Violence and Security Concerns in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland

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Abstract

Eighteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland struggles with a lingering sense of insecurity. This article discusses the underlying reasons for a sense of insecurity and vulnerability in this post-conflict context. First, ongoing sporadic communal violence reactivates communal divisions and the psychological burden of "the Troubles." The activities of spoiler paramilitary groups and sporadic communal troubles still fuel people's anxiety about the possibility of renewed violence, as the history of political violence proves how these influences can be a destabilizing factor in inter-communal relations. Second, the unchanging patterns of political mobilization, based on the historical division of unionism and nationalism, reinforce the previous cleavages and continue to inform the boundaries of the communal divide. The political arena is still plagued by ethnic outbidding and intransigent party politicking, both of which pit communities against each other and keep the zero-sum bias between the groups alive. Third, the working-class communities that constituted the backbone of the political violence carry on the legacy of war with their continued paramilitary presence and legacy of sectarianism. The social vulnerabilities of working-class areas, such as continuing paramilitary presence, the legacy of sectarianism in segregated neighborhoods, persistent mistrust toward the police, and growing youth unemployment, need to be addressed in order to generate a long-term social infrastructure for peace.

Keywords: Post-conflict, Northern Ireland, violence, security, spoilers

1. Introduction

The post-conflict period denotes the transitional period between war and peace, but the boundaries of war and peace are far from clear—in fact, they are blurry in most cases. Post-conflict countries display a high range of variance in terms of violence, such as the increased death rates in Guatemala or the outbreak of hostilities in Sri Lanka. The term "post-conflict" is in itself ambiguous, as the prefix "post" implies that the conflict is over, whereas the reality is that these countries are plagued with such problems as ragged ceasefires, false promises of non-violence, delayed reforms, etc. The post-conflict period does not bring about an immediate transition to peace in the positive sense, as associated with robust justice, liberty, and equity, with heightened levels of security and relatively little violence.[1] It can generate a weak and fragile peace unless the socio-economic transformation is accompanied by a lack

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[1]   J. Galtung, *Essays in Peace Research*, vol.1 (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlers, 1975).

of violence.[2] Rather than a smooth transition to normalcy, it is more reasonable to expect a post-conflict period in which peace is contested with bottlenecks and setbacks.[3] Insecurity and violence can be can be an intrinsic property of the post-conflict process due to the legacy of war:

> Human security regularly deteriorates in the delicate period after wars are officially declared over. As a result, so-called post-conflict realities rarely bear much resemblance to what is implied by their definition. Rather, death and injury rates often remain comparatively high even after an armed conflict has come to an "end."[4]

The conflict in Northern Ireland stems from the millennia-old political tensions between unionism and nationalism, as unionists (composed mainly of Protestants) refused to join in a united Ireland, whereas nationalists (composed mainly of Catholics) contested the legitimacy of British rule in Ireland. Northern Ireland was instituted as a devolved government of the UK in 1921, but Catholics were discriminated against socially, politically, and economically under unionist governments (1921–72). The outbreak of communal tensions at the end of the 1960s and the ensuing 30years of communal conflict, known as "the Troubles," claimed over 3,700 lives in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 2001.[5] This number may sound small for large populations; however, it had a substantial and traumatic impact for a population of about 1.6 million. Eighteen years after the 1998 Belfast Good Friday Agreement (GFA), Northern Ireland is a post-conflict society that is described by scholars as "no peace, no war,"[6] "imperfect peace,"[7] or "in the shadow of the gun."[8] These epithets refer to a post-conflict environment in which the use of violence is still on the horizon and feeds into fears about a potential lapse back into collective violence.

The Northern Ireland case illustrates that insecurity in a post-conflict context is adaptive and persistent. People still associate safety with their segregated neighborhoods[9] and they feel safer keeping the peace lines, the physical barriers separating the communities that built up during the Troubles. Recent research shows that although 58 percent of respondents want to see the destruction of the peace walls in the future, the same percentage is also unsure about the ability of the police to ensure their safety once they are removed, and 68 percent of respondents still think that peace walls are necessary to keep them safe and protect them from sectarian attacks.[10] Although crime rates in Northern Ireland have seen a downward trend since 1998, with lower crime rates compared to England and Wales,[11] a significant

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[2]   J. Burton, *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); J. Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 1996). For an alternative approach, See Ö.F. Örsün, "Containing the Shock: Dimensions of Democracy and A Model of Endogenous Armament" (paper presented at the Empirical Studies in Political Analysis annual meeting, Antalya, Turkey, January 2015).

[3]   R. Mac Ginty, "Northern Ireland: A peace process thwarted by accidental spoiling," in *Challenges to Peacebuilding: Managing spoilers during conflict resolution,* ed. E. Newman and O. Richmond (New York: United Nations University Press, 2006), 170-71.

[4]   Small Arms Survey 2005, *Weapons at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 289.

[5]   M. Smith and J. Hamilton, "The Human Costs of the Troubles," in *Researching the Troubles: Social Science Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict,* ed. O. Hargie and D. Dickson (Edinburgh, Scotland: Mainstream, 2004), 15-36.

[6]   R. Mac Ginty, *No War, No Peace: The Rejuvenation of Stalled Peace Processes and Peace Accords* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008).

[7]   R. Monaghan, "An Imperfect Peace: Paramilitary Punishments in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 3 (2004): 439-61.

[8]   J. A. Sluka, "In the Shadow of the Gun: 'Not-War-Not-Peace' and the Future of Conflict in Northern Ireland," *Critique of Anthropology* 29, no. 3 (2009): 279-99.

[9]   2012/2013 NICS (Northern Ireland Crime Survey) shows that 59 percent of respondents think that crime in Northern Ireland has increased in the last two years, only 33 percent perceive a parallel increase in local crimes.

[10]   J. Byrne, C. Gormley-Heenan, and G. Robinson, *Peace Walls:Public attitudes and impact on policy* (University of Ulster/Institute for Research in Social Sciences, November 2012).

[11]   U.K. Department of Justice, Analytical Services Group, *Experience of Crime: Findings from the 2012/13 Northern Ireland*

majority (59 percent) of the 2012–13 Northern Ireland Crime Survey (NICS) respondents perceive that crime levels in Northern Ireland have increased in the preceding two years, and they express higher levels of insecurity compared to the actual risk than their counterparts in England and Wales.[12]Existential anxiety has been a constant feature of Northern Ireland, and this is based on "fear of what can happen, rather than what 'is.'"[13]

This article discusses the underlying reasons for violence and security concerns in a post-conflict period, based on the case of Northern Ireland. It draws attention to three dynamics that feed into the undercurrents of insecurity in post-conflict Northern Ireland. First, the ongoing sporadic communal violence reactivates communal divisions and the legacy of terror. Second, the unchanging patterns of political mobilization, based on the political polarization of unionism and nationalism, continue to reinforce the sectarian divisions and preexistent cleavages despite the GFA. Third, the social infrastructure of the conflict, which is composed mainly of working-class communities, still carries some generic features that can predispose them toward violence. This study is based on 23 interviews conducted in Northern Ireland during the summer of 2014 that included local community workers, Northern Ireland deputies, and specialists on Northern Ireland conflict. The author also conducted informal interviews with residents of North and West Belfast, two of the districts that were most affected by violence.

2. Sporadic Communal Violence

The level of political violence dropped significantly after the GFA in Northern Ireland, but institutions that are remnants of communal violence, such as dissident militant groups, peace walls, and small-scale sectarian violence, continue to influence people's perception of security. In Northern Ireland, the loyalist and republican paramilitary groups became signatories of the GFA and agreed to the provisions related to the demilitarization of the area. After seven years of negotiations and pressure upon the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and its political wing, Sinn Fein, the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) announced in 2005 that the PIRA had finally completed the decommissioning of its weaponry. However, only the main organization was disbanded, leaving behind dissident republican militants that were not content with the GFA, notably the Real IRA (RIRA), the Continuity IRA (CIRA), and Óglaigh na hÉireann (ONH). These organizations are the spoilers of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Spoilers are "leaders and parties who believe that peace emerging from negotiations threatens their power, worldview, and interests, and use violence to undermine attempts to achieve it."[14] Spoiler militant groups use violence to keep the flame of resistance alive, sabotage the agreement, and challenge its content and implementation. The distribution of power during the peace process and the opportunity structure provided by such distribution can lead to the development of spoilers or their weakening. In Northern Ireland, the progress of peace negotiation pushed main militant organizations to sign up to the principles of

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Crime Survey, by P. Campbell and G. Cadogan, Research and Statistical Bulletin 8/2013 (Belfast, December 2013).

[12] 2012/2013 NICS respondents express higher levels of worry compared to the 2012/2013 British Crime Survey respondents for certain types of crimes: violent crime (17% v 12%); car crime (11% v 7%); and burglary (14% v 12%). They also display higher levels of worry for crime in general compared to their counterparts in England and Wales (9% v 7%). See U.K. Department of Justice, Analytical Services Group, *Perceptions of Crime: Findings from the 2012/13 Northern Ireland Crime Survey*, by G. Cadogan and P. Campbell, Research and Statistical Bulletin 1/2014 (Belfast, February 2014),ii.

[13] S. Kay, "Ontological Security and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland," *Contemporary Security Policy* 33, no. 2 (2012): 243.

[14] S. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 5.

nonviolence. The lack of external powers that would sponsor militant organizations and punishments on spoiler groups prevented dissident militants from steering the peace process away from its course.[15]

Republican and loyalist spoiler groups' activities create suspicion of the decommissioning and revive fears of a potential return to political violence. Dissident republican militants launch bomb attacks targeting police stations, soldiers, courthouses, and Catholic police officers in order to deter them from their involvement in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).[16]The Violent Dissident Republican Database from 1997 to 2010 shows 711 violent incidents, 187 non-violent incidents, and 70 incidents labeled as threats of violence, with an overall increase after 2007.[17] The militant dissidents also engage in moral policing, executing punishment attacks, and other forms of vigilante justice against suspected drug dealers and sex offenders.[18] However, the militant activities of dissident republicans remain minor and limited compared to those of the PIRA. As the IMC report indicates, their violent campaign "in no way matches the range and tempo of the PIRA campaign of the Troubles."[19] On the other side, the primary paramilitary organizations of loyalism, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Red Hand Commandos (RHC), the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), adopted a conflict-transformation role and banned their members from perpetuating sectarian violence and criminality.[20] However, not all factions of these organizations are committed to conflict resolution, so there remain groups engaged in criminal activities. Loyalist paramilitaries are more fractured and composed of loose structures compared to the PIRA; thus, they have more factions that take the lead in criminal business such as drug dealing, robbery, the sale of counterfeit goods, intimidation, and extortion. The IMC report states that "in contrast to PIRA, loyalist groups are finding it very difficult to contemplate going out of business."[21] The veteran members of the UVF who are at loggerheads with the current leadership reveal to the public that the UVF is making a fortune from racketeering and taxing of its own men and continue its recruitment by filling its ranks with drug dealers, the unemployed, and people inclined to anti-social behavior.[22] The IMC also acknowledges that the UDA continues the recruitment of youth, which is "inconsistent with an organization which is going out of business as a paramilitary group."[23] The PSNI statistics show a significant decrease in the number of paramilitary shooting and bombing incidents after 2005, particularly in 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 (see Table 1). The causalities due to paramilitary-style assaults and shootings also decreased after 2005 from

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[15] R. Mac Ginty, "Northern Ireland".

[16] Police officers are exposed to threats and attacks of militant dissidents. A young Catholic policeman was murdered by dissidents in 2011 using a car bomb. According to Police Federation chairman Terry Spence, an estimated 64 PSNI officers had to be re-housed because of threats of militant dissidents. See "Authorities accused of turning back on threatened police officers," *The Legacy*, February 3, 2014, accessed July 25, 2014, http://www.thedetail.tv/issues/304/displaced-policing-story-for-legacy-series/authorities-accused-of-turning-back-on-threatened-police-officers.

[17] J. Horgan and J. F. Morrison, "Here to Stay? The Rising Threat of Violent Dissident Republicanism in Northern Ireland," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4 (2011): 646.

[18] Horgan and Morrison, "Here to Stay?"643.

[19] Independent Monitoring Commission, *Twenty-fifth report of the Independent Monitoring Commission* (London: The Stationery Office, November 2010).

[20] R. Monaghan and P. Shirlow, "Forward to the Past? Loyalist Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland Since 1994," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 8 (2011): 650-51.

[21] Independent Monitoring Commission, *Twenty-sixth and final report of the Independent Monitoring Commission, 2004-2011 Changes, Impact and Lessons* (London: The Stationery Office, July 2011).

[22] "Inside the UVF: Money, murders and mayhem - the loyalist gang's secrets unveiled," *Belfast Telegraph.co.uk*, October 13, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014, http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/news/inside-the-uvf-money-murders-and-mayhem-the-loyalist-gangs-secrets-unveiled-30659663.html.

[23] Independent Monitoring Commission, *Twenty-fifth report,* 18.

three-digit numbers to two-digit numbers, and increased back to three-digit numbers only in 2009/2010 until 2014. In addition, security-related deaths dropped substantially to one death per year starting in2010/2011and only increased to two in 2012/2013.

Table 1-PSNI Security Statistics 1998/1999–2013/2014

Period	Deaths due to security situation	Shooting incidents	Bombing incidents	Casualties as a result of paramilitary-style assaults and shootings
1998-1999	44	187	123	245
1999-2000	7	131	66	178
2000-2001	18	331	177	323
2002-2003	17	358	318	302
2002-2003	15	348	178	309
2003-2004	7	207	71	298
2004-2005	4	167	48	209
2005-2006	6	156	81	152
2006-2007	4	58	20	74
2007-2008	1	42	23	52
2008-2009	5	54	46	61
2009-2010	2	79	50	127
2010-2011	1	72	99	83
2011-2012	1	67	56	79
2012-2013	2	64	44	63
2013-2014	1	54	69	70

Source: Police Service of Northern Ireland, *Police Recorded Security Situation Statistics Annual Report covering the period 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014* (Belfast, PSNI Statistics Branch), 9.

People's sense of insecurity is also fed by the resilient sectarianism in the segregated areas that shoulder the burden of the legacy of the Troubles. Belfast is historically a "polarized city"[24] in which highly politicized communities are situated in segregated areas. For years, whether it was done directly or indirectly, residents of segregated areas were exposed to the dehumanization of other communities. The violence has significantly decreased in the last years, but in the past, it was possible to hear petrol bombs, nail bombs, and rioting every single night in the interfaces between the segregated residential areas. Interfaces can be defined as "conjunctions of working class residential zones which identify with opposing ethnic/political communities."[25] The peace lines were the flashpoints of communal attacks during the Troubles, because the majority of deaths took place around them.[26] After the GFA, the number of peace walls increased from 18 to 88 by 2009,[27]but daily sectarian attacks continue to haunt the interfaces, and this revives the psychological stress of the deep-rooted distrust between communities. This psychology of constant vigilance still marks sectarian enclaves, as described by a civil society leader working in North Belfast:

[24] F. W. Boal, "Encapsulation: Urban dimensions of national conflict," in *Managing Divided Cities,* ed. S. Dunn (Keele: Keele University Press, 1994), 31.

[25] N. Jarman, *Demography, Development and Disorder: Changing Patterns of Interface Areas* (Belfast: The Institute for Conflict Research, July 2004), 1.

[26] P. Shirlow and B. Murtagh, *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City* (London: Pluto Press, 2006).

[27] Community Relations Council, *Towards Sustainable Security: Interface Barriers and the Legacy of Segregation in Belfast* (Belfast: Community Relations Council, c. 2009), 3.

> People are very aware of where they are walking here, very aware of where the other community is, very worry[sic] about what clothes they wore, they're very worry[sic] about the names of their children, what they understand from the names of their children cause you give out who they are. That's becoming less and less but in the recent past, this was something very predominant.[28]

The nature of interface conflict depends on various factors: the legacy of the Troubles, the leadership of paramilitaries, internal feuding between paramilitaries, antisocial behavior of youth, tit-for-tat attacks, and interpersonal frictions. Jarman's study on interfaces reveals five events that provoke conflict around interfaces: parades, football, bonfires, Halloween, and Gaelic matches. It also points out three groups involved in the interface troubles: youth, anti-social elements, and people from outside the immediate area.[29] In some areas, there is a "tacitly accepted level of violence" in neighborhoods under the control of paramilitaries:

> Tacitly accepted levels of violence exists in many areas. Increasingly, in some areas people will work with the police, report to the police; they will try to stop the violence. There are some areas worse than others recently. Let's say, for example, tensions have been worse around Short Strand. The UVF there is at odds with the UVF in the west of the city. So the UVF in the east of the city is more criminal in terms of protecting their territory. They do abducting and things like that. In some areas, you find people from republican groups and people from loyalist areas, they work together to reduce tensions in interfaces. In East Belfast, this is not happening at the moment. Because it probably suits the people in the UVF in particular to keep the tensions there. It gives them an opportunity; they recruit people to get them to attack. That gets them rolled into the organization and committed to the organization. In some parts of the city, tensions are much lower. It is not the same in all interfaces.[30]

Today, these attacks are another means of pursuing communal confrontation by intimidating the other community and asserting territoriality. Some incidents are referred to as "recreational rioting," which involve youth groups that riot for fun.[31]North Belfast is emblematic of the sectarian rioting in interface areas, as it is a patchwork of nationalist and loyalist communities compared to West and East Belfast, which is composed of more homogenous communities and segregated peace lines. Moreover, the symbolic premises of communities, such as schools, churches, Orange Halls, and properties of the Gaelic Sport Association, are also targets of sectarian attacks. Apart from the communal tensions around interfaces, unionist–nationalist confrontations also occur in Belfast during demonstrations or protests such as anti-internment marches or demonstrations for the Palestine–Israel conflict.[32]

3. Old Cleavages in the Post-GFA Period

Supported by the Protestant majority, unionists took hold of the political power for fifty years and prevented the participation of Irish nationalists in policy-making until the introduction of direct rule in 1972. Against the hegemony of unionist governments (1921–72), the GFA introduced power-sharing arrangements between Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists. The Agreement is a historical turning point not only because it ended the political violence of three decades but also because it instituted a power-sharing government between the two

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[28]   Rab McCallum, in discussion with the author, North Belfast Interface Network, 9 September 2014.
[29]   N. Jarman, *Working at the Interface: Good Practice in Reducing Tension and Violence* (Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research, 2006), 7-9.
[30]   Neil Jarman, in discussion with the author, Queen's University of Belfast, 22 August 2014.
[31]   N. Jarman and C. O'halloran, "Recreational Rioting: Young people, interface areas and violence," *Child Care in Practice* 7, no. 1 (2001): 2-16.
[32]   Demonstrations for Israel-Palestine conflict sometimes turn into nationalist-unionist confrontations in Northern Ireland reviving the tensions between the settler and the native.

conflicting political traditions. The political system in Northern Ireland is exemplary of Lijphart's consociational model, which is founded on a grand coalition that is representative of the diversity within society.[33]Lijphart proposes a "consociational democracy" approach to govern plural societies. It has four main pillars: minority veto power, proportional representation in the voting system, public sector recruitment, and segmental autonomy in the cultural sector. The Northern Ireland Assembly produces a collective executive drawn from political parties with significant representation in the Assembly. The Assembly is composed of 108 members elected by the single transferable vote (STV) proportional representation system, which is designed to transfer votes across nationalist and unionist blocs. The GFA introduces the requirement that all the major decisions that pass the Assembly should be based on cross-community support and approved by a majority of representatives of each community. The Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) cast their votes by designating themselves as "nationalist," "unionist," or "other" to ensure that important decisions are made with cross-community support. In addition, Northern Ireland communal division is recognized in the positions of heads of government, as the posts of First Minister and Deputy First Minister are instituted as joint premiers with equal status and they are elected by the Assembly based on cross-community voting. In the distribution of ministerial positions, the d'Hondt system is implemented to distribute ministerial posts according to party strength. This system ensures that the two main communities in Northern Ireland take seats in the government and collaborate to run the country. The power-sharing arrangements of Northern Ireland are exemplary of consociationalism, but have also its unique qualities: the role of external actors in its institution and management, its capacity to address self-determination claims of unionism and nationalism, its internal arrangements to promote reforms, and its electoral system that distributes power.[34]

The GFA was predicated upon constructive ambiguity that led both unionists and nationalists to interpret the provisions of the agreement differently. However, the GFA did not address the root causes of the conflict: the communities' historically entrenched, conflicting aspirations. In order to circumvent this problem, it set the principle of consent to change the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, which left room for both sides to realize their ethno-national agendas in the limits of law and the possibilities of politics. The main political actors of unionism and nationalism, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the Social Democratic Labor Party (SDLP), and Sinn Fein, signed up to the GFA, while the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the more hardline wing of unionism, rejected the agreement. The Agreement was also a "marriage of force" under the pressure of third parties and did not bring about a political reconciliation.[35] Unionist and nationalist parties even canvassed popular support for the GFA referendum based on the conflicting national aspirations.[36] Many provisions of the GFA concerning early release of prisoners, reform in the police sector, and the decommissioning of the IRA, pumped new life into party politicking around communal divisions.

Contrary to what was expected, the architects of the Agreement, the UUP and the SDLP, were not rewarded with electoral gains in the long term, as the hardline wings of unionism

[33] A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A comparative exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

[34] J. McGarry and B. O'Leary, "Consociational Theory, Northern Ireland's Conflict, and its Agreement. Part 1: What consociationalists can learn from Northern Ireland," *Government and Opposition* 41, no. 1 (2006): 43-63.

[35] Adrian Guelke, Personal communication, Queen's University of Belfast, August 18, 2014.

[36] I. Somerville and S. Kirby, "Northern Ireland peace process: Dissemination, reconciliation and the 'Good Friday Agreement' referendum campaign," *Public Relations Inquiry* 1, no. 3 (2012): 231-55.

and nationalism, the DUP, and Sinn Fein became the leading parties of Protestant and Catholic communities after 2003. The GFA survived not thanks to the performance of local parties and the executive, but due to the UK government's ability and capacity to implement the necessary policies and institutions to sustain the peace process.[37]The Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended four times because unionist parties withdrew their support from the executive due to the resistance of the PIRA to decommissioning. The most lengthy and serious interruption was from October 2002 until May 2007, but it was reinstituted after the Saint Andrew's Agreement. The pace of consociational politics also succeeded in bringing hardline parties to the negotiation table. Since 2007, the hardline parties of unionism and nationalism, the DUP, and Sinn Fein have cooperated in the devolved government, joined in parliamentary meetings, met the other communities' civil society organizations, and produced local decision making. In 2011, the first full term of devolved government came to an end. The consociational arrangements also eroded the radical lines of the hardline parties, which revised their ideological platforms for electoral gains and political legality. While Sinn Fein evolved from militant republicanism to constitutional republicanism and achieved the support of middle-class nationalists as well as its traditional electoral base of poor, urban working-class Catholics,[38] the DUP moderated its position on power-sharing and policing. Nonetheless, it is still not possible to talk about a normalization of relations between unionism and nationalism. The five deputies in my interviews confirm as well that without consociational arrangements, it would not be possible for unionist and nationalist parties to cooperate in a government.[39]

The electoral behavior that is divided between unionism and nationalism has not changed significantly since the GFA and maintains the preexistent cleavages in the post-conflict period. Power-sharing arrangements such as cross-community voting and veto power became an instrument of ethnic competition and a catalyst of single-identity politics.[40] Although the designation of votes as "nationalist," "unionist," or "other" in the Northern Ireland Assembly and government aims to assure cross-community support for major decisions, it also institutionalizes and rigidifies the communal divisions between Catholic nationalism and Protestant unionism. This system puts additional stress on bi-confessional parties because they are "squeezed out" by nationalist and unionist blocs.[41] The Alliance Party opposes this designation, complaining that the "other" voting has lower comparative advantage compared to "unionist" and "nationalist" voting. According to a 2010 NILT (Northern Ireland Life and Times) survey, close to 60 percent of Protestant and Catholic respondents view this

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[37] K. Jr. DeRouen, M. J. Ferguson, S. Norton, Y. H. Park, J. Lea, and A. Streat-Bartlett, "Civil war peace agreement implementation and state capacity," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 3 (2010): 333-46.

[38] J. Nagle, "From Secessionist Mobilization to Sub-state Nationalism? Assessing the Impact of Consociationalism and Devolution on Irish Nationalism in Northern Ireland," *Regional & Federal Studies* 23, no. 4 (2013): 461-77.

[39] Nigel Dodds (Democratic Unionist Member of Parliament for Belfast North), in discussion with the author, August 28, 2014; Anna Lo (Alliance Member of Legislative Assembly for South Belfast), in discussion with the author, August 29, 2014; Fra McCann (Sinn Fein Member of Legislative Assembly for West Belfast), in discussion with the author, September 2, 2014; Alban Maginness (SDLP Member of Legislative Assembly for North Belfast), in discussion with the author, September 3, 2014; Alex Maskey (Sinn Fein Member of Legislative Assembly for South Belfast), in discussion with the author, September 9, 2014.

[40] R. MacGinty and D. Darby, *Guns and Government: The Management of the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); K. Brown and R. MacGinty, "Public attitudes toward Partisan and Neutral Symbols in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10, no. 1 (2003): 83-108; J. Wilson and K. Stapleton, "Nation-State, Devolution and the Parliamentary Discourse of Minority Languages," *Journal of Language and Politics* 2, no. 1 (2003): 5-30; J. Tonge, *The New Northern Irish Politics?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[41] J. Wilson and S. Stapleton, "Discourse in the Shadows: Discursive Construction and the Northern Ireland Assembly," *Discourse & Society* 23, no. 1 (2012): 69-92.

type of voting as a catalyst of old sectarian politics.[42] The ability of the single transferable vote to generate cross-community voting was also limited, with low vote transfer between nationalist and unionist voters. According to a 2013 NILT survey, support for a united Ireland dropped below 15 percent among Catholics, but it is still highly unlikely for a Catholic to vote for unionist parties and for a Protestant to vote for nationalist parties.[43] According to Anno Lo, South Belfast deputy of the Alliance Party:

> The constitutional issue is still so black and white to many people. There seems to be no budge, no softening. It is an either/or issue. I think it is very much to do with the loyalist, unionist community that they want to stay in the UK. On the other side, nationalists and republicans want a united Ireland. The Good Friday Agreement has that principle of consent if the majority of people still want to stay in the UK. The politics here become so tribal now that there is still very little leadership from the top to try and break down these barriers between the two. There are many things the Alliance Party advocates for, like integrated education, shared housing, shared spaces. They are not happening. That's the very frustration of our party. Integrated education has shown to be wanted by parents and young people over 80 percent from each poll in the last year. Whether from parents or young people, all say that they want to see more integrated education. Even the business sector, over 70 percent, 73 percent or something, says that they see the integrated education as a means for prosperity and economic progress in Northern Ireland. But that's not happening. The budget for integrated education still remains under 7percent of the education budget. Shared housing is still a pipe dream. Public housing in Northern Ireland, 92 percent of our public housing, is single-identity housing. So if you segregate them from the age of three and four, educate them, and you put them in separate areas, there is no hope of people learning about each other and living beside each other, working beside each other, play[ing] beside each other, form[ing] relationship[s] with each other. The divide continues.[44]

While the GFA recognized the legitimacy and equality of both cultures, it opened up a new battlefront for politics based on identity issues, which gave leeway to political parties to cling onto their ethno-political trenches. After the GFA, the symbols related to Britishness and Protestantism, which were the dominant symbols during the hegemony of unionist governments, were reduced based on the principle of parity of esteem. This intensified unionists' besieged minority mentality, as they considered this reduction as erosion of their Britishness and the Britishness of Northern Ireland.[45]The debates on cultural matters, such as marches, parades, and flags, have been an instrument of ethnic outbidding by unionist and nationalist parties in order to manufacture a rally around the flag effect on their voters. The parity-of-esteem concept falls prey to party politicking and partisan debates on the matters of politico-religious parades.[46] The parade season historically inflames communal tensions in Northern Ireland, especially the Orange Order parades that are linked to the unionist tradition and Protestantism.[47] The routes of parades passing by Catholic neighborhoods invigorate

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[42] 2010 Northern Ireland Lives and Times Survey, accessed August 13, 2014, http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2010/Political_Attitudes/MLADECL1.html.

[43] According to 2013 NILT, none of the respondents who categorize themselves as Catholics support the main unionist parties, the DUP and the UUP and only 1% of the respondents who categorized themselves as Protestants support the SDLP while this figure is 0 for Sinn Fein. See 2013 NILT Survey, accessed September 2, 2014, http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2013/Political_Attitudes/POLPART2.html.

[44] Anna Lo, in discussion with the author, South Belfast, 29 August 2014.

[45] N. Southern, "Britishness, "Ulsterness" and Unionist Identity in Northern Ireland," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13, no. 1 (2007): 71-102.

[46] R. Mac Ginty and P. Du Toit, "A Disparity of Esteem: Relative group status in Northern Ireland after the Belfast Agreement," *Political Psychology* 28, no.1 (2007): 13-31; J. Ruohomäki, "Parity of Esteem: A Conceptual Approach to the Northern Ireland Conflict," *Alternatives* 3 (2010), 163-85.

[47] N. Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

sectarian hostilities.[48] The flag protests that erupted in 2012 typify the ethnic outbidding on the basis of cultural matters. In the aftermath of Belfast city council deciding to fly the Union Jack on designated days, the DUP and UUP activists sent out 40,000 leaflets to their voters, whipping up their feelings in order to outbid the Alliance party that cooperated with nationalist parties on the flag issue.[49] Loyalists that were already sensitized to cultural matters took to the streets.

4. Social Vulnerabilities of the Working Classes

The main social issue of the Troubles was the fact that the paramilitaries were mainly recruited from working-class communities, which are disproportionately affected by political violence and deprivation compared to the middle and upper classes.[50] The Troubles were also described as a working-class war.[51] Although working-class areas are better off now than they were in the times of the Troubles and have increased safety measures, the perceived vulnerability of these areas still has not faded away, because the tangible effects of the peace did not filter down to the ground. While the vibrant civil society sector of Northern Ireland focuses on improving relationships, the context of the conflict still affects the residents' perceptions and behavior in sectarian enclaves. In the interface areas, there is a lack of hope, a feeling of being left behind with little opportunity for employment or educational attainment and a fear of sectarian attacks:

> [There is] a lack of hope, nothing that sort of tangible that [a person can] touch in terms of changing their lives, feeling sort of left behind, forgotten, not much opportunity for employment, no educational change, so think all of those . . . A lot of young people who are looking for significance and belonging get the sense of value in these organizations . . . Political parties, when it comes to elections, you will see them all around. But once they get your vote, you hardly see them again. A lot of those areas where there was conflict like interface areas, there is disillusionment with politics and there is disconnection between what is happening on the ground and what is happening in the Stormont. There is a disconnection and a lot of people now feel that it has nothing to do with them.[52]

Paramilitaries are illegal military structures recruited from communities and they emerged as "defenders" of their communities at the beginning of the Troubles.[53]The robust community structures of the working-class areas were the perfect social networks for paramilitaries to flourish, and the British state could not penetrate into the social base of the paramilitaries.[54] Communities were not homogenous in their sympathy or support for these extra-military structures, but they overtly or covertly gave support to them in certain times of the Troubles, which in turn provided the paramilitaries with the motivation and the capacity to reform and engage in the conflict. The existence of paramilitaries stemmed from a triadic relationship

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[48] D. Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).

[49] BBC News Northern Ireland, "Alliance Party 'disgusted' at DUP/UUP flag policy leaflet," November 13, 2012, accessed September 2, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-20317461.

[50] M. T. Fay, M. Morrissey, and M. Smyth, *Mapping Troubles-related Deaths and Deprivation in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: INCORE, International Conflict Research/CTS, 1998).

[51] D. Murray, "The night the Troubles began," August 15, 2009, accessed August 12, 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/northernireland/6030301/The-night-the-Troubles-began.html.

[52] Alistair Little, in discussion with the author, Beyond Walls Project, 2 September 2014.

[53] D. Feenan, "Justice in conflict: Paramilitary punishment in Ireland," *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 30 (2002): 151-72.

[54] P. Staniland, "Cities on Fire: Social Mobilization, State Policy, and Urban Insurgency," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 12 (2010): 1623-49.

between state, community, and paramilitary forces.[55] Alienated from police, communities demanded justice from paramilitaries to fulfill the policing vacuum in their neighborhods.

With the release of paramilitaries under the terms of the GFA, ex-combatants adopted political, military, and communal roles in conflict resolution.[56] In today's Northern Ireland, it is very common to see ex-combatants engage in conflict resolution work, keeping the youth off the streets by leading them into bands, football clubs, and cultural activities. Youth bulge is accepted as an important dimension of urban unrest. There are alarming figures about the growing youth unemployment in Northern Ireland. The Labor Force Survey displays an increase in unemployment among Protestant youth: 24 percent of Protestants within the age group of 16–24 are unemployed compared to 15 of their Catholic counterparts.[57] In addition, the youth who grew up in the post-ceasefire period did not give up the sectarian mental map that is divided between us and them, and they show less support than the adults for integrated housing, workplaces, and education.[58] Youth in marginalized neighborhoods are still skeptical about the police due to their entrenched mistrust against the security forces.[59] Coupled with the alienation of loyalist working-class areas from the peace process and the ongoing activities of loyalist paramilitaries, this youth bulge constitutes a risk group that can be drawn into criminality and sectarian rioting:

> Yes, we have seen peace in a political sense but we have not seen peace on the ground; we have not seen peace being delivered on the ground. You can go back and you can say that there is nobody being killed, left behind. But you will still hear usually daily attacks by republicans or people offending their own communities. There are still bomb attacks. Peace has not still filtered down to those areas that are most affected. That would be working-class areas, either nationalist or loyalist. Within these areas, sectarianism is still rife and the peace process has not been built down on the ground. It has politically to a certain extent. Even politically, you will still see that political leadership is still run along sectarian lines. If you are nationalist, you get something and me, as unionist, I want the same thing. It is still one for them and one for the other community. Now we have a political framework but it has not filtered down on the ground and communities are not settled . . . Young ones' mindset says that because they weren't born during the conflict, they missed something. They missed the chance to defend their country; they missed the chance to go to jail. While you still see the Troubles glorified, you will still have young ones who still feel the need to step up and defend their country. You will see, on lots of things across loyalist working classes, the slogan "we won't be the generation to let these down" . . . We've got to remember that paramilitaries are people from that community. They were people who protected these areas . . . Young people will look for leadership and they will look for leadership from those who were connected to paramilitaries. They know who stood up, either in a political sense or in a military sense, to defend their areas. So, young people will always look up to these people. If the people who they are looking up to are charged with different ways forward and say the failures that didn't work in the past won't work again, that's the best way we can show leadership to young ones.[60]

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[55] J. D. Brewer, B. Lockhart, and P. Rodgers, "Informal Social Control and Crime Management in Belfast," *British Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 4 (1998): 570-85.

[56] K. McEvoy and P. Shirlow, "Re-imagining DDR: Ex-combatants, leadership and moral agency in conflict transformation," *Theoretical Criminology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 31-59.

[57] OFMDFM Research Branch, *2012 Labour Force Survey Northern Ireland Religion Report* (Belfast: Statistics and Research Branch, January 2014), 26, accessed October 30, 2014, http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/labour-force-religion-report-2012.pdf.

[58] P. Devine and D. Schubotz, "Caught up in the past? The views of 16-year olds on community relations in Northern Ireland," *Shared Space*10 (2010): 5-22.

[59] Jarman and O'halloran, "Recreational Rioting".

[60] Mark Vinton, in discussion with the author, Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium, 19 August 2014.

However, some factions of paramilitaries continue in-group policing by executing vigilant justice or becoming involved in criminality. Working-class areas are also deeply affected by the psychological distress of the Troubles.[61]In some working-class areas, paramilitaries still assume a disciplinary role in the community by controlling the antisocial behavior of youth, such as vandalism, rioting, and verbal abuse of adults. The PSNI, which metamorphosed into a more neutral and equitable organization, still has a bad reputation in some areas. While the 2014 Policing Board Public Perception Survey demonstrates an improved image of police, with 68 percent of respondents thinking that the PSNI is doing a very/fairly good job in Northern Ireland, the class differences need to be considered.[62]The Northern Ireland Crime Survey of 2010/2011 points out that respondents from high antisocial behavior areas have an alarming impression of police and the justice system, as they are most likely to perceive an increased level of harm caused by organized crime (35 percent), they are the least likely group to believe in policing (66 percent), community engagement (28 percent), and the fairness (45 percent) and effectiveness (28 percent) of the criminal justice system.[63] Furthermore, the ongoing residential segregation provides paramilitaries with a proper space to execute their activities. The segregation of working-class areas did not significantly change after the GFA. With the impetus of economic development, the middle and upper classes have become more mixed together in the more prosperous areas, but the working classes that are affected by deindustrialization continue to live in sectarian enclaves. Over 90 percent of social housing in Northern Ireland is still segregated.[64] Moreover, the middle classes in working-class areas began to move away after the Troubles for several reasons, such as the construction of new building in other areas, the control of paramilitaries, and a low level of social services in these areas gives paramilitaries more room to maneuver and operate.[65] The visual culture of the working-class areas reflects the paramilitaries' power and status in the community. If you are a foreigner walking around East and West Belfast, you could infer from the visual culture of the neighborhoods that intercommunal tensions are still alive and well in Northern Ireland. While the murals in West Belfast reflect the commemoration of republican militants and the history of resistance, the murals in East Belfast commemorate the ex-loyalist combatants and the settlement history with the pictures of William Orange and the Battle of Somme.[66]Segregated neighborhoods with these murals, flags, and banners have a significant role in the construction of sectarian identities and spaces.[67]

[61] D. O'Reilly and S. Browne, *Health and Health Service Use in Northern Ireland: Social Variations* (Belfast: Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2001).

[62] Northern Ireland Policing Board, *Public Perceptions of the Police, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and the Northern Ireland Policing Board*, accessed April 22, 2014, http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/january_2014_omnibus_survey_publication.pdf.

[63] U.K. Department of Justice, Statistics and Research Branch, *Perceptions of Policing, Justice and Organised Crime: Findings from the 2010/11 Northern Ireland Crime Survey*, by P. Campbell and R. Freel, Research and Statistical Bulletin 2/2012 (Belfast, November 2012).

[64] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland* (New Policy Institute, 2009), accessed June 17, 2014, http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/monitoring-poverty-social-exclusion-2009-full.pdf.

[65] Neil Jarman, in discussion with the author, Queen's University of Belfast, August 22, 2014.

[66] B. Rolston, *Drawing Support 2: Murals of War and Peace* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1995); C. Gallaher and P. Shirlow, "The geography of Loyalist paramilitary feuding in Belfast," *Space and Polity* 10, no. 2 (2006): 149-69.

[67] L. Dowler, "No Man's Land: Gender and the geopolitics of mobility in West Belfast, Northern Ireland," *Geopolitics* 6, no. 3 (2001): 158-76; N. Jarman, *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Berg, 1997).

5. Conclusion

Three decades of inter-communal violence in Northern Ireland left behind a persistent sense of insecurity that operates beyond the confines of the Troubles. However, this sense is not immune to change, as the Northern Ireland peace process has witnessed outstanding achievements, not only with the GFA but also with the restoration of relationships between conflicting parties, both at the upper- and middle-class level and at the working-class level. The situation in post-conflict Northern Ireland shows that conflict transformation is not a straight line; rather, it is jagged or zigzagged in its character. This article draws attention to three dynamics that feed the lingering sense of insecurity in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The activities of spoiler paramilitary groups and sporadic communal troubles still fuel people's anxiety about the possibility of renewed violence, as the history of political violence proves how these influences can be a destabilizing factor in intercommunal relations. Moreover, the political arena is still plagued by ethnic outbidding and intransigent party politicking, both of which pit communities against each other and keep the zero-sum bias between the groups alive. In addition, the working classes, which were exposed to the highest political violence during the Troubles, still have the lowest prospects for a safe environment in which meaningful intercommunity relations can flourish. The social vulnerabilities of working-class areas, such as continuing paramilitary presence, the legacy of sectarianism in segregated neighborhoods, persistent mistrust toward the police, and growing youth unemployment, need to be addressed in order to generate a long-term social infrastructure for peace.

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