

**NORTHERN IRELAND: A MULTI-PHASED HISTORY
OF CONFLICT, A MULTI-LEVELLED PROCESS OF
SETTLEMENT**

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**IBIS Discussion Paper
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ABSTRACT

NORTHERN IRELAND: A MULTI-PHASED HISTORY OF CONFLICT, A MULTI-LEVELLED PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT¹

The origins of the Northern Ireland conflict fall into three temporally distinct phases each of which creates a particular socio-structural context that defines a set of protagonists with conflicting interests, more or less defined aims, and a given temporality of conflict. Each is superimposed on the previous phases, further defining and intensifying conflict. The result is a multi-levelled conflict and a multiplicity of aims for protagonists. This provides a useful frame for explanation of the difficulties of negotiating and of implementing an agreed settlement and for assessment of the successes and failures of the 1998 settlement.

Keywords: conflict, conflict resolution, Northern Ireland, historical patterns, colonialism , nationalism,

¹ This paper borrows freely in arguments and occasionally in text from a much longer joint work – in its final stages of completion - on the conflict and settlement processes in Northern Ireland co-authored with Joseph Ruane. The analysis of the settlement process is informed by as yet unattributable interviews and witness seminars with politicians and officials, made possible by the IRCHSS funded project, Breaking Patterns of Conflict, undertaken with John Coakley and Christopher Farrington.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jennifer Todd is Director of IBIS, School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin. She has published extensively on Northern Ireland politics and on comparative ethnic conflict, including *Political Transformation and National Identity Change* (co-editor Routledge, 2008)

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NORTHERN IRELAND: A MULTI-PHASED HISTORY OF CONFLICT, A MULTI-LEVELLED PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT

Introduction

In this paper, I argue that the origins of the Northern Ireland conflict fall into three temporally distinct phases: the first begins with 17th century plantation and subsequent augmentation of the new power relations, the second begins with late 19th-early 20th century nationalist mobilization and state formation, the third begins with the civil rights mobilization and subsequent movement to violent conflict in the late 1960s-early 1970s. Each originating phase creates a particular socio-structural context that defines a set of protagonists with conflicting interests, more or less defined aims, and a given temporality of conflict. While it was possible that the later phases could have radically changed, indeed undone, the form of conflict set in place with plantation, the tendency at each new phase was instead to further specify, define and intensify the earlier patterns of conflict. In each phase a particular definition of conflict is 'locked in' in a path-dependent way: if the 17th century locks in a communal conflict, the creation of Northern Ireland superimposes upon it a national and nation-state form of conflict, and the crisis of the 1969-72 sets in place an intensely violent struggle in the name of conflicting nationalisms.² Each phase sets a structural level of conflict: the earlier communal struggle does not go away but remains the base and everyday level of a conflict which may be fought in the name of nationalism but which is motivated by a much wider range of interests and values. In this paper I use this framework to sketch an explanation of the difficulties of negotiating and of implementing an agreed settlement and an assessment of the successes and failures of the 1998 settlement. .

This historical perspective is not shared by all parties to the conflict. Indeed the political parties defined in the latest phase of conflict – unionists (the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)), nationalists (the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)), republicans (Sinn Féin (SF)) and their constituencies – disagree profoundly on the interrelation of the different phases. One major issue in contention in the settlement process was if the violent phase of conflict could be stopped without a reconfiguration of the form of national conflict set in place in 1921, and without tackling the conditions of communal opposition set in place three hundred years earlier. Contemporary political and scholarly debates on the character of the present political configuration rest on different judgements of the changes in each of these levels of conflict.

The first section of the paper traces the multi-phased origins of conflict, the second section shows how this led to complexly-constituted communities with multiple aims and the third section of the paper outlines the settlement

² Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, "Path Dependence in Settlement Processes: Explaining Settlement in Northern Ireland, *Political Studies* vol. 55 no.2 (2007), pp. 442-458.

reached in 1998 and assesses how far it meets the demands of the parties and addresses the key problems at each level of conflict.

The genesis of the conflict

There are three-fold origins of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

17th century plantation and its legacy.

The conflict in what is now Northern Ireland lies in a direct line of descent from the English reconquest and colonisation (plantation) of Ulster in the early 17th century. This colonisation was never separable from religious differences. Counter reformation, via Irish priests trained on the continent, came to Ireland before the English reformation had taken hold, so that by the early 17th century, when the bulk of plantation took place, religious conflict was already underway.³ Colonisation required not just ethnically distinct (English and Scots) but also *Protestant* settlers, and subsequent power relations were tied around the religious distinction, legally in the Penal Laws, informally in Protestant resistance to reform. The result was a multiply-constituted conflict, where power relations (expressed in military force, economic resources, class position, law and political representation) were partially organised by formal and informal religious institutions and networks, and where symbolic boundaries were multiplex, with religious beliefs, moral-political norms and civilisational values, historical narratives of plantation, and ethno-national identities overlapping if never quite coinciding.⁴

This created a strong tendency towards a triangular form of conflict typical of the colonial period where the English/British state was a key player in securing the dominance of the 'settlers' even if, by the 18th century, against its will.⁵ To put the point crudely, Protestants had a vital interest in retaining their possessions and security against resentful majoritarian Catholics, and relied on alliance with the state to do so; Catholics had an interest in undoing the power imbalance and multiple oppressions they suffered, and were indifferent on whether this meant that the British state or also the Protestant people had to go.⁶ The British state soon became relatively indifferent to the religio-cultural character of its supporters in Ireland (by the 18th century it had an interest in conciliating the Irish majority, not least because it needed recruits to the navy). However its overriding interest was in stability which could best be guaranteed by alliance with the dominant, Protestant, partner.

³ On the use of religious justifications for revolt by the Ulster lords, see Hiram Morgan, 'Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland', *The Historical Journal*, 36, 1, 1993, 21-37.

⁴ Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict, and Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1996), pp. 2-30.

⁵ For the complexities of the colonial model, and its only partial adequacy to the Irish situation, see Stephen Howe, *Ireland and Empire, Colonial Legacies in Irish History and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp.

⁶ Evidently there are important variations within both Catholic and Protestant populations. This schema summarises the overall result and proffers an explanation for it in terms of the interests generated by state-guaranteed social structure. It does not deal with the complex manoeuvres, rethinkings, negotiations, ambivalences and challenges of individuals and subgroups within each population who tried and sometimes (as in 1798) nearly did break the pattern.

It also created a multiply defined communal conflict, where the precise role of religion or ethnicity or political loyalty varied over time and between subgroups. Sometimes religion and ethnicity cross cut (as in the 18th century, where Scottish and English and Old English and Gaelic Irish provenance did not map onto religious divisions) and also, occasionally as in the late 18th century with the United Irishmen rebellion, religious distinction cross-cut political loyalty. Even if, for the most part, the varying dimensions of difference converged in creating loyal Protestant and disaffected Catholic populations, the reasons for their loyalty and disaffection differed quite dramatically within each population, and thus also the extent to which some might be (or might have been) won over to different politics. There were opportunities to win groups of Catholics to the state cause, not just in the 17th century, but also immediately after the Union, when early Catholic emancipation would have forestalled O'Connellite mobilisation.⁷ Conversely, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries if the state had decisively stood up to Ulster Protestants while brokering a better home rule deal for them, a different outcome was not impossible.⁸

To summarise, the seventeenth century created a colonial-style conflict between native and settler, set in place and reproduced by a state which cemented power relations and inequality, and provided the cultural and economic resources which the settlers used to augment their power, status and self-respect. This was not typical colonialism. It differed in its early genesis – 16th and 17th century – and, largely because of this early stage in English state- and empire-building, in a certain fluidity in where kingdom ended and colony began.⁹ In addition, there was the key role played by religion in communal differentiation, which superimposed a reformation dynamic on a quasi-colonial mode of state-building and massively increased the cultural differentiation of the populations. One legacy of this phase of conflict lies in the multiplicity of dimensions of distinction, so that the actors have multiple repertoires of self-categorisation and motivation. Another is the position of the British state as guarantor of deep-set communal inequality.

19th century nationalist mobilisation and 20th century state-building

Slowly, but increasing in momentum with democratization, the relative position of Catholics in Ireland improved through the nineteenth century. At the same time, nationalist mobilization increased in scope and effectiveness. For much of the period nationalism, although with a largely Catholic social

⁷ On the earlier period, see for example Jane Ohlmeyer, 'Colonization within Britain and Ireland', pp. 124-147 in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire, vol I of the Oxford History of the British Empire*, Oxford University Press, (1998) p. 140-3

⁸ Ian Lustick sees the moment which defined subsequent relations as March 1914 when the British government did not assert its authority over officers in the military camp of the Curragh who refused to march on Ulster. Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 206-9.

⁹ Joseph Ruane, 'Colonialism and the interpretation of Irish historical development', pp. 293-323 in M. Silverman and P. Gulliver, eds., *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology through Irish Case Studies* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1992).

base, was driven more by a sense of peripheral grievances against Britain than by the communal inequality and antagonism set in place centuries earlier. Much nineteenth century nationalist literature, like the 'constructive unionist' critique, focused on the benefits and disbenefits to Ireland of Union and the best ways to increase Irish prosperity and to decrease sectarian division.¹⁰ By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, nationalist ideology and grievance became superimposed upon the deeper communal oppositions.¹¹ How this happened, and if it could have been avoided is beyond the scope of this paper. That it happened is clear. There were periods in the 19th century when Protestants – including Ulster Protestants – played a role in the nationalist movement and in the latter quarter of the century the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association had significant Ulster membership.¹² Through the century, and even after nationalist politicization, many Catholics remained loyal to empire if not to state. To be sure, this coexisted with continuing local communal division in Ulster, as Frank Wright has documented.¹³ But it was only from 1885-6 that this communal division was politicised and came to be expressed in clear nationalist terms.¹⁴ Protestant dissent was silenced and, according to Northern nationalist leader, Tom Campbell, voting behavior became totally predictable by confessional allegiance.¹⁵ As mobilization against and for the third home rule bill proceeded in the early twentieth century, ethnic, religious and political distinctions were forged into a coincidence.¹⁶

Partition institutionalised the division while changing its political locus, condensing the most extreme division in Northern Ireland, with Ulster Protestant unionists opposed to Irish Catholic nationalists (and their perceived fifth column inside the Northern state) and only the scattered Irish Protestant minority excluded or excluding themselves from each group. Partition also provided a state for each group, and each state was used to dig division still deeper, in nation-building enterprises, in institutionalising confessionalism, and – in the North – in using state resources clientelistically to secure Protestant unity.¹⁷ Each state was used by the dominant political parties to

¹⁰ D. George Boyce, *Nationalism in Ireland* (London: Croom Helm, 1982) Richard English, *Irish Freedom: The History of Nationalism in Ireland* (London, Macmillan, 2006). S. Rosenbaum, ed., *Against Home Rule: The Case for the Union* (London: Frederick Warne and Co, 1912). Andrew Gailey, 'The destructiveness of constructive unionism: theories and practice, 1890s –1960s', pp. 227-250 in D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day, eds., *Defenders of the Union: A Survey of British and Irish Unionism since 1801*, London, Routledge, 2001.

¹¹ See Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981) and *Irish Nationalist Revolutionaries 1858-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987) for the tension between these aspects of Irish nationalism, a theme also discussed in English, *Irish Freedom*.

¹² James Loughlin, 'The Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and nationalist politics, 1886-1893', *Irish Historical Studies* XXIV (1985).

¹³ Frank Wright, *Two Lands on One Soil: Ulster Politics before Home Rule*. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996).

¹⁴ Brian M. Walker, *Ulster Politics: The Formative Years, 1868-1886* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1989).

¹⁵ T. J. Campbell, *Fifty Years of Ulster (1890-1940)* (Belfast: The Irish News, 1941), p. 40.

¹⁶ Still one of the best accounts is given by Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism: The Formation of Popular Protestant Politics and Ideology in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975) pp. 112-140.

¹⁷ Scholars from different perspectives converge in this judgement. Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland 1921-39*. (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1979), Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *Northern Ireland 1921-2001: Political Forces and Social*

create a world - a set of institutions manned by the dominant group and given meaning by their stories, norms, rituals - in which one groups felt secure and the other was marginalised.

Partition had another effect. It massively increased the importance of sovereignty in Northern Ireland. With another state in the archipelago, British sovereignty became much more important than before, and its importance was more deeply felt in Northern Ireland, where it was challenged, than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Unionists needed the British state to protect them against a Catholic dominated society in the South, and they identified with the British state for a whole range of reasons – economic, religious, moral – which are not reducible simply to ethnic origin or national solidarity.¹⁸

In summary, both Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists were formed in a process of mobilization and counter-mobilisation in the late nineteenth century – a period when nationalism was strong throughout Europe. Irish nationalism is a paradigm case of a peripheral nationalism successfully asserting itself against an old imperial centre. Ulster unionism unites ethnic, religious and political loyalties in a way that is sometimes defined as a form of ethno-national loyalty to ‘Britain’. However the ways the ethnic, religious, political and national categories were interrelated, and the motives that went into British loyalty, were considerably more diverse than those described in a classic nationalist model, or seen in the Irish nationalist paradigm.

Partition created the conditions for lasting conflict in Northern Ireland, institutionalising unionist majority power such that only unionists could be relied upon for loyalty to the state. In effect it created a structural bind, such that nationalist equality came to threaten unionist security.¹⁹ It became extremely difficult for unionist leaders – even the liberal ones – to conceive of what was necessary to secure nationalist acquiescence and those few who did were marginalised or defeated.²⁰

1969-72: a dynamic of violence

This period saw the end of the devolved government put in place in 1921, as mobilization within Northern Ireland for civil rights met unionist opposition and produced nationalist (and later armed republican) responses. As the British state again took control, a quarter century of intense violence ensued which cost over 3,000 deaths, with the IRA effectively carrying on a guerilla campaign against the state, and indirectly against its Protestant supporters,

Classes, (London: Serif, 2002). Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, Pragmatism, Pessimism*, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004) for example, pp. 67, 101.

¹⁸ See the study of Belfast Protestant church-goers and their varied reasons for resisting Irish unity in Frederick W. Boal, Margaret C. Keane, David N. Livingstone, *Them and Us ? Attitudinal Variation among Churchgoers in Belfast*, (Belfast, Institute for Irish Studies, 1997), pp. 89-90

¹⁹ J. Ruane and J. Todd, “‘Why can’t you get along with each other’: structure, culture and the Northern Ireland conflict” pp. 27-43 in E. Hughes, ed, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991).

²⁰ Walker, *History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, records only a few cases of dissent and the predominant inertia even of those with liberal convictions in face of sectarian practices, eg pp. 117, 121..

while Protestant paramilitaries targetted Catholics.²¹ The intense violence became self-perpetuating.. The IRA gained a foothold in local communities, whose populations were targeted by loyalists, harassed, intimidated and killed by the British army and whose support for republicanism remained strong through the period.²² The period also saw the creation of a British state apparatus of repression and administration in Northern Ireland, heavily reliant on Protestants in the security industry, which gave another experiential focus of British identification.

Meanwhile, another struggle was going on, largely independent of what the IRA, and later the British and Irish states, called the 'war'. This was a struggle between nationalists and unionists to try to create an acceptable form of society and state, waged by the political parties who were constantly called to account by politicized populations. That struggle was not centrally about state sovereignty; actual negotiations, policies and failed initiatives were about attempts to secure equality, respect, participation and recognition within Northern Ireland, the ways that state institutions and practices impacted on this, and the role that the British and Irish states could and should play to ensure these aims. State sovereignty became highlighted when reform appeared impossible (to nationalists), or when it appeared (to unionists) to weaken the union. That this political struggle was so difficult to resolve, however, is a product of the longer term processes and aims set in place with plantation and partition: a division of communities, a set of overlapping deep cultural divisions and deep-set inequalities justified in terms of values and beliefs embedded in cultural traditions of empire- and state-building and fought in terms of the rights of natives as well as of nationalists. Political struggle was also entwined with the violence. The IRA campaign ensured that the grievances of Catholics could not simply be ignored as they were before 1968 and might well have been again had the IRA been defeated. Protestant mobilization and the threat of a loyalist paramilitary backlash ensured that Protestants could not be coerced. The British state – as holder of massive power resources in the region- kept some control over the escalation of violence, and slowly implemented reforms, while guaranteeing a social structure that systematically reproduced conflict.

In summary, the period of British direct rule between 1972 and 1998 saw an intense and violent power struggle in the name of nationalism which had three separate aspects. There was a war waged by republicans and loyalist paramilitaries, dependent on a level of popular acquiescence and local community support. There was a party political struggle and usually a party political stalemate between nationalist and unionist parties over the proper form of political institutions for the region. There was an intermittent mobilization and assertion of aims, identities and oppositions by the wider populations, together with a slow renegotiation and rethinking of those aims and oppositions: this underpinned the political stalemate, bringing down

²¹ D. McKittrick, S. Kelters, B. Feeney, C. Thornton and D. McVea, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men and Women who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*, (London: Mainstream, 2004)

²² See J. Ruane, 'Contemporary Republicanism and the Strategy of Armed Struggle' pp. 115-132. in M. J. Bric and J. Coakley (eds.), *From Political Violence to Negotiated Settlement*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004

political leaders who compromised too far. The political stalemate was broken, change in popular aims confirmed, and an alternative to violence provided by a repositioning of the British government in Northern Ireland. The first step was the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) of 1985, which gave the Irish government a role 'more than consultative but less than executive' in the governance of Northern Ireland.

The parties to the conflict

Plantation left 'two communities' in the north-east of Ireland, defined as Protestant and Catholic, locally and regionally opposed, and looking to the English/British state as a tool or power resource. This continued into the twentieth century, when the British state remained a power resource for the communities in Northern Ireland, rather than an arena of democracy. Equally, despite the formal democracy of the devolved government in Stormont, politics in Northern Ireland turned into a communal power play. Individuals—for good historical reasons – constructed their senses of themselves by a subtle intersection of political aims, religious belonging and ethnic provenance, and this part-merging of religious values, ethnic solidarity and political loyalties at once made for deeper and more hard-fought opposition. What was at stake was power, but power for the sake of the very highest of values. What did the communities want? A whole range of varied aims, from the everyday to the religious to the geo-political, and on all of them they were opposed.²³ The 'constitutional question' symbolized and crystallized all of these aspects and that is why the issue of state sovereignty was so powerful a motivating force and so difficult to bypass.

Partition defined the two communities in opposing national and state-centric terms. As is well documented, the partition of Ireland and the formation of the Northern Ireland devolved parliament in 1921 was a product of unionist mobilization, the extent of the devolved territory was explicitly designed to produce a large unionist majority (approximately two thirds Protestant and one third Catholic).²⁴ The dominant party was the Ulster Unionist party and it united the Protestant population through judicious use of state resources and opportunities.²⁵ It was opposed by a slow-to-organise Catholic and nationalist population which came to be by a Nationalist Party closely integrated into the church-dominated society.²⁶ The Nationalist party was unable to achieve any of its political goals, either when it participated as a minority within a majority-unionist-dominated parliament, or when it abstained from participation. There was also a small Labour party, recruiting from both Protestant and Catholic

²³ For discussion of the multiple differences and oppositions, see Denis P. Barritt and Charles F. Carter, *The Northern Ireland Problem: A Study in Group Relations* (London, Oxford UP, 1962); John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Rosemary Harris, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbours and 'Strangers' in a Border Community*. (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1972).

²⁴ J. H. Whyte, 'How much discrimination was there under the Unionist regime?', in Tom Gallagher and James O'Connell, eds., *Contemporary Irish Studies*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983)

²⁵ Buckland, *Factory of Grievances*; Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, *State in Northern Ireland*.

²⁶ E. Phoenix, *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890-1940*, Belfast, Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994

working class, and continually outmanoeuvred as competitor for the Protestant vote by a Unionist party with state resources under its control. The party system was bi-polar, with all elections focused into the overarching unionist vs nationalist opposition. Within this overarching division, each population was internally divided, and politically fractious.²⁷

The overarching division was defined in political – indeed constitutional – terms but fuelled by religious ethos, economic conditions and perceived injustice: more precisely, these motivations reinforced a national division which – for many – was of decreasing salience in the post second world war period. By the 1960s, for example, many Catholics and ‘nationalists’ were willing to settle, in the middle-term, for a reformed Northern Ireland.²⁸ Many Protestants and unionists were willing to contemplate closer relations with the Irish state and reform within Northern Ireland.²⁹ Divisions were increasingly visible within the Protestant population, while Catholics were increasingly impatient with the old nationalist-Catholic consensus.³⁰ As the civil rights movement began, the motivations of different segments of the population were varied, and there seemed to be potential space for compromise.³¹ However conflict focused on the form and stability of the unionist devolved state. Even unionist liberals were slow to endanger their state by giving up on the unionist alliance, nor were nationalist moderates willing to help bolster the state and trust unionists to change in their own time.

The civil rights movement, initially opposed by loyalist militants (who were supported by sections of the security forces), secured some reform in Northern Ireland but at the expense of exposing the Protestant nature of the state and of the security forces. The resultant and increasing street violence showed the inability of the unionist devolved government to control its own supporters, let alone the population as a whole. It required first British army and later (in 1972) British state intervention to take government from the hands of the unionists before a measure of order was secured. By this stage, the IRA campaign of violence was well underway.

From 1971, the issues of equality within Northern Ireland and of national linkages with the South took a low place on a political agenda dominated by increasing violence and increasing repression. A new party system was developing, with a fragmentation of the unionist parties, divided as to the best strategy to maintain the union (integration, direct rule, devolution, and if devolution, in what form). The Reverend Ian Paisley’s Protestant Unionist Party was renamed the Democratic Unionist Party in 1971 and was soon to become the main contender for the Protestant vote against mainstream unionism, in the Ulster (or Official) Unionist party, which won about two thirds

²⁷ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, pp. 26-51, 67-93; Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics of Conflict*, pp. 54-78. On nationalist factionalism, see Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, (London: Pluto, 1980).

²⁸ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, pp. 77-79.

²⁹ Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, pp. 77-79; Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O’Neill years 1960-9*. (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000) pp. .

³⁰ This was true even within the seemingly traditionalist Orange Order, as shown by Eric Kaufmann, *The Orange Order: A Contemporary Northern Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp 21-80.

³¹ Mulholland *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, , pp.

of the Protestant vote over the next 25 years. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) was formed by the notables who led the civil rights movement and replaced the old Nationalist Party with a younger, more socially concerned leadership. The SDLP had aspirations for a united Ireland but these were longterm, conditional on the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland: its leadership was open to a variety of constitutional and institutional compromises.³² Meanwhile provisional republicans – whose political wing, Sinn Féin, did not seek election until the early 1980s – created a secure home-base in marginalized and underprivileged urban and rural neighbourhoods.³³ A cross community party, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) peaked in support at 16% of the popular vote in 1981, thereafter gaining no more than 10% of the poll. Under direct rule it had considerable influence on British policy, but it never seriously challenged the support of the main parties.

What did the parties want? Their strategies varied with the different policies and practices of the British state. In 1973-4 Unionists divided between those who wanted a return to majority rule devolution and those who would accept a level of powersharing, by the later 1970s and into the 1980s the division was between devolutionists and integrationists, and as both integration and majority rule devolution were ruled out, new divisions emerged between those who wanted no change (in British direct rule) and those who would contemplate change to ward off nationalist advance (and in particular to reverse the Irish role in Northern Ireland granted in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement).³⁴ All, however, wanted an immediate end to violence and they wanted this independent of and prior to any political settlement that included republicans.³⁵ For them, there was no legitimacy to armed struggle, and any attempt to stop IRA violence by reforming the state in Northern Ireland was at once unprincipled appeasement and practically useless. Politically, they were willing to allow reform within the union, how much reform, and how much equality and what equality would mean, slowly changed over time and under pressure of increasing reform from 1985.³⁶

Nationalists in the SDLP wanted equality in Northern Ireland and an open agenda on Irish unity, with an institutionalized and symbolic link with the Irish state. How this Irish dimension was to be institutionalized, and what exactly would count as equality, were matters on which views changed over time and with events. In the New Ireland Forum of 1983-4, an all-Ireland nationalist consensus emerged not on the form of Irish dimension (four different options

³² McLoughlin,

³³ F. Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy: Struggles in a Belfast Community*, (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 68-128

³⁴ For discussions of the divisions, see A. Aughey *Under Siege: Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1989). F. Cochrane, *Unionist Politics and the Politics of Unionism since the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997). H. Patterson and E. Kaufmann, *Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland since 1945: The Decline of the Loyal Family* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2007). C. Farrington, *Ulster Unionism and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

³⁵ Christopher Farrington, 'Ulster Unionism and the Northern Irish Peace Process', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. 8 (2), 2006.

³⁶ For a discussion of the reform process, see B. Osborne and I. Shuttleworth, eds., *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland: A Generation On*. (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2004)

were given) but on the necessity of it.³⁷ Republicans, in turn, wanted the Brits – that is the British state - out. They wanted a settlement that would resolve the historic causes of conflict, which, on the republican analysis, went right back to plantation and required a strong ‘equality agenda’ as well as (a path to) Irish unity. When they were convinced that Irish unity could not come in one step, but that there were other political opportunities being held open, they slowly opened negotiations that would lead to not just to the end of war, but also to the end of the political stalemate.³⁸

Paths towards a settlement ; 1997-2007

The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) of 1985 was followed by an accelerating reform programme and the outlining of a complex multi-levelled and multi-located form of governance. Negotiations between the unionists, the SDLP and APNI and the governments, and between the governments , the SDLP and republicans, were intermittent through the 1990s. A first IRA ceasefire was called in 1994, followed by loyalist paramilitary ceasefires: violence recommenced after a delay in commencing talks. A second ceasefire was called in 1997 and in September Sinn Féin for the first time was admitted to all-party talks, which the DUP and the small United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) immediately left. A settlement was finally, unexpectedly, reached in April 1998, between UUP, SDLP and SF and smaller parties, with only DUP and UKUP outside the consensus. The DUP was eventually brought in, once it had electorally destroyed the more moderate UUP.

The settlement was a complex package put together by the two governments and approved after amendments by the parties.³⁹ It had three strands – internal to Northern Ireland, North-South and East-West – and a number of important constitutional provisions and provisions for institutional reform. Constitutional change was made dependent on the vote of a majority in both parts of the island of Ireland, with guarantees by both governments to hold referenda and implement the decisions, and with a change in the Irish constitution to reflect the aim of unity by consent and only by consent of a majority in Northern Ireland. New consociational representative institutions were created: an Assembly with 108 members elected by PRSTV, who would self-designate as unionist, nationalist or other; bloc vetoes for unionists and nationalists in the form of parallel consent and weighted majority voting on contentious issues; a First and Deputy First Minister with equivalent powers to be appointed by parallel consent (simultaneous majorities) of unionists and nationalists in the Assembly; and a proportionally representative executive appointed by the d'Hondt method. The existence of the Assembly was co-dependent on the existence of a North-South Council, created by British and Irish legislation but functioning by consensus between Northern and Southern ministers. That Council would in turn have a secretariat and would set up six implementation bodies to promote consultation, cooperation and action in the

³⁷ New Ireland Forum *Report* Dublin, Stationery Office, 1984

³⁸ For discussion as to when exactly this was recognised and by whom: see Richard English, *Armed Struggle. A History of the IRA*. London: Macmillan, 2003, pp. 303-16 ; E. Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*. London, Allen Lane: The Penguin Press 2002, 3-33

³⁹ For detailed discussion of the institutional provisions, see McGarry, J. and O'Leary, B. *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 260-293.

areas of trade, EU programmes, language, waterways, Irish lights and food safety with the prospect of further harmonization of action and policies left open to agreement.⁴⁰ The Irish government retained some say in the governance of Northern Ireland through the British-Irish intergovernmental conference, although its role was decreased as powers were devolved to the Assembly. In addition, a British-Irish Council was instituted bringing together representatives of the British and Irish governments, the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish executives, and representatives from the Isle of Man and the Channel (Anglo-Norman) Isles. There were, in addition, far-reaching equality policies involving the mainstreaming of equality in all public decision making and (as yet less innovative) human rights guarantees.⁴¹ There was agreement to institute an independent international commission on the reform of policing, with the remit to create a police service 'capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole'. When the Commission reported in 1999, it proposed a radical reorganization of the policing system, to intense unionist protest.⁴² In addition reform of the administration of justice was promised. Qualifying prisoners (from paramilitary organizations on ceasefire) were to be released within two years. Decommissioning and demilitarisation were each promised, the latter dependent on the security situation, and the former dependent on the implementation of the agreement, with the parties committing to 'use any influence they may have' to achieve decommissioning within two years 'in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement'. These qualifications lost important unionist support. Successive crises of implementation led to serial unionist withdrawals from government and an eventual parking of the representative institutions between 2003 and 2007.

What was the balance of gains and losses to the parties and to their wider constituencies? Unionists secured British sovereignty, and an end to the Irish constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. Nationalists, meanwhile, ensured that the fact of sovereignty was diluted in its cultural impact, and became significantly less important in institutional organization: as unionist Peter Weir commented, the 'dimmer switch' was applied to Britishness. A radical equalization of condition in Northern Ireland was underway politically, economically and culturally, with every institution vetted for its openness to nationalist perspectives and presence, including the judicial system. Decommissioning of republican weapons was eventually achieved, five years after the agreed date, and British security installations were finally dismantled in 2007. In the meantime, the moderate UUP and SDLP were overtaken in the polls by the more extreme DUP and Sinn Féin, even while the latter parties considerably moderated their policies and, from 2007, entered government together.⁴³

⁴⁰ John Coakley, "The North-South relationship: Implementing the Agreement", pp.110-131 in J. Coakley, B. Laffan and J. Todd, (eds.), *Renovation or Revolution: New Territorial Politics in Ireland and the United Kingdom*. (Dublin: UCD Press, 2005)

⁴¹ On the equality measures and their effects, see Osborne and Shuttleworth, *Fair Employment*.

⁴² The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland, *A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland*, London, HMSO, 1999. Dean Godson, *Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal of Unionism* London, Harper Collins, 2004, pp. 472-9. A. Mulcahy, *Policing Ireland: Conflict, Legitimacy and reform*. (Devon: Willan, 2006)

⁴³ P. Mitchell, B. O'Leary and G. Evans.. "Northern Ireland: Flanking Extremists Bite the Moderates and Emerge in Their Clothes," *Parliamentary Affairs* 54(4) (2001): 725-43. G. Ganiel and P. Dixon, "Religion,

How successful was the agreement at regulating conflict? When we look at elites and activists, the 1998 settlement has proven an undoubted success. There has been a definitive end to violence with paramilitary decommissioning and British army demilitarisation. A resurgence of dissident republican violence in spring 2009 appears to have been contained. There has been a restructuring of institutions to remedy inequality, which has been effective at the middle and upper levels of employment, although Catholics remain disproportionately present in the most marginalized sections of the population.⁴⁴ The new institutional configuration with its multi-centred loci of political decision-making remains in existence a decade later and is now worked by the 'extreme' political parties. If policy-making achievements have been questioned, it is at least in part because the devolved assembly has functioned for only a small fraction of the decade from 1998. Major change has, however, occurred in the structure of governance, the institutional setting (including the creation of a range of British-Irish and North-South institutions), the security system, and the expectations of the political parties. Indeed the main parties presently in government – DUP and Sinn Féin – have moderated their policies very considerably, with the DUP sitting in government with ex-paramilitaries and Sinn Féin supporting the police.

At the everyday level, the record is less clear. There are radically opposing views among experts on Northern Ireland whether ten years of settlement has lessened or increased sectarianism, crystallised opposing views and solidified opposing blocs or moderated, even perhaps begun to transform them. Survey research show some moderation of popular views: Protestants now largely support the devolved institutions, and have come to terms with the reform of the police; Catholics are willing to make the new settlement work, and the desire for a united Ireland has remained stable over ten years.⁴⁵ However segregation is increasing and the numbers of 'peace walls' dividing the populations in Belfast have increased. Reports of sectarian violence and intimidation have increased, although as Jarman notes, this may be because police reports have only recently included this as a category.⁴⁶ Qualitative research is starkly divided over whether individuals are in process of rethinking or of reaffirmation of older oppositions.⁴⁷ In some central city neighbourhoods and among male activists, real dangers of a renewal of

pragmatic fundamentalism and the transformation of the Northern Ireland conflict", *Journal of Peace Research*, 45 (3), 2008.

⁴⁴ Paddy Hillyard, Demi Patsios and Fiona Semillon, "A daughter to ELSI – NILSI : A Northern Ireland Standard of Living Index or Problematising Wealth in the Analysis of Inequality and Material Well-being" *Social Policy and Society*, 6.1 81-98, 2007

⁴⁵ Paul Mitchell, Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary, "Extremist outbidding in ethnic party systems is not inevitable: Tribune parties in Northern Ireland", *Political Studies* 57, 2009. Joanne Hughes' Attitudes towards equality in Northern Ireland: evidence of progress?', pp 166-183 in Bob Osborne and Ian Shuttleworth, eds., *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland: A generation on*. (Belfast, Blackstaff, 2004).

⁴⁶ Neil Jarman, *No longer a problem? Sectarian violence in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research, 2005)

⁴⁷ For the former view, see Todd et al, 'Protestants, minorities and the remaking of ethno-religious identity in Ireland', *National Identities*, vol 11, no. 1 2009, Gladys Ganiel, *Evangelicalism and Conflict in Northern Ireland*. (New York : Palgrave, 2008) C. Mitchell, "Protestant identification and political change in Northern Ireland" *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26 (4), 2003. C. Mitchell and J. Todd "Between the devil and the deep blue sea. Nationality, power and symbolic trade-offs among evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland", *Nations and Nationalism*, 13 (4), 2007. For the latter view, see Shirlow, P. and B. Murtagh (2006) *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*, (London: Pluto).

conflict exist. There is, however, more rethinking among the less-politicised (often women) particularly outside the segregated city neighbourhoods. The trend, however, remains uncertain and it is crucial to the success or failure of the settlement itself. Will the institutions continue to stumble from crisis to crisis until nationalists reach 50% plus 1 of the voting population and unionists have to put up with a united Ireland or fight? Or is there a slow movement towards participation and dialogue which is gradually de-centring the constitutional question from its ethno-religious basis?

The Good Friday Agreement and conflict resolution

How far has the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 been successful in conflict management and resolution? To answer the question we need to situate the GFA as an intervention in the three nested patterns of conflict traced above: the intense and violent conflict that characterized the quarter century from 1969; the zero-sum conflict between nationalism and unionism that characterized Northern Ireland since its foundation; the British state entanglement in communal conflict that has characterized modern Irish history for four centuries.

From early in the conflict, Irish government officials and ministers had come to the conclusion that the three patterns were interrelated, that the partition settlement of 1920-1 had precluded any change in the long-term relationships of sectarian opposition, and that a new settlement had to address all three levels of conflict.⁴⁸ They disagreed on priorities and strategy, and until the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) of 1985, had little part to play in conflict management. The AIA marked the beginning of change: in giving the Irish government a small role, it acted as a wedge which allowed diplomats and politicians to argue for a more radical repositioning of the British state which would also change the structure of relations between unionists and nationalists. Nationalists and republicans shared this broad vision, although republicans had a distinctive view of the causality involved and came late to recognize the importance of creating an institutional settlement as a stepping stone to further constitutional change. The British government came more slowly and uncertainly to the view that the three levels of conflict were linked, but key figures at government and official level accepted such an understanding by the 1990s.⁴⁹ Unionists, as Farrington points out in an important article, denied these interrelations.⁵⁰ They did not see the quest for a compromise political settlement as intimately connected with the quest to end IRA violence, nor did they think a fair settlement in Northern Ireland required any wider changes in the role of the state, except perhaps as a concomitant of wider global influences on a post-devolution United Kingdom

⁴⁸ John M. Lynch, 'The Anglo-Irish Problem' *Foreign Affairs* July 1972 vol 50, no 4.. 601-617, pointed out (in an article reportedly written by one Department of Foreign Affairs civil servant and 'toughened up' by his superior) that there could be no 'internal' solution to Northern Ireland, an argument developed in the *New Ireland Forum Report* Dublin, Stationery Office, 1984.

⁴⁹ Some had consistently put the Northern Irish conflict in long-term British-Irish perspective: see for example Sir David Goodall, 'Hillsborough to Belfast: Is it the final lap?', pp 120-128 in Marianne Elliott, ed., *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002)

⁵⁰ Farrington, 'Ulster Unionism and the Northern Irish Peace Process'.

The Agreement itself was open to these diametrically opposed unionist and nationalist interpretations. There was disagreement whether the Agreement was in essence an historic compromise, which gave equality for nationalists plus constitutional security for unionists: this was the view of the UUP leadership, with the fairness and balance of the compromise questioned by UUP rank and file and the DUP. Most nationalists agreed that the Agreement was a historic compromise but they thought it went further to begin a process of dismantling the longer run causes of conflict. There was further disagreement whether paramilitary violence was to be read as a symptom of a longer term pattern of relationships, which would be resolved only as these relations were changed (the view of nationalists, republicans and loyalists), or as an independent problem to be resolved prior to implementation of the Agreement (the view of both UUP and DUP). Unionists and nationalists were, in addition, internally divided as to whether the Agreement actually resolved conflict at any of these levels. They were also divided on whether change had stabilised the balance of power or (as the DUP and UUP rank and file believed and some republicans hoped) given a power bonus to nationalists who were likely to use it to further constitutional change.⁵¹

By the mid 2000s, all parties came to accept that the power balance had been stabilized for the middle term. The IRA had decommissioned. The 2001 census showed only a gradual increase (to 44%) in the percentage of Catholics in Northern Ireland, thus showing that it would be decades before a nationalist voting majority was likely to emerge. The US, British and Irish governments made clear to all parties – and most particularly to Sinn Féin and the DUP – that if they brought down negotiations to revive the institutions, the alternative would not benefit them, indeed that the character of that alternative would depend on which party brought down the institutions. Eventually a revised settlement was reached in St Andrews, 2006, and the DUP and Sinn Féin entered government in May 2007, with the expectation that this would be the structure of governance for the middle term, carefully watched by Irish and British governments. Whether this gives space for more thorough transformations of relations, ideals and aims remains to be seen.

⁵¹ For an argument that these factors explain the successive crises of the Agreement, see. J. Ruane and J. Todd, 'The Politics of Transition: Explaining the Crises in the Implementation of the Belfast Agreement', *Political Studies*, 49, 2001, pp. 923-940