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NORTHERN IRELAND: FROM MULTI-PHASED CONFLICT TO MULTI-LEVELLED SETTLEMENT*

ABSTRACT

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

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

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INTRODUCTION

Few, if any, contemporary settlement processes designed to resolve long-running ethnic or communal conflicts can be understood without reference to their deep historical roots, and the Northern Ireland case is no exception. This essay has as its starting point the argument that the origins of the Northern Ireland conflict fall into three temporally distinct phases. The first phase begins with the English state's reassertion of control over Ireland in the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century plantation of Ulster, with their profound implications for power relations on the island of Ireland. The second phase starts with late nineteenth and early twentieth century nationalist mobilization, partition of the island, and the formation of two states. The third phase dates from the civil rights mobilization in 1968 and the subsequent drift towards violent conflict. In each phase a particular form of conflict is generated and embedded: if the seventeenth century locks in a communal conflict, the creation of Northern Ireland superimposes upon it a national and nation-state form of conflict, and the crisis of the 1969-72 sets in place an intensely violent struggle in the name of conflicting nationalisms.[1] This framework is used here to sketch an explanation of the difficulties of negotiating and of implementing an agreed settlement, and an assessment of the successes and failures of the 1998 settlement.

This historical perspective is not shared by all parties to the conflict. Indeed the political parties defined in the latest phase – unionists (the Ulster Unionist Party, or UUP, and the Democratic Unionist Party, or DUP), nationalists (the Social Democratic and Labour Party, or SDLP), republicans (Sinn Féin) and their constituencies – disagree profoundly on the interrelation of the different phases.[2] One major issue in contention in the settlement process was whether the violent phase of conflict could be stopped without a reconfiguration of the form of national conflict set in place in 1921, and without tackling the conditions of communal opposition set in place 300 years earlier. Contemporary political and scholarly debates on the character of the present political configuration rest on different judgements of the changes in each of these levels of conflict.

The first section of this essay traces the multi-phased origins of conflict; the second shows how this contributed to the formation of communities constituted in a complex way, with multiple aims; and the third section outlines the settlement reached in 1998 and assesses how far it meets the demands of the parties and addresses the key problems at each level of conflict.

THE GENESIS OF THE CONFLICT

Three temporally distinct origins of the conflict in Northern Ireland may, then, be identified: seventeenth century plantation, early twentieth century partition, and late twentieth century mobilization and counter-mobilization over reform. At each stage, initiating events created a particular socio-structural configuration that "locked-in" a propensity for conflict in a path-dependent way, defining a set of protagonists with conflicting interests and more or less defined aims, and leading to a period-specific form of conflict. While it was possible that the later phases could have radically changed, or indeed undone, the form of conflict set in place with the plantation, the tendency at each new phase was instead to further specify, define and intensify the earlier patterns of conflict. Each phase sets a structural level of conflict: the earlier communal struggle does not go away but remains the base and everyday level of a conflict which may be fought in the name of nationalism and intensified by violence and threat of violence, but which is motivated by a much wider and deeper range of interests and values. Dispute over identity, aims and the very nature of the conflict becomes endemic to the actors in the conflict: the very range of interests, identities and repertoires of conflict provides a rationale for almost all the population to take sides.[3]

Seventeenth-century plantation and its legacy

Ireland, conquered in the twelfth century by the Anglo-Normans, had a socio-political structure that was resistant to the state-building and modernising efforts of the early modern English monarchs. Ulster, the most Northern and most Gaelic province, was particularly difficult to bring under the new English order.[4] Plantation (colonisation of confiscated land by loyal settlers) had been tried, relatively unsuccessfully, in other parts of Ireland in the sixteenth century. It was imposed on a larger scale on Ulster in the early seventeenth century: vast tracts of land were distributed to English companies, and to English and Scottish settlers brought in to work it.[5] The conflict in what is now Northern Ireland lies in a direct line of descent from this English reconquest and colonisation (plantation) of Ulster.

Colonisation was never separable from religious differences. Counter-reformation, via Irish priests trained on the continent, came to Ireland before the English reformation had taken hold, so that by the early seventeenth century, when the bulk of plantation took place, religious conflict was already under way.[6] Colonisation required settlers who were not just ethnically distinct (English and Scots), but also distinct in respect of religion (Protestants). Subsequent power relations were tied around the religious distinction, legally in the "penal laws" directed against Catholics, informally in Protestant resistance to reform. The result was a multi-level conflict, where power relations (expressed in military force, economic resources, class position, legal status and political representation) were partially organised by formal

and informal religious institutions and networks, and where symbolic boundaries were multiple, with religious beliefs, moral-political norms and civilisational values, as well as historical narratives of plantation and ethno-national identities, overlapping if never quite coinciding.[7]

This created a strong tendency towards a triangular form of conflict typical of the colonial period where the English/British state was a key player in securing the dominance of the "settlers" even if, by the eighteenth century, the latter had developed their own distinctive political agenda.[8] To put the point crudely, Protestants had a vital interest in retaining their possessions and security against resentful majoritarian Catholics, and relied on alliance with the state to do so; Catholics had an interest in undoing the power imbalance and multiple oppressions they suffered, and were indifferent as to whether this meant that just the British state or also the Protestant people had to go.[9] The British state soon became relatively indifferent to the religio-cultural character of its supporters in Ireland (by the eighteenth century it had an interest in conciliating the Irish majority, not least because it needed recruits to the navy). However its overriding interest was in stability, and this could best be guaranteed by alliance with the dominant, Protestant, partner.

The result was a multi-level communal conflict, where the precise role of religion, ethnicity or political loyalty varied over time and between subgroups. Religious difference did not map perfectly onto ethnic distinction. Catholics were of both "Old English" (Anglo-Norman) and Gaelic Irish provenance, and the class position and interests of each group in the early seventeenth century were quite distinct. Meanwhile, many of the seventeenth century incomers had only the vaguest concept of religion or religious distinction.[10] By the eighteenth century, religious distinctions between Presbyterians and Anglicans were more important among Protestants than was ethnic provenance. In the late eighteenth century, the rebellion of the United Irishmen rebellion, a denominationally mixed revolutionary movement under mainly Protestant leadership, showed the extent to which political loyalty and religious affiliation cut across each other. Even if, for the most part, the varying dimensions of difference ultimately converged in creating loyal Protestant and disaffected Catholic populations, the reasons for their loyalty and disaffection differed quite dramatically within each population, as also did the extent to which some might be (or might have been) won over to a different political position. There were opportunities to win groups of Catholics to the state cause, not just in the seventeenth century, but also immediately after the Union of 1800, when Ireland became a more fully integrated part of the new United Kingdom, with the merger of the Irish and British parliaments. If Catholic emancipation had been conceded at this time, it might have forestalled the kind of mobilization that was led by the Catholic and

nationalist activist Daniel O'Connell in the early nineteenth century.[11] Conversely, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, if the state had stood up decisively to Ulster Protestants while brokering a better deal for them under a scheme of devolution or "home rule" for Ireland, a different outcome might have been possible.[12]

To summarise, the seventeenth century created a colonial-style conflict between native and settler, set in place and reproduced by a state which cemented power relations and inequality, and provided the cultural and economic resources which the settlers used to augment their power, status and self-respect. This was not typical colonialism. It differed in its early genesis – in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – and, largely because of this early stage in English state- and empire-building, in a certain fluidity as to where kingdom ended and colony began.[13] In addition, there was the key role played by religion in communal differentiation, and this superimposed a reformation dynamic on a quasi-colonial mode of state-building and massively increased the cultural differentiation of the populations. One legacy of this phase of conflict lies in the multiplicity of dimensions of distinction, so that the actors have multiple repertoires of self-categorisation and motivation. Another is the position of the British state as guarantor of deep-set communal inequality.

Nineteenth century nationalist mobilization and twentieth century state-building

The Union of 1800 created a new political regime in Ireland, now subject directly to the Westminster parliament. It left communal relations and communal antagonisms intact. Slowly, but increasing in momentum with democratization, the relative economic and political position of Catholics in Ireland improved through the nineteenth century. At the same time, nationalist mobilization increased in scope and effectiveness. For much of the period nationalism, although with a largely Catholic social base, was driven more by a sense of peripheral grievances against Britain than by the communal inequality and antagonism set in place centuries earlier. Much nineteenth century nationalist literature, like the reformist or "constructive" unionist critique of nationalism, focused on the benefits and disbenefits to Ireland of Union, and the best ways to increase Irish prosperity and to reduce sectarian division.[14]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, nationalist ideology and grievance became superimposed upon the deeper communal oppositions.[15] The questions of how this happened, and whether it could have been avoided, lie beyond the scope of this paper. That it happened is clear. There were periods in the nineteenth century when Protestants – including Ulster Protestants – played a role in the nationalist movement, and in the latter quarter of the century the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association had significant Ulster

membership.[16] Through the century, and even after nationalist politicization, many Catholics remained loyal to empire, if not to state. To be sure, this coexisted with continuing local communal division in Ulster, as Frank Wright has documented.[17] But it was only from 1885 (when the first "home rule" bill proposed devolved government for Ireland) that this communal division was politicised and came to be expressed in clear nationalist terms.[18] As a result of this, and of similar tensions over the second home rule bill (1893), which also failed to reach the statute book, Protestant dissent was silenced and, according to Northern nationalist leader, Tom Campbell, voting behaviour became entirely predictable by confessional allegiance.[19] As mobilization for and against the third home rule bill (1912) proceeded in the early twentieth century, ethnic, religious and political distinctions were forged into a coincidence.[20]

Although the third home rule bill (1912) was eventually passed in 1914, it was never implemented. Instead, the partition of Ireland was legislated for in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, with devolved government introduced in the six counties of Northern Ireland in 1921, and the 26 counties of what would eventually become independent Ireland forming a 'Free State' the following year. Partition changed the political locus of conflict, condensing the most extreme division in Northern Ireland, with Ulster Protestant unionists opposed to Irish Catholic nationalists (and their perceived fifth column inside the Northern state), and only the scattered southern Irish Protestant minority excluded or excluding themselves from each group. Partition also provided a state for each group, and each state was used to dig division still deeper, in nation-building enterprises, in institutionalising confessionalism, and – in the North – in using state resources in a clientelist way to secure Protestant unity.[21] Each state was used by the dominant political parties to create a world – a set of institutions manned by the dominant group and given meaning by their stories, norms, rituals – in which one group felt secure and the other was marginalised.

Partition had another effect. It massively increased the importance of sovereignty in Northern Ireland. With another state in the archipelago, British sovereignty became much more important than before, and its importance was more deeply felt in Northern Ireland, where it was challenged, than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Unionists needed the British state to protect them against a Catholic dominated society in the South, and they identified with the British state for a whole range of reasons – economic, religious and moral – which are not reducible simply to ethnic origin or national solidarity.[22]

In summary, both Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists were formed in a process of mobilization and counter-mobilization in the late nineteenth century – a period when nationalism was strong throughout Europe. Irish nationalism is a paradigmatic case of

peripheral nationalism successfully asserting itself against an old imperial centre. Ulster unionism unites ethnic, religious and political loyalties in a way that is sometimes defined as a form of ethno-national loyalty to “Britain”. However, the ways in which the ethnic, religious, political and national categories were interrelated, and the motives that went into British loyalty, were considerably more diverse than those described in a classic nationalist model, or seen in the Irish nationalist paradigm.

Partition created the conditions for lasting conflict in Northern Ireland, institutionalising unionist majority power such that only unionists could be relied upon for loyalty to the state. In effect it created a structural bind, in which nationalist equality came to threaten unionist security.[23] It became extremely difficult for unionist leaders – even liberal ones – to conceive of what was necessary to secure nationalist acquiescence, and those few who did were marginalised or defeated.[24]

The late twentieth century: a dynamic of violence

The third period saw the end of the devolved government put in place in 1921, as mobilization within Northern Ireland for civil rights met unionist opposition and produced nationalist (and later armed republican) responses. As the British state again took control, a quarter century of intense violence ensued, costing over 3,000 deaths, with the IRA effectively carrying on a guerilla campaign against the state, and indirectly against its Protestant supporters, while Protestant paramilitaries targetted Catholics.[25] The intense violence became self-perpetuating. The IRA gained a foothold in local communities, whose populations were targeted by loyalists, and many of whose members were harassed, intimidated and killed by the British army, but whose support for republicanism remained strong through the period.[26] The period also saw the creation of a British state apparatus of repression and administration in Northern Ireland, heavily reliant on Protestants in the security industry, which gave another experiential focus of British identification.

Meanwhile, another struggle was going on, largely independent of what the IRA, and later the British and Irish states, called the “war”. This was a struggle between nationalists and unionists to try to create an acceptable form of society and state, waged by the political parties who were constantly called to account by politicized populations. This struggle was not centrally about state sovereignty; actual negotiations, policies and failed initiatives were about attempts to secure equality, respect, participation and recognition within Northern Ireland, the manner in which state institutions and practices impacted on this, and the role that the British and Irish states could and should play to ensure these aims. State sovereignty was highlighted when reform appeared (to nationalists) to be impossible, or

when it appeared (to unionists) to weaken the union. That this political struggle was so difficult to resolve, however, is a product of the longer term processes and aims set in place with plantation and partition: a division of communities, a set of overlapping, deep cultural divisions and deep-set inequalities justified in terms of values and beliefs embedded in cultural traditions of empire- and state-building, and fought out in terms of the rights of natives as well as of nationalists. Political struggle was also entwined with the violence. The IRA campaign ensured that the grievances of Catholics could not simply be ignored as they were before 1968, and might well have been again had the IRA been defeated.[27] Protestant mobilization and the threat of a loyalist paramilitary backlash ensured that Protestants could not be coerced. The British state – as holder of massive power resources in the region – kept some control over the escalation of violence, and slowly implemented reforms, while guaranteeing a social structure that systematically reproduced conflict.

In summary, the period of British direct rule between 1972 and 1998 saw an intense and violent power struggle in the name of nationalism which had three separate aspects. There was a war waged by republicans and loyalist paramilitaries, dependent on a level of popular acquiescence and local community support. There was a party political struggle and usually a party political stalemate between nationalist and unionist parties over the proper form of political institutions for the region. There was an intermittent mobilization and assertion of aims, identities and oppositions by the wider populations, together with a slow renegotiation and rethinking of those aims and oppositions. This underpinned the political stalemate, bringing down political leaders who compromised too far. The political stalemate was broken, a change in popular aims was confirmed, and an alternative to violence was provided only by a repositioning of the British government in Northern Ireland. The first step was the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which gave the Irish government a role “more than consultative but less than executive” in the governance of Northern Ireland.

THE PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

Plantation in the seventeenth century left “two communities” in the north-east of Ireland, defined as Protestant and Catholic, locally and regionally opposed, and looking to the English/British state as a tool or power resource. This continued into the twentieth century, when the British state, rather than constituting an arena of democracy, continued to be seen as a power resource for the communities in Northern Ireland,. Equally, despite the formal democracy of the devolved government in Stormont, politics in Northern Ireland turned into a communal power play. Individuals – for good historical reasons – constructed their sense of themselves by a subtle intersection of political aims, religious belonging and ethnic provenance, and this part-merging of religious values, ethnic solidarity and political loyalties

at once made for deeper and more hard-fought opposition. What was at stake was power, but power for the sake of the very highest of values. What did the communities want? They had a whole range of varied aims, from the everyday to the religious to the geo-political, and on all of them they were opposed.[28] The "constitutional question" symbolized and crystallized all of these aspects, and that is why the issue of state sovereignty was so powerful a motivating force and so difficult to bypass.

Partition defined the two communities in opposing national and state-centric terms. As is well documented, the partition of Ireland and the formation of the Northern Ireland devolved institutions in 1921 was a product of unionist mobilization; the extent of the devolved territory was explicitly designed to produce a large unionist majority (approximately two thirds Protestant and one third Catholic).[29] The dominant party was the Ulster Unionist Party and it united the Protestant population through judicious use of state resources and opportunities.[30] It was opposed by a Catholic and nationalist population whose organisations and cultural reference points were lost with partition, and which only slowly reorganised politically under a Nationalist Party that was closely integrated in a church-dominated society.[31] The Nationalist party was unable to achieve any of its political goals, either when it participated as a minority within a parliament dominated by the unionist majority, or when it abstained from participation. There was also a small Labour party (and several republican-labour groupings), recruiting from both the Protestant and Catholic working class, and continually outmanoevred as a competitor for the Protestant vote by a Unionist party with state resources under its control. The party system was bi-polar, with all elections focused on the overarching unionist – nationalist opposition. Within this overarching division, each population was internally divided, and politically fractious.[32]

The overarching division was defined in political – indeed constitutional – terms but fuelled by religious ethos, economic conditions and perceived injustice. More precisely, these motivations reinforced a national division which – for many – was of decreasing salience in the period after the second world war. By the 1960s, for example, many Catholics and "nationalists" were willing to settle, in the middle-term, for a reformed Northern Ireland.[33] Many Protestants and unionists were willing to contemplate closer relations with the Irish state and reform within Northern Ireland.[34] Divisions were increasingly visible within the Protestant population, while Catholics were increasingly impatient with the old nationalist-Catholic consensus.[35] As the civil rights movement began, the motivations of different segments of the population were varied, and there seemed to be potential space for compromise.[36] However, conflict focused on the form and stability of the unionist devolved state. Even unionist liberals were slow to endanger their state by giving up on the unionist

alliance, nor were nationalist moderates willing to help bolster the state and trust unionists to change in their own time.

The civil rights movement of the late 1960s, initially opposed by loyalist militants (who were supported by sections of the security forces), secured some reform in Northern Ireland but at the expense of exposing the Protestant nature of the state and of the security forces. The resulting street violence, increasing steadily in intensity, showed the inability of the unionist devolved government to control its own supporters, let alone the population as a whole. It required first British army and later (in 1972) British state intervention to take government from the hands of the unionists before a measure of order was secured. By this stage, the IRA campaign of violence was not only underway, but had secured public support in key neighbourhoods.[37]

From 1971, the issues of equality within Northern Ireland and of links with the South took a low place on a political agenda dominated by increasing violence and repression. A new party system was developing, with a fragmentation of the unionist parties, divided as to the best strategy to maintain the union (integration within the United Kingdom, direct rule from London, devolution, and if devolution, in what form). The Rev Ian Paisley's Protestant Unionist Party was renamed the Democratic Unionist Party in 1971 and was soon to become the main contender for the Protestant vote against mainstream unionism, in the Ulster (or Official) Unionist Party, which won about two thirds of the Protestant vote over the next 25 years. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) was formed by the notables who led the civil rights movement and replaced the old Nationalist Party with a younger, more socially concerned leadership. The SDLP had aspirations for a united Ireland, but these were longterm, conditional on the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland; its leadership was open to a variety of constitutional and institutional compromises.[38] Meanwhile the Provisional IRA – whose political wing, Sinn Féin, did not contest elections until the early 1980s – created a secure home-base in marginalized and underprivileged urban and rural neighbourhoods.[39] A cross community party, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) peaked in support at 16% of the popular vote in 1981, thereafter gaining no more than 10% of the poll. Under direct rule it had considerable influence on British policy, but it never seriously challenged the support of the main parties.

What did the parties want? Their strategies varied with the different policies and practices of the British state. In 1973-4 Unionists were divided between those who wanted a return to devolution with majority rule and those who would accept a level of power sharing; by the later 1970s and into the 1980s the division was between devolutionists and integrationists (supporting complete absorption of Northern Ireland within the UK). As both integration and

majority rule devolution were ruled out by the British, new divisions emerged between those who wanted no change in the status quo (direct British rule) and those who would contemplate change to ward off nationalist advance (and in particular to reverse the Irish government's role in Northern Ireland granted in the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement).[40] All, however, saw republican violence as criminal terrorism and wanted it defeated independently of and prior to any political settlement that included republicans.[41] For them, there was no rationale to armed struggle, and any attempt to lessen support for the IRA by reforming the state in Northern Ireland (as nationalists in the SDLP and the Irish state advocated) was at once unprincipled appeasement and practically useless. Politically, they were willing to allow reform within the union; how much reform, and how much equality and what equality would mean, slowly changed over time and under pressure of increasing reform from 1985.[42]

Nationalists in the SDLP wanted equality in Northern Ireland and an open agenda on Irish unity, with an institutionalized and a at least symbolic link with the Republic of Ireland. How this Irish dimension was to be institutionalized, and what exactly would count as equality, were matters on which views changed over time and with events. In the New Ireland Forum of 1983-4, an all-Ireland nationalist consensus emerged not on the form of the Irish dimension (different options were given) but on the necessity of it.[43] Republicans, in turn, wanted the "Brits" – that is the British state – out, as a prerequisite for further change. They wanted a settlement that would resolve the historic causes of conflict, which, in the republican analysis, went right back to plantation and required a strong "equality agenda" as well as a path to Irish unity. When they were convinced that Irish unity could not come in one step, but that other political opportunities were being held open, they slowly opened negotiations that would lead to not just to the end of war, but also to the end of the political stalemate. [44]

PATHS TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT, 1997-2007

The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was followed by an accelerating reform programme and the outlining of a complex multi-levelled and multi-located form of governance. Negotiations between the unionists, the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the governments, and between IRA representatives and the SDLP (and the British and Irish governments), were intermittent through the 1990s. A first IRA ceasefire was called in 1994, followed by loyalist paramilitary ceasefires, but violence recommenced after a delay in commencing talks. A second ceasefire was called in 1997 and in September of that year Sinn Féin was admitted for the first time to all-party talks, which the DUP and the small UK Unionist Party immediately left. A settlement was finally, unexpectedly, reached in April 1998, between the UUP, SDLP, Sinn Féin and smaller parties, with only the DUP and the UK Unionist Party outside the

consensus. The DUP was eventually brought in, once it had electorally destroyed the more moderate UUP – but that took almost another decade.

The settlement was a complex package put together by the two governments and approved after amendments by the parties.[45] It had three strands – internal to Northern Ireland, North-South and East-West – and a number of important constitutional components and provisions for institutional reform. Constitutional change was made dependent on the vote of a majority in both parts of the island of Ireland, with guarantees by both governments to hold referenda and implement the decisions, and with a change in the Irish constitution to reflect the aim of unity by consent (and only by consent) of a majority in Northern Ireland. New consociational representative institutions were created: an Assembly with 108 members elected by the single transferable vote system of proportional representation, whose members would self-designate as unionist, nationalist or other; bloc vetoes for unionists and nationalists in the form of weighted majority voting on contentious issues; a First and Deputy First Minister with equivalent powers to be appointed by simultaneous majorities of unionists and nationalists in the Assembly; and a proportionally representative executive appointed by the d'Hondt method. The existence of the Assembly was co-dependent on the existence of a North-South council of ministers, created by British and Irish legislation but functioning by consensus between Northern and Southern ministers. That Council would in turn have a standing secretariat and would set up six all-Ireland "implementation bodies" to promote consultation, cooperation and action in the areas of trade, EU programmes, language, inland waterways, fisheries and food safety, with the prospect of further harmonization at policy and implementation level left open to agreement.[46] The Irish government retained some say in the governance of Northern Ireland through a British-Irish intergovernmental conference, responsible for policy areas not devolved to the Assembly. In addition, a British-Irish Council was instituted bringing together representatives of the British and Irish governments, the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish executives, and representatives from the Isle of Man and the Channel (Anglo-Norman) Isles.

Aside from these major institutional innovations, there were far-reaching reform policies involving the mainstreaming of equality in all public decision making and human rights guarantees (though the latter have yet to be fully codified).[47] There was agreement to institute an independent international commission on the reform of policing, with the remit to create a police service "capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole". When the Commission reported in 1999, it proposed a radical reorganization of the policing system, to intense unionist protest.[48] In addition, reform of the administration of justice was promised. Qualifying prisoners (from paramilitary organizations on ceasefire)

were to be released within two years. Decommissioning and demilitarisation were each promised, the latter dependent on the security situation, and the former dependent on the implementation of the agreement, with the parties committing to “use any influence they may have” to achieve decommissioning within two years “in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement”. These qualifications lost important unionist support. Successive crises of implementation led to serial unionist withdrawals from government and an eventual parking of the representative institutions between 2002 and 2007.[49]

What was the balance of gains and losses to the parties and to their wider constituencies? Unionists secured British sovereignty, and an end to the Irish constitutional claim to Northern Ireland. Nationalists, meanwhile, ensured that the fact of sovereignty was diluted in its cultural impact, and became significantly less important in institutional organization: as unionist Peter Weir commented, the “dimmer switch” was applied to Britishness. A radical equalization of conditions in Northern Ireland was underway politically, economically and culturally, with every institution, including the judicial system, vetted for its openness to nationalist perspectives and presence. Decommissioning of republican weapons was eventually achieved, five years after the agreed date, and British security installations were finally dismantled in 2007. In the meantime, the moderate UUP and SDLP were overtaken in the polls by the more extreme DUP and Sinn Féin, even while the latter parties considerably moderated their policies and, from 2007, entered government together.[50]

How successful was the agreement at regulating conflict? When we look at elites and activists, the 1998 settlement has proven an undoubted success. There has been a definitive end to violence, with paramilitary decommissioning and British army demilitarisation. A resurgence of dissident republican violence in spring 2009 appears to have been contained. There has been a restructuring of institutions to remedy inequality, and this has been effective at the middle and upper levels of employment, although Catholics remain disproportionately present in the most marginalized sections of the population.[51] The new institutional configuration, with its multi-centred loci of political decision-making, remains in existence a decade later, and is now worked by the “extreme” political parties. If policy-making achievements have been questioned, it is at least in part because the devolved assembly has functioned for only a fraction of the decade since 1998. Major change has, however, occurred in the structure of governance, the institutional setting (including the creation of a range of British-Irish and North-South institutions), the security system, and the expectations of the political parties. Indeed the main parties currently in government – the DUP and Sinn Féin – have moderated their policies very considerably, with the DUP sitting in government with ex-paramilitaries and Sinn Féin supporting the police.

At the everyday level, the record is less clear. There are radically opposing views among experts on Northern Ireland as to whether, ten years on, the settlement has reduced or increased sectarianism, and as to whether it has crystallised or softened opposing views, and as to whether it has solidified or moderated opposing blocs, or perhaps even begun to transform them. Survey research shows some moderation of popular views: Protestants now largely support the devolved institutions, and have come to terms with the reform of the police; Catholics are willing to make the new settlement work, and the desire for a united Ireland has remained stable over ten years.[52] However, levels of segregation have risen, and the numbers of "peace walls" dividing the populations in Belfast have increased. Reports of sectarian violence and intimidation have increased, although, as Jarman notes, this may be because police reports have only recently included this as a category.[53] Qualitative research is starkly divided over whether individuals are in the process of rethinking or of reaffirming older oppositions.[54] In some central city neighbourhoods and among male activists, real dangers of a renewal of conflict exist. There is, however, more rethinking among the less-politicised groups (often made up of women) particularly outside the segregated city neighbourhoods. The trend, however, remains uncertain, and it is crucial to the success or failure of the settlement itself. Will the institutions continue to stumble from crisis to crisis until nationalists reach just over 50% of the voting population, and unionists have to put up with a united Ireland or fight? Or is there a slow movement towards participation and dialogue which – unevenly, and for different subgroups – is gradually decoupling the constitutional question from its ethno-religious basis? And, if the latter is occurring, will it be enough to forestall future crisis?

CONCLUSION

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

From early in the conflict, Irish government officials and ministers had come to the conclusion that the three patterns were interrelated, that the partition settlement of 1920-21 had precluded any change in the long-term relationships of sectarian opposition, that this had created nationalist anger and alienation that made the IRA campaign possible, and that a new settlement had to address all three levels of conflict.[55] They disagreed on priorities and

strategy, and until the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, had little part to play in conflict management. The 1985 agreement marked the beginning of change: in giving the Irish government a small role, it acted as a wedge which allowed diplomats and politicians to argue for a more radical repositioning of the British state which would also change the structure of relations between unionists and nationalists. Nationalists and republicans shared this broad vision, although republicans had a distinctive view of the causality involved and came late to recognize the importance of creating an institutional settlement as a stepping stone to further constitutional change. British politicians and officials varied greatly in their interest in and understanding of the Northern Ireland conflict. While some “maximalists” were intuitively open to an Irish involvement in Northern Ireland up to and including joint sovereignty, and easily forged understanding with their Irish counterparts, they were unable to drive policy until the 1990s.[56] Others adopted a sovereigntist view, either keeping Northern Ireland British or seeing the alternative as an immediate united Ireland. However, key figures at government and official level had come to accept the interrelation of the three levels of conflict, and by the 1990s they had begun to converge in their views on the way forward with the Irish government.[57] Unionists, as Farrington points out in an important article, denied these interrelations.[58] They did not see the quest for a compromise political settlement as intimately connected with the quest to end IRA violence, nor did they think a fair settlement in Northern Ireland required any wider changes in the role of the state, except perhaps as a concomitant of wider global influences on a post-devolution United Kingdom

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement itself was open to these diametrically opposed unionist and nationalist interpretations. There was disagreement as to whether the Agreement was in essence an historic compromise, guaranteeing equality for nationalists and constitutional security for unionists. This was the view of the UUP leadership, with the fairness and balance of the compromise questioned by UUP rank and file and by the DUP. Most nationalists accepted that the Agreement was an historic compromise, but they thought it went further, to begin a process of dismantling the longer run causes of conflict. There was further disagreement as to whether paramilitary violence was to be read as a symptom of a longer-term pattern of relationships, which would be resolved only as these relations were changed (the view of nationalists, republicans and loyalists), or as an independent problem to be resolved prior to implementation of the Agreement (the view of both UUP and DUP). Unionists and nationalists were, in addition, internally divided as to whether the Agreement actually resolved conflict at any of these levels. They were also divided on whether change had stabilised the balance of power or (as the DUP and UUP rank and file believed, and some republicans hoped) given a power bonus to nationalists who were likely to use it to further constitutional change.[59]

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

NOTES

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[1] Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, “Path Dependence in Settlement Processes: Explaining Settlement in Northern Ireland, *Political Studies,* Vol. 55, No. 2 (2007), pp. 442-458.

[2] Conventional practice is followed here in distinguishing “republicans” (a term commonly reserved in Northern Ireland for militant nationalists, typically supporters of the IRA) from “nationalists” *simpliciter* (typically supporters of conventional political methods in the pursuit of their aims). One section of militant unionists, prepared to consider the use of violence to advance their cause and commonly of working class background, is similarly labelled “loyalist”.

[3] Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 30.

[4] Nicholas Canny, *The Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland: A Pattern Established 1565-76* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1976); Nicholas Canny, *From Reformation to Restoration: Ireland 1534-1660* (Dublin: Helicon, 1987).

[5] Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie, eds., *Natives and Newcomers: The Makings of Irish Colonial Society 1534-1641* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1986).

[6] On the use of religious justifications for revolt by the Ulster lords, see Hiram Morgan, "Hugh O'Neill and the Nine Years War in Tudor Ireland", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (1993), pp. 21-37.

[7] Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics* (1996), pp. 2-30.

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

[9] Clearly there are important variations within both Catholic and Protestant populations. This schema summarises the overall result and proffers an explanation for it in terms of the interests generated by state-guaranteed social structure. It does not deal with the complex manoevres, redefinitions and challenges of individuals and subgroups within each population who tried to break the pattern and sometimes nearly did. For example the United Irishmen rebellion of 1798, incorporating both Protestants and Catholics, might have succeeded – with very radical implications for the future of the island and the archipelago – if the planned French military intervention force had landed on schedule.

[10] Finlay Holmes, *Our Irish Presbyterian Heritage* (Belfast: Publications Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, 1985), pp. 9-11.

[11] On the earlier period, see, for example, Jane Ohlmeyer, "Colonization within Britain and Ireland", in Nicholas Canny, ed., *The Origins of Empire,* Vol. I of the *Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 124-147, at pp. 140-3.

[12] Ian Lustick sees the moment which defined subsequent relations as March 1914, when the British government failed to assert its authority over officers in the military camp of the Curragh who refused to march on Ulster; Ian S. Lustick, *Unsettled States, Disputed Lands: Britain and Ireland, France and Algeria, Israel and the West Bank-Gaza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 206-9.

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

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

[15] See Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1981), and *Irish Nationalist Revolutionaries 1858-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), for the tension between these aspects of Irish nationalism, a theme also discussed in English, *Irish Freedom* (2006).

[16] James Loughlin, "The Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and Nationalist Politics, 1886-1893', *Irish Historical Studies,* Vol. 24, No. 95 (1985), pp. 341-360.

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

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

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

[20] One of the best accounts is still that of Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism: The Formation of Popular Protestant Politics and Ideology in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), pp. 112-140.

[21] Scholars from different perspectives converge in this judgement: Patrick Buckland, *The Factory of Grievances: Devolved Government in Northern Ireland 1921-39* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1979); Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *Northern Ireland 1921-2001: Political Forces and Social Classes* (London: Serif, 2002); Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, Pragmatism, Pessimism (*Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), for example pp. 67, 101. On the two Irish states, see David Fitzpatrick, *The Two Irelands 1912-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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

[23] Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, "'Why Can't You Get Along with Each Other?': Structure, Culture and the Northern Ireland Conflict", in Eamonn Hughes, ed, *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), pp. 27-43.

[24] Walker, *History* (2004) records only a few cases of dissent, and the predominant inertia even of those with liberal convictions in the face of sectarian practices (for example, pp. 117, 121).

[25] David McKittrick, Seamus Kelters, Brian Feeney, Chris Thornton and David McVea, *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men and Wormen who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (London: Mainstream, 2004).

[26] The IRA continued as a small group of "professional rebels" opposed to Northern Ireland's existence from the 1920s through the 1960s. What was different in the recent phase of conflict, and what made it so polarising, was the implicit and explicit support from large sections of the Catholic community, and the wider understanding of republican motivation even among nationalists who opposed violence. See Joseph Ruane, "Contemporary Republicanism and the Strategy of Armed Struggle", in Maurice J. Bric and John Coakley (eds.), *From Political Violence to Negotiated Settlement* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004), pp. 115-132.

[27] Of course the formal indicators of Protestant rule were finally eliminated in 1972 with the abolition of Stormont and the institution of direct British rule. But deep structural inequality remained up until the 1990s in the economy, the make-up of the security forces and civil service, the marks of cultural capital, the publicly acceptable political positions and the public culture (see Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics* (1996), pp. 116-203)

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

[29] J. H. Whyte, "How Much Discrimination Was There under the Unionist Regime?", in Tom Gallagher and James O'Connell, eds., *Contemporary Irish Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 1-35.

[30] Buckland, *Factory* (1979); Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, *State in Northern Ireland* (2002).

[31] Eamon Phoenix, *Northern Nationalism: Nationalist Politics, Partition and the Catholic Minority in Northern Ireland 1890-1940* (Belfast, Ulster Historical Foundation, 1994).

[32] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (1991), pp. 26-51, 67-93; Ruane and Todd, *Dynamics* (1996), pp. 54-78. On nationalist factionalism, see Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (London: Pluto, 1980).

[33] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (1991), pp. 77-79.

[34] Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (1991), pp. 77-79; Marc Mulholland*, Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O'Neill years 1960-9* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000) pp. 1-7.

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

[36] Mulholland *Northern Ireland* (2000), pp. 1-11.

[37] Frank Burton, *The Politics of Legitimacy: Struggles in a Belfast* Community (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1978).

[38] Peter J. McLoughlin, "'…it's a United Ireland or Nothing?' John Hume and the Idea of Irish Unity, 1964-72", *Irish Political Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2006), pp. 157-180.

[39] Burton, *Politics of Legitimacy* (1978), pp. 68-128.

[40] For discussions of the divisions, see Arthur Aughey, *Under Siege: Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 1989); Feargal Cochrane, *Unionist Politics and the Politics of Unionism since the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997); Henry Patterson and Eric Kaufmann, *Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland since 1945: The Decline of the Loyal Family* (Manchester: Manchester Univerity Press, 2007); Christopher Farrington, *Ulster Unionism and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[41] Christopher Farrington, "Ulster Unionism and the Northern Irish Peace Process", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* Vol. 8, No. 2 (2006), pp. 277-294.

[42] For a discussion of the reform process, see Bob Osborne and Ian Shuttleworth, eds., *Fair Employment in Northern Ireland: A Generation On* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2004).

[43] New Ireland Forum, *Report* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1984).

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

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

[46] John Coakley, "The North-South Relationship: Implementing the Agreement", in John Coakley, Brigid Laffan and Jennifer Todd (eds.), *Renovation or Revolution: New Territorial Politics in Ireland and the United Kingdom* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press , 2005), pp.110-131.

[47] On the equality measures and their effects, see Osborne and Shuttleworth, *Fair Employment* (2004).

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

[49] Some crises were provoked by IRA slowness to decommission, some by the march of reform (particularly reform of policing), some by actual and alleged continuing IRA activity.

[50] Paul Mitchell, Brendan O'Leary and Geoffrey Evans, "Northern Ireland: Flanking Extremists Bite the Moderates and Emerge in Their Clothes," *Parliamentary Affairs,* Vol. 54, No. 4 (2001), pp. 725-43; Gladys Ganiel and Paul Dixon, "Religion, pragmatic fundamentalism and the transformation of the Northern Ireland conflict", *Journal of Peace Research,* Vol. 45, No. 3 (2008), pp. 419-436.

[51] Paddy Hillyard, Demi Patsios and Fiona Semillon, "A Daughter to ELSI – NILSI : A Northern Ireland Standard of Living Index or Problematising Wealth in the Analysis of Inequality and Material Well-being ",*Social Policy and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2007), pp. 81-98.

[52] Paul Mitchell, Geoffrey Evans and Brendan O'Leary, "Extremist Outbidding in Ethnic Party Systems Is Not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland", *Political Studies,* Vol. 57, No. 2 (2009), pp. 397-421; Joanne Hughes, "Attitudes towards Equality in Northern Ireland: Evidence of Progress?", in Osborne and Shuttleworth, *Fair Employment* (2004), pp 166-183.

[53] Neil Jarman, *No Longer a Problem? Sectarian Violence in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Institute for Conflict Research, 2005).

[54] For the former view, see Jennifer Todd, Theresa O'Keefe, Nathalie Rougier and Lorenzo Cañás Bottos, "Does Being Protestant Matter? Protestants, Minorities and the Remaking of Ethno-religious Identity in Ireland", *National Identities*, Vol 11, No. 1 (2009), pp. 87-99; Gladys Ganiel, *Evangelicalism and Conflict in Northern Ireland*. (New York: Palgrave, 2008); Claire Mitchell, "Protestant Identification and Political Change in Northern Ireland", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2003), pp. 612-631; Claire Mitchell and Jennifer Todd "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Nationality, Power and Symbolic Trade-Offs among Evangelical Protestants in Northern Ireland", *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (2007), pp. 637-655. For the latter view, see Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh, *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City* (London: Pluto, 2006).

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

[56] On the divisions among the state elite in the 1980s, see Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon and Henry Patterson, *The State in Northern Ireland 1921-1994: Political Forces and Social Classes* (London: Serif, 1995), pp. 204-214.

[57] Some had consistently put the Northern Irish conflict in long-term British-Irish perspective; see, for example, Sir David Goodall, "Hillsborough to Belfast: Is It the Final Lap?", in Marianne Elliott, ed., *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), pp 120-128.

[58] Farrington, “Ulster Unionism” (2006).

[59] For an argument that these factors explain the successive crises of the Agreement, see Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd, “The Politics of Transition: Explaining the Crises in the Implementation of the Belfast Agreement”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 5 (2001), pp. 923-940.