

“A Peace of Sorts”: A Cultural History of the
Belfast Agreement, 1998 to 2007

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own, except where appropriately credited


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Abstract

The 1998 Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA), a political agreement in Northern Ireland which offered the chance to end the thirty years of conflict known as ‘the Troubles,’ has attracted substantial interest from many scholars interested in political processes. Few, however, have focused on what the Agreement meant to non-political actors, especially ‘victims’ of the Troubles. The GFA not only attempted to confine violence to the past. It shaped the ways in which victims, journalists and the ‘public’ could reflect on the fresh start the Agreement promised. This thesis examines the extent to which the GFA facilitated a shift in Northern Ireland’s public discourse away from established loyalties and paramilitary divisions to focus instead on the experience and rights of victims and the navigation of concepts of peace, justice and reconciliation. Three case studies of responses to post-GFA violence serve to chart the ways in which the frameworks of public debate shaped new identities which both marked a clear point of departure from past trauma, while also revealing the ambivalent and unequal ways in which still divided communities found a voice. The consequences of this shift were multifaceted, rearranging silences surrounding paramilitary violence rather than displacing them entirely. I argue that attention to this public discourse is a vital complement to any assessment of the political and social outcomes of the GFA.

Abbreviations

32CSM	32 County Sovereignty Movement
AP	Associated Press
CAIN	Conflict Archive on the Internet
CIRA	Continuity Irish Republican Army
CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
COTT	Cost of the Troubles
CRF	Catholic Reaction Force
CRUA	Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EU	European Union
FAIR	Families Acting for Innocent Relatives
GFA	Good Friday Agreement
HET	Historical Enquiries Team
IICD	Independent International Commission on Decommissioning
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IRSP	Irish Republican Socialist Party
ITN	Independent Television News
ITV	Independent Television
LVF	Loyalist Volunteer Force
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
OIRA	Official Irish Republican Army
OSSHG	Omagh Support and Self Help Group

PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
RHD	Red Hand Defenders
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment
RIRA	Real Irish Republican Army
RTE	Right to Education
RTÉ	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
RSF	Republican Sinn Féin
SAA	Saint Andrews Agreement
SDLP	Social and Democratic Labour Party
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters
UKUP	United Kingdom Unionist Party
UTV	Ulster Television
UUC	Ulster Unionist Council
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
UWC	Ulster Workers Council
VUPP	Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party

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Introduction: “A Peace of Sorts”

1. We, the participants in the multi-party negotiations, believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.
2. The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.

The Belfast Agreement, 1998.¹

Northern Ireland transformed in 1998. The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA) offered the chance to end the thirty year conflict known as ‘the Troubles.’ The GFA aimed to maintain the ceasefires between the largest republican and loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, foster “reconciliation” between Catholics and Protestants and create a “just and lasting peace”.² Many scholars have studied the political, economic and social impacts of the GFA, with an interest in the formalities of its processes and provisions. Few, however, have focused on what the Agreement meant to non-political actors, especially people affected by the paramilitary violence which continued after 1998. This thesis argues that the GFA not only attempted to confine violence to the past but also shaped the ways in which non-political actors responded to continuing paramilitary violence, such as victims of violence, and media commentators. While this violence posed a fundamental challenge to concepts of ‘peace,’ ‘justice’ and ‘reconciliation,’ my argument is that the post-GFA public debate reflected - and consolidated - a shift in the terms in which such violence was comprehended. That shift was sufficient to contain the political impacts of ongoing paramilitary violence and define a new discourse of community response. Three case studies are used to chart the ways in which the post-GFA frameworks of public debate shaped new

¹ “The Agreement: Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations (10 April 1998),” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, April 10, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

² “Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln,” The Avalon Project, March 4, 1865, accessed February 7, 2017, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lincoln2.asp. The phrase “just and lasting peace” was used by President Clinton in a 1993 speech in Belfast. The phrase originates in the last line of American President Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address in 1865: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations”.

identities, which both marked a clear point of departure from past trauma while also revealing the ambivalent and unequal ways in which still divided communities found a voice. I argue that the GFA should not only be considered as a political document. It also laid the groundwork for new ways in which people spoke about their opposition to violence, campaigned for a more peaceful future and reflected on their own changing identities in the process.

While the GFA aimed primarily at creating peace, the processes it reflected also shaped how people were able to, or were enabled to, respond to violence. The public debate in which violence was comprehended underwent a distinct shift from that which had characterised the Troubles, when actors such as paramilitary groups maintained significant discursive power. Instead, the post-GFA discussion was shaped more by the power of testimony, the recognition of individual suffering and rights arising from it, and new conceptions of justice defined by civil action more than criminal procedure. In this transition, the perspectives of non-political actors and victims had a role that has largely been ignored by academic literature surrounding the Agreement. The wealth of scholarship so far dedicated to the GFA presents a history from above, concentrating on interactions between powerful political actors, and using opinion polls and elections to assess the success - or failures - of the Agreement. This thesis advances instead an analysis not so much 'from below' as of the mediating space of a political culture in which the impact of the GFA can be traced in a more subtle but enduring change in the terms within which success or failure were understood.

Modern conceptions of 'discourse' are heavily influenced by French philosopher Michel Foucault. In his 1969 work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes a 'discourse' as being defined by the exact specificity of its occurrence. In establishing that 'specificity,' the priorities are to:

determine its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes ... we must show why it could not be other than it was, in what respect it is exclusive of any other, how it assumes, in the midst of others and in relation to them, a place that no other could occupy. The question proper to such an analysis might be formulated in this way: what is this specific existence that emerges from what is said and nowhere else?³

³ Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2013), accessed October 15, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=1144626>, 30-31.

Foucault was interested in ideas of domination and power, with discourse and language being expressions of such power.⁴ I apply these conceptions of discursive power to ‘public’ discourse. Cultural historian and philosopher Jürgen Habermas assessed public discourse as evolving out of European seventeenth-century ideas including ‘publicity,’ ‘public opinion’ and ‘general opinion’.⁵ Historically, public discourse was a “sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed”.⁶ In keeping with Foucauldian conceptions of discourse, public discourse is “no less permeated by power relations than society as a whole”.⁷ For the purposes of this thesis, ‘public discourse’ incorporates these ideas and refers to who could say and write what through the primary vehicles of public discourse, the ‘mass media,’ especially newspapers and television.

In exploring changes in Northern Ireland’s public discourse, the perspective of cultural history is particularly valuable in – as Alessandro Arcangeli explains – focussing on “motives and meanings that individual and collective historical agents from the past gave to whatever they were doing, and the context in which they operated”.⁸ Contemporary trends in cultural history, influenced by psychology, sociology and philosophy, focus on how meaning is represented.⁹ Miri Rubin succinctly assesses that cultural history lies in the “domain of representation, the struggle over meaning” and in exploring “meanings beyond any observable reality” which are “disseminated powerfully through the constitutive language practices, rituals and representations”.¹⁰ I explore two components of the discursive change brought about by the Agreement. First, I examine how victims responded to instances of paramilitary violence after the GFA and how these responses indicated discursive shifts in allowing victims to speak about their experiences. Second, I focus on how expectations surrounding the GFA and the ‘struggle over meaning’ of its key ideas of peace, justice and reconciliation were expressed in the years after 1998. In addition to *what* they said, my interest is in the terms in which they sought to represent themselves: the identities that

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 6.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Space: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeoisie Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 25-26.

⁶ Thomas McCarthy, introduction to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Space: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeoisie Society*, by Jürgen Habermas, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), xi.

⁷ Simon Susan, “Critical Notes on Habermas’s Theory of the Public Sphere,” *Sociological Analysis* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 53.

⁸ Alessandro Arcangeli, *Cultural History: A Concise Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 16.

⁹ See Peter Burke, *What Is Cultural History?*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

¹⁰ Miri Rubin, “Cultural History I: What’s in a Name?,” Institute of Historical Studies, last updated 2008, accessed January 10, 2017, http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/cultural_history.html.

the GFA made available to them, as victims of violence but also in bearing witness to its impacts.

While histories of Northern Ireland published since 1998 have focused on the GFA and its aftermath, they have concentrated mostly on the political impacts of the Agreement.¹¹ As it has featured in broader histories of Irish politics, the Agreement has served to focus on the continuing political challenges and crises facing Northern Ireland.¹² Interdisciplinary studies have gone some way towards exploring post-GFA trends in economics and demographics, and the intersection of the Agreement with themes of religion, education and on-going segregation in Northern Ireland.¹³ My thesis is indebted to these studies of Northern Ireland's political landscape after 1998, but my focus is on an examination of the ways in which the Agreement shaped a different discourse beneath politics and as a dimension of such trends.

This thesis traces the transformation of public discourse from the 'Troubles' to the post-GFA era. Throughout the Troubles, republican and loyalist paramilitary organisations were powerful groups in shaping the terms of public debate. Although paramilitaries constituted only a small percentage of Northern Ireland's population, at maximum four per cent of the population in the early 1970s,¹⁴ they were a powerful player in limiting discussion.

¹¹ Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Paul Dixon and Eamonn O'Kane, *Northern Ireland Since 1969* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2014); Feargal Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), accessed June 8, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bv40>; Marc Mulholland, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, 3rd ed. (London: Viking, 2012); Richard Bourke, *Peace in Ireland: The War of Ideas* (London: Pimlico, 2003); Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005); Katy Hayward, "Introduction: Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution," in *Political Discourse and Conflict Resolution*, eds. Katy Hayward and Catherine O'Donnell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

¹² James Loughlin, *The Ulster Question Since 1945*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London: Penguin, 2007).

¹³ *A Farewell to Arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, eds. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke, and Fiona Stephen, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); *Northern Ireland After the Troubles: A Society in Transition*, eds. Colin Coulter and Michael Murray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins and Francis Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Bernadette C. Hayes and Ian McAllister, *Conflict to peace: Politics and society in Northern Ireland over half a century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

¹⁴ The population of Northern Ireland throughout the Troubles was between 1.5 and 1.6 million people, based on census records from 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001. Estimates from the early 1970s put the UDA's largest total membership at 40,000, however, this number refers to how many people the UDA could muster in support, rather than how many were active in the organisation. Gusto Spence claimed that UVF membership was 1500 in 1972, while the PIRA's total membership throughout the Troubles was estimated by Martin McGuinness to be 10,000 people. In any case if we add the (largest, but by no means all groups) together, we can assume is around 52,500 people of a population of 1.5 million, or just over 3 per cent of the total population. In reality, active militants have probably numbered far fewer, as the PIRA's estimate includes the whole of the Troubles while the UDA estimate includes supporters, rather than initiated UDA/UFF members.

Paramilitary groups released highly publicised statements – ceasefires, threats, warnings and other publications – and were listened to by governments. Paramilitaries literally enforced silence around certain topics by regularly murdering civilians, especially suspected informers and by intimidating witnesses,¹⁵ facilitating a culture of silence around victims, suppressing recognition of their experiences.¹⁶ Cultural historian Aileen Blaney has described paramilitary organisations throughout the Troubles as commanding a “greater degree of media visibility than the victims of violence – deceased, injured and bereaved”.¹⁷ Indeed, many victims of paramilitary violence felt that they were forgotten, silenced, ignored or marginalised during (and sometimes after) the Troubles.¹⁸

As in other societies embroiled in conflict, victims were not all literally ‘silent’ throughout the Troubles – although many may have practiced “keeping silent in the hope that the problem will at best disappear, or at worst not deteriorate further”.¹⁹ One reason for this, as Hastings Donnan and Kirk Simpson have noted, was the need to “keep your head down” as the “fear of violent threat and intimidation that marked the Troubles” made silence “a strategic necessity to avoid attack”.²⁰ This feeling was not universal. Some victims’ groups gained prominence, especially relatives of those killed in the Bloody Sunday Massacre in 1972 and the non-sectarian ‘Community of Peace People’ in the 1970s. Newspaper accounts of victims’ ‘stories’ and published collections of testimonies could break through an oppressive culture of silence on issues that deeply polarised a society.²¹ Nevertheless, many victims felt forgotten. Heading a body established in 1997 to examine the “feasibility of providing great recognition for those who have become victims over thirty years of violence,” the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner Sir Ken Bloomfield reflected that the “most vulnerable of all are those numerous victims [were those] who were not associated with any faction, cause or

¹⁵ Maria Beville and Sara Dybris McQuaid, “Speaking of Silence: Comments from an Irish Studies Perspective,” *Nordic Irish Studies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 11-12.

¹⁶ Hastings Donnan and Kirk Simpson, “Silence and Violence among Northern Ireland Border Protestants,” *Ethnos* 72, no. 1 (March 2007): 12.

¹⁷ Aileen Blaney, “Visible victims and the politics of suffering in Omagh,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2009): 415.

¹⁸ Kirk Simpson, *Truth recovery in Northern Ireland: Critically interpreting the past* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 58-59; *Personal Accounts from Northern Ireland’s Troubles: Public Conflict, Private Loss*, eds. Marie Smyth and Marie-Therese Fay (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 6; Donnan and Simpson, “Silence and Violence among Border Protestants,” 14-15; Mike Morrissey and Marie Smyth, *Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement: Victims, Grievance and Blame* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 3-5.

¹⁹ Morrissey and Smyth, *Victims, Grievance and Blame*, 61.

²⁰ Donnan and Simpson, “Silence and Violence among Border Protestants,” 12.

²¹ Peter Taylor, *Families at War: Voices from the Troubles* (London: BBC Books, 1989); Tony Parker, *May the Lord in His mercy be kind to Belfast* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993); *Personal Accounts from Northern Ireland’s Troubles* was published in 2000, but is based upon interviews conducted before the GFA.

organisation; the many “little people” caught up in violence, often in relatively isolated incidents too soon forgotten outside the immediate family”.²²

The GFA did not suddenly allow these previously silenced victims to speak openly about their experiences to a miraculously engaged and attentive audience. Indeed, some victims actually felt silenced by the GFA’s focus on forgiveness and reconciliation, which seemed to override their deep and enduring suffering.²³ However, as Donnan and Simpson have argued in relation to Protestants in Northern Ireland’s border region, the “Good Friday Agreement of 1998 has created the conditions in which it is safer and more acceptable” to speak about experiences of violence: it has “encouraged people to come forward and tell their stories”.²⁴ While encouraging victims to ‘come forward and tell their stories,’ the GFA did not instantly disempower paramilitary groups from a place in this discussion. It did, however, require them to significantly recast the ways in which they justified their roles and the place of violence within them. Northern Ireland’s post-GFA public discourse was, I argue, characterised by a significant revision in the relative power of groups in shaping the terms in which both the future and the past of their society might be represented. Equally, those terms were redefined by the forms of reportage, public testimony, international attention and cultural investment that were associated with the GFA’s context and rationale. This influence was exerted, particularly by the new forms of media, where testimonies could be aired unaltered to anyone who had access to the internet.

As sociologists Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith have argued, the 1990s saw an increase in the public’s appetite for victims’ stories in post-conflict societies. “Life narratives,” “stories of survival,” and the ability of these traumatic stories to “reinvent imagined securities” became increasingly prominent in a culture geared towards the recognition of, and the marketing of, what Laurent Berlant has termed “interpersonal identification and empathy”.²⁵ The new language and wider acknowledgement of psychological pain can also be linked to the “development of a ‘therapeutic turn’ in Anglo-American societies during the 1990s,” in which the existence of ‘trauma’ became more widely

²² “We Will Remember Them: Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB,” CAIN Web Service, April, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/victims/docs/bloomfield98.pdf>, 8, 30. Square brackets added.

²³ Nicole R. McClure, “Injured Bodies, Silenced Voices: Reclaiming Personal Trauma and the Narration of Pain in Northern Ireland,” *Peace & Change* 40, no. 4 (October 2015): 499; Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the Past? Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 53-54.

²⁴ Donnan and Simpson, “Silence and Violence among Border Protestants,” 15.

²⁵ Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human rights and narrated lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 23-25; Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy and Politics,” in *Cultural Pluralism: Identity, Politics and the Law*, eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), accessed March 18, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=3414563>, 54.

discussed and accepted.²⁶ Other post-conflict societies in the 1990s experienced similar changes in the place of victims' voices. South Africa undertook 'truth and reconciliation' commissions following the end of Apartheid in 1991, resulting in untold stories and unheard voices gaining recognition.²⁷ Northern Ireland has not commenced such a specific endeavour. As social scientists Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern have noted "addressing outstanding truth and justice issues [was] absent from the Agreement ... avoiding talk of the past, rather than addressing it, was the defining leitmotif of the Irish Peace Process in the 1990s".²⁸ For reasons specific to Northern Ireland, as will be explained in Chapter 1, the discursive shift by which victims of paramilitary violence became more able to speak about their experiences did not take place in an official forum such as a truth and reconciliation project. Instead, these new expressions of victimhood and identity can be examined in the media, the central format in which matters of public debate and discourse were discussed – but not – crucially – systematically addressed.²⁹

In constructing a cultural history of the GFA, I focus on the public discourses surrounding peace, justice and reconciliation which came to prominence in the GFA and referendum debates (Chapter 1) and influenced responses to paramilitary violence (Chapters 2 to 4). I use three case studies to examine the dimensions and changing nature of this influence: the Omagh bombing in 1998, the Holy Cross dispute of 2001 and the murder of Robert McCartney in 2005. Each of these examples highlights the ways in which inter-communal reconciliation, controversies surrounding the justice system and the nature of peace itself, were understood in post-GFA environments. These violent events demonstrated that while paramilitaries would continue to be active in Northern Ireland, the responses, in newspapers, in television, in memoir and autobiography, reflected distinct processes in delegitimising such violence. In these case studies, victims of violence found an unprecedented voice. Equally, each of these case studies demonstrate the ways in which such voices were in themselves shaped by new cultural registers of empathy and identification in ways that added their own dimensions to the peace process.

²⁶ Chis Gillian, "Traumatised by peace? A critique of five assumptions in the theory and practice of conflict related trauma policy in Northern Ireland," *Policy & Politics* 34, no. 2 (2006): 337.

²⁷ Fiona C. Ross, "Women and the politics of identity: Voices in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in *Violence and Belonging: The quest for identity in post-colonial Africa*, ed. Vigdis Broch-Due (New York: Routledge, 2005), 214-215, 233.

²⁸ Patricia Lundy and Mark McGovern, "Attitudes towards a Truth Commission for Northern Ireland in Relation to Party Political Affiliation," *Irish Political Studies* 23, no. 3 (September 2007): 322. Square brackets added.

²⁹ Catherine Happer and Greg Philo, "The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change," *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 1, no. 1 (2013): 321-322.

Chapter 1 outlines the processes leading to the GFA and public reactions to its conclusion. This chapter surveys the political and social context of the Agreement in the 1990s and analyses the subsequent referendum to endorse it, to explore how and for whom the ideas of peace, justice and reconciliation acquired meaning in 1998. Through this process many victims of violence came to prominence, shaping popular perceptions of the GFA and establishing expectations of it.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Omagh bombing. This event resulted in the largest loss of life in a single incident in the Troubles, with 29 people dead and over 200 injured. The bombing was carried out by the Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA or RIRA) who opposed the peace process. Most responses by the victims' families, journalists and politicians argued that no revenge should be carried out in response to the bombing. Crucial to the management of these responses was the wide public and international condemnation it generated, and the ways in which this outrage played out in the discourses already associated with the Agreement. No event in the years after the GFA so thoroughly challenged the principles of the GFA. As Michael Gallagher, father of a victim of Omagh and subject of 2004 film *Omagh*, noted, the bombing "occurred in what was supposed to be peacetime. So many had worked hard to secure that peace with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and that is why Omagh was shocking to so many".³⁰ The bombing created a space for relatives of the victims to engage with the meaning of the GFA and to frame their campaign for justice, by pursuing a successful civil suit against RIRA members, the first of its kind in British history.

Chapter 3 explores the Holy Cross dispute in 2001. Attacks on the Protestant enclave of Glenbryn in north Belfast caused its residents to protest against mothers and children walking to the Catholic Holy Cross girls' school located within 'their' territory. This protest resulted in almost daily riots for three months in late 2001. The protest caused widespread condemnation with a particular focus on the figure of the suffering child. The dispute revealed the tensions inherent in the GFA, especially its focus on creating a more reconciled Northern Ireland. The incident allowed for the protesters, parents of Holy Cross children and journalists to reflect on the progress of the GFA, and how their expectations of reconciliation were being damaged by such an impasse. The parties involved questioned how much had actually changed since the Troubles - especially as the GFA constructed children as the symbol of a more reconciled future. The dispute not only showed nationalist and unionist dissatisfaction with the GFA, it revealed how the use of new avenues of expression,

³⁰ Graham Spencer, *Omagh: Voices of Loss* (London: Appletree, 2005), 9.

especially through the internet, could be utilised by victims (with varying levels of effectiveness).

My final chapter focuses on the murder of Robert McCartney. McCartney was a nationalist from the Short Strand area of east Belfast, and it was here that he was murdered by Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) members on 31 January 2005. While the killing was neither planned nor authorised by PIRA leadership, it led to widespread condemnation of the PIRA and its seeming lack of commitment to the 'peace process.' McCartney's sisters and fiancée formed a campaign to bring Robert's killers to justice, after dozens of potential witnesses to the murder failed to come forward to police. The family's campaign led them to Dublin, London and Washington, where they met United States President George W. Bush in March 2005. The Agreement had, indirectly, empowered the McCartney family - exemplars of the new prominence of personalised trauma - to demand justice from Robert's killers.

Central to the consideration of these three cases is the ways in which they featured in media coverage. The print media was the primary outlet through which discourses surrounding the GFA were debated, shaping how victims of paramilitary violence were seen and heard. Newspapers also dictated which voices became prominent after the GFA. To assess this mix of expression and selection, I focus on the coverage of violence and victims in the most widely-circulated newspapers in Northern Ireland, including the unionist-aligned *Belfast Telegraph* and *Belfast News-Letter* in addition to the nationalist *Irish News*. I also incorporate the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* (The Republic) as well as regional publications relevant to my case studies such as the *Tyrone Constitution*, *Shankill Mirror* and *Andersonstown News*. The Irish Republic's *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* and British tabloids including the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* as well as liberal broadsheets including the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Observer* each reveal the ways in which the GFA influenced reportage and the place of victims in mainstream, and popular print media, in both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

In addition to these sources, I incorporate documentaries and news footage as the other main form of popular media which actively shaped the public culture of the GFA. I utilise video footage from Ulster Television (UTV), the major commercial news channel based in Northern Ireland. I also make use of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Associated Press (AP) archives as both organisations covered the events that constitute

the case studies in this thesis.³¹ Documentaries and news footage formed a crucial component of public discourse in Northern Ireland in both shaping what became ‘newsworthy,’ and specifying which voices were heard. Films focusing on victims’ experiences of post-GFA violence also form a part of my archive, as well as popularly-produced paintings, poems and songs, all of which reflected the forms of expression seized upon in a proliferation of voices after the GFA.³² I incorporate ‘new media’ including blog posts and archived websites from 1998 to 2007, which show how technology played a significant role in the discursive changes brought about by the Agreement.³³ These sources are part of the democratisation of media in Northern Ireland in the 1990s and 2000s, allowing new voices to be heard without requiring the interest or mediation of the print media. In them, ‘interpersonal identification’ became a core medium in responses to violence and in generating political momentum to address these issues.

I also incorporate biographies and autobiographies of key political actors in addition to politicians’ published diaries. These sources - which also proliferated in the course of the period covered, and in reflection on it - illustrate the power for personal storytelling available to the political actors involved in the GFA, and also the importance such key players placed on adding their own personal investment to understanding the process.³⁴ To balance such personalised perspectives, I have also examined autobiographies of less-prominent people affected by violence in each of my case studies.³⁵ The publication (and sometimes self-publication) of these sources demonstrates the willingness of victims and their relatives to

³¹ UTV is owned and operated by the Independent Television Network (ITV). ITV is owned by the Independent Television News (ITN) group and it is through ITN’s website ‘ITN Source’ (<http://www.itnsource.com/en/>) that I have accessed footage broadcast on UTV. I would like to thank the BBC archive in Belfast for allowing me to view their archived footage.

³² Mark Brozel, *Holy Cross* (BBC, 2003); Pete Travis, *Omagh* (A-Film Distribution, 2004).

³³ “The Omagh Bombing - Your Reaction,” BBC News, August 16, 1998, accessed January 10, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/reaction/152096.stm; “The Blanket: A Journal of Protest and Dissent,” 2008, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/>; “Internet Archive,” Internet Archive, accessed September 19, 2016, <https://archive.org/>.

³⁴ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004); Bertie Ahern and Richard Aldous, *Bertie Ahern: The Autobiography* (London: Arrow Books, 2010); Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London: Arrow Books, 2011); George Mitchell, *The Negotiator: A Memoir* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Mary McAleese, *Love in Chaos: Spiritual Growth and the Search for Peace in Northern Ireland* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999); Dean Godson, *Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal of Unionism* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 2004); Steve Bruce, *Paisley: Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Liam Clarke and Kathryn Johnston, *Martin McGuinness: From Guns to Government* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2003); Roy Garland, *Gusty Spence* (London: Blackstaff Press, 2001); Gerry Adams, *An Irish Journal* (Dingle: Brandon, 2001); Jonathan Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008); Alastair Campbell, *The Irish Diaries [1994-2003]*, ed. Kathy Gilfillan (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2013).

³⁵ Kevin Skelton, *Sent by an Angel: A True Story of Tragic Loss and Unexpected Love* (London: Hay House, 2011); Anne Bill, *Beyond the Red Gauntlet: The Silent Voices of Upper Ardoyne Amidst the Travesty of Holy Cross* (Belfast: AB Publications, 2002); Aidan Troy, *Holy Cross: A Personal Experience* (Dublin: Currach Press, 2005); Catherine McCartney, *Walls of Silence* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007); Raymond McCord, *Justice For Raymond* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008).

reflect their experiences, and also, the public appetite for such personalised ways of comprehending violence. The biographical and autobiographical turn of the 1990s - pervasive across so many forms of cultural production - forms an integral part of the GFA's context and significance.³⁶

The GFA was a transformative event in the history of Northern Ireland. For the first time, the British, Irish and American governments as well as unionists, nationalists, republicans and loyalists agreed on a set of principles and the necessity of 'peace' as endorsed by a popular vote. Despite useful scholarship and personal reflections from key actors, there remains another story to be told. In constructing a cultural history, focused on public discourse, we can better understand the larger, non-political impacts of the GFA and how unionists and nationalists, Protestants and Catholics, viewed Northern Ireland after the Troubles. By exploring discourses surrounding peace, justice, reconciliation, and by employing largely underutilised sources, including autobiographies of victims of violence after the GFA, this study offers an alternative narrative to the prevailing political focus on the Agreement. In constructing a cultural history of the GFA, we can better understand how people, especially victims of paramilitary violence and their relatives, saw the 'new' Northern Ireland, and their place in it.

³⁶ Tom Wengraf, Prue Chamberlayne and Joanna Bornat, "A Biographical Turn in the Social Sciences? A British-European View," *Cultural Studies - Critical Methodologies* 2, no. 2 (2002): 251-252.

Chapter 1: The Belfast Agreement, 1998



Figure 1.¹ David Trimble (left), Bono (centre) and John Hume (right). This image was taken at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast on 18 May 1998. This was an important moment for the YES campaign and was the first time that Trimble and Hume campaigned for the Agreement in public together.

On 18 May 1998, two men shook hands on a stage. In the blue shirt was David Trimble and in the yellow shirt was John Hume (see figure 1). The choice to wear shirts rather than suits was made by Trimble, who believed the outfit change could make the pair seem “less formal”.² After months of campaigning in their respective electorates, an outfit change still seemed needed to please thousands of screaming teenagers who now packed the newly refurbished Waterfront Hall in Belfast. The venue formed part of the revitalisation of the waterfront area of Belfast, a physical sign of the re-branding of Northern Ireland as a modern tourism and investment opportunity, after the republican and loyalist paramilitary ceasefires in 1994. Joining the men on stage were the Portadown-based band ‘Ash,’ probably the most popular Northern Irish band of the 1990s, and Irish band U2, who remained an influential force in international pop music. The audience of children were handpicked to represent both Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland, while the concert itself contained iconic songs of peace, optimism and hopefulness: ‘One,’ ‘Give Peace a Chance’

¹ “Iconic images from the Northern Ireland peace process,” BBC News, June 27, 2012, accessed 30 September, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-18611032>.

² Sean O’Hagan, “I was there, helping to make history. (I just wish I hadn’t been scratching my chin),” *Observer*, May 24, 1998, 2.

and ‘Don’t Let Me Down’.³ It featured a minute of silence for victims of the Troubles. The Reverend Dr Ian Paisley criticised the concert, commenting that Trimble was “already rocking now and he would be rolling on Friday”.⁴ All this effort - the song choices, the location, the handshake, the shirts - was part of a final push to secure a YES vote on Friday 22 May that could see an end to political violence in Northern Ireland. This date marked the referendum in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic on the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement (GFA).⁵

The GFA and referendum campaign not only created the framework for peace in Northern Ireland, these events established the ways in which peace, justice and reconciliation would be conceptualised and discussed in the years after the Agreement. The public discourse surrounding the GFA revolved around these three ideas which shaped the expectations of what the Agreement was meant to achieve. The media coverage of the GFA and the referendum revealed contradictions and unresolved tensions in the peace, justice and reconciliation advocated by the Agreement. This chapter analyses these themes - the cultural history of which will be developed in this thesis - at their inception in the GFA.

Historical Preamble

Captain Terence O’Neill, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland from 1963 to 1969, noted in 1967 that “all too often any discussion of Irish affairs becomes lost in a lengthy historical preamble, long before reaching the present day”.⁶ Taking this criticism into account, some background information to the conflict euphemistically called the ‘Troubles’ remains necessary. In nineteenth-century Ireland, ‘Home Rule’ referred to the popular political movement to create a devolved Irish Parliament subservient to Westminster, an idea championed by the Irish Parliamentary Party.⁷ Under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell, the party held the balance of power in Westminster in 1885, the same year it was

³ While U2 were strong advocates for peace, John Lennon had publicly supported the IRA in the early 1970s, and Paul McCartney’s song ‘Give Ireland Back to the Irish’ was banned on the BBC in 1972.

⁴ Kim Sengupta, “Oldest swingers join Bono’s crusade to rock young voters,” *Independent*, May 20, 1998, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/oldest-swingers-join-bonos-crusade-to-rock-young-voters-1158569.html>.

⁵ Jonathan Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), 108. As Powell points out, unionists tend to refer to the agreement as the Belfast Agreement, while nationalists tend to refer to it as the Good Friday Agreement. I have chosen the latter, as the abbreviation ‘GFA’ is more concise than ‘the Belfast Agreement’ and because it is used by academics from both unionist and nationalist backgrounds.

⁶ Terence O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 123.

⁷ Richard Bourke, “Introduction,” in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 10-12.

officially supported by the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland.⁸ Many Protestants, especially in the northern province of Ulster, feared that any Irish Parliament would be Catholic dominated and hostile to their interests. In the early twentieth-century, Ulster's population was largely made up of Protestant descendants of Scottish and English settlers who were the majority in counties Down, Antrim, Armagh and Londonderry.⁹ In 1912, half a million Ulster men and women signed the 'Ulster Covenant.' This document declared that

Home Rule would be disastrous to the material well-being of Ulster as well as of the whole of Ireland, subversive of our civil and religious freedom, destructive of our citizenship, and perilous to the unity of the Empire ... in the event of such a Parliament being forced upon us, we further solemnly and mutually pledge ourselves to refuse to recognise its authority.¹⁰

In 1913, opposition to Home Rule in Ulster resulted in the creation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) under the enigmatic Dublin-born lawyer Sir Edward Carson. Armed with military equipment purchased from Germany, the organisation numbered over 90,000 men and pledged to resist Home Rule by force.¹¹

In 1916, against the background of the First World War (1914 to 1918), the 'Irish Volunteers,' along with other republican paramilitary groups such as the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), took part in the 1916 Easter Rising. The Rising, centred in Dublin, was a rebellion aimed at overthrowing British rule in Ireland and establishing an independent Irish Republic. The 'Proclamation of the Irish Republic' circulated during the Rising declared

the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people.¹²

The proclamation's signatories claimed that Ireland had always been a nation, that British imperialism had attempted to extinguish this nation, and that the Irish people had the right to an independent state. The proclamation's claims were fundamentally incompatible with the Ulster Covenant's refusal to recognise Home Rule, let alone an independent Irish republic which would encompass Ulster. After the failed rising, the Irish Volunteers aimed

⁸ Paul Bew, *C.S. Parnell* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1980), 68.

⁹ Youssef Courbage, "The Demographic Factor in Ireland's Movement Towards Partition (1607-1921)," *Population: An English Selection* 9, no. 1 (1997): 185.

¹⁰ "Understanding the Ulster Covenant," Ulster Scots Community Network, 2011, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://ulster-scots.com/uploads/USCNCovenant.pdf>, 2.

¹¹ David Fitzpatrick, "Ireland Since 1870," in *The Oxford History of Ireland*, ed. R. F. Foster (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 191-192.

¹² "Proclamation of the Irish Republic, 24 April 1916," CAIN Web Service, comps. Martin Melaugh and Fionnuala McKenna, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/pir24416.htm>.

to create an Irish republic through a campaign of escalatory violence against the British state.¹³ The Irish Volunteers would come to be called the Irish Republican Army (IRA) throughout the subsequent Irish War of Independence (1919 to 1921).¹⁴ In response to the War of Independence, Westminster passed the 1920 Government of Ireland Act which created Northern Ireland, containing six of the nine historic counties of the province of Ulster: Armagh, Antrim, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone. The historic province of Ulster also contained Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, but the inclusion of these counties would have threatened a Protestant majority in the creation of Northern Ireland.¹⁵ On this basis these counties were excluded from Northern Ireland. Negotiations between the British and Irish governments in December 1921 resulted in the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, comprised of the remaining 26 counties of Ireland.¹⁶

Violence surrounded the creation of Northern Ireland. Almost 500 people are estimated to have died in clashes between the IRA and Ulster Special Constabulary (USC), as well as Protestant and Catholic civilians in Belfast during the early 1920s.¹⁷ Even as Belfast's 'Troubles' of the 1920s subsided, many Catholics did not feel at home in the newly created Northern Ireland and many Protestants were suspicious of the political threat posed by the Catholic minority.¹⁸ Protestants in Northern Ireland remained overwhelmingly unionist, while Catholics retained hopes for a united Ireland independent of Britain. Brian Barton has summarised the early period of Northern Ireland as one in which Catholics experienced "a large, armed, almost exclusively protestant police force; emergency powers applied selectively; a judicial system with a reputation for bias; rural electoral districts gerrymandered; and P.R. [Proportional Representation] extinguished in local elections".¹⁹ The Ulster Unionist Council (UUC), which had formed in 1905 in order to oppose Home Rule, now governed at the newly created Parliament at Stormont as the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), without any serious political challenge in those chambers from 1921 until it was

¹³ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*, 3rd ed. (London: Pan Macmillan, 2012), 15-17.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-16.

¹⁵ James Anderson and Liam O'Dowd, "Imperialism and nationalism: The Home Rule struggle and border creation in Ireland, 1885-1925," *Political Geography* 26, no. 8 (2007): 945.

¹⁶ "The Anglo-Irish Treaty, 6 December 1921," CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, December 6, 1921, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/ait1921.htm>.

¹⁷ Alan F. Parkinson, *Belfast's Unholy War: The Troubles of the 1920s* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 12.

¹⁸ James Loughlin, "Politics and Society, 1800-1960," in *Ulster Since 1600: Politics, Economy, and Society*, eds. Liam Kennedy and Philip Ollerenshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 241.

¹⁹ Brian Barton, "Northern Ireland, 1920-25," in *Ireland, 1921-84*, ed. Hill J. R., vol. VII of *A New History of Ireland*, eds. F. J. Byrne, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 196-197. Square brackets added.

suspended in 1972. Northern Ireland's ministers were ultimately subservient to Westminster especially in matters of taxation.²⁰

Discrimination against Catholics in government and the civil service was common and widespread gerrymandering extended to local councils.²¹ Preferential treatment for Protestants and suspicions towards the Catholic minority were publicly reinforced by Northern Ireland's political leaders, as future Prime Minister Sir Basil Brooke declared in 1933 that Catholics were "endeavouring to get in everywhere and were out with all their force and might to destroy the power and constitution of Ulster".²² The IRA conducted the so called 'Border Campaign' against the British state as represented by Stormont from 1956 to 1962, but this was largely ineffective as it had little support from the nationalist community.²³

In the mid-1960s, inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States, many Northern Irish Catholics began protesting against their continuing lack of political representation coupled with discrimination in accessing employment and housing. The civil rights movement in Northern Ireland began by promoting non-violent protests in the late-1960s. Various organisations, including the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) established in 1967, and regional groups including the Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC) created in 1968, formed the backbone of this movement. The civil rights movement had no central leader and was, at various times in different areas, led by people including Bernadette Devlin, Seamus Mallon, Eamonn McCann and John Hume, all of whom would eventually hold elected office.²⁴ Yet these protests elicited a violent response from the largely Protestant police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and the overwhelmingly Protestant militia, the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC).²⁵ Many working-class Protestants believed that the "ordinary working-class was as discriminated against as much as any Catholic" and viewed these protests as a cover for nationalist political aspirations that heralded the re-emergence of the IRA.²⁶ There was some IRA support for

²⁰ Ibid., 163.

²¹ Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London: Penguin, 2007), 6-7.

²² Brian Barton, *Brookeborough: The making of a Prime Minister* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1988), 78.

²³ Matt Treacy, *The IRA 1956-69: Rethinking the Republic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), accessed January 3, 2017, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=1069729>, 9-10.

²⁴ Feargal Cochrane, *Northern Ireland: The Reluctant Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), accessed June 8, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bv40>, 42. After more than forty years of public life, Eamonn McCann was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2016.

²⁵ The USC was created in 1920 as a militia group to assist the RUC in countering the activities of the IRA. Its successor was the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), created in 1970 which was amalgamated into the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR) in 1992.

²⁶ Peter Taylor, *Loyalists* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 49-51.

the civil rights movement,²⁷ although the majority of civil rights leaders and supporters were nationalist civilians. The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was established in 1966, taking its name from Carson's UVF of the 1910s. The 'new' UVF aimed to maintain Northern Ireland's place within the UK and defeat republicanism by executing IRA members and supporters.²⁸ After the UVF accidentally killed a Protestant woman and a Catholic civilian during one operation at a pub on 26 June 1966,²⁹ O'Neill declared the organisation illegal.³⁰

Counter-demonstrations to these civil rights marches were led by the firebrand preacher turned politician Ian Paisley throughout the late 1960s and often resulted in street violence. Paisley became a bulwark of Ulster unionism in the 1960s and in 1971 established his own party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Paisley served as Member of Parliament (MP) for North Antrim from 1970 to 2010, and as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for Northern Ireland from 1979 to 2004. He was also moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster (which he founded) from 1951 to 2008. Steve Bruce argues that "to a majority of unionists, he is the man who preserved the union from premature compromise".³¹ Political scientist Feargal Cochrane describes Paisley, from the 1960s onwards, as "a past-master at scaring the unionist electorate into the polling booths to vote for his populist and moralizing messages".³² This is the Paisley we encounter the 1960s, first opposing ecumenical relations between major churches in Northern Ireland before leading the loyalist reaction to the civil rights movement.³³ During the late 1960s, violent clashes between nationalists, counter-demonstrators and the RUC in Derry, Northern Ireland's second largest (and highly gerrymandered) city, grew more frequent. In August 1969, protracted rioting led the Northern Ireland cabinet to request the British Army to enter Belfast and Derry to regain control of the streets. The hope was that their presence would be a temporary measure.³⁴ Nationalists attempted to destroy factories while Catholic neighbourhoods in west and north Belfast were burned, causing thousands of refugees to flee the city - remembered by many nationalists as a 'pogrom' against their community.³⁵ The IRA, far smaller than it had been in the 1920s, was logistically unable to defend Catholic

²⁷ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 41-42.

²⁸ Taylor, *Loyalists*, 41.

²⁹ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007), 28-29.

³⁰ Marc Mulholland, *The Longest War: Northern Ireland's Troubled History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 67.

³¹ Bruce, *Paisley*, 280.

³² Cochrane, *Reluctant Peace*, 190.

³³ James Loughlin, *The Ulster Question Since 1945*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 57-58.

³⁴ Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 154.

³⁵ Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 417-418.

neighbourhoods. This failure, and a growing divide between republicans from the Irish republic and younger, more militant members from Northern Ireland, resulted in the split between the Official IRA (OIRA) and Provisional IRA (PIRA) in 1969.³⁶ The PIRA was responsible for an overwhelming proportion of republican violence throughout the Troubles,³⁷ dwarfing the OIRA and its splinter group, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), in terms of members, weapons and activities.³⁸ The death toll in Northern Ireland would rise when the PIRA focused its attacks on the British Army beginning in 1971.³⁹

Disastrous government policies further alienated the Catholic minority, including an extremely unpopular curfew in the republican heartland of the Falls Road in west Belfast in 1970 and the introduction of internment without trial for suspected paramilitaries in 1971. Both initiatives seriously alienated the nationalist community and increased support for the PIRA.⁴⁰ In 1972, the deaths of thirteen unarmed protesters in Derry at the hands of the British Parachute Regiment, an incident later called 'Bloody Sunday,' further bolstered nationalist support for the PIRA. The PIRA's response to Bloody Sunday, the bombing of the Belfast City Centre which killed mostly Protestant civilians, would come to be known as 'Bloody Friday.' This event directly influenced many Protestants to join loyalist paramilitary organisations, including future loyalist politician David Ervine, who joined the UVF days after the bombing.⁴¹ The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) was created as a conglomerate of separate loyalist paramilitary groups in 1971 and would continue its campaign, largely against Catholic civilians, under its cover name the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF). The largest paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, the UDA had tens of thousands of members and associates throughout the Troubles.⁴² Both the UVF and UDA targeted the PIRA and its associates, although an overwhelming majority of their victims throughout the conflict were Catholic civilians.⁴³ Focusing its violence on security forces in Northern Ireland

³⁶ English, *Armed Struggle*, 107-108.

³⁷ Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 29.

³⁸ Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 283.

³⁹ Mulholland, *Longest War*, 87.

⁴⁰ Cochrane, *Reluctant Peace*, 57.

⁴¹ Taylor, *Loyalists*, 106-109.

⁴² Ian S. Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty: A History of the UDA* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), accessed May 7, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=264973>, 195; Paul Tanney, "15,000 UDA members march in Belfast," *Irish News*, August 20, 2001, accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/15-000-uda-members-march-in-belfast-1.323339>.

⁴³ Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*, 27-30.

including the Army, RUC and UDR, the PIRA nonetheless targeted Protestant civilians in their operations.⁴⁴

The 1970s and 1980s were characterised not only by a war between the PIRA and British Army, but paramilitary violence directed towards Protestant and Catholic civilians. The ‘war’ continued for a number of reasons. By the mid-1970s, the PIRA leadership realized it could not achieve a decisive military victory against the British Army and adopted the ‘long war’ strategy, expanding the organisation’s arms supplies and beginning to focus on political change, while continuously attacking the British Army.⁴⁵ Officially, the PIRA did not target Protestant civilians, although many Protestants were massacred as a result of its actions, famously at Kingsmill, Armagh in 1976 and the La Mon Restaurant bombing in 1978.⁴⁶ Loyalist paramilitaries, equally unable to militarily defeat the PIRA, usually responded to republican violence by killing Catholic civilians. This would result in a retaliatory PIRA action, and then visa-versa. This sectarian zero-sum game was a key feature of the Troubles, a psyche that David Ervine later termed the “hamster wheel to hell”.⁴⁷ It continued, in part, because of the ‘self-appointed’ nature of the paramilitaries. Republicans and loyalists both took it upon themselves both to defend ‘their’ communities, and to respond to attacks from the ‘other’ community.

In response to the civil rights movement, O’Neill proposed changes to housing allocation and legislation aimed at reducing gerrymandering in Derry in November 1968. These reforms did not satisfy the nationalist population⁴⁸ and O’Neill resigned in 1969, just months before British troops first began patrolling the streets of Derry and Belfast. The PIRA, loyalist paramilitaries and the army escalated operations, leading to over 400 deaths in 1972 alone.⁴⁹ Political violence led to political realignments. The non-sectarian Alliance Party and the nationalist Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) were both formed in 1970, followed the DUP in 1971. Violence on the streets of Northern Ireland fractured relations between Stormont and the British government and led to the suspension of Stormont on 1 April 1972 and the introduction of ‘Direct Rule’ from Westminster.⁵⁰ The British Government’s ‘Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals’ document, written after the suspension of Stormont, proposed “giving minority interests a share in the exercise of

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2007), 150-152.

⁴⁶ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, 611-612, 745-747.

⁴⁷ Ed Moloney, *Voices from the Grave: Two Men’s War in Ireland* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 346.

⁴⁸ Mulholland, *Longest War*, 63-64.

⁴⁹ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, 138.

⁵⁰ Cochrane, *Reluctant Peace*, 65-66.

executive power”.⁵¹ In practice, this meant giving nationalists a place in the government of Northern Ireland as a partner in government rather than as an opposition party. This proposal resulted in an agreement between the SDLP, UUP and Alliance Party at Sunningdale in Berkshire, called the ‘Sunningdale Agreement.’ Crucially, the PIRA opposed the deal, as did many members of the UUP and most importantly, loyalist paramilitaries. In 1974, the Ulster Council Workers (UWC) organized a strike alongside loyalist paramilitaries which brought about the resignation of Brian Faulkner, the sixth (and final) Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. This led to the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement and power-sharing assembly.

Many leaders from 1973 were active politicians in 1998. Indeed, politicians responsible for the GFA would reflect on the opportunities and perils of Sunningdale.⁵² One loyalist active in 1973 was Augustus ‘Gusty’ Spence, then serving a sentence in Long Kesh prison where he took over command of the UVF prisoners.⁵³ Spence delivered the loyalist ceasefire in 1994 and in 1998, he headed the delegation of the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), the political representatives of the UVF, in negotiations resulting in the GFA. In the early 1970s, Gerry Adams was at the same prison, having been arrested in 1973 with key members of the PIRA’s Belfast Brigade.⁵⁴ Adams became president of Sinn Féin, the PIRA’s political wing, in 1981 and helped steer violent republicanism towards politics, culminating in the GFA. Outside prison, David Trimble joined the radical Vanguard Unionist Progressive Party (VUPP) while lecturing in Law at Queen’s University Belfast, and was a legal advisor to the 1974 UWC strike.⁵⁵ A Queen’s law student of this time was the Ardoyne-born Mary McAleese, who graduated in 1973 and went on to become President of the Irish Republic (1997 to 2011). Meanwhile, John Hume was part of the new power-sharing government established by Sunningdale in 1973. By 1998, Hume was crucial in negotiating the GFA, which his SDLP colleague Seamus Mallon called “Sunningdale for slow learners”.⁵⁶ Clearly, key figures who crafted the GFA had been active in both paramilitary and political groups in the 1970s. Thus, the spectre of the Sunningdale Agreement’s collapse and violence of the early 1970s would shape the formulation of the GFA.

⁵¹ “Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, 1973, March, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/cmd5259.htm>.

⁵² Alastair Campbell, *The Irish Diaries [1994-2003]*, ed. Kathy Gilfillan (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 2013), 110; Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room*, 106; Moloney, *Voices from the Grave*, 346.

⁵³ Steve Bruce, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 117-118.

⁵⁴ Moloney, *Secret History of the IRA*, 133.

⁵⁵ Dean Godson, *Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal of Unionism* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 2004), 43-45.

⁵⁶ Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*, 267.

By the 1990s, few civilians and victims of the conflict had public outlets in which to express their fears and hopes for the future. An enormous gap existed between the political process, paramilitary violence and public opinion. In 1993, the independently researched and funded ‘Opsahl Report’ under the leadership of Norwegian scholar Torkel Opsahl addressed this imbalance by publishing the findings of a wide-ranging citizens’ inquiry. Marianne Elliott recalled the authors’ desires to give “preferential treatment to those whose voices were normally not heard,” including “women, working-class Protestants, republicans, and the young”.⁵⁷ As a result of these submissions, the report recommended that Irish nationalism be legally recognised, the Irish republic remove its constitutional claim to Northern Ireland, the British government open informal channels of communication with Sinn Féin and paramilitaries work towards a ceasefire.⁵⁸ Crucially, the report introduced the idea of ‘Parity of Esteem’ for both communities.⁵⁹ This required both communities to be respected as equals: nationalists could aspire to a united Ireland while unionists were free to advocate for the maintenance of the union with the UK.⁶⁰ None of the submissions believed that a “military solution” could end paramilitary violence and most thought that paramilitaries would need to be involved in any “peace-seeking process”.⁶¹ The report, created without either British or Irish government support,⁶² made many recommendations which would materialise in the GFA and demonstrated that ‘the public’ wanted a political solution to the conflict. Nevertheless, paramilitary groups had yet to publicly accept the possibility of a political solution to the conflict.

By the 1990s, with the PIRA intact but Northern Ireland still part of the UK, neither republicans nor loyalists could claim ‘victory.’ Civilian deaths were the single largest group of fatalities associated with the Troubles, accounting for a total of 1967 out of 3720 total deaths from 1969 to 2007.⁶³ One incident, the 1987 Enniskillen bombing in which the PIRA killed twelve Protestant civilians, resulted in backlash from republicans and seriously altered the republican movement’s strategy, facilitating a shift towards the ‘peace process’.⁶⁴ One month after the bombing, Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin, met John Hume in secret

⁵⁷ Marianne Elliott, “The Role of Civil Society in Conflict Resolution: The Opsahl Commission in Northern Ireland, 1992-93,” *New Hibernia Review* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 88.

⁵⁸ Torkel Opsahl et al., *A Citizens’ Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*, ed. Andy Pollak (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993), 111-115.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁰ Jyrki Ruohomäki, “Parity of Esteem: A Conceptual Approach to the Northern Ireland Conflict,” *Alternatives* 35, no. 1 (2010): 169.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Elliott, “Role of Civil Society,” 88.

⁶³ Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*, 29.

⁶⁴ Moloney, *Secret History of the IRA*, 278-279.

for the first time, with Hume acting as a representative for Irish Taoiseach Charles Haughey.⁶⁵ By 1993, loyalists entered into similar secret talks with the British and Irish governments.⁶⁶ Under British Prime Minister John Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds, the 'Joint Declaration of Peace' or 'Downing Street Declaration' reiterated that the British Government had no "selfish or economic interest" in Northern Ireland, and that the government's "primary interest is to see peace, stability and reconciliation established by agreement among all the people who inhabit the island".⁶⁷ The declaration did not explicitly refer to paramilitaries, rather appealing to "all concerned to grasp the opportunity for a new departure".⁶⁸ This declaration opened up a space to negotiate with paramilitaries as it signalled that the British and Irish governments were now working together. This marked a distinctive conceptual shift from previous British statements on Northern Ireland, especially Margaret Thatcher's (reciprocated) hostility towards republicans and occasionally frosty relations with the Irish Republic in the 1980s. The document was explicitly intended as the "starting point of a peace process designed to culminate in a political settlement," a shift away from violence and towards a political solution to the conflict.⁶⁹ The British government's statement eventually resulted in a PIRA ceasefire in August 1994,⁷⁰ helped in part by back channels of secret communications between the British government and the PIRA.⁷¹ This was followed by a loyalist ceasefire in October, announced by the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) representing both the UVF and UDA.⁷²

There are numerous reasons, circumstantial and structural, why the 'peace process' occurred in the 1990s and not before. In the 1990s, American support for the 'peace process' in Northern Ireland was strengthened by President Bill Clinton's visits to Belfast beginning in 1995, and the appointment of Senator George Mitchell as United States Special Envoy for Northern Ireland in the same year.⁷³ Clinton had taken an interest in the conflict in Northern

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *Loyalists*, 222-223.

⁶⁷ "Joint Declaration on Peace: The Downing Street Declaration, Wednesday 15 December 1993," CAIN Web Service, comp. Ciaran Mullan, December 15, 1993, accessed January 4, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/dsd151293.htm>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) Ceasefire Statement, 31 August 1994," CAIN Web Service, comp. Ciaran Mullan, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira31894.htm>.

⁷¹ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "Together in the middle: Back-channel negotiation in the Irish peace process," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 6 (2011): 770.

⁷² "CLMC Ceasefire Statement 13th October 1994," CAIN Web Service, comp. Ciaran Mullan, last modified February 9, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/clmc131094.htm>.

⁷³ Mitchell had previously been a Senator for Maine from 1980 to 1995 and the Democratic Senate Majority Leader from 1989 to 1995.

Ireland as a Rhodes Scholar during the late 1960s,⁷⁴ an interest that he had retained during his Presidency from 1993 to 2001. Another Oxonian, Tony Blair, requested that his college subscribe to the republican newspaper *An Phoblacht* (The Republic) in the early 1970s, demonstrating the future Prime Minister's early interest in the conflict.⁷⁵ Blair had ancestors who were Ulster Protestants, while his wife Cherie was Catholic.⁷⁶ He recalled in his 2011 autobiography that as the "70s rolled on into the 80s and 90s, the names of the failed peace attempts became imprinted on our consciousness," indicating his (perhaps retrospective) understanding of previous attempts at peace.⁷⁷ Blair's election as Prime Minister in 1997 proved fortuitous as his House of Commons majority meant that, unlike his Conservative Party predecessor John Major, he did not have to rely on the UUP for votes in order to pass legislation in Westminster. Simultaneously, the 1997 general election in the Irish Republic saw Bertie Ahern, a popular Fianna Fáil politician, elected as Taoiseach. Blair and Ahern's were both (relatively) young new national leaders with an interest in (and lack of political baggage on) Northern Ireland. Clinton, Blair and Ahern were in a stronger position than previous leaders to facilitate dialogue between paramilitaries and politicians, and part of their political appeal rested on a capacity to make such a decisive break with the past. Their involvement indicated a significant shift in cultural frameworks: these were popular, charismatic politicians who reflected, or projected, a distinctively personalised integrity. A discourse of individual conscience, tinged with political celebrity, emerged in relation to Northern Ireland. Behind that public discourse, secret dialogue between Adams and Hume, loyalists and republicans, the British and Irish governments as well as the increasing mediating role of the United States, contributed to the eventual paramilitary ceasefires in 1994.⁷⁸

Between 1994 and 1998, representatives from republican and loyalist paramilitaries, unionists, nationalists and non-sectarian parties, as well as representatives from the United States, United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, converged on Stormont in order to discuss a peace settlement. After Sinn Féin entered talks in 1997, the DUP left in protest. Having (consciously or unconsciously) recognised some lessons of Sunningdale, and the recommendations of commissions like the Opsahl report, participants desired to keep Sinn Féin in talks, fearing that without the party's inclusion, republicans would return to violence.

⁷⁴ Peter Coulter, "Christmas with the Clintons: When Bill and Hillary Came to Belfast in 1995," BBC News, January 18, 2013, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-21029865>.

⁷⁵ Paul Bew, *Ireland: The Politics of Enmity 1789-2006* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 555.

⁷⁶ Tony Blair, *A Journey* (London: Arrow Books, 2011), 154-155.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷⁸ Cochrane, *Reluctant Peace*, 129.

A deadline of 9 April was set to establish a workable solution that could be acceptable to all parties involved. The proposals discussed were categorised into three strands. The first sought to foster better relations within Northern Ireland through the establishment of a new political body and the maintenance of paramilitary ceasefires. A 108-member Assembly (the Northern Ireland Assembly) was proposed, containing a power-sharing cabinet comprised of members of each major party, likely (at that time) to be the UUP and SDLP. Ministers would be allocated through a variation of the D'Hondt system: the largest party would nominate a First Minister, the second largest would nominate a Deputy First Minister while other ministers would be chosen from all elected members and parties.⁷⁹ This model allowed unionists and nationalists to share power, rather than the majority party ruling, while also allowing the two smaller parties, Sinn Féin and the DUP, a place in government. This proposal also envisaged, for the first time that republicans be represented in the government of Northern Ireland.⁸⁰ In addition to these measures, paramilitary prisoners would be released within two years (with the exception of those who posed a serious risk to public safety) with the hope that by this time they would have decommissioned their weapons and soon afterwards disband.⁸¹ During negotiations, Blair wrote a letter to Trimble stating that paramilitary decommissioning should begin immediately after the referendum. Blair's also stated that despite exclusion from the assembly being decided on a "cross-community basis," he would support changes if this proved to be ineffective.⁸² Blair effectively promised Trimble that if the PIRA did not decommission and Sinn Féin remained in the Assembly, he would support stronger measures in achieving either decommissioning or Sinn Féin's suspension. According to Trimble, these reassurances gave him the confidence to take the Agreement to the UUC, resulting in the council, and thus the UUP accepting the Agreement.⁸³

The second strand of the Agreement focused on healing divisions between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. In order to achieve this aim three North/South consultative bodies were formed, including the 'North/South Ministerial Council,' the 'North/South Inter-Parliamentary Association' and the 'North/South Consultative Forum'.⁸⁴ Strand three

⁷⁹ Brendan O'Leary, "The Nature of the Agreement," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 4 (1998): 1663-1664.

⁸⁰ In 1998, Sinn Féin did had two seats in Westminster, although the party maintained its policy of abstentionism in the British Parliament.

⁸¹ "Caution over Prisoner Release Bill," BBC News, June 5, 1998, accessed March 22, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/107221.stm.

⁸² David Trimble, "The Belfast Agreement," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 4 (1998): 1168.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1168-1669.

⁸⁴ The North/South Consultative Forum has, as of writing in March 2017, never met.

aimed at fostering better relations between the governments of the UK and the Irish Republic. Representative bodies including a 'British-Irish Council' and new 'British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference' would be established to improve relations between the UK and the Irish Republic. Britain's constitutional claim over Northern Ireland remained, while the Republic of Ireland agreed to vote on changing Articles two and three of its constitution, which claimed Northern Ireland's six counties. These articles, originally written into the Irish Constitution of 1937 were considered a threat to Northern Ireland's sovereignty by unionists.⁸⁵ While these changes reassured unionists, others like Paisley saw the new bodies as "at best, for Unionism, a luncheon club, but at worst it is a council where the two Governments will continue to interfere in the affairs of Northern Ireland over the heads of the people of the Province".⁸⁶

The original 9 April deadline expired, but the deal was finally agreed to on Friday 10 April, Good Friday on the liturgical calendar. The process - so dominated by the personalities of key figures - generated an atmosphere of almost redemptive power. Blair's press secretary Alistair Campbell described the moment of the 8:10 am press conference announcing the deal, having stayed up most of the night, as "amazing, unbelievable. I actually felt like crying but I held it together ... I got home, wired and exhausted, and still trying to remember how it all came together in the end".⁸⁷ The Agreement itself was also pragmatic. The proposals allowed both republicans and loyalists, most crucially the PIRA, to claim victory.⁸⁸ Sinn Féin were able to position the Agreement as part of a process leading towards a united Ireland,⁸⁹ as the 'consent principle' of the GFA allowed Northern Ireland to become a part of the Irish Republic through democratic means. Loyalist groups were able to rest on the reality that, despite some input of the Irish Republic in Northern Irish affairs, the union with Britain had been maintained.⁹⁰ Nationalists now had more political expression through the new power-sharing Assembly, and stronger links to the Irish Republic. Yet, there remained significant opposition to the GFA in Northern Ireland, and support for the Agreement would only erode in the months and years after Good Friday. Catholic support for the deal was

⁸⁵ Trimble, "The Belfast Agreement," 1152.

⁸⁶ Ian Paisley, "Peace Agreement - Or Last Piece in a Sellout Agreement?," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 4 (1998): 1306-1309.

⁸⁷ Campbell, *Irish Diaries*, 116-117.

⁸⁸ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "The Longest Negotiation: British Policy, IRA Strategy and the Making of the Northern Ireland Peace Settlement," *Political Studies* 63, no. 1 (2015): 216.

⁸⁹ Mitchel McLaughlin, "Opening Address by Sinn Féin Chairperson Mitchel McLaughlin," Sinn Féin Ard Fheis, April 18, 1998, accessed December 15, 2016, <http://www.sinnfein.org/ardfheis/98ardfheis/mitchel.html>.

⁹⁰ "AGREEMENT?," *Combat*, accessed March 7, Linen Hall Library, Belfast.

consistently strong, whereas Protestant support was difficult to precisely calculate. The Agreement was most likely supported by just over half of Protestant voters in 1998.⁹¹

By 1998, over 3500 people had died as a result of the conflict. Almost 20,000 had been incarcerated and over 40,000 had been injured in a province of 1.5 million people.⁹² With the scale of casualties and timescale of the conflict in mind, we can better understand why voters in 1998 did not want the conflict to continue for another generation, and why 71.1 per cent voted YES to the GFA, which promised something approaching ‘peace,’ ‘justice’ and hopefully ‘reconciliation’ between Catholics and Protestants. The Agreement attracted widespread international endorsement and support from all major political parties in Northern Ireland, with the crucial exception of the DUP. The 22 July referendum finalised the deal, with a strong turnout of 81 per cent of eligible people voting in Northern Ireland.⁹³ 71.1 per cent of Northern Irish voters and 94.39 per cent of Irish voters cast YES votes in the referendum.⁹⁴ In 1998, the Nobel Peace Prize was jointly awarded to John Hume and David Trimble. This choice both recognised the work of these men, and sought to “inspire peaceful solutions to other religious, ethnic and national conflicts around the world”.⁹⁵ It also compounded the perception that the Troubles was now being superseded by a culture of internationalised recognition of trauma and promises of cultural renewal. The previous winners of the Nobel Peace Prize in the 1990s reflected this international focus on peace and reconciliation as the solutions to long running conflicts: Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar) in 1991, Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk (South Africa) in 1993, Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin (Israel and Palestine) in 1994 and Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo and José Ramos-Horta in 1996 (East Timor). Crucially, the conflict in Northern Ireland was not only resolved through political innovations. The GFA was confirmed through a referendum that signified its legitimacy, tangible evidence of the support of the majority of people in Northern Ireland.

⁹¹ Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*, 273.

⁹² Bernadette C. Hayes and Ian McAllister, “Public Support for Political Violence and Paramilitarism in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 4 (2005): 600.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “The Nobel Peace Prize, 1998: Press Release,” The Nobel Foundation, October 16, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1998/press.html.

Newspapers “Give Peace a Chance”

One of the GFA’s architects was UUP leader David Trimble, an uncompromising unionist in the 1970s, who became a compromising political leader in the 1990s. Trimble noted in his 1998 Nobel Peace prize lecture that

we have a peace of sorts in Northern Ireland. But it is still something of an armed peace ... there are two traditions in Northern Ireland. There are two main religious denominations. But there is only one true moral denomination. And it wants peace.⁹⁶

Even in accepting the Nobel Prize for Peace, Trimble reflected that Northern Ireland, at best, had a ‘peace of sorts.’ Northern Ireland’s ‘relative’ peace ‘of sorts’ was a cornerstone of the GFA, shaped by a wide range of expectations of peace and experiences of the Troubles. Polls conducted in 1997 suggested that 97 per cent of people supported “the principle of a negotiated settlement for the political future of Northern Ireland”.⁹⁷ Despite supporting ‘the principle’ of a settlement, achieving a peace settlement acceptable to both communities proved problematic. Indeed, Northern Ireland was born in the violence surrounding the partition of Ireland from 1920 to 1921 and violent clashes between Protestants and Catholics.⁹⁸ What exactly did peace mean in 1998?

At the very least, peace entailed a reduction in paramilitary violence. The GFA itself did not require paramilitary groups to disband, rather it encouraged participants’ “commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations ... to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement”.⁹⁹ In reality, it would take almost a decade for large paramilitary groups including the PIRA and UVF to decommission large portions of their arsenals (see Chapter 4). A lack of significant paramilitary decommissioning would influence the peace process in numerous ways, not least in the rise in power of the DUP. The ‘peace’ that many expected in 1998, one free from paramilitary violence, was severely challenged by events after the GFA, most notably, by the Omagh bombing only months later.

The public discourse surrounding peace can be explored through the newspaper coverage of the GFA and subsequent referendum. The focus of these reports was on the

⁹⁶ David Trimble, “Nobel Lecture,” The Nobel Foundation, December 10, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1998/trimble-lecture.html.

⁹⁷ Collin Irwin, *The People’s Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 14.

⁹⁸ Parkinson, *Belfast’s Unholy War*, 107-117.

⁹⁹ “The Agreement: Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations (10 April 1998),” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, April 10, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

personal investment in, and reaction to, the Agreement. The GFA had a wide spectrum of support in the press from the distinct perspectives represented by the major papers. The *Belfast Telegraph*, *Belfast News Letter* and *Irish Times* newspapers were the three largest selling daily newspapers in Northern Ireland in the late 1990s. The *Belfast Telegraph*, the most widely read, had traditionally been a unionist paper, but by the 1990s drew its readership from both nationalist and unionist communities.¹⁰⁰ The *Belfast News Letter* had traditionally represented views from the unionist community, although it did not directly endorse loyalist paramilitaries.¹⁰¹ Both newspapers, which Greg McLaughlin and Stephen Baker describe in *The Propaganda of Peace* as “unionist in terms of content and editorial stance,” supported the GFA, even though unionists had at best “ambivalent support” for the Agreement.¹⁰² The *Irish News* largely represented the views of the nationalist community, and had distanced itself from republicanism since the 1980s,¹⁰³ instead aligning itself with the SDLP and Catholic hierarchy within Northern Ireland.¹⁰⁴ The republican viewpoint was expressed in *An Phoblacht* which John Horgan has described as the media “organ of the Sinn Féin party”.¹⁰⁵

The print media, both unionist, nationalist and largely pro-GFA, was the medium through which public debate surrounding the GFA was conducted. On the day of the referendum, the *Belfast News Letter*, *Irish News*, *Daily Star*, *Daily Express*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Independent*, *Daily Mirror*, *Sun*, *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* all endorsed the GFA.¹⁰⁶ Israeli academic Gadi Wolfsfeld later argued that media coverage of the GFA was categorised by a “relatively low level of sensationalism. This set of circumstances turned the news media into an important tool for promoting the peace process”.¹⁰⁷ Alternatively, McLaughlin and Baker argue that many newspaper editorials followed Tony Blair’s core message that there was no alternative to the GFA, and that there was no “Plan B” if it failed.¹⁰⁸ Understandably, newspapers such as the *Irish News* supported the deal, as its readership largely consisted of nationalists who overwhelmingly supported the GFA. Public discourse surrounding the GFA was partially influenced by newspaper editors and journalists who tended to support

¹⁰⁰ John Horgan, *Irish Media: A Critical History Since 1922* (London: Routledge, 2001), 127.

¹⁰¹ Bill Rolston, “News Fit to Print: Belfast’s Daily Newspapers,” in *The Media and Northern Ireland: Covering the Troubles*, ed. Bill Rolston (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 160-161.

¹⁰² Greg McLaughlin and Stephen Baker, *The Propaganda of Peace: The Role of Media and Culture in the Northern Ireland Peace Process* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010), accessed January 26, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=584345>, 32-33.

¹⁰³ Horgan, *Irish Media*, 129.

¹⁰⁴ Rolston, “News Fit to Print,” 165.

¹⁰⁵ Horgan, *Irish Media*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ Peter McVerry “Papers urge people say Yes to Peace,” *Belfast Telegraph*, May 22, 1998, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Gadi Wolfsfeld, “The News Media and Peace Processes: The Middle East and Northern Ireland,” *Peaceworks*, January, 2001, accessed January 24, 2017, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pwks37.pdf>, 30.

¹⁰⁸ McLaughlin and Baker, *Propaganda of Peace*, 24.

the Agreement. The eventual result of the referendum showed just under thirty per cent of voters voting NO in Northern Ireland. Disproportionately, virtually all newspapers in Northern Ireland, Britain and the Irish Republic officially supported the YES campaign.

The major British and Irish newspapers ran numerous stories focusing on people's adulation and cautious optimism at the news of the GFA. The British *Independent* newspaper reported one woman in the centre of Belfast who recalled that, "I saw people with tears in their eyes. I shed a few myself" after the announcement of the GFA.¹⁰⁹ This celebration expressed what many people felt at the prospect of a Northern Ireland without conflict. British tabloid the *Mirror* reported on a Falls Road resident Theresa McCarron who quipped "I believe for the first time that this could be it – once the hot heads have sense and put down their guns. I would appeal them to give peace a try. They might even like it".¹¹⁰ A letter sent to the *Belfast News Letter* the day after the GFA reminded readers "of the crucifixion of the last 30 years and of all the people who suffered and died ... the outcome of that historic and long Good Friday at Stormont can ... lead to a resurrection for the whole community".¹¹¹ Similarly, the *Belfast Telegraph* ran an editorial the day after the GFA outlining "this newspaper has charted the course of Ulster's history since 1870 and in the often violent perspective of times past – 1912, 1916, 1921, 1969 – this Good Friday 1998 will take its place as a day of destiny ... the gun and the bomb need to be taken out of this society - period".¹¹²

As this coverage elucidated, the idea of 'peace' varied between people and was informed by different memories of the Troubles. On 10 April, the *Belfast Telegraph* interviewed Mary Rodgers, a Belfast housewife. Rodgers said "I'm here with my two kids this morning and for the first time in their lifetime real peace is possible ... I grew up not knowing people from the opposite religion and all this suspicion was passed on to my generation. Maybe in theirs they will know something different and better".¹¹³ Another interviewee, Catherine Courtney, believed "everybody wants this to work, we all want to be able to live in peace, especially for the young people ... but the younger people are different – they know nothing but division. When I was younger, we didn't know the difference, the kids of all religions played together. Estates were mixed. It's different now and much harder to break that suspicion down".¹¹⁴ We can see that even on this same page, the idea of peace was

¹⁰⁹ David McKittrick, "Peace at last for Ulster," *Independent*, April 11, 1998, 1.

¹¹⁰ Nicole Tallant and Julie O'Connor, "IT'S A BRAVE NEW WORLD," *Mirror*, April 11, 1998, 4.

¹¹¹ Alf McCreary, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, April 13, 1998, 13.

¹¹² "Viewpoint: The choice is yours," *Belfast Telegraph*, April 11, 1998, 7.

¹¹³ Claire McGahan, "'Let's Hope It's for Real': Optimism rises on city's streets," *Belfast Telegraph*, April 10, 1998, 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

informed by different experiences and memories of the conflict. Hopes of ‘peace’ were certainly widespread, but they were influenced by the different memories of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.¹¹⁵ The media coverage surrounding the GFA referendum allowed for these different, and sometimes conflicting, memories to be expressed publicly and demonstrated the capacity for people to speak about their experiences.

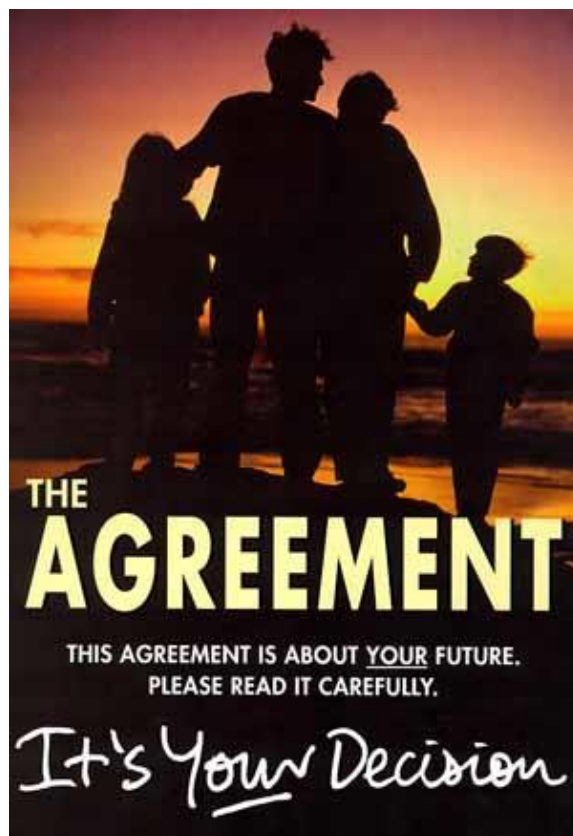


Figure 2.¹¹⁶ The front cover of the GFA which was sent to every family in Northern Ireland. The bi-line reads “THIS AGREEMENT IS ABOUT YOUR FUTURE. PLEASE READ IT CAREFULLY. It’s Your Decision”. The emphasis on ‘your’ illuminates the necessity of the referendum in legitimising the GFA. The focus on children is also present, with a family at dawn looking to the future.

Another force in the referendum debate were the celebrities in the YES campaign. Actors including Kenneth Branagh and musicians such as Bono came out in support of the GFA, as did billionaire Richard Branson, who promised to invest in Northern Ireland if the YES campaign was successful.¹¹⁷ The celebrity nature of the YES campaign may have been tied to the campaign’s emphasis on the youth and young voters. To add to the momentum of the

¹¹⁵ Ian McBride, “Introduction: Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland,” in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36.

¹¹⁶ “The Agreement.”

¹¹⁷ David McKittrick and Kim Sengupta, “Undecided Unionists hold the key to peace,” *Independent*, May 21, 1998, 1.

YES campaign, every family in Northern Ireland was sent a copy of a booklet containing the Agreement (see figure 2) and a VHS tape, containing interviews, including one with Branagh, advocating for the Agreement.¹¹⁸ Blair and Trimble stated that they believed the referendum would require a seventy per cent vote for YES in Northern Ireland in order to succeed, counting on overwhelming nationalist support and strong unionist support.¹¹⁹ This aim was eventually realised, thanks in part to the widespread support for the Agreement from politicians, the print media, celebrities and victims of the Troubles.

Despite widespread support for the GFA, the strength of the NO campaign and unionist opposition to the GFA should not be underestimated. According to sociologist Steve Bruce, the GFA contained “much that was abhorrent to unionists” including giving “Sinn Féin leaders the respectability of government office” along with releasing paramilitary prisoners and not requiring paramilitaries to decommission their weapons.¹²⁰ This was demonstrated in the political lines drawn after 10 April. Although the UUC, the governing body of the UUP, voted 55 to 23 in favour of the Agreement, the Loyal Orange Institution (or Orange Order) did not follow suit.¹²¹ Six UUP MPs, the DUP and United Kingdom Unionist Party (UKUP) formed an anti-agreement bloc, but the strength of the anti-Agreement campaign lay behind Paisley (see figure 3). When the referendum was announced, David Trimble stated that a majority of Protestants had voted for the Agreement, despite no precise mechanism of determining how exactly the Protestant vote was split.¹²² Because of this, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam claimed that a majority from “both communities” had voted for the GFA, while Paisley was able to claim that the result was illegitimate, based on his belief that a majority of Protestants had voted against the Agreement.¹²³

¹¹⁸ “Good Friday Agreement 'Yes' Campaign VHS, 1998, Northern Ireland,” YouTube, November 13, 2013, accessed January 23, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2sGJEHbaZM>.

¹¹⁹ John Mullin, “Blair back in Ulster to seal peace poll,” *Guardian*, May 20, 1998, 2.

¹²⁰ Bruce, *Paisley*, 121.

¹²¹ Godson, *Himself Alone*, 362.

¹²² News footage, “Referendum Special Montage,” broadcast May 23, 1998, accessed March 1, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

¹²³ “Northern Ireland: Referendum,” ITN Source, May 23, 1998, accessed January 21, 2017, <http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/ITN/1998/05/23/BSP230598006/?s=ian%20paisley%20referendum>.

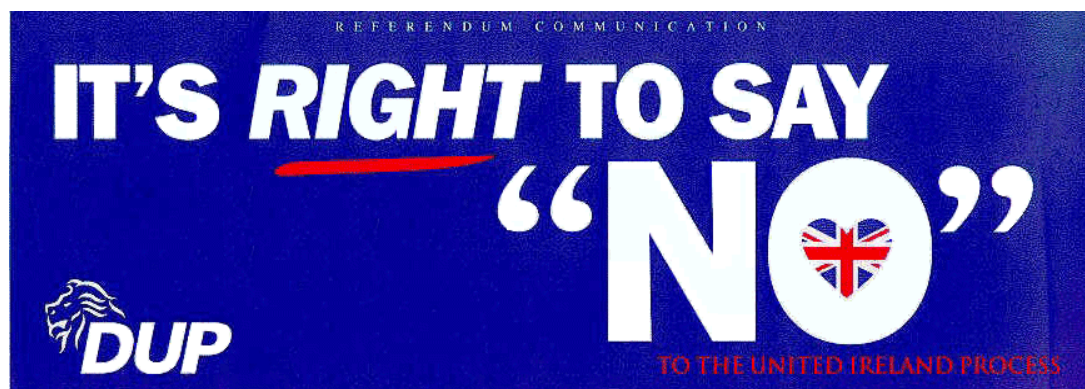


Figure 3.¹²⁴ This image comes from a pamphlet issued by the DUP in the weeks before the referendum. It reads “IT’S RIGHT TO SAY “NO” TO THE UNITED IRELAND PROCESS”. This pamphlet and others issued by the anti-GFA parties linked the GFA with republicans’ hopes for a united Ireland. This slogan was expanded into the catchier “It’s Right to Say No When There’s a Better Way to Go” in other pamphlets of the time.

Even prominent unionists who supported the GFA had reservations in completely endorsing its content. Dr Robin Eames, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh,¹²⁵ admitted “I have big problems with the document,” but “none of us want the grandchildren of Northern Ireland, let alone the children of Northern Ireland, to live their lives as so many of us have had to live ours”.¹²⁶ On the eve of the referendum, nationalists still overwhelmingly supported the Agreement, while the Protestant vote was split as many unionists remained undecided.¹²⁷ Some unionists were not swayed by the celebrity endorsements for the GFA, as a letter to the *Belfast News Letter* noted, “I cannot be swayed by celebrities or world leaders. Like my fellow countrymen and women I would prefer to rely on my own common sense and intelligence ... I want peace, I want prosperity, I want a better future for all, but I do not believe that this Agreement will deliver these”.¹²⁸ This statement outlines the feeling that many people opposed the GFA, while still desiring the peace that it promised. Coverage of the referendum and the debates throughout the print media reflected some of these different perspectives, reinforcing that despite differences between unionist and nationalist perspectives on the GFA, an overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland desired an end to paramilitary violence.

¹²⁴ “It’s Right to Say ‘NO,’” CAIN Web Service, May 22, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dup/dup.gif>.

¹²⁵ The Archbishop of Armagh also serves as the Primate of the Church of Ireland, the second largest Protestant denomination in Northern Ireland, after the Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

¹²⁶ David McKittrick, “A new era for Ulster as the people say ‘Yes’ brighter future,” *Independent*, May 22, 1998, 1.

¹²⁷ Bernadette C Hayes and Ian McAllister, “Who voted for peace? Public support for the 1998 Northern Ireland agreement,” *Irish Political Studies* 16, no. 1 (2001): 78-79.

¹²⁸ George Patton, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, May 22, 1998, 11.

Victims speak

Victims of the Troubles came to the forefront of public debates surrounding the GFA and May referendum. Many victims felt that throughout the conflict, their voices were not heard. In November 1997, the Victims Commissioner for Northern Ireland, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, investigated the experiences of victims in Northern Ireland. His report, released in April 1998 as 'We Will Remember Them,' observed that the British government has "created victims through violence, and we have produced violence out of division. It follows, then, that any form of recognition likely to generate division rather than to foster reconciliation should be avoided".¹²⁹ Bloomfield noted other problems associated with different categories of victimhood, particularly the "numerous victims who were not associated with any faction, cause or organisation; the many "little people" caught up in violence, often in relatively isolated incidents too soon forgotten outside the immediate family".¹³⁰ 'We Will Remember Them' begins to acknowledge the widespread suffering of the Troubles, and recognised that some victims had more powerful voices than others. Similarly, the final report of the Cost of the Troubles (COTT) project, an independent inquiry released in April 1999, stated "many individuals and groups have a sense of injustice and grievance against the paramilitaries, the authorities, the media, politicians, or the human service organisations. The lack of acknowledgement or denial of their needs, questioning of their rights to be considered sympathetically or the lack of support for them after their bereavement injury or loss has often exacerbated this".¹³¹ As these reports hinted, in the debates surrounding the GFA, victims were simultaneously held up as beacons of authority on the need for peace, while also using this newfound interest as an opportunity to have their personal trauma heard.

Victims' emphasis on the need for 'recognition' of their personal trauma was not a new phenomenon in 1998. In *Making peace with the past?*, Graham Dawson notes that the 1994 paramilitary ceasefires removed some of the climate of fear surrounding the Troubles. For a short time people experienced the effect of "opening up of spaces for reflection and remembrance [and] stimulated widespread telling of personal stories of loss, trauma and survival, and also a new public receptivity to such stories as representations of a collective

¹²⁹ "We Will Remember Them: Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB," CAIN Web Service, April, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/victims/docs/bloomfield98.pdf>, 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 30.

¹³¹ "Final Report: The Cost of the Troubles Study," April, 1999, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/publications/pdf/cottreport.pdf>, 29.

experience”.¹³² In 1994, the widespread hope that the conflict was (at least temporarily) over allowed many people to express themselves in ways not previously possible. Newspaper coverage of the GFA indicates that this ‘opening up of spaces’ occurred again in 1998, with the logic that an Agreement would ‘bring closure’ to families traumatised by the Troubles. As Dawson has noted, “for survivors to speak at all about the experience is to engage in a struggle to shape the traumatic event into narrative form ... but they are also seeking recognition of that pain, disturbance, dislocation and horror from others”.¹³³ Victims were utilised by newspapers as spokespeople for the Agreement, as individuals who could “break down communal divisions and act as ‘moral beacons’ for future reconciliation” or alternatively, to act as deterrents for political change.¹³⁴ If even those most traumatised by the Troubles could bring themselves to vote YES, the general public had no excuse not to support the GFA. As Marie Smyth has noted, victims of violence are “often held up, implicitly or explicitly, as instances of a higher state or example of a feat of self-transformation. If they can forgive the great injuries inflicted upon them, then those who have suffered less have little justification for persistent grievance”.¹³⁵ In the debates surrounding the GFA, victims of violence were certainly held up as agents of forgiveness and used by the media, but they also had their voices amplified through renewed interest in their stories in the form of public meetings, political discussions and media interest.

The 11 April edition of the *Irish News* led by listing five separate families who supported the GFA and emphasised their relatives’ deaths in the Troubles. Under the main headline “Deal is too late for victims” were numerous columns including “Noreen welcomes news,” “Mother optimistic for future,” “Family hopes guns fall silent” and “Parry family ‘delighted’ at deal”.¹³⁶ All (but one) of the families referred to their trauma as a reason for voting YES.¹³⁷ The prominence of victims of violence and their families was not confined to nationalist publications. The *Belfast Telegraph* ran a story on 10 April entitled “Please Give Us a Future” with the subheading “Tragic gran in call for peace”.¹³⁸ The woman in question, Gina Murray, recalled that her daughter, a victim of the Troubles, “would have been 17 now,

¹³² Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the Past? Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 69.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹³⁴ John D. Brewer and Bernadette C. Hayes, “Victimhood Status and Public Attitudes towards Post-conflict Agreements: Northern Ireland as a Case Study,” *Political Studies* 61, no. 2 (2013): 444.

¹³⁵ Marie Smyth, “Putting the Past in Its Place: Issues of Victimhood and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland’s Peace Process,” in *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil Conflict*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 125.

¹³⁶ *Irish News*, April 11, 1998, 6.

¹³⁷ Seamus McKinney, “Deal is too late for victims,” *Irish News*, April 11, 1998, 6.

¹³⁸ Claire McGahan, “Please Give Us a Future: Tragic gran in call for peace,” *Belfast Telegraph*, April 10, 1998, 5.

she would have been an auntie”.¹³⁹ Similar stories ran in the *Belfast News Letter*.¹⁴⁰ These stories both demonstrated newspapers utilising victims for the political purpose of supporting the Agreement, and indicated more fundamentally the authenticity the process gained through personalised endorsement. Public interest had created a space in which to discuss the future, and as a consequence, previously ‘silent’ victims had their voices amplified.

In exploring victims of paramilitary violence, I am keenly aware that experiences, memories and traumas in the Troubles vary enormously, and that conceptions of ‘victimhood’ remain contested.¹⁴¹ Indeed, in prioritising stories of forgiveness and acceptance of the past, the Northern Irish news media neglected stories of people refusing to forgive paramilitaries or forget their suffering. Yet memory of the origins and causes of the Troubles in Northern Ireland became important in 1998, as negotiations attempted to acknowledge the “tragedies of the past” and that “we must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families”.¹⁴² Catholic and Protestant memories of the conflict differed in understanding its origins, and the reasons and responsibility for its continuation. Polls compiled in 1999 by political scientist Colin Irwin suggest that a large percentage of Protestants believed the PIRA to be responsible for the Troubles, while a majority of Catholics believed that a lack of equality was a key cause.¹⁴³ As political scientist Nevin T. Aiken has assessed “no consensus exists on the broader ‘story’ of why violence occurred during the Troubles and who the real ‘victims’ are. This lack of a common understanding ... directly impeded efforts to move forward in any meaningful way in advancing socioemotional reconciliation through truth and justice in postconflict Northern Ireland”.¹⁴⁴ Ian McBride notes collective memory’s ability to “reduce complex historical processes to basic images and narrative types that answer specific ideological needs,” a feature of memory which may explain the divide between Protestant and Catholic memories of the Troubles, and differing expectations of peace.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ “Letters Special - YES!,” *Belfast News Letter*, May 22, 1998, 11.

¹⁴¹ Marcel M. Baumann, “Contested Victimhood in the Northern Irish Peace Process,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 22, no. 2 (2010): 172.

¹⁴² “The Agreement.”

¹⁴³ Irwin, *People’s Peace Process*, 38.

¹⁴⁴ Nevin T. Aiken, “Learning to Live Together: Transitional Justice and Intergroup Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4, no. 2 (2010): 181.

¹⁴⁵ McBride, “Memory and National Identity,” 36.

“*A Just and Lasting Peace*”

‘Justice’ was another powerful theme of the GFA document and the debates surrounding the referendum. The very different conceptions of ‘justice’ in the unionist and nationalist communities would, however, become an issue of contention. For many in the nationalist community, ‘justice’ was the impetus behind the civil rights movement. Housing, employment, as well as social and political discrimination resulted in extreme deprivation for the Catholic minority, especially in densely populated areas like Derry. Many unionists believed that the PIRA, rather than the British state or structural inequality, was responsible for the violence of the Troubles.¹⁴⁶ ‘Justice’ for many unionists therefore meant the legal prosecution of PIRA leaders and members, especially those involved in atrocities against the Protestant community. I explore how ‘justice’ in 1998 revolved around dealing with the past, paramilitary prisoner releases and the reform of the RUC.

In 1997, after a motion put forward by John Hume in the House of Commons, Tony Blair announced an inquiry into the 1972 ‘Bloody Sunday’ massacre. According to historian Paul Bew, this was done in order to “build up nationalist confidence in the peace process,” by addressing a long-standing issue in the nationalist community.¹⁴⁷ The inquiry, under the leadership of Justice Lord Saville investigated the massacre of thirteen civilians “none of whom was posing a threat of causing death or serious injury” to the Parachute Regiment in Derry.¹⁴⁸ An earlier inquiry, the ‘Widgery Report,’ had largely absolved the soldiers of responsibility for the protesters’ deaths, claiming that there was “no reason to suppose that the soldiers would have opened fire if they had not been fired upon first,” and that there would have been no deaths “if those who organised the illegal march had not thereby created a highly dangerous situation in which a clash between demonstrators and the security forces was almost inevitable”.¹⁴⁹ Many nationalists felt the Widgery Report was a cover-up.¹⁵⁰ The Saville Inquiry was part of a broader attempt to satisfy nationalist concerns. Nevin T. Aiken suggests its 2010 findings were “vital in helping to put to rest one of the single most

¹⁴⁶ Irwin, *People’s Peace Process*, 38.

¹⁴⁷ Paul Bew, “The role of the historical adviser and the Bloody Sunday Tribunal,” *Historical Inquiry* 78, no. 199 (February 2005): 115.

¹⁴⁸ “Principal conclusions and overall assessment of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry,” Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, June 15, 2010, accessed September 30, 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279167/0030.pdf, 58.

¹⁴⁹ “Report of the Tribunal appointed to inquire into the events on Sunday, 30th January 1972 [Widgery Report],” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, April 10, 1972, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmso/widgery.htm>.

¹⁵⁰ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*, 3rd ed. (London: Viking, 2012), 90.

contentious events of Northern Ireland's violent past ... the official acknowledgement of the innocence of the Bloody Sunday victims appears to have satisfied one of the key demands for justice and to have provided an important source of closure".¹⁵¹

Similarly, under the 'Constitutional Issues' section of the Agreement, the document outlines

the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil, political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities.¹⁵²

This emphasis on 'parity of esteem' also attempted to make the nationalist community more comfortable in Northern Ireland. This was one of the policies recommended in the Opsahl report and came to fruition in the GFA document. In addition to parity of esteem and the Saville Inquiry, the Independent Commission for Policing in Northern Ireland, under the leadership of former Conservative MP Chris Patten, was designed to assess the RUC in the light of nationalist concerns¹⁵³ and to guarantee nationalist support for the Agreement.¹⁵⁴ These proposals attempted to make the case that in the 'new' Northern Ireland, justice would work for, rather than against, the nationalist minority.

A key idea aimed at maintaining the republican and loyalist ceasefires was the introduction of staged prisoner releases from 1998 to 2000. Republican and loyalist prisoners, some serving multiple life sentences for murder, would be released by the end of 2000. Section ten of the GFA outlined an

accelerated programme for the release of prisoners, including transferred prisoners, convicted of scheduled offences in Northern Ireland or, in the case of those sentenced outside Northern Ireland ... prisoners affiliated to organisations which have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not benefit from the arrangements.¹⁵⁵

The issue of prisoner releases was highly emotive and unpopular among many unionists in 1998. Convicted terrorists, who many unionists believed instigated violence, could become partners in the government they had tried to destroy. This reaction also explains why, unlike

¹⁵¹ Nevin T. Aiken, "The Bloody Sunday Inquiry: Transnational Justice and Post-Conflict Reconciliation in Northern Ireland," *Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 1 (2015): 117.

¹⁵² "The Agreement."

¹⁵³ Mary O'Rawe, "Policing change: to reform or not to transform?," in *Northern Ireland after the Troubles: A Society in Transition*, eds. Colin Coulter and Michael Murray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 110-113.

¹⁵⁴ Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room*, 45.

¹⁵⁵ "The Agreement."

many republican ex-paramilitaries who were warmly welcomed home by some sections of the nationalist community, loyalist ex-paramilitaries had more difficulty re-adjusting to domestic life after 1998.¹⁵⁶ For example, Raymond McCord, a 44-year-old Protestant whose son had been murdered by the UVF, rejected the symbolism of the releases by insisting on “justice for my son and Mo Mowlam can’t deliver that”.¹⁵⁷ William Smith, also a relative of a Troubles victim, commented “we can see that these people have not put away their guns. All my family feel the same way. None of them will be voting yes. I think one would have to be silly to think that signing this thing will get rid of terrorism”.¹⁵⁸ Along with prisoner releases, many unionists had concerns about the recently introduced Parades Commission. This group was established in 1997 and became a statutory body in 1998, and was formed in order to regulate all parades in Northern Ireland. Parades, especially unionist parades under the coordination of the Orange Order were an important feature of unionist political expression and “Protestant identity”.¹⁵⁹ Regulation of these parades would become another key unionist concern, especially among Orange Order members who viewed the commission as a hostile to their interests and stifling their cultural expression.¹⁶⁰

Other unionists were more optimistic, even relatives of victims. Charlie Butler, interviewed in the *Scottish Daily Record*, whose relatives had died in the Shankill Road bombing of 1993, said “I had to explain to my family ... why I was voting yes ... I told them terrorism shaped their past but I didn’t want to shape my children’s future. Destiny is in our hands. The people of Northern Ireland are the only people that can resolve the Troubles”.¹⁶¹ Glyn Roberts of the group Families Against Intimidation and Terror (FAIT) noted “many members of Fait have suffered over the years at the hands of the paramilitaries and it is difficult for us to live with prisoner releases”.¹⁶² But as with other voters, Roberts considered the generational impact of the Agreement, “what we don’t want is to have a new generation suffering the same sense of pain and loss. For God’s sake get out and vote Yes”.¹⁶³

In creating a more just future, the GFA is notable for what it did not recommend, specifically, a ‘truth and reconciliation’ project akin to other post-conflict societies. Cillian

¹⁵⁶ Carolyn Gallaher, *After the Peace: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Post-Accord Northern Ireland* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 30-31.

¹⁵⁷ Ray McCord and John Maxwell, “Voices of the people caught up in the Troubles,” *Herald*, May 20, 1998, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Kim Sengupta, “Many protestants will vote ‘no’ in Friday’s referendum. Kim Sengupta went to the Unionist Sandy Row in south Belfast to ask why,” *Independent*, May 20, 1998, 6.

¹⁵⁹ Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control* (London: Pluto, 2000), 12-13.

¹⁶⁰ Dawn Walsh, “Northern Ireland and the Independent Parades Commission: Delegation and Legitimacy,” *Irish Political Studies* 30, no. 1 (2015): 20-21.

¹⁶¹ Simon Houston, “Silent Victims Who Pray For Ulster Peace,” *Scottish Daily Record*, May 20, 1998, 4.

¹⁶² Mervyn Pauley, “Politics – Taylor and Adams confident of ‘Yes’,” *Belfast News Letter*, May 21, 1998, 8.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

McGrattan has pointed out the effect of ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ commissions in other examples of conflict, especially in Germany and Israel, and how truth recovery can contribute to reconciliation.¹⁶⁴ A truth and reconciliation commission also famously took place in South Africa in 1996. A Northern Ireland commission, an idea considered during the referendum campaign, proved difficult to envision, as “agreeing on or at least having a broadly accepted narrative of the “causes” of the Troubles, is one of the biggest challenges to building some form of reconciliation into the future”.¹⁶⁵ Northern Ireland did not engage in a single wide-ranging inquiry into deaths in the Troubles, although it established the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) in 2005, focusing on unsolved murders from the Troubles, subsequently disestablished in 2014. While implementing different reforms to address issues of justice following the Troubles, the GFA was ambiguous on how to confront the issue of injustices that occurred before the Agreement.

The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC) established shortly after the GFA, aimed to implement “the range of judicial and non-judicial processes that are necessary to deliver truth, justice, accountability and redress in a society emerging from armed conflict”.¹⁶⁶ As Nigel Biggar has described, the purpose of criminal justice in societies such as Northern Ireland should be thought of “in terms not of retribution but the vindication of victims” which “significantly relaxes the tension between justice and the politics of making peace ... the ultimate goal of justice is also to make peace - by repairing damage, protecting victims, and reforming criminals - both apart from, and also through, retributive punishment”.¹⁶⁷ This restorative focus of justice in the GFA contradicted some unionist perceptions of justice as for many in the unionist community, ‘justice’ focused on the legal prosecution of terrorism. The creation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to replace the RUC in 2001 allowed for the possibility of better relations between the nationalist community and police, but this change also made some unionists fear that an important legal protection from terrorism was being removed.

Republicans had other conceptions of justice. *An Phoblacht*, the republican movement’s key publication, described the moment the “Balcombe Street Heroes” entered

¹⁶⁴ Cillian McGrattan, *Memory, Politics and Identity: Haunted by History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15-17.

¹⁶⁵ Brandon Hamber, “Rights and Reasons: Challenges for Truth Recovery in South Africa and Northern Ireland,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 26, no. 4 (2002): 1093.

¹⁶⁶ “Dealing with Northern Ireland’s Past: Towards a Transitional Justice Approach,” Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, July 31, 2013, accessed September 30, 2016, http://www.nihrc.org/uploads/publications/NIHRC_Transitional_Justice_Report.pdf, 1.

¹⁶⁷ Nigel Biggar, “Making Peace or Doing Justice: Must We Choose?,” in *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice after Civil Conflict*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 16-17.

Sinn Féin's 1998 annual meeting, the Ard Fheis. These four ex-paramilitaries had taken hostages in Balcombe Street, London in 1975 and were eventually charged with multiple counts of murder. The newspaper reported that "the four men received a ten minute standing ovation from the packed audience was testament to their courage and fortitude. They had endured so much in the past years yet survived".¹⁶⁸ The men were "unbowed and unbroken ... the surge of emotion that swept through the hall came not from any inherent desire to rub peoples' noses in it the way we understand triumphalism".¹⁶⁹ In response to this, the *Guardian* reported that this reaction had "chilled Unionists" and "overwhelming nationalist support for the deal has not reassured waverers: "when they're that happy, you have to worry," says Julie Blemmings, an undecided voter on the Cregagh Road".¹⁷⁰ This revealing comment illustrates some remaining mistrust between the two communities and reservations over changes in the judicial treatment of paramilitaries. A similarly joyous greeting met Michael Stone, a UDA prisoner on temporary release who was welcomed to a rally at Belfast's Ulster Hall, hosted by the UDA-aligned Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). For Kate Fearon and Monica McWilliams, members of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) involved in the GFA talks, the presence of these paramilitary prisoners demonstrated that "the war was over. Prisoners were coming home".¹⁷¹

Whereas newspapers and public debate had indicated that virtually all parties in Northern Ireland wanted an end to paramilitary violence, the idea of justice was polarising in 1998. Debates surrounding the GFA gave a chance for those who wanted 'justice' to be heard, both pro and anti-GFA voices, through the medium of an overwhelmingly pro-GFA media. Debates in the new Northern Ireland Assembly would revolve around these ideas of victimhood and justice. As a recent PhD thesis from the University of California, San Diego notes, in the years after the GFA

debate over the definition of victimhood was brewing in the Northern Irish Assembly... disagreement over to what degree retributive or restorative mechanisms should be used to deal with past political crimes. ... a clash of different ideals of justice: formed both by local experience and political philosophies, and in reaction to the recent institutional focus on victims as subjects of state intervention.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ "Unbowed... unbroken," *An Phoblacht*, May 14, 1998, accessed December 10, 2016, <http://republican-news.org/archive/1998/May14/14pris.html>.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ "People in Northern Ireland will have no one to blame but themselves," *Guardian*, May 20, 1998, 18.

¹⁷¹ Kate Fearon and Monica Williams, "The Good Friday Agreement: A Triumph of Substance over Style," *Fordham International Law Journal* 22, no. 4 (1998): 1263.

¹⁷² Francis Candler Hallman, "Debating Death: Discourse and Legitimacy in the Northern Irish victims' rights movement" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2014), accessed February 12, 2017, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5m34j04g#page-19>, 16-17.

The idea of justice, so crucial to the implementation of the GFA, would become a divisive issue to both the politics of Northern Ireland and the changes in public discourse brought about by the Agreement.

“Teach Your Children Well”

The GFA opens with the pledge to “firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all” while also attempting to “strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements”.¹⁷³ The Agreement itself was, as social scientist Duncan Morrow has noted, “profoundly marked by the language of reconciliation”.¹⁷⁴ But what did reconciliation mean before 1998? Many voluntary organisations, with support from Protestant and Catholic communities pre-date the intense violence of the Troubles, and seven ‘reconciliation’ groups were formed between 1964 and 1992.¹⁷⁵ The existence of such organisations indicates that many groups believed relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland were often strained, and that a society as divided as Northern Ireland needed to change. The importance of reconciliation in resolving the conflict was a view shared by Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, co-founders of the ‘Community of Peace People,’ and joint winners of the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize.¹⁷⁶ Williams, who came from a mixed Catholic and Protestant background, believed “energetic reconciliation among peoples” was possible by “getting them to know each other, talk each other's languages, understand each other's fears and beliefs, getting to know each other physically, philosophically and spiritually”.¹⁷⁷ In her Nobel lecture, Williams reiterated her organisation’s declaration from 1976:

we want to live and love and build a just and peaceful society ... we want for our children, as we want for ourselves, our lives at home, at work and at play, to be lives of joy and peace ... we dedicate ourselves to working with our neighbours, near and far, day in and day out, to building that peaceful society in which the tragedies we have known are a bad memory and a continuing warning.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ “The Agreement.”

¹⁷⁴ Duncan Morrow, “The Rise (and Fall?) of Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” *The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 44, no. 1 (2012): 21.

¹⁷⁵ Maria Power, “Getting to Know the “Other”: Inter-Church Groups and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland,” in *The Long Road to Peace in Northern Ireland: Peace Lectures from the Institute of Irish Studies at Liverpool University*, ed. Marianne Elliott, 2nd ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 196.

¹⁷⁶ Along with Williams and Corrigan, the group was co-founded with Ciaran McKeown.

¹⁷⁷ Betty Williams, “Nobel Lecture,” The Nobel Foundation, December 11, 1977, accessed September 30, 2016, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1976/williams-lecture_en.html.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

The focuses of this speech, on the ‘simple message’ of peace, the necessity of a ‘just and peaceful’ society as well as all of this being ‘for our children’ were just as strong in 1977 as they were in 1998. The years between 1977 and 1998 resulted in greater trust between the British and Irish governments, paramilitary ceasefires in 1994, a lessening of violence from the 1970s and mass public support for a negotiated political settlement. Only in 1998 did a political solution exist which satisfied a majority of political preferences, and a supportive media that acted as a space for such views to be expressed.

There was a widespread view in 1998 that reconciliation was not just political, but that it required an end to sectarianism and better relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. Theologian Cecelia Clegg has argued that, in the context of Northern Ireland, “societal reconciliation rather than political reconciliation is the key to sustainability” and suggests a typology of reconciliation that requires personal, interpersonal, societal and finally, political reconciliation.¹⁷⁹ Clegg also makes the crucial distinction that reconciliation is “both a process and a goal” which helps capture idea of the ‘peace process,’ and the GFA’s aim of the ‘achievement of reconciliation’.¹⁸⁰ Duncan Morrow defines reconciliation as an “end to all threat of violence, a political system which commands legitimacy across ancient hostilities and the development of a culture of independent action and cooperation in which the claims of citizens to goods and rights from the whole community are treated as personal and individual”.¹⁸¹ These ideas describe how many people in 1998 conceptualised reconciliation, something that was political, but also societal, between Protestants and Catholics, rather than being based on a political settlement alone. As Aiken has noted, transitional justice requires “intergroup reconciliation, therefore, transitional justice strategies must keep socioemotional, instrumental and distributive ends in mind, or should at the very least be designed to work in tandem with other ongoing societal efforts to rebuild trust, cooperation and equality between former enemies”.¹⁸² For Israeli academics Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, reconciliation requires the

formation of new beliefs, attitudes motivations, goals, and emotions that support the peaceful relations. This new psychological repertoire includes the evolvment of mutual respect, trust, positive attitudes, and sensitivity to the other group’s needs, fostering friendly and cooperative relations marked by equality and justice,

¹⁷⁹ Cecelia Clegg, “Embracing a Threatening Other: Identity and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” in *Peace and Reconciliation: In Search of Shared Identity*, eds. Sebastian C. H. Kim, Pauline Kollontai and Greg Hoyland (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2008), 81, 92.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 82.

¹⁸¹ Morrow, “Rise (and Fall?) of Reconciliation,” 11.

¹⁸² Aiken, “Learning to Live Together,” 171-172.

Reconciliation, then, is essentially a psychological process. Structural measures both contribute to its evolvment and are among its consequences.¹⁸³

The psychological element of reconciliation is crucial in this definition, and is not one that can be achieved by political means alone. Research conducted before, during and after the GFA indicated that better relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland required not only 'structural measures' such as a new Assembly, but also 'mutual respect, trust, positive attitudes, and sensitivity to the other group's needs.' The GFA was full of reconciliatory language, but crucially, did not explicitly state how such reconciliation would be achieved.

Why did reconciliation become such an influential idea associated with the GFA? In 1998, reconciliation became a catch all term for a better future and was one idea in which victims of violence in the Troubles and their relatives could express their hopes for what the Agreement could achieve. The print media encouraged the idea of reconciliation as a solution to the Troubles and hopefully a consequence of the GFA. One writer to the *Belfast News Letter* expressed joy at the "expression of Christian compassion and hope for the future" elicited by the Agreement, hoping that it would be a "source of inspiration for those politicians, and ordinary decent people who are striving for genuine peace and reconciliation".¹⁸⁴ On the day of the referendum, the newspaper's front cover read "WE MUST SAY YES" reasoning that "today, unionism and nationalism can begin to work together to build the new model we can be proud of ... a New Ulster which provides an example to the world of how people with old grudges can set their differences aside, leave the past behind, and walk together into a bright new future".¹⁸⁵ Others were not so optimistic. In an interview with the *Belfast Telegraph*, Church of Ireland Archbishop Robin Eames warned "the vast majority of people are longing for a settlement, but if there is an agreement, the real problem is going to be the attitude on the streets of Northern Ireland".¹⁸⁶ Archbishop Eames outlines a counter claim to the political emphasis of the peace process: that the issue of the Troubles was based around the relations between the two communities, something the GFA alone could not fix. The morning before the referendum result was announced, the *Belfast News Letter* reported "unionists, who for decades have been preoccupied with

¹⁸³ Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, "The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process, II," in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 37.

¹⁸⁴ Woman Loyalist, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, May 22, 1998, 11.

¹⁸⁵ "Morning View – WE MUST SAY YES," *Belfast News Letter*, May 22, 1998, 6.

¹⁸⁶ "Eames in plea for Easter peace," *Belfast Telegraph*, April 9, 1998, 4.

maintaining an unsatisfactory status quo ... will have voted for reconciliation”.¹⁸⁷ The *Observer* pointed out in the wake of the referendum “no sooner is the triumph of the referendum digested than minds turn to the next phase in the long road to reconciliation”.¹⁸⁸ On 24 May the newspaper also noted that the GFA’s “loud call for peace and reconciliation from the whole island of Ireland, will impress even those who call the vote a gerrymandered sham”.¹⁸⁹ We can see in these reflections the validity of Clegg’s claim that reconciliation is both a process and a goal. The print media’s coverage of the GFA reflected the conceptualisation of the Agreement as an agent for a change in societal relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, not just a political settlement between paramilitaries and political parties.

As well as featuring victims of violence, newspaper reports pointed to generational reasons for wanting peace, the idea that those who had grown up in the Troubles did not want their children to experience further trauma. In various statements, prominent YES politicians including Tony Blair, Gerry Adams, John Hume and Bill Clinton mentioned children (often their own) as reasons for voting YES in the referendum.¹⁹⁰ This was also a trope used by the media. Under the headline “Just vote yes,” a *Daily Mirror* story began with the line “We can’t deny our children a future”.¹⁹¹ This article echoed First World War recruitment posters: “when your children and grandchildren ask: “What did you do in the great referendum of 1998”, what shame there will be if you were not part of this great moment”.¹⁹² Similar headlines came from the *Scottish Daily Record*: “vote Yes for your kids and your grandchildren”.¹⁹³ The *Independent* reported a resident of the Falls Road – the republican heartland of west Belfast – Kathleen McPeake noting: “my three children were brought up in the Troubles and I don’t want the same as my grandchildren”.¹⁹⁴ The newspaper reported another Falls resident, Bernadette McMenery, stating “my children grew up like this. It was hard for them to try and keep away from it when it was all around them.

¹⁸⁷ “Morning View – Standing on the edge of history,” *Belfast News Letter*, May 23, 1998, 6.

¹⁸⁸ Henry McDonald, Patrick Wintour and Andy McSmith, “Yes. But that was the easy bit,” *Observer*, May 24, 1998, 6.

¹⁸⁹ Neal Ascherson, “Peace in Northern Ireland has to built on its divisions, not on a fiction of unity which does not yet exist,” *Observer*, May 24, 1998, 26.

¹⁹⁰ Frank Millar Coleraine, “Blair and Trimble appeal to undecided unionists,” *Irish Times*, May 21, 1998, 1; Deaglan De Breadun, “High turnout expected in North,” *Irish Times*, May 22, 1998, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/high-turnout-expected-in-north-1.155277>; Severin Carrell, “Dissidents in 'triumph for terror' claim - Political Correspondent,” *Scotsman*, May 22, 1998, 6; “Clinton pledges to help build a better society,” *Belfast News Letter*, May 24, 1998, 4.

¹⁹¹ “JUST VOTE yes,” *Mirror*, May 22, 1998, 1.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ David Thompson, “Vote Yes for your kids and your grandchildren,” *Scottish Daily Record*, May 22, 1998, 20.

¹⁹⁴ Andrew Buncombe, “Irish peace talks – Bitter experience puts hope on hold,” *Independent*, April 10, 1998, 3.

But we have to have peace for the children. Even the men of violence know that. We can't let another generation grow up the way the last did. We can't let any more lives be destroyed".¹⁹⁵ Gloria Hunniford, a Northern Irish media personality, revealed to the *Mirror* "I brought my kids up in Northern Ireland. Despite all the troubles it is a wonderful place full of wonderful people and they deserve to have normality after all these years".¹⁹⁶ Similarly, a resident from the Protestant Shankill Road in Belfast's west said to the *Mirror* "all I know is that I have nine beautiful grandchildren and I want them to grow up in a country where there is no killing. People just want to live normal lives".¹⁹⁷ Children, symbolising innocence and the future, had become a central part of the YES campaign.

In the lead-up to the Agreement, singer-songwriter Tommy Sands composed a song entitled 'Carry On' in support of the talks at Stormont. Sands performed the song outside the Stormont Castle buildings. The performance incorporated children from both communities, attracting enough attention that participants in the talks including John Hume, David Trimble, Gerry Adams, David Ervine, Seamus Mallon and Mo Mowlam joined in the chorus. The song's message was direct, as the final four lines made abundantly clear "Don't betray your children's birthright / That's the right to stay alive / For there is no greater treachery / Than to let your children die".¹⁹⁸ Not all children were universally in favour of the Agreement. The *Guardian* reported that a mock election at the Ballyclare high school, a largely Protestant grammar school in County Armagh, resulted in a NO vote by 268 votes to 135.¹⁹⁹ Regardless, children remained a feature of the referendum, as it was 'their future' that was at stake. A campaign in which British, Irish and American politicians campaigned alongside loyalists, republicans, nationalists, unionists, celebrities and musicians needed a clear and simple message that all could endorse. Children may have been an important feature of the YES campaign because 'their future' was one of the few things the ideologically broad YES campaign, and the public, could unanimously agree upon (see figure 4).

¹⁹⁵ Nicole Tallant and Julie O'Connor, "IT'S A BRAVE NEW WORLD," *Mirror*, April 11, 1998, 4.

¹⁹⁶ "MY DREAM HAS COME TRUE," *Mirror*, April 11, 1998, 6.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Tommy Sands, "Carry On," Troubles Archive, 1998, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.troublesarchive.com/index.php/artforms/traditional-music/piece/carry-on>.

¹⁹⁹ "People in Northern Ireland will have no one to blame but themselves," *Guardian*, May 20, 1998, 18.

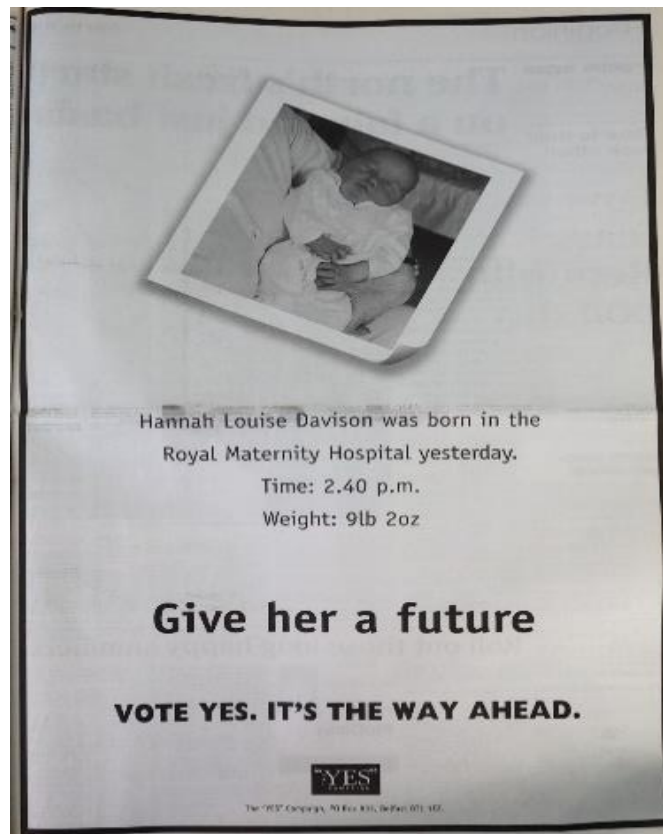


Figure 4.²⁰⁰ This advertisement from 22 May 1998 appeared in Northern Ireland's major newspapers including the *Irish News* and *Belfast Telegraph* in the days before the joint referendums. It reads "Hannah Louise Davidson was born in the Royal Maternity Hospital yesterday. Time 2.40 p.m. Weight: 9lb 2oz. Give her a future. VOTE YES. IT'S THE WAY AHEAD". This advertisement associated the GFA with hopes for the future, especially the hopes that children would not have to live through violence of their parents' generation.

Notably, children also were the main attendees at U2 and Ash's Waterfront Hall concert on 18 May. Children not only applauded the politicians searching for peace, they also vocally endorsed them. Catherine Hamill and David Sterrett, a Catholic girl and Protestant boy, who, according to the *Mirror*, "symbolised Northern Ireland's desire for peace," both celebrated the deal.²⁰¹ 11-year-old Catherine assessed the impact of the multi-party talks, summarising "I can't stop smiling, I always said my prayers for peace every night and hoped it would happen" while 14-year-old David approved of the international dimension, adding "Bill Clinton is magic and so is Tony Blair. We're gonna have peace now".²⁰² The idea of Catholic and Protestant children, male and female, having friendly relations symbolised what reconciliation could look like in a peaceful Northern Ireland. Parents also wanted their children to continue this newfound spirit. Anne and Clive Patterson named their baby

²⁰⁰ "Give her a future," *Irish News*, May 22, 1998, 9.

²⁰¹ Connor Hanna, "It's our dream come true say peace kids," *Mirror*, April 11, 1998, 3.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

daughter born on the day of the Agreement ‘Hope.’ The Patterson family explained in an interview to the Scottish *Sunday Mail* that they “wanted to call the baby Hope so we would be able to tell her that they signed for peace on her birthday. The idea that she could grow up in a country that doesn’t tell the difference between religions would be wonderful”.²⁰³ Clive Patterson also explained to the *News of the World* “I am 30 years old now and my wife is 27. We have known nothing but Troubles all our lives”.²⁰⁴ The hopes of reconciliation instilled in children were certainly part of the appeal of the GFA, and a love of children may be one of the few things that truly united the republicans, loyalists, nationalists and unionists who supported the YES campaign.

In 1994, John Hume noted that the “real division in Ireland is not the line in the map that we call partition. That line in the map simply institutionalized a division that has existed for centuries in the hearts and minds of the Irish people”.²⁰⁵ Although the GFA explicitly outlined reconciliation as one of its goals, becoming an important feature of the public discourse surrounding the Agreement, there was a vagueness as to how this would be achieved. Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland remained segregated in education, employment and housing, a feature of life that would make reconciliation and the perception of better community relations difficult to achieve in the years after the Agreement.²⁰⁶ Far from ending sectarianism, journalist Eamonn McCann believed that the Agreement “envisages the reformation, not the removal of sectarianism. The structures are designed to contain sectarian rivalries, not get rid of them”.²⁰⁷ Even amidst the goodwill of 1998, and a public discourse focused on achieving reconciliation, concerns remained that a political settlement alone would not help Northern Ireland become a more reconciled society.

Explaining a moment

Authors David McKittrick and David McVea have expressed how, in 1998, “the sense of a new era was in the air, many feeling that nothing would be the same again”.²⁰⁸ Many of the reactions to the GFA reflected the significance of the Agreement in changing relations within

²⁰³ “In Ulster, a baby called HOPE,” *Sunday Mail*, April 12, 1998, 1.

²⁰⁴ “Give peace a chance,” *News of the World*, April 12, 1998, 6.

²⁰⁵ John Hume, “Acceptance of Diversity: The Essence of Peace in the North of Ireland,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 18, no. 4 (1994): 1087.

²⁰⁶ Bernadette C. Hayes and Ian McAllister, *Conflict to peace: Politics and society in Northern Ireland over half a century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 166-168.

²⁰⁷ Eamonn McCann, *War & Peace in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Hot Press Books, 1998), 241.

²⁰⁸ McKittrick and McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles*, 259.

the British Isles. British and Irish newspapers printed thousands of stories on the GFA, highlighting its significance. British tabloid the *Daily Mirror* urged its readers to

remember the date. Good Friday, 1998. The day a new future dawned for Northern Ireland after decades of bloodshed. Yesterday's agreement is truly historic. It is so remarkable, such a fantastic achievement that it barely seems possible ... in the new Northern Ireland everyone is going to have to work with everyone else ... but they did it. They got this far and their names will go down in the history books because of it.²⁰⁹

These celebratory responses were common and many journalists, voters and politicians were extremely happy with the result. When the referendum proved to have been successful, the threads surrounding the GFA came together: silenced voices amplified, future generations free from trauma and a 'new' Northern Ireland built on peace, justice and reconciliation. The *Observer* went so far as to announce that "a new people is born in Ireland".²¹⁰ Yet the media-driven public discourse left many questions unanswered, especially what peace, justice and reconciliation would look like in the 'new' Northern Ireland. The discussion above reveals some of the differing expectations surrounding the GFA – most notably the contested idea of justice. These differing ideas shaped the public discourse surrounding the GFA, but were themselves highly malleable and in some cases, meant different things to unionists and nationalists. As I have outlined in this chapter, the GFA was not only politically significant, it shaped what people thought the 'new' Northern Ireland would be and how peace, justice and reconciliation would be a part of it. The greatest challenge for those wanting to implement the Agreement, and for those attempting to live peaceful lives after the GFA, was the persistence of paramilitary violence. While virtually all political and paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland supported the GFA, a dangerous minority of paramilitaries did not. With hindsight, seemingly pessimistic accounts of the GFA can be re-read as cautious warnings. An article published in the *Observer* on 24 May, two days after the success of the referendum, warned "the Continuity IRA, the INLA and the latest faction to join the rejectionists, the so-called Real IRA, have been holding joint meetings on a common campaign to destroy the agreement" and that although these groups had little support, "they still pose a threat".²¹¹ Indeed, it would only be 85 days between the announcement of the successful referendum, and the worst single loss of life in a paramilitary attack in Northern Ireland – the Omagh bombing.

²⁰⁹ "New dawn as old hatreds are put aside," *Mirror*, April 11, 1998, 6.

²¹⁰ "Leading article - A new people is born in Ireland," *Observer*, May 24, 1998, 26.

²¹¹ Henry McDonald, Patrick Wintour and Andy McSmith, "Yes. But that was the easy bit," *Observer*, May 24, 1998, 6.

Chapter 2: The Omagh Bombing, 1998



Figure 5.¹ An image appearing in the *Tyrone Constitution* on 27 August 1998. The people have been whited out to protect their identities. The image depicts Market Street in Omagh, County Tyrone. The red Vauxhall Cavalier in the right of the picture contained the 500lb Real IRA bomb which killed 29 people only hours after this image was taken.

At 3:04 pm on 15 August 1998, a car bomb exploded in the market town of Omagh, killing 29 people and injuring over 200 others (see figure 5). The bombing was carried out by the Real Irish Republican Army (RIRA or Real IRA), a group that split from the PIRA in 1997 and opposed the ‘peace process.’ The Omagh bombing came only 85 days after the historic GFA referendum and was the worst single loss of life in a paramilitary attack in Northern Ireland.² This chapter investigates the public discourse surrounding the Omagh bombing and examines how discourses of peace, justice and reconciliation were reformulated in light of the bombing. I argue that the Omagh bombing is a defining moment in the ‘new’ public discourse formulated by the GFA, evidenced by changes in the discursive power of paramilitaries and the victims and relatives of the Omagh bombing. The Omagh bombing indicated that legally, ‘justice’ would be extremely difficult for victims to achieve after the Agreement. However, the Omagh relatives’ successful civil suit against the RIRA in 2009

¹ “Have You Seen This Car?,” *Tyrone Constitution*, August 27, 1998, 2.

² The worst single day of the Troubles was 17 May 1974, when bombs exploded in Dublin city and Monaghan town. During this attack, 27 people died in Dublin while 7 were killed in Monaghan. This bombing remains the worst loss of life in a paramilitary attack in the Republic of Ireland while Omagh remains the worst single loss of life in a terrorist attack in the history of Northern Ireland.

would also demonstrate that public discourse had changed in Northern Ireland, to the point that relatives of victims of paramilitary violence could now actively campaign for justice in ways not possible before the Agreement.

“An Armed Peace”

The GFA had passed the test of a referendum, supported by voters north and south of the border, but support for the Agreement was never as strong in the unionist community as it was among nationalists. Indeed, unionist support for the Agreement would drop after the referendum. 74 per cent of Protestants polled said they supported the Agreement in March 1998, a number which would drop to 47 per cent by October 2000.³ Positive perceptions among unionists of the Agreement also fell. Polls surveyed by Roger Mac Ginty from 1998 to 2002 indicated that 41 per cent of Protestants believed that unionists and nationalists benefited equally from the Agreement in 1998, dropping to 19 per cent by 2002.⁴ Similarly, the belief among Protestants that nationalists benefited “a lot more” from the Agreement than unionists rose from 31 per cent in 1998 to 55 per cent in 2002.⁵ For unionists, dissatisfaction revolved around the key concerns outlined in Chapter 1: paramilitary decommissioning, prisoner releases, Sinn Féin in government, North/South bodies, the Parades Commission and police reform. In the months and years after the Agreement, these concerns would become magnified, as paramilitary prisoners were released in 2000, the police service was transformed from the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) into the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in 2001 and Sinn Féin retained a place in the Assembly from 1998 to 2002 without substantive PIRA decommissioning. Ian Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) positioned itself as the champion of disaffected unionists and began to overtake the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) as Northern Ireland’s largest political party, after the 2001 Westminster election, by promising a ‘new agreement’ more favourable to unionists.

Expectations that loyalist paramilitaries would have active involvement in the new Assembly faced numerous setbacks. The UVF and UDA had forged political parties, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) respectively. The PUP won only two out of the 108 seats in the first Assembly election in June 1998, whereas the

³ Colin Irwin, *The People’s Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 260. There is a jump for Protestant support in a May 2000 poll, but this support falls in a subsequent October 2000 poll.

⁴ Roger Mac Ginty, “Unionist political attitudes after the Belfast agreement,” *Irish Political Studies* 19, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 89.

⁵ Ibid.

UDP won none and dissolved in 2002.⁶ Both the UDA and UVF continued to carry out paramilitary attacks, often targeting each other in various feuds throughout the early 2000s. A violent feud broke out between the two groups in 2000, enflamed by sections of the UDA supporting the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), a splinter group of the UVF.⁷ Simultaneously, the LVF (which had opposed the GFA) continued to carry out attacks against nationalists and their UVF rivals.

The most infamous loyalist attack in the months after the referendum was the murder of the Quinn Brothers on 12 July 1998.⁸ Jason, Mark and Richard Quinn, aged eight, nine and ten burned to death after members of the UVF fire bombed their house in Ballymoney in County Antrim.⁹ The attack was carried out at the height of the 1998 Drumcree dispute, a recurring disturbance surrounding requests for Orange marchers to pass through the nationalist Garvaghy Road in Portadown, County Armagh. This dispute had become an annual test of the peace process during the 1990s, and a chance for paramilitaries including the LVF and UDA to reiterate their status as the defenders of the loyalist community.¹⁰ The murder of the Quinn brothers at the height of the 1998 Drumcree dispute “brought condemnation from both sides of Northern Ireland's sectarian divide,” notably, First Minister David Trimble and his deputy Seamus Mallon, who both attended the Quinn brothers’ funeral.¹¹ The incident demonstrated that loyalist paramilitaries had (clearly) not voluntarily disbanded in the months following the GFA. They remained willing and able to carry out acts of violence and the entire political spectrum in Northern Ireland would continue to condemn such violence.

The key unionist fears of the GFA, especially police reform and the creation of the Parades Commission, had facilitated the development of a more confident and vocal nationalist minority in Northern Ireland.¹² Like unionists, the nationalist community was changing politically. Nationalists began to support Sinn Féin over the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), with the latter being the largest nationalist party since its formation in

⁶ James W. McAuley, “Whither New Loyalism? Changing Loyalist Politics after the Belfast Agreement,” *Irish Political Studies* 20, no. 3 (September 2005): 326.

⁷ Ian S. Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty: A History of the UDA* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), accessed May 7, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=264973>, 244.

⁸ John Mullin, “Distraught mother flees petrol bomb trial,” *Guardian*, September 8, 1999, accessed November 1, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/1999/sep/08/northernireland.johnmullin>.

⁹ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007), 1434-1436.

¹⁰ Graham Spencer, *The State of Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 146-148.

¹¹ “Ahern attends mass for Quinn brothers,” BBC News, July 18, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/latest_news/135053.stm.

¹² Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 418-422.

1970. As the Assembly began to falter over the issue of decommissioning, nationalist faith in the SDLP began to waver. In a distinct change from voting patterns before 1998, the UUP lost votes to the DUP and the SDLP lost votes to Sinn Féin.¹³

As Sinn Féin began to gain significant electoral success after the GFA, their dissident republican rivals continued the ‘armed struggle.’ The origins of the Omagh bombing can be seen in the 1997 split within the PIRA that created the Real IRA. The PIRA had largely scaled down its attacks by 1998 despite not fully decommissioning its weapons until 2005 (see Chapter 4). Even before the GFA, some republicans did not support Sinn Féin’s embrace of political republicanism and participation in the new Assembly and instead, supported groups which broke away from the PIRA. Throughout the Troubles, the PIRA had been the largest republican paramilitary group since the split between the ‘Provisional’ and ‘Official’ IRA (OIRA) in 1969.¹⁴ The 1969 split occurred over both the failure of the IRA to defend Catholic homes during rioting in August of that year and the plans to repeal the traditional republican abstentionism of the parliaments of Dublin, London and Belfast.¹⁵ The Dublin-based OIRA increasingly focused on Marxism, whereas PIRA members tended to be younger, Northern Ireland-based and focused on defending the northern nationalist community.¹⁶ The Provisionals quickly overtook other republican groups such as the OIRA and its subsequent splinter group, the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), in terms of members, weapons and activities.¹⁷ The next key split was again over the issue of abstentionism. Sinn Féin had an official policy of abstentionism in the Dáil Éireann since the Irish Civil War ended in 1923. This changed in 1986, when party members were allowed to sit in the Dáil, much to the disdain of traditionalist supporters of abstentionism. Opponents of this change formed Republican Sinn Féin (RSF) in 1986 which eventually established its own militant group to rival the Provisionals, the Continuity IRA (CIRA). The RSF even established its own newspaper *Saoirse* (freedom) to rival *An Phoblacht*.

Under the leadership of Michael McKevitt, Quartermaster General of the PIRA since 1985, the Provisionals split again in 1997, this time into a group dubbed by the media as the

¹³ Sean Farren, “The SDLP governing with uncertainty,” in *A farewell to arms? Beyond the Good Friday Agreement*, eds. Michael Cox, Adrian Guelke and Fiona Stephen, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 121.

¹⁴ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*, 3rd ed. (London: Pan Macmillan, 2012), 106-107.

¹⁵ Ibid., 105-108.

¹⁶ Andrew Sanders, *Inside the IRA: Dissident Republicans and the War for Legitimacy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), accessed September 4, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=714146>, 86.

¹⁷ Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 283.

“Real IRA”.¹⁸ The Real IRA opposed republican involvement in the peace process and established its own military command along with a political affiliate, the 32-County Sovereignty Movement (32CSM).¹⁹ The Real IRA vigorously opposed the politicisation of the republican movement in the 1990s. 32CSM co-founder Bernadette Sands-McKevitt, Michael McKevitt’s wife and hunger striker Bobby Sands’ sister, defended the group’s opposition to the peace process and the 1997 ceasefire. Sands stated that her brother “did not die for cross-border bodies with executive powers. He did not die for nationalists to be equal British citizens in the Northern Ireland state”.²⁰ This was an uncomfortable assertion for Sinn Féin. In the 1970s, the party had promised nothing less than a unified Irish Republic but had by the 1990s, diverted attention to civil rights issues and the culpability of the British state in the conflict.²¹ Peace studies scholar John Darby has described the RIRA as “Zealots,” who refused to engage in the peace process and forged an “alliance of convenience” with the “well-established Continuity IRA”.²² Zealots or not, the RIRA had the support of Bobby Sands’ sister, a former PIRA Quartermaster General as well as Marian Price, an ex-prisoner described by International Relations scholar Andrew Sanders as “arguably the most prominent female IRA volunteer”.²³

The RIRA began its campaign in January 1997 by targeting large towns and RUC stations with large car bombs. The group bombed the town of Banbridge in County Down on 1 August 1998 after giving a thirty minute warning, devastating the town centre and injuring dozens.²⁴ According to Conflict Studies scholar James Dingley, the Real IRA were “beginning to establish genuine momentum ... starting to pick up recruits from old and current Provisionals”.²⁵ Strategically, Omagh’s town centre, especially the courthouse, was considered a centre for ‘British’ justice and thus a legitimate target.²⁶ Additionally, the town had a nationalist majority which displayed “above average republican support” including Francie Mackey, a 32CSM member of the Omagh District Council.²⁷ The audience for these

¹⁸ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2007), 507.

¹⁹ English, *Armed Struggle*, 316.

²⁰ Ibid., 316-317.

²¹ Cillian McGrattan, *Memory, Politics and Identity: Haunted by History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 131-132.

²² John Darby, *The Effects of Violence on Peace Processes* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), 48.

²³ Sanders, *Inside the IRA*, 210.

²⁴ James Dingley, “The Bombing of Omagh, 15 August 1998: The Bombers, Their Tactics, Strategy, and Purpose Behind the Incident,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 24, no. 6 (2001): 457.

²⁵ Ibid., 458.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

attacks was republicans with reservations about Sinn Féin's participation in the peace process.²⁸

On Saturday 15 August, families from Omagh and the surrounding area visited the town centre to shop for school supplies, as classes were set to resume after the summer holidays. Few expected violence in this place at this time. As Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan died in the bombing noted, it had “occurred during peacetime. So many had worked hard to secure that peace with the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and that is why Omagh was shocking to so many”.²⁹ On that day, Maggie Hall, an assistant at Ulster Television (UTV), received a phone call from a man representing ‘Óglaigh na hÉireann’ (Soldiers of Ireland or IRA) – the official name used by the Real IRA. The man warned of a “Bomb Courthouse Omagh, Main Street, 500 pounds explosion, 30 minutes” followed by a second warning claiming a bomb was “about 200 yards up from the courthouse – High Street, the main street”.³⁰ Omagh does not contain a ‘main street,’ and this confusion caused police to move people away from the courthouse, and towards the car containing the bomb on Market Street, which detonated at 3:04 pm.³¹

The resulting explosion killed 28 people, and injured hundreds more.³² The blast was devastating and random. Kevin Skelton remembered being “six feet away” from the bomb when it exploded and escaped uninjured, while his wife Philomena “took the full force of the blast and saved my youngest daughter in the process”.³³ For hundreds of people on Market Street, injuries ranged from minor scratches to limb loss and even decapitation.³⁴ Numerous limbs scattered around the explosion site and hundreds of people were rushed to hospital (see figure 6). Some were killed instantly while others died in the days after the bombing. Due to the sudden influx of patients, many of the injured had to be transported to hospitals outside of Omagh, meaning some families waited until the next day to learn if their loved ones had died. Two victims, Oran Doherty and Sean McLaughlin, were from the Irish Republic. Fernando Blasco Baselga and Rocio Abad Ramos were Spanish and James Barker

²⁸ Sanders, *Inside the IRA*, 210.

²⁹ Graham Spencer, *Omagh: Voices of Loss* (London: Appletree, 2005), 9.

³⁰ Ruth Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath: The Omagh Bombing and the Families' Pursuit of Justice* (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), 1-2. As Dudley Edwards points out, the bombing was later incorrectly identified as occurring at 3.10pm, whereas it actually occurred at 3.04pm.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

³² The twenty-ninth victim, Sean McGrath, died as a result of injuries sustained in the bombing on 5 September 1998.

³³ Spencer, *Voices of Loss*, 32-34.

³⁴ Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath*, 49.

was born in England. The remaining the victims were from Omagh or its surrounding areas including Avril Monaghan, who died while pregnant with twins.³⁵



Figure 6.³⁶ The aftermath of the Omagh bombing. Similar images were beamed around the world following the bombing. The RIRA's telephoned warnings led the RUC to move people from around Omagh courthouse at the western end of Market Street further east, towards the car containing the 500lb bomb. The bomb burst a water main, leading to a visible 'river of blood' flowing down Omagh's Market Street.

Processing the so-called "so-called peace process"

Politicians, clergy and other prominent figures were quick to condemn the bombing. Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair, David Trimble and Bill Clinton were among the political leaders who issued statements in the days after the event. The most significant figure to condemn bombing was Gerry Adams, who, in an interview with a group of journalists, stated "I condemn it without any equivocation whatsoever".³⁷ The use of the word 'condemn' was momentous, as it marked the first time Adams had ever used the word in relation to republican violence, albeit, 'dissident' republican violence.³⁸ Adams reiterated his stance on 1 September, saying "my position on what happened in Omagh on 15th August is quite

³⁵ McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, 1436-1460.

³⁶ Stephen Wright and Martin Robinson, "Dark day for justice as Omagh bombing case collapses: Heartbreak for families as 'Real IRA foot soldier' who was last remaining suspect walks free," *Daily Mail*, March 1, 2016, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3470887/Bricklayer-accused-Omagh-bombing-set-walk-free-families-29-dead-say-left-dark-fear-never-justice-victims.html>.

³⁷ "Adams's condemnation further isolates dissidents," *Irish Times*, August 17, 1998, 8.

³⁸ 'Dissident' republicans is the umbrella term for non-PIRA republicans who did not accept the peace process or GFA.

categoric. I have condemned it without equivocation”.³⁹ Ahern welcomed Adams’ September statement, with a press statement saying that the Taoiseach “also endorses the view of Sinn Féin that there is a shared responsibility to removing the causes of and to achieving an end to all conflict and to making the Omagh bombing the last violent incident of its kind”.⁴⁰ Ahern, Trimble, Blair and Clinton’s remarks on the bombing were expected, but Adams’ condemnation demonstrated that republicans’ responses to violence had changed, acknowledgement of new political context that allowed Adams to condemn republican violence without alienating the republican base from the peace process.

In condemning the bombing as an aberration, politicians also linked the atrocity with the need to continue the political peace process and their vision of a ‘new’ Northern Ireland. Although not ‘using’ the bombing as part of a purely self-interested political calculation, some politicians positioned the atrocity as a direct attack on the peace process, rather than being in some way caused by it. Ahern condemned the attack as “an attack on democracy, a cruel denial of the clearly expressed wish for peace of the overwhelming majority of the Irish people, as shown by the referendums of the Good Friday Agreement”.⁴¹ The Irish Government released a statement building on these remarks, calling the bombing “a direct attack on the Good Friday Agreement and the principles of democracy itself”.⁴² Having only just been informed about the bombing, Blair commented in an interview “so much of our emotions are grief, but there has to be with that grief a determination that they won’t succeed, that they won’t destroy the chance of a decent future for the people of Northern Ireland”.⁴³ However, such rallying to the cause was predictably not uniform. Ian Paisley and other anti-GFA unionists interpreted the bombing as evidence of the weaknesses of the GFA and capitalised on public shock and horror. Paisley noted “no one can do a bombing anywhere in Northern Ireland without the knowledge of the IRA and without their collusion in it”.⁴⁴

³⁹ “Keynote Statement by Gerry Adams on the Current State of the Peace Process, 1 September 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, September 1, 1998, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ga1998.htm>.

⁴⁰ “Press Release on behalf of Bertie Ahern, then Taoiseach, Welcoming the Statement by Sinn Féin, 1 September 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, September 1, 1998, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dott/ba010998.htm>.

⁴¹ “Statement by Bertie Ahern, then Taoiseach, Condemning the Omagh Bomb, 15 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, August 15, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dott/ba150898.htm>.

⁴² “Statement issued by the Irish Government in response to the Omagh Bomb, 19 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, August 19, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ba19898.htm>.

⁴³ “Northern Ireland: Omagh Bomb,” ITN Source, August 15, 1998, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/ITN/1998/08/15/BSP150898002/?s=Tony%20Blair%20Omagh>.

⁴⁴ Barrie Clement, “Omagh bomb: Paisley’s hardliners may reap the benefit,” *Independent*, August 16, 1998, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/omagh-bomb-paisleys-hardliners-may-reap-the-benefit-1171936.html>.

Paisley also condemned the British government for entering into agreements with Sinn Féin.⁴⁵ This exchange of views began a pattern of responding to post-GFA violence: pro-GFA politicians viewed the bombing as evidence for the need to continue the peace process while anti-GFA politicians saw paramilitary violence as evidence of the Agreement's faults.

President Clinton addressed the people of Omagh on 3 September 1998 at the Omagh Leisure Centre, a building used as a field hospital in the days after the bombing. Clinton quoted a letter he received, originally sent to the US Ambassador to Ireland. The letter sent by a man from County Mayo said "throughout my life there has never been peace on this island. I never realized how precious peace could be until my wife, Martina, gave birth to our daughter, Ashleen, 20 months ago. We don't want her to grow up in a society that is constantly waiting for the next atrocity, the next bunch of young lives snuffed out in a sea of hatred and fear".⁴⁶ Clinton concluded "we came here today to say we grieve for your loss, but to pledge to that little Ashleen in Mayo ... that we will work to build this peace, to make it a place where children can dream; to redeem the loss of innocents from the madness of people who must fail so that your life can go on".⁴⁷ As in the referendum campaign, politicians such as Clinton incorporated children as symbols of hope for the future and a reason to continue the political peace process. This sentiment was reiterated by republican paramilitaries, through an *An Phoblacht* interview with an anonymous PIRA spokesperson, who stated "we suspect that this attack and previous bomb attacks by this and other groupings have been aimed at the peace process, in general, and at Sinn Féin's peace strategy in particular".⁴⁸ Such reactions to the bombing demonstrated that the commitment of (at least) the core elements of the disparate coalition of paramilitaries and politicians in supporting the GFA would continue in the aftermath of such an atrocity.

Simultaneously, many who had opposed the GFA saw the bombing as evidence of both the futility of the Agreement and the peace process in general. Free Presbyterian Church ministers from County Tyrone blamed the peace process for the bombing. They accused the British government of "of pursuing a policy in Northern Ireland that has encouraged this atrocity and the many others that have gone before, by seeking to placate terrorism through

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Remarks by President Clinton to the Victims and Families of Victims of the Bombing in Omagh, (3 September 1998)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Brendan Lynn, September 3, 1998, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/bc030998.htm>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Text of an Interview with an IRA Spokesperson, 1 September 1998," CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, September 1, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira1998.htm>.

immoral concessions such as the present early release of convicted”.⁴⁹ The emotive issue of prisoner releases, especially worrying to some unionists in the May referendum campaign, is positioned here as a precursor to paramilitary violence exemplified by the Omagh bombing. Ian Paisley, the moderator of the church, linked the bombing to the decommissioning, and said the “bomb would not have been made or detonated if Sinn Féin/IRA had handed over its explosives and weapons”.⁵⁰ Paisley repeated this idea in the Northern Ireland Assembly’s 15 September debate dedicated to the bombing, saying that there was “no difference between the killings of the past, on both sides of the religious and political divide, and this killing in Omagh. The only thing that happened this time was that the Governments had a vested interest in their so-called peace process, so that is why they had such a quick and swift answer to this matter”.⁵¹ Pro-GFA politicians stressed how unacceptable Omagh was compared to other paramilitary attacks, emphasising its uniqueness, as Blair later stated “we have known tragedy in Northern Ireland many times before; but this was an indiscriminate attack on a whole community”.⁵² Contrastingly, Paisley honed in on the similarities between pre-GFA paramilitary attacks, reiterating “there is no difference between the villainy, the hellishness and the hideousness of what took place in Omagh and all the killings of the past”.⁵³ Paisley’s statement is a direct rejection of the ‘peace’ promised by the GFA and frames the bombing as a consequence of the Agreement itself.

The public reaction to the bombing was spontaneous and enormous. Hundreds of letters were written to major newspapers expressing condolences for the victims and their families. Memorial services and minutes of silence were held all over the Irish Republic, with thousands attending services in Dublin and Cork. A hurling match between Clare and Offaly was halted to observe an ecumenical service.⁵⁴ The *Tyrone Constitution*, one of Omagh’s largest newspapers, along with the *Ulster Herald*, were inundated with messages of condolence from dozens of local organisations including businesses, churches and sports groups as well as

⁴⁹ “Statement from the Free Presbyterian Church ministers in Co. Tyrone following the bombing of Omagh,” *Tyrone Constitution*, August 20, 1998, 18.

⁵⁰ Barrie Clement, “Omagh bomb: Paisley’s hardliners may reap the benefit,” *Independent*, August 16, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/omagh-bomb-paisleys-hardliners-may-reap-the-benefit-1171936.html>.

⁵¹ “Omagh Bombing— in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 15th September 1998,” Northern Ireland Assembly: They Work For You, September 15, 1998, accessed November 11, 2016, <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=1998-09-15.2.0>.

⁵² “Omagh,” Hansard, September 2, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1998/sep/02/omagh>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Michael Laverty, “One silent minute reaching eternity,” *Irish Independent*, August 24, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/one-silent-minute-reaching-eternity-26178244.html>.

letters of sympathy from as far away as India and Australia.⁵⁵ The *Ulster Herald* reported a similar response, recording condolences from other newspapers, banks, grocery stores and schools along with dozens of funeral notices.⁵⁶ Tens of thousands of signatures filled dozens of condolence books across Northern Ireland, in the cities of Belfast and Derry as well as the towns of Enniskillen, Strabane, Newtownstewart, Castlederg, Clady, Plumbridge, Donemana and Omagh itself.⁵⁷ In the Irish Republic, thousands queued to sign books of condolences in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Dundalk and Buncrana.⁵⁸ In addition, an online book of condolences was opened by the Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), the Irish national broadcaster, which recorded 500 messages and 2000 signatures of condolence.⁵⁹ An independently organised “International Book of Condolence” was created, and amassed over 500 online messages which were then sent to the Omagh District Council.⁶⁰ The website declared that the messages “will also remain here [online], lest we ever forget the sadness”.⁶¹ This use of ‘new media’ allowed for people all over the world to express their solidarity with the people of Omagh. Ruth Dudley Edwards recorded that 800 books of condolences were delivered to Omagh after the bombing, containing up to two million signatures.⁶²

The public outpouring of sympathy was certainly used by politicians to reinforce the peace process, but it was not forced on an unsympathetic public. The public outcry over the bombing was a chance for politicians, and for many members of the public, to reaffirm their commitment to the principles of the GFA through traditional and new forms of personal expression. Letters from Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and Britain contained a combination of sympathy and anger. Anger was especially strong in letters from the Irish Republic, where many sought to distance themselves from republicans claiming to be fighting on behalf of the Irish nation. One letter to the *Irish Times*, addressed to the RIRA, thought the bombing “will do absolutely nothing to convince people, North and South, rightly sickened and appalled by the 30 years of chaos that you have wrought, of the worthiness of your fascistic intentions. For “patriots” like you, the foulest pits of hell seem

⁵⁵ *Tyrone Constitution*, August 27, 1998, 11-12.

⁵⁶ *Ulster Herald*, August 20, 1998, 2, 6.

⁵⁷ Ian Starrett, “Omagh bomb horror - Candlelit trail of tears as little boys go,” *Belfast News Letter*, August 19, 1998, 7.

⁵⁸ Christine Newman, “Children's flowers and words carry message of sympathy,” *Irish Times*, August 18, 1998, 9.

⁵⁹ Bernadette Burke, “World uses Web to express outrage over Omagh bomb,” *Irish Times*, August 20, 1998, accessed November 9, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world-uses-web-to-express-outrage-over-omagh-bomb-1.184691>.

⁶⁰ Colm Cochran, “Here are the messages of condolences received,” accessed November 20, 2016, <http://renview.com/omagh/formsmgr/journal.html>.

⁶¹ Colm Cochran, “The Omagh Bombing International Book of Condolences,” accessed November 20, 2016, <http://renview.com/omagh/>. Square brackets added.

⁶² Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath*, 85.

too good a place”.⁶³ Another letter outlined the feeling that the RIRA “DO NOT SPEAK FOR US. WE DO NOT WANT YOU. GO AWAY AND LEAVE US IN PEACE”.⁶⁴ The overwhelming tone of letters selected by newspapers such as the *Irish Times* was anger and shame that the bombers had an ideological link with the Irish Republic. This public rejection of the Real IRA is also a repudiation of the discourse of ‘national liberation’ and ‘armed struggle,’ so central to republican ideology throughout the Troubles, now delegitimised by paramilitary violence.

Letters condemning the bombing in relation to the GFA were particularly prominent in the unionist *Belfast News Letter*, which had supported the GFA, but also expressed doubts about the peace process in editorials and letters throughout the referendum campaign. One letter to the newspaper from 19 August summarised the pro-GFA public response to the bombing, “far from marking the end of the peace process this tragic event is a brutal reminder of what life in the Province will be like if we fail to energetically pursue its objectives”.⁶⁵ However, others linked the bombing to Adams, the PIRA and Sinn Féin. A letter on the same page of the newspaper considered, “if this is the peace and stability on offer then I think that I was right to say “NO”. Is the murders of innocent men, women and children in Omagh the price Northern Ireland has to pay, so the prisoners get their freedom and we get Sinn Féin/IRA in government?”⁶⁶ For contributors such as this, the bombing was evidence of the falseness of the GFA and evidence that allowing republicans in government and releasing paramilitary prisoners was a fundamentally flawed plan. For example, another letter pointed to the perceived hypocrisy in Gerry Adams’ condemnation of the bombing, as “one merely has to think of Bloody Friday to wretch [sic] at the sheer scale of hypocrisy involved” concluding “the Stormont Agreement [GFA] is yielding a bitter harvest”.⁶⁷ This letter notes that PIRA’s infamous ‘Bloody Friday’ massacre in 1972, scarred in many people’s (especially unionists) memories of the Troubles, resembled the Omagh bombing and that Northern Ireland had changed for the worse as a result of the GFA. Public sympathy for the victims of the bombing should not be misconstrued as support for the Agreement which was, in the unionist community, fragile at best. The *Belfast News Letter* would publish more anti-GFA views in the following months, as unionists began to reject the GFA.

⁶³ Edwin McCloughan, letter to the editor, *Irish Times*, August 17, 1998, 17.

⁶⁴ John McEneaney, letter to the editor, *Irish Times*, August 18, 1998, 15.

⁶⁵ M Stephens, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, August 19, 1998, 12.

⁶⁶ Colin Dean, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, August 19, 1998, 12.

⁶⁷ Dieu et Mon Droit, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, August 18, 1998, 12. Square brackets added.

The public response to the Omagh bombing demonstrated that not only had thousands been devastated by the atrocity, but much of the power in public discourse had shifted away from paramilitaries and towards the victims of their actions. Some dissident republican paramilitary groups announced ceasefires in the wake of the bombing, including the INLA. The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), the political wing of the INLA, issued a statement asking “the Irish National Liberation Army, who we know have been considering a ceasefire, to reach a decision quickly”.⁶⁸ In response, the INLA issued a statement on 22 August:

although we, for our part believe that the Good Friday Agreement was not worth the sacrifices of the past 30 years and are still politically opposed to it, the people of the island of Ireland have spoken clearly as to their wishes ... we acknowledge and admit faults and grievous errors in our prosecution of the war. Innocent people were killed and injured and at times our actions as a liberation army fell far short of what they should have been ... it is now time to silence the guns and allow the working classes the time and opportunity to advance their demands and their needs.⁶⁹

This statement contains a level of reflection not seen by other paramilitary groups, especially as the INLA acknowledged its opposition to the GFA while accepting its legitimacy. The statement can also be considered as accepting the power of the public’s response to the bombing. The INLA now recognised that the GFA was legitimised by the ‘people of the island of Ireland,’ who no longer supported the idea of an ‘armed struggle.’ Even the inclusion of the word ‘innocent’ shows a change from how many paramilitary groups fought the Troubles, in which few victims were classified as innocent. The statement followed ‘the script’ of the GFA, the expectation that paramilitary groups would bow to the will of the ‘public,’ or in this case the ‘working classes,’ and the Agreement could allow for republican and loyalist groups to have a dignified exit from paramilitary activities.

The INLA statement was not matched in its magnanimity by the Real IRA. On 18 August, a RIRA statement blamed security forces for not heeding their three bomb warnings, defended the bombing as “part of an ongoing war against the Brits” and ended curtly by saying “we offer apologies to the civilians”.⁷⁰ The organisation then revealed that it had

⁶⁸ “Statement issued by the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) following the Omagh Bomb, 17 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, August 17, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/irsp17898.htm>.

⁶⁹ “Ceasefire Statement issued by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), 22 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, August 22, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/inla22898.htm>.

⁷⁰ “First Statement issued by the “real” IRA, 18 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, August 18, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/rira18898a.htm>.

suspended its military campaign.⁷¹ The 32CSM also released a statement, lamenting the deaths but noting that the organisation was “a political movement and we are not a military group. We reject categorically any suggestions that has been publically made, that our movement was responsible in any way”.⁷² The blame directed towards security forces and the seeming lack of remorse for civilian deaths led to a widespread rejection of the RIRA and 32CSM’s statements by politicians and victims of the bombing. These statements were not only interpreted as insensitive to the Omagh victims, but a serious *faux pas* in the discourse of the ‘new’ Northern Ireland. Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, described the RIRA’s statement as “a pathetic attempt at an excuse for mass murder, I think it's contemptible and I think it's an insult to the people of Omagh ... the sole responsibility lies with the bombers”.⁷³ Mowlam promised that “we and the Irish government will continue to do all we can to hunt them down”.⁷⁴ Similarly, Seamus Mallon called the Real IRA’s statement “beneath contempt ... I believe what we see happening right throughout the length and breadth of Ireland is a victory, a victory of the human spirit, over the evil of terrorism and violence”.⁷⁵ The RIRA statement was not only condemned by political leaders, but by people who experienced the bombing. The *Belfast News Letter* reported the response of Rita Aroua, a nurse who helped treat injured people after the bombing, who said that the apology “is an absolute insult. People will be disgusted”.⁷⁶ This was echoed by Geraldine Keys, a community worker from Omagh, who said that “just admitting that they had done it does not make a blind bit of difference to the families who are burying their loved ones and those visiting injured relatives in hospital”.⁷⁷

⁷¹ “Second Statement issued by the “real” IRA, 18 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, August 18, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/rira18898b.htm>.

⁷² “Statement issued by the 32-County Sovereignty Committee following the Omagh Bomb, 16 August 1998,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, August 16, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ttsc16898.htm>.

⁷³ “Ireland: Mo Mowlam Rejects the Real IRA Apology,” AP Archive, August 18, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/N-IRELAND-MO-MOWLAM-REJECTS-THE-REAL-IRA-APOLOGY/cf7ea203003c33daca26a88cca963d16?query=mo+mowlam+rejects+ira¤t=1&orderBy=Relevance&hits=5&referrer=search&search=%2Fsearch%3Fstartd%3d%26enddd%3d%26allFilters%3d%26query%3dmo%2bmowlam%2brejects%2bira%26advsearchStartDateFilter%3d%26advsearchEndDateFilter%3d%26searchFilterHdSDFormat%3dAll%26searchFilterDigitized%3dAll%26searchFiltercolorFormat%3dAll%26searchFilteraspratioFormat%3dAll&allFilters=&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=963d16>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ “Ireland: Funeral of 3 Youngsters Killed in Omagh Bombing (2),” AP Archive, August 19, 1998, accessed January 17, 2017, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/IRELAND-FUNERAL-OF-3-YOUNGSTERS-KILLED-IN-OMAGH-BOMBING-2-/2bea9aac64f6ac479d65706d324a609c?query=ireland¤t=8&orderBy=Relevance&hits=36&referrer=search&search=%2Fsearch%3Fquery%3Direland%26allFilters%3D%26searchFilterHdSDFormat%3DAll%26searchFilterDigitized%3DAll%26searchFiltercolorFormat%3DAll%26searchFilteraspratioFormat%3DAll&allFilters=&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=4a609c>.

⁷⁶ “Omagh bomb horror - Emotional scenes at candle-lit peace vigil,” *Belfast News Letter*, August 19, 1998, 3.

⁷⁷ “Sorry, but war goes on,” *Belfast News Letter*, August 19, 1998, 1.

In a change from past tactics, loyalist paramilitaries on a tentative ceasefire did not carry out revenge attacks for the bombing. In the aftermath of previous atrocities committed by republican paramilitaries, the UDA and UVF often responded by attacking suspected IRA members or Catholic civilians. For instance, loyalist paramilitaries killed a number of Catholic civilians in response to the PIRA's Coleraine (1973), Enniskillen (1987) and Teebane (1992) bombings. Chris Hudson, a mediator between the UVF and the Irish government said after the bombing that a "combination of national and international condemnations about the Omagh bomb helped defuse pressure for loyalist retaliation" after Omagh.⁷⁸ This also marked a distinct change, as in this case, public opinion appeared to affect paramilitary policy. This statement indicates that the public response to the bombing may have inadvertently reinforced the peace process, by proving to loyalist leaders and paramilitaries that retaliation was not what the public wanted. John White, former UDA prisoner and a spokesman for the UDA-affiliated UDP party said the "Loyalist paramilitary groupings who I would be close to are saying very clearly that they don't want to be drawn into the conflict, which would be the hopes of the people who planted this bomb ... so I'm very hopeful that the Loyalist cease fire from the UVF's point of view will remain intact".⁷⁹ From White's statement, we can suppose that some loyalist paramilitaries perceived the bombing as a provocation for a paramilitary response and that loyalists purposefully chose not to respond. In any case, the lack of a loyalist response shows the power of the public's response to the bombing. As opposed to the early 1990s when paramilitaries ignored the overwhelming desire for a peaceful solution to the conflict, these groups now actively listened to 'national and international condemnations.'

"The Bridge of Hope"

Reconciliation became an important idea in discussions surrounding the Omagh bombing. Newspapers across Northern Ireland and the UK, which had been largely supportive of the GFA, responded to the bombing by emphasising the peaceful nature of Omagh as a town and its good cross-community relations. The Omagh District Council had, in the lead up to

⁷⁸ Chris Hudson, "The Ulster Volunteer Force and the Path to Decommissioning," in *Ulster Loyalism after the Good Friday Agreement: History, Identity and Change*, eds. James W. McAuley and Graham Spencer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 78.

⁷⁹ "N. Ireland: The Real IRA Admit Planting Bomb in Omagh," AP Archive, August 18, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/N-IRELAND-THE-REAL-IRA-ADMIT-PLANTING-BOMB-IN-OMAGH/3b30ee6bf4db069052e5c6f9f44527fb?query=ireland¤t=4&orderBy=Relevance&hits=31&referrer=search&search=%2Fsearch%3Fquery%3Direland%26allFilters%3DArmed%2520forces%3ASubject%2CBombings%3ASubject&allFilters=Armed+forces%3ASubject%2CBombings%3ASubject&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=4527fb>.

the referendum, voted ten to four in favour of the GFA.⁸⁰ Exit polls estimated a turnout of 83.23 per cent in Omagh's surrounding area of west Tyrone, leading to a corresponding 83 per cent YES vote in the referendum.⁸¹ The town's peacefulness was emphasised by a 20 August *Irish Times* article which reported that, before the bombing, Omagh "had seen no atrocities like the Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen to the west, and no sectarian confrontations like those in Cookstown and Portadown to the east".⁸² The article went on to describe how

in a town of about 60% Catholics and 40% Protestants, community relations have been relatively cordial. There is a philosophy of "live and let live" ... locals point to the gesture of local Catholics when the area's Methodist church was damaged by sectarian vandals 18 months ago. The parish priest at the Sacred Heart Church organised a collection among his congregation to help with repairs.⁸³

Similarly, the *Ulster Herald* reported that the community of Omagh which was "assaulted as one, has already shown that it intends to face the future as one".⁸⁴ This description rendered Omagh as more sheltered from sectarianism than other parts of Northern Ireland and aimed to further delegitimise the RIRA's choice of target. These descriptions also created the impression that these victims were particularly innocent and that their murders were absolutely unnecessary.

Newspapers reported many stories of many large and small acts of reconciliation in the wake of the bombing. The *Irish Times* carried a story in which

two Protestants said they had dealt with their despair by demonstrating to their Catholic neighbours that even a 500 lb [bomb] would not destroy their friendship. They went to their local Catholic Mass and walked up to receive Communion. Another Protestant woman, Heather Wilson, had a friend who said she was ashamed to be a Catholic "but I had said the same to her when the Quinn boys were murdered ... many of my friends are Catholic and that certainly will not change".⁸⁵

The British Catholic *Tablet* magazine made a similar point:

there was a universality to the group who died - Protestant and Catholic, from south of the border as well as north, and ranging from grandmothers to babies, some of them unborn. The consequence was to unite the community, to bond it rather than divide it. Moreover, by including so many Catholics among their victims, the republican rump had wiped out large numbers of innocents from its own side.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ "Omagh council votes in favour of Agreement," *Tyrone Constitution*, May 7, 1998, 1.

⁸¹ "83 per cent in West Tyrone voted Yes, newspaper poll claims," *Tyrone Constitution*, May 26, 1998, 12.

⁸² Andy Pollack, "Omagh a quiet town which had escaped worst of violence," *Irish Times*, August 17, 1998, 6.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ "A Time for Mourning," *Ulster Herald*, August 20, 1998, 3.

⁸⁵ "Screams give way to silence of the tomb," *Irish Times*, August 17, 1998, 6. Square brackets added.

⁸⁶ Paul Vallely, "From the ashes of Omagh," *Tablet*, August 29, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/29th-august-1998/6/from-the-ashes-of-omagh>.

The symbolism espoused by these anecdotes was that the bombing had actually strengthened relations between Protestants and Catholics, undermining the supposed aim of the bombers. A core component of the GFA's reconciliatory pitch and the YES campaign was the place of children and the idea the new generation would not need to grow up in a violent Northern Ireland. The fact that children were among the victims of the bombing, was utilised in the media's coverage of the bombing's aftermath and poetry was one mechanism that the public used to express this grief, sadness and anger. Twelve-year-old Sean McLaughlin, who died as a result of the bombing, had previously written a poem entitled 'The Bridge' for President Mary McAleese:

Orange and Green, it doesn't matter
 United now, don't shatter our dream
 Scatter the seeds of peace over our land,
 So we can travel hand in hand
 Across the bridge of hope.⁸⁷

Here was a poem, written by a victim of paramilitary violence, advocating for a reconciled future that he would never have the chance to experience. 'The Bridge' and other poems offered a version of reconciliation that was incorporated by numerous publications and encapsulated public grief and hopes for a more reconciled future. The poem was printed in the Omagh's *Ulster Herald* as well as other Northern Irish and Irish newspapers.⁸⁸ It was later read by Liam Neeson in a collaborative album, 'Across the Bridge of Hope,' containing songs performed by Sinéad O'Connor, Van Morrison, U2 and Boyzone.⁸⁹ Just as in the campaign surrounding the May referendum, celebrities reinforced the need for reconciliation for the children of Northern Ireland.

Other poems focused on the youthfulness of the victims of the bombing. One poem titled 'The Driver' appeared in the *Tyrone Constitution* on 20 August and read "Are you the hero of the day / Now there's flesh and blood in Market Street / From young and old you've taken life, / You've broken hearts and severed limbs away".⁹⁰ Another poem, 'The people of Omagh' referred specifically to the suffering of children "Tearing and destroying, women, children, teenagers lying all around ... I want to gather up my family and run from your

⁸⁷ "Sean's poem for peace," *Ulster Herald*, August 20, 1998, 7.

⁸⁸ Kim Sengupta, "Omagh Aftermath: In a land of dark shadow, three boys are buried by thousands," *Independent*, August 20, 1998, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/omagh-aftermath-in-a-land-of-dark-shadow-three-boys-are-buried-by-thousands-1172789.html>; "Buncrana weeps for three local children and two Spanish," *Irish Times*, August 18, 1998, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/buncrana-weep-for-three-local-children-and-two-spanish-1.184095>.

⁸⁹ "Irish stars back bridge of hope," BBC News, November 2, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/206240.stm>.

⁹⁰ "The Driver," *Tyrone Constitution*, August 20, 1998, 7.

town”.⁹¹ A 27 August poem called ‘A Sad Sad Day in County Tyrone’ talked again about children’s suffering “There were children there who came from Spain / And babies, too, who were barely born / Together they died and shared the pain”.⁹² The same day another poem published in the newspaper read

Is there children in your life? [sic] Are you in touch with a young one?
Just look at that child, what do you see?
A world surrounded by hope, joy and a promise to be free.
But only you decided for some families that was not to be,
They will always ask and search - why me?.⁹³

The 3 September edition of the *Tyrone Constitution* offered numerous other poems that reflected on these themes, explicitly linking the innocence of children to the necessity of the peace process. Most explicitly, ‘How Can This Be?’ said that

This time we’re not spared the details, we must remember this pain,
We voted for Peace, now voice your condemnation again and again ...
Religious borders now broken by murder - what a tragedy!
Saturday 15th August, Omagh, a dark day in our history.⁹⁴

“Precious Tears” described “Mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. Brothers and sisters, Babies so young” while the poem ‘And the Greatest of These’ referred to “Burned blinded broken and torn / Mothers and children, babies unborn”.⁹⁵ Linking these various poems are themes of the reconciliation and the tragedy of children suffering. The choice of newspapers to publish these poems pays tribute, not only to the children killed in the bombing, but to the belief that children desired and deserved a reconciled future.

These poems also served a political purpose, as the poems chosen by these publications restated the public’s support of the GFA, especially the generational reasons for achieving peace expressed during the 1998 referendum campaign. The form of poetry is also important to note. Whereas personal suffering and experience of trauma throughout the Troubles was often sidelined as many victims of violence felt silenced, poetry as a personal form of reflection represents a change – personal experience was now made public. As Seamus Heaney, Derry-born poet remarked in his Nobel acceptance speech, poetry contains “the power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values, that our very solitudes and distresses are creditable, in so far as they, too,

⁹¹ “The people of Omagh,” *Tyrone Constitution*, August 20, 1998, 17.

⁹² “A Sad Sad Day in County Tyrone,” *Tyrone Constitution*, August 27, 1998, 5.

⁹³ “You Only You,” *Tyrone Constitution*, August 27, 1998, 5. Square brackets added.

⁹⁴ “How Can This Be?,” *Tyrone Constitution*, September 3, 1998, 6.

⁹⁵ “Precious Tears,” *Tyrone Constitution*, September 3, 1998, 6; “And the Greatest of These,” *Tyrone Constitution*, September 3, 1998, 6.

are an earnest of our veritable human being”.⁹⁶ Poetry is, in other words, a highly personal form of communication, one that can be utilised to process enormous tragedy using one’s own words. In 1998, many members of the public not only shared their experiences in the media, but recorded them in the highly personal form of reflective poetry. Heaney himself asked one week after the bombing

could it be that we have finally moved beyond "the politics of the last atrocity"?
Could it be that we now perceive the enemy in "dullards", in "insensibility" itself?
Could it be that tears have finally shown what the "totality of relationships" boils
down to, namely, a care for each other as creatures of the species, creatures who need
safety and shelter and grounds for trust among ourselves? As realists, we know that
such a trust will be constantly disappointed and that the atrocious will always be a
threat; but as mourners, we have reason also to believe that we have reached some
tragic conclusion, and that the whimper of exhausted grief just might turn into the
cry of something vulnerable and new.⁹⁷

Whereas the poems submitted by the public may not have possessed the polish of Heaney’s words, the hope that ‘we have reached some tragic conclusion’ is evident throughout the poetic responses to the bombing.

The bombing other artistic responses including U2’s melancholic 2000 song *Peace on Earth*, which went as far as to mention the names of the victims

They're reading names out over the radio
All the folks the rest of us won't get to know
Sean and Julia, Gareth, Ann and Brenda
Their lives are bigger, than any big idea ...
Hear it every Christmas time
But hope and history won't rhyme
So what's it worth?
This peace on Earth.⁹⁸

U2 had publicly supported the GFA and this song expresses some of the band’s feelings of hopelessness in the wake of the bombing. Powerful reactions to the bombing also came in the form of visual arts. Gerry Gleason’s painting ‘Interface (for Omagh)’ captures some of the disbelief that a bombing could happen after the 1994 ceasefires and the GFA (see figure 7). As Gleason reflects “the ceasefires had occurred the society was moving towards power sharing and people were a bit more optimistic. Then this dreadful act happens”.⁹⁹ The bombing also inspired a painting by visual artist Michael Farrell entitled ‘Omagh Bombing,’

⁹⁶ Seamus Heaney, “Seamus Heaney - Nobel Lecture,” The Nobel Foundation, December 7, 1995, accessed January 24, 2017, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/heaney-lecture.html.

⁹⁷ Seamus Heaney, “The Omagh Bombing - The Reciprocity of Tears,” *Irish Times*, August 22, 1998, 7.

⁹⁸ U2, *Peace on Earth*, All That You Can’t Leave Behind (Dublin: Island Records, Interscope Records, 2000).

⁹⁹ Gerry Gleason, “Interface (for Omagh),” Troubles Archive, 1998, accessed December 18, 2016, <http://www.troublesarchive.com/index.php/artforms/visual-art/piece/interface-for-omagh->.

which pictured a pair of boy's shoes surrounded by blood as well as McLoughlin's poem (see figure 8).



Figures 7 and 8.¹⁰⁰ 'Interface (for Omagh)' by Gerry Gleason (left) and 'Omagh Bombing' by Michael Farrell (right). Gleason's painting sees a figure planning the Omagh bombing who "sits at a computer planning the event, dates, times, logistics, mobile phones etc. He is remote from it all, almost in virtual space the foot soldiers will do the rest and carry it out in real space, in real time. I hope that a dreadful act like this does not happen again in my life time". Farrell's painting involves "a pair of boys shoes" which are "awash in blood. Standing above is the lower part of a sinister black overcoat and heavy black shoes". Farrell also makes use of poetry by inscribing McLoughlin's poem on the bottom of the canvas.

The religious affiliations of the fatalities were significant in the discussions following the bombing. During the referendum campaign Blair had hoped for a "Northern Ireland where no one gives a damn whether you're Catholic, Protestant, wherever you come from".¹⁰¹ Blair's tone changed after the Omagh bombing. The Prime Minister's statement to the House of Commons in September noted that, of the Omagh victims, "seventeen were Roman Catholic, 11 were Protestant, 11 were under the age of 18 ... you sought to divide the community, and you failed".¹⁰² Although contradicting his previously stated belief in the need to look past other people's religion, the cross-community nature of the victims of the atrocity was a necessary point for Blair and other politicians to make. That more Catholics were killed than Protestants was crucial to note, as these fatalities meant that neither community could

¹⁰⁰ Ibid; Michael Farrell, "Omagh Bombing," Troubles Archive, 2000, accessed December 29, 2016, <http://www.troublesarchive.com/index.php/artforms/visual-art/piece/omagh-bombing>.

¹⁰¹ "N. IRELAND: TONY BLAIR MAKES FINAL APPEAL FOR A YES VOTE (2)," AP Archive, May 21, 1998, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/N-IRELAND-TONY-BLAIR-MAKES-FINAL-APPEAL-FOR-A-YES-VOTE-2-/e7a01032a3dacdc898c7183274e69b8e?query=ireland¤t=8&orderBy=Relevance&hits=15&referrer=search&search=%2Fsearch%3Fquery%3Direland%26allFilters%3DReferendums%3ASubject%2CPeace%2520treaties%3ASubject&allFilters=Referendums%3ASubject%2CPeace+treaties%3ASubject&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=e69b8e>.

¹⁰² "Omagh," Hansard.

claim unequivocal victimhood and the attack could not be considered a sectarian victory for the RIRA or republicans more generally. The civilian and cross-community nature of the bombing's victims may explain the huge public reaction in the form of vigils, memorials and thousands of signatures in books of condolences.

There were also times when official commemorations and public sentiment mirrored one another. Reconciliatory symbolism was extensively utilised in the 'Omagh: Act of Remembrance' ceremony and BBC Northern Ireland television broadcast, one week after the bombing.¹⁰³ The broadcast began with a metaphor of community reconciliation: "two rivers meet in the heart of the town ... this week, people have found consolation in the symbol of that confluence, they have come through this together and they hope to move on from it as one".¹⁰⁴ Present at the ceremony were representatives from the Catholic, Church of Ireland (Anglican) and Presbyterian churches. Just as in the referendum campaign, music was used to bring the communities together, with "the Lord is my Shepherd" being played by St. Eugene's band, described as having "members from across the community".¹⁰⁵ Dr Brendan McCarthy, Pastor of Omagh Community Church said in his address "we stand together as a united community" and "our community will not be torn apart" by the bombing.¹⁰⁶ The subtext of these comments was that the bombers had aimed to ignite sectarian tensions between Protestants and Catholics in the town and perhaps to provoke a paramilitary response. The 'Omagh: Act of Remembrance' ceremony was a chance for numerous politicians to restate their commitment to the peace process, including attendees David Trimble, Gerry Adams, Seamus Mallon and John Hume as well as religious figures including Church of Ireland Archbishop Robin Eames and Catholic Archbishop Seán Brady. The presence of these political and religious figures along with the statements about the divisive intent of the bombing positioned the attack as being not only against the peace process, but as an attempt to bring the Catholic and Protestant communities into conflict.

The bombing also allowed for the public to express its grief online as the BBC established a webpage entitled 'The Omagh Bombing – Your Reaction.' This page enabled the international community to directly express their reactions to bombing. This was the first act of violence in Northern Ireland in which anyone with internet access had such a direct way of expressing their views. The development of these technologies did not, in the case of

¹⁰³ Television Broadcast, "Omagh: Act of Remembrance," broadcast August 22, 1998, accessed March 1, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Omagh, directly change the types or responses that were recorded. Rather, these changes allowed more people than ever to have their voices heard. One contributor summarised that

one only recently prayed that the burning alive of the Quinn Brothers might bring this cycle to an end. Now we have the sheer horror of the largest single bombing in Northern history. That the bomb seems to have ripped indiscriminately [sic] into both Catholic and Protestant shoppers may be the difference ... together protestants and catholics [sic] must learn to live, or die, in No. Ireland. Sectarianism, obviously, will only drive an individual, or an entire people, mad.¹⁰⁷

A majority of responses on the website called for peace and many statements such as the one above focused on the inane nature of sectarianism in Northern Ireland. 'Diane' asked "how many families today are without loved ones just because of religion? ... I come from a mixed family and I love everyone the same - regardless of whether they are Protestant or Catholic".¹⁰⁸ These statements reflected the editorials from Northern Ireland's major newspapers, which unanimously condemned the bombing as an attack on reconciliation. Responses such as these also demonstrated continuing public engagement in responding to paramilitary violence and a perception that the bombing was an attack on reconciliation. Alongside the rise of biographies and autobiographies relating to the Troubles, the inclusion of personalised reactions to violence through mediums including the internet would only increase in the years after 1998.¹⁰⁹

On 3 September 1999, just over a year after the bombing, a free concert took place in Omagh. The Corrs, one of Ireland's most famous bands, performed to a crowd of around 30,000. Andrea Corr said that the victims of Omagh were "prepared to move on and to go forward and they have always put peace first and I think that's always the message from Omagh ... this evening is about moving forward I think".¹¹⁰ The concert also contained a performance from the 'Omagh Youth and Community Choir' containing Catholic and Protestant members. Mo Mowlam said that the young people of Omagh "have an ability to not forget what happened, but say that we must try, with a determination that amazes me, not just to build bricks and mortar but the spirit that is necessary to re-build, and that is what

¹⁰⁷ "The Omagh bombing - your reaction," BBC News, August 16, 1998, accessed November 16, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/reaction/152096.stm. Square brackets added.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Hopkins, *The Politics of Memoir and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 178.

¹¹⁰ "Entertainment Weekly: Ent1 OMAGH CONCERT," AP Archive, September 9, 1999, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/ENTERTAINMENT-WEEKLY-ENT1-OMAGHCONCERT/e2bd0e35d3aa3c625758e1d4f63161d4?query=omagh+concert¤t=1&orderBy=Relevance&hits=6&referrer=search&search=%2fsearch%3fstartd%3d%26endd%3d%26allFilters%3d%26query%3domagh%2bconcert%26advsearchStartDateFilter%3d%26advsearchEndDateFilter%3d%26searchFilterHdSDFormat%3dAll%26searchFilterDigitized%3dAll%26searchFiltercolorFormat%3dAll%26searchFilteraspectratioFormat%3dAll&allFilters=&productType=IncludedProducts&page=1&b=3161d4>.

you feel when you look at these young kids here tonight ... primarily the millennium generation are here".¹¹¹ Judging by these comments, we can infer that the concert was not only designed to aid the town of Omagh, but to demonstrate the necessity of the peace process and reconciliation through music. More broadly, Mowlam's comments reiterate the Agreement's acknowledgement of the "tragedies of the past" while acknowledging victims through a "fresh start".¹¹² The British and Irish governments positioned the bombing as a sectarian attack on reconciliation, designed to promote violence between communities in Northern Ireland and by doing so, further delegitimised the bombing and attempted to strengthen support for the GFA. The enormous public response to the bombing demonstrated that public discourse largely mirrored the political focus on reconciliation, particularly as tens of thousands attended memorial services and denounced sectarian violence in the media.

"We will not be quiet, we will not be forgotten"

The political call for justice was issued shortly after the bombing took place. Blair assured the House of Commons in a 1 September address that the "investigation to bring to justice those responsible is being pursued with the utmost intensity and with complete unity of purpose between the British and the Irish authorities".¹¹³ Ahern promised the Dáil Éireann that the "people of this island, North and South, will enjoy the peace they democratically endorsed and that the victims of Omagh will have justice".¹¹⁴ Once politicians had made speeches and the public had mourned the victims of the bombing, the question arose, what was to be done to the perpetrators? Whereas throughout the Troubles the primary judicial practice was retributive – focusing on imprisoning paramilitaries – the emphasis in the GFA was on restorative justice. In comparison to retributive justice, restorative justice focuses on rehabilitation of criminals and integration back into their respective communities.¹¹⁵ This was a paradigm shift in thinking which focused on social outcomes of prisoners rather than

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² "The Agreement: Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations (10 April 1998)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, April 10, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

¹¹³ "Statement by Tony Blair, then British Prime Minister, on the Omagh Bomb to the House of Commons, 2 September 1998," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, September 2, 1998, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/tb020998.htm>.

¹¹⁴ "Statement by Bertie Ahern, then Taoiseach, to the Dail on the Omagh Bomb, 2 September 1998," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, September 2, 1998, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dott/ba020998.htm>.

¹¹⁵ Rachel Monaghan, "Community-Based Justice in Northern Ireland and South Africa," *International Criminal Justice Review* 18, no. 1 (March 2008): 89-91.

punishment for crimes, as the GFA attempted to “facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community by providing support both prior to and after release, including assistance directed towards availing of employment opportunities, re-training and/or re-skilling, and further education”.¹¹⁶ The Omagh bombing posed a serious dilemma for lawmakers: the prospect of releasing perpetrators of terror before the GFA while prosecuting those who conducted terror during the ongoing ‘peace process.’

In comparison to the progressive treatment of current paramilitary prisoners, the British and Irish governments introduced tough anti-terror legislation in the wake of the Omagh bombing in an attempt to destroy the RIRA and other dissident republican groups. British law changed under the ‘Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998’ which increased the power of senior police’s evidence in convictions, allowing an inference of guilt to be drawn from a suspect’s silence and stronger forfeiture and confiscation penalties against those suspected of handling the assets of a terrorist group.¹¹⁷ The Irish government introduced the ‘Offences against the State (Amendment) Act 1998’ which extended Gardaí arrest and forfeiture powers, created new offences and increased penalties for explosives and firearms offences – all aimed at constraining the activities of dissident republican paramilitaries operating in the Irish Republic.¹¹⁸

The introduction of strict anti-terror laws in 1998 stands in stark contrast to victims’ legal avenues for achieving justice for crimes committed before the GFA. While there were almost 20,000 imprisonments for paramilitary offences during the Troubles, in 1998 there remained over 3000 unsolved killings.¹¹⁹ The Historical Enquiries Team (HET) was established in 2005 to investigate 2535 of the 3268 unsolved murders of the Troubles, although due to funding constraints, the organisation was closed in September 2014.¹²⁰ A crucial component of the GFA was the negotiated release of paramilitary prisoners by the end of 2000. The British government had the unenviable task of attempting restorative justice measures by releasing hundreds of paramilitary prisoners from 1998 to 2000; simultaneously assuring the victims and families of the Omagh bombing that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

¹¹⁶ “The Agreement.”

¹¹⁷ Clive Walker, “The Bombs in Omagh and Their Aftermath: The Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998,” *The Modern Law Review* 62, no. 6 (November 1999): 883, 885, 892.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 881.

¹¹⁹ Kirk Simpson, *Truth Recovery in Northern Ireland: Critically Interpreting the Past* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 94.

¹²⁰ “Inspection of the Police Service of Northern Ireland Historical Enquiries Team,” CAIN Web Service, 2013, accessed November 15, 2016, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/hmic/2013-07-03_HMIC_HET-report.pdf, 108.

The Omagh justice campaign revolved around the creation of the Omagh Support and Self Help Group (OSSHG) formed by some relatives of Omagh victims and others impacted by the bombing. Within this group formed the core group of victims' relatives who eventually won a civil suit against the Real IRA in 2009, including Michael Gallagher, Kevin Skelton and Victor Barker. A 2000 inquest by the Greater Belfast coroner John Leckey outlined the impacts of the bomb on the victims, posited that the Real IRA were responsible and that their warnings were inadequate.¹²¹ However, lasting charges were not laid against the key suspects. Between the bombing and the 2000 inquest, numerous suspects had been arrested, questioned and subsequently released without charge, despite some officers revealing that they were aware of the bombing's perpetrators.¹²² A BBC Panorama documentary aired on 9 October 2000 named Liam Campbell, Seamus Daly, Colm Murphy and Oliver Trainor as suspects linked to the bombing.¹²³ On 23 January 2002, Colm Murphy was found guilty of conspiracy to cause the Omagh bombing in a Dublin court, although this charge was overturned upon appeal in 2005.¹²⁴ A lack of evidence against the bombers was a key issue, as were allegations of police mishandling of evidence including reports that Gardaí detectives lied at various points of the investigation, allegations later proven to be false.¹²⁵ The stagnation in the case was made worse by allegations in 2002 from Northern Ireland Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, that the RUC (and later PSNI) had a breakdown in communication and may have been able to prevent the bombing.¹²⁶ These allegations were strongly denied by police Chief Sir Ronnie Flanagan and were further refuted in a 190 page report by the PSNI.¹²⁷ The entire exchange undermined OSSHG faith in the PSNI, the justice system and the hope that the state would prosecute the Omagh bombers.

Following Murphy's overturned conviction and lacking any criminal prosecutions against suspected bombers, twelve families of Omagh victims including members of the

¹²¹ John Mullin, "It took 12 minutes to list Omagh victims' names," *Guardian*, October 4, 2000, accessed November 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/oct/04/northernireland.johnmullin>.

¹²² John Mullin, "We know who was behind Omagh bombing – RUC," *Guardian*, October 3, 2000, accessed November 14, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/oct/03/northernireland.johnmullin>.

¹²³ "Panorama: Who Bombed Omagh?," BBC News, October 9, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/panorama/transcripts/transcript_09_10_00.txt.

¹²⁴ "Bombing conviction is overturned," BBC News, January 21, 2005, accessed November 14, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4193307.stm.

¹²⁵ "Garda cleared in Omagh bomb case," BBC News, October 8, 2006, accessed January 18, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/6077476.stm.

¹²⁶ "Statement by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland on her Investigation of matters relating to the Omagh Bomb on August 15, 1998," Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, December 12, 2001, accessed January 20, 2017, <https://www.policeombudsman.org/PONI/files/d6/d611c014-7121-4739-a1b3-6a5570a4048c.pdf>, 6.

¹²⁷ "Flanagan attacks 'inaccurate' Omagh report," *Guardian*, January 25, 2002, accessed January 20, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jan/24/northernireland>.

OSSHG decided to take legal matters into their own hands. Represented by Lord Daniel Brennan QC, the families began a civil suit in 2008 against suspected Real IRA members Liam Campbell, Michael McKevitt, Seamus Daly, Colm Murphy and Seamus McKenna. This case marked the first time in British and Irish history that a civil suit (rather than a criminal suit) had been filed against members of a terrorist organisation. The successful civil suit filed against the suspected bombers resulted in £1.6 million being awarded to the Omagh victims' families in 2009, with all suspects other than McKenna found liable for the bombing.¹²⁸ As Dudley Edwards notes, there was "no precedent for a group of victims challenging the system who were neither attached to nor under the wing of a political party".¹²⁹ Why was the Omagh justice campaign successful while the victims of so many other comparable republican bombings such as Kingsmill, Enniskillen and the Shankill Road, have never resulted in criminal convictions? What had changed in Northern Ireland to facilitate such a precedent? The difference lies not only with the nature of the Omagh bombing, a dissident republican attack which impacted both communities, but the changes in the public discourse surrounding justice after the GFA.

The clearest difference between Omagh and previous bombings was the reaction of the victims' families and the public. Many journalists called for the continuation of the peace process and urged victims to pursue justice through legal channels. Tim Pat Coogan, popular historian and supporter of the GFA, wrote in the *Irish Times* "we must keep before our eyes the image of justice, not of vengeance" and argued that the "only way to prevent further Omaghs is to make the Belfast Agreement work".¹³⁰ The *Belfast Telegraph* editorial on 17 August called for the people of Northern Ireland to "commit ourselves to peace, and peace alone. Let us back the forces of law and order".¹³¹ This is not to say that there were not angry and revanchist public responses to the bombing; there were some calls for the bombers to be killed. The *Irish Times* reported Omagh resident David Graham, who had been in the town during the bombing, asking "what peace process? ... the only solution is to take an Israeli attitude. Shoot to kill and annihilate the terrorists. Give the RUC, the British Army and the Royal Irish Regiment a free hand for 48 hours. Let's see how brave the bombers are then".¹³² There were also calls for retribution through the BBC's aforementioned 'Your Reaction'

¹²⁸ Henry McDonald, "Four Real IRA leaders found liable for Omagh bombing," *Guardian*, June 8, 2009, accessed November 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/jun/08/omagh-real-ira-leaders-liable>.

¹²⁹ Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath*, 114.

¹³⁰ Tim Pat Coogan, "Justice rather than vengeance must be aim in the wake of Omagh bomb," *Irish Times*, August 18, 1998, 14.

¹³¹ "Let everyone unite against this evil," *Belfast Telegraph*, August 17, 1998, 8.

¹³² "Silence at leisure complex is broken only by sobbing," *Irish Times*, August 17, 1998, 5.

website. ‘Diane’ claimed that the “death sentence would even be far too kind for these people” while ‘James’ asked “why can’t these murderers be publically hung? [sic]”¹³³ ‘KJ Bradbury’ believed “these people when caught should be publicly hanged” while ‘Helen McIntosh Veal’ argued that the “death penalty should be re-enacted for the people who have done this horrendous crime”.¹³⁴ There is a sense in these comments that there is some difference between previous paramilitary actions and the Omagh bombing and the idea that after the GFA, attacks on civilians of this scale were simply unacceptable. Nuala O’Faolain, an *Irish Times* journalist wrote on 17 August “I want to see them tortured, the human beings who look upon their innocent fellow beings bustling about their happy Saturday tasks and then blast them to an awful death, without a minute to say goodbye ... there’s no forgiveness for it”.¹³⁵ The internet may have been the most obvious media to countenance the angriest responses including death threats, but such responses were also present in the print media, as Nuala O’Faolain’s column demonstrates.

These voices contrasted with relatives of the victims’ calls for legal, rather than paramilitary or vigilante justice. Although there were a wide range of reactions from the Omagh victims’ families, none called for violence against the perpetrators of the Omagh bombing. Sociologist Graham Spencer noted that none of the victims of the bombing or their families that he interviewed from 2003 to 2005, “sought to advocate violent retaliation against those responsible” but rather “wished justice to be pursued through the courts”.¹³⁶ Previous paramilitary atrocities had not produced such a measured response by victims’ relatives or paramilitaries. After the PIRA bombing of the Shankill Road in 1993, which killed nine Protestant civilians (and the bomber), one paramilitary prisoner described the how “anybody on the Shankill Road that day from a Boy Scout to a granny, if you’d given them a gun they would have gone out and retaliated”.¹³⁷ The UDA did retaliate in this instance, killing over 10 Catholic civilians – most infamously in the Greysteel Massacre. None of the Omagh victims had direct paramilitary links, loyalist paramilitaries did not respond on behalf of victims, victims came from both communities and that the bombing occurred after the GFA meant that public sympathy, empathy and support could be harnessed effectively into a successful legal campaign.

¹³³ “The Omagh bombing - your reaction,” BBC News, August 16, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/reaction/152096.stm. Square brackets added.

¹³⁴ “The Omagh Bombing - More Reaction,” BBC News, August 16, 1998, accessed November 1, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/reaction/152067.stm.

¹³⁵ Nuala O’Faolain, “Sheer evil of Omagh outweighs all the good,” *Irish Times*, August 17, 1998, 16.

¹³⁶ Spencer, *Voices of Loss*, 155.

¹³⁷ Peter Taylor, *Loyalists* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 224.

The second difference between Omagh and instances of paramilitary violence before the Troubles was the media response. The Omagh justice campaign used media attention to its advantage, utilising commemorations, court appearances and interviews to pressure police, politicians and paramilitaries for more support. For example, the OSSHG boycotted the opening of the ‘Garden of Light’ commemoration space designed by the Omagh District Council as a memorial garden for victims of the bombing in 2008. Although much effort was made to include themes of reconciliation and healing in the ceremony, the OSSHG disapproved of the presence of republican politicians at the event, especially considering that no one had yet been convicted of the bombing.¹³⁸ The boycott resulted in increased media attention, with Kevin Skelton giving interviews in which he blamed politicians who had “done nothing for the families of the Omagh atrocity and it doesn't matter what side they come from. They have done nothing for us”.¹³⁹ The court appearances of suspects were also used as opportunities to promote the case, as were meetings of the 32CSM which the OSSHG picketed.¹⁴⁰

The enormous legal costs of the Omagh civil suit were supplemented through public donations and support from the *Daily Mail* which urged its readers to donate to the Omagh legal campaign. The *Daily Mail*, which had consistently supported the Conservative Party throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, was particularly opposed to Blair’s New Labour.¹⁴¹ The newspaper’s coverage of the justice campaign, with headlines including “Shameless betrayal: How Omagh victims were left to confront bombers themselves after Blair failed to deliver justice” was part of its wider opposition to Blair’s Labour government.¹⁴² The 1999 ‘Bridge of Hope’ album generated further funding for the Omagh Bomb Appeal Fund, as did charity golf tournaments and a charity auction from Newcastle United F.C.¹⁴³ The role of the media was explicitly acknowledged by the campaigners themselves in Graham Spencer’s 2005 book *Omagh: Voices of Loss*. Interviewed in Spencer’s book, Godfrey Wilson, whose daughter Lorraine died in the bombing, said that

¹³⁸ Nuala C Johnson, “The contours of memory in post-conflict societies: enacting public remembrance of the bomb in Omagh, Northern Ireland,” *cultural geographies* 19, no. 2 (2011): 253.

¹³⁹ “Omagh families boycott memorial,” BBC News, August 8, 2008, accessed November 15, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/7548671.stm.

¹⁴⁰ Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath*, 143-144.

¹⁴¹ Max Hastings, “May God judge Blair more kindly than British history,” *Daily Mail*, June 26, 2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/columnists/article-464592/May-God-judge-Blair-kindly-British-history.html>.

¹⁴² Dudley Edwards, “Shameless betrayal: How Omagh victims were left to confront bombers themselves after Blair failed to deliver justice,” *Daily Mail*, June 16, 2007, accessed November 16, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1193257/A-SHAMELESS-BETRAYAL-After-Omagh-atrocity-Tony-Blair-promised-victims-families-justice-delivered-The-families-vowed-confront-evil-bombers-themselves.html>.

¹⁴³ “Omagh appeal tops £1m,” BBC News, October 11, 1998, accessed November 15, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/northern_ireland/latest_news/190868.stm.

the “media seems to be our battlefield. It’s the only spot we can turn to that will listen”.¹⁴⁴

Gerald McFarland, whose daughter Samantha died in the bombing, said

we have met so many politicians, government ministers and so on, but all you get is the niceties with no product at the end of it. If it hadn’t been for the media, I do have no doubt that it would have died away and been swept under the carpet. The media is a very strong weapon and important for the victims seeking justice.¹⁴⁵

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan had died in the bombing, offered similar sentiments, saying

from early on, I think we realised the value of the media ... I think that if we can keep Omagh alive, the better chance we will have of getting to the truth of what happened. It would cost millions of pounds to pay for the publicity that we have got through the media and from very early on, I decided to do anything, to go anywhere, to bend over backwards to facilitate the media.¹⁴⁶

By utilising the media as a source of public support and funding, the Omagh justice campaign was able to keep their story in the media and public pressure on the bombing’s suspects. OSSHG members also positioned their campaign against lacklustre political support. Kevin Skelton said “we were promised everything at the time, but years down the line and the help hasn’t materialised” and Godfrey Wilson felt that the “politicians have used us for PR purposes,” sentiments also echoed by Gerald McFarland.¹⁴⁷ Positioning their justice campaign against a lack of lasting political support, the OSSHG campaign demonstrates some of the tensions between the ‘peace’ promised by the GFA, and the belief that the Agreement would allow victims of paramilitary violence to achieve justice. Skelton published *Sent by an Angel* in 2011, recording his experience of dealing with the trauma of losing his wife Philomena in the bombing. At the end of the book, Skelton concludes

just because you don’t hear about bombs exploding in Northern Ireland every other day does not mean that it’s a peaceful place ... when it comes to justice in Northern Ireland, in my mind there is none ... if the prime minister of either country lost a loved one in a bombing, you can be sure that in a matter of weeks, not years, someone would be behind bars for the crime.¹⁴⁸

This conclusion not only outlines Skelton’s ideas about reconciliation and justice in Northern Ireland, this form of personal testimony shows how much Northern Ireland changed after the GFA. Far from feeling silenced by the Omagh bombing, Skelton recorded his personal trauma and made his experiences public. Indeed, the Omagh bombing was an ideal

¹⁴⁴ Spencer, *Voices of Loss*, 62.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 94.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 149.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 35, 62.

¹⁴⁸ Kevin Skelton, *Sent by an Angel: A True Story of Tragic Loss and Unexpected Love* (London: Hay House, 2011), 213-214.

opportunity for many politicians to ally themselves with victims and to stress the importance of the GFA's role in creating a more peaceful, reconciled and just Northern Ireland. As these recollections of Omagh victims' relatives reveal, victims' faith that politicians and the legal system would support their justice campaign eventually faded, leading victims groups including the OSSHG to turn to both the media and the public for support.

In 2004, *Omagh* was released, a film based around the bombing and the OSSHG justice campaign.¹⁴⁹ The film focuses on the experiences of Michael Gallagher, who is positioned as a representative of the grief experienced by other Omagh families.¹⁵⁰ Director Pete Travis utilised production techniques such as grainy film, handheld camera and naturalistic dialogue, which were also used in producer Paul Greengrass' previous 2002 film *Bloody Sunday*. In a similar structure to *Bloody Sunday*, *Omagh* portrays devastating loss that eventually turns into an ongoing fight for justice.¹⁵¹ The film acknowledges other victims of the Troubles, exemplified in the fictionalised Gallagher's final line "we speak for the victims of the Troubles of whatever tradition and all those victims of terror wherever it happens. We will not go away, we will not be quiet, we will not be forgotten".¹⁵² The film, released with the approval and input of the OSSHG, helped to further bolster the publicity surrounding the Omagh justice campaign, especially as it won the BAFTA Television Award for 'Best Single Drama' in 2005.¹⁵³ Far from being silenced, the OSSHG had their personal stories, memories and traumas publicised through the medium of film. In assessing the *Omagh* film, cultural historian Aileen Blaney describes how, during the Troubles, "paramilitary organizations commanded a greater degree of media visibility than the victims of violence - deceased, injured and bereaved," a power that victims' groups such as the OSSHG challenged through *Omagh*.¹⁵⁴

Celebrity endorsements, which proved important to the YES campaign some months before the bombing, also contributed to the success of the Omagh justice campaign. U2, the Corrs and other bands played a tribute show on the RTÉ's 'Late Late Show,' while celebrities including Bob Geldof lent ongoing support to the campaign.¹⁵⁵ In addition to U2's *Peace on Earth*, heavy metal band Def Leppard released the angry ballad *Paper Sun* on their 1999 album

¹⁴⁹ Pete Travis, *Omagh* (A-Films Distribution, 2004).

¹⁵⁰ Aileen Blaney, "Visible victims and the politics of suffering in *Omagh*," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 4 (2009): 419.

¹⁵¹ Paul Greengrass directed *Bloody Sunday* and co-produced and co-wrote *Omagh* which was directed by Pete Travis.

¹⁵² Travis, *Omagh*.

¹⁵³ "'Omagh' wins BAFTA Television Award," Northern Ireland Screen, accessed November 15, 2016, <https://northernirelandscreen.co.uk/news/868/omagh-wins-bafta-television-award.aspx>.

¹⁵⁴ Blaney, "Visible victims in *Omagh*," 415.

¹⁵⁵ Dudley Edwards, *Aftermath*, 218.

‘Euphoria’.¹⁵⁶ New media also played a role in the justice campaign. A BBC forum ‘Omagh verdict: Your reaction?’ also expressed a wide range of opinions on the conviction of Colm Murphy, very few of which sympathised with the RIRA member.¹⁵⁷ As well as having the suspects of the bombing written about, the OSSHG established its own website in 2005, entitled ‘Omagh Support & Self Help Group: Campaigning for the Human Rights of Victims of Terrorism’. The website allowed supporters from around the world to keep up to date with the proceedings of the justice campaign and also lists petitions, donations and press releases in its pages.¹⁵⁸ It also contained a monthly newsletter first issued in May 2005, letting supporters know how they could help further alongside updates on the justice campaign.¹⁵⁹ Through this website, the Omagh justice campaign could gather funding, rather than waiting for donations. These examples of new media meant that the Omagh case would remain in public interest for the many years after the bombing.

The successful 2009 ruling occurred a full eleven years after the bombing and only after millions of pounds in legal fees were donated by the public, demonstrating the enormous effort required on the part of victims’ groups to pursue legal justice. The Saville Inquiry, dealing with the Bloody Sunday massacre in 1972, released its findings in 2010, the year after the Omagh ruling. The Saville inquiry cost almost £200 million and took thirteen years, making it the most expensive legal inquiry in British history.¹⁶⁰ For families with relatives killed in one-off attacks, or even victims’ groups based around incidents from earlier in the Troubles, this meant that atrocities with fewer casualties, and less public attention, would prove difficult to fund and prosecute in the ‘new’ Northern Ireland.

In examining the Omagh justice campaign, the differences between the Real IRA’s brash 1998 statements compared to its collapse after the 2009 trial not only demonstrates the legal developments in Northern Ireland after the GFA, but how public discourse changed over time. Victims of paramilitary violence such as the Omagh relatives showed how public discursive power had shifted away from paramilitaries and towards victims of violence. Such victims were fearless to openly challenge the paramilitaries who had injured them or killed

¹⁵⁶ Def Leppard, *Paper Sun*, Euphoria (Dublin: Mercury, 1999).

¹⁵⁷ “Omagh verdict: Your reaction?,” BBC News, January 28, 2002, accessed November 1, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/1775640.stm.

¹⁵⁸ “Omagh Support & Self Help Group: Campaigning for the Human Rights of Victims of Terrorism,” Internet Archive, February 9, 2006, accessed November 15, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060209041030/http://www.omaghbomb.co.uk/>.

¹⁵⁹ “Omagh Support and Self Help Group Newsletter,” Internet Archive, May, 2005, accessed November 15, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20070726144150/http://www.omaghbomb.co.uk/images/upl_files/003927.pdf.

¹⁶⁰ Nevin T. Aiken, “The Bloody Sunday Inquiry: Transitional Justice and Postconflict Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” *Journal of Human Rights* 14, no 1. (2015): 106.

their relatives and unafraid to use the media to achieve their legal goals. Michael Gallagher, one of the leaders of the campaign, said after the successful 2009 verdict “we have sent out a message to terrorists that from now on you don't only have to worry about the authorities - the families of your victims will come after you” and that the verdict was a “message to governments that, if you don't do it, then we will. We have also sent a message to victims of terrorism around the world. You now have a way of challenging those who murder your loved ones”.¹⁶¹ Gallagher's statement encapsulates, not only the feelings of the Omagh relatives, but some of the key changes in public discourse brought about by the GFA. There were clearly legal reasons which can explain why Omagh campaign achieved success in 2009. Changes in British and Irish terror legislation had made convictions easier to secure, as had improved technology involved in the civil case including cross-border phone tracking. Far from being the ‘silent victims’ of violence, the Omagh families demonstrated the new ways in which victims of paramilitary violence could openly challenge governments, institutions and paramilitary organisations without fear. The public support for the Omagh justice campaign marked a significant turning point in how justice was encapsulated in Northern Ireland's public discourse.

‘What peace process?’

In studying the reactions to the Omagh bombing, we can see how the public discourse surrounding the key ideas of the GFA – peace, justice and reconciliation – were debated in the wake of Northern Ireland's worst paramilitary attack. Public support for the peace process and reconciliation remained high, shaped not only by official government commemorations for the bombing, but by an outpouring of grief and support in the form of music, poetry and condolences. The bombing was an important test case of the legal avenues for victims of violence after the Troubles. While the OSSHG justice campaign served as an example of what could be achieved, few other victims' groups had garnered the attention or funding that their campaign received. Responses to the bombing reveal a tension between the peace promised by the GFA and the justice demanded by victims of paramilitary violence and their relatives, as well as (sometimes questionable) the value of political promises for justice made in 1998. The bombing also demonstrated that paramilitary groups, who had been powerful players in Northern Ireland's public discourse throughout the

¹⁶¹ Michael Seamark, “Hallelujah for justice: Real IRA bombers killed their loved ones. But 11 years on, Omagh families prove people CAN beat the terrorists,” *Daily Mail*, June 9, 2009, accessed November 1, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1191600/Hallelujah-justice-Real-IRA-bombers-killed-loved-ones-But-11-years-Omagh-families-prove-people-CAN-beat-terrorists.html>.

Troubles, could now be publicly questioned and legally prosecuted by the victims of their violence.

Chapter 3: The Holy Cross Dispute, 2001



The four images above were published in the *Belfast Telegraph* during the Holy Cross dispute.¹ These pictures reflected some of the key images of the dispute that were relayed worldwide. Top left shows a crying Holy Cross pupil walking to school. Top right shows the injuries sustained by a police officer from the 5 September pipe bombing. The bottom left image shows the proximity of police, parents, children, the army and protesters throughout much of the dispute. The bottom right image shows a protester being restrained by the RUC, indicative of resident frustrations over the policing of the incident.

In June 2001, residents of the Protestant Glenbryn² estate in north Belfast protested against parents taking their children to the Catholic Holy Cross Girls' Primary School along the Ardoyne Road. From September to November, a daily picket of Glenbryn residents and their supporters captured worldwide media attention by continuing to protest on the Ardoyne Road. These protests led to confrontations with police, the army and the parents of Holy Cross children. The protest ended on 23 November 2001 after the intervention of the First Minister David Trimble, although some violence continued into 2002. I argue that the Holy Cross dispute created the space for the media, along with the parents and protesters involved in the dispute, to reconsider the formulations of peace and reconciliation enshrined in the

¹ Rebecca Black, "Holy Cross dispute: Payouts for Catholic schoolgirls who faced terrifying loyalist protests in Belfast," *Belfast Telegraph*, September 1, 2016, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/holy-cross-dispute-payouts-for-catholic-schoolgirls-who-faced-terrifying-loyalist-protests-in-belfast-35011283.html>.

² 'Glenbryn' is also called 'Upper Ardoyne' by the residents of the area. The terminology differs, as both 'Lower' and 'Upper' Ardoyne residents call the area Glenbryn while only the residents call the area 'Upper Ardoyne.' For this reason I have chosen to use the term Glenbryn to distinguish between this area and the surrounding nationalist Ardoyne.

GFA. The dispute also revealed how debates around ‘victimhood’ and ‘silencing’ could play out in Northern Ireland’s public discourse, with both parents and protesters claiming that they were the true victims who had been ignored or misrepresented by the media. As with the Omagh justice campaign, the Holy Cross dispute demonstrates the limits of victims’ justice campaigns after the GFA, while also revealing how victims’ discursive power had changed since the Agreement.

Ardoyne and Glenbryn: A North Belfast Saga

In 2001, the political situation in Northern Ireland was bleak. Decommissioning of the PIRA’s weaponry had not taken place. This put enormous pressure on David Trimble. Trimble had entered into the new Assembly, which included Sinn Féin, with confidence in the GFA’s provision that decommissioning would occur “within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement”.³ The PIRA’s decommissioning, which was set to begin by June 1998, did not take place.⁴ After Trimble threatened to resign, the Assembly was suspended in 2000 and twice again in 2001 in order to pressure the PIRA into decommissioning. Following Trimble’s resignation as First Minister on 1 July 2001, the PIRA commenced its first act of public decommissioning on 23 October.⁵ Protestant support for the Agreement, which was tenuous at best in 1998, began to fall, with polls conducted by the *Belfast Telegraph* in 2000 suggesting that less than half of Protestants would still vote for the Agreement.⁶ This fed the rise of anti-GFA parties like the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) who positioned themselves as the champions of those disillusioned by the Agreement.

While the PIRA did not decommission a significant part of its arsenal until 2005, loyalist paramilitaries, especially the UDA, struggled throughout 2000 to 2002 over the leadership of the organisation. The UDA did not have a commander of the entire organisation since Andrew ‘Andy’ Tyrie stepped down in 1988.⁷ As part of the GFA’s program of prisoner releases, Johnny ‘Mad Dog’ Adair, an infamous UDA brigadier from

³ “The Agreement: Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations (10 April 1998),” CAIN Web Service, April 10, 1998, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

⁴ Dean Godson, *Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal of Unionism* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 2004), 351-352.

⁵ Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 299.

⁶ Collin Irwin, *The People’s Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 260.

⁷ Ian S. Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty: A History of the UDA* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), accessed May 7, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=264973>, 133.

west Belfast, had been released from prison in 1999. UDA Brigadiers believed that Adair was attempting to take control of the organisation and this resulted in a violent feud over the group's leadership.⁸ This feud, coupled with tensions between the UDA and UVF concerning UDA links with the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF), undermined the legitimacy of loyalist paramilitary ceasefires and resulted in some west Belfast residents fleeing to areas of north Belfast.⁹

North Belfast was one of the most violent parts of Northern Ireland during the Troubles. 577 people died in the area between 1968 and 1998, a figure eclipsed only by nearby west Belfast, with a death toll of 623.¹⁰ 99 people died in the largely Catholic Ardoyne area alone.¹¹ In 2001, violence in north Belfast intensified as the summer marching season began. Communal tensions were also high as a result of the Drumcree dispute, a traditional Orange march opposed by nationalist residents of the Garvaghy Road in Portadown, County Armagh, which also resulted in rioting in north Belfast.¹² The Parades Commission, established in 1997, formed in order to regulate all parades in Northern Ireland, including the march at Drumcree. The Commission was concerned with what it described as the "Portadown situation" and remained extremely unpopular in sections of the unionist community.¹³ The Orange Order refused to recognise the body, leading the commission to describe the Lodge as having an, "unnecessarily unhelpful, uncompromising and self-damaging stance" on contentious parades.¹⁴ The 'Portadown situation' would become a reference point of conflict during the Holy Cross dispute.

The Protestant residents of the Glenbryn area of north Belfast were ageing, declining in number and wary of the growth in the neighbouring Catholic Ardoyne area. As sociologist Peter Shirlow has noted, Glenbryn residents felt "besieged by being domiciled close to a growing Irish Republican community" while, for Ardoyne residents, "besiegement is influenced by being virtually surrounded by 'Protestant' territory".¹⁵ Both the Ardoyne and Glenbryn communities felt encircled and threatened by the nightly violence taking place

⁸ Ibid., 242.

⁹ Henry McDonald and Jim Cusack, *UDA: Inside the Heart of Loyalist Terror* (Dublin: Penguin, 2005), accessed December 14, 2015, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/detail.action?docID=3386195>, 359.

¹⁰ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007), 1560.

¹¹ Ardoyne Commemoration Project, *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002), xiv.

¹² Adair was one of many loyalist paramilitaries present at the July 2000 confrontation.

¹³ "First Annual Report: 1 April 1998 – 31 March 1999," Parades Commission for Northern Ireland, April 28, 1999, 2. Obtained through a Freedom of Information Request.

¹⁴ "Fourth Annual Report: 1 April 2001 – 31 March 2002," Parades Commission for Northern Ireland, 2002, 2. Obtained through a Freedom of Information Request.

¹⁵ Peter Shirlow, "'Who Fears to Speak': Fear, Mobility, and Ethno-Sectarianism in the Two 'Ardoyne's,'" *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 3, no. 1 (2003): 83.

throughout summer 2001. It was against this background of growing political instability, the contentious marching season and the social decline of Glenbryn that trouble broke out on the Ardoyne Road.

On Tuesday 19 June 2001, Jim McClean was putting up both “union flags” and “ulster flags,” on the Ardoyne Road when he was accosted by a man wearing a “Celtic shirt”.¹⁶ Writing in *Crimes of Loyalty: A History of the UDA*, Ian Wood referred to “UDA flags” being raised on the Ardoyne Road.¹⁷ Nearby, Amanda Johnson recalled that the “next minute the car reversed a bit and rammed towards the ladder”.¹⁸ Anne Bill, a Glenbryn resident writing in 2002, said “some youngsters” were putting flags up when “a convoy of cars started to build up”.¹⁹ From another perspective, journalist Anne Cadwallader interviewed the man in the Celtic shirt, given the pseudonym “Sean,” who claimed that he was attacked first and only reacted to men attacking his car.²⁰ One interviewee in Cadwallader’s book *Ardoyne: The Untold Truth* confirmed Sean’s account and said that a taxi driver was attacked by loyalists who “began stoning the car” after which “the taxi driver swerved out of instinct and nearly hit some fella on a ladder. The loyalists thought this was done deliberately and within the space of a few moments the street was full of them”.²¹ The BBC’s 2003 docudrama *Holy Cross* takes a line between these two conflicting sets of testimonies, showing a man erecting paramilitary flags (contradicting McClean’s own recollection) but portraying ‘Sean’ purposefully reversing his car into the flag raisers.²² Whatever the exact events of that afternoon, a street riot broke out between Glenbryn and Ardoyne residents, occurring at the same time that Holy Cross School pupils finished classes for the day. This meant that Holy Cross pupils and their parents found themselves in the middle of a confrontation between Glenbryn and Ardoyne residents. Conflicting accounts of the events surrounding 19 June hint at the fractured nature of community relations in 2001, as neither side could agree as to the origin of the dispute, nor could they agree how it should be resolved.

As a result of the violence on 19 June, Glenbryn residents began protesting against the parents and children walking to the Holy Cross school through the Ardoyne Road on

¹⁶ Anne Cadwallader, *Holy Cross: The Untold Story* (Belfast: The Brehon Press, 2004), 31. Celtic Football Club are the traditionally Catholic football team from Glasgow, matched by the traditionally Protestant Rangers Football Club in a rivalry known as the ‘Old Firm’. Support for both teams also runs across sectarian lines in Northern Ireland which contains numerous Celtic and Rangers supporters’ clubs.

¹⁷ Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty*, 270.

¹⁸ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 30.

¹⁹ Anne Bill, *Beyond the Red Gauntlet: The Silent Voices of Upper Ardoyne Amidst the Travesty of Holy Cross* (Belfast: AB Publications, 2002), 24.

²⁰ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 33.

²¹ Ardoyne Commemoration, *Untold Truth*, 507.

²² Terry Cafolla, *Holy Cross*, Television Broadcast, Directed by Mark Brozel (Belfast: BBC, 2003), Film.

Wednesday 20 June. These protests continued daily until the school term ended the following Friday. In the June protest an estimated fifty to sixty Glenbryn residents attempted to blockade the Ardoyne Road.²³ Parents and children were at times told to use the ‘alternative entrance’ to the school through the Crumlin Road (see figure 9). Following the June protests, Glenbryn residents formed a group called Concerned Residents of Upper Ardoyne (CRUA), while Ardoyne residents and Holy Cross parents formed the Right to Education (RTE).²⁴ The summer discussions between the two groups, which sought to resolve the conflict, were not successful. Nightly violence in north Belfast surrounding the July-August marching season provided a bleak background to negotiations. As with the ladder dispute, both the CRUA and RTE have conflicting accounts of why talks were not successful, with both sides claiming that the other was not interested in dialogue.²⁵ The issue of parents and children walking the Ardoyne Road was not resolved and the CRUA agreed to resume its protest when school returned in September after the summer holidays.

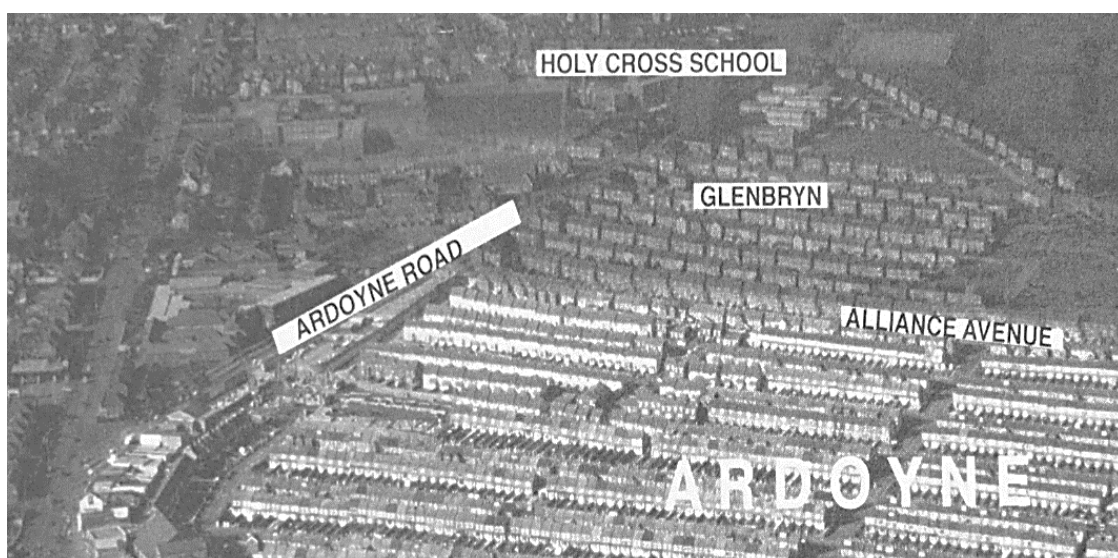


Figure 9.²⁶ This image taken in the late 1980s illustrates the size of the Catholic Ardoyne compared to the Protestant Glenbryn area, separated by Alliance Avenue. It also shows the position of the Holy Cross School, located well within the Protestant Glenbryn estate. In the left side of the image just west of the Ardoyne Road is the Crumlin Road, through which the ‘alternative entrance’ to the school was located.

The world’s media became aware of the Holy Cross dispute when the protest resumed on 3 September 2001. On this day the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) formed a protective

²³ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 45.

²⁴ The RTE should not be confused with the RTE, the latter of which is the Irish national broadcasting company (see Abbreviations).

²⁵ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 54-55.

²⁶ Ardoyne Commemoration, *Untold Truth*, xvi.

barrier around parents and children walking to school to separate them from the Glenbryn protesters. However, police were unprepared for the sheer number of loyalist protesters. This event was the first since the June protest to be reported by the media, as television and radio crews as well as print journalists reported on the events taking place on the Ardoyne Road.²⁷ Protests continued every school morning that the Holy Cross children walked to school, with a smaller protest most afternoons as the children returned home. A pipe bomb was thrown into the group of parents and children walking to the school on 5 September. Henry McDonald and Jim Cusack claim in their work *UDA: Inside the Heart of Loyalist Terror* that the pipe bomb was thrown by a drug dealer who owed £500 to Adair's infamous west Belfast 'C Company'.²⁸ The unnamed man was faced with two options: being shot or agreeing to "carry out an attack for the UDA".²⁹ Although physical violence on the road never again became as intense as the pipe bombing, a 2008 House of Lords' inquiry into police conduct summarised the worst of the protests as also including the

throwing of other missiles at those making the journey to and from the school ... bricks, rubbish, balloons filled with urine, dog excrement and in particular in the pre-Halloween period firecrackers and bangers ... death threats ... verbal abuse of a vile sectarian nature ... obscenities of a sexual nature [directed] at women and children ... racist abuse ... pornographic material was displayed ... [placards describing priests] as paedophiles and stated that they had joined the priesthood to abuse small children ... children, their parents and the priests already referred to were spat at ... use of whistles, sirens, horns and other instruments.³⁰

While these were the worst incidents, the protests and responses from the parents varied in intensity from day-to-day. On some days, protests were silent as participants turned their backs on parents and children, while in other cases the protests were extremely loud, with Glenbryn residents blowing "claxon horns, whistles, car horns and sirens".³¹ The protest was occasionally suspended, for example, after the '9/11' terrorist attacks in the United States.

After meeting with the First Minister David Trimble and Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon, the CRUA permanently suspended the protest on 23 November 2001. The total June to December police operation cost approximately £3 million and resulted in 41 injuries to police officers.³² The Glenbryn residents were promised £8.7 million investment

²⁷ Aidan Troy, *Holy Cross: A Personal Experience* (Dublin: Currach Press, 2005), 45.

²⁸ McDonald and Cusack, *Heart of Loyalist Terror*, 356-357.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.

³⁰ "Opinions of the Lords of Appeal for Judgement in the Case In Re E (a Child) (AP) (Appellant) (Northern Ireland)" (House of Lords: House of Lords, November 12, 2008), House of Lords, November 12, 2008, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldjudgmt/jd081112/inrea.pdf>, 11-12. Square brackets added.

³¹ Mary Fitzgerald, "Principal tells of relief as protest hits subdued note," *Belfast Telegraph*, September 10, 2001, 2.

³² "House of Lords Judgement," 16.

in the community on 19 September,³³ and further security and community regeneration packages in the November negotiations.³⁴ The dispute became newsworthy fifteen years after it had ended, when a September 2016 *Belfast Telegraph* article revealed that three former Holy Cross pupils had been awarded compensation for their trauma as part of the Northern Ireland Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme.³⁵

Political Responses

Politicians were present at the dispute from its commencement. The politicians involved in the dispute perceived the protest to be evidence that the GFA needed to be implemented more fully, or, evidence of the Agreement's fundamental flaws. Billy Hutchinson, a former UVF prisoner and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) representing the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) joined protesters. Gerry Kelly former PIRA prisoner and Assembly member, supported the parents of Holy Cross. Nigel Dodds, the DUP member for Belfast North, was present, as was the SDPL's Alban Maginness and former UDA prisoner John 'Coco' White,³⁶ now working for the UDA-aligned Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). British MPs including Quentin Davies, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, visited the scene, as did Irish President Mary McAleese, who was born in Ardoyne. International observers sending support to the Holy Cross children included New York Senator Hillary Clinton, members of the 'Little Rock Nine' (black high school students who had endured pickets at their school in Arkansas in 1957) and South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu.³⁷

Billy Hutchinson, while aligning himself with the protesters, criticised the 5 September pipe bombing, saying it made him "ashamed to be a loyalist,"³⁸ but later re-joined the protest and was given an award by the CRUA at the conclusion of the dispute.³⁹ Politicians debated how best to end the dispute in the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont, Westminster, the Dáil Éireann and Belfast City Council. The Northern Ireland Assembly's 10 September debate on the protest produced predictable results. Most parties

³³ Marie Foy, "New homes for troubled area," *Belfast Telegraph*, September 19, 2001, 6.

³⁴ Kathryn Tomey, "Suspension of protest widely welcomed," *Belfast Telegraph*, November 24, 2001, 1.

³⁵ Rebecca Black, "Holy Cross dispute: Payouts for Catholic schoolgirls who faced terrifying loyalist protests in Belfast," *Belfast Telegraph*, September 1, 2016, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/holy-cross-dispute-payouts-for-catholic-schoolgirls-who-faced-terrifying-loyalist-protests-in-belfast-35011283.html>.

³⁶ Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty*, 240.

³⁷ Documentary, "Spotlight: Teach the Children," broadcast November 13, 2001, accessed March 2, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

³⁸ "Officers hurt in school protest blast," BBC News, September 5, 2001, accessed September 14, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1526032.stm.

³⁹ "Upper Ardoyne presentation to Billy Hutchinson," *Shankill Mirror*, Christmas 2001/January 2002, 7.

and participants who agreed with the protest or its aims were anti-GFA, while those who opposed the protest tended to be pro-GFA. The exception to this rule was the PUP, the political wing of the UVF, who supported both the Agreement and the aims of the protesters. One of the few things uniting politicians' responses was their criticism of other politicians and the new Assembly. In the Assembly debate, Alban Maginness said that the dispute was "symptomatic of the failure of all politicians to direct their energies towards dissolving the great sickness of intercommunal sectarianism in our society. The Good Friday Agreement should have given politicians and the community at large the opportunity to address that issue".⁴⁰ The dispute was another chance to debate the validity of the GFA, this time in the context of the Holy Cross dispute, rather than the issue of paramilitary decommissioning.

The dispute brought comparisons with the contentious 'Portadown situation.' As Danny Kennedy, an Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) member, noted during the Assembly's debate, Gerry Kelly's notion that "those who wish to peacefully process on a main route should be allowed to do so. This is welcome news ... with regard to the rights of Orangemen in Portadown".⁴¹ Similar comparisons were made in the media, as Norman Boyd writing for the cross-community *Community Telegraph* asked, "where was the media coverage when junior Orange Order members were being attacked in Portadown? Why were there no live pictures on Sky Television for these attacks on young Protestant children by republican thugs?"⁴² The Assembly debates ended by passing an amendment to Gerry Kelly's motion that the Assembly supported the "right to education of school children attending the Holy Cross Primary School in north Belfast," to the more inclusive, "right to education of school children attending all schools throughout north Belfast".⁴³ A meeting of the Belfast City Council on 21 September encouraged "community and political leaders in the locality to make every effort to defuse this stand-off".⁴⁴ The amended notion "this council supports the right to education of all children in North Belfast," split the council, but was approved after UUP Lord Mayor Jim Rodgers' cast his tie-breaking vote.⁴⁵ These hotly debated phrases and resolutions resulted in no change on the ground in north Belfast.

Politicians used the dispute largely to score political points, but also to debate the practical effects of the GFA. The DUP's Nigel Dodds encapsulated this view, saying at the

⁴⁰ "Holy Cross Primary School," Northern Ireland Assembly: They Work For You, September 10, 2001, accessed September 30, 2016, <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/ni/?id=2001-09-10.5.0>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Norman Boyd, "Media selective in Ardoyne reporting!," *Community Telegraph*, September 14, 2001, 6.

⁴³ "Holy Cross Primary School," They Work For You.

⁴⁴ "City chiefs in debate on school stand-off," *Belfast News Letter*, September 22, 2001, 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

end of the protest that the “situation in Ardoyne came about as a result of government continually ignoring the plight of isolated Protestant communities who have been the subject of an organised campaign of intimidation over 30 years”.⁴⁶ The real and imagined presence of paramilitaries on both sides, the UDA orchestrating the protests and the PIRA coordinating the parents, also spoke to the belief that paramilitary organisations did not suddenly disappear as a result of the GFA. While contemporary paramilitaries were the focus of politicians, former paramilitaries were prominent, including Billy Hutchinson and Gerry Kelly. Hutchinson and Kelly had a unique opportunity, as two former paramilitaries who had personally helped negotiate the GFA on behalf of the loyalist and republican communities,⁴⁷ to symbolise the power of dialogue and discussion over violence. Instead, their presence validated claims of paramilitary (or at least ex-paramilitary) involvement in the Glenbryn and Ardoyne communities and the two ex-prisoners’ personal discussions were chronicled mostly as shouting matches broadcast by the BBC.⁴⁸ Politicians in Belfast, Westminster and Dublin did not appear to have any effect in shortening the dispute until the end of the protest in November. Did the media fare any better?

Media Responses

The competing newspaper coverage of the dispute focused on two issues: problems within the Northern Ireland Assembly and, unfinished issues in community reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics. As in the debates surrounding the GFA, while the political focus was dominant, many newspapers reported on the concern that political change was irrelevant while significant reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics had not taken place. The *Belfast Telegraph* was one of few newspapers in the 1990s that had a cross-community readership and the newspaper’s support for the peace process was reflected in its coverage of the Holy Cross dispute. The newspaper reported “appalling as the past week has been, it must not be allowed to derail efforts to put the peace process back on track. A new Northern Ireland is being fashioned ... life is still infinitely better than it was 10 or 20 years ago”.⁴⁹ At the conclusion of the protest in November, the newspaper again focused on the political peace process saying that the protest’s suspension “underlines the power of direct dialogue ... community dialogue ... [which] could serve as a pioneering framework for settling

⁴⁶ Steven McAlister, “School Protest ‘Resolved’,” *Community Telegraph*, November 30, 2001, 3.

⁴⁷ Graham Spencer, *The State of Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 164-165.

⁴⁸ News footage, broadcast September 6, 2001, accessed March 2, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

⁴⁹ “Viewpoint: People must learn to live and let live,” *Belfast Telegraph*, September 8, 2001, 16.

differences in other interface areas of north Belfast”.⁵⁰ Perhaps unbeknown to the *Belfast Telegraph*, dialogue between the CRUA and RTE had been attempted before the September protests but had broken down due to mutual distrust. For the *Belfast Telegraph* and its editor Edmund Curran, who had supported the peace process since he began as editor in 1994, the dispute was a chance to explore the weaknesses of the new political system, while arguing strongly that the new Assembly needed to function effectively.

After the 5 September pipe bomb, the newspaper’s editorial read “if the assembly is to prove its worth, it should have a means of addressing issues like the Ardoyne trouble without delay ... too many people feel remote from, or alienated by, the political changes that have been taking place ... they must be included, or the peace process will fail”.⁵¹ The selected letters to the editor also reflected the newspaper’s pro-GFA and pro-reconciliation stance. A letter to the editor supported the view that “hatred and sectarianism” needed to “be decommissioned. We see this poison most potently at work in the daily persecution of the little girls trying to go to Holy Cross School”.⁵² This view reflects many of the concerns present in the 1998 referendum, especially the idea that the Agreement was only a political innovation, and that there were more fundamental changes required in Northern Irish society. Not all of the *Belfast Telegraph*’s coverage was pro-GFA. Derry-based journalist Eamonn McCann wrote that the “images from Ardoyne are relevant, too, in that they suggest that the days of the Assembly ... are probably numbered anyway ... how can the children of Ardoyne enjoy a “happy, safe and secure childhood” while the politics which sustain the State we live in survive?”⁵³ This assessment echoed McCann’s 1998 position that the Assembly had reinforced sectarianism in Northern Ireland.⁵⁴ This range of views pointed to the problems of reconciliation after the GFA, arguing both the top-down view that if the Assembly were to function, then community relations would improve and, that community reconciliation needed to be improved on a local level.

For the *Belfast News Letter*, which as Bill Rolston has noted, never endorsed the actions of loyalist paramilitaries,⁵⁵ the UDA’s pipe bombing delegitimised the protest. The newspaper still published articles and letters that criticised the Holy Cross parents, but its editorials from 5 September argued for the benefits of ending the protest. On the morning

⁵⁰ “Viewpoint: School settlement offers hope for all,” *Belfast Telegraph*, November 24, 2001, 18. Square brackets added.

⁵¹ “Viewpoint: The madness must be stopped,” *Belfast Telegraph*, September 5, 2001, 12.

⁵² Patrick McCafferty, letter to the editor, *Belfast Telegraph*, October 27, 2001, 16.

⁵³ Eamonn McCann, “Positive intentions but little hope,” *Belfast Telegraph*, September 5, 2001, 12.

⁵⁴ Eamonn McCann, *War & Peace in Northern Ireland* (Dublin: Hot Press Books, 1998), 241.

⁵⁵ Bill Rolston, “News Fit to Print: Belfast’s Daily Newspapers,” in *The Media and Northern Ireland: Covering the Troubles*, ed. Bill Rolston (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 160-161.

of the 5 September pipe bombing, the newspaper reported “there are some elements on the nationalist/republican side in Ardoyne who ... may not at all be sympathetically disposed to a compromise solution ... extreme republicans are prepared to use innocent children in pursuit of a narrow sectarian agenda, centred on issues far removed from education”.⁵⁶ Like the protesters, the newspaper reported that republicans were in some way involved in coordinating the parents and children’s walk to Holy Cross. In the wake of the pipe bombing the newspaper’s tone changed. The 6 September edition still considered that parents “on an understandable point of principle ... continue placing their children at the front line,” but now said that the protest should “desist immediately,” as it had become “a case of innocent children of one religion being abused and terrorised by grown men of another ... on the international stage, comparisons with how the Nazis treated the Jews are being drawn. Is this really how the loyalist people of north Belfast want to be regarded?”⁵⁷ As a result of the pipe bombing, the newspaper became more outspoken. On 11 September, it reported that the “Ardoyne protest has served to remind us all – and the watching world – there is a very long way to go before Northern Ireland is at peace with itself. Indeed, the naked hatred on view this week demonstrates vividly that divisions in some places are more pronounced than ever”.⁵⁸ The tone of the newspaper resembled that of the *Belfast Telegraph*. Whereas that newspaper pointed mostly to the failures of the new Assembly, the *Belfast News Letter* focused on reconciliation as a localised problem rooted in sectarianism.

Other publications such as the nationalist *Irish News* criticised the parents less than their unionist counterparts, although some articles did question their behaviour. An editorial in the paper in September mirrored the tone of the *Belfast News Letter* in calling for “everyone concerned to ensure that pupils are removed from the front line in a confrontation which is not of their making,” while also noting “there can be no justification for placing the pupils at any further physical risk. They should take the alternative route which is available”.⁵⁹ The ‘alternative route’ refers to aforementioned back entrance to the school through the Crumlin Road (see figure 9). Despite this advice, *Irish News* journalist Roy Garland wrote “Ardoyne children and residents are paying the price for our collective failure to deal with endemic sectarianism,” and that it was impossible to return to a “respectful apartheid. There has to

⁵⁶ “Morning view – Legitimate grievances no excuse for harassing school children,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 3, 2001, 8.

⁵⁷ “Morning view – These shameful scenes are a reminder of the worst of times,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 6, 2001, 8.

⁵⁸ “Morning view – In the absence of dignity, be thankful for small mercies,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 7, 2001, 8.

⁵⁹ “Keep children out of front line,” *Irish News*, September 6, 2001, 6.

be changes in the relationships between the communities”.⁶⁰ These contributions demonstrate not only nationalist expectations of improved civil rights from the GFA, but the feeling that reconciliation, especially reconciliation from below, had not yet been achieved. The newspaper was also critical of politicians in the dispute, as journalist James Kelly reminisced “it seems a long time since we all voted for the new beginning and the news was hailed everywhere ... what happened to tarnish the dream of a new Ireland at peace with itself ... ask the politicians”.⁶¹

Republican newspapers like the *Andersonstown News* also focused on the dispute in reference to the GFA: “what is unfolding in Ardoyne is part of the legacy left to us by the Orange state, background music orchestrated by those out to thwart the agenda for change contained in the Good Friday Agreement”.⁶² Similar views were aired in *An Phoblacht*, the republican movement’s key publication. On 6 September Laura Friel wrote: “for decades, northern nationalists have been forced to run the gauntlet of sectarian hatred ... if the Good Friday Agreement is to mean anything it has to mean an end to sectarian harassment and discrimination, and for the little girls of Holy Cross, the right to walk to school unmolested”.⁶³ For republican newspapers such as these, the dispute showed not only that sectarianism was still an issue in Northern Ireland, but that the GFA needed to be implemented more fully. The idea of a ‘back door’ entrance was contrary to the spirit of the Agreement, which as republicans saw it, was meant to foster equality and civil rights for nationalists in Northern Ireland. A similar idea was aired by Northern Irish journalist Henry McDonald, writing for the *Guardian*, who blamed the dispute on the GFA’s failure to “address the structural sectarianism prevalent in northern society ... it rather too neatly compartmentalised us all into categories of unionist and nationalist, republican and loyalist with no encouragement to the centre ground. In short the Agreement institutionalised sectarianism”.⁶⁴ McDonald’s claim is insightful in interpreting the Holy Cross dispute, as the GFA created a framework for unionist and nationalist politicians to share power, but in doing so did not directly address the communal sectarianism clearly present in the Holy Cross dispute.

⁶⁰ Roy Garland, “The Monday Column: Children are paying price of our failure,” *Irish News*, September 10, 2001, 2.

⁶¹ James Kelly, “What happened to tarnish the dream?,” *Irish News*, September 8, 2001, 8.

⁶² Robin Livingstone, “Little Rocks and pipe bombs,” *Andersonstown News*, September 8, 2001, 6.

⁶³ Laura Friel, “Ardoyne: Running the Gauntlet,” *An Phoblacht*, September 6, 2001, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/7841>.

⁶⁴ Henry McDonald, “Holy Cross Wasn’t Little Rock,” *Guardian*, September 10, 2001 accessed September 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/sep/09/northernireland.comment1>.

British and Irish media sided with the Holy Cross parents, and while some criticised parents for bringing their children through the Ardoyne Road, most wished for the protest to end as soon as possible. This was the case in the *Sun*, the most widely read British tabloid in 2001.⁶⁵ The *Sun*'s coverage placed blame on the protesters for the dispute, asking "Is this REALLY the United Kingdom in the 21st century? Is this REALLY Northern Ireland, where they claim there is a "peace process"?," describing the protest as a "hate demo" and a "hate-filled protest".⁶⁶ The *Sun* eventually published a letter from John Reid, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, decrying the "disturbing images" of Holy Cross.⁶⁷ The *Guardian*, Britain's highest selling left-leaning newspaper in 2001, took a wider view, and stated "the best hope for the future is mediation between the two communities, an end to paramilitary violence and progress in the faltering Northern Ireland peace process, three things that are notoriously difficult to achieve".⁶⁸ While nationalist and republican publications assessed nationalists as the true victims of the dispute, Henry McDonald, writing for the *Guardian* affiliated *Observer*, noted that in "Northern Ireland's cult of victimhood, it is Protestants who believe they are the true victims of sectarian intimidation".⁶⁹ For mainland British newspapers, the dispute offered a grim reminder of Northern Ireland's past, and displayed how much more the political peace process needed to do in order to create a more reconciled society.

The news coverage of the dispute certainly ran along political and sectarian lines, but also questioned previously held expectations of the GFA, especially its emphasis on reconciliation. Media interest in the Holy Cross dispute not only resulted in the publication of thousands of news articles, it empowered protesters and parents. Their views were now able to be voiced in a variety of mediums and to a number of different news outlets. Protesters and parents were not just the subjects of newspaper and television reports. Through the CRUA and RTE, protesters and parents used the media to their advantage. I will now focus specifically on the protesters and their use of the media.

⁶⁵ "Daily Mail overtakes Sun as biggest-selling Saturday paper," *Daily Mail*, December 7, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2013/dec/06/daily-mail-overtakes-sun-sales>.

⁶⁶ "No lower; Sun says; Leading Article," *Sun*, September 6, 2001, 8; "Six banned from school hate demos," *Sun*, September 21, 2001, 16; "Smile of hope," *Sun*, November 27, 2001, 24.

⁶⁷ John Reid, "Let's build on a year of progress," *Sun*, December 29, 2001, 25.

⁶⁸ Simon Jeffery, "Violence at Holy Cross school," *Guardian*, September 4, 2001, accessed October 4, 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/04/qanda.schools>.

⁶⁹ Henry McDonald, "A hard lesson at Holy Cross," *Observer*, September 9, 2001, accessed October 4, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/sep/09/northernireland.schools>.

Glenbryn Protesters and the CRUA

The protesters at Holy Cross, a majority of whom came from the Glenbryn community, faced a media battle for public legitimacy when their protest resumed on 3 September. The images beamed around the world focused on the plight of the Holy Cross girls crying on their way to school, and these images did little to justify the protesters' civic concerns.⁷⁰ The goals of the protest changed with the CRUA and protesters differing among themselves as to their exact demands, although most proposals revolved around improving security in Glenbryn.⁷¹ By November, the CRUA specifically wanted a "re-design of the Ardoyne Road, traffic calming measures, CCTV and windows ... with Perspex shutters" in order to protect homes from attacks.⁷² These demands, repeated in Northern Irish newspapers, demonstrate that security measures were an important part of the protest. However, in the same document issued at the end of the protest in November we also see that protesters wanted "concrete evidence that their safety, security and stability is valued".⁷³ This statement demonstrates that the protesters wanted not only physical changes to their community safety, but to know that their interests were 'valued' and that they were being listened to in a political atmosphere that they felt had ignored their concerns. The CRUA and other protesters used the media to advance their interests, especially CRUA members Anne Bill, Jim Potts and Marc Coulter. The protesters both used the dispute to highlight attacks on the Glenbryn area, and had their voices amplified to speak more broadly about their place in the 'new' Northern Ireland.

The protesters and their supporters referred to ideas of 'ethnic cleansing' and 'genocide' in order to draw attention to what they saw as the intentional violent expansion of nationalists into Glenbryn. Underlying this claim was the idea that Glenbryn residents were the true (and ignored) victims of the Holy Cross dispute. One anonymous letter to the editor in the *Belfast Telegraph* noted that the "media seem not to hear – or don't want to hear – and see what happens in Protestant areas such as Whitewell, Glenbryn, South Armagh or of the "ethnic cleansing" which is and has been taking place".⁷⁴ This idea of Protestant marginalisation was reiterated by other letters to the editor, including a letter to the *Community Telegraph* declaring that the "Protestants of north Belfast have, for thirty years, been the victims of a sustained ethnic cleansing campaign. The IRA have sought by means of murder,

⁷⁰ John D. Brewer, Gareth I. Higgins and Francis Teeney, *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 61.

⁷¹ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 222.

⁷² Kathryn Torney, "Revealed: Loyalist demands for ending school protest," *Belfast Telegraph*, November 23, 2001, 2.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Anonymous, letter to the editor, *Belfast Telegraph*, September 14, 2001, 12.

arson, beatings, intimidation of children and many other vile tactics to ethnically cleanse north Belfast of Protestants”.⁷⁵ The claim of ethnic cleansing brought comparisons with another sectarian conflict, the Yugoslav Wars (1991 to 2001), which (coincidentally) ended during the protest on 12 November 2001.⁷⁶ The idea of an ethnic cleansing of Protestants in Northern Ireland dates to at least 1994, in response to the perception of republicans carrying out ethnic cleansing of border areas in Northern Ireland.⁷⁷ The claim of ethnic cleansing demonstrated in clear terms that the ‘reconciliation’ and improvement in community relations promised by the GFA had not materialised in north Belfast. Far from this, many Glenbryn residents felt they were still under siege from the PIRA who protesters believed could act with impunity. While the claim of ethnic cleansing may appear exaggerated, especially in comparison to the tens of thousands who were killed in the Yugoslav Wars, the idea encapsulates the protesters perception of Glenbryn’s decline as the result of a hostile republican force. The ethnic cleansing claim was also validated for the protesters by the emergence of a Catholic Reaction Force (CRF) which posted threats to Glenbryn residents ordering an end to the protest (see figure 10). Police doubted the authenticity of the CRF, especially as other seemingly fake threats began to circulate from “Members of Oldpark and Ardoyne Sinn Fein” which misspelt numerous words, crucially, ‘Sinn Féin’ as “Sinn Fien”.⁷⁸ Regardless, publication of the CRF’s threats, which were reported by news outlets including the BBC, gave some tangible evidence to the threat of violent republicanism, as voiced by protesters.⁷⁹ Despite real nightly violence, which protesters claimed was organised by the PIRA, the organisation’s Army Council made no statements on the subject.

⁷⁵ Ian Hall, letter to the editor, *Community Telegraph*, November 9, 2001, 6.

⁷⁶ Michael Humphrey, *The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation: From terror to trauma* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 73.

⁷⁷ Neil Southern, “Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland: A Political, Cultural and Geographical Examination,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2007): 171.

⁷⁸ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 219-221.

⁷⁹ “Letter threats over school dispute,” BBC News, October 10, 2001, accessed March 21, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/1590929.stm.

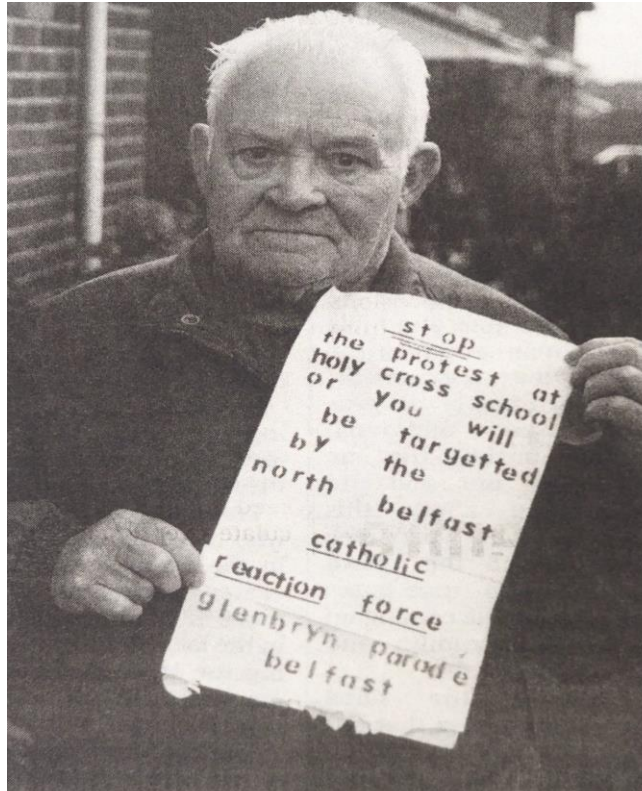


Figure 10.⁸⁰ A photograph of Glenbryn resident, Charlie Smith, holding a letter from the 'Catholic Reaction Force' as printed in the October edition of the *Shankill Mirror*. The letter reads "stop the protest at holy cross school or you will be targetted by the north belfast catholic reaction force glenbryn Parade belfast [sic]".

The protest also provided a chance for Glenbryn residents to voice concerns at the 'justice' promoted by the GFA, especially the change from the RUC to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Interviewed in the *Shankill Mirror*, protester Anne Bill said "Upper Ardoyne residents who, for over thirty years, have lived in fear of attacks against them by the IRA depended on the Security Forces to protect them. Now they feel the protector has turned aggressor".⁸¹ This sentiment was reiterated by other protesters, who felt that the police had been heavy handed in their tactics throughout the dispute.⁸² The Patten Commission's recommendation to select recruits equally from the Protestant and Catholic population was a demographic and symbolic change from the RUC's 88 per cent Protestant makeup in 1998.⁸³ The change from the RUC to the PSNI was a sensitive one for unionists, many of

⁸⁰ "Shankill Bomb Jokes 'Sick'," *Shankill Mirror*, November, 2001, 10.

⁸¹ Alex Crumlin, "Upper Ardoyne residents condemn police aggression," *Shankill Mirror*, October, 2001, 11.

⁸² News footage, broadcast September 3, 2001, accessed March 2, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

⁸³ "A New Beginning: Policing in Northern Ireland – The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland," CAIN Web Service, September 1999, accessed January 14, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/patten/patten99.pdf>, 82, 88.

whom saw the old RUC as a legal defence against the PIRA and the historical protector of the Protestant community.

The protest was also a chance for Glenbryn residents and their supporters to argue for their victimhood and assert that their experiences of violence were as valid as those reported by the parents of Holy Cross. As Peter Shirlow has noted, north Belfast reflects the narrative familiar in interface areas of the “‘Collective Self’s’ suffering at the hands of the ‘collective other’”.⁸⁴ The newspaper coverage of the dispute reflected protesters’ perceived victimhood which impacted their views of the motives of Holy Cross parents. One letter to the *Belfast News Letter* asked how Catholic mothers could “cry about what loyalists are putting their children through each day, when they are the ones who are dragging them right through the middle of the mob. Any mother with any sense of maternal instinct left would keep her children as far away from angry protesters as she could. But maybe a child left emotionally scarred by abuse is a small price to pay to get your political agenda through to the world’s media”.⁸⁵ A later piece in the *Belfast News Letter* by former DUP politician St Clair McAlister condemned the “republicans” who would “use their children to make a political point ... this is not the typical behaviour of a loving parent one would expect to see in any circumstances”.⁸⁶ From this perspective, the continual use of the Ardoyne Road by Holy Cross parents and children was evidence of republican influence on the Holy Cross parents, and a reason that the protest should continue. While local and international media broadly condemned the protest, protesters turned the focus towards the Holy Cross parents in order to establish the validity of their claim of ‘true’ victimhood.

There was also, as critical theorist Fidelma Ashe has noted, a gendered subtext to the dispute, as protesters employed the “ideology of motherhood and femininity to legitimise” their actions and discredit the Holy Cross parents.⁸⁷ The interviewees for the BBC ‘Spotlight: Holy Cross’ documentary, aired on 13 November 2001, expressed their feelings of victimhood and criticised the parenthood of the Holy Cross parents. Harry McConnell, one of the protesters interviewed, said that the dispute was “bringing stress on all children,” rather than just the children of Holy Cross.⁸⁸ McConnell went on to describe how, on the protesters’ side “women and children were beaten by both army and police” as well as one

⁸⁴ Shirlow, “‘Who Fears to Speak,’” 82.

⁸⁵ Anonymous, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, September 6, 2001, 20.

⁸⁶ St Clair McAlister, “Protestant complaints lost in shameful scenes,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 7, 2001, 8.

⁸⁷ Fidelma Ashe, “Gendering ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland: A comparative analysis of nationalist women’s political protests,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 5 (September 2007): 777.

⁸⁸ “Spotlight: Teach the Children.”

instance in which “a child, a six month old baby in a buggy was threw aside by police, as if you would throw your bin lid around into the bin [sic]”.⁸⁹ In explaining why he believed protesters had been ill-treated by police, McConnell responded that, “basically I think we’re the easiest to touch, the Protestant people always were, it’s easier to get into the Protestant people and there’s less of a comeback from that”.⁹⁰ Here McConnell reassesses the Troubles, casting Protestants as the principal victims of the conflict and nationalists as the recipients of favourable police treatment. This is the antithesis of the republican view of the conflict supported by *An Phoblacht*, which viewed nationalists and republicans as the victims of the unionist state. The categorisation of Glenbryn children as ignored victims of the dispute echoes the protesters’ broader concern of the ignored victimhood of the people of Glenbryn.

Andy Cooper, another protester, said in the documentary “I’ll not bring my child in front of a TV camera, cause I don’t believe it’s in his best interest to do that there, and the one thing that concerns me is how people can put their children in front of television cameras, to have them used “oh this is the problems” “oh my child’s suffering”. All children should never suffer no matter what religion they are, but our children are suffering too”.⁹¹ The implicit meaning of the ‘how people can put their children in front of television cameras’ is that the Holy Cross parents were using their children for political ends, rather than focusing on their children’s needs - delegitimising the moral authority of the parents. These interviews, show the continuing concerns of the Glenbryn residents as to how they were portrayed, and, protesters’ feelings of victimisation by the media. Children, Protestant and Catholic, who had been ubiquitous during the GFA and referendum were at the centre of attention in a dispute that questioned the legitimacy, meaning and purpose of the Agreement which was designed to free this new generation from sectarian violence.

What role did loyalist paramilitaries play throughout the protest? Loyalist paramilitaries were highly visible throughout the protest, in a variety of guises. Not only were many current and former UDA members present on the Ardoyne Road throughout the dispute, masks of Johnny Adair were worn at numerous stages of the protest (see figure 11). However, far from continuing the protest for strategic reasons, key UDA figures wished for the dispute to end quickly, including Brigadiers John ‘Grugg’ Gregg, John ‘Jackie’ McDonald and Johnny Adair.⁹² On 10 November, while imprisoned, Adair called for the protest to end, saying “the protest has run its course and the loyalist people are being made to look bad in

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Wood, *Crimes of Loyalty*, 272.

the eyes of the media” and, “I think everybody now wants to see the protest resolved”.⁹³ While coverage of the dispute frequently mentioned the UDA presence at the protest, it is important to note that many protesters did not respond to the requests of the UDA brigadiers, and continued the protest for a number of weeks after Adair called for it to end. The pipe bombing on 5 September allowed protesters to denounce paramilitary violence as illegitimate, as Billy Hutchinson had done. While performing acts of violence on behalf of the Protestant community may have been loyalists’ perceived role throughout the Troubles, reactions to the pipe bombing demonstrate that protesters had entered a new phase of Northern Ireland’s history. Paramilitaries could no longer dictate people’s actions in the way they once could, and would be roundly and robustly criticised if they attempted violence. A rumour emerged that Sean Kelly, who had helped carry out the Shankill Road Bombing in 1993, was present at the protest.⁹⁴ Anne Cadwallader later rebuffed this claim, quoting Gerry Kelly who said that this idea may have been the result of two Ardoyne residents who were the “spitting image” of the bomber.⁹⁵ Whereas loyalist paramilitaries were active throughout Holy Cross, the PIRA issued no statements about the dispute, although ex-PIRA members including Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly were vocal in their support for the parents of Holy Cross children.⁹⁶

⁹³ “Protest has run its course – Adair,” *North Belfast News*, November 10, 2001, 2.

⁹⁴ Bill, *Beyond the Red Gauntlet*, 45.

⁹⁵ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 95.

⁹⁶ “Eyewitness: Holy Cross – Political Voices,” BBC News, last updated 16 October, 2014, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/eyewitness/holycross/political/index.shtml>.



Figure 11.⁹⁷ The front page of the *Andersonstown News* from 29 October 2001 featuring a protester with Johnny Adair's image and the slogan 'Trick or Treat.' This was the phrase shouted at victims of the Greysteel Massacre in 1993 as they were killed by members of UDA. Images like these, along with paramilitary flags and masks of Adair appeared throughout the protest.

Protesters also criticised the use of 'new media' by the RTE, who established a website 'http://ardoyne.com' to express their views online. The website was criticised by protester Marc Coulter in the *Shankill Mirror*, who asked if the website's use of children was an "Admission of Child Abuse," presumably because Coulter believed that it was the parents, rather than the protesters, subjecting the children to abuse.⁹⁸ The website was also criticised in a letter to the editor of the *Belfast Telegraph*, which supposed "Holy Cross parents refused to use the free-from protest route in the school, but choose instead to put their children through the trauma we witness daily ... give the world this information – it is more than enough".⁹⁹ New media was considered, in these opinions, to be an unfair advantage for the RTE not utilised by the protesters. While the voices of both sides were amplified the dispute, the RTE had opened a new media front in the discursive war against the CRUA – the internet – in which it had dominance. For victims' groups, the use of the internet also introduced a form of storytelling that was entirely personal and without the need of an intermediary such as a newspaper or television interview to have their voices heard. The RTE's use of this

⁹⁷ *Andersonstown News*, October 29, 2001, 1.

⁹⁸ Marc Coulter, "Tutu condemns 'use' of children," *Shankill Mirror*, December, 2001, 5.

⁹⁹ Non Supporter, letter to the editor, *Belfast Telegraph*, November 9, 2001, 14.

relatively new means of communication coincided with the GFA's discursive changes, allowing victims of violence to speak more openly than before the Troubles.

Protesters wrote articles, gave interviews, appeared on television and in the case of Anne Bill, published books on their experiences of the dispute. Local, national and international media was largely against the continuation of the protest, but protesters used the dispute to express their own stories and dissatisfaction with the peace process. While the protest certainly focused on the issues of security and discrimination, the form of the protest and its continuation was born from the frustration of not being heard in the twenty-first century public discourse of Northern Ireland. Bill, a protester and member of CRUA, recorded her testimony in the self-published work *Beyond the Red Gauntlet: The silent voices of Upper Ardoyne Amidst the travesty of Holy Cross*. Bill's work reiterates many of the grievances of the Glenbryn community, and explains some of their reasons for continuing the protest. The book's first chapter expresses that many residents in North Belfast "share the feeling of their identity being stripped from them in a meticulous attempt to implement and impose the Good Friday Agreement – no matter the cost".¹⁰⁰ Bill also believed

there was a definite feeling that Protestants had been let down by the "Good Friday Agreement", most felt that the Government was out to appease those who posed the most severe terrorist threat, rather than protect those who felt in genuine danger. In the Good Friday agreement it is said "all people should live free from sectarian harassment" when then [sic] was the Government not listening to the appeals of the Protestant people of Upper Ardoyne (many who voted YES to the promised peace), before they had to proactively go out and protest because no one would pay attention.¹⁰¹

Beyond the Red Gauntlet also quotes a 2002 letter to Bill from a concerned resident asking, "where is our NEW future promised under the present Good Friday Agreement?"¹⁰² Bill's emphasis on the GFA was, like the protest itself, not necessarily policy focused. Rather, Bill connected with wider feelings of disappointment in the GFA and the peace process more generally. Bill's work also emphasises the discursive powerlessness many residents felt before, during and after the protest. During the protest, one elderly resident is reported to have said "at least now people are starting to listen ... they all hate us but they are listening".¹⁰³ As the book concludes:

I have watched as a community responded to low-key and murderous attacks, as they came from being an apathetic, segregated, frustrated, degenerated, neighbourhood who felt they could do nothing but tolerate all the world was throwing at them, to

¹⁰⁰ Bill, *Beyond the Red Gauntlet*, viii.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰² Ibid., 130.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 53.

becoming a district who stood against all the odds to try as best they could to highlight the artificial and deceitful falsehoods being portrayed against your community ... where you have been given some of the factual information surrounding the events and history of this area and not just been left to the mainly biased spiel of the media and Republicans; I will only then have fulfilled my objective for writing this sequence of events.¹⁰⁴

Bill's concerns speak not only to the security issues of Glenbryn, but the feeling that the community's voices were not being heard, leading the community to 'highlight' their issues in the face of seemingly 'biased' media through a protest. The self-published nature of the work certainly indicates that Bill's perspective was not as valued as others. We can also read into her account the feeling that the GFA was meant to create a more reconciled Northern Ireland where people could 'live free from sectarian harassment,' an aim that Glenbryn residents did not think had been achieved.

Critiques of the GFA from politicians, journalists and the media more generally are crucial to understanding the wider reactions to the dispute. Critiques coming from people who believe, rightly or wrongly, that they do not fit in to the 'new' Northern Ireland should be considered especially significant. While it is statistically true that by 2001, most Protestants no longer supported the GFA, this overall shift is more thoroughly illuminated by the Holy Cross dispute. Some of the greatest concerns in the 1998 referendum campaign, especially the fear that a political settlement would not improve reconciliation, or that justice would favour one community over the other, were manifested in the protest at Holy Cross.

Holy Cross Parents and the RTE

The Holy Cross parents and their advocates, organised under the leadership of RTE, were largely supported by local, national and international media. Like the Glenbryn protesters, the parents of Holy Cross children and their supporters had their voices amplified through media interest, and they used the protest to air broader concerns about the peace process. They also criticised the media coverage and groups that did not give them outright support, including Bertie Ahern and the Catholic Church. The RTE's tactics rested on the assumption that if enough people around Britain, Ireland and the world knew about the dispute, then it would surely come to an end.

The BBC 'Spotlight' special, 'Teach the Children' broadcast perspectives from the different sides of the dispute. The documentary contains no voiceover and all of the words are verbatim testimonies of those involved. The documentary separates the groups involved

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 138.

into the categories of ‘Mothers,’ ‘Protesters,’ ‘Priest,’ ‘Policeman,’ ‘Glenbryn Community Worker’ and ‘Teacher.’ One parent interviewed, Lisa Irvine, stated “it saddens me because, you know, we’re the lost generation, we didn’t know any peace growing up ... these children are the hope for the future, they weren’t supposed to grow up like this”.¹⁰⁵ Irvine went on to say “for years we’ve been fighting in this country for civil rights and equality. I’m not a second-class citizen, my daughter is not a second-class citizen, as far as I am concerned apartheid has been abolished. So why then should I be sneaking in and out a back door just to get the right to an education?”¹⁰⁶ Irvine’s comments consider the future created by the GFA, in particular, the hope that children would grow up in a Northern Ireland in which they were treated as equal citizens. Irvine’s statements also reflect the nationalist conceptions of civil rights, describing the ‘apartheid’ of the years before the peace process. Irvine’s testimony demonstrated that the concern for Holy Cross was more than the immediate protest, and reflected nationalist conceptions of the GFA as a milestone of nationalist civil rights in Northern Ireland.

The subject of legal justice was an important issue for parents and their supporters. A letter to the editor of *Andersonstown News*, referred to the GFA directly, noting “under the Good Friday Agreement we were told “everyone has the right to live free from sectarian harassment”. That right is being abused every day in Ardoyne”.¹⁰⁷ Writing in the same newspaper, Holy Cross parent Tanya Carmichael stated “at every point in our history unionists have tried to oppress us into believing we are second class citizens but this is where it stops. My daughters will not grow up thinking they are inferior, we are a strong group brought together by this abuse of our civil rights”.¹⁰⁸ Writing for the newspaper as ‘Fr Des,’ columnist Desmond Wilson demanded “law and penalties first, ecumenical discussion and persuasion afterwards. That is the right pattern and it does work”.¹⁰⁹ The newspaper noted that the “British are talking about reforming the discredited criminal justice system here. They could do worse than start with bringing the full weight of the law to bear on the sick bigots bullying schoolchildren in North Belfast”.¹¹⁰ One parent attempted to initiate legal action against the protesters, although this was ultimately unsuccessful.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ “Spotlight: Teach the Children.”

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ M Doherty, letter to the editor, *Andersonstown News*, October 8, 2001, 21.

¹⁰⁸ “Holy Cross parents to make history,” *Andersonstown News*, October 27, 2001, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Fr Des, “The roots of injustice,” *Andersonstown News*, September 8, 2001, 18.

¹¹⁰ “Holy Cross horror must be halted,” *Andersonstown News*, October 29, 2001, 8.

¹¹¹ Allison Morris, “Archbishop Tutu Visits Holy Cross: South African cleric prays with children and teachers as parents begin legal action to try to bring nine-week primary school blockade to an end,” *Andersonstown News*, November 10, 2001, 4-5.

In addition to being the subjects of interviews, some parents of the Holy Cross children gave their own testimonies. For example, Elizabeth Irvine wrote an article in the *Irish News* on 30 October urging protesters, rather than parents, to take the first step towards ending the protest.¹¹² A public demonstration against the Holy Cross protest occurred in nationalist west Belfast, where “500 people” gathered in a “demonstration of solidarity” organised by Sinn Féin.¹¹³ One parent even began a hunger strike.¹¹⁴ Holy Cross parents held alternative protests, most notably at Belfast City Hall and Stormont. News of the Stormont protest included reports that the RTE had asked to see David Trimble, but were denied access to the First Minister.¹¹⁵ These demonstrations functioned as counter-protests to those taking place on the Ardoyne Road, attempting to demonstrate ‘legitimate’ forms of protest, compared to the perceived sectarian blockade of Holy Cross. By using the media, the parents also responded to accusations by the protesters, especially claims of ethnic cleansing. The ethnic cleansing claim was rejected by the *Irish News* which quoted one parent as saying “this is ethnic cleansing,” but that it was directed at the parents, because the protesters “just don’t want Catholic people around here”.¹¹⁶

Supporters also took to the media to defend parents from attacks. One letter to *An Phoblacht* declared that the “parents in Belfast were completely blameless in the circumstances. Bigots and bullies should not be allowed to force children in the back door by a roundabout route through another school’s playground, football pitch and field. This would be the road to back to 1967, of second-class citizen status, resentment and despair”.¹¹⁷ The claim of second class citizenship and nationalist victimhood throughout the Troubles was already an overriding historical metanarrative for republicans,¹¹⁸ and one that could be easily adapted for the Holy Cross dispute.

Ardoyne = Alabama

In addition to dismissing the ‘ethnic cleansing’ claims of the protesters, the Holy Cross parents and supporters issued a counter-claim: that the protests were similar to the civil rights movement in the Southern United States during the 1950s and 1960s. The comparison with

¹¹² Elizabeth Irvine, letter to the editor, *Irish News*, October 30, 2001, 19.

¹¹³ Andrea McKernon, “Mother weeps for plight of families,” *Irish News*, September 8, 2001, 9.

¹¹⁴ Kevin Hurley, “Holy Cross parent in hunger strike protest,” *Belfast Telegraph*, November 19, 2001, 2.

¹¹⁵ Kathryn Torney, “Holy Cross parents in protest at Stormont,” *Belfast Telegraph*, November 2, 2001, 2.

¹¹⁶ Frank McNamara, “They haven’t a thread of humanity or decency left,” *Irish News*, September 6, 2001, 3.

¹¹⁷ Mick Finnegan, letter to the editor, *An Phoblacht*, September 6, 2001, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/7845>.

¹¹⁸ Stephen Hopkins, “Sinn Féin, the Past and Political Strategy: The Provisional Irish Republican Movement and the Politics of ‘Reconciliation’,” *Irish Political Studies* 30, no. 1 (2015): 84.

civil rights in the United States was one that had been used by the nationalist community since the Northern Ireland civil rights movement of the 1960s.¹¹⁹ A mural on the Ardoyne Road, drawing comparisons between Holy Cross and the African-American civil rights movement was made even more powerful when members of the Little Rock Nine were photographed with Holy Cross children (see figure 12). Laura Friel from *An Phoblacht* referred to the events in Alabama in the 1960s: “the power relationship of oppressed and oppressor had been exposed by the display of naked sectarianism captured on screen, just as it had been in Alabama decades ago”.¹²⁰ The parents and the RTE used the analogy of Arkansas, in which the ‘Little Rock Nine’ attempted to make their way to school at the state’s capital in Little Rock, to make their expression of victimhood more vivid.



Figure 12.¹²¹ This mural, painted in 2001, reads “Arkansas-1957” and “Ardoyne-2001” with the phrase “It’s Black and White”. “Everyone has the right to live free from sectarian harassment” is painted above the picture of the Ardoyne Road. The phrase comes from the ‘Policing and Justice’ section of the GFA.

¹¹⁹ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 25-26.

¹²⁰ Laura Friel, “Ardoyne: Running the Gauntlet,” *An Phoblacht*, September 6, 2001, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/7841>.

¹²¹ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 160-161.

The civil rights analogy was also used by the American news media, including a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, which evaluated that

it was wrong in the 1950's and 60's when bigoted white Americans tried to prevent African-American students from attending school in the South. It was wrong in 1974 when bigoted Irish-Americans in South Boston threw stones at the buses of African-Americans trying to go to high school there through desegregation. And it is wrong today, in the 21st century, when Protestants throw rocks at small Catholic schoolgirls returning for a new school year.¹²²

An Phoblacht thoroughly supported the analogy: “in the words of Minister for Education Martin McGuinness, the time when nationalists will sit at the back of the bus or go by the back door are gone and gone for good,” before listing comparisons with Little Rock.¹²³ Indeed, Suzanne Breen, writing in the *Belfast News Letter*, reported “I’ve spoken to American, Canadian, Australian and French journalists. It isn’t just Sinn Féin making the comparisons with 1960s Alabama and 1957 Little Rock, Arkansas”.¹²⁴ As Lisa Irvine mentioned in the ‘Teach the Children’ documentary, “if the children were black the whole world would be up in arms about this”.¹²⁵ This idea was utilised by the RTE, which took out full page advertisements in the *Andersonstown News* drawing the comparison between Alabama and Ardoyne (see figure 13).

¹²² Michael Fagan, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, September 7, 2001, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/08/opinion/1-belfast-outrage-they-re-little-girls-not-pawns-089842.html>.

¹²³ Laura Friel, “Ardoyne: Running the Gauntlet,” *An Phoblacht*, September 6, 2001, accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/7841>.

¹²⁴ Suzanne Breen, “Horrible lesson in naked sectarianism,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 6, 2001, 8.

¹²⁵ “Spotlight: Teach the Children.”

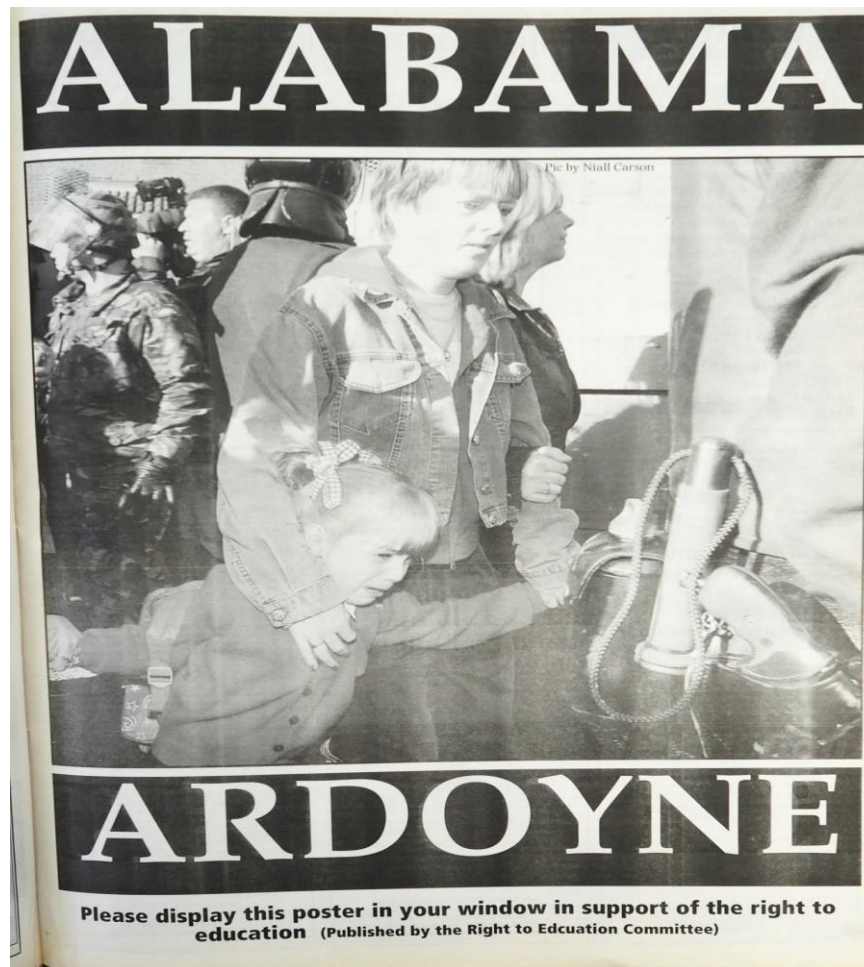


Figure 13.¹²⁶ An advertisement taken out by the RTE in the *Andersonstown News* from 19 November 2001. The analogy that Ardoyne resembled Alabama in the 1950s was not just reported by the media, it was used by parents' groups like the RTE to draw parallels with the African-American civil rights movement in the United States.

The use of comparisons with African-American civil rights did not end with the analogies of Alabama and Arkansas. Throughout the dispute, the words “If we were born where they were born, were taught what they were taught, we would believe what they believe,” were written on the side of the school, attributed to United States President Abraham Lincoln.¹²⁷ There is no documented evidence that President Lincoln ever said or wrote these words. As with Lincoln’s verifiable words hoping for a ‘just and lasting peace,’ the usefulness of these phrases comes from the hope that they inspire in a peaceful, just and reconciled future.

The Holy Cross parents were also artistically supported in a way that protesters were not, particularly through the submission of poems in various newspapers. A poem in the *Andersonstown News* written by ‘Black Mountain Beginner’ takes the perspective of a child

School holidays are meant to be days full of fun, of smiles

¹²⁶ “Alabama Ardoyne. Please display this poster in your window in support of the right to education (Published by the Right to Education Committee),” *Andersonstown News*, November 19, 2001, 41.

¹²⁷ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 162.

Of barbecues, not bonfires, of kiss and tell with boys,
 So why is all this going on?
 When can we walk up to our school?
 The helicopters hover, watching our every move.
 We only want to smile and laugh and skip and learn again
 I hope they find the end.¹²⁸

Another poem published the next month ends with the lines, “We saw their faces full of hatred / And contorted with their screams / Some say the peace process is working / Only in their dreams”.¹²⁹ Poetic responses such as these were one other way to keep the Holy Cross story in the media, and can be interpreted as an attempt to delegitimise the protest through an artistic medium. As with poetic responses to the Omagh bombing, these poems display a personal and heartfelt response to violence after the GFA, lamenting that children’s experiences of the peace process may only occur ‘in their dreams.’

The RTE used new media in its campaign against the Holy Cross protesters. Brendan Mailey was a former PIRA prisoner who headed the RTE. Under Mailey’s leadership, the RTE created a website in November in an attempt to end the protest (see figure 14). Websites such as these further contributed to the competition of ‘victimhoods,’ especially at interfaces between republican and loyalist communities.¹³⁰ Mailey said that a website “was the best and fastest way of getting that information across” to the world and that the RTE was “expecting a lot of ‘hits,’ especially from America, and we hope the website will publicise the issue and keep the focus on the protest”.¹³¹ The *North Belfast News* claimed that the website’s petition had garnered thousands of signatures “it is expanding and mushrooming like a kind of chain letter around the world”.¹³²

¹²⁸ Black Mountain Beginner, “Suffer Little Children,” *Andersonstown News*, September 15, 2001, 25.

¹²⁹ “A short poem on the plight of Holy Cross children,” *Andersonstown News*, October 15, 2001, 21.

¹³⁰ Paul Reilly, “Framing Online Communications of Civil and Uncivil Groups in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, November 2007), accessed January 24, 2017, <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/131/1/2007Reillyphd.pdf>, viii-xi.

¹³¹ Mary Fitzgerald, “Holy Cross school plight highlighted on new website,” *Belfast Telegraph*, November 29, 2001, 2.

¹³² “Holy Cross reaches the world wide web,” *North Belfast News*, November 17, 2001, 2.

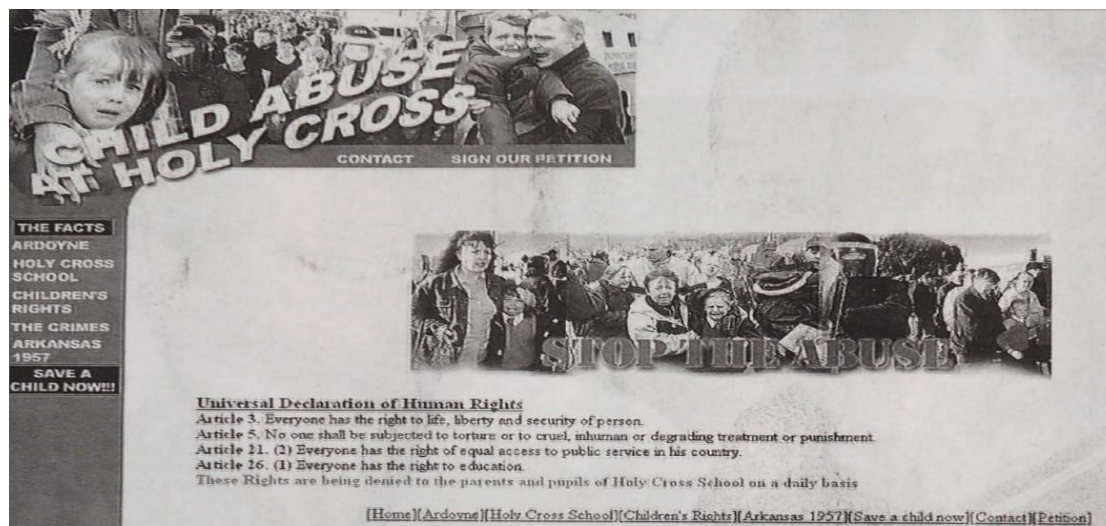


Figure 14.¹³³ A screenshot from the now defunct 'http://ardoyne.com/' website, created by the RTE. The website contained numerous pages that formed the parents' key arguments throughout the dispute, including reference to human rights and the comparisons with 'Arkansas 1957.' The web site's main page reads "Vulnerable children in Belfast are now the targets of a small group of racist/sectarian bigots who gather on a daily basis to inflict physical, verbal and emotional abuse upon them".¹³⁴

Threats were made by the loyalist Red Hand Defenders (RHD) against parents walking up the Ardoyne Road while the UDA made threats against police officers for continuing to escort children to Holy Cross.¹³⁵ Loyalist paramilitaries also threatened to recruit snipers to shoot parents if they continued to walk up the Ardoyne road.¹³⁶ The impact of the dispute on the health of the children involved was also revealed in the news. The BBC reported that a local general practitioner prescribed sedatives and tranquilisers to Holy Cross children as a result of the dispute, while also detailing the behavioural effects on the children of the nearby Wheatfield Primary School.¹³⁷ The trauma experienced by the children was also used as a discussion point for the victimhood of the Ardoyne community and more broadly the trauma of people in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, especially in north Belfast. One protester went as far as to say that "our children are as much traumatised as any other, but if I had to go down to the lower Ardoyne Road and seen that happening, I wouldn't put my child through that [sic]".¹³⁸ As the *Belfast News Letter* reported, the "ongoing unrest is symptomatic

¹³³ Mary Fitzgerald, "Holy Cross school plight highlighted on new website," *Belfast Telegraph*, November 29, 2001, 2.

¹³⁴ "Ardoyne Facts," accessed October 4, 2016, <http://web.archive.org/web/20011130070721/http://ardoyne.com/>.

¹³⁵ "Tensions still running high at Holy Cross," *Belfast Telegraph*, October 24, 2001, 7.

¹³⁶ Jackie McKeown, "Protestors branded 'sick' after violence," *Belfast News Letter*, September 27, 2001, 2.

¹³⁷ News Report, "BBC News Report," September 7, 2001, accessed March 2, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

¹³⁸ "Eyewitness: Community Voices – Lillian North," BBC News, last updated October 16, 2001, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/eyewitness/holycross/community/north.shtml>.

of the fears and apprehensions of two distinct and highly-polarised communities, seriously traumatised by 30 years of the murder and mayhem of the Troubles”.¹³⁹ A parent of one Wheatfield child claimed that “I have known nothing but the Troubles and I hoped that things would be better for our children”.¹⁴⁰ These statements reveal that the generational hopes for peace were not confined to Holy Cross parents or nationalist publications such as the *Irish News*, as many protesters and Glenbryn residents shared these fading expectations of the peace process.

Tony Blair did not comment directly on the dispute, although reports were sent to him informing the Prime Minister of the situation.¹⁴¹ Bertie Ahern issued a statement calling the protest a “shameful spectacle of sectarian harassment” as early as 19 September.¹⁴² Ahern met with Fr Aidan Troy, the chair of the governors of Holy Cross, on numerous occasions, and President Mary McAleese wrote in support of the Holy Cross parents and children.¹⁴³ Despite this high-profile support, the protest continued, and the perceived ‘silence’ from Irish and British politicians and institutions was seen as implicit support for the protesters. The impact of this silence was evident in a letter to the *Andersonstown News* where the writer lamented that “the greatest shame when all of this is over, the greatest hurt visited upon the children of Holy Cross Primary School will be by those who did nothing and who by their silence encouraged the ‘peaceful’ protesters”.¹⁴⁴ The expectation of wider support was then directed at other politicians who had not commented on the dispute, with one article from the *Andersonstown News* quoting Liz Murphy, a Holy Cross mother, who said it was “time now to have this stopped, we need people like Bertie Ahern and leading organisations to come out in open support of our children”.¹⁴⁵ The November article commented that parents “say the silence from Taoiseach Bertie Ahern is deafening ... I think it is despicable that Bertie Ahern would remain silent ... if this violent protest against our children was taking place south of the border I am sure Mr Ahern would not be so indifferent in his response”.¹⁴⁶ The silence from other groups was also noted, especially the perceived lack of support from the Catholic Church. One article in the *North Belfast News* asked “school girls as young as five

¹³⁹ “Morning view - Legitimate grievances no excuse for harassing school children,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 4, 2001, 8.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Sheriff, “It's ugly, but it's our home,” *Belfast News Letter*, September 6, 2001, 7.

¹⁴¹ Troy, *Personal Experience*, 101.

¹⁴² “Ahern condemns “shameful” Holy Cross protests,” RTÉ News, September 19, 2001, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://www.rte.ie/news/2001/0919/18837-north1/>.

¹⁴³ Troy, *Personal Experience*, 56-57, 90, 98.

¹⁴⁴ C Keenan, letter to the editor, *Andersonstown News*, November 12, 2001, 21.

¹⁴⁵ “Holy Cross Parents Slam Ahern Over School Protest Silence,” *Andersonstown News*, November 17, 2001, 5.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and their parents are bombarded with obscenities, pipe bombs, fireworks and any other abomination loyalists can think of ... why is the Catholic Church as a body not giving visible support to the Catholic children of Holy Cross?"¹⁴⁷ Members of the Church hierarchy as well as their Protestant counterparts did criticise the events surrounding Holy Cross,¹⁴⁸ but had little influence in stopping Glenbryn residents from continuing the protest. Instead, the church largely relied on the leadership of the Chair of the Holy Cross Board of Governors Father Aidan Troy in addition to Father Gary Donegan, who both walked with parents and children throughout the protest. The perception of silence from the Catholic Church and the Irish government, institutions with historic ties to the nationalist community, increased the sense of isolation among the parents of Holy Cross, and, the feeling that their voices were being heard, but not valued. The expectation that the Irish government would intervene may also be a legacy of the GFA, which had promised a greater involvement of the Irish Republic in Northern Ireland.

Reflection on the Ardoyne protest continued in the years that followed the Holy Cross dispute. In 2002, the 'Ardoyne Commemoration Project,' asked 300 people to describe their experiences of Ardoyne since the 1960s, covering the Troubles and the Holy Cross dispute. The aim of the project was to

give control and ownership over what is written about victims to their relatives and friends. It is primarily a community project and one defined by the importance of writing 'history from below'. The book offers a platform for the community to 'write back' and set the record straight ... these unheard voices of ordinary people will enter the public discourse. In doing so they will reclaim an important part of their history for future generations. Who better to tell that story than those who have experienced political violence first hand? If the history of the conflict is to be written well, we believe these very powerful and poignant testimonies can, and must, be allowed to speak for themselves.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, the authors noted that the people in Ardoyne believed that the media had been manipulated to minimise their suffering. Throughout the Troubles, the media's

control of information, had a devastating effect on the lives of the ordinary people of Ardoyne. At the heart of the conflict in the north of Ireland was a struggle over the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. The battle for legitimacy was fought out as much in the media as elsewhere.¹⁵⁰

This work in many ways mirrors features of Anne Bill's account of the Holy Cross dispute. Not only were both works intended to 'set the record straight,' they both intended to ensure

¹⁴⁷ C McCabe, "Why is the Catholic Church as a body not giving visible support to the Catholic children of Holy Cross?," *North Belfast News*, November 17, 2001, 20.

¹⁴⁸ John Deane, "Churches call for end to violence in Ardoyne," *Belfast News Letter*, September 10, 2001, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Ardoyne Commemoration, *Untold Truth*, 2.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 524.

that ‘unheard’ voices entered Northern Ireland’s public discourse. Anne Cadwallader’s work of the same year *Holy Cross: The Untold Story* also focuses on personal testimony, and compiles a wide-ranging series of interviews with dozens of people involved in the Holy Cross dispute. Cadwallader blames both unionist and nationalist politicians, singling out the “populist approach” of the DUP and the UUP’s electoral decline.¹⁵¹ The book’s description of nationalist politicians is no more flattering, as “neither their own political parties nor the Irish government were effective in persuading London to act swiftly to bring the protest to an end. They were, as usual, themselves alone”.¹⁵² Cadwallader concludes that the protest was

undoubtedly, the result of the continuing failure of politicians in the North to deliver what the electorate expected and wanted from the peace process. Holy Cross is yet another example of many showing the continuing weakness and fault lines in the Irish peace process. An uneasy peace now prevails on the Ardoyne/Glenbryn interface, but it is imposed from outside rather than negotiated from within and therefore unstable and liable to fissures.¹⁵³

The peace Cadwallader mentions as being ‘imposed from outside rather than negotiated from within,’ reflects the fear that political changes in Northern Ireland would not necessarily result in communal reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics, despite the hopes created by the GFA. These ideas are also revealed in Cadwallader’s interviewees. For example, ‘Martha’ recalled how after the GFA

we were going to be given equal rights as everyone else. This was brilliant, this was going to be different ... my children were going to have equal rights and be treated properly ... the Agreement meant it wouldn’t matter where you came from, you were going to have a chance and not be looked down on. It was about an end to all that was rotten in this society. I know that sounds foolish naïve and ‘pie in the sky’, but that was how our family genuinely viewed it.¹⁵⁴

This passage encapsulates the nationalist response to the dispute and the hopelessness that equality, a better future and improved civil rights had not yet been achieved.

Fr Aidan Troy, parish priest and chairman of the Holy Cross Board of Governors, had his account of the protest, *Holy Cross: A Personal Experience*, published in 2005. Fr Troy linked the dispute to the fact that Northern Ireland did not have a Truth and Reconciliation project like South Africa, lamenting that “we don’t have Archbishop Desmond Tutu to lead such a listening body”.¹⁵⁵ Unlike Cadwallader, Fr Troy emphasised the problems associated with both communal relations and marginalised voices: “we must find a way of letting the

¹⁵¹ Cadwallader, *Untold Story*, 315-316.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 315.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁵⁵ Troy, *Personal Experience*, 218.

painful stories and even the hatred be released ... everyone who wants to tell their story must be heard".¹⁵⁶ In releasing his recollections to the public through a Dublin-based publisher, Fr Troy's version of the Holy Cross dispute had a far greater reach than Anne Bill's account, which was self-published and less widely available. Fr Troy wrote that, among other recommendations, in order to ease tensions in the area, "why not open an internet café in the Family Centre and let our young people know that the World Wide Web has more to unite us than anything that divides us in North Belfast?"¹⁵⁷ This optimistic assertion of the power of the internet underestimates the medium's ability to create powerful divisions - hate groups, bullying, trolling and other less than inclusive features. Last, Fr Troy concludes *A Personal Experience* by hoping that the "children of the children of Holy Cross will never know the pain their parents went through".¹⁵⁸ This optimism for future children consciously or unconsciously echoed the focus on children as agents of reconciliation and hope for the future during the 1998 referendum campaign, hopes now confined to the next generation.

The "Untold Story"?

The Holy Cross dispute had ramifications far beyond what may be expected from a localised quarrel. The dispute demonstrated the limits of new discourses of justice and reconciliation and the lack of empowerment experienced by both unionists and nationalists who felt left out of the peace process. The divisions between the Glenbryn and Ardoyne communities were political, religious and cultural, but one of the few things that united these communities was the belief that their voices were not being heard in the 'new' Northern Ireland. Few journalists focused on the protests in the years after Holy Cross. One exception was English author and journalist Beatrix Campbell writing in the *Guardian* in December 2003: "two years on the question remains: why was no one with any power prepared to take the side of a group of small Catholic schoolgirls?"¹⁵⁹ Many did side with the parents and children of Holy Cross, a majority of the media in Northern Ireland, Britain and Ireland, as well as civil and religious figures including Mary McAleese and Desmond Tutu. Despite this support, Glenbryn residents were determined to continue the protest, as Bill's account demonstrates, because it empowered a marginalised community that felt it had no other avenue of expression. Only three years after the GFA no group - political, social or paramilitary - felt that they had the power to end the dispute. Despite the new focus on peace, justice and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 213-214.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 219.

¹⁵⁹ Beatrix Campbell, "At the mercy of the Mob," *Guardian*, December 2, 2003, accessed September 16, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/dec/01/northernireland.faithschools>.

reconciliation and a decline in paramilitary violence, communal tensions, mistrust, suspicion and hatred meant that the dispute continued for many weeks. Perhaps the Holy Cross dispute reveals that, as some commentators noted in 1998, reconciliation in Northern Ireland required more than political settlement – it demanded fundamental changes in the relationships between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland.

The BBC released a docudrama entitled *Holy Cross* in 2003 telling a fictionalised account of the dispute (see figure 15). In this retelling of Holy Cross, parents and protesters were represented in somewhat caricatured forms. In the film, protesters drink heavily and reflect on the decline of Glenbryn while the father of the central Ardoyne family is an ex-PIRA member.¹⁶⁰ The director Mark Brozel described how “news tends to tell stories in a very black and white way ... it also desensitises us to the pain and experiences of the individuals involved. What a drama like *Holy Cross* can do is give people a really strong emotional connection with what people actually go through”.¹⁶¹ The film’s emphasis on revealing ‘what people actually go through’ overlooks the extent to which both sides of the dispute consciously used the media to have their voices heard. Like Cadwallader’s *Untold Story* and the Ardoyne Commemoration Project’s *Untold Truth*, the BBC’s rendering of the dispute implied that the voices of those involved needed to be uncovered. The voices of those involved in the dispute were (and are) openly available, in the form of interviews, newspaper reports, television broadcasts, websites and later through published (and self-published) autobiographies.

¹⁶⁰ Cafolla, *Holy Cross*. Brendan Mailey, head of the RTE was a former republican prisoner and some Glenbryn residents did drink throughout the protest. However, it is difficult to assess how many parents of Holy Cross children were ex-paramilitaries.

¹⁶¹ “Holy Cross,” BBC One, accessed October 4, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2003/10_october/24/drama_holy_cross.pdf.



Figure 15.¹⁶² Two actors from the 2003 BBC film *Holy Cross*. The film appeared two years after the dispute concluded and was filmed in Manchester. The film's message was that reconciliation had still not occurred in Northern Ireland and it used peace walls as a metaphor for the physical separation between Glenbryn and Ardoyne residents.

Whereas the Omagh bombing had reinforced aspects of the GFA through public ceremonies of ecumenism and reconciliation, the Holy Cross dispute projected a divided, flawed situation that all of the institutions created by GFA could not resolve. Neither protesters nor Holy Cross parents could agree on a solution, or even agree upon the events surrounding the origin of the dispute. Even after the protest, participants wrote autobiographies to tell 'their side' of the story. If discourse is about power, then the Holy Cross dispute was about powerlessness, felt and expressed by the protesters and parents of Holy Cross. By continuing the protest, Glenbryn residents regained some of the discursive power they believed they had lost through a lack of media coverage concerning their personal security. Similarly, parents were empowered to speak more broadly about their hopes for the GFA. In the absence of effective political action, protesters and parents used the media to shape the dispute and used their amplified voices to discuss the GFA, achieve their own ideas of justice and argue for their victimhood in the violence surrounding Holy Cross. The Omagh justice campaign demonstrated the potential that non-paramilitary campaigns had to achieve justice. Holy Cross on the other hand showed the limitations of this approach, because for parents, children and the RTE, all the media attention and support in the world did not end the

¹⁶² Ibid.

protest quickly. The dispute demonstrated that many in Northern Ireland felt that peace was a long-term project, pursuing justice was challenging and that despite the hopes of 1998, reconciliation would be extremely difficult to achieve.

Chapter 4: The Murder of Robert McCartney, 2005



Figure 16.¹ Bridgeen Hagans, Donna, Paula, Claire, Gemma and Catherine McCartney (left to right). A little over fifty days had passed from McCartney's murder to the family's trip to the United States, and some other victims of violence believed that the McCartney family were receiving disproportionate attention compared to other victims of paramilitary violence.

This chapter examines the public discourse surrounding the 2005 murder of Robert McCartney and the McCartney family's justice campaign (see figure 16). McCartney's murder ignited a public dialogue between paramilitaries, politicians and the public over the meaning of 'justice' after the GFA. After outlining the events leading to the murder, I will examine the media response and the McCartney family's justice initiatives. Two aspects of this case merit particular attention: the family's public dialogue with the PIRA and the contrast between the public response to the McCartney family campaign and other victims' groups. Why did Robert McCartney's murder, just one of dozens of paramilitary murders committed after the GFA, inspire such strong national and international interest? I argue that the McCartney family's campaign was not only a case of good media management and public popularity, it was facilitated by the discursive space created by the GFA, a space in which

¹ Michael Seamark, "Man cleared of 'IRA' killing as 71 witnesses saw nothing," *Daily Mail*, June 28, 2008, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1029938/Man-cleared-IRA-killing-71-witnesses-saw-nothing.html#ixzz4NUh3PQb4>.

paramilitaries could be publicly challenged. Equally, however, the McCartney family's justice campaign, like that of the Omagh relatives and Holy Cross parents and protesters, also demonstrated the limits of the 'justice' promised by the Agreement. This new discourse empowered some victims and victims' groups after the Agreement. Others were not so lucky.

“Not a Bullet – Not an Ounce”

The murder of Robert McCartney became infamous in the context of the unresolved issue of paramilitary decommissioning. In 1998, section seven of the GFA outlined the commitment of all parties to “achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years following endorsement in referendums North and South of the agreement”.² Decommissioning was particularly important to unionists,³ who saw it as an assurance that the PIRA would not re-engage in violence against the Protestant community. In the dying hours of talks surrounding the GFA, Tony Blair wrote a letter to David Trimble, assuring him that Sinn Féin could be excluded from the new Assembly if decommissioning did not occur within two years.⁴ The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD) was established in 1997 to oversee this process, which was slow at best. The PIRA announced it had begun to decommission its weapons after agreeing to proposals by the IICD in August 2001, only to then reverse this decision.⁵ This slow progress and the reluctance of republicans to support decommissioning led to graffiti in Belfast reading “Not a Bullet – Not an Ounce,” representing the PIRA's intransigence towards destroying its arsenal.⁶

Why did decommissioning of PIRA weapons take so long? According to political scientist Eamonn O'Kane, decommissioning was a “powerful bargaining chip that republicans used to secure concessions from the other participants in the process”.⁷ Acknowledging the impact of the ‘9/11’ terrorist attacks in the United States, the PIRA

² “The Agreement: Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations (10 April 1998),” CAIN Web Service, comp. Fionnuala McKenna, April 10, 1998, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/agreement.htm>.

³ Colin Irwin, *The People's Peace Process in Northern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 217.

⁴ Dean Godson, *Himself Alone: David Trimble and the Ordeal of Unionism* (Hammersmith: Harper Collins, 2004), 351-352.

⁵ “Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement, 9 August 2001,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira090801.htm>; “Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement, 14 August 2001,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira140801.htm>.

⁶ Brian Rowan, “IRA 'moved slowly' to disarmament,” BBC News, September 26, 2006, accessed October 25, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4282858.stm.

⁷ Eamonn O'Kane, “Decommissioning and the Peace Process: Where Did It Come From and Why Did It Stay So Long?,” *Irish Political Studies* 22, no. 1 (March 2007): 100.

agreed to decommission part of its arsenal,⁸ as the Bush administration was expected to take a harsher line against the PIRA than former President Clinton.⁹ In October 2001, the IICD confirmed that it had witnessed the PIRA destroy a portion of its arsenal.¹⁰ More arms were destroyed in 2002 and 2003 before the IICD confirmed that “all arms in the IRA’s possession” had been decommissioned by September 2005.¹¹ These milestones came well after the two-year timeline proposed by the GFA, and by 2005, prisoners had been released and Sinn Féin members were part of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The extremely slow progress of PIRA decommissioning had created a chaotic political situation in Northern Ireland at the beginning of 2005. The spectre of decommissioning haunted David Trimble, as his party’s cooperation with Sinn Féin was based on hopes of decommissioning and ultimately, the PIRA’s eventual disbandment. The two largest parties at the time of the GFA, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), were losing support after the 2001 Westminster election. Sinn Féin had become the largest nationalist party in 2003 while the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) overtook the UUP in the 2005 Westminster election.¹² After the GFA, unionists grew increasingly suspicious of the plausibility of decommissioning, in part because Blair had implicitly linked republican participation in the new Assembly with prisoner releases and decommissioning.¹³ The DUP’s anti-Agreement stance helped the party to win a majority of the unionist vote, profiting from its uncomplicated message of opposition to the GFA, UUP and Sinn Féin.¹⁴

Political scandals stoked tensions between Sinn Féin and its potential partners in government. The revelation of the ‘Stormontgate’ spy-ring in October 2002, when it was alleged that Sinn Féin’s offices at Stormont Castle had been used as part of a PIRA spy

⁸ “Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement, 20 September 2001,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira200901.htm>; “Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement, 23 October 2001,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/docs/ira231001.htm>.

⁹ Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 2007), 490–491.

¹⁰ “Statement by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), 23 October 2001,” CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/decommission/iicd231001.htm>.

¹¹ “Report of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning (IICD), 26 September 2005,” CAIN Web Service, September 26, 2005, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/decommission/iicd260905.pdf>, 1.

¹² Cillian McGrattan, *Northern Ireland 1968–2008: The Politics of Entrenchment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 172.

¹³ Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 273.

¹⁴ Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 157.

operation, further isolated Sinn Féin from the other political parties.¹⁵ The Northern Ireland Assembly, one of the foundations of the GFA, was subsequently suspended. According to Northern Ireland Secretary John Reid, the suspension was due to republicans needing to make a “choice between violence and democracy,” and paramilitaries’ “continuing alleged violence”.¹⁶ These comments hinted at both Stormontgate and recent allegations that PIRA members were training guerrilla groups in Columbia. Suspicions surrounding PIRA and Sinn Féin criminality worsened as a result of the Northern Bank robbery on 20 December 2004. Over £25 million was stolen in the largest bank robbery in British history, with police pointing to the PIRA as the likely perpetrators.¹⁷ In addition to association with criminal activities, Sinn Féin had not accepted key aspects of the GFA. The party, for example, did not recognise the authority of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), established in 2001 as a result of the 1999 Patten Report and structured to make policing more acceptable to the nationalist community.

Political loyalism fared little better. The loyalist feud of 2000 to 2002 ended with the banishment of Johnny Adair and his associates from Northern Ireland, who had attempted to take control of the UDA. Far from this being the end to loyalist violence, attacks continued as the UDA, UVF and Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) feuded, with loyalist paramilitaries responsible for 28 deaths between 2002 and 2006.¹⁸ Facing electoral defeats, the UDA-aligned Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) disbanded in 2001, while the UVF-aligned Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) lost one of its two seats in the 2003 Assembly election. On the republican side, despite the public backlash from the Omagh bombing, the Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA or RIRA) and Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA) continued their campaigns of violence. Community relations, although bolstered by funding from bodies including the European Union (EU), still faced difficulties, demonstrated by yearly rioting during the July-August marching season. Communal segregation also increased. In the years after the GFA, Belfast contained more ‘peace walls’ than it had during the Troubles.¹⁹ Without paramilitary decommissioning, the resumption of the Assembly or

¹⁵ “Stormontgate: how events unfolded,” *Irish Times*, December 17, 2005, accessed December 7, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/stormontgate-how-events-unfolded-1.1287301>.

¹⁶ “Assembly suspended over ‘lack of trust,’” BBC News, October 14, 2002, accessed December 4, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/2325833.stm.

¹⁷ Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939: The Persistence of Conflict* (London: Penguin, 2007), 354.

¹⁸ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2007), 1553.

¹⁹ Peter Shirlow, “Belfast: a segregated city,” in *Northern Ireland after the Troubles: A Society in Transition*, eds. Colin Coulter and Michael Murray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 78.

significant desegregation, it was difficult in 2005 to see the dividends of the peace, justice or reconciliation promised by the Agreement.

Against this background the murder of Robert McCartney became international news. Robert McCartney died at 8:10 am on 31 January 2005 in the intensive care unit of Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital (see figure 17). McCartney had been stabbed the previous night outside Belfast's Magennis' Bar²⁰ after a fight by men who were widely alleged to be members of the PIRA.²¹ Unlike many other paramilitary murders post-GFA, the suspected involvement of Sinn Féin members meant that McCartney's death attracted huge domestic and international attention as well as having a direct political impact on Sinn Féin, the PIRA and the peace process more generally. The impact of the murder was accentuated by the justice campaign of the McCartney family: Robert's sisters Catherine, Paula, Claire, Donna, Gemma, and his fiancé Bridgeen Hagans.²² The McCartney family's campaign inspired widespread support, but perhaps more pointedly, their campaign reflected how victims of violence could challenge paramilitary organisations in ways that would have been unthinkable prior to the GFA. While paramilitary murders did not stop after the GFA, this chapter demonstrates how, by 2005, the reaction to them had changed significantly.

²⁰ The bar was subsequently named 'Ronnie Drews' after the Dubliners' iconic singer.

²¹ Ashleigh Wallace and Jonathan McCambridge, "Two men quizzed over murder of Short Strand dad," *Belfast Telegraph*, February 1, 2005, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/two-men-quizzed-over-murder-of-short-strand-dad-28219493.html>.

²² Catherine, Paula, Claire, Donna, Gemma McCartney and Bridgeen Hagans are usually collectively referred to as the 'McCartney Sisters.' In this chapter, I use the term 'McCartney family' to include Bridgeen's contributions to the family's justice campaign.

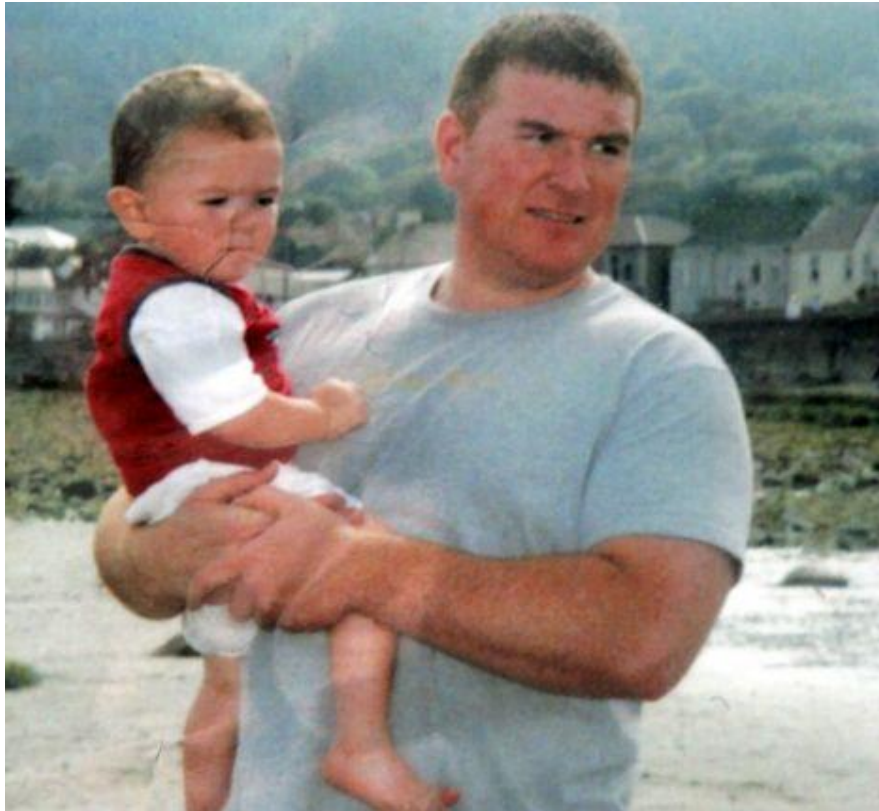


Figure 17.²³ Robert McCartney (right) with his son Conlaed (left). McCartney was murdered by suspected PIRA members after a bar fight on 30 January, 2005.

Robert McCartney was from the Short Strand area of east Belfast, a strongly republican area of the city separated by high walls from east Belfast's loyalist community. Throughout the Troubles, the area had been a hotbed of republican support, and had often come under attack from its neighbours, especially around the July-August marching season. One of the key events in the formation of the PIRA occurred in the Short Strand, during the 1970 'Battle of St. Matthews' when PIRA snipers held off loyalists attempting to invade the area.²⁴ McCartney's murder attracted both domestic and international attention because he had been murdered by the PIRA – the supposed protectors of the Short Strand. The men who allegedly carried out the murder, the subsequent forensic 'clean-up' of Magennis' Bar and the intimidation of witnesses were reported from 2 February onwards, in the *Irish News* and *Belfast News Letter*, to be members of the PIRA.²⁵ It was then revealed that these suspects were also Sinn Féin members and the party (temporarily) suspended their memberships.²⁶

²³ Michael Seamark, "Man cleared of 'IRA' killing as 71 witnesses saw nothing," *Daily Mail*, June 28, 2008, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1029938/Man-cleared-IRA-killing-71-witnesses-saw-nothing.html#ixzz4NUh3PQb4>.

²⁴ Peter Taylor, *Provos: The IRA and Sinn Féin* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), 75-78.

²⁵ Joanne Lowry, "Murder probe police are attacked again," *Belfast News Letter*, February 2, 2005, 5; Maeve Connolly, "Two still being questioned over stabbing," *Irish News*, February 2, 2005, 5.

²⁶ "Provo squad "beat up SF worker in interrogation"," *Belfast News Letter*, March 10, 2005, 4.

Walls of Silence: The McCartney Family's Campaign

Murders after the GFA were often categorised as a matter of concern only for paramilitaries, and given the morbid explanation of 'internal housekeeping,' a euphemism famously used by the office of Northern Ireland Secretary of State Mo Mowlam in 1999.²⁷ But whereas McCartney's friend who was injured in the bar fight, Brendan Devine, had a criminal history relating to drugs, and apparent debts to the PIRA, McCartney had no such involvement.²⁸ His lack of paramilitary involvement and reports in the media that he was defending Devine from violence, reinforced the categorisation of McCartney as the innocent victim of republican violence.²⁹ The McCartney family's campaign not only benefited from these circumstantial elements of this case, like the Omagh victims and others, they also used media attention in an attempt to pursue 'justice.'

Initially, the family called on the dozens of potential witnesses in Magennis' Bar to come forward to the PSNI with any information they possessed about the murder. The family organised a protest in the Short Strand in February 2005 followed by a vigil outside Magennis' Bar in April, adding further publicity to their cause. The McCartney family's insistence that witnesses go to the police exposed a tension between Sinn Féin and the police, as the party did not yet recognise the authority of the PSNI. Gerry Adams called on witnesses with reservations about giving information to the PSNI to instead, "give any information they might have either to the family, a solicitor or any other authoritative or reputable person or body," stressing no one involved in the murder "acted as a republican or on behalf of republicans".³⁰ These carefully worded statements demonstrated Sinn Féin's public support for the McCartney's justice campaign and its lack of acceptance of the PSNI, while also denying direct Sinn Féin or PIRA involvement in the murder. Adams also indicated some level of knowledge of who actually committed the crime. 'Acting' as a republican is a flexible term and does not explicitly say that those suspects were not members of the PIRA or Sinn Féin. Adams' phrase 'on behalf of republicans' implies that the murder was not sanctioned by either Sinn Féin or the PIRA's Army Council. Paula McCartney confirmed two weeks

²⁷ "Murder as Housekeeping' Row Hits Mowlam," *Daily Mail*, August 10, 1999, 2.

²⁸ "McCartney murder book prejudices trial: accused – Irish News," CAIN Web Service, November 1, 2007, accessed January 20, 2017, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/newspapers/irish_news/morris_in_011107.pdf.

²⁹ News Report, "BBC Newline," broadcast February 14, 2005, accessed March 2, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

³⁰ "Adams in appeal to catch killers," BBC News, February 14, 2005, accessed December 23, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4263359.stm.

after the murder that “we know it was done by members of the Provisional IRA. We are fully aware of this and we also know the IRA did not sanction it”.³¹

By the middle of February, the McCartney family stated that Sinn Féin was not doing enough to bring Robert’s killers to justice and that witnesses to the crime were being intimidated.³² Following visits to the Dáil Éireann and Downing Street respectively, Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and Prime Minister Blair offered public support to the McCartney family. Media exposure and endorsements from British and Irish politicians contributed to the mounting criticism of Sinn Féin’s handling of the murder, but did little to identify and prosecute key suspects. The PSNI claimed that their slow progress in charging suspects was due to the lack of witnesses to the crime, despite more than seventy people being reported at Magennis’ Bar on the night McCartney was murdered. In early February, Sinn Féin expelled three members it believed were involved in the murder and in March, suspended seven others, although they were eventually readmitted to the party.³³ During this time, the family continued to cite the suspected intimidation of witnesses to the murder as a barrier to convicting Robert’s killers.³⁴ Throughout, the case highlighted the awkward balances between old loyalties of republican solidarity and Sinn Féin’s new accountability as the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland.

The McCartney family also walked an important line between remaining republicans, while disavowing republican violence and remaining apolitical, both necessary for their public persona. In an interview with the London *Times*, Paula McCartney described Robert’s murderers as “psychopaths who have been empowered” while also noting the impact on Sinn Féin’s electoral prospects, as “Sinn Féin voters have come up to me and said, ‘If we’d known this was going to be the price of peace, we’d have thought twice about voting’”.³⁵ The GFA loomed large in Paula McCartney’s statement as a dividing line in the legitimacy of PIRA violence. In a later interview, Paula McCartney noted “in my opinion the IRA men of those days were more honourable than they are now ... a lot of it’s to do with a different

³¹ Ashleigh Wallace, “We know the Provos killed Robert,” *Belfast Telegraph*, February 14, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/we-know-the-provos-killed-robert-28238420.html>.

³² David McKittrick, “Denials ring hollow as fury grows at IRA over father’s murder,” *Belfast Telegraph*, February 15, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/denials-ring-hollow-as-fury-grows-at-ira-over-fathers-murder-28238391.html>.

³³ “SF suspends members over killing,” BBC News, March 3, 2005, accessed January 15, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4316767.stm.

³⁴ Thomas Harding, “IRA is still intimidating witnesses, say sisters in relentless pursuit of killers,” *Telegraph*, March 10, 2005, accessed January 7, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1485300/IRA-is-still-intimidating-witnesses-say-sisters-in-relentless-pursuit-of-killers.html>.

³⁵ David Lister, “Fiancée leads crusade against IRA killers,” *Times*, February 14, 2005, 14.

calibre of people, abuse of power, idle hands and psychopathic tendencies”.³⁶ The implication of this statement was that PIRA violence in the Troubles was legitimised by the circumstances of the time, particularly in defending the Short Strand, but that those conditions had now changed. Drawing this distinction was crucial to the family’s status as true ‘republicans’ from the Short Strand, while also allowing them to criticise McCartney’s murderers and Sinn Féin’s ambivalent support.

In addition to the effective use of the media, the McCartney’s gained prominence in other forms of recognition and valorisation that were part of the cultural context of the GFA. They received many accolades, including sharing the *Daily Mail*’s ‘Women of the Year’ award for 2005. When it was revealed to the McCartney family backstage that Margaret Thatcher was also receiving an award for ‘Woman of the Year,’ the family decided not to share the stage with the former Prime Minister. They cited Thatcher’s (reciprocated) antagonism towards republicans during her tenure as Prime Minister, especially during the 1981 Hunger Strikes.³⁷ This move attracted some criticism, notably from Sir Bernard Ingham, Thatcher’s former Press Secretary. Ingham called the family’s actions a “monumental hypocrisy,” and his comments were reported in British tabloids such as the *Daily Telegraph*.³⁸ Conversely, the *Irish News* reported the comments of Lord Tebbit, another Thatcher minister injured in the PIRA’s 1984 Brighton bombing. While Tebbit wondered “if they have done it on their own initiative or if they were advised to do it,” his lordship sympathised with the family’s actions, stating that the family had “got trouble enough with the Sinn Fein/IRA people and it would enable Sinn Fein/IRA to justify its treatment of the McCartney family if they were to share a platform with Lady Thatcher”.³⁹ The family released a statement following the event, saying: “our campaign is one of justice and as an Irish republican family we feel we cannot share the same platform with a former prime minister who inflicted injustices on our community”.⁴⁰ Ingham’s assertion mirrors much of the coverage of the campaign that wondered who was controlling the family, but at least reflected the family’s strategy of retaining republican credentials while remaining officially apolitical. The family met numerous times with republican leaders, including Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly, while receiving some political advice from the SDLP. The McCartney family

³⁶ David Sharrock, “We did not plan to damage the IRA - the killers did that,” *Times*, March 2, 2005, 30.

³⁷ Catherine McCartney, *Walls of Silence* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2007), 210-213.

³⁸ “McCartney sisters’ Thatcher snub ‘hypocritical,’” *Daily Telegraph*, November 4, 2005, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1502236/McCartney-sisters-Thatcher-snob-hypocritical.html>.

³⁹ Marie Louise McCrory, “McCartneys hypocrites: ex-PM’s press secretary,” *Irish News*, November 5, 2005, 7.

⁴⁰ “McCartney sisters snub Thatcher at London awards,” *Irish Times*, November 3, 2005, accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/mccartney-sisters-snob-thatcher-at-london-awards-1.1184357>.

also attended Sinn Féin's 2005 Ard Fheis, receiving a standing ovation upon entering. In these ways, the family's management of these relationships demonstrated the agency that some victims of violence possessed after the GFA. The family were not only subjects of media and political manoeuvring, they actively shaped their media profile to their advantage.

Family members even considered running for political office, in particular, standing for the Belfast City Council election in May 2005. Advising them to "be very careful" in an interview on the BBC's Radio Ulster, Martin McGuinness cautioned that any move "into the world of party political politics [could], do a huge disservice to their campaign," potentially bringing "dismay and disillusion [to] an awful lot of people, tens of thousands of people who support them in their just demands".⁴¹ These comments by the former PIRA commander were reported domestically and internationally as a 'warning' against the McCartney family.⁴² McGuinness' comments also revealed a sensitivity to the intrusion of victims into a domain of politics still incompletely distanced from paramilitary organisations. It also registered that at least some of the family's power came from an apolitical campaign, one that challenged the legitimacy of the still fragile and incomplete political settlement the GFA had promised.

In response to the lack of progress in convicting their brother's killers, the McCartney family accepted an invitation to the United States in order to bring their case to influential American lawmakers. It was hoped that such agents might have been able to lever change through external influence. The speed with which the family arrived was astonishing – less than fifty days had passed since Robert's death on 31 January 2005 to the McCartney's reception at the White House on 17 March (Saint Patrick's Day). Women from the working-class Short Strand, previously unknown to the world's media, would now meet with President George W. Bush (see figure 18). In their meeting, the McCartney family gave President Bush a dossier of information relating to the murder. The family also met Senators Edward Kennedy, John McCain and Hillary Clinton. In comparison to the warm welcome that Bush bestowed upon the McCartney family, no Northern Irish politicians were invited to the White House for Saint Patrick's Day, the first time this had occurred since the GFA. Bertie Ahern introduced the family to President Bush, and the Taoiseach had tentatively supported the family since their visit to the Dáil. This was, as journalist Ed Moloney noted, the "Bush

⁴¹ "Party politics warning to sisters," BBC News, March 14, 2005, accessed October 28, 2016, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4349183.stm. Square brackets added.

⁴² David Teather and Angelique Chrisafis, "McGuinness warns McCartney sisters," *Guardian*, March 15, 2005, accessed January 9, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/mar/15/northernireland.northernireland>; "Warning for murdered man's family," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 16, 2005, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Warning-for-murderedmansfamily/2005/03/15/1110649203172.html>.

administration's way of signalling its displeasure over the Northern Bank Robbery and Sinn Féin's part in it ... a sign that the Americans were ready to take a tougher line with the Provos than either Tony Blair or Bertie Ahern would ever contemplate".⁴³ This signal was interpreted as a profound snub to Northern Irish politicians, but especially to Gerry Adams, whose American fundraising was a key source of Sinn Féin's revenue. The sudden high profile of the McCartney family, and their potential threat to republican electoral prospects, led to the family's trip to the United States being described in the *Andersonstown News* as "Unionism on Tour".⁴⁴ This statement reflects the view that the McCartney family were pawns of the unionist establishment, presumably because their campaign in some way questioned the legitimacy of Sinn Féin from within the republican community.



Figure 18.⁴⁵ Paula McCartney, Bridgeen Hagans, Catherine McCartney meet with President George W. Bush, accompanied by Bertie Ahern (left to right).

In order to keep pressure on the PIRA and Sinn Féin, the family also attended a session of the European Parliament in April 2005. By this stage of their campaign, the family publicly considered pursuing a civil case against Robert's killers rather than waiting for criminal proceedings, citing the example of the Omagh families' (ongoing) civil action campaign.⁴⁶ As with their Washington trip, the family met various Members of the European Parliament

⁴³ Moloney, *Secret History*, 553.

⁴⁴ Jim Cusack, "Adams runs risk of US ban after Kennedy attack," *Irish Independent*, March 27, 2005. A quote from the *Andersonstown News*.

⁴⁵ "Belfast murder: Who was ex-IRA man 'Jock' Davison?," BBC News, May 5, 2005, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-32590286>.

⁴⁶ "McCartneys 'consider civil case'," BBC News, March 27, 2005, accessed March 3, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4386323.stm.

(MEPs) and spoke publicly about their case. Following debates in the European Parliament, they were eventually awarded EU funding to pursue a civil case.⁴⁷ A resolution passed on 10 May 2005 confirmed the family's account of events concerning Robert's murder, including PIRA involvement, a cover-up of the crime scene and the intimidation of more than seventy witnesses.⁴⁸ Some of the strongest support in Brussels came from unionist politicians. One of these was the DUP's James 'Jim' Allister MEP.⁴⁹ In addition to using parliamentary privilege to name "Bob Fitzsimmons," "Joe Fitzpatrick" and "Terry [Jock] Davison" as people who had information on McCartney's killing, Allister decided to:

endorse the call that the EU should help fund an action so that the killers and conspirators can be pursued at least through the civil courts. But, given that the IRA has benefited to the tune of EUR 40 million from its Northern Bank robbery, it would be an odious scandal if state legal aid were available to anyone to defend such proceedings. Finally, I would add that the EU fund should also be available to the many other victims of the IRA, who for years have been denied justice because of this same intimidation.⁵⁰

In Allister's statement we can see some of the political motivations for unionist political support for the McCartney family, sentiments echoed by Allister's DUP colleagues Nigel Dodds and Ian Paisley.⁵¹ This support was politically opportune as the murder was taken as evidence that Sinn Féin was deceptive and that republican paramilitaries were still active despite the GFA and supposed PIRA ceasefire. Allister's statement also made the point of highlighting other victims of PIRA violence, prompting people to remember other, presumably unionist, victims of the republican violence.

Beyond these political formalities, the murder also facilitated an online discussion in the (relatively) new medium of blogging.⁵² This discussion, again, highlighted the deep ambivalence of the case in terms of old loyalties while creating a new space in which personal responses to violence could be expressed. Republican-leaning blogs criticised the McCartney family and media coverage of the murder. One stated "we will know more about the

⁴⁷ "European Parliament resolution on violence and criminality by the self-styled 'Irish Republican Army' (IRA) in Northern Ireland, in particular the murder of Robert McCartney," European Union Parliamentary Debates, May 10, 2005, last updated October 2, 2008, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2005-0169&language=EN&ring=B6-2005-0281>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Allister would go on to oppose the St Andrews Agreement in 2006 and establish his own party, the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) in 2007.

⁵⁰ "Monday, 9 May 2005 – Strasbourg, Justice for the McCartney Family," European Union Parliamentary Debates, May 9, 2005, last updated September 30, 2005, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=CRE&reference=20050509&secondRef=ITEM-014&format=XML&language=EN>. Square brackets added.

⁵¹ Carolyn Gallaher, *After the Peace: Loyalist Paramilitaries in Post-Accord Northern Ireland* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 199.

⁵² Online blogging has existed since the 1980s, but rose to prominence in the 2000s with the establishment of websites such as Tumblr in 2007.

motivations of the McCartney sisters once we find out who is financing their trip to the United States” and claimed that the “mainstream media will ignore” new information on the case “because it hurts the image that they have created of Robert McCartney being a saint”.⁵³ One blog, *Balrog*, echoed McGuinness’ warning to the McCartney family against entering electoral politics, writing that their campaign “could be tainted by entrance into electoral politics and I hope and pray the family gets justice for their brother but they need to be sure they are not being led by others whose only objective is to vilify republicans”.⁵⁴ Some American and British bloggers strongly supported the McCartney family⁵⁵ and the murder was covered by the popular Northern Ireland political blog *Sluggie O’Toole*.⁵⁶ The online response to the murder followed the public and journalistic reaction in supporting the McCartney family’s justice campaign and, demonstrated that debates over victimhood would become even more volatile in online forums. As with responses to the Omagh bombing, the freedom and anonymity provided by the internet allowed the more extreme and provocative opinions to enter public discourse, into which anyone with an internet connection could join.

The McCartney family’s campaign also evoked and confronted stereotypes surrounding nationalist women in politics. As critical theorist Fidelma Ashe has noted: “conservative ethno-nationalist discourses in Northern Ireland have tended to constitute a women’s identity as apolitical, more orientated to peace, physically fragile and naturally suited to the private sphere”.⁵⁷ The McCartney family both adopted this identity (particularly apoliticsm) but also challenged it by bringing personal ‘grief and emotion’ into public politics. The emphasis on emotion, personal suffering and loss was unacceptable to republicans, who were unable to “include the political voices of dissenting republican women in the framing of republican politics”.⁵⁸ Attempts to deny the agency of the McCartney family recurred throughout their campaign: McGuinness’ warning against entering politics; republican

⁵³ *Diarmid*, “Robert McCartney and political football,” *Irish Tribesman*, March 17, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://irishtribesman.blogspot.com.au/2005/03/robert-mccartney-and-political.html?m=0>; *Diarmid*, “McCartney friend in court,” *Irish Tribesman*, June 13, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://irishtribesman.blogspot.com.au/2005/06/mccartney-friend-in-court.html>.

⁵⁴ Chris Gaskin, “Time for Truth, Time for Justice,” *Balrog*, March 15, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://gaskinbalrog.blogspot.com.au/2005/03/time-for-truth-time-for-justice.html>.

⁵⁵ Dave, “Justice for Robert McCartney,” *Heretical Librarian*, March 3, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://hereticallibrarian.blogspot.com.au/2005/03/justice-for-robert-mccartney.html#111122575162623425>; Danny, “Murdering the Murderers,” *Bermant’s Blog*, March 9, 2005, accessed January 10, 2016, http://www.bermant.com/blog/archive/2005_03_06_index.html.

⁵⁶ Mick Felaty, “A backgrounder on the McCartney affair,” *Sluggie O’Toole*, March 17, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, http://sluggerotoole.com/2005/03/17/a_backgrounder_on_the_mccartney_affair/.

⁵⁷ Fidelma Ashe, “The McCartney Sisters’ Search for Justice: Gender and Political Protest in Northern Ireland,” *Politics* 26, no. 3 (2006): 162.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 163-165.

allegations that the family were being used by unionists in their American trip⁵⁹ and Ingham's assumption that the family must have been advised to act as strategically as they did.

In addition to challenging the politics of gender in Northern Ireland, the McCartney family mobilised a particular construction of innocence by incorporating Robert's children into the campaign in order to pressure witnesses to come forward. One anecdote repeated in numerous newspapers mentioned Bridgeen's difficulty in telling Robert's children, Brandon and Conlaed, that their father been killed.⁶⁰ A *Guardian* article recounted Paula McCartney's assertion that four-year-old Conlaed was "already seeing a child psychiatrist," and that neither child could "be exposed to any more trauma".⁶¹ The choice to reveal this information was both an honest and calculated move, in order to draw attention to the extremely difficult task of informing children that their father had died. Ashe points out, "the women were framed not only as sisters but as mothers," giving them a greater moral authority to pursue justice.⁶² This story, along with including the children in press photographs, was another public weapon that the family used against the PIRA (see figure 19). The McCartney case also drew on the GFA's use of children as symbols of innocence and the future – if the GFA promised a better future for a new generation, what about McCartney's children?

⁵⁹ Fidelma Ashe, "Gendering ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland: A comparative analysis of nationalist women's political protests," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 5 (September 2007): 783.

⁶⁰ Ashleigh Wallace, "Robert 'was an innocent bystander'," *Belfast Telegraph*, February 3, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/robert-was-an-innocent-bystander-28245335.html>; Mary Fitzgerald, "Robert McCartney: the family man," *Belfast Telegraph*, March 5, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/robert-mccartney-the-family-man-28245287.html>.

⁶¹ Angelique Chrisafis, "McCartney fiancée forced to leave home," *Guardian*, July 7, 2005, 13.

⁶² Ashe, "McCartney Sisters' Search for Justice," 164.



Figure 19.⁶³ This image, published in the *Irish Independent*, depicts McCartney's fiancé Bridgeen Hagans and their children Conlaed (left) and Brandon (right) next to a sign of Robert with the children with the caption 'WHY MY DADDY?'.

Building upon gender construction and the idea of women as innocent peacemakers, the McCartney family constructed their brother as an innocent victim of republican violence. Their account of the murder, that Robert defended his friend Brendan Devine from PIRA members may be the truth, but it also serves to construct their brother as an archetypal 'innocent victim' of illegitimate, unprovoked and unnecessary paramilitary violence. In an interview two weeks after the murder, Paula McCartney said "Robert was a gentleman, he was larger than life, loveable, well respected ... Robert was trying to defuse an argument in that bar that night".⁶⁴ It is these aspects of the case which allowed unionists to latch on to the McCartney murder for political gain – he was, it could be seen, just as innocent as the hundreds of unionist victims of PIRA violence. The popularity of the McCartney family links more broadly to narratives popular after the Troubles – personal stories in post-conflict societies that challenge injustice.

⁶³ Ellis O'Hanlon, "The easy part is over . . . the IRA must now do nothing every single day, for ever," *Irish Independent*, July 31, 2005, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/analysis/the-easy-part-is-over-the-ira-must-now-do-nothing-every-single-day-for-ever-26211017.html>.

⁶⁴ News Report, "BBC Newline," broadcast February 14, 2005, accessed March 2, 2016, BBC Northern Ireland Video Archive, Belfast.

The McCartney family did not pursue a civil case against suspects in Robert's murder. Eventually, key suspects including Jock Davison, were tried and acquitted in a criminal case before a Belfast court in 2008. The presiding Judge, Lord Justice John Gillen, cited a lack of evidence and doubted the reliability of Brendan Devine's testimony.⁶⁵ Lord Justice Gillen concluded:

I recognise that the family of Mr McCartney and others who held him dear will be frustrated and disappointed that whoever it was who cut this young man down in the prime of his life has or have not yet been brought to justice. However the memory of Mr McCartney and the rule of law itself would be ill-served by this court failing to observe the high standards of criminal justice and the burden of proof which prevail in courts in Northern Ireland ... I have no doubt that the investigation into this crime will continue and if new evidence emerges in connection with this murder no one, including for that matter even the accused in this trial, will be beyond the reach of potential prosecution.⁶⁶

Despite Lord Justice Gillen's optimism and faith in the justice system in Northern Ireland, as of writing in March 2017, no one has ever been convicted of the murder of Robert McCartney. Although the McCartney family received worldwide acclaim and support for their justice campaign, like so many other relatives of post-GFA victims of violence, there have been no legal consequences for their effort. Despite the McCartney family's disappointment at the lack of repercussions for Robert's murder, the campaign demonstrated the non-violent avenues that families of victims of paramilitary violence could take after the GFA: challenging paramilitaries, questioning politicians and using constructions of gender and innocence to try to achieve justice.

‘Whatever You Say, Say Nothing’

The press reaction to the McCartney murder and family's justice campaign is crucial in understanding how public discourse had changed after the GFA. Traditionally unionist newspapers the *Belfast Telegraph* and *Belfast News Letter* led condemnations of McCartney's murder, linking it more broadly to the PIRA's criminality, and by extension, Sinn Féin's duplicity and untrustworthiness. The initial response of the *Belfast Telegraph* was condemnation of the murder, later calling for the PIRA to disband completely.⁶⁷ The

⁶⁵ "In the Crown Court in Northern Ireland: The Queen v Terence Malachy Davison, James McCormick and Joseph Gerald Fitzpatrick," Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, June 19, 2008, accessed January 15, 2017, http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/en-GB/Judicial%20Decisions/PublishedByYear/Documents/2008/2008%20NICC%2025/j_j_GIL7205Final.htm.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Barry White, "Make your mind up time for Sinn Féin as common decency prevails," *Belfast Telegraph*, February 19, 2005, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/make-your-mind-up-time-for-sinn-fein-as-common-decency-prevails-28234341.html>.

newspaper's editorial on 18 February stated that the republican movement was still "inextricably linked to criminality" and called for "Sinn Féin to cut its links with the IRA once and for all, and for the IRA to disarm and disband".⁶⁸ Journalist Barry White wrote on 19 February that Sinn Féin had "a long run with the Armalite and the ballot box but those days are fast disappearing" and that the McCartney murder "is an example of the kind of "justice" handed out by little Hitlers everywhere to anyone who disagrees with them".⁶⁹ There are few surprises in this account from the *Belfast Telegraph*, considering the newspaper's (moderate) unionism and support of the GFA.

The *Belfast News Letter*, the other major unionist newspaper in Northern Ireland, published letters referring to other PIRA murders, including the murder of Jean McConville in 1972.⁷⁰ This case was notable for McConville's status as a mother of ten and allegations of Gerry Adams' knowledge or involvement in the murder.⁷¹ McConville remained, until 1999, one of the 'disappeared,' victims whose remains have never been found. One letter to the editor asked whether Gerry Adams could "urgently clarify why the Jean McConville abduction and murder was different to that of Robert McCartney? The chilling fact is that Sinn Féin are more concerned about how the murder of Robert McCartney will play in the media, rather than any more desire for justice".⁷² Another letter from 9 March described the family's campaign as "people power at its best, because it rejects the grip that has subdued it ... will the press ask the Sinn Féin leadership what the difference is between the murder of Robert McCartney and the murder of Jean McConville and will they persist until they get an answer?"⁷³ The newspaper noted "unionists shouldn't underestimate the bravery of the McCartney family" who had "conducted themselves with immense dignity" and have "stressed they want the murderers dealt with by solely legal means".⁷⁴ Unionist condemnation of republican violence had changed little since before the GFA, but the championing of nationalist victims of republican violence was new, especially nationalists like the McCartney

⁶⁸ "Viewpoint: Cash find puts Sinn Féin in dock," *Belfast Telegraph*, February 19, 2005, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/viewpoint-cash-find-puts-sinn-fein-in-dock-28227913.html>.

⁶⁹ Barry White, "Make your mind up time for Sinn Féin as common decency prevails," *Belfast Telegraph*, February 19, 2005, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/make-your-mind-up-time-for-sinn-fein-as-common-decency-prevails-28234341.html>.

⁷⁰ David McKittrick et al., *Lost Lives*, 1532-1534.

⁷¹ This would later be revealed in allegations made by Brendan Hughes, former IRA commander, in interviews posthumously published in Ed Moloney's *Voices from the Grave: Two Men's War in Ireland* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2010), 130.

⁷² Earl Storey, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, March 8, 2005, 18.

⁷³ Mervyn Storey, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, March 9, 2005, 19.

⁷⁴ Suzanne Breen, "McCartneys show real bravery," *Belfast News Letter*, February 17, 2005, 21.

family who identified as republicans. Unionist-aligned newspaper support for the McCartney family mirrored the unionist political support for their justice campaign.

The *Belfast News Letter* also used the interest surrounding McCartney's murder to remind readers of the Protestant sense of victimhood created by the PIRA. One letter asked if McGuinness would condemn the "brutal murders carried out by IRA "volunteers" at such places as La Mon House Hotel, Kingsmill and Enniskillen? Perhaps these murders don't count, as the victims were innocent Protestants, whereas Mr McCartney was a Roman Catholic living in a strong republican area and could cost Sinn Féin/IRA votes at the next election".⁷⁵ This comment indicates public awareness of Sinn Féin's precarious position in responding to the McCartney murder. In similar reportage to the *Belfast News Letter*, the *Sun* magazine denounced the PIRA's actions in the aftermath of McCartney's murder. The *Sun* reported on 28 February "not long ago a victim's family would have been too terrified to speak out amid fear of reprisals. It is now clear that the law abiding nationalist community are no longer prepared to shield their supposed former protectors".⁷⁶ The newspaper also incorporated Robert's children in its reportage, predicting on 2 March that the "republican movement will never regain any respect until it publicly destroys its guns and hauls Robert's killers by the scruff of the neck into the nearest police station. It's the only way little Brandon and Conlaed will ever get the justice that is their right".⁷⁷ The *Sun* put an emphasis on defending British law and justice as the newspaper was ideologically opposed to the PIRA throughout the Troubles and now, like other British tabloids, highly supportive of the McCartney family. The change in reporting from the Troubles was not a shift in opposition to republican paramilitaries, rather, these newspapers now supported self-described republicans against the PIRA.

The liberal *Guardian* newspaper rebuked republicans for different reasons, also linking McCartney's murder to the PIRA's Troubles-era violence, and using the dispute to refute Sinn Féin's legitimacy as the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland. Journalist Robin Livingstone wrote that the "ghosts of the disappeared and the grim search for their bodies has haunted the IRA for years. How ironic it would be if the last of the disappeared remained alive, was one of their own, and did them most damage".⁷⁸ In relation to republican justice campaigns, journalist David Aaronovitch noted, "Sinn Féin and their supporters rightly demand justice for Pat Finucane and for those killed on Bloody Sunday, but offer no

⁷⁵ Patten Reject, letter to the editor, *Belfast News Letter*, March 10, 2005, 22.

⁷⁶ "Brave Strand," *Sun*, February 28, 2005, 8.

⁷⁷ Paddy Clancy, "Opinion: See justice through eyes of two boys," *Sun*, March 2, 2005, 8.

⁷⁸ Robin Livingstone, "This crisis threatens to halt the advance of Sinn Féin," *Guardian*, February 19, 2005, 24.

justice whatsoever to their victims”.⁷⁹ The newspaper focused on nationalist victims, showing admiration for the McCartney family, praising their status as “folk heroes” and revealing that the “family have always voted Sinn Fein, and yesterday again paid tribute to the sacrifices IRA members and “true republicans” had made to protect their community ... yet they vowed they would not give up until the IRA “came clean” and made sure the dozens of its members they believe to be involved in the killing are tried”.⁸⁰ The newspaper described a “so called ‘people’s revolt’” against the PIRA as the “last thing that a party that sees itself as the voice of the oppressed ever wants to face”.⁸¹ These interpretations of the McCartney family’s campaign demonstrate how effectively they constructed themselves as true republicans, legitimising their claims for justice from republican paramilitaries.

The sense of outrage over the McCartney murder was magnified by references to the promises of the GFA. On the subject of justice, the nationalist *Irish News* reported that the “harsh reality is that a man can be killed near a city centre bar, presumably with witnesses abundantly in attendance, in the full knowledge none would dare identify the perpetrators in court. This is the principle of the omerta we associate with the mafia ... this is not the rule of law: it is the law of the jungle”.⁸² Whereas the *Belfast News Letter* had focused on Protestant victims of the PIRA, the *Irish News* wondered how the “innocent Maguire and Conlon families remain in jail while the real murderers walked free” in reference to the infamous ‘Guildford Four’ and ‘Maguire Seven’ cases of false imprisonment of suspected republican paramilitaries in the 1980s.⁸³ The article stated simply “casualties of terrorism did not end with the peace as the McCartney and other post ceasefire murders prove”.⁸⁴ In reference to the GFA, the newspaper asked “it is impossible to understand why, almost eight years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the IRA chooses to retain its structures. At the risk of repeating ourselves, an organisation which does not exist cannot, rightly or wrongly, be accused of criminality”.⁸⁵ A later article stated that the “spirit of the Good Friday Agreement committed all parties to working within accepted constitutional structures which would involve the main paramilitary organisations, republican and loyalist, quietly leaving the stage ... the IRA should listen to the verdict of the Irish people, as delivered through the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement and take decisive steps

⁷⁹ David Aaronovitch, “Time to lose the men in berets,” *Guardian*, February 22, 2005, 5.

⁸⁰ Angelique Chrisafis, “How pub brawl turned into republican crisis,” *Guardian*, February 28, 2005, 4.

⁸¹ Martin Kettle, “Too weak to succeed but too strong to defeat,” *Guardian*, March 1, 2005, 24.

⁸² “Let no-one be above the law,” *Irish News*, February 9, 2005, 6.

⁸³ Tom Kelly, “The bottom line – Sinn Fein is a weed strangling democracy,” *Irish News*, February 15, 2005, 23.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ “IRA must state its intentions,” *Irish News*, February 21, 2005, 8.

towards its own disbandment”.⁸⁶ Similar reports came from the *Irish Times*, which reported that the McCartney family, “broke the only commandments that matter: thou shalt not wash dirty linen in public; thou shalt not give ammunition to the enemy ... the case they make, as former Sinn Féin voters, is all the stronger for being couched as disgust that volunteers in a once-proud defence force should stoop so low”.⁸⁷ In the view of the *Irish News* and *Irish Times*, expectations that paramilitary organisations would decommission and eventually disband had clearly not been met by 2005. As with the Holy Cross dispute, the peculiarities of the case allowed for widespread support for the family from unlikely sources, including Northern Irish unionist newspapers along with British tabloids who had previously opposed republicanism throughout the Troubles.

An (occasionally) veiled criticism of the McCartney family’s campaign was that their case received special attention, while other victims of pre-GFA violence had suffered in silence for decades. One article by Lindy McDowell in the *Belfast Telegraph* contrasted the family’s campaign to the “silence of so many, many victims of the Troubles whose stories have never been told because, even now, years after the event, they live in terror of the repercussions of speaking out”.⁸⁸ McDowell added: “it’s because we are used to such silence that it makes headlines when someone finally breaks it. The family of Robert McCartney have shattered the silence in a big way”.⁸⁹ Many victims of the Troubles were disappointed by the enormous public attention the McCartney family received. McDowell asked “if the IRA is going to eject members for complicity in brutal murder, we’re talking thousands ... surely the families of their victims also deserve justice? Surely those criminals should be given up to face justice too?”⁹⁰ Some relatives of Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers killed in the Troubles voiced their displeasure with the McCartney campaign, especially their access to American, Irish and European political figures.⁹¹ Amidst the frustrations surrounding decommissioning, the murder of Robert McCartney was a chance for the press to reflect on

⁸⁶ “Irish people do not want the IRA,” *Irish News*, March 10, 2005, 6.

⁸⁷ Fiona O Connor, “McCartney Sisters and the Media Whirlwind,” *Irish Times*, March 25, 2005, accessed September 14, 2016, <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/mccartney-sisters-and-the-media-whirlwind-1.426442>.

⁸⁸ Lindy McDowell, “Brave family shatters silence of the lambs to the slaughter,” *Belfast Telegraph*, February 18, 2005, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/brave-family-shatters-silence-of-the-lambs-to-the-slaughter-28230165.html>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Lindy McDowell, “Stench of blood finally putting people off Sinn Féin sales pitch,” *Belfast Telegraph*, March 3, 2005, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/stench-of-blood-finally-putting-people-off-sinn-fein-sales-pitch-28246041.html>.

⁹¹ Anonymous, “Where was the outrage when my brother was murdered?,” *Belfast Telegraph*, March 7, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/where-was-the-outrage-when-my-brother-was-murdered-28239728.html>.

post-GFA notions of justice, and for members of the public to voice their own sense of forgotten victimhood.

The perceived threat from the McCartney family to the republican movement was reflected in the movement's key publication *An Phoblacht*. The newspaper defended Sinn Féin member, Alex Maskey, who criticised the PSNI's policing tactics rather than the PIRA.⁹² The newspaper's 10 February edition, the second that month, made no direct mention of the McCartney murder, ignoring one of the largest media disasters that the republican movement had faced since the GFA.⁹³ Instead, the magazine's headline and front page read "Sinn Féin is up for the fight" and quoted Gerry Adams' statements against other parties who "have not put forward one constructive suggestion of how to resolve the current difficulties" – presumably, questions about the Northern Bank robbery and the murder of Robert McCartney.⁹⁴ By March *An Phoblacht* had begun directly referring to the murder. The newspaper now reported on the "cynical manoeuvring of the political and media establishment in regard to the foul and brutal murder of Robert McCartney".⁹⁵ Where other news outlets saw a chance to pressure the PIRA into decommissioning, *An Phoblacht* viewed the republican movement as the victims of negative media coverage.

Debates surrounding justice and victimhood in Northern Ireland were now also waged online, where critics and supporters of the family attacked and defended the new Northern Ireland created by the GFA. The murder also spurred debates within republican circles over the rationality of Sinn Féin's response to the murder and the subsequent media and political response. This was evident in 'The Blanket,' an online journal which harnessed the accessibility of the internet to explore the writings and experiences of ex-paramilitary (mainly republican) prisoners⁹⁶ and promised to "facilitate analysis, debate and discussion, to resist censorship, and to create the space for a diversity of views".⁹⁷ One article sarcastically suggested that, like the Omagh case, the McCartney family should initiate a civil suit, because "if Omagh can have one, why not the McCartneys too? ... just like Omagh, if you are of a republican nature, you are guilty until proven guilty ... justice isn't the sole possession of the

⁹² "Maskey slams point-scoring over tragic death," *An Phoblacht*, February 3, 2005, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/12970>.

⁹³ *An Phoblacht*, February 10, 2005, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/latest-edition/edition/2005/02/10>.

⁹⁴ "Sinn Féin is up for the fight," *An Phoblacht*, February 10, 2005, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/12986>.

⁹⁵ "Whoever killed McCartney should come forward," *An Phoblacht*, March 3, 2005, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/13105>.

⁹⁶ Niall Carson and Paddy Hoey, "The Bell and the Blanket: Journals of Irish Republican Dissent," *New Hibernia Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 86.

⁹⁷ "The Blanket: A Journal of Protest and Dissent," The Blanket, accessed December 8, 2016, last updated <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/>.

injured party”.⁹⁸ Others, including ex-republican prisoner turned journalist, Anthony McIntyre, supported the family. Later publishing *Good Friday: The Death of Irish Republicanism*, McIntyre wrote many articles in ‘The Blanket’ praising the “courage and commitment” of the McCartney family and concluded that neither “Sinn Fein nor the IRA should be allowed to feign a humane concerned approach to the family in public while undermining its search for justice on the streets. Murder, cover-up, intimidation – it’s time to go”.⁹⁹ With the exception of republican detractors, most publications in Northern Ireland supported and advocated for the justice campaign. One aspect of the case which most newspapers agreed on was the unbelievable number of witnesses who claimed to be in the bathroom during the murder. This absurdity was parodied throughout the media (see figure 20) as the bathroom was given the title of ‘T.A.R.D.I.S.’ in reference to the fictional time machine from ‘Doctor Who’ – larger on the inside than it appears on the outside.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ N. Corey, “Civil Case/Witch Hunt,” *The Blanket*, May 17, 2005, accessed October 31, 2016, <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/nc2205055g.html>.

⁹⁹ Anthony McIntyre, *Good Friday: The Death of Irish Republicanism* (New York: Ausubo, 2008), 166.

¹⁰⁰ T.A.R.D.I.S. stands for ‘Time And Relative Dimension In Space.’ The revitalised ‘Doctor Who’ premiered on the BBC in March 2005, and this may explain why this particular reference was so widely circulated around this time.

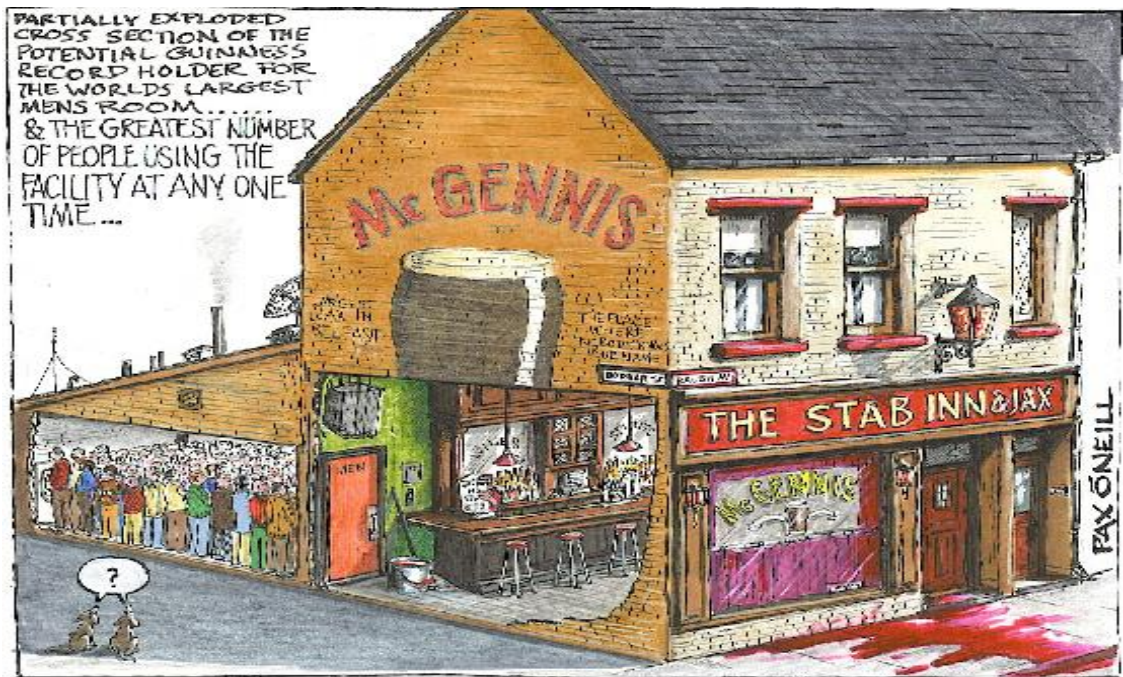


Figure 20.¹⁰¹ This cartoon centitled “World’s Largest Men’s Room” appeared on ‘The Blanket’ website in February 2005. The caption reads “PARTIALLY EXPLODED CROSS SECTION OF THE POTENTIAL GUINNESS RECORD HOLDER FOR THE WORLDS LARGEST MENS ROOM & THE GREATEST NUMBER OF PEOPLE USING THE FACILITY AT ANY ONE TIME ...”. ‘Magennis’s Bar’ is changed to ‘McGennis’ and the bar’s front reads “THE STAB INN & JAX”.

Why did the McCartney family have so much support in their justice campaign? The McCartney family’s personal story created empathy but also allowed for victims who felt forgotten in 2005 to express their claim of victimhood. It was because the murder occurred after the GFA that the campaign had such success in ways not possible during the Troubles. Newspapers and the public, in print and online, largely shared the assumption that paramilitary violence was now illegitimate. Existing pressure from unionist and nationalist politicians, and some republicans, to make the PIRA decommission or disband made McCartney’s murder a highly relevant topic of discussion. The media and public reaction to the murder of Robert McCartney was perceived as a shift in nationalist perceptions of justice, from the traditional focus on civil rights and equality to a more precise focus on legal justice and prosecution of paramilitaries.

¹⁰¹ Brian Mór, “World’s Largest Men’s Room,” *The Blanket*, February, 2005, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/bm0403054g.html>.

P O'Neill Weighs In: The McCartney family debates the Provos

The extent of discursive changes in Northern Ireland since the GFA are demonstrated by the direct dialogue between the McCartney family and the PIRA. The PIRA issued numerous statements through the pseudonym 'P O'Neill' speaking from the 'Irish Republican Publicity Bureau' in Dublin.¹⁰² The first statement was released on 16 February, two weeks after the murder and read simply:

the IRA was not involved in the brutal killing of Robert McCartney. It has been reported that people are being intimidated or prevented from assisting the McCartney family in their search for truth and justice. We wish to make it absolutely clear that no one should hinder or impede the McCartney family in their search for truth and justice. Anyone who can help the family in this should do so. Those who were involved must take responsibility for their own actions which run contrary to republican ideals.¹⁰³

The PIRA's second statement clarified their version of events in which it claimed "Brendan Devine, Robert McCartney and another man ended up in Market Street. It is the view of our investigation that these men were leaving the scene. They were followed into Market Street where Robert McCartney and Brendan Devine were attacked and stabbed," and finally "both men were stabbed by the same man. Robert McCartney died a short time later in hospital".¹⁰⁴ However, the third statement, which examined in greater detail the events of the night, mentioned that the

IRA representatives detailed the outcome of the internal disciplinary proceedings thus far, and stated in clear terms that the *IRA was prepared to shoot the people directly involved in the killing of Robert McCartney*. The McCartney family raised their concerns with the IRA representatives. These included: Firstly, the family made it clear that they did not want physical action taken against those involved. They stated that they wanted those individuals to give a full account of their actions in court. Secondly, they raised concerns about the intimidation of witnesses.¹⁰⁵

The offer to kill those involved in McCartney's murder, nonchalantly added within a large statement about a meeting with the family, was met with ridicule and anger by most

¹⁰² McIntyre, *Death of Irish Republicanism*, 319.

¹⁰³ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) statement about the killing of Robert McCartney, (16 February 2005)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 18, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira160205.htm>.

¹⁰⁴ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) second statement about the killing of Robert McCartney, (25 February 2005), CAIN Web Service, comp. Brendan Lynn, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira250205.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) third statement about the killing of Robert McCartney, (8 March 2005)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira080305.htm>. Italics added.

newspapers in Northern Ireland.¹⁰⁶ The entire political spectrum in Northern Ireland (including republicans) condemned the offer.¹⁰⁷ While all politicians and major newspapers condemned the murder, only the republican *Balrog* blog offered a defence of the PIRA's offer to murder McCartney's killers, asking "most people will find this disgraceful but people have been demanding that the IRA do more for weeks now, so what more do people realistically want the IRA to do?"¹⁰⁸

The statement appeared to be at best a public relations misstep by the PIRA, confirming the organisation's criminal nature and its vigilante mentality. It also made it difficult to argue that the PIRA was incapable of murder, violence, or that it had renounced paramilitary methods. For unionists, it confirmed pre-existing ideas about the nature of the PIRA. It also revealed how far there was to go until the PIRA decommissioned its weapons and the threat the organisation posed to the nationalist community. The statement is comparable to the RIRA's much criticised statement in the aftermath of the Omagh bombing. As in that case, the media's response to the PIRA's was swift. The *Sun* asked simply "are we supposed to slap them on the backs for this unexpected show of public-spiritedness? ... the IRA's thugs do not rule this part of the United Kingdom. The law does".¹⁰⁹ The *Irish News* said that the offer showed "just how out of touch it is" and "Mr McCartney's death was down to the same killing machine which ... still sees violence as the answer".¹¹⁰ The newspaper also reported that the "murder of Robert McCartney was horrific and his family are to be praised for pursuing justice, not revenge. The IRA offer to shoot the murderers of Mr McCartney beggars belief".¹¹¹ The overwhelming tone of the media's responses was indignation that the PIRA would offer to murder someone and reflects a change in attitude towards paramilitary violence since the GFA: much of the public and the media would no longer accept paramilitary murders as 'internal housekeeping.'

Under increasing public pressure, the PIRA continued to defend its response to the McCartney murder in the months after the killing. The case was mentioned again in the PIRA's 2005 Easter statement, describing the murder as "wrong, it was murder, it was a

¹⁰⁶ David McKittrick, "IRA offered to shoot killers of McCartney," *Belfast Telegraph*, March 9, 2005, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/ira-offered-to-shoot-killers-of-mccartney-28217436.html>; Stephen Dempster, "MPs to hit Sinn Féin coffers with £400k sanction," *Belfast News Letter*, March 10, 2005, 8; Newton Emerson, "Law onto themselves," *Irish News*, March 12, 2005, 16.

¹⁰⁷ "Orde says IRA offer 'was to kill'," BBC News, March 9, accessed January 12, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4331819.stm.

¹⁰⁸ Chris Gaskin, "IRA Offer," *Balrog*, March 8, 2005, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://gaskinbalrog.blogspot.com.au/2005/03/ira-offer.html>.

¹⁰⁹ "Killers' spin," *Sun*, March 9, 2005, 8.

¹¹⁰ Andy Wood, "The Friday Column – Not only are IRA tactics crazy, they are old news," *Irish News*, March 11, 2005, 2.

¹¹¹ Tom Kelly, "Opinion – Doublespeak's day is done, to put it bluntly," *Irish News*, March 14, 2005, 10.

crime. But it was not carried out by the IRA, nor was it carried out on behalf of the IRA. The IRA moved quickly to deal with those involved. We have tried to assist in whatever way we can".¹¹² The statement ends with a republican claim of victimhood at the hands of the media, as "unfortunately, it would appear that no matter what we do it will never be enough for some".¹¹³ Like Adams' statement denying that those involved in the murder 'acted as a republican or on behalf of republicans,' the PIRA's Easter statement denying that the murder was 'carried out on behalf of the IRA' does not deny that PIRA members were personally involved in the murder. On 20 July 2005, the PIRA issued its 'Statement on the Ending of the Armed Campaign.' In this statement, the PIRA pledged that "all IRA units have been ordered to dump arms. All Volunteers have been instructed to assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means".¹¹⁴ The organisation confirmed its desire to support the "full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement" along with the "goals of Irish unity and independence and to building the Republic outlined in the 1916 Proclamation".¹¹⁵ The organisation confirmed on 26 September that all arms had been put beyond use.¹¹⁶

The PIRA's numerous statements about the McCartney murder facilitated an unprecedented conversation between the PIRA, the public and the McCartney family. A key issue of victims groups was the lack of accountability for paramilitaries; they could murder, maim and injure without having to explain or defend their actions. Now, the PIRA was going to great lengths to explain the murder of one man of the over 2000 people dead as a result of republican violence since the Troubles began. The PIRA appeared to be issuing statements defensively. Discursive power seemed to have shifted to the McCartney family, who gave some 800 interviews in the two years after Robert's death¹¹⁷ and were supported by a range of political figures in openly criticising the PIRA. The family's campaign was used more broadly by the group tasked with influencing paramilitary decommissioning, the IIMC, whose fifth report from 24 May 2005 noted that

¹¹² "Irish Republican Army (IRA) Easter Statement, 23 March 2005," CAIN Web Service, comp. Brendan Lynn, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira230305.htm>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement on the Ending of the Armed Campaign, (28 July 2005)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira280705.htm>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ "Irish Republican Army (IRA) Statement on Putting Arms Beyond Use, (26 September 2005)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 17, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/ira/ira260905.htm>.

¹¹⁷ McCartney, *Walls of Silence*, 218.

Robert McCartney's family have set an example to everybody by their courage and determination. Their demand has always been for justice, never for revenge. Throughout they have recognised that this crime could be properly dealt with only through the working of the justice system. The general acceptance of this principle would get to the root of many of the problems associated with paramilitary crime.¹¹⁸

The IIMC incorporated the McCartney family's campaign in their statement as it reinforced the spirit of justice advocated by the GFA. This statement projected expectations of the GFA on the McCartney justice campaign, especially a lack of calls for revenge, a key feature of post-GFA reactions to paramilitary violence. The PIRA statements also indicated an organisation that was out of touch with the changes in public discourse relating to violence. After the GFA, paramilitaries became more publicly accountable for their actions and exchanges similar to the one between the McCartney family and the PIRA show that while paramilitaries could intimidate witnesses, they could not silence victims in public.

Victimhood: The McCartney Family as a Rallying Point

The wider consideration of 'true' victimhood in Northern Ireland was hotly contested after the GFA. Each political party differed in who it categorised as victims of the conflict. The DUP explicitly excluded members of paramilitary organisations,¹¹⁹ the SDLP had a more inclusive definition, while Sinn Féin included people convicted of crimes during the Troubles.¹²⁰ Between the publication of Bloomfield's 'We Will Remember Them' report in 1998 and the 'Eames–Bradley Report' in 2008,¹²¹ numerous 'victims,' 'survivors' and 'injured' groups came into existence, formed around common experiences of pre and post-GFA violence. A draft Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) report lists over 100 groups dedicated to victims, survivors and the injured in 2008, although some of these are now defunct.¹²² Some organisations including the WAVE trauma group received EU funding and financial support from the Northern Ireland Assembly. Other groups such as the Pat

¹¹⁸ "Fifth Report of the Independent Monitoring Commission, (HC 46), (24 May 2005)," CAIN Web Service, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed October 18, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/imc/imc240505.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ "A Voice for Victims: The Democratic Unionist Party's Policy on Innocent Victims of Terrorism," CAIN Web Service, 2003, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dup/dup03victims.pdf>, 5.

¹²⁰ Sara McDowell, "Who are the victims? Debates, concepts and contestation in 'post-conflict' Northern Ireland," CAIN Web Service, 2007, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/introduction/smc07whoarethevictims.html>.

¹²¹ This inquiry was compiled by Church of Ireland Archbishop Robin Eames and Dennis Bradley, a PSNI officer and former Catholic priest.

¹²² "[DRAFT PAGE] 'Remembering': Victims, Survivors and Commemoration List of, and information about, groups providing support to victims and survivors of the Conflict in Northern Ireland," CAIN Web Service, comps. John Nagle and Martin Melaugh, 2008, last updated November 4, 2015, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/groups/victimgroups.html#cross>.

Finucane Centre, focus on nationalist victims of collusion, while Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR) caters to unionist victims of republican violence in South Armagh. FAIR's first website post from 2004 stated its aim to "help us regain our lost dignity and get our message out" including the "ethnic cleansing and genocide that has taken place" in South Armagh.¹²³ While not all groups were as directly politicised as this, the issue of how to deal with 'victims' in Northern Ireland was a fractious and important one after the GFA, with virtually all definitions of victimhood being politically contested.¹²⁴ The special attention directed towards the McCartney case in 2005 opened up discussion about who the 'true' victims of the conflict were, and why of the dozens of paramilitary murders since the GFA, McCartney's murder received such attention.

Having rejected multiple offers for a film to be produced about their story,¹²⁵ Catherine McCartney decided to write about her experiences in a 2007 book entitled *Walls of Silence*. The title speaks to the McCartney family's perception of the silence of both Sinn Féin and witnesses to Robert's murder. *Walls of Silence* fits into a category of books written by victims of the conflict, with a distinct political twist. It shares some of the similarities that Stephen Hopkins describes in memoirs of victims of the Troubles, including being based on an individual experience of the conflict, and in aiming to gain public recognition for personal suffering.¹²⁶ Unlike memoirs written by combatants or participants in the conflict, civilian victims of violence can "look back at the past through a less ideological prism".¹²⁷ While perhaps less 'ideological' than political memoirs, the McCartney case was intrinsically linked with Sinn Féin as a political entity and the challenge that the McCartney family posed to their electoral success, as Catherine McCartney's book reflects.¹²⁸

The murder of Robert McCartney not only brought about discussion concerning victimhood, it led to the McCartney family entering into contact with relatives of other victims of paramilitary violence. The McCartney family received support, in person and through the media, from other victims of violence after the Troubles. The families of loyalist

¹²³ "William Frazer – Member of: Families Acting for Innocent Relatives," Families Acting for Innocent Relatives, 2008, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://victims.org.uk/main.html>; "The Future," Families Acting for Innocent Relatives, 2008, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://victims.org.uk/future.html>.

¹²⁴ John D. Brewer and Bernadette C. Hayes, "Victimhood Status and Public Attitudes Towards Post-conflict Agreements: Northern Ireland as a Case Study," *Political Studies* 61, no. 2 (2013): 444; Stephen Hopkins, "Sinn Féin, the Past and Political Strategy: The Provisional Irish Republican Movement and the Politics of 'Reconciliation'," *Irish Political Studies* 30, no. 1 (2015): 82.

¹²⁵ Margaret Canning, "Bloody Sunday film-maker to make drama on McCartneys – Irish News Online," CAIN Web Service, January 16, 2008, accessed January 10, 2017, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/newspapers/irish_news/canning_in_160108.pdf.

¹²⁶ Stephen Hopkins, *The Politics of Memoir and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 178.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ McCartney, *Walls of Silence*, 82.

victims Raymond McCord Jr., David McIlwaine and Craig McCausland were in contact with the McCartney family, as were the relatives of other PIRA victims: Lisa Dorrian, Jerry McCabe, James McGinley and Matthew Burns. James McGinley's case, in Derry, had similar circumstances to the McCartney family, especially suspected witness intimidation.¹²⁹ The family also used the inspiration of the Omagh Support and Self Help Group (OSSHG) civil case and expressed their view that a civil rather than criminal case could be one avenue of achieving justice.¹³⁰ Michael Gallagher, a leader of the Omagh justice campaign, stated "Gerry Adams seems to have had a change of heart over the Robert McCartney murder" and asked whether or not he was "willing to treat the Omagh families on an equal basis?"¹³¹ There is some evidence in this case study of mutually beneficial relationships between victims' groups, as they used the successes (or failures) of other groups as examples, and, criticised political favouritism towards one group or another.

Cases of unionists calling upon nationalist politicians for support also occurred. For example, the family of David McIlwaine met with the SDLP in March 2005 in order to pressure the UVF into releasing information about McIlwaine's murder.¹³² Raymond McCord Sr., whose son Raymond Jr. was killed by the UVF in 1997, used Adams' call for McCartney's killers to come forward in order to pressure PUP politician David Ervine into compelling the UVF to release the names of his son's killers. McCord's plea was reported in the *Belfast News Letter* in which he stated his intent to "put pressure on the UVF, like the McCartney sisters are doing on the IRA, to make them reveal the murderers who have not been caught".¹³³ Sociologist Catherine Gallaher has noted that, unlike the McCartney case, the families of Raymond McCord Jr. and Andrew Robb, both murdered by the UVF before the GFA, attracted only a fraction of the attention of the McCartney case and lacklustre support from unionist politicians.¹³⁴ McCord's case functions as a worthwhile comparison to the McCartney's justice campaign. His campaign was neither as popular nor applauded as that of the McCartney family and in part this was due to a comparative lack of media attention towards the case.

¹²⁹ Angelique Chrisafis, "IRA facing popular revolt as two more families join campaign," *Guardian*, March 5, 2005, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/mar/05/northernireland.northernireland>.

¹³⁰ "McCartneys may pursue civil action," *Belfast News Letter*, March 28, 2005, 1.

¹³¹ "Omagh relatives challenge Sinn Fein to back their fight for justice," *Belfast News Letter*, March 7, 2005, 6.

¹³² Christ Thorton, "UVF must also bow to people power, says father of victim," *Belfast Telegraph*, March 3, 2005, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/imported/uvf-must-also-bow-to-people-power-says-father-of-victim-28217399.html>.

¹³³ Gemma Murray, "McCartney sisters hope to meet Bush," *Belfast News Letter*, March 8, 2005, 2.

¹³⁴ Gallaher, *After the Peace*, 199-200.

As unionist politicians supported the McCartney family, republicans supported McCord as he rallied against collusion between security forces and loyalist paramilitaries. Just as issues surrounding law and order drew unionists to support the McCartney family, McCord's belief that collusion between security forces and loyalist paramilitaries played a part in his son's death led republicans to support his cause. McCord published his own account of his justice campaign, *Justice for Raymond* which was released in 2008, and was, like Catherine McCartney's *Walls of Silence*, published through the 'Gill & Macmillan' press based in Dublin. One passage from the book illustrates the similarities between McCord and the McCartney family's campaign: "with the help of the media over the past ten years, my family and I have achieved our goal of exposing collusion and killers getting away with murder".¹³⁵ Here McCord, like the Omagh, Holy Cross and McCartney families, acknowledges the role of the media in facilitating his fight for justice. Whereas the McCartney family benefited from the pressure put on Sinn Féin around the issue of decommissioning, McCord focused on the issue of collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and security forces. Nuala O'Loan, Northern Ireland's Police Ombudsman, confirmed the presence of such collusion in relation to McCord Jr.'s death in a 2007 statement.¹³⁶ McCord tapped into the long-standing republican claim that security forces colluded with loyalist paramilitaries, who targeted both the PIRA and nationalist civilians. Collusion has recently been explored by Anne Cadwallader, working for the Pat Finucane Centre, in her 2013 work *Lethal Allies*, and in Ian Cobain's 2016 book *The History Thieves*.¹³⁷ However, McCord's focus on collusion isolated his campaign from wider unionist support, as many unionist politicians had a "desire to avoid the topic of collusion, which is certain political quicksand".¹³⁸ McGuinness' warning against the McCartney family could have just as easily applied to McCord, who alienated potential unionist political support even further by running as a candidate in the 2007 Assembly elections.¹³⁹

Both the McCartney family and McCord navigated the treacherous waters of Northern Irish politics using different tactics. The McCartney family wanted to maintain

¹³⁵ Raymond McCord, *Justice For Raymond* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008), 95.

¹³⁶ Nuala O'Loan, "Public Statement by Mrs Nuala O'Loan on her investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Raymond McCord Junior and related matters, (Operation Ballast), (22 January 2007)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, last modified February 9, 2016, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/police/ombudsman/poni220107.htm>.

¹³⁷ Anne Cadwallader, *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* (Cork: Mercier, 2013); Ian Cobain, *The History Thieves: Secrets, Lies and the Shaping of a Modern Nation* (London: Portobello, 2016). Cadwallader's book focuses on collusion while Cobain devotes Chapter 6 of his work to exploring how collusion between security forces and paramilitaries was concealed throughout the Troubles.

¹³⁸ Gallaher, *After the Peace*, 200.

¹³⁹ McCord, *Justice for Raymond*, 202-205. McCord also stood for the 2003 election, although this attempt received less attention than his 2007 effort.

their status as ‘republicans’ while pressuring Sinn Féin (see figure 21), although the family eventually left the Short Strand due to safety concerns.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, McCord wore his father’s Orange sash while addressing Sinn Féin’s 2008 Ard Fheis in order to assert his unionism - while appealing for republican support (see figure 22). However, his story was never as prominent as the narrative surrounding the McCartney family for a number of reasons. Practically, the only group McCord could exert pressure on were loyalist paramilitaries and loyalist politicians, the latter of which had little political power (compared to Sinn Féin) after the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended in 2002. McCord Jr.’s status as a UVF member and McCord Sr.’s troubled history with the UDA meant that neither McCord could be portrayed as an ‘innocent victim’ of paramilitary violence, unlike Robert McCartney.¹⁴¹ McCord Sr. eventually became a political candidate and disavowed himself of the apolitical advantage that the McCartney family had in their justice campaign. Most significantly, McCord Jr.’s 1997 murder occurred before the GFA, and as with many other victims of violence around this time, his story does not fit with public discourse surrounding paramilitary violence, delegitimised after the GFA. In a passage relevant to the McCartney and McCord justice campaigns, social scientist Duncan Morrow assesses that reconciliation “implies an end to all threat of violence, a political system which commands legitimacy across ancient hostilities and the development of a culture of independent action and cooperation in which the claims of citizens to goods and rights from the whole community are treated as personal and individual”.¹⁴² In the McCartney and McCord cases, unexpected alliances may have been formed between victims and politicians, but this continued along (inverted) sectarian lines, demonstrating the work that remained in achieving something resembling societal reconciliation.

¹⁴⁰ “Sister moves house after killing,” BBC News, October 21, 2005, accessed March 21, 2017, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4364882.stm.

¹⁴¹ McCord, *Justice for Raymond*, 25.

¹⁴² Duncan Morrow, “The Rise (and Fall?) of Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,” *The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 44, no. 1 (2012): 11.



Figures 21 and 22.¹⁴³ The McCartney family (left) sits while receiving a standing ovation at Sinn Féin's 2005 Ard Fheis. Raymond McCord (right) addresses the 2008 Ard Fheis wearing his father's Orange Order sash.

Interviewed in 2016, McCord stated that he was, like the McCartney family, committed to seeing the “people that murdered my son standing in a dock”.¹⁴⁴ McCord's case demonstrates that while some victims of paramilitary violence gained discursive power after the GFA, this was far from evenly distributed, favouring victims and their families without paramilitary connections and murders that occurred after the Agreement. The very specific features of Northern Irish politics in 2005 including PIRA decommissioning, the rise of the DUP and continued suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly allowed the McCartney family to put pressure on Sinn Féin. Of all the cases of paramilitary murders after the GFA, both the Omagh and McCartney cases drew enormous attention. The designation of the ‘little people,’ forgotten during the Troubles, remarked upon by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in his 1998 report, could also apply to many murders after the GFA. Especially horrific atrocities like Omagh and infamous murder victims such as Robert McCartney dominated the public's interest in victims, often obscuring or ignoring others whose deaths were not as memorable or politically relevant.

‘Justice for Robert’?

The massive media interest in the McCartney case had faded by 2006. Occasional articles were written at events like the one year anniversary of McCartney's death (see figure 23), but in the wake of the PIRA's end of the ‘Armed Struggle’ declaration, the motivation for rallying

¹⁴³ McCartney, *Walls of Silence*, 120-121; “Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 2008: Irish Unity and the Peace Process,” *An Phoblacht*, March 6, 2008, accessed December 22, 2016, <http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/18233>.

¹⁴⁴ “Raymond McCord: ‘I’m a dad looking for justice and I’m never going to stop,’” *Belfast Telegraph*, March 7, 2016, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/raymond-mccord-im-a-dad-looking-for-justice-and-im-never-going-to-stop-34516023.html>.

against the PIRA and Sinn Féin was not as strong as in early 2005. Two significant factors may be responsible for this. First, as with the Omagh campaign, it is difficult for victims of paramilitary violence to keep a single story in the media for months and years at a time when there are few exciting developments, especially in the absence of a long-running trial or other criminal proceedings. Occasional trials of suspects, including Davison's 2008 acquittal, did not contain the excitement of the family's initial campaign or their many awards and visits to Ireland, America and Europe. Second, the PIRA's statement ending its armed campaign and its September 2005 decommissioning was heralded as an important step in the peace process, and took some of the pressure off Sinn Féin from the Northern Bank Robbery and McCartney murder. The October 2006 'St Andrews Agreement' (SAA) led to the restoration of the Assembly, now consisting of a DUP-Sinn Féin led power-sharing coalition with Ian Paisley as First Minister and Martin McGuinness as his deputy, marking the most significant political development since the Assembly was dissolved in 2002. Media focus on the McCartney case faded as the DUP and Sinn Féin entered government together in 2007. Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's Chief of Staff, noted in his memoirs that the "combination of the Northern Bank robbery and the McCartney murder meant republicans had no choice but to dissolve the IRA unilaterally if they wanted to pursue a political future" and that the "McCartney killing was a bigger crisis for the IRA than the bank robbery because it affected their base".¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the murder may have been a useful opportunity for Adams, as according to political scientist Jonathan Tonge, he already wanted the PIRA to end the armed struggle.¹⁴⁶ Sinn Féin's response to McCartney's murder also led to fewer votes than expected in local elections in 2005, although the party gained seats at the Westminster election on 5 May 2005.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the small political dent created for Sinn Féin was not as lasting as the discursive changes exposed by the McCartney family's campaign for justice. An absolute fearlessness in questioning the power of paramilitaries served as an inspiration for other victims groups and resulted in the family winning numerous accolades, even inspiring a 2011 Spanish language book entitled *Les germanes Young* or 'Young Sisters' with the bi-line, a "fictional story based on the murder of Robert McCartney" and the "fight for the truth of the five sisters".¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Jonathan Powell, *Great Hatred, Little Room: Making Peace in Northern Ireland* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), 267.

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Tonge, *Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), accessed December 12, 2016, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com.virtual.anu.edu.au/lib/anu/reader.action?docID=1186865&ppg=159>, 196-199.

¹⁴⁷ Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*, 307-308.

¹⁴⁸ Pili Garcia and Jesús Martínez, *Les germanes Young* (Barcelona: Ediciones Carena, 2011).



Figure 23.¹⁴⁹ This cartoon comes from Anthony McIntyre’s online blog, the *Pensive Quill*. A staunch supporter of the McCartney family’s campaign, McIntyre’s blog uses this which depicts Catherine McCartney with her fist raised saying the words ‘Our Day **Will** Come!’ while wearing a shirt reading ‘Justice for Robert.’ ‘Our Day Will Come’ is the English translation of the republican slogan ‘Tíocfaidh ár lá,’ in reference to the eventual re-unification of Ireland.

On 5 May 2015, Gerard ‘Jock’ Davison, the McCartney family’s key suspect in Robert’s murder, was shot dead in the Markets area of Belfast, only a five minute walk from where McCartney had been stabbed ten years before.¹⁵⁰ Some weeks later, Kevin McGuigan, a suspect in Davison’s murder, was himself shot dead in the Short Strand.¹⁵¹ Ten years after their brother’s murder the McCartney family condemned Davison’s killing. In an interview with the *Belfast Telegraph*, Catherine McCartney noted “I see his murder as an unfortunate, awful result of what happens when the system fails victims” and “you can’t leave people without justice”.¹⁵² The McCartney justice campaign demonstrated both the practical impacts of the GFA and the discursive changes that it facilitated. Practically, the improved relations

¹⁴⁹ John Kennedy, 2008, *Our Day Will Come! Justice for Robert*, Cartoon, in Anthony McIntyre, “The Walls Of Silence Still Stand,” *Pensive Quill*, October 8, 2008, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://thepensivequill.am/2008/10/walls-of-silence-still-stand.html>.

¹⁵⁰ “Belfast shooting: Ex-IRA man Gerard ‘Jock’ Davison shot dead,” BBC News, May 5, 2015, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-32590282>.

¹⁵¹ Suzanne Breen, “This is payback for Jock Davison’ - IRA hitman Kevin McGuigan killed in a hail of bullets at his Belfast home,” *Belfast Telegraph*, August 18, 2015, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/this-is-payback-for-jock-davison-ira-hitman-kevin-mcguigan-killed-in-a-hail-of-bullets-at-his-belfast-home-31448284.html>.

¹⁵² Ibid.

between Ireland, the UK and strong ties with the United States (all cemented by the Agreement) allowed the McCartney family to use these connections to their advantage. Although the McCartney family's campaign did not result in criminal convictions for key suspects, it facilitated a wider discussion within the public discourse surrounding justice, peace and victimhood after the GFA. The public reactions to the McCartney family's justice campaign, demonstrated that since the GFA, significant power in Northern Ireland's public discourse had shifted away from paramilitaries and towards victims of their violence.

Conclusion: (What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Justice and Reconciliation?

Over the past three days in St Andrews we have engaged intensively with the Northern Ireland political parties with a view to achieving the goal we set in Armagh in April, which is shared by all the parties and the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland: the restoration of the political institutions. We believe that the transformation brought about by the ending of the IRA's campaign provides the basis for a political settlement.

The St Andrews Agreement, 2006.¹

On 13 October 2006, at the university town of St Andrews on Scotland's eastern shore, Northern Irish, British and Irish politicians agreed to a set of proposals to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly. Sinn Féin agreed to accept the PSNI as a legitimate police force in Northern Ireland and the DUP agreed to enter into a power-sharing executive with Sinn Féin. The 'St Andrews Agreement' (SAA) would come into effect after the March 2007 Assembly elections, which would see Ian Paisley elected First Minister with Martin McGuinness as his deputy. In accepting his post in May 2007, Paisley stated

at long last we are starting upon the road, I emphasise starting, which I believe will take us to lasting peace in our province ... we salute Ulster's honoured and unaging dead, the innocent victims, the gallant band, members of both religions, Protestant and Roman Catholic strong in their allegiance to their differing political beliefs, unionist and nationalist, male and female, children and adult, all innocent victims of a terrible conflict ... from the depths of my heart I can say to you today that I believe Northern Ireland has come to a time of peace. A time when hate will no longer rule. How good it will be to be part of a wonderful healing in this province. Today we have begun the work of plenty and we will all look for the great and blessed harvest.²

Paisley, who had opposed the civil rights movement in the 1960s, Sunningdale in 1973, Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 and GFA in 1998, now openly embraced the language of the 'peace process.' The 'Big Man' who for many had symbolised loyalist resistance to republicanism, who had interrupted a European Parliamentary session to denounce Pope John Paul II as the 'antichrist,' now agreed to share power with McGuinness, a Catholic former PIRA commander. Crucially, the change was not only political. Paisley's language had transformed from apocalyptic anti-republicanism and anti-Catholicism to a more accepting

¹ "Agreement at St Andrews," CAIN Web Service, October 13, 2006, accessed January 25, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/nio/bi131006.pdf>.

² Ian Paisley, "Speech by Ian Paisley (DUP), then First Minister, on the resumption of devolved government in Northern Ireland, Stormont, Belfast, (8 May 2007)," CAIN Web Service, comp. Martin Melaugh, May 8, 2007, accessed February 2, 2017, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/dup/ip080507.htm>.

focus on ‘lasting peace,’ victims ‘Protestant and Roman Catholic’ and ‘wonderful healing’: the language of the peace process. Far from having a relationship defined by bitterness or animosity, Paisley and McGuinness became known as the ‘chuckle brothers’ for their friendly relationship and occasionally jovial exchanges.³ The SAA is a worthwhile comparison to the GFA, as both attempted to replace political stagnation and mutual mistrust with something ‘new.’

This thesis has demonstrated that the GFA not only created new institutions in Northern Ireland, it fundamentally changed how the public, journalists, politicians and victims responded to acts of paramilitary violence. Each case study reveals an evolving discussion not only about the changing place of paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland, but the nature of the peace, justice and reconciliation promised and, in ambivalent ways, delivered by the Agreement. These ideas acquired new meanings after the GFA, as ‘peace’ was challenged by paramilitary violence, the terms of ‘justice’ were fiercely contested among victims of the conflict, and continuing communal tensions made a more ‘reconciled’ Northern Ireland difficult to achieve. While each of these dimensions can be interpreted as failings or limitations of the GFA’s agenda, this thesis has focussed on what these ‘new meanings’ in themselves contributed to that process after 1998. The identities, rights and visibility acquired by victims of violence, and the shaping of public debate around their claims, must be integral to any assessment of the GFA, both with regard to what it achieved and to what it added to the continuing complexities of seeking ‘a peace of sorts.’

In this public debate, the media acted as vehicle and a conditioning agent. Newspapers continued to be integral to Northern Ireland’s public discussion. Even as print sales declined, newspapers remained a primary outlet in which commentators shaped the understanding of events through which the public sought to voice their views on the peace process. The imperatives of tabloid journalism – given those print sales – with a focus on the sensational, the emotional, the celebrity and personal identification, were themselves part of this process. Equally, ‘new media,’ in the form of the internet, began to play an increasing role in influencing the terms of debate, lending prominence to testimonies of individual experience and opinion. At the same time that the political process emphasised the power of victims’ voices, new media facilitated this change even further. In the Omagh case, blogs were established as online books of condolences, allowing people all over the world to identify with, show solidarity for and grieve alongside the people of Omagh. During the Holy

³ Steve Bruce, *Paisley: Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 271. The relationship between Paisley and McGuinness inspired *The Journey*, a film set to be released in theatres in 2017.

Cross dispute, the Right to Education's (RTE) website attracted attention and (presumably) donations from interested parties, using this relatively new technology to try to achieve justice. In the Robert McCartney case, the debates in Irish and British newspapers were echoed online, where bloggers challenged and defended the McCartney family. This democratisation of media facilitated by the rise of the internet meant that anyone could voice an unfiltered opinion or experience online. This dynamic also generated new opportunities for political leverage, and new registers of response to violence, as political and cultural leaders in and beyond Northern Ireland found increasing opportunities for, and mileage in, identifying with the cause of peace.

What does 'peace' mean when paramilitary organisations continued to murder people during the peace process? My case studies from the GFA to the SAA show the declining power of the PIRA in Northern Ireland's public discourse, from openly refusing to decommission in 1998 to issuing multiple statements in a public dialogue with the McCartney family, before (finally) decommissioning in September 2005. Similarly, loyalist paramilitaries' power diminished, from internal and cross organisational feuding, to losing most of their electoral prospects and being effectively left out of the SAA.⁴ Occasional 'last stands' at Holy Cross and Drumcree could not alleviate the decline in power that loyalist organisations experienced since the Troubles had ended. Not only were loyalist and republican paramilitaries less powerful numerically and financially by 2007, they had also lost the power to influence public debate. In their place, victims of their pre and post-GFA violence felt more and more able to speak about their personal trauma and crucially, to seek justice. This process did not fully address the suffering of the past; it did, however, map out identities for the future.

The meaning of 'justice' in Northern Ireland remained a contested point in the wake of the GFA. In many ways, as my case studies have shown, the concept acquired greater complexity amid the proliferation of voices seeking recognition and the power of accounts of individual trauma to displace consideration of systematic change. This thesis has not sought to analyse the effectiveness of the justice system in Northern Ireland. It should be noted that as of writing in March 2017, the OSSHG justice campaign remains ongoing.⁵ The

⁴ There is perhaps one exception. Michael Stone, a UDA member infamous for carrying out the 1988 Milltown Cemetery killings was released under the terms of the GFA. Stone stormed Stormont on 24 November 2006, forcing the inaugural sitting of the new (new) Assembly to be suspended. The image of Stone being arrested and dragged out of Stormont is a fitting image for the power changes that had occurred since the GFA.

⁵ "Omagh bomb: Murder case against Seamus Daly Collapses," BBC News, March 1, 2016, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-35680970>.

McCartney family's campaign only ended with the murder of Jock Davison in May 2015, while the former pupils of Holy Cross only received compensation for their trauma as recently as September 2016. The hopes for justice for these, and many other groups of families in Northern Ireland, have not yet been satisfied. A unifying feature of the Omagh, Holy Cross and Robert McCartney cases was an eventual disillusionment with the justice and policing system in Northern Ireland. This disappointment was also reflected in public responses to these events, when victims of violence sought their own solutions to achieve justice. The Omagh families raised money for a civil suit rather than waiting for the PSNI to initiate criminal charges against the suspected bombers. Parents of Holy Cross pupils used the internet and international support in an attempt to end the Glenbryn residents' protests. For the McCartney family, lacking any witnesses, their justice campaign consisted of traveling to Washington and Brussels in order to court the support of American and European politicians. The campaigns of these groups also allowed other victims of pre-GFA violence to argue for their own victimhood and attempt to pursue their own ideas of justice, campaigns that would not have been possible during the Troubles. The longer-term implications of these shifting avenues for justice in Northern Ireland remain to be seen.

'Reconciliation' was an integral part of the GFA, but also proved difficult to achieve. Whereas the Omagh bombing allowed politicians and large sections of the media and public to reinforce the need for open redress after an atrocity in which members of both communities were murdered, Holy Cross displayed the opposite. All of the political involvement, public interest and celebrity endorsements in the world could not stop a protest that was harmful to both the image of Glenbryn residents and the mental health of the children and parents of Holy Cross. The extremity of that protest, it could be argued, in part reflected the extent to which Glenbryn residents perceived themselves to be increasingly marginalised by the gains made by Ardoyne nationalists in the new cultural registers of the GFA. In retrospect, Holy Cross functioned as a debate about victimhood after the GFA, with both Ardoyne and Glenbryn residents claiming that they (and their children) were the 'true' victims of paramilitary harassment.

As my case studies have demonstrated, despite mixed results, many victims of post-GFA violence felt they could achieve justice, question politicians and pursue paramilitaries in ways not possible before the GFA. Some of this shift was a direct result of legislative changes brought about by the Agreement: a new Assembly, changes in policing and (eventual) paramilitary decommissioning. However, my case studies also speak to the discursive changes brought about by the GFA, creating a space in which the experiences of

groups including the OSSHG, Ardoyne and Glenbryn residents and McCartney family acquired a new influence. A changing public discourse which now allowed victims to speak about their experiences. Virtually every political leader present at the GFA talks has published an autobiography or has a biography written about them. As of writing in March 2017, Gerry Adams alone has published seven editions of his memoirs and journals.⁶ It would be easy to see this as an opening-up of public discussion - and that must be an important aspect in an assessment of the influence of the GFA. But, in tracking the preconditions to such a process in terms of public *discourse*, I have also wanted to highlight the ways in which what was said was also conditioned by a distinct political culture, with its own rules, opportunities, and limitations.

Future research, beyond the scope of this thesis, might examine how public discourse has changed since the SAA. The Belfast City Hall flag protests from 2012 to 2013 would be a good counter-point to the GFA. The 2013 protests, marred by violent clashes between protesters and the PSNI, exhibited some aspects of the loyalist marginalisation previously evident in the Holy Cross dispute. Use of the internet allowed flag protesters to vent their anger and was a key way that loyalist groups organised themselves.⁷ Both the Holy Cross and Belfast flag protests involved loyalist paramilitaries, the perception that nationalists were politically favoured and the use of new media as a way of voicing dissent. Another example of loyalist marginalisation worth studying would be the protest on Twaddell Avenue in north Belfast that lasted over 1000 days from 2013 to 2016. This sense of alienation reflected in such actions may be set to increase, as the decline in Northern Ireland's unionist population will eventually lead to the group becoming both a minority on the island of Ireland, and within Northern Ireland itself.⁸ The rise of internet-based discourses also deserves attention, as news, debate and discussion moves online. The increasing power of victims' groups also merits further research, especially considering the findings of the Saville inquiry in 2010 and recent work on paramilitary collusion from journalist Anne Cadwallader from the Pat Finucane Centre.⁹ Indeed, the rise of victims groups has coincided more broadly with the lessening of the power of organised religion, especially the Catholic Church on the island of Ireland as a whole, due to declining religious observance and numerous child sex abuse

⁶ Not to mention Adams' colourful twitter feed which was made into a book in 2016.

⁷ "The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a Protest," Queen's University Belfast, 2014, accessed January 28, 2017, http://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/files/13748797/The_Flag_Dispute_report_PRINTED.pdf, 70-71.

⁸ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, "Northern Ireland since 1920," in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 164.

⁹ Anne Cadwallader, *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* (Cork: Mercier, 2013).

scandals.¹⁰ Survivors groups, of both paramilitary atrocities and clerical abuse, became very prominent in Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in the 2000s, both challenging institutional silences and the marginalisation of victims' experiences of trauma.

This thesis insists that the impact of the GFA was not only political or legislative; it was discursive and part of wider transformations in the ways in which post-GFA identities, unionist and nationalist, were being shaped. The Agreement began the process of taking away discursive power from paramilitaries, allowing the public, especially victims, to have their voices heard. Continuing paramilitary violence throughout 1998 to 2007 only demonstrated how much power paramilitaries had lost, both militarily and in a public discourse that considered their actions to be illegitimate and unnecessary. Northern Ireland transformed in 1998, in ways that cannot be simply measured in terms of the success or failure of the Agreement. Instead, we need to take account of the specific terms in which peace, justice and reconciliation acquired meanings in Northern Ireland's unique, divided and ongoing peace (of sorts).

¹⁰ Diarmaid Ferriter, "Twenty-First-Century Ireland," in *The Princeton History of Modern Ireland*, eds. Richard Bourke and Ian McBride (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 176-178.

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