

**Peacebuilders Perceptions of Peace: Grassroots Peacebuilding in Derry-Londonderry,  
Northern Ireland**

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## GRASSROOTS PEACEBUILDING NORTHERN IRELAND

### **ABSTRACT**

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998 was considered the end of the thirty plus year-long conflict in Northern Ireland known colloquially as “the Troubles.” However, issues remain surrounding the continued segregation of Northern Irish society, problems implementing tenets of the GFA, and sporadic violence from dissident splinter groups continue to leave peace in Northern Ireland in a precarious liminal position. This exploratory case study examines peacebuilders perceptions of Northern Ireland being ‘at peace.’ They have lived and experienced everyday events before, during and after the conflict. Seven grassroots peacebuilders from Derry-Londonderry Northern Ireland participated in one-on-one interviews. This research examines their perceptions of peace, successes, and challenges, and their hope for Northern Ireland in the future. This study challenges the idea of the Liberal peace and adds an important voice to the grassroots peacebuilding literature.

The findings show that the peacebuilders believe that peace as the ‘absence of violence’ is inaccurate, and that Northern Ireland has a long way to go to achieve true peace. Findings also highlight successes and challenges in peacebuilding work. Views of success were varied and showed the heterogeneity amongst the peacebuilders; this trend continued when peacebuilders discussed how they keep hope in their work. The largest barrier seen as an impediment to peace in Northern Ireland is the continued societal segregation, which was viewed by many of the peacebuilders as a result of the GFA ‘institutionalizing’ sectarianism. The reluctance of the politicians to engage and to invest in dealing with the past was also identified as a key barrier to peace. Finally, the peacebuilders felt that until the past has been properly dealt with, Northern Ireland will not be able to move forward. Uncertainty around Brexit and a hard Border in Northern Ireland remain of serious concern and the future of peace in Northern Ireland remains

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uncertain. Despite this, the peacebuilders remain hopeful that Northern Ireland will continue forward and that we are unlikely to see the levels of violence that dictated life in Northern during the Troubles.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

Northern Ireland is often heralded as a shining example of a successful peace accord. It is the epitome of the liberal peacemaking model; a model that has been used or referred to in other ethnic conflicts recovering from years of protracted conflict (e.g., Murithi, 2009; O'Neill, 2007; Racioppi & O'Sullivan See, 2007). The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was signed in 1998 by the British and Irish governments and is widely considered the formal end to the thirty-year conflict known as the Troubles (Bew & Gillespie, 1999). The causes of the conflict are complex, and are rooted in the long history of the island of Ireland, but are seen as being firmly rooted in the partition of Ireland in 1921, and the ethno-religious division between the largely Protestant Unionists, who wish to retain ties with Britain, and the largely Catholic Unionists who want a united Ireland. The Troubles saw the deaths of over 3,700 people, and over 48,000 people were injured during the period 1968-1998, the majority of which were civilians (Bunting, Ferry, Murphy, O'Neill, & Bolton, 2013; Ferguson, Burgess, & Hollywood, 2010; Mac Ginty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007). The conflict was wide reaching, devastating the small province of 1.5 million people, and many issues that inflamed the conflict forty-years ago remain unaddressed to this day. For example, increased residential and social segregation, the marginalization of minorities, unstable political systems and increased sectarian violence call into question the success of the GFA and challenge the point-of-view that the signing of a peace accord is a guarantor of peace.

This exploratory case study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of peace in Northern Ireland through the eyes of grassroots peacebuilders. This study is comprised of seven in-person one-on-one interviews with various peacebuilders with over 15 years' experience based

at the Junction, a peacebuilding organization in Derry-Londonderry Northern Ireland. This study challenges the liberal peace idea and explores theories of critical and emancipatory grassroots peacebuilding in protracted ethnic conflict. The research aims to challenge the perception of the ‘perfect’ peace in Northern Ireland and the Northern Irish people’s sole reliance on the liberal peacemaking model in protracted ethnic conflicts, whilst showing the reality of peace on the ground through the work of grassroots peacebuilders in the communities that are still attempting to transition from decades of violence to a sustainable peace.

## **1.2 Context**

After several failed attempts (see Bew & Gillespie, 1999; Byrne, 2001), the British and Irish governments, and most Northern Irish political parties, with the help of U.S. Senator George Mitchell and the European Union (EU), produced the 1998 GFA. Notably, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), now the current Unionist party in power with Sinn Fein (SF), abstained and publicly rejected the agreement (Byrne, 2001). Unlike its predecessor, the GFA seemed to address all of the necessary issues that caused the 1973 Sunningdale Agreement to fail (Mansergh, 2006). The Agreement was heavy on political reforms. It introduced the first elected powersharing government in over 25 years, addressed the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, the reformation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) to the more neutral Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), and touched on social reforms such as rights for victims and integrated education (GFA, 1998; Mansergh, 2006). The GFA is full of what Aughey (2005) calls “constructive ambiguity,” (p. 148) which is present in many of the document’s provisions. This ambiguity is seen as a way to postpone debate on more contentious issues, as well as to ensure acceptance of the agreement by all parties (Aughey, 2005). The agreement also ensured the

“linguistic diversity” of the island; which secured the rights of Irish Gaelic, Ulster-Scots Gaelic, and other minority languages; the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into law; and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Commission for Human Rights (NICHHR) (GFA, 1998). The ongoing discussions and negotiation of Britain leaving the European Union (EU) called Brexit is not only impacting Northern Ireland directly, it is also impacting businesses and people living along the Border corridor, as well as emboldening radical dissident Republicans that have carried out a number of recent atrocities. The EU has been a cornerstone of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, investing over 2.5 billion euros to date on peacebuilding projects within the country and was instrumental in the negotiation of the GFA (Halverson, 2018). With the exit of the United Kingdom (UK) from the European Union (EU) imminent, it remains to be seen what will happen to the human rights legislation and EU funded projects enacted in Northern Ireland since the signing of the GFA.

On May 22, 1998, referendums were held in both the North and the Republic of Ireland. The referendum in the North was held to vote on the acceptance of the GFA while the referendum in the South was to approve the British-Irish Agreement and amend the constitution to remove the constitutional claim to the territory of Northern Ireland or articles 2 and 3 (GFA, 1998; CAIN n.d.). The results of the referendum were promising with 71 percent voting yes in the North and 94 percent in the South ,with voter turnout around 81 percent in the North and 56 percent in the South (Ark 1998 Referendum). People’s hope for peace was high, yet the ‘honeymoon’ was short lived. Just two months after the GFA was fully implemented in December 1999, both the Executive and the Assembly were suspended in the first of a long line of “stop and starts” in the Northern Irish Government (Mansergh, 2006).

The Peace Process also brought with it large-scale economic aid, both through the establishment of the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) after the 1985 Anglo Irish Agreement (AIA), which was heavily dependent on investment from the United States (US) (500 million USD by 1996) and the EU Support Fund for Peace and Reconciliation (The Peace Funds) (Byrne et al., 2009). Both funds were established to build the peace dividend by supporting reconciliation, peacebuilding, and economic regeneration in both Northern Ireland and the Border areas, with the aim of addressing the underlying social, economic, and political problems facing each of these areas (Byrne et al., 2009). However, there are many critiques that can be leveled at this form of peacebuilding. In research done with community leaders from both communities, Byrne et al. (2009) found that many felt that there was too much reliance on outside forces to make real reconciliation happen. They also found that many question the motivation of some of those who are requesting funding, the distribution of funds, and the difficulty of both applying for, and obtaining funding from these programs (Byrne et al., 2009). Many also expressed concern at the preference for “single identity” programs as opposed to those that encouraged cross-community cooperation (Byrne et al., 2009). Although billions of dollars in economic aid have been poured into the Northern Irish economy, it has not been the panacea to build peace many felt it would be (Byrne et al., 2009).

Despite the end of large-scale violence, sectarian conflict is still present in Northern Ireland because the core issues of territory and identity have not been addressed as the conflict continues to escalate to a boiling point. Jarman (2009) states that while Northern Ireland is more peaceful than it has ever been; the agreement has not been able to put an end to the violence. Many have argued that the institutional arrangements enacted through the GFA has unintentionally increased group competition between the Catholic Nationalist Republican (CNR)

and Protestant Unionist Loyalist (PUL) communities (e.g., Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006), and has forced politicians to attempt to balance the cultural traditions of each group to secure each group's need for "prestige, legitimacy and validation" (Tausch et al., 2005, p. 115). The identity needs of the Unionist community have failed to be addressed. Where the PUL once dominated culturally pre-agreement, it is now competing against a Celtic cultural revival centered on music, Gaelic sports, and the Irish language (Tausch et al., 2005). Many in the Unionist community see this cultural increase in "Irishness" as the removal of their "Britishness" from Northern Ireland (Hennessey & Wilson, 1997; Mac Ginty & DuToit, 2007).

### *1.2.1 The Problem with Peace Accords*

Wolff (2010) posited that four factors have contributed to ethnic conflicts: structural, economic, political, and sociocultural. Most peace accords, the GFA included, tend to address only the political aspects of the conflict under the assumption that a stable government begets a stable state (e.g., Byrne, 2001; Cox, Guelke & Stephen, 2006). However, the transformation of political structures rarely addresses the structural, economic, or sociocultural aspects that play a large role in both the causes and sustainment of protracted ethnic conflict (Mac Ginty, 2011; Wolff, 2010). Within the Northern Irish context, it can be argued that issues surrounding economics and the sociocultural divide between both communities played a larger role in sustaining the conflict than politics did, and the GFA failed to address many of these core factors upon its implementation.

As John Hume said about the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA), and as Caroline Kennedy-Pipe (2006) argues, the GFA is essentially a framework that was designed to facilitate, but not ultimately guarantee, peace in Northern Ireland (Kennedy-Pipe, 2006). Both of the representatives of the Nationalist and Unionist parties that were key in the negotiations during

the GFA, John Hume for the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) and David Trimble for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), subsequently fell out of favour with their constituencies. This left SF and the DUP to now lead the Northern Ireland Assembly (NI Executive, 2015; Patterson, 2012). The DUP position, both before and after the agreement, has been one of “internal opposition” to the GFA. This position continues to reflect the view of many in the Unionist community, who feel that they had been sold false promises by both former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair and David Trimble, which was subsequently reinforced by the series of delays and political suspensions after the Agreement (Patterson, 2012). This sentiment was mirrored in subsequent surveys looking at feelings toward the Agreement and whether it had been perceived as benefitting both communities equally. When members of the Unionist community were asked this question in 1998, 41 percent felt that the Agreement benefitted both communities equally; when asked in 2002, that number had dropped to 19 percent, showing the growing discontent among Unionists a mere four years after the signing of the GFA (Patterson, 2012).

### *1.2.2 Segregation after the GFA*

One of the key issues to arise out of the Troubles and to remain constant after the signing of the GFA is continued community segregation. This voluntary segregation, while implicitly implied at a religious level, exists in all facets of Northern Irish society. Schools, leisure centers, workplaces, friendships, and romantic relationships remain segregated, and there are little opportunities for mixing between the two communities (McGlynn, Niens, Cairns & Hewstone, 2004; O’Donnell & Hargie, 2011). This is particularly problematic in both working class communities, where public housing estates are almost entirely comprised of one ethnoreligious

group over the other (Housing Executive 2011; McAlister et al., 2014). The working class communities played the biggest role and bore the brunt of the three decades of conflict. Statistically speaking, those living in areas of economic deprivation were disproportionately at risk for violence and death related to the Troubles (Smyth, 2006; McAlister et al., 2014). The segregation in these areas is particularly problematic in terms of both conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Continued urban and rural segregation is helping to sustain the conflict by fostering ignorance and suspicion, further reinforcing group boundaries, and helping to maintain the prejudicial and stereotypical views of the “other” (Tausch et al., 2007).

Initially, segregation during the conflict makes implicit sense. In areas that were much more mixed prior to the onset of the violence, population shifts due to the conflict saw people seeking refuge within their own communities; the population movement in Belfast was so vast that it was “the greatest due to violence in Europe since WWII and the street disturbances, sectarian intimidation, and killings promoted long-lasting divisions into Catholic and Protestant enclaves” (Hargie, O’Donnell & McMullen, 2011, p. 880). This displacement changed the social and spatial landscape of the city as well as Derry-Londonderry’s, resulting in increased segregation between the two communities. These enclaves have now manifested beyond the psychosocial barriers to physical barriers, such as the peace walls, in many of these working class communities, particularly in the interface areas in Belfast and Derry-Londonderry, which remain hotbeds for sectarian violence and new paramilitary activity.

An interface in this context is defined as “locations where Catholics and Protestants live side by side in segregated communities divided by peace walls and other symbolic boundaries” (Leonard, 2006, p. 225). Daily life is shaped in these communities by both real and symbolic boundaries, which creates the perception of other neighbourhoods as “landscapes of risk”

(Leonard, 2006). These areas have remained deprived and ghettoized, experiencing high levels of unemployment and poverty as people live in a liminal peace (Hargie et al., 2011). This is most apparent in the utilization of ‘peace walls’ as a way of managing conflict in interface areas, particularly in Belfast. To date, there are ninety-nine ‘peace walls’ or interface areas in Belfast alone. Forty-four of these are in North Belfast, half of which were constructed after the ceasefires in 1994 (Belfast Interface Project, N.D., Leonard, 2006). The building of walls is inherently counterintuitive to the reforms proposed in the GFA, which emphasized integration as the way to sustain peace in Northern Ireland. As Shirlow and Feldman (2006) note, “the wall itself becomes the malevolent face of the people who live on the other side” (p. 229).

The construction and sustainability of peace walls after the cease-fires, and after the agreement, highlights how unresolved business from the GFA is, in essence, undermining the peace process (Bell, 2014). McAlister et al. (2014) suggest that Belfast exists in two dimensions: “Consumerist Belfast” and “Troubles Belfast.” Where some areas have benefited from the peace accord, others, such as those living in these interface communities “are increasingly corralled in sink estates, stratified by poverty, segregation, and fear” (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2014, p.#). Sectarian tensions are highest in these communities; politicians and policymakers would be wise to remember that the beginnings of the Troubles started in these communities mere decades ago.

### *1.2.3 Moving Away from Peace: Implementation of the GFA*

One of the key examples of a failure of reform implementation is the integrated school system in Northern Ireland, which was met with great fanfare both prior to and after the Agreement and has shown substantial promise in reducing negative stereotypes of the other community (Byrne,

1997). Integrated education was included in the GFA as “an essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing,” yet it gets little or no funding from the government or the Department of Education (GFA, 1998 cited in Hansson, O’Conner-Bones & McCord, 2013, p. 49). As Stephens (2006) points out in her chapter on integrated education, the effect that a segregated educational experience has on children’s attitudes toward the other community should not be overlooked. Research on children three-to-six years old shows that children begin to identify as a member of their respective community as early as five, which coincides with the first two years of formal education (Stephens, 2006). The first integrated school in Northern Ireland was established through the All Children Together (ACT) movement that started in the 1970s (Byrne, 1997). With the support of parents and Betty Williams, this resulted in Lagan College becoming the first integrated school in Northern Ireland in 1982 and this was achieved with little to no political support (Byrne, 2001). The goal of integrated schooling is to “foster an understanding of the two dominant traditions and to overcome negative stereotypes, as children from diverse backgrounds are educated together on a daily basis in the same classroom” (Hansson et al., 2013, p. 47).

To date, there are 62 fully integrated schools in Northern Ireland comprising approximately 7 percent of the school population (Hansson et al., 2013). While there are ‘mixed’ schools, which are those schools that have at least 10 percent of the ‘other’ community enrolled, the majority of students in Northern Ireland still attend single tradition schools (Hansson et al., 2013). A surprising but positive revelation is the high level of parental support for integrated education, which has led to a significant unmet need for spaces in integrated institutions. Preference for integrated schools has risen from 82 percent in 2003 to 88 percent in 2011, and

over 69 percent of Northern Irish residents see integrated education as an important component to building peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland (Hansson et al., 2013). Their perceptions are not unfounded, with a growing body of research showing the benefit of integrated schooling (e.g. Stringer et al., 2009; McGlynn et al., 2004). These include a more positive overall school experience, a fostering of cross-community friendships, a significant reduction in prejudicial attitudes, and an increased sense of security in “religious, racial, or ethnically diverse environments” (Hansson et al., 2013, p. 48).

Although parental support for integrated education has remained high, political support has remained highly ambiguous. The position of the government and the Department of Education (DoE) has been less explicit and is also blatantly apparent in their educational policy initiatives since the GFA. Education policy since 1998 has moved away from explicitly addressing integrated education, as was laid out in the first initiative, ‘A Shared Future’ (Hansson et al., 2013). It has now been superseded by ‘shared education’, despite the “statutory responsibility of the Department of Education to support and facilitate integrated education” (Hansson et al., 2013, p. 53). These references to a ‘shared’ education are also apparent as an area of focus for the Peace IV Fund, which makes an explicit reference to ‘shared’ over integrated education (Peace VI). There is no mention of integrated education in either the Programme for Government (2011-2015) or in the remit from the Ministerial Advisory Group for Advancing Shared Education (Hansson et al., 2013). Most explicitly, the political manifestos of both parties have shifted from a focus on integrated to shared education. With integrated schools continually oversubscribed, and high parental and empirical support, it is confounding to see a move away from an integrated education system. This shows the reluctance of the political parties to address the systemic structures that are maintaining the conflict in Northern Ireland.

However, as Joshi and Darby (2013) note, peace accords are “hard to implement and implementation is hard to track” (p. 257). Within the context of the GFA, it took over 10 years for the complete revision of the police service in Northern Ireland. This is problematic, as research suggests that the length of implementation of peace accords or negotiated settlements leaves these countries in a vulnerable situation, with many conflicts initially ended with a peace accord tending to resume a state of conflict within five years as the conflict remains in a liminal stasis (Joshi & Darby, 2013). On average, peace tends to last three and a half years before the conflict resumes, largely in part to the failure to properly implement the provisions of the peace accord, or a failure of the peace accord to meet the expectations of the populace (Joshi & Darby, 2013).

Although this gap is undeniably an issue that needs to be addressed, it can also create a unique opportunity for grassroots and voluntary civil society actors to begin the process of reconciliation from the ground up, before the conflict has a chance to resume. However, grassroots community leaders face many challenges in Northern Ireland, even in 2019. Many smaller agencies are unable to work through the bureaucratic red tape of the EU Peace Funds, while many larger groups are forced to hire expensive consultants to successfully apply for funding (Creary & Byrne, 2014). Grassroots peacebuilding has the potential to provide avenues for sustainable peace in Northern Ireland, and there are many groups on the ground attempting to build peace (e.g. Creary & Byrne, 2014; Belonni, 2010; Hyde & Byrne, 2015). However, these peacebuilders face many systemic and funding obstacles as well as an increasingly segregated and hostile society that makes it difficult to work to create reconciliation between both communities.

### **1.3 Purpose Statement**

So hope for a great sea-change. On the far side of revenge. Believe that further shore is reachable from here. Believe in miracles and cures and healing wells.  
(Seamus Heaney, 1979, p. 77)

The purpose of this study is to explore how peacebuilders in Northern Ireland view their work and view peace before, during, and after the signing of the 1998 GFA. There is little literature to date that looks at how peacebuilders view their contributions, identify key challenges or what their opinions and perspectives are of the GFA, given how they were privy to life in Northern Ireland before, during, and after the implementation of the peace process in Northern Ireland. This study aims to better understand the perceptions of peacebuilders on the ground in Derry-Londonderry, highlight their successes, explore their challenges, and examine their opinions and hopes for the state of peace in Northern Ireland.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study has the potential to be significant on several levels. The interdisciplinary discipline of Peace and Conflict Studies is based on the idea of reflective praxis (Byrne et al., 2019). As my results are disseminated and shared with the participants, it may help to enlighten their peacebuilding work. Research on grassroots peacebuilding is burgeoning, yet not much has been done to specifically explore the successes and challenges facing grassroots peacebuilders in post-peace accord societies. Most importantly, the hope is that it will impact policymaking at the state and inter-state levels, particularly when it comes to addressing the challenges faced by these peacebuilding organizations. This study means to explore the experiences and perceptions of grassroots peacebuilders, and the successes and challenges they face regarding building peace in a divided society. It also explores their images of the peace process, and what they perceive it

holds for Northern Ireland in the future. It allows us to examine the effectiveness of the peace process on a micro, as opposed to a macro or meso level and to examine the level of success of the peace process in more concrete terms.

This study will contribute to the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) discipline by outlining the need to include a wider number of voices when assessing the potential success of a peace process as well as highlighting the need to include grassroots voices in these evaluations. These peacebuilders are working within a transitional society, and are helping to shape the society of the next generation of citizens and policymakers, and it is important to consider their contextual perspective if we are to have any indication of what Northern Ireland may look like 10, 20, or 50 years in the future.

### **1.5 Limitations of the Study and Positionality**

The limitations of the study are varied. First, all of the seven peacebuilders interviewed for this study were highly educated with each obtaining the minimum of a bachelor's degree and several having earned Master's and PhD degrees. This is not to their detriment, yet it must be noted that this level of education provides a certain level of bureaucratic access that may not be available to less formally educated peacebuilders. Essentially, their status as a "middle tier elite" (Lederach, 2010) added a fluidity to their roles that would perhaps not have been available to "nonprofessional" peacebuilders. Second, the participants all lived and worked in the Derry/Londonderry area of Northern Ireland, a broader scope of location (e.g. Belfast, Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone) could have enriched the data and allowed for geographical comparisons and perspectives across Northern Ireland.

Finally, it must be noted that I am half Northern Irish of the Protestant tradition. My Mum was born in Northern Ireland and I was raised very much in the Northern Irish tradition and it has had a huge influence on my life. As such, my position as both an insider and an outsider can offer some unique perspective. While I was very aware of what was going on in Northern Ireland growing up, and essentially, what ‘side’ my family was on, I was fortunate enough to not have borne witness to the violence directly though I have been affected by it indirectly. I have had a cousin in-law shot and killed by a member of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), and a great uncle that was imprisoned for his involvement with the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and released under the provisions in the GFA. My great aunt and my cousin, to whom I am very close, were nearly killed in the Frizzle’s fish shop explosion on the Shankill Road in 1993 and I vividly remember the phone call my grandparents received after the event. However, I do not believe that my family background affected my interviews in many ways it allowed me a certain level of access I do not feel I would have received if I had been purely an “outsider.” Being not quite an ‘insider’ and not quite an ‘outsider’ allowed me a certain level of freedom than had I been someone born and raised into the Protestant tradition in Northern Ireland and I feel my Canadian accent made things a bit easier regardless of my genealogy.

## **1.6 Outline of the Study**

The first chapter of this thesis was intended to give context to the history of the conflict in Northern Ireland and what has brought us to the signing of the GFA and beyond. It also outlined the significance and limitations of this research as well as the positionality of myself as a researcher. The second chapter of this work focuses on the theoretical frameworks that comprise this study, namely Galtung’s theories of negative and positive peace, the liberal peacemaking

model and the role of the grassroots peacebuilders. The third chapter of this work outlines the research methodology and the reasons for choosing this specific research method while conducting this research.

The following three chapters are the empirical basis of this study. Chapter Four examines the peacebuilders perceptions of peace and how they view the state of peace in Northern Ireland. Chapter Five examines the inspirations for entering peacebuilding work, the success and challenges faced by those in this field and explores how the peacebuilders maintain hope in their work. Chapter Six looks at the GFA and its roles in Northern Irish society, if the participants feel it has been a successful peace accord and where they see the path of Northern Ireland in the future. The final chapter reflects on the effects of Brexit on the state of peace in Northern Ireland, issues around the hard Border and my reflections on Northern Ireland three years after I concluded my research.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a short overview of the history and context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and defined the purpose, significance and limitations of this research. In the following chapter I outline the theoretical concepts that define this work.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Three theoretical concepts originally comprise the basis of this study: (1) Galtung's (1996) measure of negative (the absence of war) versus positive peace (social justice), (2) the liberal peacemaking model and its critique, and (3) the role of the grassroots in transforming conflict. This research investigated through the eyes of peacebuilders the notion of peace, how is it defined, and how those living in post-peace accord societies experience or view it. How one defines peace will unarguably shape the way that s/he may attempt to build or keep it. Second, the peace accord or negotiated agreement is the cornerstone of the liberal peacemaking model, the ultimate achievement of any peacebuilding project. This model is often seen as the 'golden standard' of peacebuilding models, in which the peace accord becomes the 'business deal,' which must be pursued (Mac Ginty, 2006). The emphasis of this model lies more in deal making or 'striking a bargain' than on focusing on the strained relationships that are the locus of the conflict (Mac Ginty, 2006, p. 174). This is in direct contrast to the third and final theoretical concept to be explored, which is that of grassroots and hybrid peacebuilding between the grassroots and external actors and processes. For example, John Paul Lederach, a prolific peace scholar, argues that the 'bottom-up' involvement of grassroots community leaders is an essential component of sustainable conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997 cited in Creary & Byrne, 2014, p. 67).

### 2.2 Protracted Ethnic Conflict: Positive vs. Negative Peace and Challenges to Peacebuilding

Johan Galtung (1996) identifies three ideologically based roots of protracted ethnic conflict: structural, cultural, and direct violence (cited in Byrne & Senehi, 2012, p. 5). Violence can begin or end with any of these forms of violence, and each feed into the other. Structural violence

refers to non-physical violence and is often ‘unseen’ violence, built into political or ideological structures that result in an unequal distribution of power and resources (Reimer et al., 2015, p. 24). Cultural violence involves aspects of a culture that is used to legitimize structural or direct violence, and direct violence is the physical manifestation of both structural and cultural violence – a cyclical process that is perpetuated by both (Reimer et al., 2015, p. 24).

Galtung (1996) was the first to coin the terms ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ peace and he states that for one to know peace, one must know violence. Negative peace typically refers to an absence of direct violence, while positive peace in this context refers to the absence of both cultural and structural violence (Galtung, 1996). The focus of the liberal peace leans more toward the negative concept of peace, in so far that the primary goal is the cessation of direct violence through ceasefires and the management of conflict or other formal agreements such as peace accords, without addressing the long standing systemic issues that continue to foster the conflict (Mac Ginty, 2008). Positive peace refers to the ‘presence’ of values such as human rights, social justice and equality and includes the cessation of violence (Kappler, 2017).

There is no scholarly consensus on what comprises positive peace but one facet that is present across all definitions is justice (Kappler, 2017). Positive peace is ‘just’ peace in contrast to negative ‘status quo’ peace, and is oriented towards the transformation of structural, cultural and physical violence (Galtung, 1996; Kappler, 2017). Direct violence in Northern Ireland has undoubtedly subsided, yet issues with structural and cultural violence remain intact and threaten the fragile peace there. Direct violence is also seen as a symptom of cultural and structural violence and is sustained because of them (Galtung, 1996; Kappler, 2017).

Cultural violence as defined by Galtung (1990; as cited by Ferguson, McDaid & McAuley 2018) as the “collective or societal attitudes about the necessity for violence.” In

Northern Ireland, the Republican Nationalist community, glorified the 1916 Easter Rising, while the Loyalist Unionist community has used the Battle of the Somme to legitimize the use of violence in their armed campaigns (Ferguson, McDaid, & McAuley 2018). The use and legitimization of 'blood sacrifice' continues to be maintained in Northern Ireland through the use of murals, songs and parades, though the direct violence has largely cooled down in recent years.

Most pertinent to the conflict, structural violence can be described as "a form of social structure, or social (political) institution which can prevent people from attaining their basic needs or fulfilling their potential" (Galtung, 1969 as cited in Ferguson, McDaid & McAuley 2018). When the violence is structural, it is perpetuated and maintained within existing structures, "fueling direct violence, and legitimized cultural violence" (Ferguson, McDaid & McAuley 2018, p. 6). Structural violence can be perceived as a major contributor to the outbreak of the conflict, largely through the exclusion of Catholics in most facets of daily life due to the populist politics of Ulster Unionism (Bew & Gillespie, 1999). Currently, it can be argued that the segregation of communities across all facets of life in Northern Ireland is continuing to contribute to expressions of cultural violence, which then gave way to spurts of direct violence even in 2019.

### **2.3 The Liberal Peace**

Oliver Richmond (2011) defines the liberal peace as "a model through which Western-led agency, epistemology, and institutions, have attempted to unite the world under a hegemonic system that replicates liberal institution's norms, and political, social and economic systems" (p. 1). It has been used in over 50 post-conflict states over the last 20 years and has remained the primary model of peacebuilding since the end of the Cold War (Richmond, 2011). The Liberal

peace package involves an “IKEA framework” that includes a capitalist economy, democracy, elections, human rights, and security reform (Mac Ginty, 2008). Richmond (2014) states that, “the Liberal peace is predicated upon the idea that post-conflict states want to join, and mirror, the states that comprise the international community.” (p. 7). The stance of the international community as having a ‘responsibility to protect’ has resulted in an overly standardized perception of peacebuilding based on agreed standards that both measure state behavior, or can trigger intervention (Richmond, 2014).

Contemporary peacemaking processes, especially those led by international organizations or states, are influenced largely by bureaucratic business and legalistic traditions (McGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007). This type of peacebuilding focuses on ‘tangible measures’ such as ‘good governance’ reforms, whilst simultaneously failing to address the underlying structural causes of the conflict (McGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007). This often results in a disconnect between local communities and their views on peace agreements negotiated by national and international elites (Chandler, 2017; McGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007). Peace agreements are typically negotiated outside of the country in which the conflict is taking place (e.g., Angola, Kosovo) with a few ‘local elites’ who “have a controversial claim to represent local constituencies” (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, pp. 763-764). Thus, these ‘top down’ interventions are often questioned as a legitimate way of making peace, as they often leave out critical aspects including the emotional and affective issues faced by communities in post-peace accord societies (McGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007).

Building on his previous work and on that of Galtung (1995), Richmond (2014) introduced the concept of hybridity in peacebuilding, which can either be positive or negative. A positive peace hybrid is a locally focused grassroots peace in which “broader political and social

injustice is addressed across local and international scales” and adds legitimacy and agency to local actors; a negative peace hybrid represents “the outsourcing of power and norms from the international to the state or society” (p. 2). The involvement of local actors is often looked down upon by the political elites, even though grassroots level actors are “more understanding of the limitations and potential of both their own and international frameworks than those who work in external, metropolitan centers” (Richmond, 2014, p. 4). Both the Liberal and neoliberal peacebuilding frameworks are ill equipped to deal with the most contentious issues in post-peace accord settings. Both the Liberal peace and negative hybrid forms of peace can contribute to the perpetuation of structural (Mac Ginty, 2010, 2011), particularly in conflict situations where international actors have intervened, such as in Cyprus (Richmond, 2014).

As Roll (2016) notes, conflict is not uniform, and conflicts at the local level often differ and diverge from conflict at the national level. As such, the conflict on the ground level may not be a replication of the conflict at the ‘top’ (Roll, 2016). A focus on the conflict purely at the upper levels can obscure the analysis of the conflict at the local level, and it can be articulated that conflict resolution at the supranational or national level, will not create peace at the local level, while the reverse also remains true (Lederach, 1997). The liberal peace in essence, should open the door for local and civil society actors to take an active role in peacebuilding in the local communities, yet barriers such as access to funding and unaddressed issues of structural and cultural violence make it difficult for many local organizations to become effective purveyors of peace.

## **2.4 Grassroots Peacebuilding**

The study of local and grassroots level dynamics is still in its infancy, with little attention being paid to micro level conflict dynamics until the early 2000s (Autesserre, 2014). This view

continues to challenge the notion of ‘trickle down’ peace; rather that peace achieved at the national level will trickle down to the local level (Autesserre, 2014). The empowerment of the peacebuilding process has many incarnations, Lederach (1997, p.22) for example, defines peacebuilding as “a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and strategies needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relations” (cited in Skarlato, Byrne, Ahmed, Hyde & Karari, 2013, p. 20). While establishing “rules of law, a peaceful settlement of dispute, and universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” comprise Ramcharan’s (2009) general principles of peacebuilding, “local participation, capacity building, relationship building, and cross-community dialogue” are imperative to the process (Jeong, 2005, cited in Skarlato et al., 2013, p. 4).

Northern Ireland has a long history of grassroots level movements, many of which developed during the height of the conflict. The churches, which were often responsible for helping to inflame sectarian tensions, played critical roles during the 1994 ceasefires, and have reached across the community divides symbolically by attending the funerals of victims from both communities (Byrne, 2001). Thousands of Protestants and Catholics came together during the 1976 Peace Peoples movement led by Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, a protest in response to the increase in sectarian murders, which was not an insignificant feat at a time when intercommunal tensions and fear of violence were at its apex (Byrne, 2001). Although unable to establish lasting peace in Northern Ireland, it is credited with being “directly responsible for the de-escalation of sectarian violence” showing the power of movements that come from the people (Byrne, 2001, p. 340). This movement has been of significant influence in burgeoning grassroots peacebuilders to the ranks to work for social change in Northern Ireland.

Community groups such as the Quaker Peace Education Project, the Community Relations Council (CRC), and the Junction in Derry-Londonderry have been working tirelessly to build peace at the community level in Northern Ireland. For example, the Quaker Peace Education project, encouraged “peace education and education for mutual understanding in both primary and secondary schools” while volunteers provide prejudice training and conflict resolution workshops to children (Byrne, 2001, p. 339). The director of the Junction, Maureen Hetherington, who assisted me in recruiting volunteers for this study, has worked in peacebuilding for over 25 years, and has done amazing things within the local communities. She developed a methodology of ‘storytelling and positive encounter dialogue’ that is used to heal and transform post-peace accord societies. The Junction is part of larger network of community groups and organizations that are engaged in peacebuilding initiatives, with a focus on social transformation and healing. Its aim is to create a ‘safe space’ for both communities and to encourage and foster intergroup dialogue (Maiangwa & Byrne, 2015).

Within Northern Ireland, cross-community dialogue has been fostered locally through the efforts of many local community organizations (Skarlato et al., 2013). Grassroots initiatives, parallel to political and institutional cooperation, have led to increased levels of intercommunity contact, while “promoting relationship-building, goodwill, and trust” (Skarlato et al., 2013, p. 6). The empowerment of civil society is contrary to “top down” peace strategies as they focus on people as the key resource (Creary & Byrne, 2014). Lederach argues that the ‘bottom-up’ involvement of grassroots community leaders is an essential component of sustainable conflict transformation (Lederach, 1997 cited in Creary & Byrne, 2014, p. 20). Grassroots peacebuilding movements empower those who are the most likely to be involved, as well as those affected by the conflict, to take action against violence and the deprivation that comes as a consequence of

conflict (Creary & Byrne, 2014). These ‘bottom up’ approaches emphasize the facilitation of local ownership, which is critical as “any peace process not embraced by those who have to live with it is likely to fail” (Creary & Byrne, 2014, pp. 67-68). Paradoxically, ordinary people are often excluded from ‘top down’ initiatives for not having “official power” or are stripped of agency for being “too close to the conflict” (Creary & Byrne, 2014, p. 68).

As Cochrane (2006) points out, while track one elites, namely the political parties, governments and paramilitaries, have largely driven both the conflict and the peace process, they have not been solely responsible for the dynamics of peace and conflict in Northern Ireland. The political deadlock of the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of civil society as an avenue for alternative political engagement. However, the sectarian divide at the heart of the conflict was often mirrored in the community groups and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that emerged in Northern Ireland during this time period (Cochrane, 2006). The Catholic Nationalist community, long excluded from the politics of Northern Ireland, were much more successful at community organizing than their Protestant Unionist counterparts, who primarily relied on the state to meet their needs, many of whom saw the development of civil society as an “anti-state Catholic phenomenon” (Cochrane, 2006; Belloni, 2010, p.110). As the Protestant community became disenfranchised within Northern Ireland, the Unionist civil society sector began to grow, albeit at a slower and less developed level compared to their Catholic counterparts (Belloni, 2010).

Much of the development of civil society activism in Northern Ireland, on both sides of the divide, was born from immediate needs due in large part to the destruction of housing, infrastructure, and the breakdown of social services during the conflict (Belloni, 2010). These groups developed in response to a clear problem, but often-lacked directive, being primarily

motivated by “a need to do something, rather than by a clear political objective” (Belloni, 2010, p. 110). At the height of the Troubles and after a particularly deadly year in 1972 where 472 people were killed, peace movements began to emerge (Belloni, 2010). The 1976 Peace Peoples movement brought together over 50,000 people from both communities to protest sectarian violence in the wake of the deaths of three children. Its founders, Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams would go on to win the Nobel Peace Prize, yet this success and intercommunity cooperation was short lived (Belloni, 2010). As Belloni (2010) notes, “mobilizing the pro peace middle class without a political platform or a proposal for negotiation, its momentum quickly waned amid disillusionment about political engagement” (p. 107).

Tense relations between the government and civil society marked the 1980s and early 1990s, with many voluntary organizations the victims of funding cuts due to real or perceived association with paramilitary organizations. The late 1990s and the newly elected British Labour government, in contrast, brought with it an increase in funding as well as the recognition of this ‘third sector’ as “important to ensuring social cohesion by identifying and addressing locally experienced social problems” (Belloni, 2010, p. 111). Although this recognition of the government is important, it has also created additional challenges. Funding opportunities through the EU Peace Funds and the International Fund for Ireland have, in theory, created greater access to funding, they have also created greater group competition, as funding is limited and need is high. The reliance on outside funding agencies can also call into question the perceived grassroots legitimacy of these groups, as pressure from outside donors can directly influence some organization’s activities. These dwindling funding reserves also present problems in terms of being able to provide for staff and other necessary employees needed to carry out the peacebuilding projects (Skarlato et. al., 2013).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined some key theoretical concepts that comprise this study. Galtung's concepts of positive and negative peace, the liberal peacebuilding model and its critiques, and a brief history and explanation of grassroots peacebuilding movements in Northern Ireland were discussed in this chapter. While not an exhaustive review it addresses many of the key theoretical issues surrounding the peace process in Northern Ireland and provides context to the type of grassroots peacebuilding work that has been undertaken there. The next chapter outlines the research methodology that comprised this study.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods and Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Qualitative research as a methodology is used to enrich and better inform the literature as to how humans interpret a given social phenomenon. Interviews are widely used in qualitative research and are one of the most commonly used data collection methods (Whiting, 2008). Semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with “a deep assortment of information allowing deeper insights into the respondent’s ideas and meanings” (Byrne, 2009 p. 20; also see Druckman, 2005). These organizations have the potential to provide greater insight into exploring the possible success of the GFA, as they are working with communities living the everyday reality of a post-peace accord state. Although both Derry-Londonderry and Belfast were heavily affected by the Troubles, there has been a divergence in how each city is navigating the post-peace accord milieu.

The Director and founder of the Junction, Ms. Maureen Hetherington, secured my access to the peacebuilders at the Junction located in Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Each participant had a minimum of 10-to-15 years’ experience and was given an introductory letter explaining the research project and they were asked formally if they consented to participate in the study. All research took place on site in Northern Ireland, where I have previously conducted both qualitative and quantitative research ~~in the past~~. Each participant participated in a one-on-one semi-structured interview for approximately 60-90 minutes in locations that were mutually agreed upon before the interview start date. Each participant signed a waiver allowing me to record audio of the sessions, collecting non-identifiable information; pseudonyms are used in place of real places, people, institutional affiliations, and names etc. to protect the identities of my informants.

This study consisted of seven semi-structured qualitative interviews (Druckman, 2005) that were used to explore how peacebuilders in Northern Ireland view the effects of their work on the peace process, how they view the state of the current peace process, and where they feel Northern Ireland is heading as the society moved into the 18th year of the GFA. Convenience sampling was used to the extent that, while each of the interviewees have or had worked at other organizations previously, they are all currently connected to the same peacebuilding organization. The data was analyzed using grounded theory, a qualitative analysis tool that “was derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process” (Kahn, 2014, p. 226; also see Glaser 1978; Strauss & Glaser 1967, 2009). It is an inductive approach that is “an appropriate way to study human behavior on a sensitive topic, even in a different cultural context” (Wolcott, 1980, as cited in Kahn, 2014, p. 225).

### **3.2 Recruitment**

Prior to commencement of this study ethics approval was obtained from the University of Manitoba’s research ethics board (JFREB). After initial approval, I obtained contacts through my advisor to whom I sent an introduction email, describing the intention of the study, requesting any interested parties to contact me at the given email address. The main criteria were people who worked in the peacebuilding field during and after the Troubles, and who had roughly 10-15 years of experience in the field. Interested parties who met the criteria then contacted me at their leisure as we met at a place most agreeable to the participant. For the purposes of this study, a convenience sample and a purposive sample were used. Convenience sampling in that the participants were made available to me via previous connections, and purposive in that selection

was determined based on specific traits and characteristics, for example a minimum number of years working in the field (Bogdan & Biklin, 1997).

### **3.3 Qualitative Research Design**

In the PACS discipline, and in the program at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg in particular, storytelling has emerged as a preferred research methodology for many students (Senehi, 2019). Senehi (2019) posits that this is reflected through the personal experiences that students and researchers bring into their practice. For myself in particular, oral storytelling is a large part of Irish/Northern Irish culture and is a key facet of everyday life. The stereotypes and references to the Irish “gift of the gab” is reflective of our love and ability to talk and tell stories.

Storytelling has been an emerging area of research in the peacebuilding literature, as a way to build trust and foster reconciliation between traditionally conflicting societies (e.g. Chongruska et. al., 2010, Senehi, 2008). The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed the participants a level of comfort and control throughout their participation to tell their own stories. Storytelling is an important methodological tool because it puts the storyteller in a position of authority, whereas in traditional research it is often the researcher that holds the power of influence (Senehi, 2019). This methodology focuses on and respects the knowledge of the research participants, and aims to bring in additional, often overlooked voices into the mainstream academic literature (Senehi, 2019). I personally chose this methodology because I have read of the conflict, I have heard of the conflict but I have not lived the conflict. These are not my stories to tell, but they are my stories to share.

### 3.4 Research Questions and Scope

The project was guided by the following six research questions:

1. How do the research participants define peace?
2. How do grassroots peacebuilders perceive the peace process and the GFA? Do they think it is successful, why or why not?
3. What do they feel is their organizations' biggest strength or success? Its biggest challenge or failure?
4. How do they see the future of their community, and Northern Ireland, 5, 10, 25 years from now? What are their best hopes and dreams, and worst fears and worries for the future?
5. Do they feel Northern Ireland will ever be at "peace"? Why or why not? What could make it peaceful?
6. Should the NGOs peacebuilding strategies be exported to other ethnic conflict zones?

The intent of the project was to help me to understand the interviewees various understandings of peace in Northern Ireland and to challenge the extent that Northern Ireland can be held up as an example of a successful peace process. The interview questions are included in Appendix A of this thesis. All interviews were arranged in advance with preference given to locations suggested by the participants. Before commencement of the interview, each interviewee signed a waiver allowing me to record the sessions, collect non-identifiable information; pseudonyms were used in place of real places, people, institutional affiliations, and names and so forth. to protect the identities of my informants. All research participants were then asked to sign a consent form before commencing their participation in the project, and these forms explicitly communicated

their right to withdraw or discontinue their participation in the study at any time with no repercussions.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Before initial analysis the interviews were sent to an independent Canadian transcriber who was familiar with Northern Irish accents for audio transcription. To ensure security of the data the recorder was sent via traceable packaging and delivered straight to the transcriber's door. The transcriber was also required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to receiving the recorder. The transcribed interviews were then sent to me via password-protected documents, and the recorder returned via secure mail. The original transcripts were deleted from the transcribers computer after I had successfully received and accessed them. The transcripts remained password protected throughout the analysis.

Upon receipt of the transcriptions, a grounded theory approach was used to interpret the data. Grounded theory is the most appropriate theory to use when "theory is not available" but can be used to help inform theory on a particular process (Creswell, 2007). As this research is exploratory, the analyzation of the data draws themes and connections that inform the result of the research, allowing them to relate these results back to theory (Ibid, 375). I read through each interview several times, taking notes on key themes. I then identified themes as they relate to my core research questions and divided them into separate word documents based on theming. Once in their major theme areas, I looked for connections and core concepts that emerged as I read through the participants' stories in a single document.

Once the results were divided, the coding process was completed in two parts, open coding and selective coding. Open coding helps to identify significant statements and identify common words and concepts. Selective coding breaks this down further by connecting the emergent themes and allowing for the formation of a theory (Creswell, 2007). The purpose of this particular study was not to develop a theory on peacebuilding, but to give voice to significant actors in the peace processes that are often overlooked by both the politicians and the academy, and to add a different perspective to the common narrative of the state of peace in Northern Ireland. When appropriate, I added in my own anecdotes when they related to one of the themes present in the data and allowed for a level of transparency regarding my own biases. Once my data chapters were completed and analyzed, rough copies were sent to each of the participants for review. I included the pseudonym that I assigned so they were able to identify their quotes used in the research and to suggest changes and correct any misinterpretations. I included the option to send all interested parties a completed thesis at their discretion once it is completed.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained through the University of Manitoba Joint Ethics Review Board before the commencement of the study (see APPENDIX B). After the University of Manitoba Human Subjects approval, data gathering for this study commenced in September 2016, and continued for three months. Considerations for ethical approval of this study included the following:

1. ***Informed consent:*** All participants went through their copy of the consent form with the researcher and were encouraged to ask any questions that arose before signing the form. They were also made aware that their participation is completely voluntary and they are able to withdraw from the study at any time. Consent forms were handed to the participants before the interview commenced. Included on the consent form was the researcher and advisor's contact information, and the participants were encouraged to contact the researcher at any time if clarification is needed or questions arise.
2. ***Confidentiality:*** As indicated, the research participants participated in one-on-one interviews. Their names were not used in any documentation or publication without explicit written consent from the participants. Before beginning the study all of the participants were asked to sign both a consent form and a confidentiality agreement. All information is kept strictly confidential.
3. ***Compensation:*** No compensation was provided to the participants. Some beverages and snacks were provided to some participants.
4. ***Risks and Benefits:*** There are no known risks to the participants, or any third parties involved in this study. However, due to the somewhat volatile nature of some of the interviewee's home communities, every precaution was taken to ensure that the participants were able to complete the project safely. A discussion regarding safety was undertaken with the participants with regards to their perception of risk and details regarding confidentiality were explained thoroughly. No names or identifiable information will be made public without explicit written consent. There was also the risk that some of the interview questions, or the discussions arising from the interview, may have brought up topics that could result in re-traumatization. To this end, information on

mental health/counseling services was given at the end of every session as required (please see Appendix C for a list of counseling services). The benefits of this study is an increased awareness of the lived reality of peace in Northern Ireland, and an opportunity to inform the wider international community as to the state of peace in Northern Ireland.

### **3.7 The Role of the Researcher and Positionality**

I must admit the idea for this section came from the thesis of one of my PACS MA colleagues Kris Fics (2015). Much like myself, he was researching a conflict in which there was an intimate personal connection. Though we are all inflicted by some bias, the closer one is to an issue the easier it is for the lines to be blurred and our biases harder to dissect (Smith, 1999). It must be stated, though it is well known within my department, that my family is Northern Irish. I am a first generation Canadian on my mother's side and have been heavily influenced by these roots while growing up. My Northern Irish identity is a core component of my overall identity and I have been following the conflict on a personal level long before I ever had the opportunity to study it in an academic setting. I have had family members killed, almost killed and arrested during the height of "the Troubles" and have vivid memories of phone calls that my grandparents received when my great aunt and cousin were nearly killed in the Frizzle's fish shop explosion in 1993. On the other side of that, my first experience in Northern Ireland was shortly after the first ceasefire in 1995 when I was 8 and I have nothing but wonderful memories. There were no barricades, no bomb checks, and up until recently I didn't realize how tenuous the situation still was. I did, and still do, think Northern Ireland is an amazing place and it truly is my second home.

For this study however I was living in a place that I had not spent much time and that I had little firsthand experience of, my several visits to the Giants Causeway notwithstanding. My 4-year-old son was with me and was enrolled in a working class Protestant primary school during the duration of my research. I loved the school but it gave me a personal experience of how divided things still are and how the role of “shared education” is not fulfilling the tenant of the GFA in regards to integrated education. Outside of our accents, it also pegged my son’s “affiliation” and mine as the colours of his uniform denoted our “alliances.” Not that we experienced anything overt, nothing in Northern Ireland is typically “overt” but it certainly added a different perspective for me as now I was experiencing some of the segregation firsthand.

### **3.8 Conclusions**

This chapter focused on the research methodology that guided this study and gave insight into the research process. The next chapter examines how the peacebuilders define peace and how they observe the state of peace in Northern Ireland to be.

## Chapter 4: “There is no such thing as a perfect peace”

### 4.1 Introduction

I guess at the minute peace is largely here, is largely an absence of violence. There is still violence, clearly there is still violence, and there is still sectarianism. There is reduced levels of violence possibly reduced levels of explicit sectarianism but all that needs to be dealt with and swept away and so there's coalescence between inner peace and outer peace and I think all of us perhaps need to be working on both.

(Northern Irish Peacebuilder #6)

A firm definition of peace, I would argue, is unattainable to the extent that depending on one's perspective and subsequent backgrounds, how it is defined will differ. How politicians define peace has often been at odds with how people living in protracted conflict situations feel about the same situation (e.g., Nelson Mandela in South Africa). All the participants in this study were in Northern Ireland during the heart of the “Troubles” and lived and worked there during the implementation of the peace process and thereafter giving them a multi-faceted perspective on their definitions of peace. Three common themes emerged across all interviews: (1) That peace is made of acceptance and respect, not just tolerance; (2) That peace is more than just the absence of violence,; and (3) That while things are better than they were, there is no true peace in Northern Ireland as it has become frozen and trapped in a liminal stasis. This chapter focuses on how these peacebuilders view and define peace, and what it means to them and how they see it in the context of Northern Ireland.

## 4.2 Tolerance is not Peace

Good God ah, ya know we've got a tolerated peace, ya know I think genuinely you know 98 percent of the population I would say, hazard a guess would be, ya know has very strong feelings that no matter what your views are or your cultural beliefs are, your religious views are, no one wants to go back to where it was.

(Northern Irish Peacebuilder #3)

I went into this research genuinely curious at how peace is defined by peacebuilders in particular, as my personal perceptions and definitions of peace are often jarringly different than those that I have heard espoused by politicians and certainly to some extent academics both within and beyond PACS. As stated earlier, the definition of peace merely as the 'absence of war' is overly simplistic and overtly ignores the many systemic and micro level structures that continue to perpetuate conflict without there being open violence. Peace tends to be in pieces in a heterogeneous milieu that is complex, untidy, and messy (Mac Ginty, 2006). To this end, I posited two questions to my participants regarding the definition of peace. The first asking them to define peace in their own terms and the second, if they felt that there was peace as they would define it currently in Northern Ireland. The responses were varied but two main themes emerged, that of respect and that of acceptance. One participant noted that acceptance is critical. This is what he had to say on the issue:

To me peace is acceptance you know not just tolerance but proper acceptance you know what I find until that happens I mean were always going to get on but we need to get to that point where we actually genuinely respect each other's culture and political beliefs and value.

(NI Peacebuilder #3)

Two fellow participants noted the themes of respect and acceptance. NI 3 reported that people must respect each other's dignity. He reported on the issue as follows:

I think it's a society where people live respectfully together, I'm not, they don't all think the same way that they live in a society with different views, but they respect people as human beings.

(NI Peacebuilder #2)

Similarly, NI 1 articulated that people could coexist together peacefully if they are treated fairly. She highlighted the following in her story:

It's not a society where there's no arguments but a society where people are largely fairly treated and respectfully treated and treat each other.

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

The problem with the idea of tolerance is that it is often equated as being something that should be strived toward in areas that are moving out of conflict (e.g. Abu Nimer & Smith, 2016). Tolerance is defined by the Webster's dictionary (Merriam-Webster, N.D.) as "sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own." I am not alone in recognizing the problematic language in those statements. Tolerance does not equate to respect, nor does it create understanding or breed a desire to learn about those beliefs that might conflict with one's own. In Northern Ireland, religion is the social marker, which denotes one's ethnic and political origin. Religion itself is a well-suited vehicle for the process of "othering," which denotes placing outgroups into categories 'less deserving' than one's own (Brewer & Teeney, 2015). According to Brewer and Teeney (2015) "religion retains its saliency in modernity only when it stands in as a surrogate for ethnonational and political conflict" (p. 3652). Othering is often presumed to be prescribed from an ingroup to an outgroup, yet the process of 'self othering' makes salient cultural differences between groups to ascertain their status as a minority, thus making their culture in need of preservation and legitimization (Brewer & Teeney, 2015). Both the Unionist and Nationalist communities perceive themselves to be cultural minorities under attack. Prior to the GFA, the Catholic population was marginally

smaller than that of the Protestant population, though in later years the two groups have comparable numbers at 45 and 48 percent respectively (NI Census, 2011).

To that end, respect is defined by Webster's dictionary (Merriam-Webster, N.D.) as "a. to consider worthy of high regard; b. to refrain from interfering with". To respect is to understand, even if you do not agree. It is to live and let live without fear of retribution of what church you go to or what football team that you support. Northern Ireland is just not there yet. This brings us to the second key theme that emerged from the data, the notion that peace is more than just the absence of violence.

#### **4.3 "Peace is too important to be left to the politicians"**

To restate a core theory from my literature review, negative peace typically refers to an absence of direct violence, while positive peace in this context refers to the absence of both cultural and structural violence (Galtung, 1996). In direct opposition to the grassroots model of peacebuilding, the liberal model leans heavily on the concept of negative peace, with an end goal ultimately being the cessation of violence (Mac Ginty, 2008). In one instance NI 5 was familiar with the term negative peace. When I asked him how he would define peace he stated the following:

Right, it is a place, it is a situation in which all who live in a place feel valued, safe, equal. What I'm trying to bring in is, in the absence of justice there cannot be peace. The issue of inequality, injustice, discrimination on the grounds of whatever diversity makes for non-peace and so I think there is not a lot of that about in the world. There is an absence of violence but that emphatically does not mean that there is peace. There is also here in our context something that, maybe you've heard the term negative peace, a place where people are not at the moment being killed. I mean that has actually been stated in parliament, in Westminster a couple of times to say no we're fine, nobody is being killed, we have peace. How dare they? I

suppose the final bit is that I think peace is too important to be left to politicians.  
(NI Peacebuilder #5)

And acknowledgment that the absence of violence is not the same as there being peace was present in almost every interview. For example, NI 4 highlighted that peace is an ongoing process whereby both communities need to integrate and get to know each other so that they can build a future together:

Well I certainly don't see peace as just the absence of war; that's much too simplistic. It is an ongoing process that has to be worked at. Secondly, I see it as a society becoming accepting and respectful of each other. I don't consider that communities living separately constitutes a basis for peace. I think the communities have to integrate and accept each other and to be able to live a normal kind of life together.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

Their perceptions of peace as more than an absence of war is contrasted by the vast majority of political and scholarly analysis that argue that the world is more peaceful largely through the measurement of the decrease in violent behavior (Diehl, 2016; Goldstein: 2011; Pinker, 2011). As Diehl (2016) has noted, this type of measure has major flaws. Using North Korea as an example under this framework he shows how, by this measure, North Korea is at peace with both South Korea and the United States. He also shows how the relationship between Iran and Israel could, for scholarly purposes, be viewed as peaceful due to the lack of major military engagements. We know this is not the case, and that by many measures there is no 'peace' between these nations. By this design though they are 'peaceful.' Now I am aware that this is overly simplistic, but often times the analysis of peace is simplistic. Peace is nuanced and never straightforward. It is often in a liminal frozen state where ethnic groups are neither at war nor are they at peace.

As I conclude, I will note that I would never be so vain as to argue that things are not more peaceful in Northern Ireland in the sense that large scale attacks on individual groups has certainly declined (e.g. Wilson, 2016). But deaths that are related to the Troubles are still being counted every year, many of them suicides that can be traced back to trauma related to the Troubles (Wilson, 2016). When I was conducting research in Northern Ireland in 2014 and 2016 there were at least two 'paramilitary style' shootings during my time there and one bomb scare in 2016. NI 6 shared my view that peace exists on the surface as many people continue to carry hurt and pain, and are not at peace:

We're in a better place than we were and that there is less killings going on, there's less shootings going on overall you get dips and troughs but there's not real peace. There's a sort of peace that's very on the surface type of peace but if you dig deep beneath the surface and you have the likes of Twadell Avenue which is the protest, you have the flags dispute, you have the questions about inquests, have the questions about the need for inquiries, you have demands for things being investigated that happened in the past so there's not a lot of people at peace.

Yet for some folks, for example to use the Omagh bombing example there are some people that said right and very similarly you have people from the Bloody Sunday community as well and many of them have said but without an inquiry we have got as much truth as we think we're going to get and we need to move on and yet there's other folks say no we need justice we need more to come out of it and those people are not at peace. I'm not saying that one person is right and one person is wrong, but clearly when you see the people on television they're not at peace so therefore you know, my answer we're in a better place but we're not at peace.

(NI Peacebuilder #6)

One participant noted that it was easy for the political establishment to make people afraid of other groups. She articulated the issue in the following manner:

It's fear, the greatest fear is fear itself and you know you can stoke up fear of migrants you can stoke up fear of the other religion or you can stoke up fear of gay people or you can stoke up fear of any minority and of course we don't have to go back too far in history to see how that can lead to world war or countries just stoke up the fears and we need to be very aware of that.

And unfortunately we'll see through the likes of Brexit and the likes of Donald Trump and whatever where by there are fears, genuine fears amongst people

but you know you don't answer those by putting your head in the sand you know you answer those by trying to answer things and debate rationally. But the establishment or whatever the word is, has a lot to answer for as well because the establishment became removed from the ordinary people.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

Three years after these interviews, overt violence in Northern Ireland is beginning to escalate. A focus on the absence of direct violence as a key indicator of peace has been to the detriment of the people in Northern Ireland, and it has allowed for unresolved issues to fester to a boiling point. While things are better, they are not peaceful, which leads us to the third and final key theme that emerged in this chapter.

#### **4.4 It's Better, but We're Not There Yet**

Most, if not all, of the participants expressed the view that things in Northern Ireland are significantly better than they were but there was some dissent amongst them as to how far this can be considered peace. Outwardly that Northern Ireland is more peaceful can hardly be disputed, as long gone are they days of check points, metal detectors and a noticeable military presence. For example, a former NI 7 expressed that the conflict is escalating tensions especial the mindsets that must be decommissioned and that are reinforced by segregation and sectarianism:

...NI, which is a very conflicted society for so many years. In fact really since it was set up in the early 1920's there's always been violence there and I suppose you could say in someways, which is maybe developing negatives and positives, peace here in NI is the absence of violence or at least an improvement on the situation that we had particularly between 1969 and 1994-95 when the ceasefires came in. It means that you're waking up in the morning and you're not hearing about the bombs that went on overnight or the killings that went on overnight, its more of a normal society. There's obviously still issues here with the dissident Republicans and some loyalist paramilitary activity.

We have unfortunately I would almost say institutionalized sectarianism in our education processes in where our libraries are built our housing where you have Catholic housing estates and Protestant housing estates. Its reinforced by things such as the peace walls and there's more peace walls here in 2016 than there was in 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement kicked off. There may be less violence and less activity on the streets but I think within people's minds they're still distressed and they're still, you know worry about what the other ones are doing.

We tend to vote here in a very religious way and the Protestant Unionist Loyalist population vote way and the Catholic Republican Nationalist population tend to vote another way. Its great to see we now have the institutions of powersharing up at Stormont, not perfect but we're struggling along there and we're in a better place I believe than we were many years ago. But a lot of work still needs to be done and developing what you talk about is peace is on peoples minds because they're still a lot distress and I know its there and its only when you travel the world and go to certain other areas that you realize we really should able to fix what we have here...

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

The issue with segregation is something that continually came up in the interviews when I asked the respondent's about peace in Northern Ireland. This is a topic that is important to place within the context of the GFA, and it is important to note its emergence as a key barrier to sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. The segregation of education is seen as an anomaly in Europe and has been criticized by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (Wilson, 2016). NI 4 discussed the issue with segregation while also maintaining hope that things are continually getting better. She had the following to say on the issue:

It has to a certain extent but problems remain; housing is segregated and the education system is segregated. There are a lot of public areas that one side or the other wouldn't go to; so no it's not a normal society yet and its going to take a long time. But I think it's better than it was and it is getting better.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

When talking about peace in Northern Ireland NI 5 noted the problem of denial regarding the legacy of the Troubles and the struggles with dealing with the past. He also expressed a different view on the state of peace in Northern Ireland as follows:

There is massive denial about what continues to exist and the legacy that only dealt with the past impinging on the present. The generation of young people who have not lived the experience of the Troubles are deeply affected by the conflict because of the failure to resolve, to deal with our past. No there isn't no, no, there isn't. The young people – a minority - who are getting drawn into extreme republicanism now are being fed all the old traditional republican story lines but they have not lived through the 'Troubles' so have no understanding of how awful all that violence was. They are being manipulated by older hard line republicans who do not want anything other than total British withdrawal and are wedded to the violent approach to solving our problems. They do not seem to factor in that half our population are British or that we have made substantial progress through dialogue and negotiation. A sectarianism as in which is centuries old and unresolved, and ready to be manipulated by the forces have a benefit in so doing and so no, we don't have peace.

(NI Peacebuilder #5)

The consensus among the peacebuilders is that while things are considerably better than they were, Northern Ireland still has a long way to go. This quote is impactful as it addresses what the recently murdered generation journalist Lyra McKee (2016) reaffirmed as “ceasefire babies.” Young people born in the era of the ceasefires and the GFA are not afflicted by the same ‘war weariness’ that some argue allowed for the initial implementation of the GFA to succeed (e.g. Byrne, 2001). For many young people, the peace process has brought “further marginalization, increased social exclusion, and exposure to hazardous environments” (Browne & Dwyer, 2014, p. 792). Young people navigating this “new” Northern Ireland continue to face new challenges and new dangers.

Although the risks faced by children in Northern Ireland are similar to those marginalized children elsewhere in the United Kingdom (UK), much research suggests that “sporadic acts of inter-community violence, the threat of paramilitary recruitment, the impact of residential

segregation, the negotiation of risky spaces, and the negotiation of risky spaces and interfaces” (Brown & Dwyer, 2014, p. 795) add an additional layer of risk for those children residing in Northern Ireland and have a significant impact on their day-to-day lives (Browne & Dwyer, 2014). In contrast to their adult counterparts, children and young people are more likely to experience, engage in, and be exposed to violent incidents (Browne & Dwyer, 2014).

We see this in the emergence of young Catholic people joining new and existing paramilitary groups such as the “New Irish Republican Army” or NIRA, the group responsible for the 2019 killing of journalist and fellow Northern Irish Lyra McKee. Anecdotally, a ‘UDA recruiter’ approached one of my cousins shortly before I arrived in Northern Ireland in 2016. Young people who only know Northern Ireland ‘at peace’ are being presented with a romanticized version of the Troubles, that is coupled with rampant unemployment among young working-class men is allowing predatory new paramilitary splinter groups to recruit these young men to their ideological causes that continue to stoke the fire of unrest within Northern Ireland.

#### **4.5 Summary and Key Findings**

Three key themes emerged inductively from the data regarding the peacebuilder’s definitions of peace and of their perceptions of peace existing in Northern Ireland during the time of the interviews.

First, most of the participants had similar beliefs regarding the definition of peace in that it is more than tolerance, and that the type of peace in Northern Ireland is, to quote one participant, a ‘tolerated peace’ rather than a peace built on mutual acceptance and respect. Acceptance and respect were quoted by almost all the participants as key components of their definition of peace highlighting the importance of a mutual respect and understanding of the

other community for this to be achieved. At its most basic tenets, the idea of acceptance and respect is not to dissolve all differences between the groups, but instead to recognize that respect and acceptance is born from a common humanity, rather than from one's religious or ethnic group affiliation. All of the peacebuilders ascertained that this point is crucial if the society is to move forward peacefully. A peaceful society does not mean to cease making arguments or not recognizing differences. Rather it means that people are enlightened enough to 'live and let live' and that a society can grow together because of its differences instead of in spite of them. Unfortunately, the continued physical, social, and psychological segregation continues to persist, hindering cross-community dialogue and understanding.

Second, all the participants expressed the view that true peace was more than just the absence of violence and they expressed that things are much better in Northern Ireland than they were during the Troubles. Most feel that Northern Ireland is not 'at peace' but acknowledge that peace is a process and something that needs to be continued to be worked at. One participant summed it up succinctly when he noted that "a peaceful society is not necessarily a trouble-free society" (NI Peacebuilder #1). Finally, the majority of participants viewed Northern Ireland as being more peaceful, but they agreed that work continues to be needed before Northern Ireland will be at peace. Continued voluntary segregation and conflict surrounding truth and justice remains an impediment to the peacebuilding process.

Deutsch and Coleman (2016) have identified six psychological requirements that they feel are necessary for building sustainable peace in any society: (1) A strong sense of interdependence, (2) A strong sense of both global and local patriotism and loyalty, (3) Sharing of basic core common values, (4) Mutual understanding, (5) A sense of fair recourse, (6) And violence being seen as a socially taboo way of solving problems (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016).

Within the context of Northern Ireland, virtually none of these conditions are currently being met.

Deutsch and Coleman (2016) define a strong sense of interdependence as members of a society feeling a strong common bond with each other and having a ‘sink or swim’ mentality. Community members of societies that have this ideal of interdependence often live, work and socialize together. In Northern Ireland, segregation is ingrained into every facet of daily life. The schools are segregated, the streets are segregated, the names are segregated. Segregation permeates every facet of life there. As was mentioned in both the introduction and in this chapter, the move away from integration, which was a key component of the GFA, has allowed these perceptions of the ‘other’ to continue to be propagated. This is true more specifically for the working-class communities, where in 2011 over 91 percent of public housing estates are comprised almost entirely (80 percent) of one ethnic/cultural group (Housing Executive, 2011; Hargie, 2014; McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2014). This number has remained relatively stable, as David Carpenter reported for the Guardian newspaper in 2017 that, in spite of the ‘shared futures housing program’ whose aim is to ensure that no community housing projects “contain no more than 70% of any one religion”, 90 percent of social housing remains single identity.

In another example, Shirlow and Murtagh’s (2004) survey of 18-25 year olds in twelve areas separated by peace walls revealed that over 68 percent had never had a ‘meaningful conversation’ with a person in the ‘other community.’ In later surveys, it was estimated that one in four youth living in these areas has been a victim of sectarian harassment or abuse within the past year (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2014). Children and youth in particular are subjected to sectarianism in every facet of their daily lives. Whether it is to/from school, town or city centers, or when they leave the ‘safety’ of their home communities (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon,

2014). The fear of a sectarian attack is so great in some of these communities that many young people feel imprisoned within the boundaries of their own neighbourhood (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2014; Shuttleworth & Lloyd, 2007). The impact of this segregation is felt so acutely, that some young people refuse to attend training courses or colleges in certain areas due to their location and perceived identity of the institution (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2014).

The second requirement, a strong sense of global and local loyalty and patriotism, suggests that one's identity is intrinsically linked to both their global and local communities (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016). Deutsch and Coleman (2016) use the examples of "Irish American" or "Italian American" as being identities that link both the local and global facets of identity. In Northern Ireland, there is no common global link that ties the two communities together and loyalty and patriotism toward their local communities (e.g. Unionist Loyalist, Nationalist Republican) further drives the wedge and reinforces perceived differences between the communities.

Although the development of a common identity has the potential to help depolarize Northern Irish society, it continues systemic and psycho-cultural challenges, including the advent of Brexit. Regardless of self-identification, the dominant communities 'besieged' mentalities and a long history of intercommunal violence, unstable politics, and ardent displays of cultural symbolism create barriers to the development of a shared identity (Carter & Byrne, 2000). Other issues, including amendments through the peace process, the ability of the citizens of Northern Ireland to hold both an Irish or British passport and dual citizenship could be seen as a deterrent to an integrated Northern Irish identity. Many of the accommodations that were meant to be inclusive may have inadvertently widened the gap between the two communities. This gap then

reinforces group boundaries, increases the saliency of one's ethnic identity, and serves to reinforce the fear of the other.

Take for example the cultural traditions of the respective groups. After the GFA, politicians have attempted to balance each groups need for "prestige, legitimacy, and validation" through numerous endeavors such as instating the official status of the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages, or regulating parade routes for the Orange Order and Republican marches (Tausch et al., 2005, p. 115). From a psycho-social standpoint, and for Unionists in particular, this increase in 'Irishness' is being interpreted by many in the Unionist community as the removal of 'Britishness' from Northern Ireland. Where they had once dominated culturally, they are now contending with a strong Celtic revival centered around Irish music, sports, and language (MacGinty & DuToit, 2007; Tausch et al. 2005). Where Deutsch and Coleman (2016) state that local loyalty and patriotism is a crucial component to sustainable peace, Northern Ireland lacks the global identity (e.g. "European," "American") needed to remove the entrenched stereotypes of the 'other' communities to which their more hardline loyalties lie.

The third requirement, sharing of basic common goals, is "the recognition that all human beings despite differences or disagreements have the right to be treated with respect, dignity, and justice, as well as to have their basic needs fulfilled" (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016 p. 5). Respect and acceptance were core ideals that the peacebuilders perceived were necessary for there to be true peace in Northern Ireland. The concept of relative deprivation refers to "an individual's subjective evaluation of inequality, with these feelings of unjust disadvantage stemming from social comparisons with other groups" (Goeke-Morey et. al., 2016, p. 286). After the signing of the GFA, the Unionist community perceived their community to be 'losing ground' as a result of the agreement introducing both social and legislative change that appeared to benefit the

Catholic community (Goeke-Morey et. al., 2016, p. 286). The nature of ‘zero sum’ politics is not unique to Unionists, in residential working-class Loyalist and Republican communities, relative deprivation theory suggests that conflict is not born out of difference, but rather between those experiencing a common problem (Burke, 2015). The continued segregation and isolation of the communities, especially those in the working class, are creating the perfect storm of factors that could see the rise in politically and ideologically motivated violence.

The fourth requirement, mutual understanding, refers to the freedom of expression and the freedom to be informed in such a way that the meaning is mutually understood by both parties (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016). Politics in Northern Ireland are split across ideologically fueled lines and the combative nature between the Nationalist and Unionist politicians do not foster an environment of mutual expression and understanding. This affects the people of Northern Ireland in a significant way even if they do not agree with the messages being spouted by the politicians. When I was completing my honours thesis in 2014, which examined the effect of the Scottish Referendum on intergroup attitudes in Northern Ireland, a young participant expressed to me that, while he did not necessarily support Sinn Fein, family ties (his cousin was an MP) and a sense of feeling ‘stuck’ were his motivations for continuing to vote for them. The culture of Northern Ireland, to a certain degree, is also a culture of silence. People tend to tip toe around divisive topics in public to avoid the confrontation, even though they might be politically active or hold differing views in their private lives. Until people are able to feel safe and understood, and free to express themselves in mutual dialogue this requirement will never be met.

The fifth requirement, a sense of fair recourse, refers to “a fair and efficient means of recourse” when injustices and oppression arise which in turn reduces the likelihood of political

and criminal violence (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016 p. 6). The debate around truth and justice in Northern Ireland remains a highly divisive issue, one that is explored deeper in Chapter 6. Northern Ireland's 'contested past' and general disagreement around victimology has left the society in a state of limbo. Until there is some resolution to the issue of dealing with the conflict Northern Ireland will remain in a liminal frozen stasis.

The sixth and final requirement that violence is seen as a socially taboo way of solving problems, is something that had largely been resolved although sporadic incidents of paramilitary violence remain (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016). Recently however, the New Irish Republican Army (NIRA) has become increasingly visible and active and is responsible for at least one death in 2019. Although both communities, the state of things, now largely condemn acts of paramilitary violence on the ground in Northern Ireland are creating the perfect environment for a rise in civil unrest. The uncertainty surrounding Brexit has left both communities on edge.

These six requirements, like most theoretical constructs surrounding building peace, are not in and of themselves the answer, but they are a framework from which sustainable peace can be achieved (Deutsch & Coleman, 2016). Deutsch and Coleman (2016) suggest that the more a society invests in these principles, the greater the likelihood of sustainable peace and the decreased likelihood of destructive conflict. The peacebuilders reiterated that peace is more than the absence of violence, and that while Northern Ireland has come a long way, it still has a long way to go. I would like to end on this quote by Brewer and Teeney (2015) who noted that, "Peace is never about eliminating differences, the merging of the world religions in rainbow ecumenicalism, it is about the way disagreements are handled better in the future. It is also about the reproduction of continued religious difference but in non-violent ways, encouraging all the religious groups to feel they belong despite their remaining religious differences" (p. 3653).

#### **4.6 Conclusions**

This chapter explored how the peacebuilders conceptualize peace in Northern Ireland and looked at some key issues preventing sustainable peace there. In the next chapter, I examine the motivations of participants for entering into peacebuilding work, and how they feel their challenges and successes have made an impact on Northern Irish society.

## Chapter 5: Challenges as Opportunities

### 5.1 Introduction

I was very aware that it was bad and what people in the South tend to look at it as if the trouble was happening everywhere and that everywhere was unsafe. Whereas actually where we were living was practically safe, well okay, random things might happen, ya know, you're always aware of that, but for quite a while some friends wouldn't come up they were too afraid to cross the Border.

(NI Peacebuilder #5)

This chapter focuses on peacebuilders inspirations for entering this field of work, their successes, their challenges, and how they maintain hope in their work. As such, it will be divided into the headings of inspiration, successes, challenges and barriers, and maintaining hope. Key themes that emerged concerned issues with funding, the continued segregation of society, general indifference from politicians, governments and the general public. It also highlights those profound moments of peacebuilding that show how these barriers can be broken down, and how they continue to do this work in the face of continued adversity.

### 5.2 Inspirations

When I think of inspiration, I typically think of an artist who finds a muse that inspires her or his work with the result that that inspiration becomes something tangible such as a painting or a song. Peacebuilding is oft times a thankless endeavor and a path that has, arguably, more downs than ups during one's career. So the question for me became what would motivate someone to choose this type of path. When posited with that question NI 6 described her inspirations as follows:

What inspired me? I think you know in a way times I don't see this as work and of course it is work in a way I see it as it is active citizenship. It's me saying to me we had a terrible problem here, which some people describe as the Troubles, which is a euphemism. The Troubles, you know, if you examine it, it means that over 3,700 were killed as many as 40,000 were injured some of them very, very seriously injured. People lost legs, lost eyes, lost arms and as people get older they're living with how that affects them. They may have been injured in their 20's and they're now in their 60's. And also, all those people who are, if you would like wounded psychologically or emotionally traumatized communities.

So I've grown up in this possibly having contributed to the Troubles by being passive when I could have been more active. So there is something deeply human about saying for me, saying I want to be part of the solution not part of the problem and the kind of work, particularly the work around ethical storytelling that is story telling in support of healing and understanding...

(NI Peacebuilder #6)

With my background in psychology, I was particularly interested in dissecting what motivates people to engage in this line of work. When researching for empirical evidence of psychological motivation for what inspires certain people to engage in advocacy, I found the literature lacking. One study looked at the role of Social Justice Advocacy (SJA) as an extension of Multicultural Competency. These are both seen as positive contributors to advocacy behaviours and social justice commitments (Presseau, Luu, Inman & DeBlaere, 2018). Multi-Cultural Competency is a model of counseling that is comprised of a tripartite model that consists of three elements: (1) that the person be aware of their own identities and cultural beliefs, (2) be knowledgeable about other cultures, (3) acquire skills in working with culturally different clients (Presseau, Luu, Inman & DeBlaere, 2018). Although the participants are not counselors per se, this model highlights the mechanisms for which one might become engaged in this type of social justice work. Vera and Speight (2003, p. 795 as cited in Presseau, Luu, Inman & DeBlaere, 2018) define social justice work as "scholarship and professional action designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that a disadvantaged or marginalized groups gain increased access to these tools of self-determination."

Most if not all of the participants of this study are university educated individuals with many having left Northern Ireland for a period of time before coming back to begin their work within the province. Several have lived and worked in other countries enmeshed in conflict (for e.g. ,South Africa) that affected their desire to return home. One participant who was heavily involved in the integrated school movement talked about her time in South Africa when she was asked about her inspiration for pursuing this line of work. NI 2 stated from her experience of working as a schoolteacher in South Africa that it is critically important to educate Protestant and Catholic children together is a long-term peace is to be built in Northern Ireland:

I was educated at Queen's University in Belfast, I came from a Catholic background and when I came back to work here in 1983 it was one of the worst years of the Troubles but 1972 was worse but anyway '73 was really violent and when I came back one of the locals schools which was controlled as a Protestant school somebody said "ya know they take in Catholic children now," and I thought well that's a very sensible idea and I was working in South Africa and I would go into school that had black and white children. So I'd just go in and see what they are doing and what happens and so I went into this school and there was a visionary head there called Geoff Starrett who saw that the population in Derry was moving from.

The Protestant population was moving out of the West side to the East because they were being blown up and shot and killed and so the population was changing so the Protestant school was losing students and he also felt that schools should bring Protestants and Catholics together because if they sat children beside one another they would learn something from one another and maybe that would help in the future so that's where I started off .... I always thought it made sense to bring children together and after a conversation here in Crawford Square in 1990 we were saying why do we still separate children. We separate them by gender, by religion by ability it is all of these things. Why do we do that and account that this conversation grew into likeminded people and we had a meeting to talk about opening up an integrated school in Derry.

(NI Peacebuilder #2)

Others saw their international experience as being something that they could bring back and use to contribute to building the peace in Northern Ireland. NI 4 noted that his experience of working

in international development in Africa and in Latin America empowered him to put lessons learned to good use on the ground in Derry-Londonderry:

I have a background in international development of about 25 years all together, beginning in Northern Nigeria, which is where Boko Haram is now making a horrible name for itself. Following a substantial period there I had a roving commission in management and in leadership training and in assessing needs all over Africa and Latin America followed then by a hands-on engagement in South Africa, pre-apartheid, while apartheid was still operating...

Since returning home I have had significant opportunity to bring something of the learnings from a wider experience to this place and at the same time to learn from working here.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

Not all of my interviewees had to go so far from home to experience this same motivation. NI 3 who self-identified as being from the Protestant tradition talked about attending university in England while the Troubles was still ongoing. He observed that English people did not seem to grasp the complexity of the conflict and they ended up blaming the Protestant community for the everyday violence that was not accurate. He reflected on this issue in the following manner:

...I always found it really, really frustrating, even when I went to university in England even with good friends there or general student people I was working with. You can always sense they were looking at us as if to say that you Protestants you're the oppressor, look what you're do, discriminate against these Catholics despite the fact that on the new everyday there was the Kingsmill Massacre or there was some kind of atrocity and they just completely ignored it.

I always find it very frustrating when I try to talk to them about why you aren't as British citizens more concerned about this you know they were completely unconcerned about whatever they did .... You know so I always kind of find that really frustrating that kind of dragged me back to NI just thinking about England ya know, it was kinda. Plus ya know NI despite everything else or maybe in spite or maybe because of it. It is a very strong sense of community in NI which you don't get in England ya know. There's a very strong sense of family and ya know you always felt more comfortable here.

(NI Peacebuilder #3)

Although I did ask each participant which community they identified with, I was hesitant to mention it unless something of note emerged from the participant's stories. In this sense I felt it

appropriate, as their feeling of indifference from England is something that is felt by many of those in the Protestant tradition in Northern Ireland. Catholics by contrast have never been attached to the state, while Protestant identity is often tied up in its concept of 'Britishness' and many have strong allegiances to the UK that is often not reciprocated by British governments.

There was no one motivation for why these participants chose this path. Experience in other countries, work, education, and a sense of home all contributed to their peacebuilding work in an individual and unique capacity. Each person came from different backgrounds, travelled to different places, or were from different places and had different experiences and motivations seeking out those experiences. However, it all led them down the same path and to chase the same goal of making Northern Ireland a better place. This leads us into the next section in which we explore some of the key successes experienced by these participants during their peacebuilding work.

### **5.3 Success: A stab in the heart kind of feeling**

Totally! Totally! Ya know the child comes from the playground "he called me a Protestant" and I said "I know you're Protestant, yea and so what's your problem." "He just called me that" and then so the discussion opened up as when you use words as a weapon as opposed to a descriptor, what it is and what does that mean in your, and then who's and then you open the discussion all up again, all of those kind of things.

(NI Peacebuilder #2)

I have found something so profound in each interview that I feel so fortunate to have had the opportunity to speak with each of these wonderful individuals and hear about their work.

Although I am only able to highlight a few, I want to acknowledge all of the successes that these individuals and groups have had. Every individual viewed success differently and as such, I underscored three different examples. Throughout my analysis one quote has continued to stand

out for me. It is such a lovely small moment that shows how big of an impact these peacebuilders have had on other people's lives. This story was told in reference to what they perceive to be their organization's key success. NI 1 was another instrumental individual in the integrated school movement. He relayed the following in his story:

There's a story that they talk about in mixed marriage where you have Protestant parents and Catholic parents who really didn't want the mixed marriage in the first place. It was only when children arrived that their hearts melted and things get on but then they, the story that I have often told about the group of parents and the opening of the integrated family school here. So this is September 1991 and among the parents was at least one mixed marriage maybe more. Well there was more than one mixed marriage so they kind of found it particularly suitable.

Obviously in that situation but there was a little girl who had been at an existing school already for something like 3 years and it doesn't matter if it was a Catholic school or a Protestant school. She then started and after a few days of school she was coming in after school and her mother's in the house and her mother says, "how did you get on today?" And the little girl was taking off her school bag and she said, "I got on fine" and her mother said "how do you like your new school?" And the little girl says "fine," and the mother said quite casually, not expecting any kind of profound statement, "what's the difference between your new integrated school and your old school?"

And the mother herself said she was quite taken aback when the little girl said to her, "Mummy, I never told you before but at my old school I talked about Daddy but I didn't talk about you. At that Oakgrove integrated school I can be proud of both of you." And I thought, that's what it's all about. If everyone in NI can be proud of her parents then there's the problems solved we can find a way to do it. But that was even a child of 8 in a divided society knows there are things you don't talk about including your own mother. Huh, stab in the heart kind of feeling.

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

I feel that stab in my heart every time I read that story, as it is simultaneously heartwarming and heartbreaking. Expanding on that, NI 2 speaking about the overall impact integrated schools have had on education in general noted that the staff in integrated schools began to critically explore what they were doing that was different:

What it also has done is changed the conversation in other segregated schools because we beg the question about why were we not good enough that they felt they had to start a school that was integrated. I think that is one of the key things that it did because I know that there were conversations in all our staff rooms around that and I think that its good that we raised that question elsewhere, that question was

never raised before that until they had to look at what they were doing and is there anything we are doing that's you know, like are we teaching this or what is it that we are doing because they felt they had to be different and do this, so I think that was a huge issue, besides all of the internal work of the school and how difficult all that, we beg the question because of our existence.

(NI Peacebuilder #2)

Other participants used examples of structural change, such as the reformation of the police service to better represent the society. He noted the positive impact of the PSNI in terms of broader recruitment and acceptance especially within the Catholic community:

Well I think if you look at the transition of policing in the last 15 years you've gone from a body that was really underrepresented as the community to one that is more represented as the community. For example in 1998 you would have had in the police service here roughly 6 percent Catholic, 7 percent female, now in 2016 you have roughly 30 percent Catholic and 30 percent female so the old organization is going down the right path as far as better representation of the people it serves as involved so that's quite a big success.

There have been attempts to introduce more policing into the community as opposed to what could be largely looked upon as paramilitary policing. Its a little bit of smoke and mirrors there and I don't think tis quite as good at policing the community as its glossy leaflets would say but nonetheless it realizes what it is has to do and there is better engagement between policing and the community and that wasn't the case in the past and it was all communities which is a good way of doing business. So I think policing is slowly going down the right direction, I think it is more representative of the society it serves and I think that can only be but a good thing.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

Other interviewees used examples of specific projects. For example, NI 3 talked about a project that he worked on which he is very passionate about. He reports on the issue in the following way:

The most successful program that I've been involved in has been with the Londonderry Bands Forum. There's been a lot of superficial programs that have happened over the years now that I've been involved in, some of them as well. I keep saying if you stood long enough in the Fountain Estate over there for example, someone would paint a mural on your back and I find all that stuff ya know... especially if it looks effective but doesn't make any difference if ya scratch the surface. Whereas the Bands Forum I think has been really really, really important in the city and because what it did was it worked with a constituent group that had

largely been ostracized and blamed for everything and we flopped it right on the head.

Parading isn't a barrier to peace here it's the structures around parading and bands are the solution because the most vulnerable alienated section of loyalists, the ones that are most likely, if anyone was to engage in violence are the young people, working class Protestant communities and those young people are drawn to violence. They are already in violence, so what we're saying was how can we use that structure to really progressively develop the communities. We work with all of the loyalist bands. There is 14 and we brought them together under kind of a forum and ya know what the message we're putting across is, the actual real effective leaders in Derry are not the community workers or the youth workers that are paid by Europe or by whoever, it's actually the band leaders because they have the most disenfranchised members of the community on a weekly basis working with us.

For example, you look at New Buildings and the estate of New Buildings have two bands and a combined membership of about 100 of which about 50 are young people under the age of 25. The youth club doesn't attract 50 of those young people but they come to band practice every week you know. So what we're saying is how do we value those young people not only in terms of them individually in terms of their own personal development because most of them as well fall into this low education trap that Protestant working class are in as well so how do we use the band structure to look at their own broader training needs, and use the band practice as an opportunity to direct them or work with them on other skills.

But how do we get these young people to become leaders with other communities and influence the quality of life going forward? And we have been able to do that at a local level. We've been able to use the band leaders, the band masters to become progressive leaders and they've been able to influence the young people they work with. And then on the broader more holistic level, the bands forums themselves have been a huge influence in terms of cementing peace in the city because they are the people you'll find with band leaders are very, very straight ya know don't take any bullshit

(NI Peacebuilder #3)

The successes were riveting and varied, with each individual placing emphasis on different aspects of success. Some are directly structural while others are more personal but none-the-less they touch on the breadth of the work that is done by grassroots peacebuilders. In the next section we note some of the challenges and barriers the grassroots faced during their careers and what they feel are the key challenges facing peacebuilders in Northern Ireland.

## 5.4 Barriers and Challenges

We're in a situation where there are 2 competing nationalisms and there is a wonderful quote which I can give you from Senator George Mitchell about NI as a fascinating and lovely modern literate, articulate community but that they have a history of centuries of antagonism and each side feels out to be a victim and each side has all sorts of evidence about why its a victim and that they do not understand the other side.

And he talked in a different part of the book, he refers to a meeting that Ian Paisley had with president Clinton and Gerry Adams had with President Clinton when Clinton was on a visit here and George Mitchell said "I could not understand how two people could have two different views of the same society and that's because we live separately so desegregate NI."

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

When the interviews moved from discussing successes to barriers and challenges there was a lot more consensus among the participants about what are the key barriers and challenges faced by peacebuilders in Northern Ireland then and now. Two key themes emerged: 1) Issues of, and surrounding segregation, and 2) Reluctance of the government to engage in the peacebuilding process. These two issues are distinct but not mutually exclusive. The segregation of the two communities is often fodder that prevents government agencies to act. NI 6 spoke of the complexity of the reluctance of community activists to speak about the conflict and peacebuilding for fear of being targeted as Lundy traitors in their own communities or maybe their peacebuilding actions are more superficial so there is no real community dialogue and engagement:

I think, you know sometimes in what passes for community dialogue what's actually really happening is that, this may be arrogant to say, but I'm going to say it anyway, that what's happening is that one person is, I suppose we all do this this, is saying implicit in what they're saying is I'm right and you're wrong and the person listening is saying to themselves, but I'm right and you're wrong and they're not actively listening to each other so and the I am right could come out of an ideology and sectarianism coalescing, comingled. People are unaware of this so we seem to for example, in Stormont we seem to have Sinn Fein and the DUP who don't really talk to each other so they talk but the talking is not promoting transformation cause they're not ongoingly transforming relationships and there is

a stuckness and that's replicated arguably in the community I come from and the community X comes from. So there's a lot of work that needs done, they promote that kind of transformation.

Some people define where we are as benign apartheid and I think its so...I like people who say what's benign about apartheid so I suppose benign in the phrase benign apartheid means that there is a reduced level of violence. As you would know in 1972 something like 500 people, just under 500 people killed in one year. So comparatively, this is peace but X is working with young people. On Wednesday of this week and I brought in a Celtic top and a Rangers top and the young people know straight away. There's no way if you're from the Catholic tradition you'd be wearing a Celtic top in given areas or vice versa and those are markers of the challenges. There's also challenge's around the narrative. There's many, many challenges and the narrative may be that maybe it could be argued that the Republicans want to create and promote their narrative and such it becomes a dominant narrative and then there are people from the Protestant community.

I was speaking to a woman yesterday from the Protestant community whom I've invited to be an interviewee in this project and she said "I'm not sure whether I want to do this." And yet when you would meet her she would say the only narrative in town is the Republican narrative so she would advocate that people from her community speak. But when she's asked to speak there is hesitation so she's asked me to ring her back. So that tells me there are things that are deeply unresolved and in sense repeating and possibly your question is repeating what has been asked previous. There's so much that needs doing and the obvious thing that strikes me is that people need jobs, people need equality...

(NI Peacebuilder #6).

Feeding into this point and to the previous discussion about the issue with young people in Northern Ireland NI 5 noted that segregated schools and housing make it very difficult for them to break out of their ideological entrapment and sectarian mindset so social change is not happening:

I think the biggest challenge that there is, 2 that spring to mind. One is the intergenerational problem as its one thing working with schools and having a really positive reaction from young people and I think probably its a lasting reaction on a lot of them. But I think for some they're going back home and the home environment is strongly Republican or is strongly Loyalist. It probably eventually negates whatever work has been done you know and they fall back into their family attitudes. Not saying all do but that is a problem and the other one especially for Derry, well I suppose it applies largely to Belfast as well is the segregated housing that is a major problem because you're not getting the kind of natural mixing that you'd have in a lot of areas normally.

Say if you were in a town in the South you wouldn't know one road had more Protestants than Catholics ya know? People just live wherever they want and

okay you would have maybe a class breakdown and economic breakdown because of areas. But here its so segregated and there's no sign of it changing and I even notice with, because you would expect maybe less problems in middle class areas and maybe more willingness to move because they have more choice about where they go. I think there's still a tendency to stick to your own for a lot of people and in a way I suppose. Derry geographically is divided by the river, which ya know is a very definite divide. And for some people maybe its not so much they think cause the Waterside would be regarded as kind of more the Protestant area although its changing. I'm not sure whether people will move across the river because the river is like a big divide and they're used to everything being on the city side that they use.

But there's an element of and us and them. But I dunno whether its fair to blame it totally on the sectarian mindset because you get that split in Dublin too where the river divides the city. As a southsider I wouldn't dream of going to live on the northside, that has nothing to do with me not liking northsiders. It might just be a geographical thing. But there's a bit more to it here because yak no they feel comfortable in the communities they're in but its very bad for the city and you find that in conversations. If you were living on the west bank there's an assumption ya know that if you're talking about things that everyone is coming from the same perspective. So there would be references to holy communion, there's an assumption that everyone around you is the same. Whereas if you had a diverse city with a real mixing of people you wouldn't make those assumptions if you were in groups, I think.

(NI Peacebuilder #5)

Segregation, in the context of Northern Ireland, can be defined as “locations where Catholics and Protestants live side by side in segregated communities divided by peace walls and other symbolic boundaries” (Leonard, 2006, p. 225). Although both communities often share the same social and economic struggles, it is the differences, rather than the similarities, that are perpetuated throughout the communities, particularly in the more hardline areas such as interfaces (Leonard, 2006). In these areas, daily life is constrained by both real (e.g. Peace Walls) and symbolic (e.g. a particular side of a street or river) boundaries, which sustain the segregation and perpetuates the view of the other neighbourhoods as “landscapes of risk” (Leonard, 2006). To this end, the topic of integrated schools has come up many times in the interviewees' stories, and it is still something that I and quite obviously many of my participants feel passionate about. When I asked NI 4 within the context of our conversation on his take on segregated schools

being a barrier to coexistence he offered an interesting perspective that integrated education on its own was not a panacea to transform the society as much more peacebuilding and reconciliation work needs to be done to transform prejudiced behavior:

You've touched on a topic that to me is a debatable one. I have come from being passionate about integrated schooling to an acknowledgement by itself its a very limited response by it on itself because children go home in the evenings and go into communities and so on. Because, anyway, for all of the reasons, ya know that I would mention that and what can I say, yes. I therefore say absolutely yes to integrated education but in the context of a much, much, much wider addressing of the issue, because I wear an education hat and because when I came back from Africa my first engagement was with formal education.

I had a sense at that time that this society was dumping the problem on education. Now as an educator I resented that, I said that's getting, oh ya, teachers, let teachers teach children to get on well with each other when we go and continue our prejudice unchanged. So I think that is pointing to the need for an integrated education system in the context of a wider societal process. So in the absence of that I think that, to me its not a wonder that the integrated school population amounts to about 6-7 percent of the total school going.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

I agree with this to an extent. Integrated education alone is not going to singlehandedly resolve the problems with segregation in Northern Ireland. However, there is a lot of empirical support for integrated schooling as a buffer to some of the effects of a home environment. For example, a study done by Stringer, Irwing, Giles, McClenahan, Wilson, and Hunter (2009) showed that contact with, and the presence of, intergroup friendships, was associated with lower levels of prejudice. Further, contact with group members in school was associated with more moderate political attitudes, rather those in mixed schools reported significantly lower levels of political attitudes than those in segregated schools (Irwing et al., 2009).

The issue of segregation was woven throughout the stories of every peacebuilder and how this relates to inaction and reluctance of the political structures to engage. NI 4 stated that all of the key political actors will not approve of a macro truth and reconciliation process to deal

with the atrocities of the past as the wounds are too raw and these political actors are reluctant to do so:

I think its simply being honest to accept the fact that the political institution as currently constructed is not up for dealing with the past and never will be. They are engaging in a pretense. Sinn Fein say that they are ready to tell the truth about the atrocities carried out by the Provisional IRA as soon as the British government are ready to do the same. But they know full well that neither the British government nor British security will ever do so. And let me say the Irish government too are holding back on truth telling. So Sinn Fein can promise to tell what they know in the knowledge that there'll never be required to talk.

In the absence of a formal official response to dealing with the legacy of the past, we in civic society are doing what we can towards meeting the deficit. Even if there was a fully-fledged official process for dealing with the past, there is a limit to the extent to which the formal official process can deal with the past by itself and there is an ongoing role for the community and voluntary sector to help society move on from its violent past.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

The idea that the past has not been properly acknowledged appeared in other parts of the interviewees' stories too. For example, NI 6 reported on this topic when we were talking about the state of peace in Northern Ireland. He noted that truth recovery, past memories, and the demand for social justice are very complicated and intricate. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I was talking to a man last night who's brother was shot dead by the Provisional IRA and he told me, I've never met this man, I've only spoken to him over the phone, but I'm going to meet his sister soon. And he told me that after his brother was shot dead his mother never left the house and he meant literally, never left the house. And when she was dying, I'm not sure if it was cancer or a heart problem, when she was dying she was saying "I wish my young cub was here" meaning the young son. So there's that woundedness that people have and its expressed through desire and demand for truth, and a desire and demand for justice. And also a pessimism that truth will never be delivered and justice will never be delivered so all of that everyday.

You look at the paper there's someone saying, "I need the truth about what happened, I need justice." There are wonderful individuals who are saying this. I knew someone namely X who works for the YZ Centre and X is saying I know now what happened. I know how my father was killed. I know who killed my father and

I don't think the common good is served by seeking out prosecutions. There are other people who are saying I know now who killed my brother, and I want prosecutions. I believe that I owe this to my brother, to secure prosecutions and to not seek out prosecution is in a sense betraying my brother its as if he doesn't matter.  
(NI Peacebuilder #6)

The issue of dealing with the past is not unique to Northern Ireland. We are currently navigating through a similar process in Canada with our Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As Brewer and Hayes (2015) noted the "peace versus justice" dilemma is a confounding factor for both formal and informal "truth recovery processes" (p. 76). In Northern Ireland in particular, Brewer and Hayes (2015) note that the idea of who can be considered a victim in Northern Ireland is highly contested, and current prosecutorial actions against members of the British army in Northern Ireland have shown how divided the society still is on this issue. For example, the 1971 Ballymurphy massacre, the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre, the 1975 Miami Showband massacre, the 1976 Kingsmills massacre of Protestant workers, the 1987 Remembrance Day massacre in Enniskillen, and the 1993 Shankill Road massacre demonstrate that there are many wounds to heal, and many micro social injustices to address.

This conundrum is present within my own family. While it is believed that my cousin knows who killed her husband, she wants no action taken. My aunt, who was not privy to that information, would push for prosecution wholeheartedly. On both the macro and micro level there remains issues surrounding what constitutes truth and justice in Northern Ireland and it remains to be seen how the muddy waters can be cleared for the society to heal itself. With barriers so deeply embedded in the political processes it begs the question of how peacebuilders continue to press forward in an environment that is reluctant to change. In this final section we examine how the participants keep hope alive

in their work and what encourages them to continue their peacebuilding efforts despite the barriers and challenges they face.

### **5.5 “Hope is Believing Despite the Evidence”**

There is much scholarly debate about how to define hope and how it is defined and measured often varies across disciplines. Friere (1994 as cited in Boddy, O’Leary & Tsui, 2017) views hope as “radical, indispensable, emancipatory” while Webb (2010) sees it as “a vision for the future about what is possible, with oppression and injustice being a cause for hope” (cited in Boddy, O’Leary & Tsui, 2017). Hope is something that is experienced by everyone at some point in their lives, it can be born from tragedy or hardship or emerge as a motivator that inspires people to continue moving forward (Boddy, O’Leary & Tsui, 2017). When I posed the question of maintaining hope in their work the participants responses were varied, some look inwardly as their motivation for hope, while others looked to their family or their work as reason to keep pushing forward. For example, NI 4 concluded that social change is only possible when people believe it to be even in the face of contradictory evidence, and they act on it in spite of the facts:

For me the difference between optimism and hope, is that optimism is working in the belief that I will see eventually some sign of success. If I can have evidence that my efforts are bearing fruit, then I can stay optimistic. But I think that’s a dangerous starting point for this kind of work because if you’re waiting for evidence of success you could wait. I greatly appreciate what Vaclav Havel, poet, revolutionary, who eventually became president of Czechoslovakia, says about the difference between optimism and hope. Hope, he says, is about doing things because they are the right thing to do and not because they produce visible evidence of success.

I’ve also drawn on something that a radical evangelical who leads the Sojourners community in Washington says. “hope is believing, despite the evidence, in the possibility of change, and in the strength of the believing watch the evidence change.” It is the energy that comes from believing that peace and human well-being is a possibility that provides the motivation to” continue striving – and that’s what causes the evidence to change. The “evidence” in our time, in the wake of

Brexit and Trump etc. is not encouraging. But its believing despite the evidence and then in the strength of the believing that better things are possible, that will bring about change

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

This is an important distinction between optimism and hope. So much of the evaluatory measures of successful peacebuilding, such as the projects from the EU Peace Funds, largely depend on there being defined and measurable results (e.g., Byrne, 2009; Hyde & Byrne, 2014). NI 4 continued to articulate that the intangibles that spillover from peacebuilding projects are difficult to measure even as they make a tremendous contribution to local everyday peacebuilding. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I also have experience of being on the funding allocation side of the table and so I have no apologies to make for asking groups in receipt of funding to account for how they use the funds and to evidence learning from reflecting on the outcomes of their projects. So I'm all in favor of accountability and reflective practice and action research. But working to effect social change, and especially to build peace in the wake of conflict, is a nebulous business; it can't be measured in the same way that you can measure the output from a jam factory; you cannot. But funders often don't seem to understand this.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

NI 7 introduced an introspective take on this question speaking to his individual motivation he articulated that it is vital that people have hope that things will change for the better otherwise they will get stuck in quicksand and never be able to get out of it:

Well, I would be involved a little bit with policing still and I would be at police headquarters talking about various things. I think it comes down to you as an individual, are you a glass half-full or glass half empty person. I think overall I think I'm a glass half full person. I can get very enthusiastic and sometimes I'm always let down with negative thinking and if you think of the great film called Kelly's Heroes where Donald Sutherland said, "go away with your negative vibes." I do not like surrounding myself with people with negativity. So you have to be positive and you have to think of the vision and the mission and that we are in a better place than we were years ago. And you know I've got 2 boys, one who's floating about there. And you have to be hopeful because of them because if you're

not it gets, if you don't have hope what do you have. Its one of those things, its very hard to tangibly touch but its something emotionally buy into.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

Family is a topic that came up several times when people talked about their ability to hope. For example, NI 3 spoke about his nephew and of the effect of young people as a key reason for him keeping hope alive. He highlighted that more young people are more progressive in their thinking and they have transcended the sectarian mindset, and are dealing with more bread-and-butter issues than Loyalism or Republicanism:

I think now I'm not entirely unhopeful but I think there's enough good to take it forward. I've seen it with bands forum because it showed people who would have maybe been Loyalist paramilitaries themselves in the past looking at doing stuff that they would never have dreamed of before. But the real hope is the younger generation and I see that sounds quite corny like but you see it all the time. You see the young generation coming through now. They see themselves as Europeans. They see themselves as global citizens. They want something different. They have higher expectations. They're not going to settle for second best and they're going to be the leaders and the politicians of the future and they'll ensure that happens I think.

I have a nephew for example who has an East bank Protestant boy's foot band, which was set up in the early 1970s as really a reaction to the IRA. It was quite openly a sectarian paramilitary band. His father was one of the founder members and has a best friend and his best man at his wedding as well was shot by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), ya know. So the band's now a kind of memorial to him ya know? My nephew is in it now and to him its not about that at all. He doesn't know about the politics. He doesn't care. He has Catholic friends. He plays the drums. He goes to work to the youth centre in Derry and plays with Catholic musicians there.... He's walking along a street where thousands of people are waving at him. His family is there. His grandparents are there. His uncles are there. He's waving at them and they're waving at him. Its a pride he feels and its something he's proud of and good at so ya know so they have a band that is about comradery and he's one of the low academic achievers, very poor academically.

But this is the one thing in his life that gives him pride and credibility and respect and he loves that. That's why he's in a band. He knows that his father's best friend was killed by the INLA. But he doesn't care about the politics of the past and so like if you could have young people like that at every level of society now ya know who are more progressive in their thinking that bodes well ya know. As I said at the very start you know nothing is black and white anymore. In my day you were a Unionist and pro-British and not the IRA or you were pro Republican and if you saw a Catholic vice versa, we were having a fight. People are very much somewhere

down that middle ground or side to the left or right ya know very few are extremes anymore and it was those at the extremes that had to engage in violence and if those minority dwindle then you know I think we're safe going forward.

(NI Peacebuilder #3)

NI 3 mentions that the UK is part of the European Union (EU) offering young people as well as all citizens living in Northern Ireland the opportunity to identify as European. A European identity allowed a certain level of freedom and gave Northern Ireland's citizens a third more supranational or 'neutral' identity and allowed them to identify themselves as global citizens. With the UK now seceding with from the EU with Brexit, it remains to be seen what will become of this third overarching identity and what affect it will have in Northern Ireland. Finally, one peacebuilder identified seeing the power of testimony as a reason to hope, as he witnessed a former PIRA hunger striker tell his story of how he was transformed from a person who committed violent acts to a nonviolent spiritual person:

You weren't able to get to the session with Mr. X? Some people said that afterwards that that was the most powerful testimony event that they had seen in this building. Some people say its the most powerful event that they'd seen and so, an event like that where Mr. X came in and shared his story, which he has done before, but not recently. And there was a palpable supportive silence in the room after he spoke when he spoke without notes for about 35 minutes. He doesn't need notes because he's sharing his story. I still find it today. I'm deeply moved by what happened and that kind of event encourages my hopefulness and the fact that so many people came, myself, and Mr. Y talked about this briefly on Wednesday.

It tells me that there is still a need or a hunger for people to hear this kind and this type of storytelling that is not simply about people. Its not simply either about dredging up the past because part of Mr. X's story is how as a hunger strike, fifty-five days into a hunger strike, how he changed and how he moved from being a member of a paramilitary organization to being a man, a more Christian, a more spiritual man. So within the story there's as I listen, a reminder of the possibilities from me, that change is possible, deep change is possible, so that all helps.

(NI Peacebuilder #6)

Hope has been identified in previous studies as being a “crucial emotion needed to promote peace”, thus it is important within the context of peacebuilding by creating opportunities for “conceiving new paths and behaviours, toward the positively viewed goal of peace” (Cohen-Chen et. al, 2015, p. 499). Within the context of Northern Ireland, research shows that hope is positively correlated with forgiveness toward the outgroup and a lower desire to retaliate (Cohen-Chen et. al, 2015). Hope itself is a powerful motivator for not only peacebuilders, but for the citizens who are living in areas of protracted conflict.

## **5.6 Summary and Key Findings**

Three main themes emerged in this chapter. First, as expected, there was no ‘one size fits all’ approach to peacebuilding. There were some commonalities, mainly when speaking of the challenges of peacebuilding work, yet each perspective was unique and offered more depth and insight into the grassroots peacebuilding movement in Northern Ireland. Much research has been done on the effect of funding and EU support of the peace dividend (e.g., Byrne et. al., 2009; Byrne & Irvine, 2001; Creary & Byrne, 2014; Hyde & Byrne, 2015) in peacebuilding in Northern Ireland, but few, if any, studies have focused on the intimate, smaller scale grassroots initiatives that comprise so much of peacebuilding work in the country. Inspirations, unsurprisingly, are presented in numerous forms. For many, experience and knowledge gained in other transitional societies (such as South Africa), or societies still embroiled in conflict (e.g., Nigeria, Colombia) were motivators for several of the peacebuilders and helped them shape the work they conducted at home. For NI 2 for example, her experience in South Africa formed her desire to work in integrated education at home. As was mentioned previously, exposure to other cultures and the development of multicultural competency were major components that

contribute to engaging in this type of social justice work. For others, the idea of active citizenship and taking personal responsibility for making things better “at home” also appeared throughout the transcripts. Much like I discovered on my first day of class at the University of Manitoba, many of us PACS students have personal, and direct experience that led and inspired us to pursue graduate degrees in Peace and Conflict Studies.

How the peacebuilders viewed and measured their success was also varied and deeply personal. For some it was seeing a direct example of the impact of the work they’ve done, such as the example of the young girl who finally felt comfortable enough at her new integrated school to talk about both of her parents. NI 3 had a similar example looking at the engagement of young people in the band forum, and the work that they have done to engage youth on the fringes and potentially keeping them off the path of political violence. Others mentioned more directly legislative changes such as the restructuring of the police force, as breaking down some of the scaffolding of structural violence. Although the police remain a divisive entity for both communities, having significantly more Catholic and women police officers helps to ‘even the playing field and allow for the building of trust through the breakdown of traditional structures.

Second, the largest barriers identified from the data was the idea of segregation and the reluctance of the politicians to get involved in breaking down these barriers. The barriers identified were not surprising, as the issue of segregation appeared numerous times and was identified by all participants as one of the key barriers to peace in Northern Ireland. For the peacebuilders, some felt that despite the great work they were doing with youth, the fear remains that all of that would be undone and unravel when the children go home to their strongly Nationalist or Loyalist homes and back to their segregated schools. Although their families might hold strong in those beliefs, to me, the fact that these children and youth are willing to engage in

these types of projects gives me hope that regardless of what goes on at home or school the intergroup contact will remain salient.

The second barrier identified was the reluctance of politicians to engage with each other and on projects promoting integration. This issue commonly came up, along with the perception of either side not actively listening to the other. The politicians in Northern Ireland, specifically the DUP and Sinn Fein, often find ways to ‘inflammé’ the other. A more recent example of this comes from the results of the 2018 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILTS). The NILTS is long standing survey of social attitudes in Northern Ireland conducted through Ark – a joint initiative between Ulster and Queen’s universities. In the survey they ask respondents how they identify (Nationalist, Unionist, Neither). For the first time since the beginning of the survey 50 percent of people surveyed identified as neither Unionist nor Nationalist, while 26 and 21 percent identified as Unionist and Nationalist respectively (Breen, 2019). For comparison, this number was at just 33 percent in 1998 (Breen, 2019).

In response to this, Sinn Fein MLA Emma Sheeran stated, “consistent with the recent election results, this survey is further confirmation that support of a union with Britain no longer exists” (Breen, 2019 n.p.). Whereas some politicians would see this as a positive move towards a more global identity (i.e. European) and a freedom to identify more freely, Sinn Fein has used this to support their push for a ‘united Ireland’ by twisting statistics to suit their political agendas. To reiterate, the referendum for a united Ireland can only be conducted when the majority of people in Northern Ireland want to hold one. The election results this particular MLA is referencing actually saw an increase in votes for more moderate political parties. With the Alliance party gaining major ground in Northern Ireland politics it is possible that we are seeing the move away from the dominating narrative of traditional zero-sum sectarian politics.

Finally, how peacebuilder's view their successes and maintain hope were very individual and personal endeavors. When looking at maintaining hope I did not expect consensus, but I was more interested in how the peacebuilders conceptualize hope in their work. I loved this quote from NI 4: "believing despite the evidence and then in the strength from that, believing that better things are possible and will bring about change." This spoke to me on a fundamental level as a mother, as a scholar, as a human being. Some declared that their families were the reason to maintain hope, if you cannot hope to build a better future for your children, your nephews and nieces, then what are you doing it for? Another peacebuilder described setting one's expectations, and that one cannot measure the success of one's work "in the same way that you measure the output from a jam factory" (NI 6). NI 7 spoke of himself as being a 'glass half full' kind of person. That is a personality trait that allows peacebuilders to continue to hope. NI 5 discussed how being a part of the EU and seeing youth identify as more global citizens rather than as part of divisive groups helped her to maintain hope for the future. Notably, as mentioned previously, the NILTS supports this point with its most recent data. To conclude, this chapter was not meant to define the parameters of success in peacebuilding rather it was to explore all facets of a peacebuilders work and tell the stories that may not have been heard otherwise.

## **5.7 Conclusions**

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the inspirations, challenges, barriers and reasons for hope in grassroots peacebuilders in Northern Ireland. The hope was that it would allow for the emergence of common themes and provide insight into their work. In the next chapter we examine the role of the GFA eighteen years after its signing, how the peacebuilders see it as a peacemaking venture, and what they see for Northern Ireland in the future.

## Chapter 6: The Good Friday Agreement Eighteen Years On

### 6.1 Introduction

I think George Mitchell was a saint. He said that that it was harder than all the work he had ever done in American politics, harder than being a majority leader in the Senate, nothing was as hard as his work in trying to get agreement here...

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

The 1998 GFA is synonymous with Northern Ireland. It is used as an example of a successful peace process all over the world. The answer to a failed 1973 Sunningdale Agreement, the GFA brought an arbitrary liminal of frozen peace to war-torn Northern Ireland. After a series of ‘stops and starts’ with the Northern Ireland executive, the 2006 St. Andrews Agreement brought the DUP to the table and allowed for the formation of the first functioning Northern Ireland Executive in years (Mansergh, 2006). As someone who does not live in Northern Ireland and having formed my own position on the success of the Northern Ireland peace process that has largely been informed by my academic pursuits and anecdotal evidence from the lives of my family members who still reside there, it was of great interest to me how peacebuilders, particularly those who had lived through the pre and post GFA Northern Ireland, view the success of it. This chapter looks at the GFA through the lives of those who have lived and worked through it.

### 6.2 “It’s the best we could hope for”

When I asked participants outright if they felt that the GFA had been successful in bringing peace to Northern Ireland, the consensus was yes, with caveats. Namely that everyday living is better than it was, yet they believed that the GFA should have been used as a starting point to be built on. Instead of being a ‘be all, end all’ it should have been used as a framework. NI 4 stated that the GFA had institutionalized a sectarian rather than cross

cutting political structure as the politics of intransigence have frozen the political landscape:

Here's my take on the Good Friday Agreement. It was the best that could be achieved at the time. It did establish the basis for transition from violence towards a political process. But the political arrangements it set in place are now clearly unfit for purpose. It institutionalized sectarianism; we have two parties in leadership that are fundamentally sectarian and are not about to change because their very identity hinges on them being who they have always been.

But it is these who carry the mandate for the elimination of sectarianism; it is nonsense! In retrospect a 'shelf-life' should have been attached to the political structures, by which time if they had not shown at least some indication of an ability to move on from sectarianism a plan B should have been put in place.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

NI 5 also brought up the issues with segregation in her story. As mentioned in previous chapters, segregation continues to impede on the peace in Northern Ireland. She reported on this issue in the following manner:

It has to a certain extent but there is still those problems of a lot of segregation because the housing is segregated the education system is segregated. There are a lot of areas that public areas that one side or the other wouldn't go to. So no it's not a normal society yet and it's going to take a long time. But I don't want to kind of put it down or anything. I think its massively better and it is getting better.

(NI Peacebuilder #5)

There was reluctance in some ways to criticize the GFA outright, largely I believe because the participants lived through the Troubles at their height. The memory of that past Northern Ireland is very salient. As NI 1 stated the fact that an agreement was signed by all of the political parties is a miracle and the reality on the ground has not met with people's expectations so more peacebuilding work needs to be done to deliver the GFA on the ground:

If you'd ask anyone in 1997 would they have settled for this, everyone would have said yes there's no doubt about that. I remember it was at the very end of 1997 that

I actually joined a political party. I joined the Alliance Party as they seemed to be serious about the integrated education. And so I very clearly remember that even after god months and months and years of discussion there was absolutely no expectation of an agreement at the end of 1997. It was only 4 months before the Good Friday Agreement so it just could have gone on forever in the talks.

George Mitchell talked about people who after was it something like 4 months discussion hadn't even agreed a page and a half of an agenda. So anyway 1997 there was no expectation, not just there wasn't a hope for it. But people just didn't expect any results from the talks so since then we've got some kind of a normal society. Its far from perfect absolutely far from perfect. But yes, I would regard this as a peaceful society, really difficult but I regard this as peaceful. But there is a lot of work to improve.

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

NI 3 reiterated the need to view the GFA as a framework and he also brought up an extremely important point that often gets overlooked. The original parties who were negotiating the GFA were ultimately sidelined after its implementation, paving the way for more hardline politicians to take centre stage. He noted that people just get on with their daily lives regardless of what is happening with the Northern Ireland executive or the GFA:

I saw it with my own eyes ya know people who wouldn't speak to Sinn Fein or would hate each other but they could find time meeting with Bill Clinton. They just loved that ya know, and ya know a lot of superficial things like that do make a difference. You can't kind of overestimate that and I think there had to be a process going through it. I think that sad thing is the people who were the real drivers of the Good Friday Agreement, which were the SDLP and the Ulster Union Party but also as importantly the friends parties like the UDP (Ulster Democratic Party), the Woman's Coalition, the Progressive Unionist Party, people like David Irvine, people who really had to do the hard work, like drive the people from their own hard land estates onto the process. They were all discarded very, very quickly ya know.

The biggest protagonist of the Good Friday Agreement or the ones how have benefited most ya know the SDLP, the DUP criticized the Ulster Unionist Party but held onto their coattails and then discarded them. Sinn Fein did a similar thing with the SDLP so I think that's the important element of it. I think it probably would have taken longer to find peace. It needed some kind of structure, legislation and direction and thank God it came when it did. But I think it got to a point now that its almost like the Good Friday Agreement is largely irrelevant ya know. It was a watershed at the time but in terms of the guidance it gives I mean I think if the

worse case scenario happened for example if the executive would collapse, I think people would still get on with their lives. It's collapsed a few times since then...  
(NI Peacebuilder #3)

A fellow peacebuilder reiterated a similar sentiment but also mentioned the need to begin to deal with the past and legacy of the Troubles. NI 7 noted that the politicians should take five years to address all of the tricky and challenging questions of the past so that the society can move on:

Well its created an environment, which is better than it was pre-1998 and you have the powersharing set up, which is chugging along. Ironically there was powersharing in 1974 suggested, but somebody described the Good Friday Agreement a selling deal for slow learners so you begin to wonder why did all of those thousands of people who survived between 1974-1998 bought it. The Good Friday Agreement has set up institutions yet it didn't really deal with the hard questions or we're now having to deal with the hard questions such as what is a victim, which is a very tricky question.

I think, in Northern Ireland, what you tend to see is people kicking the issues of the past further down the road like a tin can. Nobody actually wants to deal with it so it gets kicked a bit further and I think in someways the idea is that eventually everybody will be dead and they'll say, "well ya know just let the historians judge," and that's maybe what happens but I think we can do better than that. I think we can actually do something, and I think it is important that we set a deadline of maybe 5 years and say look there's 5 years to implement all the things that were suggested and in the Stormont House Agreement. Let's get on with it. Lets sort of see where we get to because as you mentioned a little bit about RUC guys and no we're not getting any younger, and eventually everybody will be gone.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

Ultimately though, valid criticisms aside, it has been instrumental in the reduction of physical violence yet it has not broken down the structures that continue to perpetuate the systemic segregation of the two communities. The struggle and desire to deal with the past is something that has continued to emerge throughout each of the interviews. In the next section we look at the peacebuilder's discernment at the use of the GFA as a model that could be transferred into other conflict environments.

### 6.3 The Model of the Good Friday Agreement

As was mentioned in both the introductory and literature review chapters the Good Friday Agreement is often credited as being a ‘gold standard’ model of a successful peace process by politicians and academics alike. Often, those in a position of political power and those within the academic community are disconnected from the lived reality of post-peace accord life. Referring to Galtung’s (1996) concept of negative peace, the view that a lack of physical violence is indicative of a peaceful society continues to be perpetuated.

Mac Ginty (2008) argues that Western peace supports methods that are formulaic. As such, when implementing projects in cross-cultural contexts, it is assumed that if a program or intervention is successful in one society, it can be transposed onto a different society to the same result. He refers to this as the ‘IKEA’ model of peacebuilding that results in uniform and non-reflexive interventions (Mac Ginty, 2008). This sentiment was echoed by many of the participants. NI 7 stated that it is impossible to transfix models from one culture to another:

I did my Master’s in human rights, there’s some theory that says you can’t pick up say a anti-corruption law in London and drop it into Nigeria, its not going to work, it’s not going to work.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

He continued to explain the intricacies of building peace in Northern Ireland. All things considered this is a very small geographical area and the violence has been described as being more intimate compared to other conflicts, yet there was utility in transposing bits and pieces to other conflict situations. He said that the 2008 Eames-Bradley Report proposed a restorative justice model to appoint a legacy commission or a reconciliation forum and tribunals of inquiry to deal with the past could be transplanted into other societies such as Colombia, the Basque country, and Sri Lanka transitioning out of a violent past:

Oh ya, the idea was firstly that we would in the early days, we would just adopt the South African Truth, and Reconciliation model. But that ain't going to work because what you had in Northern Ireland was a very small country, a very small population where you maybe have the postman being murdered by one of the people that he delivered the post to or vice versa. In South Africa you had a huge country where people were anonymous and didn't know each other so in a country like Northern Ireland where you have neighbours killing neighbours and it was as stark as that it was always going to be difficult and people knew who the killers were so there was a lot of rawness and a lot of difficulty there.

As a result of that through many different manifestations of getting the right answer, teaching that two and two doesn't actually make four, it makes something between three and a half and nine and a half. The latest manifestations is the Stormont House Agreement, which is based largely on the Eames Bradley Model of about 2008, with that we have a good model that I think can be moved to different countries. At the start it can't just be brought over exactly the way it is, one of the worst things that we did was the European Union when we were trying to get countries to adopt their policing to what we were doing, was to give them the model which didn't work it just withered on the vine. You have to work with countries and you have to talk to them and listen to them to seek what out of the process.

But you have in your back pocket a copy of the Stormont House Agreement and say "well do you think, are you comfortable?" Nigeria, for example, a great country of telling stories, they love to tell stories about their villages and things so that's a big thing there. Other maybe more Germanic or Russian countries are more into process. They're more into facts and figures so that could work there. So it's about like pick and mix, things can be taken from other things can work in different countries.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

NI 4 had a different interpretation of the Eames Bradley report. The Eames Bradley report of 2008 was a commissioned report to address and propose solutions for dealing with the legacy of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Their recommendations included £12,000 in restitution for relatives of those killed during the Troubles and suggested the idea of a "Legacy Commission with Information Recovery and Investigation Units," which would be set up similar to a truth and reconciliation commission (Duffy, 2010). The suggestion of restitution was poorly received by the mainstream society, as was the report as a whole. NI 4 discussed the need to create a process off of the Eames-Bradley Report that is customized

to suit the complexity of what happened in the past rather than trying to reach a consensus of what actually happened:

I continue to insist that we need an officially constituted process for dealing with the legacy of the conflict. But to design one that is effective there are learnings to be had from previous attempts elsewhere, for example the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. That process was seriously flawed and the learnings from it are very much about how *not* to do it. A process that is worth having has to be one that ensures the fullest possible truth recovery and that absolutely does not tolerate dominant narratives remaining dominant. All voices need to be heard.

Dealing with the past is a multi-layered process. There is truth recovery, justice, compensation, and reconciliation. These overlap, but at the same time each needs specific attention. A fundamental flaw in the South African process was the merging of the truth telling with the reconciliation dimension. Those summoned to tell of their part in atrocities were invariably economical with the truth; they told lies and half-truths; and yet their victims came under immediate pressure to forgive and be reconciled with them. So yes, I want the past to be dealt with, formally. But it must be authentic. Actually I don't expect it to happen.

Archbishop Eames, retired Anglican Archbishop of Ireland and a guy called Denis Bradley, were officially commissioned to identify, through a community consultation process, what an effective peace process might look like. The Eames/Bradley Report was excellent; but it was rubbished, quite deliberately, because what it recommended was a step too far the establishment. But let me just add a personal caveat about the Report. I have come to recognize that in its assumption that what was needed was to work for the creation of a consensus in society as to what happened in Northern Ireland and why, it was expecting the impossible. There cannot be a single narrative about the Troubles. We need a narrative that embraces the diverse experiences of the conflict. Conflict is messy – and complex.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

As we were discussing the Eames-Bradley Report I began to talk about the process of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada and the debates around the recommendations and restitution here. NI 4 continued that it is the reluctance of the establishment to tell the truth to grassroots citizens that is the problem not the report itself:

The Eames-Bradley Report had as a single half sentence that was used to dismiss it in its entirety. It offered a basic compensation of the same amount to all Troubles

victims; and ‘shit hit the fan’ as they say. But the establishment used the reaction to that recommendation to shelve the entire Report. . What you are suggesting as a why is, I don’t think that that is the major problem Ashleigh. I think it is the reluctance of the establishment to come out and tell the truth. My sense is that ordinary people are up for it. This is what Ms. X and myself have discovered.

In contrast to the crass failure of officialdom it is my experience and that of my colleagues in the peace-building business, that ordinary people are up for the doing what needs to be done to recover from the past. People are willing to tell of their experiences, to take risks; they are generous enough to listen to stories of others however painful even if it upsets their own narrative. People are great. The British Government’s security forces, the Irish Government’s security forces here as well as the paramilitaries have a lot to answer for. They will not tell the truth and until they do, ordinary people are silenced. What we are up against here I think is the unwillingness of the establishment to engage with ordinary people.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

The idea of a truth and reconciliation commission in Northern Ireland came up organically in almost every interview. The interviewees frequently mentioned South Africa as a restorative justice model to extol in particular. NI 5 explained her perspective on the GFA and a truth and reconciliation commission in Northern Ireland as follows:

Well I think we can always learn from each other and I think we can be open. There were a lot of things done that I think people could learn from but also we can learn from other places as well ya know? And I think we need to look again at the whole area of truth commissions and how we reintegrate the ex-prisoners the ex-paramilitaries and that’s quite a big issue. It’s worth looking at Columbia and a few other places we’ll see what they did there. I know they looked quite closely at South Africa so ya places can always learn from each other...

I always have the mind that you have to talk about things and bring them out in the open to be able to move past them but I’m now starting to wonder when things are so, as you say the waters are so muddy and people are so entrenched. Maybe if people could manage to do it if we could bury the hatchet a bit and just move on and get things done and maybe at a much later stage look back and recognize that some things shouldn’t have happened and maybe people, and sometimes a retrospective apology, even if it’s a long time later, its still quite powerful...

(NI Peacebuilder #5)

The major criticism that seemed to come up in regard to exporting the GFA to other communities in conflict largely revolved around their inability to deal with the past. This

is an issue that has plagued Northern Ireland since the signing of the 1998 GFA and it is an issue that continues to be debated today. The concept of victimization and what ‘qualifies’ as a victim continues to be hotly contested and had led to a hierarchy of victimhood (Jankowitz, 2018). There is pushback from all levels of government to engage in a truth process, as who is to blame for the conflict remains an area of contention, with each side claiming victimization from the other (Jankowitz, 2018). The UK’s Brexit from the EU puts Northern Ireland in a very precarious situation. In this next section we look at how peacebuilders see Brexit impacting peace in Northern Ireland.

#### **6.4 Brexit in Northern Ireland**

On June 23, 2016, shortly before I arrived in Northern Ireland, the UK took a vote to decide whether to leave the EU or stay within it. Disillusionment surrounding British sovereignty and perceived issues around immigration from the EU to the UK, lobbied for by ‘leave’ politicians were the main impetus for the referendum. A minor victory for the ‘leave’ group (51.9 percent) resulted in what is now commonly termed as Brexit (Doherty et. al., 2017). This has resulted in Scotland looking to reaffirm its place within the EU, with talks of another referendum for Scottish independence while SF looks for an all-Ireland referendum on the issue. Scotland and Northern Ireland both voted to remain in the EU at 62 percent and 55.9 percent respectively (Electoral Commission, 2016).

The EU was instrumental during the peace process in Northern Ireland and has provided significant political and financial support since the 1980s (Harvey et. al., 2018). The EU is also enmeshed in numerous legal documents including the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) and the GFA (Harvey et. al., 2018). It remains to be seen as to what will

happen to the hard border between Northern and the Southern Ireland, which has now become a sticking point in the UK's negotiations with the EU. When asked if they think that Brexit will have an impact on peace in Northern Ireland, the main theme to emerge from the respondent's was the issue of a hard border between the North and the South and what the logistics of that would be. NI 1 believes that a hard border is inevitable just on practical principles. He noted that the UK has to protect its borders against traffickers, smugglers, and migrants to secure its territory:

If the European Union wants to protect its border from people outside it has to have a strong border you can't just leave it open okay? So that means for smuggling goods and services not just migrants. See you've got to have some kind of customs boundary and a migration boundary in any country. The basic principle of any state is that it defends its citizens against any outsiders. The Ministry of Defence is unfortunately the most important part of any government.

So if there is not a strong EU border between the Republic of Ireland and NI then the only alternative is that you go back to where it was in WW2, which are the Border wars on the Irish sea between NI and Britain. So people still migrate here but the Unionists absolutely don't want that, that you would have to show your passport to get from Belfast to Liverpool or Belfast to Heathrow or over to Glasgow or something.

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

The issues around a hard border were expressed by almost all participants, many who also noted what impact the implementation of a hard border might have there as well as a certain level of uncertainty. NI 4 articulated that the installation of a hard border will stiffen the resolve of sectarian attitudes, escalate conflict, and mark the return to political violence:

Here NI in partnership with most other places, we have no notion what's coming next. We are in a most uncertain future. I think we are in paradigm shift mode globally. So the issues for NI, for example of Brexit, we just have no notion how that will play out. There is the risk that Brexit will catapult us back into sectarianism with a hard border and all of that. There is the possibility that Scotland could go independent and join the European Union or get into the European Union which would leave this tiny bit of an island right in the middle of the Atlantic belonging to a former United Kingdom, which would no longer be a UK so there's all of that. Whether NI in terms of peace, I would not be complacent I have a great fear that if

the past is not dealt with that the past will deal with us. A repetition, I have a fear and I suppose the work of organizations like the X is working against that fear with hope.

(NI Peacebuilder #4)

Some noted that Brexit might result in a hard border between the North and the South, yet they remained hopeful that it would not reignite conflict in the North. For example, NI 5 explained that the DUP supports Brexit because it does not want refugees streaming over the border from the Republic of Ireland:

I don't think it will impact peace. I don't think we'll go back to out and out war. The dissidents may do bits and bobs here and there but overall I don't think it will. But it doesn't help relations because the DUP is so pro-Brexit and everybody else isn't. I was very disappointed that Arlene Foster was so quick mind you to go over the leadership to come out swinging behind Brexit. She was very strident in the beginning and took up quite a hardline position and I thought well that's not very helpful, its not very diplomatic....

The problem is ya see that they're going to want, because they're so anti-immigration where does that happen then, is it because immigrants could come into Ireland and there's nothing to stop them hopping on a bus and crossing the border? If there's no hard border they can get into the UK that way quite easily. So how does the UK think that it is going to prevent immigration unless they have a hard border?

(NI Peacebuilder #5)

NI 6 also spoke with disappointment at the DUP and the hardline, anti-immigration stances of Unionist politicians. The Republic of Ireland appears more open to diversity while the Protestant mind-set of saying no is ingrained in what the young Apprentice Boys shouted from the walls during the 1689 Siege of Derry, "no surrender, and not an inch" that is informing the behavior of the DUP Brexiteers. This is what she had to say on the issue:

Well you know Sinn Fein, you know what I mean in English, those two words. In English it means "Ourselves Alone" and why that was adopted as a title for that Republican party is ourselves alone as in we will run our country. So it's about independence from the British state, decolonization. So Sinn Fein are actually pro-Europe so it's almost contradictory. But I suppose as an aspiration for an independent free Ireland they see their natural hinterland being in Europe and there is a danger as I look at the Brexiteers is that what it promotes is introverted

nationalism, right wing introverted nationalism, patriarchal, right wing introverted nationalism, homophobic, introverted patriarchal, nationalism and it threatens us all. I think you know the kind of place I would want to be living in is a place of welcome.

The Irish for welcome is Failte so the tourist board in the south of Ireland is called Board Failte, the board of welcomes. So welcome to the tourists but welcome for the Polish and the Syrians and the lesbians and the gays and the transgender, and I wonder ya know like the DUP are resisting same sex marriage. The DUP seem to be the politics of a different century and I don't mean the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sometimes I think Ashleigh that now this may be wrong, but I'm going to say it, that phrase and that ideology, "no surrender" runs very deep. And I wonder is that like an outcome of being a planter that you come and you get the land. Somebody has to vacate the land so you're always feeling under threat because morally, psychologically, you know you've done the wrong thing. And you got to repress that and repress that and you say now I got this land, "not an inch, no surrender."

(NI Peacebuilder #6)

There was one slightly dissenting voice in the group who felt that a hard Border would be unlikely, and that issues around the border have been resolved before. NI 7 stated that a hard border will not be reinstated and that the governments in Belfast and Dublin will be able to work out a deal:

I think Brexit has made things a big wobbly. I don't think it will impact the peace at all, come up with something. I wouldn't want to see a hard border. I think that's a lot of nonsense. I don't think it will happen. I think what will maybe piss off the Unionists here if you see some sort of a hardish border along the seaports in Scotland. In other words they'll say, "do whatever you want in Ireland or NI but you'll have to show your passport to get here," that'll be interesting. Or the alternative is to go the other way and come up with some agreement with the south that people entering the south of Ireland. But I can't see that happening. I think we'll come up with something together.

The great thing is we've got dual nationality many, many Unionists I know, Loyalists I know are now running about with Irish passports and it will be a bad thing if the astute people in the North or Ireland can't make it work in some way in their favor. There will be no barricades going up there will be nothing like that. It'll be, I think probably what they'll do is they'll enhance checks in GB from people coming from either end of Ireland. I would imagine but there are, and then in the past with policing there's been issues with a soft border and sex offenders. There's a big issue of sex offenders here who were able to come and go in the north of Ireland quite easily via the soft border. It's like having no border? It's a different set of rules there so it was something that had to be dealt with in the past. But it will

be dealt with it again. I can't see any great customs checks going on and things like that.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

The peacebuilders had many different views on whether or not Brexit would affect peace in Northern Ireland yet there are many unanswered questions that remain. What Brexit 'is' and what it will look like even in 2019 remains to be seen, as the formal leave date for the UK has been suspended yet again until October. This is something that is addressed in the discussion, yet for now we move to the final section of this chapter, which asked the peacebuilders to reflect on what they see as the future of Northern Ireland.

### **6.5 The Future of Northern Ireland**

I wanted to include this question in my research as I was interested in how peacebuilders who have lived, worked, and continue to live in Northern Ireland see the progression of the peace process in the future. What will Northern Ireland look like over the next 20 years, where will it be? The purpose of this section is not to look for a theory per se, but rather to gain insight on the topic through the eyes of people living this reality. Most of the peacebuilders agree that it is unlikely that Northern Ireland will move back to the large-scale violence that denoted Northern Irish people's lived experience of the 1970s and 1980s yet they caution about what it will mean if some of the systemic issues continue to be ignored. NI 7 concluded that people are beginning to move slowly but surely out of their entrenched sectarian mindsets to embrace class issues and global politics that are so important as part of the journey toward peace:

It's the journey thing again, the journey towards a goal or towards peace or whatever you want talk about it. But its never going to be perfect but then sure what society is perfect, there's none. But it's getting better. If you can put in integrated

education if they could address the peace walls so called peace walls, if they could look at shared housing and if they could address people's fears and if we have the proper political leadership rather than people just pandering to what they think people want to hear. The famous story is told of the politicians standing on the street corner talking to a reporter and the mob runs past and the politician says to the reporter I must follow the mob because I am their leader. It really puts it all into a very interesting way because we tend to be led here by emotions and what happened in 1690.

But I would work with some of the Loyalist paramilitary groups in North Antrim and they're on a journey. And I was talking to one a couple of days ago, I suppose he would be heavily linked to the UDA and he's now talking in terms of ya know the words of Jeremy Corbin for example. And the 2 of them would not be at all in agreement with views on a united Ireland but he would see more of the socialist stuff being more important for a community that I think a lot of people would probably say was abused by the Unionist hierarchy for many, many years. There's little bits of good work going on like that and getting people away from traditional ways of thinking towards a wider way of thinking. So I think all those things are helping on the journey. The journey is in the right direction. It's gonna be a very slow journey and we need to start looking at how we deal with the past that's the big thing, and that includes integrated education.

(NI Peacebuilder #7)

NI 6 also referred to the search for peace in Northern Ireland as part of a journey. This is what he had to say on the issue:

I think we're probably be involved. I mean and I say you could say, is America ever gonna be at peace? Is Canada ever gonna be at peace? Is Britain, UK, well see now even that's contentious, Scotland, Wales, England, Cornwall, are they ever going to be at peace, you know. I particularly like people like Eckhart Tolle, John Kabat Zinn who talk about that inner peace too. I would say a country is like an individual. There is a journey and we are on the journey and we are in a better place now than we were when people were going on killing sprees you know. One of the [1993 UFF Greysteel Massacre] shooter's [Geoffrey/Jeffrey Deeney] allegedly as he was shooting he said "trick or treat," so we moved from that mostly, mostly from that craziness to a better place.

(NI Peacebuilder #6)

Others spoke of the uncertainty of Brexit and how that could shift the landscape of peace in the country. For example, NI 3 noted the following in his story:

Brexit, I dunno, I've wanted to remain, largely because I felt that we're going forward, it's a step backwards to become more parochial and that's what I think

what I eluded to earlier on, a lot of young people in this country see themselves more now as European and global citizens ya know they travel more, social media and internet gives them a broader perspective and I think a step out of Europe was a backward move but at the same time I was slightly conflicted because I am very much a Unionist and pro-British. I support sovereignty and I felt at times Europe ...there were pluses and minuses even in terms of European funding that helped build peace here, no doubt and it helped build a lot of infrastructure here but in terms of the bureaucratic processes it just became demoralizing, so Europe had a lot of faults but at the same time I don't think we should have thrown the baby out with the bath water, I think it needed reform we didn't need to leave it. I don't know if it'll affect peace too much here. I don't think that the financial resources, money, grants we get will make a difference, like I said they make it quite clear that Peace four was going to be the final peace monies anyway ya know?

That money was gonna have to be found from somewhere else ya know it'll be up to the UK government to resource the community centres and I don't think that's changed much that way where it might impact economically ya know. If it restricts economical growth then it'll be a negative obviously from what I was saying earlier on that you know if you've a strong economy young people have jobs then they'll step away from violence or antisocial behavior anyway so it may have an impact that way, but we're at a stage where no one seems to know even know. I mean we're getting so many conflicting messages that we don't know how its' going to pan out or how it's going to impact, some say it's positive, some say its negative there's opportunities, it's whatever.

I think the country will survive but I think just socially it, ya know because [of the history] of Britain's human rights record and that's recording in terms of inclusiveness and that gets a bad press at times unfairly, but generally it's no coincidence that a lot of immigrants want to come to the UK, they do it because the reputation that the country has and how it generally welcomes diverse communities and I thought it was really embarrassing and poor message to send out by Britain that we're saying I know, you're not welcome anymore because, that was actually made me angrier and sadder than any of the other economic or peace building applications was how it reflects, now America is taking the embarrassment away from us by electing Trump so but I think those kind of things are important to me how other countries viewed internationally and I think it's a country we should be very proud of but that was a backwards step certainly.

(NI Peacebuilder #3)

The level of uncertainty is augmented by the reality of past experiences. When thinking about the uncertain future of Northern Ireland and addressing the issues of a border, NI 1 spoke about his experience crossing a hard border through Donegal. He explained the issue in the following manner:

I don't see it going back to violence anytime soon but there is still fundamental conflicting nationalisms and this support mechanisms for that are moving apart at the moment. Whereas before the UK and Ireland were both in the European Union and now the UK is moving out of the European Union. There may be a border where for the last 50 years there hasn't been. When I was a small boy if you were driving into County Donegal you had to stop the car and get a thing stamped to let you in. You didn't have to show a passport, but you still had to stop and if you came back after midnight the border was closed and you couldn't bring your car legally back in. That has all gone.

It went originally between the UK and Ireland and then in the bigger European scene so that the support systems which made the divisions in Ireland less visible are now in an unhappy state. And I see no way that we will not have some kind of a more rigid border now so we're bringing back divisions where they have gone before. And so, I think there will always be some people who think that the way to make a perfect Ireland is to use violence against the British even though the British say they have no selfish strategic interest in NI, and I think there will always be Loyalists who feel so opposed to an all-Ireland state that they will fight against it. so I'm not sure how those two competing violent nationalisms can stay quiet in the future.

(NI Peacebuilder #1)

The major themes that presented themselves in this section are that the interviewees' have a cautious optimism. It is generally agreed, or at least hoped, that Northern Ireland won't see the same levels of violence that preceded the signing of the GFA. However, there remains many issues that need to be addressed to ensure that the door is not left open for the violent extremists and dissidents to once again gain ground.

## **6.6 Summary and Key Findings**

This chapter sought to examine the interviewee's perceptions of the GFA, its roles as a model to other communities moving out of conflict, the issues surrounding Brexit and what these peacebuilders see as the future of Northern Ireland moving forward. Four themes emerged from the data.

First, most respondents agree that the GFA was instrumental in ending the violence in Northern Ireland, yet that the reliance on it as more than a political framework has left considerable gaps that remain to be addressed. One participant described the GFA as “institutionalizing sectarianism.” While the GFA was intended to be a framework from which the political process was to build, it has continued to propagate segregation. For the Unionist community, the GFA has created a crisis of identity. The DUP position has been described as an ‘internal opposition’ to the GFA. The Unionist community, who feel that both Tony Blair and David Trimble sold them false promises, was reinforced in the years after the agreement by the series of delays and political suspensions (Patterson, 2012). This sentiment has been reflected in subsequent surveys examining feelings toward the agreement and the perception that it has benefited both communities equally. When members of the Unionist community were asked this question in 1998, 41 percent felt that the agreement benefitted both communities equally; when asked in 2002, that number had dropped to 19 percent, showing the growing discontent a mere four years after the signing of the GFA (Patterson, 2012). Unlike their Catholic counterparts, who remain relatively static in their Irish identity, Protestant identity tends to be much more fluid, although it was primarily British during the Troubles (Muldoon, et al. 2007).

For many anti-agreement Unionists, events following the 1998 referendum have fed into the sentiment that the GFA was a ‘loss’ to the Nationalists. For example, changing the name of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) was interpreted as the total removal of British symbolism, and is perceived as an insult to the thousands of Protestants that suffered at the hands of the IRA (Patterson, 2012). More recently, the 2012 flag disputes and riots, which were to protest the decision to only fly the Union Jack flag at Belfast City Hall on designated days, show how fragile the situation is (BBC, 2012). The

Northern Ireland Assembly almost collapsed in December 2015 when former First Minister Peter Robinson resigned in protest to an alleged PIRA killing, which further supported the initial reservations of Unionists that the PIRA would not make good on their promise to decommission. Nor were these initial fears unfounded as the PIRA did not fully decommission its weaponry until 2005. The 2007 arrest of PIRA members for training Colombian FARC guerrillas questions the totality of the decommissioning and the purported inactivity of the PIRA, while dissident Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups remain active in Northern Ireland to this day (McAlister, Scraton & Haydon, 2014).

The Northern Ireland Executive finally collapsed in 2017 when Martin Mc Guinness resigned from the executive after the fallout of the Arlene Foster DUP led ‘renewable heat incentive’ scandal and it has not been reinstated. Paramilitary activity remains with groups becoming more and more active in recent years, particularly the NIRA. Protestants in Northern Ireland are dealing with an aging population, low birth rates, and a less developed community sector than their Catholic counterparts and the reality of this ‘peace dividend’ built on an arguably sectarian peace agreement has reinforced the pre-agreement grievances of the Unionist community (Gillespie, 2006 cited in Cox, Guelke & Stephen). My fear is, that if external American, British, European, and Irish politicians continue to ignore the needs of the Unionist community, we could see an emergence of increased Loyalist political violence, much like the PIRA instigated during the Troubles in 1969. In the years after the agreement, the more moderate political parties that were instrumental in securing the GFA, have been pushed to the wayside for more hardline Loyalist (DUP) and Nationalist (Sinn Fein) politicians who seem unwilling to cooperate with each other.

Second, there is general agreement that some parts of the GFA could be utilized in other communities coming out of a violent past yet that it is better for a peace process to be ‘personalized’ dependent upon the localized complexity of that conflict. Many participants spoke that the main hindrances of the GFA as a model is its inability to deal with the past. As one of the participants mentioned, the violence in Northern Ireland is very intimate where neighbours have killed neighbours and the vast majority of victims were uninvolved citizens who were caught in the paramilitary crossfire (Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood, 2010). The concept of victimization in Northern Ireland continues to be a highly contested issue, as was seen in the reaction to the Eames-Bradley report. While the GFA pays lip service to the needs of victims and survivors it has left the definition of victim deliberately vague (Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood, 2010). Smyth (1998, as cited in Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood, 2010) argues that the experience of the Troubles is geographically diverse and paramilitary groups to legitimize their acts of violence use the role of victims. Concerns around ‘hierarchies’ and the ‘legitimacy’ of victimhood in Northern Ireland continue to be debated. Can someone who was involved in a paramilitary group be considered a victim? Or someone who was not directly affected by violence? There is some argument to the effect that everyone in Northern Ireland was touched by the conflict in some way, many are living with the psychological effects of it even if they had not experienced violence directly.

NI 6 referenced a testimony event that was organized by his organization that allows former paramilitary members, in this case a former member of the Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR), to share their stories. Much like involving the paramilitary groups in the peace process was essential to its success, more needs to be done to involve them in the peace process. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs help to provide skills to former

combatants and to reintegrate them into society in the hope that this will prevent them from pursuing illegal pursuits during demobilization Smyth (Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood, 2010). Psychologically speaking, people tend to attribute negative qualities to a fault of character rather than considering outside factors that might have contributed to the behaviour. Our assumption is that anyone that commits a crime is fatally flawed as a human being, rarely are outside factors of poverty, abuse, and homelessness affect how we act. With the recent uptake in paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland more attention needs to be paid toward those most vulnerable to paramilitary recruitment.

Third, the main concern arising from Brexit considers the issues of the hard Border between the Republic and Northern Ireland. If it is implemented, what will it do to the peace in Northern Ireland. All but one of the peacebuilders believe that Brexit will result in a hard Border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Some also feared the loss of a European identity. As was mentioned in a previous chapter, over 50 percent of people in Northern Ireland do not denote themselves as being as Unionist or a Nationalist. Having Europe as an ‘other’ identity could arguably have contributed to the development of a ‘Northern Irish’ identity within a European supranational identity context, which can be transposed across all identity groups in Northern Ireland. With Brexit negotiations ongoing and the deadline pushed back until October 2019 there is still no resolution to this concern as of June 2019. Much like happened with the Northern Ireland executive over the years, the ‘stop and start’ process of Brexit negotiations continues to leave Northern Ireland in a precarious quandary.

Finally, we looked and how the peacebuilders view the future of Northern Ireland. While most agree that the return to large scale violence is unlikely, all noted issues that remain that would set the stage for the return of violence if they continue to be ignored such as dealing with

the past. Though there was sporadic violence at the time of the interviews in 2016, things have progressed significantly in 2019 with one death already attributed to an active paramilitary group, the NIRA. The fear is palpable that if dealing with the past does not become a more pressing issue for the politicians, we will see increasingly violent incidents occurring. Northern Ireland, having once been named the ‘hate crime capital of Europe,’ also has the distinction of having one of the most heavily subsidized economies in Europe. It was once described by former UK Prime Minister David Cameron as “having an Eastern European level of dependence on the public sector” (Patterson, 2012 p. 252; also see Byrne et al., 2009; Pehrson, Gheorghiu & Ireland 2012). Referring back to Galtung’s (1995) theory of peace the British government's focus on political, rather than economic stabilization both during and after the conflict has created a negative ripple effect across Northern Ireland (Patterson, 2012).

At its heart, Northern Ireland’s Civil Rights movement sought to address both the political, as well as economical, disadvantages Catholics faced in the late 1960s (Burke, 2015). This economic disadvantage has been correlated with Catholic participation in the violent Republican movement, the PIRA, and research has shown that fluctuations in the unemployment rate during the Troubles were positively correlated with Republican violence (Burke, 2015). It is interesting to note that the fluctuation did not correlate with increased incidences of Loyalist violence (Burke, 2015). Research by Burke (2015) also found that it was not unemployment, but rather Gross Domestic Household Income, that was significantly correlated with levels of political violence. In most working-class communities, high rates of unemployment, sub-par housing conditions, high rates of mental illness, and suicide, are factors that transcend ethnicity and affect each community to comparable degrees (Burke, 2015; Leonard, 2006). Paramilitary groups remain active in these areas and often target disenfranchised youth for recruitment.

Northern Ireland is already in a precarious political and economic situation, the uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the financial, political and social implications for a Northern Ireland out of the EU remain issues of serious concern.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter examined the peacebuilder's perceptions of the GFA at being able to bring peace to Northern Ireland, whether they think this model could be exported to other countries going through conflict, how they think Brexit will affect the peace there, and how the inability to deal with the legacy of the Troubles will affect Northern Ireland in the future. In the final chapter we examine the role of Brexit and the Border question and look at the state of Northern Ireland three years after the completion of this research.

## **Chapter 7: The Rocky Road toward Peace**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this Master's thesis research was to add another voice to the rhetoric surrounding the 'peace' in Northern Ireland. As an exploratory case study, the hope was that common themes would emerge from this data, and it would give some insight to the motivations and perceptions of peacebuilders 'in the thick of it.' The central findings indicate a commonality in motivation for entering peacebuilding work, although the path chosen for each peacebuilder was unique. There were recurrent themes regarding barriers and challenges, and what peacebuilders see for Northern Ireland in the future. Namely, that segregation and political disengagement remain the main barriers identified and the question of a hard border between the North and South leaves the fragile liminal peace in the North in a precarious position (see Mitchell & Kelly, 2011; Byrne et al., 2018). This research was completed in the fall and winter of 2016 and much has happened in Northern Ireland since that time. Issues surrounding Brexit, the collapse of the executive, again, and a rise in sectarian violence have shifted the landscape in Northern Ireland since I left in 2016. Thus, this chapter examines the issues that were discussed by the peacebuilders and provides an updated picture of the state of Northern Ireland in 2019.

### **7.2 Brexit and the Border Question**

Brexit was an issue that was discussed at length during the interviews, both formally and informally. Over the past three years there remains a number of unanswered questions and the 'Border question' has once again been thrust into the political forefront. It contributed to the political collapse of the Northern Ireland executive in 2017 and it has yet to be reinstated. Brexit has also given rise to discussions of a united Ireland, with the Irish government arguing for the

inclusion of a provision that would allow Northern Ireland to “rejoin the EU as part of a United Ireland” similar to what was done with Berlin after the fall of the wall (Harvey et. al., 2018). Ironically, Brexit has been shown to stoke a sectarian response from both communities. Irish Nationalists, who voted overwhelmingly to stay felt that “English Nationalists have come over their heads and denied a part of their identity which was critical to them feeling comfortable living here” (Harvey et. al., 2018 p. 3). British Loyalists, on the other hand, feel that Brexit has ‘opened the door’ to a united Ireland and created fears about what affect this will have on Loyalist paramilitaries. Specifically, there have been minimal, if any, discussions on equality, political rights or human rights regarding the Loyalist community should Ireland be reunified (Harvey et. al., 2018). Consequently, there remain several issues that affect both communities and are dependent upon the result of Brexit that could have far reaching consequences for the people of Northern Ireland.

The question of a hard Border emerged throughout this research as a key concern for many of the peacebuilders and for good reason. The question of a Border between the North and the South of Ireland has become a major sticking point in the UK negotiations to leave the EU. There has been a soft border between the North and the South since the end of the Troubles and the signing of the 1998 GFA. Currently, the Border is open with free movement between the two states. The EU has provisions for a “third country border” should no special arrangement be negotiated (Durant & Stojanovic, 2018). Specifically, border checks and regulatory checks would be required to move trade between the North and the South and would introduce new costs to trade (Druant & Stojanovic, 2018). These costs would have a direct negative impact on both sides of the Border, with analysts predicting that cross Border trade could drop between 9-17 percent with the introduction of a hard Border (Druant & Stojanovic, 2018).

Perhaps the biggest threat from Brexit is in adding fodder to the cause of dissident Republican groups who are opposed to the peace process. It is feared that the introduction of a hard Border will make salient ‘the reality of partition’ and as the chief constable of the PSNI states, the introduction of a hard Border would create a “fair game” for attacks (Harvey et. al, 2018). There has already been a rise in violence, with one death being attributed to dissident Republican Groups. Twenty-nine-year-old journalist Lyra Mckee was shot and killed in the Creggan during a riot by the NIRA, a dissent splinter group of the PIRA (BBC News, 2019). The only good to come from this tragic event was the outpouring of support and condemnation from both sides of the divide over Lyra Mckee’s murder, and the chance of renewed talks of reinstating the executive, although to this end nothing has emerged to make this happen as of June 2019.

To date, both the EU and the UK have appeared committed to avoiding the introduction of a hard Border although the question remains how this will play out in the long run. The EU has introduced a “three stage approach” to avoiding a hard Border which is: (1) through the overall UK relationship; or failing that (2) via specific solutions to address the unique circumstances of the island of Ireland or if that does not work (3) through full alignment with those rules of the EU’s Internal Market and Customs union which, now or in the future, supports North-South cooperation, the all-island economy and the protection of the 1998 GFA (Druant & Stojanovic, 2018, p. 5). The latter step is considered an ‘insurance policy’ should the other options fail (Druant & Stojanovic, 2018). However, issues remain and the discussions around a hard Border remain vague. Only time, and Brexit, will tell what will happen if a hard Border is reinstated between the North and the South of Ireland.

### 7.3 The GFA and Northern Ireland Three Years Later

Three years after I completed this research, the social and political landscape of Northern Ireland remains in flux. Questions surrounding Brexit, the end of the Game of Thrones (a large contributor to the Northern Irish economy) and attacks from splinter Republican and Loyalist groups have shifted the landscape and has left a level of uncertainty not seen since before the signing of the GFA (Maiangwa et al., 2019). Segregation was, and continues to be, a level of concern for the peacebuilding community. This level of segregation can be attributed to some degree to the GFA. As Shirlow (2018) notes, the GFA is more focused around conflict management than conflict resolution and has “institutionalized sectarianism.”

Whereby political parties must denote themselves as either Nationalist or Unionist politicians continues to reinforce sectarian politics. The GFA, whose aim was to bring down barriers, in actuality, has continued to reinforce them. The political illusion surrounding the existing Border in Northern Ireland to appease both Unionist and Nationalist communities has in essence contributed to the conflict (Shirlow, 2018). With the idea of a united Ireland now on the forefront, which arose as a Republican response to Brexit, have put Unionists on the defensive. The fear of the ideological ‘other’ and the threat of the defanged Celtic tiger remain salient within this population so that the Border question becomes pertinent to them maintaining their identity and enhances their experience of a besieged community (Shirlow, 2018).

This uncertainty has created an ideal condition for the rise in radical Republican violence as dissidents see Brexit as an opportunity to reclaim Northern Ireland. The NIRA’ has become increasingly active, sending four mail bombs to London and Glasgow, putting a car bomb outside the court house in Derry, placing a bomb under an off duty PSNI officer’s vehicle, and were responsible for the death of journalist Lyra Mckee. Political events in Northern Ireland remain

tenuous and uncertain. Until an agreement on Brexit is reached it is hard to predict what the long-term effect this political blip will have on the peace process in Northern Ireland. I remain hopeful that Northern Ireland will not witness again the level of violence it experienced during the Troubles, and the cross-community response to Lyra's death at the hands of the NIRA has given me a level of reassurance that this will not be the case.

#### **7.4 Conclusion and Future Research**

This study was not meant to speak for all grassroots peacebuilders in Northern Ireland, nor was it meant to be the final word on what challenges peacebuilders face there. The hope is that it will provide a snapshot of the motivations, challenges, successes and hopes for people building peace on the ground, and that it can be added to the voices of those who are working to make Northern Ireland a better place. The most important contribution that this thesis can make is to add another layer to the peacebuilding literature and provide avenues that can be expanded on for future research.

More research needs to be done across Northern Ireland, not only in its cities and towns and also in rural areas. The experience of the Troubles and the type of peacebuilding work needed varies widely from one geographical location to the next. What Belfast might need is not necessarily the same as what Omagh might need, or Armagh, or the Border towns. A more comprehensive and geographically diverse sample would shed more light on the complexities on peacebuilding work here and again add another voice that can challenge the overarching narrative of 'peace' in Northern Ireland.

There are many great people and organizations on the ground trying to build peace at the local level, yet it is difficult to foster intercommunity contact when the structures, both real and

psychological, continue to be propagated at both the political and societal levels. Although Northern Ireland has made steps toward building a lasting and sustainable peace, many unresolved issues remain and only time will tell how long this ‘peace’ will last in Northern Ireland. Peacebuilding was at the heart of Northern Irish society long before the GFA and continues to thrive, despite numerous challenges people across the bicomunal divide face engaging in this type of peacebuilding. This study highlights the need for a greater number of voices to be included at all points in a peace process. Peacebuilders need to explore and be privy to increased avenues in which to lobby for change deserve a stronger voice in post-agreement discussions. Projects targeted at reducing the systemic violence of continued segregation should be pursued without delay. Similar to what we saw with these peacebuilders, these groups can instigate real and meaningful change. They may hold the key to building sustainable peace in Northern Ireland.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

The following questions will be posed to grassroots community leaders in Northern Ireland. Rapport will first be established with the interviewee before the commencement of the interview. Additional probing questions may be asked throughout the interview depending on the participant's response.

1. In what country and city/district do you currently live/work? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your ethnic background? \_\_\_\_\_
3. In what type of work does your organization engage in (e.g. work with youth, peacebuilding, reconciliation, development etc.)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. In the dissemination of this research would you like to be identified:  
 Using your name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Your Organization or Institution \_\_\_\_\_  
 I prefer to remain anonymous
5. What inspired you to pursue this line of work?
6. There is so much talk from politicians, researchers, and academics about what constitutes 'peace'. How do you view or define peace?
7. Living in Northern Ireland now, and thinking of your experience living in Northern Ireland before the signing of the 1998 GFA, do you feel that there is peace in Northern Ireland, as you would define it? Why/Why not? What major differences do you see?

8. Do you feel that the Good Friday Agreement has been successful in bringing peace to Northern Ireland? Why/Why not? In what ways?
9. Thinking about the work that you do, and the people and communities that you work with, what do you think has been your or your organization's biggest 'success'? What has been its biggest challenge? Is your organization making a real difference in Northern Ireland?
10. What barriers do you feel are facing peacebuilders in Northern Ireland? What do you think needs to be done to bring down these barriers?
11. How do you feel Northern Ireland will look five years from now? 10 years? 25 years? Will it continue to move forward or do you see it moving backward? Please elaborate.
12. Do you think Northern Ireland can be held up as an example to other communities going through conflict? Why or why not? In what ways?
13. Will Northern Ireland ever be 'at peace'? What, in your opinion, could bring peace to Northern Ireland? Should the Northern Ireland peace model be exported to other divided societies emerging from violence?

## **Appendix B**

### **Mental Health Resources**

#### ***Wave Trauma Center Derry-Londonderry***

23a Bishop Street

Derry Londonderry

Co. Londonderry BT48 9PR

Tel: (028) 7126 6655

#### ***Adult Psychological Services***

Old Bridge House

Glendermott Road

Waterside, Londonderry

BT47 6AU

Telephone: 028 7132 0143

#### ***Wave Trauma Belfast***

5 Chichester Park South

Belfast, Co. Antrim

BT15 5DW

Tel: (028) 9077 9922

