA. There was support from the wider international community to encourage peace negotiations and initiatives specifically the Irish-American Lobby who put pressure on the British Government. Also, at this time the UN Agenda for Peace, a paper that made peace-making a priority and created an atmosphere of cooperation and peace among the highest echelons of global leadership. Within Northern Ireland the Opsahl Commission looked to include marginalised community voices. Alongside the role of the leadership in making productive negotiations, the role of civil society was crucial to the peace process in the lead up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. The strength of civil society comes from its community embedded nature as it was bound by the will of the people that when harnessed true progress could be made. The Opsahl Commission was important for bringing the many unheard voices of community stakeholders to light. Ultimately the leaders who were negotiating the settlement could act with confidence in the knowledge of the mood of the people and of what people on the ground wanted.

It can be seen that the Northern Ireland Peace Process is first and foremost a collective process and achievement that involved many components. It is at least in part because of this that the peace process is so successful despite the challenges that it faced.

Chapter Two- Sustaining the Peace Following the Signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 to the Present Day

The Belfast Agreement or the Good Friday Agreement as it is also known, was signed on 19th April 1998 in Belfast by representatives of the Government of the Republic Ireland, the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and representatives of the political parties of Northern Ireland. It actually consisted of two

agreements, the Multi-Party Agreement signed by the parties of Northern Ireland and the British-Irish Agreement between the Governments of Ireland and Britain.⁷⁰

The agreement was a pivotal moment in the Troubles and the apex of the peace-making process which many had championed and campaigned for almost three decades by this point. It ended the vast majority of the intercommunal violence seen during the Troubles and was validated in that parties from all sides of the conflict were in favour (although not unanimously) of the agreement. This finally broke many of the long-standing barriers to a peace between the conflicting parties and was much desired by the people of Northern Ireland.⁷¹

The Agreement is a comprehensive document with a number of key strands under the headings Constitutional Issues, Democratic Institutions in Northern Ireland in Strand One, North/South Ministerial Council in Strand Two, and British-Irish Council and British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in Strand Three. Following these three Strands there are headings on Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity, Decommissioning, Security, Policing and Justice, Prisoners, and Validation, Implementation and Review.⁷²

To aid in the end of the Troubles both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom agreed to change the legal view of Northern Ireland and in the words of Connolly and Doyle “Central to the success of the process was the agreement by the British and Irish Governments to change their constitutional expressions of sovereignty on Northern Ireland.” The decision of both governments to agree to this was crucial as the Irish Government removed part of the cause for Irish Nationalists to try a forceful reunification of Ireland and the British Government agreed to let the people of Northern Ireland decide if they wished to unify with the Republic of Ireland as long as a majority of the population voted for such an outcome.⁷³

The constitutional amendments that were agreed by the British were expressed in the Good Friday Agreement as follows.

[I]t is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland (GFA, Constitutional Issues para 1 (iv)).⁷⁴

This statement appears prominently in the Good Friday Agreement in the section aimed at tackling constitutional issues and represents concession by the British Government to the

⁷⁰ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland.*

⁷¹ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland.*

⁷² *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland.*

⁷³ Connolly and Doyle, p. 81.

⁷⁴ Connolly and Doyle, p. 82.

Republican cause by finally and explicitly recognizing Northern Ireland's right to self-determination.⁷⁵

Embedded within the Agreement are a number of legally binding rights and freedoms, these include the right to free political thought, freedom and expression of religion, the right to pursue democratically national and political aspirations, the right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means, the right to freely choose one's place of residence, the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity, the right to freedom from sectarian harassment and the right of women to full and equal political participation.⁷⁶

These are supported by John Burton's Human Needs Theory model that argued that the most important human needs are Distributive Justice, Safety and Security, Belonginess, Self-Esteem, Personal Fulfilment and Identity. Abraham Maslow in the same work lists Self- Actualisation, Esteem Needs, Belonging or Love Needs, Safety Needs and Psychological Needs. Bukhari and Roofi state that "Most conflicts in this world emerge from the unfulfilled demands of people living in the conflict area and most of these demands are usually related to their religious, ethnic, linguistic or political identities". This matches up with Northern Ireland very well and as such Human Needs Theory is applicable to the Northern Ireland Conflict.⁷⁷

The above-mentioned rights were a huge step in the right direction for Northern Ireland as the Troubles saw human rights violations carried out by both sides and this agreement enshrined these crucial human rights into the very fabric of the new self-governing, independent Northern Irish legislator. The freedom of religion principle is key as the sectarian issues originated from the conflicts between the Protestant and Catholic communities and so the inclusion of this was an important step in removing the barriers to a peace agreement.

Freedom from sectarian harassment is explicitly guaranteed which speaks to the recognition that this issue was at the heart of the conflict. After decades of sectarian violence, the threat of this needed to be addressed quickly and decisively and this perhaps shows that both sides of this conflict were getting weary of the constant violence. It was quite an ambitious goal as much work needed to be done to transform the attitude and beliefs of members of both communities on the ground. Success in this area would be mean real and lasting peace as well as a real achievement and worthy goal. Bukhari and Roofi argue that religious needs being left unmet are one of the most common reasons for conflict in the world and as

⁷⁵ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*.

⁷⁷ Bukhari and Roofi, p. 383-384.

such ensuring that these needs are met is key to preventing conflicts and it is therefore unsurprising that this was targeted to ensure lasting peace.⁷⁸

The agreement was careful to specify precisely how powers would be exercised and the processes by which Northern Ireland would govern itself. This was a vital necessity as with the creation of a power-sharing government between the two competing factions it was important to ensure that neither was able to get a leader into power who could push the boundaries or utilise their authority to oppress or persecute the other. This potentially was a very real possibility that could have undone not just the Agreement but the entire peace process. Actually, this has not come to pass as Tilly, Garry and Matthews found in their analysis of voting patterns in Northern Ireland following the Good Friday Agreement. They found that consociationalism power sharing incentivised moderation with political parties sitting fairly closely in terms of policy positions.⁷⁹

The exact powers of the new legislator and the new executive branch were detailed to provide necessary clarity. The emphasis was on the democratic processes to ensure proper representation of different parts of the community. The effect of this was to give confidence to the populace at a time of great change. This reestablishment of faith in the leadership and governance is important in conflict resolution to ensure that members of conflicting parties have less incentive or cause to reignite the conflict.

The Belfast Agreement highlights the goal of involving women more extensively in the politics of Northern Ireland. This is an important strategy identified in conflict resolution theories. The goal of greater political freedom and participation for women recognises that when women are included in a peace process it is generally more successful and was also a key step as for the most part during the peace process towards the end of the Troubles women played a small and very underappreciated and unrecognised role. It can be taken as a statement that the conflict was trying to move on by ensuring that this was also practised by the new look Northern Irish nation.

Adjei has assessed the scholarship on women's participation in peace processes and found it to be sparse but there is significant evidence that when women have an important role to play in post-conflict communities, sustainable peace is supported. Adjei notes that women's contribution has always been important both in the ending of conflict and the shaping of peace but has only since the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 that it has been properly recognized. The Resolution formally advocated for the inclusion of women in peace

⁷⁸ Bukhari and Roofi, p. 384.

⁷⁹ James Tilley, John Garry, and Neil Matthews, 'The Evolution of Party Policy and Cleavage Voting under Power-Sharing in Northern Ireland', *Government and Opposition*, 56.2 (2021), pp. 226–44 (p. 226), doi:10.1017/gov.2019.20.

processes. The Good Friday Agreement was ahead of its time as it recognized women's role in the peace process two years before the UN formally did.⁸⁰

According to Adjei, "Although the gaps in women's participation remain significant, there is a growing body of literature to show that including women in peace processes improves the success and sustainability of the process. The significance of this cannot be overstated if one considers the global cost of conflicts and including women in the four aspects of peace identified by Adjei in the scholarship: peacekeeping, peace-making, peacebuilding and peace education, should be a priority."⁸¹

This relatively underappreciated role played by women in the Troubles can be best highlighted by their pre troubles electoral record. Gilmartin writes that

Historically, Northern Ireland's record on female descriptive representation is profoundly bleak. During the first 50 years of its existence (1921-1972), a total of nine women were elected to its devolved parliament, representing a mere 4% of all elected members during that period.⁸²

This on its own highlights a key facet of the male dominated world of Northern Irish politics and could also explain the somewhat understated role of women in the peace process as they were very underrepresented in the realm of elected officials that extends as far as Westminster. In the same region prior to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement only three women had been elected as Members of Parliament, a truly tiny number.

The newly created Assembly with its 108 members represented the start of a new era for the political participation of women in Northern Ireland although to the disappointment of the women of Northern Ireland their participation has remained relatively modest, despite some improvement. In 1998 for example only 16% of electoral candidates were women and they made up only 13% of those elected to the new assembly. This increased a little in 2003 from 14 elected members to a total of 18 elected officials a number that was maintained in 2007.⁸³

This unfortunately shows that even with the Strands of the Good Friday Agreement enshrining women's political participation into law it was still met

⁸⁰ Adjei, p. 133.

⁸¹ Adjei, p. 134.

⁸² Niall Gilmartin, 'Gendering the "Post-Conflict" Narrative in Northern Ireland's Peace Process', *Capital & Class*, 43.1 (2019), pp. 89–104, doi:10.1177/0309816818818089. Pp-90-91.

⁸³ Niall Gilmartin, 'Gendering the "Post-Conflict" Narrative in Northern Ireland's Peace Process', *Capital & Class*, 43.1 (2019), pp. 89–104 (p. 90-91), doi:10.1177/0309816818818089.

with challenges. This will likely be a battle that shall continue well into the future as women's roles in traditionally male dominated areas is still rising but the progress has been rather slow and in a post-Brexit society Northern Ireland could be in line for more instability that could affect increasing women's participation.

The electoral situation has improved in more recent years and in the March 2017 elections the now reduced Assembly of 90 seats saw women secure 27 seats or 30% of the total seats, a much larger figure than before but still not a fully equal split.⁸⁴ However, this is now enough of a membership to give women a greater role in the political fabric of Northern Ireland and while it is unlikely that all female Members of the Assembly will agree on everything they now have enough of a voice in the Assembly that they can influence the changing tides of Northern Ireland, hopefully to the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland.

The agreement tackled some of the structural violence that had contributed to the conflict over the decades. A key area where this happened was in policing. The policing of Northern Ireland was vastly different from the rest of the United Kingdom in that all officers of the Royal Ulster Constabulary were armed, as opposed to the rest of the United Kingdom and as such reform was needed. The RUC was disbanded, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland was created as the new national police force, which is still in place today. This was also intended to reform, root and branch the law enforcement of Northern Ireland. The Opsahl Commission of 1992-93 discovered that Northern Irish Catholics recognised that the RUC had been in a position where if they focused on policing regular crimes, they were liable to be killed or injured and if they focused on security operations against the republicans then they would be neglecting their normal policing duties. It was also viewed as a British force as while there were some Catholic RUC officers the overwhelming majority were Protestant, and this was a key issue as the Catholic population saw the force as a force of the British. The fact that this was noted and acted upon shows that those who formulated the Agreement had been paying attention to this issue.⁸⁵

The RUC had been the most dangerous police force to serve in globally during the conflict with the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation listing a total of 312 officers as killed in terrorist attacks with 302 of those between 1969 and 1998. They also give a figure of over 10,000 officers injured in the line of duty with a total of three hundred wounded so severely that they were declared severely disabled. These deaths led to the creation of their own special welfare support network but

⁸⁴ Gilmartin, p. 91.

⁸⁵ Elliott, p. 94.

most tellingly of the danger that the RUC faced in the Troubles was the number of gallantry awards that were awarded to officers of the RUC during the conflict. In total 370 awards for Gallantry were awarded with a total of 712 officers receiving the Sovereign's Awards for Distinguished Service for a total of 1,082 awards, a truly huge number of awards for what was still a police force. It should also be noted that the RUCGC Foundation notes that 1183 families had to move house due to threats to members.⁸⁶ While this reflects the realities of the RUC during the conflict one must consider the psychological effects of the stress of this conflict. The largely protestant RUC suffered over ten thousand killed and wounded with a total of 9% of all deaths in the Troubles being RUC officers.⁸⁷ It is important to consider that these figures refer to around ten thousand casualties sustained out of a total regular and reserve complement of around 13,000 with 8,500 regulars and 4,500 reservists. This is a potential 79% casualty rate over the course of the conflict and while this simple calculation just calculates the number of casualties as a percentage of the whole force, it does not account for officers injured multiple times nor that some officers would not have been on the streets, it can show that at its most drastic, officers could have faced an 80% chance of being injured in the line of duty.

Despite the challenges it faced in trying to police such a divided society in the face of such extreme danger and religious tensions, the RUC was able to provide an important security role in Northern Ireland, alongside support from the British Armed Forces. There are questions about the provocation such security may illicit to heighten tensions when one considers Galtung's theory of structural violence. There were some controversies as to the conduct of its members, however it is important to remember that the RUC was still able to do its job with professionalism and in recognition of its services, the RUC was awarded the George Cross for its gallantry in 1999.⁸⁸

One of the most crucial steps that needed to be taken for the conflict to truly end was the decommissioning of weapons by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries, so as to ensure that it would be much more difficult for the conflict to flare up again to its previous level of violence.⁸⁹ Access to weaponry would be restricted and the recommencement of sectarian violence less likely. If weapons remained, then the police would have to treat every potential suspect as armed and dangerous and as such the chances of police violence or someone accidentally being shot could rise significantly. The situation would still be as risky as it was in the first place and would have therefore been something of a waste of time to try and reform. The decommissioning of weapons by the IRA was overseen by former Canadian General

⁸⁶ 'Background | Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation -'.

⁸⁷ 'Background | Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation -'.

⁸⁸ 'Background | Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation -'.

⁸⁹ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 20.

and twice Chief of the Canadian Defence Staff, John de Chastelain. De Chastelain was a former Canadian Ambassador to the US and became involved in the peace process in 1995. He was the chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning from 1997 to 2011 and was an effective neutral voice in the difficult days of the decommissioning of weapons by the IRA.⁹⁰

The security of Northern Ireland was in desperate need of reform. In the face of escalating violence, the security forces of Northern Ireland had responded and faced accusations of increased brutality.⁹¹ Changes were desperately needed to restore trust and lessen the danger of further escalation. Policies such as internment without trial were deeply resented for example and needed to change.⁹² Furthermore, the complex nature of counter-terrorism operations, which involve the armed presence of security forces on the streets and at checkpoints, were invasive to the public. Similarly, the peace walls, while keeping conflicting communities separate, also inhibited community cohesion.⁹³

During the Troubles there were many prisoners arrested from among the republican and loyalist paramilitaries and as such what to do with prisoners from the conflict was a question that needed to be answered. Although many of those in prison were guilty of actual crimes others were not and in essence it was a complex issue as justice truly served would have seen many remain in prison; keeping them imprisoned would stir up resentment in republican and nationalist circles that could have derailed the entire process and so as such the question had to be addressed in the Agreement.⁹⁴

The Agreement also outlined the various safeguards and many other caveats that would be crucial to the creation and hopeful longevity of the new state. The agreement also outlined the expected responsibilities of the newly created position of First Minister of Northern Ireland as well as their code of conduct and the same for the Deputy First Minister and other Ministers of State. This would be crucial as it ensured that those elected and entrusted with the reins of power in the nascent nation would not be able to overstate or exceed their authority as two other governments, both of which possessed an active interest in ensuring stability in the region, were legally recognising these outlined powers as a crucial necessity.⁹⁵

This document is a formal British Government paper coded as Command Paper 3883 which was presented to the British Parliament on the 10th April 1998 by the

⁹⁰ Connolly and Doyle, p. 83.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch, 'United Kingdom Human Rights Development' <<https://www.hrw.org/legacy/wr2k/Eca-22.htm>> [accessed 11 September 2024].

⁹² *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 21.

⁹³ Elliott, p. 89.

⁹⁴ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 25.

⁹⁵ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 5-8.

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It was intended to fully articulate and explain the principles agreed upon of the Good Friday Agreement. It also outlines the responsibilities that the British Government as well as their Irish counterparts held in actually implementing and maintaining the agreement.⁹⁶

The agreement also led to the founding of joint British-Irish committees such as the British-Irish Council and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference. These were intended to break down the barriers between the two governments and to create a forum for the discussion of ideas and the free transfer of thought between both parties. It was also intended to “promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the people of these islands”⁹⁷. This shows that both governments were committed to solving the issues of the past and to avoid the generations of the future having to undergo the same trials and tribulations that they had gone through. It also served as the basis for the creation of new ideas and ways of maintaining the peace that had been so hard fought and well earned. This had its origins in the work of the Opsahl Commission in the early 1990’s where this style of peace-making and societal collaboration was first tried and was a great success. It was clearly seen as such by those negotiating the agreement as they chose to specifically include this strand in the formal peace agreement.

This part of the agreement is arguably its biggest success as both governments were now openly stating that they wanted the conflict over with and were willing to actually take real steps to prove this and show not just each other but the population and those on their side that might not want to end the conflict that they would support them no longer if it came to it. The selection of the members of this Council, from both the British and Irish Governments ensured that both sides of the story should be heard in any issues as well as representatives from England, Scotland and Wales as well alongside those from Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. It also specifies how the Council will function and crucially how often it will meet thereby trying to avoid gridlock and the stymying of anything it tries to achieve.

The most crucial part of this paper and the agreement that it describes is not found in any one clause or point but in the fact that this document exists to explain this agreement and how it was actually reached. An agreement like the one agreed in 1998 had been decades in the making and had been the dream and ambition of many on both sides of the conflict. It also looked to be unattainable, but they actually managed to achieve it and for this everyone involved is worthy of the highest praise. The negotiations were difficult and trying to reach a general agreement was made more complicated as in the words of O’Dochartaigh the IRA more generally was not a singular organisation and was a far more nebulous entity

⁹⁶ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 29.

⁹⁷ *The Belfast Agreement: An Agreement Reached at the Multi-Party Talks on Northern Ireland*, p. 14.

than it first appeared. It included the Provisional IRA, the Real IRA and various other splinter groups. All together they had many different goals that they sought to achieve, some of which they did and others they still have not such as a United Ireland. O'Dochartaigh describes the IRA as "a politically astute actor focused on achievement, ready to make major concessions in order to achieve a settlement and quite logically focused on the British state as the key actor it was necessary to influence in order to achieve this" This view portrays the IRA as more than just a terrorist organisation, it recognises it as an actual political force that was even willing to make political concessions to the Loyalists and the British Government to try and achieve their political goals and their dream of a United Ireland.

The wider success of the peace process extends far beyond the borders of Northern Ireland onto the international stage. On this stage, the ending of such a long social conflict could provide a template for the potential ending of other similar conflicts. Guelke writes that

This cloud over the future of the Agreement and thereby over the peace process itself has not prevented the British government from promoting it as a possible model for the solution of other conflicts. In particular, Blair has expressed the hope that Israeli and Palestinian leaders might follow the example of Northern Ireland in resuming their peace process.⁹⁸

Parallels have often been made between the two conflicts and the resolution in Northern Ireland gives hope that perhaps one day the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians. Given the heavy and tragic loss of life in the conflicts between the two groups that have been involved in constant conflict for the last eight decades and unless they make a breakthrough in their own peace process then they shall likely remain in conflict for the foreseeable future.

A more recent threat to the continuation of the peace process and the continuing implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is the problems posed by the 2016 Brexit Referendum and its result triggering the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union from the 31st January 2020. This decision and vote were extremely controversial in mainland United Kingdom and within the still divided Northern Ireland and its communities. Connolly and Doyle have studied the impact of Brexit on the peace process and state

The decision by the UK government to withdraw from the EU has serious implications for the future of this peace process, with the most visible and immediate impact being the potential imposition of a hard border on the island of Ireland and a return to a pre-Good Friday Agreement status quo.⁹⁹

The fact that a hard border would interfere directly with the continued implementation of the Good Friday Agreement has been a real worry for the continued success of the Northern Ireland peace process. The signing of the peace agreement is not yet the end of the peace process, but the beginning of a second

⁹⁸ Guelke, p. 66-67.

⁹⁹ Connolly and Doyle, p. 80.

phase whereby divided communities must work together and sustain a fragile peace. In many ways the signing of the Good Friday Agreement was the start of the real work of conflict resolution and leaders need to be mindful that the wider political environment can have an impact.

It should however never be forgotten that the first major threat to the end of the Troubles was the threat to the peace process was the proliferation of weapons in Northern Ireland. Connolly and Doyle write that

As part of this post-agreement transition, the IRA destroyed all of its weapons in a process witnessed by Canadian General John de Chastelain, and an international commission, which was endorsed by British and Irish security sources who agreed with Gen. de Chastelain's analysis that the IRA had completely disarmed. Following the decommissioning of weapons, in 2005 the IRA issued a public statement calling an end to its armed conflict.¹⁰⁰

Part of the challenge following the signing of the agreement is the need for leaders to work together and cooperate within the new power sharing arrangements and this has not always been easy. Connolly and Doyle note that "Ulster Unionists and in particular the DUP, have remained reluctant participants in Northern Ireland's post-agreement political processes."¹⁰¹ Brexit offered an opportunity for the DUP to gain leverage through their alignment with the Conservative Government led by Theresa May. This has effected the peace process as it gave one of the staunch anti-Republican parties more power and influence.

The Good Friday Agreement had put the question of Irish Unification to bed for at least a while, but the Brexit Referendum brought this question back to the forefront of debate in Northern Ireland. "The polls show Irish nationalists as overwhelmingly willing to positively support a referendum on Irish unity."¹⁰² one effect of Brexit and its discussion on borders was that there was a renewed energy for a reunited Ireland among the Irish Nationalist population which is counterproductive towards a smooth peace process.

Connolly and Doyle cite polling and market research data that describes Northern Irish dissatisfaction with leaving the EU.

While polling data is showing a lot of volatility in response to the immediate political environment and a lot of sensitivity to precise question wording, for the first time since modern polling has been conducted in Northern Ireland, credible opinion polls are showing that, in certain circumstances, in particular around a hard Brexit, a majority of the

¹⁰⁰ Connolly and Doyle, p. 83.

¹⁰¹ Connolly and Doyle, p. 83.

¹⁰² Connolly and Doyle, p. 87.

population would vote to join a united Ireland in order to re-join the EU (Lucid Talk [2018](#)).¹⁰³

The Brexit vote and the resulting departure of the United Kingdom from the EU was an unhelpful irritant to the power sharing agreement at a time when the Northern Irish community were trying to build unity. It remains to be seen whether this threat to the unity of the island of Ireland will be fatal or if the population of the island will be able to keep the unity that so many have worked for decades to achieve.¹⁰⁴

The Conservatives under Teresa May needed to have a majority in Parliament to form a government and so made an alliance with the DUP which interfered with the power sharing arrangements.

For example, the two Governments could have decided to legislate for same-sex marriage or Irish language protections, through the British parliament, in effect removing those contentious issues from the debate around re-forming a devolved Executive. However, the Confidence and Supply agreement between the DUP and the British Conservatives, meant that the joint-government external management of the peace process was effectively ended.¹⁰⁵

All of these were particularly unhelpful to the continuing efforts of the peace process. Connolly and Doyle note that “The debate on the Irish border has created tensions between the Irish and British Governments that weaken their capacity to jointly administer the peace process.” This is a key issue as the true keystone of the peace process was the Irish Government removing the constitutional intention of unifying Ireland and the British Government had agreed that if the majority of the population of Northern Ireland voted to unify then they would accept it.¹⁰⁶

The issues that the potential instillation of a harder border would cause are perhaps best described by Lord Mandelson, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland between 1999 and 2001 and a man who had supported the peace process. He states that

[T]he re-imposition of a formalised border would be a radical departure from the established strategy of the administrations in Dublin, London and Belfast. Anything in my view that strengthened a sense of separatism between Northern and Southern Ireland – physically, economically, psychologically – has the potential to upset the progress that has been made and serve as a potential source of renewed sectarianism that would always bear the risk of triggering further violence in Ireland, particularly in the North. (Mandelson [2016](#))¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Connolly and Doyle, p. 87.

¹⁰⁴ Connolly and Doyle, p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ Connolly and Doyle, p. 88.

¹⁰⁶ Connolly and Doyle, p. 89.

¹⁰⁷ Connolly and Doyle, p. 90.

This could have undone the progress that the Good Friday Agreement allowed either partially or in its entirety as a hard border would in effect separate the two parts of Ireland again just as they had been prior to the signing of the Agreement.

Human Needs Theory is a theory developed by John Burton which argues that conflict arises when human needs are not met. Walsh makes a case that consociationalism, which is a feature of the political landscape of Northern Ireland during this period of conflict resolution, is able to develop institutions that meet basic human needs and therefore support the nurturing of peace. "Consociationalism can be a mechanism through which identities can cease to be a source of conflict and agitation." Consociationalism recognizes the different identities in Northern Ireland post-Good Friday Agreement and their differences. What has been key however is that they are still able to work in cooperation with each other for a common purpose. This has been a strength of the peace process and of the Northern Irish people. It can be argued that Brexit meanwhile has torpedoed the progress that has been made through the introduction of fresh arguments and divisions.¹⁰⁸

At this time there were more international advocates for peace not just in Northern Ireland but globally in the UN. "The debates within the United Nations and the ideas in the *Agenda for Peace* and *Brahimi Report* were important international perspectives on ending conflict because they broadened understanding about international peacemaking interventions and highlighted the need for approaches for consolidating a sustainable peace"¹⁰⁹ Jarman notes that the two UN papers above were important contributions to peacebuilding ideas generally. They introduced ideas of post-conflict peace and proposed strategies for building sustainable peace that include engagement with local parties to improve quality of life, fair elections, policing, human rights, disarmament and the creation of longer-term strategic frameworks for peacebuilding. Resolutions were put in place to incorporate women's peace initiatives and support women's groups with a view to a long-term sustainable solution.

This section has focused on the period of peace making following the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998 and how the agreement and the activities that follow since align with conflict resolution theory ideas. The signing of the Belfast Agreement was the culmination of almost three decades of work. As a document the Belfast Agreement sets out to establish a new set of relationships for a peaceful Northern Ireland. The Agreement includes legally binding rights and freedoms that seek to address the needs of all members of Northern Irish society in line with the Human Needs model of Conflict Resolution.

The most important element of the Agreement was to establish the right of the people of Northern Ireland to self-determination. The emphasis on women in the Agreement also invoked the right of self-determination as women were given a voice in the fate of their country. The Agreement was able to create a forum for cooperation between the British and Irish populations. The existence of the agreement itself was a great success for the population of Northern Ireland as the peace process had led to visible and tangible progress. The IRA itself was aware of the political realities and did actually seek an agreement to end

¹⁰⁸ Walsh. p-268

¹⁰⁹ Jarman, 'The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation', p. 131.

the conflict and achieve its goals. The peace process has been a success especially on the international stage and has been promoted as a model for other conflicts to be resolved.

At present the Brexit Referendum has risked the continued success of the peace process. The threat of a hard border between the Ireland and Northern Ireland has threatened the continuation of the process. Cooperation between the leaders of the various groups of Northern Ireland has at times been lacking between certain groups. As a result of Brexit, the question of Irish Unification has reared its head again. Polling data suggests support for a referendum on Irish Unification is rising due to anger at leaving the EU. The chaos of the post-Brexit political world was further complicated by political manoeuvring of Theresa May's government with the DUP.

Conclusion

The Northern Irish Peace Process is a far more complicated and protracted process than one might initially suspect. Peace in Northern Ireland is a significant achievement considering the enduring nature and bitterness of the conflict over many decades. Ultimately communities pulled together and with the efforts of leadership, civil society and allies further afield, peace was achieved. The people of Northern Ireland are worthy of much praise for being able to work through the apparent insurmountable issues that plagued their nation in the latter part of the twentieth century.

This paper set out to examine the journey to peace against the lens of conflict resolution theory and sought to identify ways in which lessons could be drawn from the process that may be of use in other protracted conflicts, both current and future. It is almost certainly too optimistic to hope that these theories and processes of conflict resolution will never be needed in the future, however it must be hoped that when called upon to end the conflicts of the world, they prove up to the task of restoring peace and preserving the lives of those caught up in wars around the globe.

An examination of the work of many in the face of political repression, religious division, segregation, violence and terrorism reveals much of value regarding conflict resolution practice. Conflict resolution theorists will no doubt recognise and find new lessons from the Northern Ireland experience as conflict resolution as a theory is always evolving and being refined. A number of key elements can be identified as contributing towards the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the restoration of peace to the region. The difficult road to peace emerged when dissenting elements were finally able to find common ground and goals that all communities were able to get behind. The fact that the leadership of both parties to the conflict were able to create a discreet space for back-channel negotiations was key to being able to understand each other's position and find ways to reach an acceptable

solution. An important aspect of the negotiations was the final recognition of the republican Sinn Fein as a political party rather than as a terrorist group. This provided legitimacy to deeply held beliefs about the right of the people of Northern Ireland to self-determination. Recognition of human needs is an important element in achieving peace.

The spiral of violence that Northern Ireland entered during the Troubles required its own focus to break. This required an examination of the structures of violence leading to reforms of the security and policing of Northern Ireland which were specifically outlined in the Good Friday Agreement. These reforms were important to the peace process as they began undoing the structures of violence that had existed in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. The disbandment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and a clean slate start with the Police Service of Northern Ireland was the first step. It was also decided that a focus on the recruitment of more Catholic's to become PSNI officers was key to making the security services a more diverse and less Protestant dominated force.

The participation of women was another element that contributed to the peace process. The women of Northern Ireland deserve praise for the work they did in not only ending the conflict but in also improving the political situation of the Northern Irish woman in the process. The work of women both from abroad and from Northern Ireland itself is worthy of its own study into how this may have had an effect on other peace processes around the globe and may be carried out in the future.

The research for this work has revealed the power of civil society in the face of violent conflict and in an era of social media hopefully this can be used in parts of the world that need it. The members of civil society in Northern Ireland are worthy of the greatest of respect for being able to articulate their needs in the furtherance of peace. In particular since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement the communities of Northern Ireland have worked hard to avoid a resurgence of the conflict despite multiple potential issues that could have reignited it.

This dissertation has been a true privilege to research and write, it has however also been sobering and difficult at times. It is the hope of this author that this research could be continued in the future, possibly as part of a PhD. Conflict resolution research could usefully be focused on other protracted conflicts across the world with three possible case studies coming to mind. A study of the ongoing conflict in the Korean Peninsula would be fascinating and would be a different challenge from this study of the Troubles. A potential study of the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict and its origins would also be worthy of its own in-depth study as to its causes and attempts to achieve peace. The Russo-Ukraine War and especially the era before the Maidan Revolution, the Maidan Revolution itself and the post-Maidan to the beginning of the 2022 Russian Invasion would be a challenge through the amounts of disinformation and propaganda that surrounds the conflict. These are all of course hypothetical projects but would be very valuable to carry out in the future.

Overall, the people of Northern Ireland have been able to accomplish a remarkable achievement. In the face of the threats of the new world and threats that may come to pass in the future it is the sincere hope of this author that the peace that so many fought for both survives and thrives. After decades of work and the loss of thousands of lives a relapse into the terror of conflict would be a tragedy and a loss for all of the people of Northern Ireland and indeed the world.

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