CIVIL SOCIETY PEACEBUILDING

IN A PEACE PROCESS:

LESSONS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND

By

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, the undersigned hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Ireland peace process is widely considered a success – a model for other conflict societies to follow – but has lost momentum far from the finish line. Certain factors have hindered the much lauded power-sharing arrangements in going beyond conflict-prevention and into full-blown peacebuilding. Part of the cause is the intended and unintended limitations placed on civil society peacebuilding by political actors and political agreements. This paper ascertains the political root causes of civil society disempowerment, substantiates the case for a stronger civil society as a vital part of peacebuilding and suggests learning outcomes for policymakers from the case of Northern Ireland. A series of 11 interviews carried out with individuals working along the politics-civil society interface provide the basis of research for this paper.

Key recommendations include (a) establishing an independent conduit for all community relations funding, (b) politically empowering the undesignated 'middle ground' in consociational power-sharing models, (c) creating and sustaining an independent consultative committee for citizens on the peace process, and (d) consider measures to mitigate the negative effects of including more extreme actors into the political process. These learning outcomes have significance for Northern Ireland itself and as a model for other contexts.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CFNI: Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

DUP: Democratic Unionist Party

MLA: Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly

NICVA: Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

OFMDFM: Office of the First and Deputy First Minister

PIRA: Provisional Irish Republican Army

SDLP: Social Democratic and Labour Party

SOE: Spirit of Enniskillen

UUP: Ulster Unionist Party

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Patrick Corrigan, Northern Ireland Programme Director and Head of Nations & Regions at Amnesty International UK

Chuck Richardson, Director at the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust 1990-2011

Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive at the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action

Dr. Dominic Bryan, Director of the Institute of Irish Studies and Reader in Social Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast

Gareth Gordon, Political Correspondent at BBC News Northern Ireland

Paul Kavanagh, Special Advisor to Deputy First Minister at the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly 2009-2013, Sinn Féin Policy Team 2013-present

Liam Duggan, Former Participant and Coordinator at the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust

Basil McCrea MLA, Member of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly

John O'Doherty, Director at the Rainbow Project, Northern Ireland

Leo Green, Peace III Finance Officer at the Community Foundation Northern Ireland

Richard Haass, President at the Council on Foreign Relations

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Ireland 'peace process' has become known worldwide as a model for success, yet shows signs of stagnation, and even regression, something needs to be addressed. The compromises, agreements and new, power-sharing system of government are often mentioned in the same breath with those of post-Apartheid South Africa (Guelke 2008). The continuing involvement of the United States of America is testament, in part, to the prevailing opinion among US policymakers that Northern Ireland is one of their few clean foreign policy victories, a valuable good story (MacGinty 1997). At the same time, Northern Ireland remains one of the most divided societies in the world along sectarian lines and the much-lauded consociational style of government appears to be entrenching division, rather than providing the means by which to move on. The interview accounts for this paper were unanimous in their acknowledgement of the progress made since 'The Troubles' (the period of violence from the early 1970s until the late 1990s), but only one seemed to think the sluggishness at which the much-hoped-for peaceful, functional and non-sectarian society is coming about was something to be expected. The remaining 10 interviewees, to varying degrees, concurred on the basic point that civil society was an under-utilised actor which could help spur the peace process forward, and could have done so already had certain steps been taken to consolidate the role of civil society peacebuilding at important junctures in the preceding two decades.

The stalling peace process has quite evidently reached a stage at which a new impetus is needed to push political actors and society at large towards a new paradigm, beyond sectarian division, that would be more beneficial for the people of Northern Ireland. Ultimately, division costs Northern Ireland huge amounts in the duplication of public services (McAleavey 2015), limitations on social capital and continuing tensions and trouble over symbolic issues such as parades and flags. The dysfunctional system of devolved government, at the time of writing, is in

danger of having to return devolved powers to Westminster because compromise cannot be reached among its partisan, one-community parties. Considering also reputational damage among a raft of other drawbacks (Hamilton et al. 2008), there is a compelling case for a strongly critical look at the peace process in Northern Ireland. And of course, as long as there is significant social division, the continued difficulties and tensions arising from the lingering trauma of the Troubles will still hang rife in the air, and there will always be an underlying danger that violence could return to Northern Ireland. Despite the progress that has been made, there are occasional reminders of that fact.

The essential puzzle this paper addresses is why consociational peace agreements, despite promising beginnings, run out of steam before transitioning to a shared society from a divided one, and where civil society is situated in relation to that phenomenon. It is found that such arrangements pitch political actors and interests in confrontation with the goals of civil society peacebuilding and limit the space for civil society to build networks and contribute. This paper includes first-hand responses from individuals who are professionally on the interface between civil society and political actors garnered via interview in order to further develop an understanding of the interface between politics and civil society in Northern Ireland from the time just preceding the Belfast Agreement up until the contemporary political climate. This paper thereby suggests what might have been done differently by policymakers at the time of the Belfast Agreement to better work towards achieving a sustainable peace and ultimately exiting the peace process. The conclusions of this paper are linked to combating the negative effects of a consociational settlement in Northern Ireland, known locally as power-sharing, but there are implications in this regard for similar peace agreements in other contexts.

CHAPTER 1: PEACE AGREEMENTS AND PEACEBUILDING

Before analysing the specific effects of the peace process on peacebuilding civil society in Northern Ireland, and vice versa, the potential for an active role for civil society in relation to peace agreements should be established and the background for Northern Ireland as a case study explained in more detail. This section will examine existing literature on what role civil society has in peacebuilding, and the role of civil society peacebuilding in a peace process. Terminology and case selection will also be defined.

1.1 The potential role of civil society in peace agreements

For the purposes of this paper, it is necessary to define what is meant by the closely related, but distinct, terms: civic society, civil society and the voluntary sector. Civic society refers to all groups which exist outside of politics, but play, or seek to play, a role in shaping the political and societal landscape. This includes business, religious groups and churches, voluntary groups and academia. The onus in this case is on 'civic duty', representation and voice. Civil society comprises of much the same actors with the exception of business, and has an aspect of civic duty, but with an onus on action over representation. Civic society tends to operate in fora 'of the state' whereas civil society has its own independent space and the possibility of discrete goals from those of political actors. Civil society is largely included in the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, relying as it does on volunteers to carry out its work or having a mission to support activities which rely on volunteers. Though generally referred to synonymously, the voluntary sector does not entirely subsume civil society. For instance, civil society can refer to advocacy groups, trade unions, academics or the judiciary (acting in a personal capacity). None of these terms should be conflated with the civil service or civil servants, which constitute those in the public sector directly employed in the work of central government.

This paper responds to the call of Elliot (2013) for a return to the prerogatives of the 1993 Opsahl Commission. Made of civil society, the Commission focused on investigating ways to empower civil society to challenge structural imbalances and other social factors that can lead to violence. Much of the literature on peacebuilding focuses on the return to order and neglects these issues (Jeong 2005, 2-3). Although literature focused specifically on Northern Ireland cannot be said to lack reference to structural imbalances, it does fall short of proposing specific methods of actively addressing this through civil society or of addressing other social issues. This paper seeks to draw attention to the neglect and under-utilisation of civil society in the peace process and propose ways of redressing this discrepancy.

In the same way that every violent conflict is different, every peace process is unique and there are no wholly transferable solutions applicable to all contexts (Bleiker 2012, 295). However certain frameworks can be applied across cases that identify universal considerations and dimensions to any peace process (Jeong 2005, 2; Richmond and Mitchell 2012, 1-3). This paper draws on the work of Galtung on modes of achieving peace to help in reaching conclusions as to the limitations placed on peacebuilding civil society by the peace process. Literature on the subject focuses on what has been achieved (Knox 2010; White 2011; Farrington 2008a; 2008b). This paper seeks to build on that groundwork by focusing more on what was not done and what limitations were placed in civil society peacebuilding.

Galtung, in 1976, split peace processes into three inter-linked parts: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding. Peacekeeping is "the dissociative approach" and involves introducing buffers at the point of conflict when two or more groups are in conflict (Galtung 1976, 282-290). An example from Northern Ireland is the 'peace walls' in urban areas which present physical barriers between two communities. Peacemaking is also known as 'conflict resolution'. Essentially, this is creating acceptable mechanisms which provide a method for resolution when rival actors hold incompatible goals (Galtung 1976, 290-297). In Northern Ireland, power-sharing, consociational

government is an example of this. Northern Ireland has strong manifestations of both of these approaches. Finally, there is peacebuilding, which is usually noticeably absent. This involves forming new societal goals which are not incompatible (Galtung 1976, 297-304). It is the longest in terms of timeframe, the most difficult to observe, and potentially runs against the goals of political actors.

During the 1990s, attempts at peace occurred at both a local and international level, leading to certain trends in the dynamics of interaction. The involvement of international actors creates a two-step removal from the local actor (via the national) that can lead to local aspects and needs being neglected (Richmond and Mitchell 2012, 7). In other words, during negotiations, the presence of local political actors in Northern Ireland acted as a buffer between civil society grounded in local communities and the facilitative international governments of the USA, the United Kingdom and Ireland. In these cases, academics in international relations are generally divided over how core actors should engage with more localised and peripheral actors in peace negotiations, between building on the foundation of what Richmond and Mitchell call "the everyday" – the civic backdrop which underpins higher political machinations – and controlling it as a threat to the goals of core actors (Richmond and Mitchell 2012, 19). Their analysis both overestimates and underestimates the influence of the civic backdrop. It overestimates it in assuming political actors had to make a choice between constructively or destructively engaging with civic society during peace negotiations. In Northern Ireland, civic society was highly peripheral during the negotiation period. Political parties resented attempts by civil society to "interfere" with Northern Ireland's political élite (Guelke 2003, 69; Richardson 2015; McAleavey 2015; Corrigan 2015). Civic (and by extension civil) society is underestimated by Richmond and Mitchell, when they fail to consider the effect civic society can have in setting a tone for peace negotiations in the preceding years, a strong point of civil society in Northern Ireland. Ultimately, their analysis is lacking in consideration of time-relativity and heavily weighted to the point of

view of the political actor, failing to regard to inward capabilities of civil society to find its own niche.

1.2 Northern Ireland as a case

I am analysing the peace process in Northern Ireland as a 'building block' case study of a particular phenomenon, as per George and Bennett (2005). The current trend in global conflict is for conflagrations to happen within nation-states, not between nations. The international community tends to be able to contain conflict within states and bring them to an end but underlying animosities often remain unresolved and require continued engagement from the international community. Examples of such recent conflicts include Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo and the Sudan.[1] The "particular kind of heuristic purpose" George and Bennett (2005) maintain is a necessary part of such an analysis is present in that many of the findings of this paper are assumed or incorporated anecdotally in the existing literature on civil society in the Northern Ireland peace process. This paper focuses on developing alternative policies which could then be investigated further in the Northern Ireland context or another in order to develop a particular theoretical typology, hence the 'building block' function.

International political actors remain happy to use Northern Ireland as a propaganda tool or as part of their individual legacies. The British government has promoted the Northern Ireland model as one from which Israel and Palestine can draw inspiration (Guelke 2003, 66-67), as has the US Council on Foreign Relations (Haass 2012). Northern Ireland has managed to move a significant way down the road to a normally functioning democratic society. The status quo is incomplete, in terms of a peace process, but it is proving politically resilient. In this respect, Northern Ireland provides the necessary theoretical 'toughness' recommended by George and Bennett (2005) as a means of applying stress on the findings of the paper and developing

[1] The Uppsala Conflict Data Program is a useful source of further information in this regard http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/

"alternative causal paths to similar outcomes when equifinity is present" (George and Bennet 2005).

1.3 Community terminology

There are no definitive terms for the community division in Northern Ireland. Two camps are relatively discernable, although "there is more duality and confusion than is generally recognized. The Irish nationalist, British-loyalist configuration is less clear than it once was" (Elliot 2013, 100). 'Unionist' and 'nationalist' generally refer to the political standpoints of supporting the Union with Great Britain or preferring the concept of a united Ireland. 'Republicanism' can be used to refer to the armed movement for a united Ireland and the popular body of community support for that movement, and 'loyalism' can refer to paramilitaries in favour of protecting the Union. Both, however, are sometimes used interchangeably with 'nationalist' (republican) and 'unionist' (loyalist) in a political sense without necessarily referring to support for violent groups. Historically, the political stance of individuals behind either unionism or nationalism has largely corresponded with being of the Protestant and Catholic religions, respectively. These terms are often used in Northern Ireland to refer to political viewpoint and community background over and above religious belief and also have strong connotations of cultural belonging. For this reason, broader statements on the political sphere in Northern Ireland may refer to 'sectarian' politics, without necessarily referring an overt religious element. Finally, nationalists and republicans tend to identify themselves as Irish, and unionists and loyalists as British. However, on issues of British or Irish nationality there is significant crossover, with many considering themselves as one while also identifying with strong aspects of the other, and a minority considering themselves as both.

CHAPTER 2: THE BELFAST AGREEMENT AND WHAT FOLLOWED

How civil society influenced the foundations upon which the Belfast Agreement was built is a matter for the following chapter. However, impact of the Belfast Agreement demonstrates both the effect such an agreement can have on civil society peacebuilding and the need for such work subsequent to its implementation. Ultimately, the Belfast Agreement was purposefully ambiguous in its language, known as 'constructive ambiguity' used to avoid alienating potential supporters needlessly (Farrington 2008a, Gordon 2015; Green 2015). No matter what the intentions behind the agreement, the dominant actors immediately in the wake of its implementation were in a position to shape much of what it has come to mean.

2.1 The Belfast Agreement: aims and implications

The Belfast Agreement was signed in 1998 and came into being after an intense period of negotiation which had been brought about through the involvement of US Senator George Mitchell (O'Hara 2014; Bell 2000). The preceding period had been much longer and sluggish in the absence of outside encouragement (Bell 2000). It instituted a transition from majority rule to a power-sharing arrangement with powers devolved from Westminster. Its signing and the subsequent 'yes' vote in referenda in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are regarded as marking the beginning of a new era of peace in Northern Ireland. It is also known as the Good Friday Agreement, in reference to the day on which negotiations were concluded and the compromise announced.

The 1973 Sunningdale Agreement acknowledged an Irish dimension to governance in Northern Ireland, incorporating some influence from the government in the Republic of Ireland, which was eventually taken further by the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (Bell 2000). Though the Sunningdale Agreement was brought down by unionist civil disobedience, the Anglo-Irish Agreement survived, which forced unionism to accept that power-sharing was going to be part of

any political settlement (Guelke 2013, 63). These steps were important precursors to the Belfast Agreement, laying down the pathway to the 'three-strand' approach outlined in Bell (2000; and Guelke 2003): "(i) relationships within Northern Ireland, (ii) relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and (iii) relationships between the British and Irish governments." Without resolution of all three strands, no agreement would be reached (Guelke 2003, 64).

The British and Irish government in that period took the official position in that period that they were moderators in the negotiations, but there were clear implications for both governments dependent on their outcome (Bell 2000). Both the British and Irish governments held constitutional claims on Northern Ireland which underpinned the violent campaigns and needed to be resolved. The British government, Irish nationalists and British unionists each held different viewpoints on the main causes of conflict, that all had to be addressed in the negotiations (Bell 2000). The international community took a hands-off approach, contributing legitimacy both to the state, by tacitly supporting the incorporation of Northern Ireland into the United Kingdom, and in to the armed challenge to the state, by neglecting to condemn that challenge (Bell 2000).

Counter-intuitively, once the Assembly was established, the more extreme elements came to the forefront of Northern Ireland politics. During the Troubles, the term 'constitutional political parties' emerged to refer to parties which sought to act only through political means and did not have direct links to paramilitary organisations (Guelke 2003, 63; Bell 2000). These parties were more amenable to inter-party and inter-governmental talks and compromise. However, it was deemed necessary to include as many of Northern Ireland's politically disaffected as possible in any settlement if the settlement was to last (Richardson 2015; Corrigan 2015; McCrea 2015; Green 2015; Gordon 2015). The conflicting viewpoints of local political actors were reinforced and exacerbated by deeply involved UK and Irish governments. The eventual involvement of the

USA as a neutral international actor forced local actors into a position where they are more likely to adapt to the priorities of the international actor (Richmond and Mitchell 2012, 8), but change was extremely begrudging. Sinn Féin only came to the negotiation table after public opinion had turned against the PIRA and it appeared to have been severely limited in its operative capabilities by British counter-terrorism. The DUP rejected the Belfast Agreement from the outset. That Sinn Féin and the DUP are now the dominant political parties in the Assembly is indication, in part, of a new spirit of compromise from the two groups (Gordon 2015; McCrea 2015; Green 2015), but also an underpinning of a divided and often dysfunctional government (Gordon 2015; McCrea 2015; Green 2015; Richardson 2015)

The consociational arrangement of the Northern Ireland Assembly requires a certain level of agreement between unionist and nationalist parties in order to pass legislation. As stated in Article 5 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement:

> (d) arrangements to ensure key decisions are taken on a cross-community basis;
>
> (i) either parallel consent, i.e. a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the unionist and nationalist designations present and voting;
>
> (ii) or a weighted majority (60%) of members present and voting, including at least 40% of each of the nationalist and unionist designations present and voting.
>
> Key decisions requiring cross-community support will be designated in advance, including election of the Chair of the Assembly, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, standing orders and budget allocations. In other cases such decisions could be triggered by a petition of concern brought by a significant minority of Assembly members (30/108).

Parties need to designate themselves as either 'Unionist' or 'Nationalist' in order to affect this legislative requirement of cross-community consensus. Essentially, it renders incompatible goals of unionists and nationalists impossible to legislate for. However, the third section of parties, those designated as 'Other', are not part included in the veto provision. The only option available

to those parties (essentially only the Alliance Party in the current party-political make-up of the Assembly) is to form a temporary alliance with another party in the Assembly to use the petition of concern function (also part of Article 5 of Strand One of the Belfast Agreement). This function can only go as far as to ensure that issues not designated as "key cross-community" decisions can become so. In this respect, Other parties and, by extension, the electorate who would vote for Other parties are disenfranchised. This has an extended effect on peacebuilding as parties less obliging to civil society and the concept of peacebuilding (Sinn Féin and the DUP) have a weighted constitutionalised advantage.

2.2 The international element

Since the preceding negotiations and its initial phases, the US, UK and Irish governments have allowed their focus to drift from Northern Ireland (Richardson 2015; Gordon 2015; Bryan 2015; McAleavey 2015; Kavanagh 2015; Corrigan 2015). The British and Irish governments, however, did make commitments in the form of the British-Irish Council and the North/South Ministerial Council. Though these institutions still operate, their influence is negligible (McCrea 2015). In many ways, this is a legitimate stance to take. The financial crash recently preoccupied the Irish government, and the events of September 11th and two wars in the Middle East have distracted the governments of the UK and the USA. There are benefits to the peace process from this happening. Because the option of "running to Dublin or London", as Gordon put it, is off the table, the primacy of workable compromise is re-emphasised in the Assembly (Gordon 2015). The involvement, or lack thereof, of international actors is significant in the kind of moderate rhetoric which is missing thereafter. What Chuck Richardson (Director of the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust 1990-2011, which carried out community relations work in schools in Northern Ireland) terms "the language of liberalism" is something that he claims the DUP and Sinn Féin have learnt or are learning to use for political gain but which flows naturally in civil society peacebuilding organisations (Richardson 2015). Without a gain in the influence of civil society to

match the void left by the abdication of international actors, that liberal push will lose potency. Local political actors do not necessarily encourage civil society or centrist parties to fill that void.

The governments of Britain, Ireland and the USA as international actors played a huge part in the negotiations of the Belfast Agreement, but, as is natural, new priorities have taken their focus away from Northern Ireland. The politics of Northern Ireland rarely register in the Republic of Ireland or the rest of the United Kingdom. The British-Irish Council established by the Good Friday Agreement as a conduit for those governments to discuss Northern Ireland only makes headlines when bemoaned as nothing more than an unwelcome intrusion into the schedules of its participants. When an independent mediator was needed in recent discussions around symbols, flags and parades, it was not a high-ranking member of the US government that ventured to Northern Ireland to facilitate, but Richard Haass of the Council on Foreign Relations. The US-driven International Fund for Ireland which supported Northern Ireland's fledgling peace has dried up as the work was considered finished and the spending frivolous (Richardson 2015). The September 11th attacks of 2001 pushed the American and British governments to take a stronger stance with Sinn Féin and the IRA, especially over issues around decommissioning and the long-term cessation of terrorist activities (Schmitt 2008, Farrington 2008a), but overall the political will to remain 'hands-on' dissipated in the face of other concerns (Farrington 2008a).

The Belfast Agreement has implemented and reinforces a culture of toleration, rather than inclusiveness. In terms of national identity, too, the Belfast Agreement enshrines the right to dual British and Irish nationality, no matter the future status of Northern Ireland. At a structural level, Belfast has regular, established links to both Dublin and London through the North/South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council. However, existing as it does against a societal backdrop that is not fully accepting of the legitimacy of alternative national identities, the 'parity of esteem' clause of the Belfast Agreement is begrudged, not promoted, and is predicated on the assumption of distinct, separated communities. An OFMDFM initiative produced the *Shared*

Future document which detailed a vision of Northern Ireland with integrated education, public services and political life. NICVA, representing the voluntary sector, would subscribe to that document (McAleavey 2015). However, political actors "tip their cap towards shared future" (McAleavey 2015), with Sinn Féin going as far as produced a "widely derided" document of their own in response advocating for an agenda closer to "separate but equal" (Richardson 2015). The agenda pursed and political structure implemented is not one of a shared future, but a shared-out future, in which unionists and nationalists reciprocate in passing legislation aimed at singular communities and achieve no significant legislation which brings the two communities together.

2.3 Post-Agreement: politics of division

The original premise of the peace process was that it would be a temporary arrangement but in the case of Northern Ireland this has slipped into self-perpetuation. The idea of community-based vetoes in Northern Ireland's legislative bodies was a recommendation of the 1993 Opsahl Commission, with the intention of breaking the "nothing is agreed till all is agreed" outlook that had led to an impasse in political negotiations (Elliot, 92). However, ethnic conflicts have a path-dependent nature prior to peace agreements (Farrington 2008a). In 1976, Galtung stated, "The world has seen far too many conflicts frozen into protraction by the dissociative approach [(peacekeeping)] (291)". Because the primary manifestation of conflict is gone, political impetus is lacking to push the process forward, even if the wider society might want that to happen at a faster pace.

In order to ensure a lasting, stable and healthy peace, the overall goals of conflicting factions must be brought closer to a position of harmonisation. Old priorities can come back to haunt peace processes after the fact. Negotiations are essentially conducted by representatives of factions and, even if they reach acceptable compromises at the time, reaching compromise does not change the fact that overall goals of the faction can remain unfulfilled and may surface later (Jeong 2005, 6). In Northern Ireland, the hard core of unionism was never fully in agreement

even with the initial compromises of the Belfast Agreement, with the DUP urging its supporters to reject it. Though the referendum's 'yes' result was ultimately accepted, significant elements among unionism remain deeply unsatisfied with the results of the peace process. Within nationalism there has been less open dissent against the concessions of the peace process, but when it has been expressed it has been more threatening, sometimes taking lethal form through dissident paramilitary groups.

The type of peacebuilding work that could bring Northern Ireland's disparate political views closer to a position of harmony is unduly hindered by the consociational system of government. The voices of more moderate elements more likely to empower and pursue a peacebuilding activity are largely locked out of the consociational safeguards in the Assembly. There is no automatic veto for parties designated as 'Other' and the petition of concern has a threshold too high for moderate parties to achieve on their own. Peacebuilding civil society is therefore more vulnerable to the whims of tribal politics. It is the Other section of the Assembly which is pushing the shared society agenda, and as such is given oversight over controversial governmental departments such as the Department of Justice, under the auspices of the Alliance Party. But with inclusion in this provision limited to those parties designated as either Nationalist or Unionist, the goal of a shared society can be actively legislated against, provided it was at the behest of the majority unionist and nationalist parties.

Although it is not possible to state specific identities due to the politically sensitive position of some interviewees, it is the view of six interviewees (out of seven questioned on this) that the main parties in the Assembly – the DUP and Sinn Féin – have not consistently pursued a shared society, but have, at times, chosen to 'share-out' decisions and policies that entrench division but solidify their own electoral bases. The recently-extended £80 million Social Investment Fund of OFMDFM was cited by one interviewee of an example of a funded project aimed at the symptoms of division in selected disadvantaged areas as an alternative to addressing division

itself. One interviewee characterised it as "still competing, as opposed to building together" towards a "true peace [which] isn't just absence of violence". All interviewees who observed the two parties pursuing a 'shared-out' agenda, in one way or another, felt that they felt threatened or in some way hostile to civil society peacebuilding.

Some see political debates on 'traditional', universal political issues as a sign if significant progress in Northern Ireland and are therefore reluctant to criticise too harshly the impact of the peace process. In terms of traditional political stances, there is a curious phenomenon among the political parties in Northern Ireland that has seen them line up on a left-right political axis which mirrors their position on the axis from nationalism to unionism (Gordon 2015; Duggan 2015; see Figure 1). The beginning of 2015 has been marked by stalling talks on welfare reform that have threatening the continued devolution of powers to Northern Ireland from Westminster. BBC News Northern Ireland political correspondent Gareth Gordon takes the view that because the current debates in the Assembly are being happening along "traditional" policy lines is a sign of progress (Gordon 2015). Gordon contrasted the current debate threatening the devolution of welfare if the parties cannot agree with 2002, when the Assembly collapsed over an alleged republican 'spy ring' in the parliament buildings. That the Assembly is at rick over, seemingly, a policy issue and not a party-political one is indicative of Northern Ireland moving forward. Unionists now trust Sinn Féin are taking "genuine" policy stances without merely seeking political point-scoring, and no longer hold Sinn Féin responsible for the actions of dissident republicans (Gordon 2015).

Progress has undoubtedly occurred but it has slowed pointedly and political operations remain highly idiosyncratic and dysfunctional (Gordon 2015; Richardson 2015). All of this points to the inherent problems of relying only on peacekeeping and peacemaking, which saddles a post-conflict society with a perpetuated peace process vulnerable to relapse. Without genuine impetus

behind peacebuilding – the formulating of genuine societal transformation – the Northern Ireland peace process remains incomplete, sluggish and needlessly fragile.

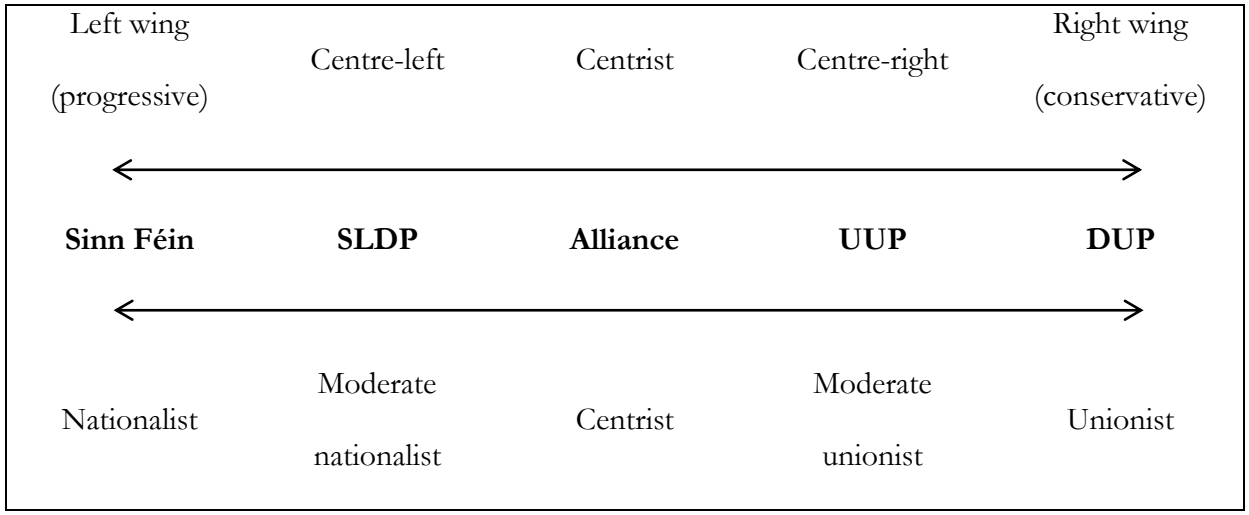

Figure 1: The general dispersion of political parties in Northern Ireland along traditional and nationalist-unionist axes

2.4 The recent status quo

> The idea of being overtly sectarian now in Northern Ireland is generally not regarded as a good thing. That is not to say that there is not a lot of sectarianism: there is. And there is in our sector as well because, if it is reflective of society, then I think you have got to accept that. But there are large groups of people – and they will coalesce in our sector – who are trying to combat that. (McAleavey 2015)

Article 5 of the section of the Belfast Agreement entitled "Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity" subsection "Economic, Social and Cultural Issues":

> All participants acknowledge the sensitivity of the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes, and the need in particular in creating the new institutions to ensure that such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division. Arrangements will be made to monitor this issue and consider what action might be required.

Peace processes must be set up in the expectation that not all issues will be resolved with a single agreement and that the process will encounter significant obstacles. Major conflict over goals can arise again in two ways: (i) more extreme elements within a faction attempt to revive serious tensions over issues that were resolved in the agreement, or (ii) new issues come onto the

political agenda that present new incompatible goals. In the first instance, Northern Ireland experienced a great test in the Omagh bomb of 1998. That, and other dissident republican activity in the early 2000s, failed to bring down the peace process and, if anything, served to embolden the resolve of the majority who support it to ensure its success. In the second instance, recent difficulties around the issue of emblems and flags have presented a new point of controversy with mass protests happening over the decision by Belfast City Council to limit the flying of the Union flag over Belfast City Hall.

Renewed tensions, with regard to the issues of flags and emblems, cannot be explained only by a new point of conflict coming to prominence. It is something built into the peace process itself. At the time of the Belfast Agreement, a precarious deadline was in place and there was much at stake. Conciliation was a goal in and of itself. Over a decade later, the mechanisms for negotiated compromise remain in place, but the political environment has changed. Conciliation is no longer viewed as being as critical, sustained compromise has worn at the will of some actors to continue in this vein. A perception has come to the fore among a significant body of unionism that the unionist community has been forced to concede more than is fair which has served to legitimise initial fears surrounding the Belfast Agreement. This is an inevitable result of a peace agreement that neglects peacebuilding. The goal of peacebuilding is change the rhetoric from one of conceding, compromise and conciliation into something altogether more constructive and mutually beneficial. As the initial spirit of and impetus for negotiated compromise fades, without a corresponding revolution in the political and cultural landscape and rhetoric, old tensions, perceived injustices and fears will return to salience (Jeong 2005, 9). In other words, if the juggernaut of political tension which leads to violence is slowed and somewhat controlled, but fails to be transformed, it is liable to pick up momentum again of its own accord once new issues emerge. It is in being this catalyst for transformation that civil society's role needs to be nurtured in order to adequately support the peace process.

CHAPTER 3: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

The impact of civil society is quite naturally hard to define. Journalists, steeped in the world of politics, tend to take the point of view of political actors that the peace process is a top-down one on which civil society has little impact. This was juxtaposed against the statements of Quintin Oliver in 2002, who refuted journalist Suzanne Breen's assertion that public gatherings organised by civil society and trade unions had no actual impact on political machinations. Oliver, Director of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action 1985-1998 and leader of the 'Yes' campaign, insisted that civil society has significant impact on the "mood and atmosphere" of the political backdrop (Guelke, 2003: 62). Civil society certainly runs against the dynamics of the political sphere in that it is much less rooted in sectarian political division and more akin to the "metropolitan liberal perspective" (Guelke 2003, 68).

3.1 The Opsahl Commission and expanding ownership

The 1993 Opsahl Commission was made up of academics, former political actors, a lawyer, a church representative and an historian and, as such, was a civil society initiative from the outset, selected by an independent citizens' group chaired by Quintin Oliver, then the Director of NICVA (Guelke 2003, 70; Elliot 2015, 86; McAleavey 2015)). The Commission was purposed with spurring the political situation forward in Northern Ireland and had an impact politically and on future civil society initiatives (McAleavey 2015; Elliot 2013). The groundwork laid by the Opsahl Commission raised awareness in Northern Ireland of the need for a strong buy-in by such civil society actors (McAleavey 2015) and also exhibited a format that profoundly influenced how further consultations were carried out. "Because they represented a cross-section of Northern Irish opinion, they feature in some form or other in every other attempt at furthering the peace process since then – including the Good Friday Agreement" (Elliot 2013)

A feeling of ownership is crucial in engendering civic commitment to peace, therefore, a peace process, primarily politically-driven and negotiated by political actors, needs to find ways of engaging with other sections of society in order to be successful.

Civil society has an important role to play in facilitating wider ownership of the peace process through open engagement and a capacity to operate at a highly localised level in a deeply community-embedded way without facing the same political obstacles as governmental actors (McAleavey 2015, Green 2015). In Northern Ireland, the 1993 Opsahl Commission addressed this issue through a programme of public consultations. It was both an exercise in open participation and consistent reporting on, and advocating for, the concept of ownership in ensuring engagement with the peace process (Elliot 2013, 87). One of the key realisations was that, a certain demographic of society – those who were themselves party to violence – needed to become active participants in promoting peace (Green 2015). The PEACE grants negotiated between the Northern Ireland Executive and the European Union to support peacebuilding initiatives have been used support to community projects run by former paramilitary prisoners on the basis of these ideas (Green 2015).

The Opsahl Commission gave birth to ideas that ultimately became central to the Belfast Agreement and subsequent political climate. The Women's Coalition political party was set up following the Commission's observation of the male-centric political arena in Northern Ireland and the more conciliatory nature of the female voice that was missing (Elliot 2013, 91; Morrice 2013). It was the Opsahl Commission that first pushed the idea of recognising Irish nationhood in Northern Ireland, along with protective, community-based veto powers being in place because "what can be agreed upon should be agreed upon" (Elliot 2013, 92). Policing reform, too, was highlighted by the commission and came to prominence in the peace process, as did the creation of a police ombudsman and a parades commission (Elliot 2013, 93-94).

3.2 NICVA, the 'Yes' Campaign and pre-Agreement

Seamus McAleavey heads NICVA, an umbrella body which has represented Northern Ireland's voluntary sector (and, by extension, the vast majority of civil society) since 1938. The views and opinions of NICVA's 1100 members are "probably fairly reflective of Northern Ireland society" and, since the 1980s, NICVA has moved from a non-sectarian to having an "actively anti-sectarian" stance as the groundswell of feeling among its members shifted to favouring a more active approach to peacebuilding (McAleavey 2015).

> A lot of organisations within our sector, I think, very much involved in community relations-type work, in peace work, in trying to promote political development in Northern Ireland. I think our sector found itself with plenty of people who, in other circumstances, in other places, may well have found their outlet in political parties, but maybe thought in Northern Ireland it was too dominated by the big constitutional-type issue.

McAleavey explained the crucial role of civil society in the 'Yes' campaign. When surveyed, NICVA members were strongly supportive of the Belfast Agreement (over 70% in favour, the majority of the remaining wishing to remain neutral). As an organisation, NICVA publicly distanced themselves from the 'Yes' campaign. However, many of its members took the lead in campaigning. Political parties were left behind on the campaign side because simply due to the nature of a referendum vote, which put them on unfamiliar footing. Civil society organisations were better placed to take up this challenge, being in a position to mobilise manpower, contacts and good will, which they did with great energy. As a result, the 'Yes' campaign was primarily a civil society initiative (McAleavey 2015, Bryan 2015).

3.3 The Civic Forum

The Civic Forum was the only provision of the Belfast Agreement that referred directly to civic actors, but was a half-hearted attempt at inclusion in this regard and duly failed to fulfil its imagined role and was allowed to pass out of existence. The civic forum was described by interviewees variously as "tokenism" (Gordon 2015) and "designed to fail" (Corrigan 2015,

Richardson 2015). Politicians found the Forum to be a challenge to their authority, with no electoral mandate (McCrea 2015). Bell's analysis found that the Forum was hampered by its own 'civic' mandate. The implication on civic duty meant that the Forum was tied to political actors and unsure of how to define itself in this sense – able to engage in civic debate, provided it was within the agenda of political actors (Bell 2004). Expected to present a singular front as an organisation despite being formed from many and varied sources, it became paralysed (Bell 2004). The failure of the civic forum saw civic society, an important outlet for civil society, "relegated" in the new era from the outset (Green 2015).

3.4 Community relations work

Civil society peacebuilding is simply the work of civil society when it seeks to work towards a shared society. Community relations work may fall under this umbrella term, but it is specifically bringing members of two communities into meaningful contact with each other. Often, it involves children. That type of work can exist on a number of levels, from that which seems frivolous to something deeply transformative. That it tends to be lumped in to one conceptualisation is often to its detriment. Community relations work could be said to exist on four levels: (1) meeting – simply providing a forum in which participants can both engage in a neutral activity, (2) discussing – encouraging participants to speak to each other about issues related to community division, (3) challenging – through facilitators or participants themselves, challenging apparently sectarian or bigoted (or simply unfamiliar) viewpoints, and (4) understanding – reaching a stage when participants have a sense of new insight into the viewpoint of the other community or their own views.

Past-participant and facilitator with Spirit of Enniskillen, an organisation that carried out cross-community dialogue and leadership programmes in schools in Northern Ireland, Liam Duggan agreed with the above analysis and with the assertion that SOE was highly adept at bringing participants to the fourth level in a relatively short space of time (Duggan 2015). This author, too,

was a participant on a Spirit of Enniskillen programme and a facilitator with the charity for some years. Along Richardson and other participants and facilitators, this author would hesitate to testify to the deeply transformational impact simple cross-community work can have, nor to the enormous need for such work to take place in tackling Northern Ireland's "apartheid school system" (Gordon 2015; Hamilton et al. 2008; Richardson 2015).

From the evidence returned by practitioners, there is hugely fertile ground for full-bodied community relations work in Northern Ireland. Elliot found that the Opsahl Commission consultations prompted groups of people to engage in dialogue and come to mutual understanding that otherwise would not have done so, fulfilling "a tremendous, unrequited thirst for dialogue among the people of Northern Ireland" (Elliot 2013). She also found that there was a level of acceptance of the idea that mutual fears had a strong basis in ignorance of the other community, even one's own fears. In carrying out the work of the Spirit of Enniskillen, it was consistently found by facilitators that participants largely (a) were unaware that they held sectarian views, or (b) were aware of their own sectarian views but believed they were valid or not actually sectarian (Richardson 2015). Community relations work comes in all shapes and sizes, but it will always be an indelible part of peacebuilding given the potential for organisations like the Spirit of Enniskillen to germinate and grow, providing personal and societal growth through volunteers. Organisations such as SOE are hugely persuasive arguments in themselves for the necessity of such work and the capacity for peacebuilding civil society to achieve results that political cannot in a way which supports and advances the peace process.

3.5 Conflict with political actors and political limitations

As was seen with the Civic Forum and from the personal experience of civil society actors, political actors in Northern Ireland have a dismissive, if not hostile, approach to peacebuilding civil society. As a standalone group in society, it is seen as not of significant weight to have significant influence and, with so much stock put into the distribution of political power in a

consociational system, representative groups without electoral mandates are often not considered as lacking legitimacy (Guelke 2003, Corrigan, 2015, Richardson 2015). By playing to the liberal goals of the international actors supporting the peace process, civil society is seen as "meddling" (Richardson 2015). The Opsahl Commission found that the people of Northern Ireland are not familiar with the idea of civic democracy, having a 'dependency culture' in which the populace will complain about their politicians without exercising their own political voice. Politicians then resent actors that challenge the status for breaking with convention.

The wider backdrop of political partisanship made it very difficult to manoeuvre independently as civil society. NICVA were rejected by nationalists and unionists alike for at one time or another for allegedly pushing aspects of the agenda of the 'other side' (McAleavey 2015). Quintin Oliver had to leave his position as Director at NICVA in order to head the 'Yes' campaign. According to Seamus McAleavey, who was part of NICVA and took over from Oliver:

> We did think that that had to be done by someone who wasn't attached to an organisation… A lot of organisations in our sector would have had the view: keep your head down, don't really get involved in the politics in Northern Ireland, because you tend to get it chopped off. And that's simply because politicians or political parties see everything through a very partisan lens. And, therefore, if you appear to support them, you're a very fine, upstanding organisation. If you appear to support the other crowd, whoever they may be, you're an absolutely dreadful organisation and really should be closed down. So there's real tension that exists, and certainly existed then, between political parties, and voluntary and community organisations. (McAleavey 2015)

It is important to remember that political actors may become included in government for the first time as an effect of a peace process, and may have a strong sense or even resentment of having been excluded in the past. In the case of Northern Ireland, this was true to an extent for all of the political actors, which had all spent time under Westminster rule or excluded even from more recent power-sharing. There was an initial backlash against organisations like NICVA which had had a certain amount of access to government during that period and influence with civil servants (McAleavey 2015). The organisation recognised that building long-term relationships with

political actors was necessary for NICVA in terms of achieving their own goals (McAleavey 2015). Yet, despite having a respected position among political actors and representing the majority of the voluntary sector, NICVA remains a marginal voice.

CHAPTER 4: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

If it is established and accepted that political actors are not benevolent, if not hostile to political actors, then certain actions come to the fore as of interest to policymakers who would wish to protect civil society from political hostility and advance its position from the margins into the centre. This section will identify the potential benefits of having a political structure more inclusive of civil society and propose structural solutions and considerations that could aid in achieving this aim.

4.1 Why civil society needs to be supported

Peacebuilding civil society needs to be supported for three reasons: (a) the actors that are arranged in opposition to it (intrinsic opposition), (b) the benefits of having a healthy civil society network, and (c) its unique and effective work (and its necessity).

4.1.1 Intrinsic opposition

As described above, the eventual absence of international actors leaves a void in terms of moderate, liberal voices, and newly empowered political actors resent civil society and see it as 'meddling'. Leo Green is PEACE III Finance Officer at the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI). He is responsible for coordinating the third wave of funding coming from the EU to support the peace process. Green saw a problem with the politicisation of civil society work.

> Some way needs to be found to depoliticise issues, as opposed to people preserving some particular issues as the stuff of the political fight that they are involved in. You can see how, for example, [the] flags [issue] is tied up with identity, it's tied up with ethos, the Irish language is also now politicised. There seems, to me anyway, to be reluctance on the part of politicians to allow for a depoliticisation of these issues because that's their preserve. And, maybe if these issues were depoliticised, it would create a potential – well, not so much a potential, a possibility – that the message or the role of some of the political parties would become less significant. (Green 2015)

4.1.2 The benefits of a civil society network

It is almost impossible to refer to peacebuilding civil society initiatives in Northern Ireland in a singular way, without mentioning the impact of other actions. In a compact place like Northern Ireland, initiatives which could be modest elsewhere can have a penetrative and pervasive impact, sharing personnel, ideas and formats. In this way, the importance of giving civil society the space to develop networks is clear in terms of the powerful information it can gather and the build-up of social capital (Bryan 2015). Even without pointing to specific undertakings of civil society, it is possible to demonstrate the importance of peacebuilding civil society in influencing its own development. The aforementioned Opsahl Commission, 'Yes' campaign, and NICVA are all connected by the Quintin Oliver, the preceding Chief Executive of NICVA to Seamus McAleavey. Oliver "effectively ran" the 'Yes' campaign as an individual, according to McAleavey (2015). In an interview with the Belfast Telegraph in 2014, Oliver explained that many believe the neutral space provided by civil society prior to the Agreement was necessary for birthing some of the central ideas of the peace process (O'Hara 2014).

On the other hand, the current lack of a civil society network is conspicuous by its absence. Green felt legacy issues often returned to prominence and prompted political actors to "battle it out in public" (Green 2015). In his view, Northern Ireland lacked a body of civil society which would step in and object. The highly politicised nature of certain issues such as flags, emblems and the Irish language were evidence of "the failure, or the silence, or the inability – maybe that's a fairer description of it – of civic society to impose themselves on the political process" (Green 2015). While certain individuals and small groups would air their views, their contribution was highly individualised and lacking momentum (Green 2015).

4.1.3 Effectiveness, uniqueness and necessity

It is the view of McAleavey that, compared to politicians "who tend to lead from the middle of the herd, or the back", civil society often takes the lead in enacting change. Groups active in

interface areas are preparing groundwork with a view to moving on to a new stage from the foundational stage of peacekeeping, such as by removing the peace walls (McAleavey 2015). They are taking up the mantle in this regard. It could be argued that Northern Ireland remains highly divided and the goals of the Shared Future document are yet to be fully pursued, never mind achieved. However, Bryan would argue that the concepts of shared space and society only became as prominent as they are for as long as they have been because of the influence of civil society in bringing opinions and ideas out of the Northern Ireland populace and presenting an alternate and more inclusive vision of the future. Parties like the DUP and Sinn Fein have been forced to at least address the issue of division and form an official stance on it because of the continued work of civil society (Bryan 2015). The DUP and Sinn Féin are Northern Ireland's primary parties, operating under the terms of the Belfast Agreement, when the DUP was the only major political party not to endorse the Agreement. There is no greater testament to the potential for civil society to take a the lead in directing policy and societal change ahead of the political curve.

Peacebuilding civil society can enact change in areas that are too politically sensitive for political actors to engage with. The 'Derry model' was mentioned by Bryan as an example of an extremely effective initiative that has operated in Derry for over a decade which could only have been achieved through the civil sector. Orange parades are contentious across Northern Ireland, but in Derry members of the Orange Order and local catholic residents focussed on the mutual goal of protecting, or even boosting, the local economy during the course of the parades (BBC News 2010). This allowed compromise and shared action to occur to the point where a local nationalist museum will advise visitors to stopover at the local Orange Order-run centre, and vice versa, something unthinkable just a few years previously (Bryan 2015). Another example is given by Green of CFNI's work facilitating meetings in secret between loyalist and republican ex-political prisoners who were now engaging in community work (Green 2015). To be seen to work with convicted terrorists of the opposing community or reaching out across the community divide in

Derry over parades would have been too contentious for a political party to do. Because civil society has now done that, there is groundwork present for a new rhetoric to among Derry's political actors and ex-prisoner community work, resettlement and reintegration are now accepted facets of the peace process.

It would seem that the full range of objectives of a peace process employing consociational model of conflict resolution can only be achieved in stages (Guelke 2003, 69). The foremost effect of such a model is to divide centralised politics along rival community lines and put influence into the hands of political actors, and more extreme ones at that. This is part of the necessary peacemaking stage under the peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding conceptualisation. The methods of achieving peacebuilding contradict the methods of peacemaking, so it follows that peacebuilding must come to the fore later (Guelke 2003, 69). After the initial backlash against civil society which, as stated by McAleavey (2015), is natural for newly-empowered political actors, civil society should be in a position to push political actors, to "rap hard on their door" (Green 2015) in order to hold them to account over the promises of the peace agreement, and shape the political landscape themselves.

4.2 How civil society can be supported

Because the peacemaking model tends to embed itself into the peace process, policymakers must consider methods which will spur the process on to the next stage without relying on the political actors in control of implementing peacemaking.

4.2.1 Independent peacebuilding bodies

It was the opinion of Green that the politicisation of civil society activities is a tremendously significant barrier to their activities, but the method of distributing PEACE funding for the European Union provides a ready model for an alternative approach. In the current status quo, government departments will often judge funding applications for projects with a heavy bias on

political feasibility, rather than on the merits of the project itself. PEACE III funding has been channelled from OFMDFM to community projects run by former paramilitary prisoners through the Community Foundation in order to use it as a political buffer. Using CFNI in this way allowed these projects to be supported without being politicised in the way they would have been if funding had gone through usual political channels (Green 2015). Non-political organisations focussed on building peace such as CFNI can retain a certain outward projection of neutrality that increases their capacity to support peacebuilding initiatives at a localised level in this way.

When presented with the prospect, Green was supportive of the idea of an independent body which would allocate funding in much the same way as the Community Foundation (Green 2015). However, the pushback from political actors would be instinctive. The models for ensuring the survival of a viable, independent organisation in such a contentious climate are already present in Northern Ireland. The Parades Commission receives a lot of criticism in its role regulating allegedly antagonistic parades, yet it remains fulfilling that function. The Community Foundation is already providing that buffer between political actors and potentially quite sensitive community relations funding with the PEACE budget. With enough due diligence put into its formation, an independent funding body is feasible and potentially of huge benefit.

Another benefit from having an independent peacebuilding body is that it potentially ring-fences funding for peacebuilding initiatives, insulating it to a degree from financial shocks. The 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis took a toll on Northern Ireland as it did all over the world. In response to rapidly tightening purse strings, the budget for community relations in schools was cut by Sinn Féin Minister for Education Caitríona Ruane. In the view of McAleavey, this was simply down to activities by voluntary and community organisations consistently falling into the bracket of discretionary rather than statutory spending at a departmental level (McAleavey 2015). McAleavey, puts the number of funding decisions which have a political element to them as "much fewer than people might suspect" (McAleavey 2015). This might sound like a promising

presumption for peacebuilding civil society. But it remains the case that, whether financial difficulties present a political opportunity to cut peacebuilding funding, or it is simply an attractive area in which to make savings, peacebuilding work can easily become surplus to requirements when financial obstacles arose if left vulnerable to local decision-making.

Aside from an independent funding body, simply a body to promote an active engagement with civic life could also have a strong, potentially transformative effect. In the early 1990s, the Opsahl Commission yielded crucial insight into the psyche of the people of Northern Ireland, produced key recommendations for the successful peace negotiations in the following years and was clearly connected with a wider civic network. Although the primacy of such work might no longer be there to the same extent, instituting an organisation purposed with facilitating debate rather than aggregating disparate views into a unified position – such was the role of the Civic Forum – would have been much more valuable in the year after the Belfast Agreement. Part of the reason the Civic Forum failed was that it was designed to be dependent on engaging with political actors. Some in the Opsahl Commission, in contrast, did not want to publish their findings because they saw their mission as purely promoting and nurturing civic activity and debate (Elliot 2013). Considering the small scale of Northern Ireland itself, on a smaller scale than the Opsahl Commission, creating and empowering such an organisation to carry out similar work would provide fantastic groundwork for a civil society network and ensure a steadier stream of ideas, opinions and alternative viewpoints to challenge the entrenchment of the status quo.

4.2.2 Restructuring veto powers

In Northern Ireland's consociational system veto power is the preserve only of nationalist or unionist parties. It should be ensured for political parties which designate as Other, not just along community lines of division, as these parties represent an under-empowered middle ground in divided society which is more amenable to peacebuilding civil society. Other parties pursue a peacebuilding agenda and will draw electoral mandates from this rather than from a promise to

protect the interests of 'their' community or other forms of institutionalised sectarianism. Currently, moderate voters are reluctant to vote for Other parties because they know that they don't have veto power and that those parties will play a role of oversight, rather than of action. Should more powers be granted, more parties would be encouraged to fill that space. The obstacle most interviewees brought up to counter this suggestion was that supposedly neutral parties will be labelled (accused of being) nationalist or unionist due to (a) voting with a nationalist party or a unionist party on any given issue and (b) community background – "Are you a Catholic neutral or a Protestant neutral?" being a classic turn of phrase in Northern Ireland.

The strongest opposing argument is simply this: politicisation of Other parties happens anyway. The Alliance Party was 'kingmaker' in Belfast City Council for legislation restricting the flying of the Union Flag from Belfast City Hall in 2012, pushing the nationalist vote into a majority in favour and the Alliance Party was forced to absorb a vicious backlash. Interestingly, in the net election the vote share of their sole Westminster MP increased, demonstrating the appetite among moderate voters for a more active middle ground willing to challenge the status quo. A political party in such a position would benefit civil society and advancing an agenda closer to that of civil society at large.

4.2.3 Balancing extreme and moderate elements

In the period before the Belfast Agreement, more moderate parties were electorally more successful as the public began to put faith in negotiations achieving results (Guelke 2003, 64). However, bringing extreme elements into the peace process was a necessary step to ensure a degree of stability essential for its initial survival. Since the Agreement came into force, Sinn Féin and the DUP have moved from the margins to become the dominant parties. The reason is that institutionalising compromise blunts its usefulness as a political quality in political parties, as it is taken care of by the system of government. Instead, the tendency to think in a protectionist way regarding the interest of one's own community is seen as a position of strength. This is especially

true when fear remains strong among the electorate regarding the underlying motivations and aspirations of an apparently opposing community (Richardson 2015).

Extreme parties are more likely to politicise peacebuilding work than moderate parties. It was clear from Paul Kavanagh, member of the Sinn Féin policy team, that the idea of community relations work had become highly politicised in his view. Obfuscation arose when Kavanagh went as far as referring separately to community relations work and "grassroots work… on the ground… in communities… across interfaces" (Kavanagh 2015). Within the voluntary sector, a distinction was made between 'community development' and 'community relations' in the years prior to the Belfast Agreement (McAleavey 2015). Kavanagh sees more 'on-the-ground' community development as supportive of peace but as less tainted by British government mis-characterisation of Northern Ireland's problems in order to negate their own responsibility, referring to a "community relations industry" (Kavanagh 2015) in much the same way a "reconciliation industry" had been mentioned to the Opsahl Commission in 1993 (Elliot 2013) as something eye-catching, but ultimately a frivolous waste of resources. Richardson sees this point of view as one held more widely within Sinn Féin (Richardson 2015). There is some basis to the claim of a 'British agenda' which seeks to downplay their role in creating and exacerbating the conflict. The British government has had to be forced to address legacy issues regarding their role in the Troubles through a raft of legal challenges, leading to a "drip-drip" of information, part of a wider failure to adequately deal with legacy issues (O'Doherty 2015, Graham 2015). But level of politicisation regarding this view of peacebuilding civil society is very much a minority viewpoint in Northern Ireland (McAleavey 2015, Richardson 2015). Ensuring the continued viability of more moderate positions, such as that of the SDLP as a nationalist alternative to Sinn Féin, would create a polity more amenable to peacebuilding civil society.

How political actors with more partisan viewpoints view the potential of civil society conflicts with what robust civil society peacebuilding has shown to be achievable and is a significant

limiting factor on civil society peacebuilding. Kavanagh stresses the ultimate positive outcome of cross-community dialogue is reaching a stage when conflicting views and identities are mutually and equally respected. What organisations like the Spirit of Enniskillen show is that it is possible to reach a stage when a new, shared identity emerges which, while community differences are present and respected, is predicated more on what is shared than what is not. The narrative of such political actors is threatened by the over-arching goal of many peacebuilding civil society actors of allowing for a more singular understanding of identity in Northern Ireland.

CONCLUSION

The peace process in Northern Ireland was an initial success. Peacekeeping and peacemaking were implemented and worked, albeit after a protracted period of violence and preceding negotiations. The wheel has stopped turning in this regard and one area is conspicuous as an area in need of vitalisation. Although advancing the activities of peacebuilding civil society will not, and would not have, addressed all of the shortcomings of the Belfast Agreement and wider Northern Ireland peace process, it would, and could, have made a significant impact in maintaining dynamism.

This paper concludes that consociational peace processes lose steam because extreme political views are made dominant, division is heavily institutionalised, the moderate, liberal voices present at the genesis of agreement soon dissipate, and the overriding focus on political actors and achieving a political settlements neglects to empower the section of society preoccupied with peacebuilding: civil society.

Empowering civil society, as with any policy solution, is not a panacea. Interviewees O'Doherty and Green mentioned the issue of victims and the continuing pursuit of truth and justice, Gordon and Kavanagh more general legacy issues, as something which seeps into the political process, periodically slowing it down and holding it from progressing to the next stage. This is an example of an issue requiring a wholesale response beyond the remit of civil society.

Whatever solutions are put in place to address the civil society problem, the thinking needs to be long term which enables, rather than directs, civil society. The stage of peacebuilding in a peace process is a protracted one. Civil society organisations are heavily dependent upon their reputation and need space and time to develop influence (McAleavey 2015; Green 2015). Bleiker points to a Western-centric approach to peacebuilding which directly reflects on its relevance (2012, 293-296). He does, however, point to the need for an enabling and discursive, rather than

top-down directive, approach to peacebuilding in order to make it more universally applicable. The recommendations above are after this fashion, as enabling growth and space and allowing for a more lateral ownership of peace agreements are central to enabling civil society.

APPENDICES

Interview protocol

The interviews carried out lasted 30-180 minutes each. One interview was conducted via email, the others face-to-face in a period 19th-26th May, 2015. When carrying out interviews, this author first explained the definitions of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding underpinning research (Galtung 1976), then allowed interviewees to lead conversation around the general theme of civil society and the Northern Ireland peace process. Though each interview was tailored to an extent, four generalised questions were put to each interviewee, in some form:

1. What was the role of civil society around the time of the Good Friday Agreement?

2. Do political actors feel threatened, supported by or ambivalent towards civil society peacebuilding?

3. Are Sinn Féin and the DUP pursuing a shared-out future, as opposed to a shared future?

4. Have the British and Irish governments lost interest in Northern Ireland?

Where possible, interviews were recorded. Otherwise, the author took notes.

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