

[James Hughes](#)

## Reconstruction without reconciliation: is Northern Ireland a "model"?

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## Chapter 9

### Reconstruction Without Reconciliation: Is Northern Ireland a “Model”?

*James Hughes*

Elite discourses about the lessons to be drawn from the Northern Ireland conflict and the 1998 Belfast Agreement share many of the same concerns as those in academia concerned with designing fixes to violent conflict and postconflict reconciliation and reconstruction. A curious feature of the discourse about Northern Ireland being a “model” for conflict resolution is that it stresses process over outcome. There is much emphasis on “dialogue” while there is also much reticence about promoting the actual content of the agreements that brought the violent conflict to an end—the consociational institutional engineering—as a key element in the “model.” There is also much reticence about structural features of the conflict and the challenges of reconciliation and reconstruction in a divided society. The major lesson that policy makers have drawn from this case is that even the most protracted conflicts can be ended, and “dialogue” with the extremes can pay dividends for peacemaking. It is a paradox of the peace agreement in Northern Ireland that the ethnic power reallocation under consociationalism has fostered interethnic elite accommodation and cooperation, while at least in the short term hardening the obstacles to a social transformation from divided society to a more integrated one. Criticisms of consociationalism tend to reflect a normative repulsion to the ethnification of politics entailed in its institutional features (invariably understood as a reification

of ethnicity that perpetuates conflict), and the perception of political stasis that it creates. An undoubted strength of consociationalism is that it fosters stability and trust by working with, rather than against, the political realities of identity politics in a divided society by entrenching ethnic blocs in power. However, it also severely constrains what kind of postconflict reconstruction is possible by posing limits to the forging of shared identities and limiting the possibility of new politics and policies to promote structural change to the divided society. We must accept, however, that the structures of the divide, and the identity politics that they have engendered in Northern Ireland, have developed over centuries and are thus deeply embedded and will not easily or quickly be undone.

### **The Northern Ireland Model**

Politicians have presented the Northern Ireland conflict as a model for conflict resolution. As the most protracted conflict to afflict an advanced democracy in modern times, it might seem odd to present this thirty-year-long ethnonational and sectarian conflict as a model. The very protractedness would, on first principles, suggest a gross failure of political and military management. However, the reason why this case is represented as a model appears to lie more in the fact that the conflict was ended at all. This was the lesson drawn by George Mitchell, the US mediator in the conflict (1995–98), when he stated that Northern Ireland and his other peace-building experience demonstrated that “there’s no such thing as a conflict that cannot be ended. Conflicts are created, conducted, and sustained by human beings. They can be ended by human beings” (Mitchell 2002). Similarly President Bill Clinton, at a time when he was deeply engaged in negotiations in the Middle East conflict, was one of the first to point to the international demonstration effects of the Belfast Agreement (1998) (hereafter the Agreement). Clinton stressed the symbolic importance of the fact that the parties to one of the world’s most protracted conflicts had reached a settlement: “And let me tell you, you cannot imagine the impact of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland on troubled regions of the world—in Africa and the Middle East, in Latin America and, of course, in the Balkans, where the United States has been heavily involved in my time. Peace continues to be challenged all around the world. It is more important

than ever to say: but look what they did in Northern Ireland and look what they are doing in Northern Ireland” (Clinton 2000). Drawing on this peace-building expertise, President Barack Obama subsequently appointed Mitchell as his Middle East peace envoy in January 2009. In his speech in Belfast in June 2013, Obama applauded the Agreement for setting an “example” and as a “blueprint to follow” for other conflicts, while recognizing that there were still “many miles to go” in building peace (Obama 2013). Is there anything more to the Northern Ireland peace agreement than an example of the ending of a protracted conflict? If there is, what precisely are these elements?

The views of British practitioners on the concept of the model emphasize the importance of the process of mediation itself (the “peace process,” “dialogue,” “talking with terrorists,” etc). Former secretary of state for Northern Ireland Peter Hain, for example, in a speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London in June 2007 promoting Northern Ireland as a model of conflict resolution identified four main components: the importance of personalities, the aligning of international influence, the political framework, and dialogue. Hain shied away from the explicit endorsement of the actual content of the Agreement, which involved a complex system of consociational institutional engineering. In fact, Hain declared, the “detailed structures are secondary to a basic political will to agree,” and developing dialogue in the peace process was “arguably . . . its ultimate objective.” For Hain, Northern Ireland offered lessons for conflicts as diverse as Iraq, Sri Lanka, Basque Country, Kashmir, and Western Sahara (Hain 2007a). As a consequence of the success in Northern Ireland, the Irish government has placed conflict resolution and mediation at the core of its stated foreign policy objectives through its Conflict Resolution Initiative. Drawing on the experience of Northern Ireland, the Irish government aims to become a “world leader” in UN mediation efforts and has begun to establish a number of special roving ambassadors to crisis regions.

A key British negotiator and Blair advisor, Jonathan Powell, has also recently argued that the importance of the Agreement lies in the way that engaging and “talking to terrorists” moved them from violence to democratic politics. It was a case of building peace from the extremes rather than from the moderate center ground. Controversially, he posited that a similar process of engagement is required with al Qa’ida (Powell 2008). When the British government applied the lessons from peacemaking in Northern Ireland in its foreign policy, they also drew on practitioner expertise. Former

secretary of state for Northern Ireland Paul Murphy was engaged in mediation in Sri Lanka by the Sri Lankan, British, and Norwegian governments. As part of the mediation exercise, former Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) leader, and now deputy first minister in the new government of Northern Ireland, Martin McGuinness was asked to visit Sri Lanka in January and June 2006. McGuinness also cochaired, with former South African government minister Roelf Meyer, mediation talks between Iraqi groups held in Finland in September 2007, which led to the Helsinki Agreement between the main Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish groups at a pivotal moment in the US military and political “surge” in Iraq. Subsequently, Sheikh Humam Hamoudi, chair of the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) of the Iraqi Parliament, led an EU-sponsored CRC study delegation of fifteen representatives to Northern Ireland in March 2008, and there was a follow-up visit in May 2009 by members of the Article 23 Committee of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, charged with resolving the dispute over Kirkuk. The nature of the lessons to be drawn from Northern Ireland were written up in a UN report that stressed issues such as leadership, power sharing, dialogue and inclusion, equality, human rights and reconciliation, the role of civil society, and security and public order, all of which were considered to be critical for reaching a peaceful solution to the Northern Ireland conflict and to the process of promoting national dialogue in Iraq (Iraq Helsinki Project 2009; Hinds and Oliver 2009).

There is clearly a disjuncture between how the Northern Ireland “model” is being framed by politicians as a matter of “process” and “dialogue,” while in practice the lesson learning that is being demonstrated is often of a more pragmatic nature with regard to institutional and policy practice changes on the ground. Equally, there is dissonance between the politicians’ emphasis on “dialogue” and much of the political science analysis of the ending of the conflict and the Agreement. For academics the importance of the accommodation in Northern Ireland lies less in the process and more in how it has been engineered as a framework of institutional and other reforms. Both the supporters and critics of the Agreement alike concur that it is constructed around a consociational framework. Among the ranks of the most robust defenders of the Agreement are also the most persistent advocates of consociationalism for Northern Ireland, and equally the most fervent opponents of the Agreement are the most trenchant critics of consociationalism. The pivot for the schism in scholarly approaches is

whether one positively or negatively evaluates the value of consociationalism as a conflict regulation mechanism.

As academic enthusiasm for consociationalism in Northern Ireland was revitalized in the 1990s, advocates such as McGarry and O’Leary located their analysis of the conflict within Lijphart’s paradigm of “deeply divided societies,” though with some significant modifications. Whereas Lijphart problematized the accommodation of confessional and linguistic “segmental” cleavages in states where politics was rather conventionally concerned with the democratic politics of power and resource allocation between such groups, McGarry and O’Leary connected consociational theory more firmly to theories of ethnonationalism, violent conflict, and state-building. McGarry and O’Leary seek to “champion” consociationalism normatively as the most effective way to manage the historically grounded and competing variants of Irish-British ethnonationalisms that have been the key driver in the conflict (McGarry and O’Leary 2009, 24). Other structural features and epiphenomena of the conflict, they suggest, such as sectarianism, and by implication segregation, have derived from the ethnonational “root cause.” For them, the Agreement is a “worked” example of conflict resolution precisely because it addresses the binational nature of politics in Northern Ireland. They also locate the study of political accommodation in Northern Ireland within a comparative framework, which holds that it has both incorporated past experience while also providing transferable lessons and benefits to other conflict cases, such as Iraq (McGarry and O’Leary 1990; McGarry 2001; McGarry and O’Leary 2004; O’Leary and McGarry 2006).

The academic critics, mainly liberals but also those on the Left, are unsettled by the consociational theory underpinning the Agreement, and its underlying philosophy. The critique has pragmatic and normative dimensions. First, critics regard the theory to be a “group” differentiated approach to governing divided societies, which by institutionalizing power sharing among the ethnic or other blocs that constitute the divided society, merely serves to institutionalize the conflict and allows no possibility of transcending the divide. This is seen as inherently unstable. Second, the institutionalization of divisions is regarded as a fetishization of ethnic and other cultural markers, which is a normative contravention of any notion of the liberal individualism seen as underpinning democracy, or of a mobilization around social class, which is important still for some on the Left. The critics of the Agreement contend that its consociational design lacks a

grounding in “democratic governance” and serves only to reproduce systemic sectarianism. Rather than overcoming the causes and legacies of the “Troubles”, it is argued, the consociational institutions embed and reinforce them. Moreover, critics are unsettled also by the fact that the peace process and its electoral process has led to the entrenchment of the representatives of “extreme” forms of nationalism and unionism—Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party. That the peace process was inclusive, drawing in the political extremes of both sides to cooperate within a consociational framework, is a feature of the Northern Ireland settlement that particularly rankles with liberals. The peace is perceived by them as having been won by the extremists, and the “bad guys,” who have been rewarded with power. This elitist undercurrent in this critique frames the competing ethnonationalisms as a form of false consciousness, contingently mobilized and ensuing from the drift to violent conflict in the late 1960s. Fundamentally, the critiques of consociationalism deride an outcome that, they claim, offers no vision of the “common good” or the “good life.” In sum, it is a nightmarish dead end of sectarian politics. In effect, the approach is conditioned by an ideological or normative preference for liberal values and a class divide over what are perceived to be polarized essentialist ethnonational and sectarian communities (Taylor 2001 and 2009; Wilford and Wilson 2006; Wilson 2009 and 2010).

What McGarry and O’Leary and their critics share is a focus on the role of elites and the institutions of government. For McGarry and O’Leary, the Agreement is analyzed as an elite pact (with local, regional, and international constituents) that has engineered an institutional fix to end the conflict. For the critics, it is the wrong kind of elite deal and a misengineered fix. The debate between both approaches, in essence, turns on whether the deal is viewed as a progressive outcome or not. The shared focus on elites and institutions, however, addresses only one level of the conflict, though obviously it is a critical one. There are other levels. These approaches tend to objectify society. Society is the seemingly inactive canvass on which elite politics and the institutional fix is overlain. Both approaches decouple their defense from a contextualization of consociationalism, assuming that the forms and structures of the deeply divided society in Northern Ireland are inherently self-evident, and, importantly, that the societal divisions are somehow either predetermined and set, or readily transformable. The nature of the societal divisions, and how they are reflected in socioeconomic structures and everyday realities, is fundamental to the debate about

the “root cause” of the conflict, and therefore fundamental to evaluating the outcome of the conflict.

Does not the kind of diversity matter for conflict and its outcome? McGarry and O’Leary offer a “two nations” perspective on the conflict, declaring that Northern Ireland is a “bi-national place, a sub-set of the category of pluri-national places, which have more than one mobilized national community” (McGarry and O’Leary 2009, 25). In such places, they affirm, national and ethnic identities are politically salient and are testable by examining the nature of party competition and civil society. The question, however, is not simply does the nature of party competition and the organization of civil society reflect nationalist ideological, ethnic, and/or religious social cleavages, but also how are those cleavages socially embedded? The nature of the deeply divided society in Northern Ireland is in flux, and new social factors, such as new immigrants, are in play. Consequently, we cannot evaluate the Agreement and whether it is a “model” without taking account of the social basis of the conflict, the dynamism of social change, and structural impediments to social change.

There are three interwoven strands to the analysis that follows. First, I want to shift the focus from the new governing institutions and bring society back into our discussions. Is the divided society in Northern Ireland fixed or in flux? Second, by analyzing social dynamism, we may be better positioned to evaluate some of the elite discourse and mindsets about the outcome of the peace process, in particular, the swelling elite discourse around the notion that Northern Ireland is a model of conflict resolution. Third, I aim to demonstrate that the objectification discourse and mindset is a current that permeates not only academia and political and managerial-administrative elites, but also those parts of civil society engaged in peace building and reconciliation. By shifting the lens to society, I aim to refocus attention on the structural foundations of the divide and the Agreement, and the prospects for reconstruction and reconciliation, for any evaluation of whether Northern Ireland is a “model” must take the structural factors into account.

### **The Parallel Communities of Consociational Society**

The Agreement is seen as historic precisely because it is presented, and indeed its implementation was organized so, in a manner to bring to a



conclusion not just the conflict in Northern Ireland, but also the deeper historical ethnonational conflict between British and Irish identities. The political rhetoric of the elites about the Agreements reveals that they perceive the outcome as a kind of “end of history,” where violence as a means of resolving nationalist antagonisms has been transcended, although the antagonisms themselves have not. Although the Agreement itself recognized that changing society was a critical element of political stabilization, its content in this area was minimal and rhetorical. The declaration at the beginning of the Agreement stated a commitment to “the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.” The section on reconciliation and victims of violence stated more specifically: “An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing” (*The Agreement* 1998, 18). What accounts for this lack of concern with social transformation in the Agreement?

We could interpret the Agreement in a positivist frame by understanding it as a sequenced, two-stage solution to the conflict: achieve elite accommodation first, and society will follow (given that the erosion of the segregation and parallel living of the two communities must be seen as a much longer term project). Whereas the minutiae of the governing institutions, security arrangements, and the relationships between the UK and Ireland were specified in intricate detail in the Agreement, no such policy specifications were made for societal transformation. This kind of elitist institutionalist approach is intrinsic to the core thinking underlying consociationalism. For Lijphart, “accommodation” was a value that was to be understood first and foremost as a “spirit of accommodation” between political leaders—the elites involved in making the consociational institutions work (Lijphart 1975, 103–4).

However, we can examine the challenge of social transformation in a segregated society along several key dimensions: housing, education, public service provision, culture, and employment, among others. There is a general recognition that the two key pillars of the parallel communities—housing and education—are durable features of Northern Ireland’s divided society. The Harbison report of 2002 (i.e., post-Agreement) on the state of community relations in Northern Ireland observed that there is “little evidence of significant increases in shared education or housing” (Harbison 2002, 4). The segregated living of parallel communities translates into

multiple domains of segregation: relationships and marriage, work, culture, use of public services and facilities (including welfare, health, and leisure), use of public transport, employment, and shopping; and it even develops its own psychological frame with regard to mental mapping, “ownership,” and movement within space, and calculations about risk and the desirability of contact.

Let us explore one of the key dimensions—housing segregation—as a means of illustrating some of the bigger questions about cause and effect in the conflict. Segregation implies a strong emotive content to social values, but it may be driven by many factors, including cultural distance and mutual repulsion, racism, and most obviously in a conflict zone, by fear, anxiety, risk, and insecurity. It is seen as a negative social phenomenon, the “laager mentality” that embeds and reinforces mutual ignorance, which in turn may both consolidate the support of hardliners and conflict entrepreneurs, and also be manipulated by such groups. Official statistics and independent academic research reveal a high degree of territorial segregation in the housing of the two main religious groups since the start of the “Troubles”. Scholars of spatial segregation in Northern Ireland such as Shirlow have argued that the phenomenon is impelled by a political logic to mobilize fear through “propaganda conditioning” and thereby create ethnoreligious “enclosures” (Shirlow 2003, 77). In a segregated society “psychological barriers are reinforced by physical boundaries” (Hughes et al. 2007, 46). This interpretation reinforces the elitist understanding of politics in Northern Ireland, with the two communities being the objects of social conditioning by elites within their respective “laagers,” but it also ignores the colonial origins and development of ethnic and religious segregation as an imposition by state policy over many hundreds of years.

The weakness of the historical data makes it difficult to ascertain just how far back the antecedents of housing sectarianism stretch. Key studies have suggested that segregation along ethnic and religious lines originated in the Ulster Plantation in the early seventeenth century. The northern part of Ireland was the last redoubt of Gaelic rule and culture in Ireland, which was overwhelmingly agrarian. Town building became part of the colonization process. In Ulster, as had been the case with colonization in the rest of Ireland, towns were largely fortified English garrisons and administrative centers, and the native Irish were usually segregated to poor lands in rural areas and settlements outside the town walls in the ubiquitous “Irish-towns”—a nomenclature that is preserved today in many towns and cities

in Ireland. Certainly, there is evidence of ethnic and religious segregation in the pattern of urbanization that developed as a result of the development of the linen and shipbuilding industries in the nineteenth century. According to influential studies by Boal, segregation in Belfast increased in periodic surges. Census data provides robust evidence that by 1911, 41 percent of Catholics and 62 percent of Protestants were living in segregated areas. Between 1911 and 1969, residential segregation was driven by a ratchet effect from episodes of interethnic violence in the early 1920s, during and after partition, in 1935, during the Great Depression, and in the period from 1969 after the outbreak of the “Troubles” (Boal 1982, 253; Boal 1999).

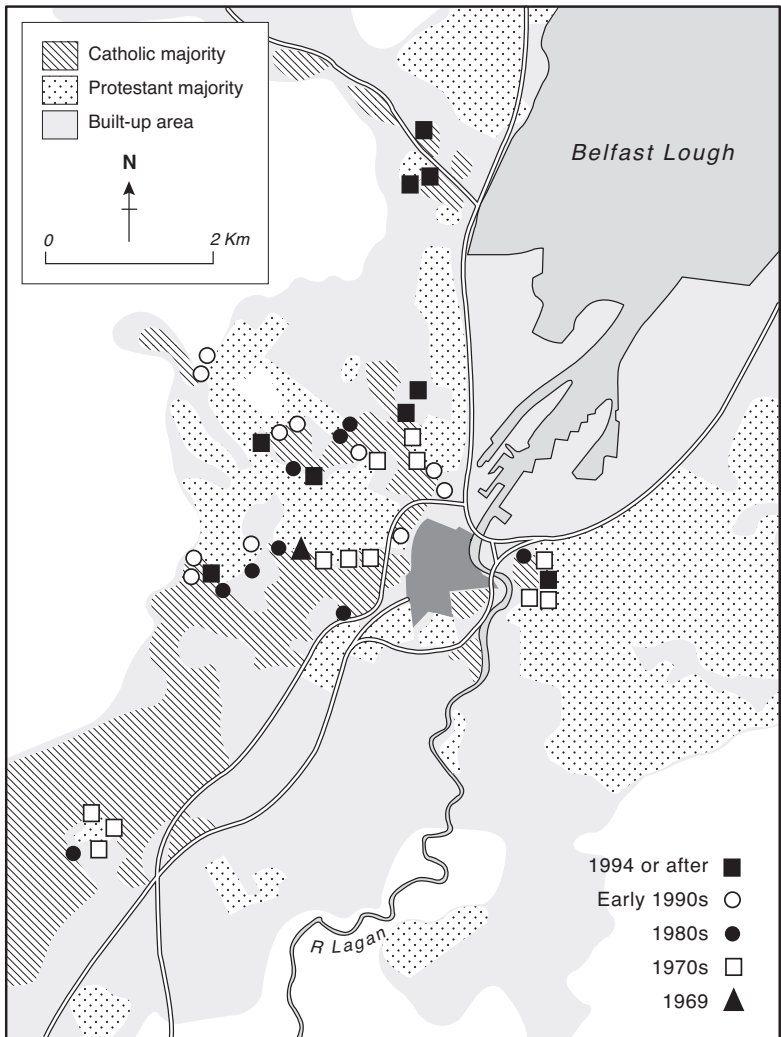
Discrimination in housing and employment by Protestants against Catholics were major pillars of the Unionist regime, and even successive British governments from the late 1960s on recognized that the escalating conflict was driven by materialist grievances on the part of Catholics, which Unionists were unwilling to address. Discrimination in the allocation of public housing was one of the main causes of the emergence of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement in the mid-1960s (Purdie 1990). Housing discrimination was not simply about the gerrymandering of local political control by Unionists, but was part of the more systemic ethnonational hegemony. The “ethnic cleansing” violence of the early “Troubles” (1969–72) consolidated the segregation of the working class of the two communities, especially in the capital, Belfast. It is estimated that the ethnic cleansing in the Belfast area alone between August 1969 and February 1973 affected between eight thousand families (minimum) and approximately fifteen thousand families (maximum), or roughly between 6.6 percent and 11.8 percent of the population of the Belfast urban area—perhaps as many as sixty thousand people (Darby and Morris 1974, summary page c).

At least forty-one security barriers, sometimes referred to locally as “peace lines,” were constructed in Belfast along the interfaces between the Catholic and Protestant communities in north, west, southwest and east Belfast after the beginning of the conflict in August 1969 (Jarman 2005a). There are also a small number of security barriers in Derry and Portadown. The first barbed-wire security barrier in Belfast was built by the British army along the line of existing barricades between the working-class communities of the Falls area (Catholic) and Shankill area (Protestant) after the interethnic violence of August 1969. Twelve more were constructed in the 1970s, nine in the 1980s, and ten in the 1990s, with the barriers becoming highly engineered large-scale concrete walls over time. A further nine were constructed after the ceasefires and effective end of the violent conflict in

1994 (Map 9.1). After 1969 housing became part of the systemic securitization of Northern Ireland by the British state. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) was established in 1971 to take the political heat out of the contentious issue of public sector housing allocation by removing it from local Unionist political control and centralizing it to a professional, and it was hoped “neutral,” government agency. For security considerations NIHE reinforced the segregation of public housing by preserving the highly polarized territorial ethnoreligious divide established by the violence and intimidation of the early 1970s. NIHE also constructed innumerable “informal” or disguised security walls as part of its reconstruction and modernization of housing zones in Belfast.

The richest data on housing segregation is collected by NIHE, and by the late 1990s its data revealed that of a housing stock of some 132,000 units, 42 percent were in Protestant-only estates, 30 percent were Catholic, and 29 percent were classified as “integrated.” Murtagh has shown that there is a strong correlation between districts that are stable in their religious demography, low rates of violence during the conflict, and higher levels of NIHE-classified “integrated” housing (Murtagh 2001, 777–80). These housing estates tend to be located in peripheral areas outside the main conurbations. However, we should treat the claims of housing “integration” with caution. NIHE classifies “integrated” estates as those with just a minimum of 10 percent Protestant or Catholic residents. Most studies of bipolarized societies recognize that a much larger figure from each community is a reliable indicator of residential mixing. When Shirlow and Murtagh attempted to measure segregation and mixing in Belfast, they found that just 10.7 percent of Catholics and 7 percent of Protestants live in areas that are 41 to 60 percent Protestant or Catholic—a more accurate and realistic assessment of the low level of mixing (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006, 59–60). Model “integrated” public housing estates are only now being developed by NIHE, but these involve only a few schemes of a few dozen houses each in rural areas largely unscathed by the violence, and where arguably people are already comfortable living together. The British government’s research found that housing had become more segregated over the twenty years since 1980. By 2003 more than 70 percent of Housing Executive estates were more than 90 percent Protestant or more than 90 percent Roman Catholic (Community Relations Unit 2003).

There are also other types of social enclosure. Observation suggests that postconflict development in the main urban areas of Northern Ireland has been characterized by significant growth in “elite spaces” and middle-class



**Map 9.1.** The Development of Security Barriers at Communal Interfaces in Belfast Since 1969

Source: Based on the work of the Belfast Interface Project [www.belfastinterfaceproject.org](http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org).

“gated communities.” The 2011 census revealed that Catholics now outnumber Protestants by 49 percent to 42 percent in Belfast. Furthermore the trend is for a growing Catholic population while the Protestant population is in decline and ageing. The demographic shift of young, professional Catholics with consumerist lifestyles fed by the postconflict economic growth in the decade after 1998 to traditionally Protestant middle- and lower-middle-class areas of southwest and east Belfast has accelerated. Research tends to focus on working-class segregated communities, however, rather than the so-called “mixed” middle-class areas. The latest research in this field finds that Catholics are more amenable to “mixing” and have more nuanced attitudes on politics and religion, whereas the demonization of the “other” is more salient among Protestants, and the difference in values may be related to perceptions of winners and losers from the political accommodation in the Agreement itself (Hughes et al. 2007, 46).

One factor of social dynamism in Northern Ireland that may contribute to social transformation sooner rather than later is new migration. The 2011 census identified that 5 percent of the population had an identity other than British, Irish, or Northern Irish, and just under 4.5 percent were born outside Britain and Ireland. About 2.5 percent of this minority is composed of new migrants from the accession countries of the EU in central and eastern Europe. The current wave of migration is a new trend for several reasons: its speed and scale, the fact that the new migrants have no prior connection with the UK or Ireland, and the fact that many are nominally Catholic (especially the Poles and Lithuanians) (Northern Ireland Statistics 2012). The scale of this new migration may also be underestimated. If within the near future the migrants form 3 to 5 percent of the population, it would be at a level where local politics could be affected. Furthermore, the scale of migration is of a level where it is already a significant social factor in local employment, housing, education, and religion (Jarman 2005b).

The analysis of housing presented above provides some insight into the scale of segregation and the challenge facing any attempt at rapid social transformation. The studies of housing segregation discussed above conclude that any social transformation of this reality is a long way into the future. This must explain the lack of social content in the peace process and in the Agreement itself. This social structure has major psychocultural consequences for the behavior and values of groups and individuals, some

of which I mentioned earlier, but it also has profound political effects, shaping voting patterns and ethnifying public policy. Residential patterns have a major impact on ethnic parades in Northern Ireland, which are a critical form of ritual especially for the Protestant community. Historically this was the case, and so it is today, even some fifteen years after the Agreement, that Orange parades passing through or near Catholic areas continue to be a significant source of provocation, interethnic tension, and violence. Some four thousand parades were held in Northern Ireland in 2012, with about 60 percent being loyalist or unionist, and less than 4 percent nationalist. The Parades Commission, a quasi-judicial government-appointed body, was established in 1998 to attempt to promote understanding, facilitate mediation, and make “determinations” whether contentious parades should be allowed on a case-by-case basis. It has had mixed results in managing contentious parades as evidenced by the increasing violence at interfaces around the time of “marching season.” Ross has suggested that an important factor in building understanding and promoting trust over contentious parades is the wider civic involvement of “civic leaders” (politicians and community and business leaders) in the dialogue around a “negotiated redesign” of ritual to make them less provocative. Thus, Derry has peacefully managed its annual Apprentice Boys’ parades (Ross 2007, 123–25). However, this is in essence a form of coexistence, not reconciliation in the sense of agreed narrative and shared ritual. In other places such civic engagement, or indeed mediation, has not worked to reroute let alone redesign parades, deal with issues such as flags, or stop violence, for example, in parts of Belfast and Portadown.

### **The “New Public Management” Challenge to Consociationalism**

There was a dynamic tension within British policy making between the consociational design of the Agreement and normative impulses for greater “integrationist” approaches to society in the immediate aftermath of the Agreement. In particular, when the Agreement stalled, the British promoted a much more ideologically “integrationist” outlook in public policy agendas and began to challenge key structural pillars of segregation. “New public management” usually refers to practices commonplace in the private sector, particularly the imposition of a powerful management hierarchy

that exerts discipline and is driven by cost efficiency, external accountability and monitoring, and an emphasis on standards of evaluation. Encapsulated within a “governance agenda,” aspects of the new managerialism were developed under the reintroduction of British direct rule in Northern Ireland between 2002 and 2007 when the Agreement was temporarily suspended by the British government. This was not simply a rational-technical perspective on eliminating inefficiencies arising from the conflict but was also an attempt to use social intervention policies to challenge the philosophical foundation of the consociational settlement. The new managerialist challenge evolved in two main guises. The first developed in the period 1999–2005 and entailed a more open ideological challenge. Beginning with the publication of the consultation exercise on “community relations” in 1999, which led to the Harbison Report of 2002, and including the policy ethos underlying the new Northern Ireland Executive’s draft program for government of 2001, it culminated with the UK government’s *A Shared Future* consultation and policy of 2003–5 (*Consultation Document* 2000; Harbison 2002; Community Relations Unit 2003; Community Relations Unit 2005). This policy focus on transcending the community divide sooner rather than later coincided with the period 2000–2005, when the consociational political institutions were in crisis and then suspended. It was during this period of British direct rule that critics of consociationalism pushed their agenda forward.

Harbison presented a stark policy choice for future policy: “separate development” or “co-existence” versus a “a cohesive but pluralist society.” The former, he determined, was “inherently unstable, undesirable, inefficient and not an outcome implied or desired in the Programme for Government.” The costs of a divided society, he argued, were unsustainable. He advocated “promoting inter-dependence,” and he offered two key proposals to move ahead on social transformation: first to incentivize infrastructures “to promote better relations within and between communities”; and second, to change the policy idiom, abandoning the very language of “community relations” (which was seen by respondents, according to Harbison, as “tarnished, outdated and divisive”) in favor of the more neutral, and essentially more liberal, term “good relations,” which had been employed in the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Harbison 2002, 8, 41–42, 49). A leading community relations professional in Northern Ireland told the author that the formulation “good relations” originated in Whitehall, not locally, and was seen as a more inclusive term (author’s interview, Belfast, December 2007).



The stated philosophy of the UK government's *Shared Future* policy also reflected a colonialist discourse on the conflict as an "Irish problem": "The *underlying difficulty is a culture of intolerance*, which we will need to remedy if we are to make Northern Ireland a more 'normal' society" (Community Relations Unit 2003, 8, emphasis in the original). The stated policy goal was "a shared society defined by a culture of tolerance: a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere and where all individuals are treated impartially. A society where there is equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence" (Community Relations Unit 2003, 10). It envisioned that a special state agency or watchdog would be established to promote the agenda.

Inherent in the consociational thesis is the principle that a divided society must bear certain running "costs of duplication" in order to sustain stability and avert conflict. The "integrationist" policy drive of 2000–2005, however, was not only couched as a moral critique of the divided society but also concealed a powerful managerialist "economic imperative" to budgetary discipline and rationalization through an attack on the costs and diseconomies of the divided society: "Parallel living and the provision of parallel services are unsustainable both morally and economically. . . . Policy that simply adapts to, but does not alter these challenges, results in inefficient resource allocations. These are not sustainable in the medium to long-term" (Community Relations Unit 2005, 20).

The managerial attack on the economic irrationality of the divided society was evident, for example, in the so-called *Costs of the Divide* report by Deloitte, commissioned under British direct rule in 2005, but not published until April 2007. It estimated that the "upper limit" of the costs of community segregation in terms of security, public services, education, and housing amounted to about £1.5 billion annually, though only about £600 million could be directly estimated with any accuracy (Deloitte 2007, 27). The key annual costs are: £504 million extra policing costs; £24 million added to the housing bill; £10 million extra in education; £13 million for community relations; £7 million on support for victims; about £50 million in tourism losses; plus an estimated loss of some 27,600 jobs over seventeen years. It works out at under £1,000 per person in Northern Ireland per year.

Events demonstrated that British leaders were pragmatic about both the new managerialist and the normative challenge to the Agreement. The

*Shared Future* agenda was very quickly overtaken by the St. Andrews Agreement of November 2006, which led to the restoration of the power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland in May 2007. The new arrangement saw the two main “ethnic” parties, DUP and Sinn Féin, agree to form a new government under the Agreement (with some modifications). All parties to the St. Andrews Agreement were complicit in a “culture of silence” about the sectarian divide. In annex b of the St. Andrew’s Agreement, the British government promised to promote “the advancement of human rights, equality and mutual respect,” but when one examines the content of its proposals, the focus is on victims, security arrangements, and language rights (St. Andrews Agreement 2006, annex b). The British government has simply taken much of the liberal normative attack on segregation and the concerns about diseconomies off its agenda as part of the quid pro quo of reaching an agreement with Sinn Féin and the DUP to make the Agreement work. Even accessing the Deloitte report through official channels is now difficult. The policy push on a “Shared Future” was quietly “parked.” It took almost three years for the new DUP–Sinn Féin executive to produce its own policy on social transformation in the consultation exercise around the *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (July 2010). A comparison of this document with the *Shared Future* strategy reveals several significant conceptual shifts that reflect a more realistic and pragmatic understanding of Northern Ireland’s divided society. The *Programme for Cohesion* document stresses practical tasks of creating shared and safe spaces, through local community involvement. Its concern is with encouraging “mutual accommodation,” a perspective that is accepting of the ethnic divide, rather than the grand vision of “reconciliation,” and the overcoming of ethno-religious identities, inherent in *A Shared Future*. The two strategies reflect fundamentally opposed understandings of the socio-political dynamics of Northern Ireland. Cohesion assumes that “cultures” and “identities” are not only relatively fixed and enduring, but are to be valued. One of the new executive’s strategic aims is to promote “pride in who we are and confidence in our different cultural identities” (*Programme for Cohesion* 2010, 2.3). Its vision is of “an intercultural society” with any identity change occurring over the long term. The policy focus is on achieving equality of opportunity, and safe shared spaces. This contrasts with the conceptual basis of *A Shared Future*, where identities were seen as being in flux, mutable, and transformable. The Liberal critique of this policy shift on society is that the *Programme for Cohesion* reflects the goals and interests

of the “ethnic blocs” in the “reification of ‘cultures’” (Todd and Ruane 2010, 3–4).

### **Coexistence over Reconciliation**

Reconciliation is a contested term with multiple meanings, the use of which is disfigured by ambiguous jargon. For some advocates reconciliation is essentially a process, while for others it is the end stage of a process (D. Bloomfield 2006). The spectrum of reconciliation ranges from a pragmatic, worldly kind of “peaceful coexistence” to the nirvana of religious “harmony.” For many activists engaged in the area of reconciliation, however, coexistence is viewed negatively, even akin to a form of benign apartheid (Kelly and Hamber 2005; Hamber and Kelly 2005). In fact we can distinguish between two influential process-based approaches: the secular and the religious. We see direct influences on the conceptualization and jargon of policy approaches to reconciliation in Northern Ireland in the period after 2000 from the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in Stockholm and the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in New York City. The concept of building a “shared future,” and the idea that reconciliation involves a “process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future,” seems to have been transferred into British policy documents from these sources (Bloomfield, Barnes, and Huyse 2003, 12). The faith-based psychocultural version is most closely associated with John Paul Lederach, who has by now achieved the status akin to a guru in this field. There is also a great deal of overlap in the rhetoric of the secular and the religious approaches.

Community relations activists and professionals working in Northern Ireland have vigorously promoted a narrative that holds that the Agreement would have been impossible without their decades of work on legal and social justice, and equality and dialogue (Fitzduff 2001, 256). However, there is a tendency to gloss over the unpalatable realities about reconciliation work in Northern Ireland: that “community relations” was highly politicized and securitized as part of the British government’s strategy for managing the conflict, that British army “community relations” units created deep mistrust among Catholics, that civil society organizations were overwhelmingly polarized on sectarian grounds, and that much of the effort was grounded in churches and religious organizations, with the dialogue

between government, political parties, and paramilitaries facilitated most effectively by religious figures. Perhaps reflecting the relative strength of religious organizations working in the fields of reconciliation, community relations, and mediation in Northern Ireland, it is Lederach’s work that has most informed practitioners since the mid-1990s. A committed Mennonite Christian, Lederach drew on his experience as a mediator in Central America to develop a thesis on “conflict transformation.” His stress on the concept of “transformation” is concerned with developing reconciliation in society and among individuals, far beyond the parameters entailed in institutional conflict resolution designs (Lederach 1997; 1999; and 2003). This discourse also shaped secular currents on “social transformation.” Lederach’s work is driven by Christian notions of nonviolence, mutual respect, and peace building through dialogue. Since being first invited to Northern Ireland in 1995 as part of the discussions surrounding the EU’s Peace and Reconciliation I program, Lederach’s work has been enormously influential in shaping the discourse about reconciliation. Lederach’s vision of “conflict transformation” has also infiltrated the public policy arena through project funding, for this is also a philosophy of social activism for practitioners. It requires a core of enlightened believers who will push the “conflict transformation” process along.

The substantive content to the notion of “conflict transformation” is less easy to discern. Lederach criticizes the “narrowness of resolution approaches” because while they may solve problems in the short term they do not create a dynamic of “constructive change.” Whereas prominent critics of consociationalism (Taylor, Wilson, Wilford, Dixon, and others) focus their ire precisely on how its institutional design embeds ethnic blocs in power, Lederach is largely unconcerned with the institutional outcomes to peacemaking. But what kind of “constructive change” does Lederach envisage? This is never fully explained; rather Lederach loosely uses ill-defined concepts such as building positive “relationships,” “changing lives for the better,” and building “capacities which are creative, responsive, constructive, and non-violent” (Lederach 2003, 69, 70). Lederach’s philosophy places faith in dialogue at its core and appears to be a reformulation of the Christian humanist idea that by “bringing people together” in a process of dialogue it is possible to overcome divisions irrespective of their nature, structure, or material basis.

In the case of Northern Ireland, the confusion over the meanings of reconciliation has been accentuated by the fact that there is a range of

advocates of reconciliation. We can usefully distinguish four main categories of reconciliation actors in Northern Ireland. First, given the salience of religious identity and the organizational power of churches, it is no surprise that there have been faith-based approaches to reconciliation since the mid-1960s. The foundation of the ecumenical religious community at Corrymeela in 1965 provided a combination of neutral haven and forum for dialogue, and a network of religious activists committed to reconciliation throughout the “Troubles”. Religious figures have also played a significant role as mediators at key junctures in the peace process. Second, there have been secular ideological advocates of three main types: leftists (mainly trades unionists, and community and voluntary sector activists), women’s groups, and liberal intellectuals (mainly university academics and journalists). Third, there is an interest-based approach to reconciliation from businesses, state agencies, and local government professionals. Whereas the previous categories are principally value driven, which is to say that they are motivated by an altruistic concern with building a more tolerant society through notions of “outreach,” the third category is mainly impelled by a functional imperative to enact government legislation and policy preferences concerning nondiscrimination, promoting good relations, and security, and with grappling with the diseconomies of the conflict and the divided society.

A fourth category of actors emerged in the latter stages of the “Troubles” and is composed of what we may term the “mediation” professionals. This includes NGOs and consultancy firms engaged in promoting the concept of “mediation” and “dialogue” and disseminating international mediation best practices within Northern Ireland. This group has been most active in chasing large (though diminishing) pots of UK, Irish, EU, and international funds. In totality these four categories encapsulated that part of “civil society” in Northern Ireland that was active in the field of reconciliation. Moreover, this sector too reflected the parallel organization of society. The duration of the Northern Ireland conflict over some thirty years despite the efforts of these groups is a powerful testament to the weak capacity of “civil society” independently to mitigate conflicts in deeply divided societies.

Peacemaking is a business, and something akin to a salariat has emerged in the reconciliation sector. By the time of the Agreement, according to official figures, there were approximately five thousand voluntary and community organizations alone in Northern Ireland, which provided employment to some thirty-three thousand people. By this stage of the conflict,

there were more people engaged in this sector than were employed in manufacturing. At this time, the gross annual income for the sector was estimated to be around £500 million (*Consultation Document on Funding* 2000, 3). Of the four main sources of funding for peace building and reconciliation (direct grants from the UK government; the EU’s Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland, which includes six border counties of Ireland [hereafter referred to as the Peace Programme]; the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and the Atlantic Philanthropies (a foundation of US entrepreneur Chuck Feeney), the Peace Programme is the most significant.

Established by the European Commission in 1995 following the first cease-fires, the peace program was backed by Jacques Delors (commission president in 1993–94) as an opportunity to build EU institutional power and capacity in conflict resolution. The program has evolved in three sequential stages: Peace I (1995–99), Peace II (2000–2004) and the Peace II Extension (2005–6), and Peace III (2007–13). Northern Ireland received £640 million in EU funding through the programs in the period 1995–2006. Between 1986 and 2004, the IFI provided funding totaling over £465 million, and the Atlantic Philanthropies funding totaled £230 million between 1982 and 2004 (Deloitte 2007, 24–27). The grand total for the period from the early 1980s to 2006 is approximately £1.35 billion—about the same amount as Deloitte’s estimate of the “costs of the ‘Troubles.’” A further 333 million was provided under Peace III, and Northern Ireland has received hundreds of millions of euros through other programmes related to its status as an “Objective 1” region. This funding has not only extended the life of community relations organizations but has also helped to sustain economic life in working-class ghettos, where project funds are normally brokered and distributed by political organizations and former paramilitary organizations (or both). Many of these projects involve former prisoners. Equally, the funding has created a new professionalized, and somewhat parasitical, private sector “mediation” business, and facilitated the integration of the managing cadre of that sector into the international peace and reconciliation industry. The discourse and practices of the sector in Northern Ireland cannot be understood without reference to international developments in this field. The influence of Lederach on framing practitioner mindsets is one important source of internationalization; another is the theoretical and policy influence of the ICTJ, established in 2001.

Based around legal practitioners and human rights activists with experience of democratization and “dirty wars” in South America, South Africa, the Balkans, and elsewhere, the ICTJ has shaped international policy approaches to transitional justice in postconflict societies. This kind of internationalization could be usefully connected to McGarry and O’Leary’s analysis of the political accommodation in Northern Ireland. If we examine the accommodation in Northern Ireland through the lens of transitional justice, we would expect to see significant developments along four key dimensions: restorative justice (essentially—trials: punishing perpetrators, ensuring impunity does not go unpunished), reparations (supporting victims and securing compensation), truth seeking (normally through a “truth commission,” public hearings, eliciting statements of regret and wrongdoing, developing a consensus narrative and a culture of forgiveness), and finally institutional reform (primarily in the field of security and civil-military relations).

The transitional justice thesis is that addressing its formulations is essential for the successful move to a postconflict stable society, and the best mechanism for guaranteeing that there is no return to violence. There are many aspects of the Agreement that suggest that transitional justice issues were marginal to the political accommodation. For example, there was, unusually for our times, a de facto amnesty for perpetrators in Northern Ireland (officially termed the “accelerated release scheme”). The few major investigations of past atrocities are bogged down, inconclusive, and expensive. As the Bloomfield report noted, even the issue of who is a “victim” is highly contentious in Northern Ireland (K. Bloomfield 1998). Victims’ commissioners have been appointed, and some £44 million of public money had been allocated to support victims’ groups between 1998 and 2011; however, the issue has been peripheralized politically because of its contentious nature.

The tentative, and some would say cynical, approach of the politicians to transitional justice issues is evident in widespread criticism among British political elites of the Bloody Sunday enquiry (1998–2010), largely but not solely focusing on its cost of approximately £400 million. The enquiry’s “Saville report” of June 2010 concluded that the killings by British paratroopers in Derry in January 1972 were “unjustifiable” and that soldiers had repeatedly lied to cover the war crime, leading to an unreserved apology from the British prime minister, David Cameron (*Report of the Bloody Sunday Enquiry* 2010; Cameron 2010). Peter Hain’s establishment in 2007

of a consultative group of “wise persons” led by former Church of Ireland head Lord Eames to make recommendations about how the past might be best managed appears to have been motivated by the aim of keeping truth recovery off the agenda, for as Hain put it: “Recent political progress in Northern Ireland should make us pause and ask whether re-living or even re-fighting the “Troubles” in the court room or the public inquiry or through police investigation is really a healthy way forward. Whether a focus on identifying issues which happened over 30 years ago at a time of terrible conflict is productive for a society which has, after May 8 2007, resolved that conflict politically. And whether the hundreds of millions of pounds involved could not be better spent on the future” (Hain 2007b, 8).

The Consultative Group on the Past saw its mission as one that tied “lasting peace and prosperity” to a “comprehensive process” for dealing with “legacy” issues relating to the “Troubles”. Its final report, delivered in January 2009, made a number of recommendations including the creation of an independent Legacy Commission akin to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which would have an international head and a budget of £100 million. The proposal was overshadowed by its most controversial proposal: that the government should make “recognition payments” of £12,000 (i.e., compensation) to all those who lost relatives, without distinction (Consultative Group on the Past 2009). This attempt to sidestep the question of “who is a victim” was seized on by opponents of truth recovery. Following a highly critical consultation exercise, the British government quietly “parked” the report. Political parties and public opinion are sharply divided across both communities on the issue of a truth commission. The British government and the administration led by DUP and Sinn Féin have been reluctant to fully address “truth” issues in open public debate. This is despite the generally positive response to the Bloody Sunday enquiry report. No doubt, it is not simply economic costs that act as the deterrent to such investigations of the past, or that the nature of the “dirty war” in Northern Ireland makes the protagonists wary of the reputational costs that would follow from any serious wholesale investigation of the past. But also it is the fact that the issue of dealing with past, competing narratives about the conflict, and controversies of power displays of ritual and identity, remain immensely contentious and that the political elites recognize they cannot move on these issues too far ahead of their constituencies. By appointing an outsider in July 2013, U.S. diplomat Richard Haass, as chairman of the new Stormont all-party group to deal with the contentious issues of flags,



parades, and the past, the governing parties in Northern Ireland aim to renegotiate ritual from without, once again bypassing society just as the Agreement itself did.

## Conclusion

In reflecting on the *pro et contra* debate over peace and reconstruction in Northern Ireland, I have argued here that a more fruitful analytical approach is not to disaggregate the institutional peacemaking elements from the complex social structure of the divided society and the challenges it poses to postconflict transformation and reconciliation. For while the intricate details of the consociational moment—the institutionally engineered “fixes” of the Belfast Agreement and the St. Andrews Agreement—are comprehensively analyzed by many, there are several key levels of analysis that are unsatisfactorily addressed: the skewed packaging of the “model” by politicians, the erratic management of social change, and the question of episodic managerial and technocratic challenges to the Agreement.

It is an open question whether Northern Ireland constitutes a new “model” or “blueprint” for conflict resolution and postconflict reconstruction as regards its consociational institutional engineering and elite accommodation. The major lesson that policy makers claim to have drawn from this case is that even the most protracted conflicts can be ended, and that a realpolitik “dialogue” with the extremes, when bounded by commitments to nonviolent means, can pay dividends for peacemaking. This packaging downplays the irreplaceable value of consociational institutional engineering to building trust and accommodation among the main parties and their leaderships in particular, even in the absence of a wider societal reconciliation or pursuit of transitional justice. The critics of consociationalism and the advocates of conflict transformation approaches argue that the reconstruction of a polarized society into a more “shared” and integrated one is obstructed by the new impediments of ethnic power allocation under consociationalism, precisely because communal coexistence is copperfastened and a thicker societal reconciliation or transitional justice mechanisms are not on the agenda. Here I have attempted to refocus attention on the structural determinants of consociationalism in Northern Ireland. One of the core structural features of the divided society, residential segregation, has been analyzed to illustrate how the divided identities are a product of the settler colonial foundation of state and society in Northern

Ireland and its consolidation over centuries. Residential segregation was also further reinforced by the British state’s securitization policy from the very onset of the “Troubles.” The divided identities and parallel communities of Northern Ireland are at root a product of colonial authoritarian social engineering and its construction of power asymmetries. Top-down social engineering in today’s democratic environment, even under conditions of greater equity and levelling of those power asymmetries, is unlikely to easily or quickly undo the divide and achieve the kind of social transformation aspired to by the critics of the Agreement. For the latter are normatively repelled not only by the institutionalization of ethnonational identity in the architecture of government, but by the profundity of nationalist cleavages and the democratic legitimacy of nationalist parties (whether Irish or British Unionist), and the very persistence of ethnonational identity itself.

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