NORTHERN IRELAND –
PEACE WITHOUT RECONCILIATION

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Abstract

Recent events in Northern Ireland suggest that peace has finally been achieved and a new era of improved inter-community relations has commenced. However, the conditions within which the major communities experience antagonistic relations have not been displaced but entrenched within the new political dispensation. Through an exploration of what reconciled relationships might demand it is apparent that whilst peace has been achieved the promise of reconciliation has yet to be realised.

On 8 May 2007, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, Rev Dr Ian Paisley joined Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein on a shared platform at Stormont Government buildings in East Belfast. The polysemic symbolism of the event, staged as a media spectacle, suggested a wide range of different ways to interpret its significance despite considerable energy expended by civil servants, journalists, politicians and others to fix the proceedings as an 'historic breakthrough', 'a symbolic end to the Troubles' or the 'new dawn of a reconciled Northern Ireland'.[1]

Paisley, eighty years old, and an internationally recognisable figure, has been widely identified with both the cause and course of what has been labelled euphemistically 'the Troubles', a period of violence and political turmoil experienced over the past forty-five years.[2] McGuinness, who had once been the young Irish republican activist from the Bogside district in the northern city of Derry/Londonderry[3] had himself come to the world's attention in the aftermath of 'Bloody Sunday', an event in which thirteen civilians had been killed by the British Army following a civil rights demonstration in 1972. Whilst Paisley formed his own party in 1971 to challenge the hegemony of the Official Unionist Party (subsequently renamed the Ulster Unionist Party – the UUP), which had been in power from the formation of developed local government[4] in 1921 until its suspension in 1972, McGuinness had joined the Provisional Irish Republican Army in 1970 and, so it has been asserted, had a seat on the PIRA's Army Council for much of the past three decades.[5] During this time the organisation had engaged in a violent struggle to stymie any attempt to return to Stormont rule, remove partition and dissolve Northern Ireland into a united Ireland.

These individual profiles are of importance because both exemplify and, in turn, have been active in shaping many of the contours of Northern Ireland's recent past. It is tempting to render both as complex ciphers through a jagged and complex relationship between competing nationalisms, ethnicities, ideologies or political projects that have been encoded. Each represented, in a highly condensed form, opposing visions of Northern Ireland or the 'six occupied counties' with Paisley seeking to copper fasten the Union with Great Britain and McGuinness seeking to secure a thirty-two county Irish Republic.

Viewed from a distance they appear as natural representatives of two nationalised communities each ranged against the other: The British in Ulster and the Irish of the north of Ireland locked into an endlessly repetitive struggle freighted with considerable historical weight. Drawing closer it becomes clearer that both ought to be recognised as representative of more obdurate tendencies within each of the respective communities from which support is drawn. Paisley's DUP, was the smaller political party in terms of electoral support assuming a dominant position within Ulster unionism in 2005 by supplanting the UUP led by David Trimble. McGuinness, is a prominent member of a political party tied by umbilical cord to a paramilitary organisation – PIRA – which only began to emerge as a serious force following the 'political turn' of the Republican Movement precipitated by the success of mass mobilisations in support of hunger strikes, in the pursuit of political status, waged by Republican prisoners in the Maze prison in 1981. Twenty-five years later Sinn Fein had displaced the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), led by John Hume, as the main representative of the northern nationalist community.[6]

A decoding of the symbolics at play on the platform at Stormont could also make much of how each represented political tendencies that had resolutely opposed previous, state sponsored, initiatives to reconvene inter-community relationships with Northern Ireland and between Ireland and the United Kingdom. New governmental structures had been proposed in the past; the Sunningdale Agreement in 1973 and the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 to name but two, both of which had been met by strenuous resistance mounted by both Sinn Fein and the DUP whose chosen means of protest had frequently gone well beyond trading reasoned debating points or peaceful public assemblies. By contrast Sinn Fein had taken an active negotiating position in shaping the Belfast Agreement in 1998.[7] Paisley's party had remained implacably opposed to an initiative that was characterised as having not only conceded much too much to Irish Republicans but also rendered the Union substantially weaker.

Whilst not widely entertained within the mass media's interpretation of the Stormont event, a rather more 'hard nosed' or realist reading, shared by many residing in Northern Ireland itself was to enquire what the conflict of the past forty

years had actually been about. More specifically, how over 3,500 people had lost their lives; approximately 47,000 significant injuries had been sustained; 37,000 shooting and 16,000 shooting incidents had been recorded only to see representatives of those who could be said to bear a heavy responsibility for the injuries done and quality of life compromised, ending up sharing the spoils of power?

Another, perhaps more nuanced reading, might assert that it required precisely those who had pursued the more fundamentalist political projects, and provoked others to acts of violence to buy into the Belfast Agreement and bring their respective constituencies with them, that was the only way of securing stability governed by a set of agreed rules of conduct that could eventually bring 'the Troubles' to a verifiable conclusion.

From the vantage point of May 2007, much had indeed been achieved which, seen within the long duree of the North's history signified real progress beyond the remorseless inter-community antagonisms of the past. It would be churlish to downplay, still less to dismiss, the signs of progress which had been reflected in a dramatic decline in violent death or injury largely arising out of the cessation of paramilitary activities as well as the return of British troops to barracks and their eventual redeployment elsewhere in the world. During the accompanying period there has also been a perceptible modification of many material practices and related discourses which have created the space for new, less antagonistic relationships to emerge and an experiment in partnership government to commence. Further, the Belfast Agreement had promoted a significant recalibration of inter-state relationships between Britain and Ireland which has diluted the zero-sum calculations which almost invariably attend issues of sovereignty. Within Northern Ireland itself there have been hard fought reforms of major institutions including the Police Service (formerly the Protestant dominated Royal Ulster Constabulary), the introduction of tough anti-discrimination legislation placed on the statute book as well as the establishment of an Equality and Human Rights Commission and other institutions intended to oversee the successful amelioration of the previous causes of conflict.

At the centre of this changing landscape stand those political institutions established by the Belfast Agreement which reactivated devolved government in Northern Ireland, after many fits and starts, in April 2007. In essence, the Agreement provided for the establishment of a power-sharing executive which was to administer government departments on the basis of proportionality measured by the electoral strength of the parties secured through local Assembly elections. This consociational arrangement was materialised in a 108-seat Assembly with duel leadership embodied in the posts of the First Minister (Ian Paisley) and Deputy First

Minister (Martin McGuinness). The decision-making mechanism within the Assembly rests on parallel procedures of inter-community consent which requires that key issues can only be determined by the Assembly if there is an overall majority plus one of those designated as nationalist or unionist when the vote is taken.

Peace without Reconciliation

Less than two weeks after the Stormont event had been concluded the Northern Ireland Office announced that a new twenty-five feet-high 'Peace Wall' was to be erected in the grounds of a school in north Belfast.[8] This security barrier was judged necessary to impede the frequently violent exchanges which have continued to characterise relationships between nationalist and unionist communities particularly in this part of the city. It joined one of forty-six other 'Peace Walls' and eleven fortified gates, which act to control the flow of people from one location to another and total approximately thirteen miles in length. Of further significance was that this new edition to the local security apparatus – aimed at separating antagonistic communities – was one of many erected during the course of the 'Peace Process'. The number of 'Peace Walls' deemed necessary had risen from eighteen in the early 1990s to their present level. A further ironic twist to these developments was that the grounds through which the barrier was to be erected belonged to Hazelwood Primary School, an integrated educational institution catering to pupils from both major ethnic communities in the north, in a region where approximately 95 per cent of children attend state schools (almost exclusively Protestant in Background) or maintained schools (exclusively Catholic).

This event, like many others which could be cited, provides an important symbolic counterpoint to the appearance of partnership, cooperation and consensual relationships projected by the resumption of devolved government at Stormont. Moving away from an institutional and party political account of the present state of Northern Ireland, critical questions can be raised in relation to the quality of peace and reconciliation as well as the nature of inter-community relationships, social processes and social forces which can either enhance or circumscribe the prospects of a genuinely reconciled society.

Despite undoubted progress, the North remains a deeply divided society which has yet to come to terms with the bitter legacy of violence and frequently destructive inter-ethnic competition. In a place where the parading of cultural difference is both widespread and forthright, high levels of inter-community mistrust remain and residential and educational segregation determines important aspects of the lives of a significant majority of the population. In a recent case study of the city of Belfast, Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh highlight an urban space within which;

> … the majority of persons from a Catholic or Protestant background live in places that are at least 81 per cent Catholic or Protestant. Just over two-thirds of Catholics (67.3 per cent) and 73 per cent of Protestants live in such places. A mere 10.7 per cent of Catholics and 7.0 [per cent] of Protestants live in places that are between 41 [per cent] and 60 per cent Catholic or Protestant, places that could be described as mixed.[9]

As the authors assert, the period of the 'Peace Process' has not seen any substantial decline in the occupational or segregated spaces which remain the crucial sites for the reproduction of antagonistic difference. So, whilst there has been a significant decline in the numbers of people killed, frequently taken as a crude mono-dimensional index of peace, violence has not been wished away but transformed into violence perpetrated at the interface between segregated communities, attacks on symbolic targets, or the felt need to police boundaries.

The attachment to mono-ethnicised space appears to have remained as resolute as it was during the most intense periods of violence experienced in the 1970s. So, whilst Northern Ireland has witnessed a considerable amount of effort being expended on officially sponsored peace-building efforts over the past decade, this has also been accompanied by frequent acts of intimidation, street violence and widespread instances of territorial disputes between local communities.

There are a range of factors which can be identified as making a significant contribution to maintaining and reproducing segregated space. In the first instance, it is important to acknowledge that the felt need expressed by many who reside in mono-ethnic communities to articulate demands for the maintenance and, in some instances, extension of boundary-making practices and/or physical barriers, is real enough. This is frequently couched in a discourse that identifies fear of the other and the potential of contamination which would follow if unhindered contact with the hostile outsider was permitted to proceed.

Boundary-making practices and related discourses not only have the consequence of casting potential inter-community contact in a decidedly negative light as potentially threatening the physical or ideological integrity of a community, but they also serve to create the perceived necessity to police the community and impose internal homogeneity. Demand for continued segregation, rooted in an expression of fear, also supplies a justificatory logic for the continued functioning of paramilitary organisations even after, in some instances, a formal cessation of violence has been publicly declared. This is neatly encapsulated by the watch words, incorporated within wall murals extolling the virtues of the loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force: 'Prepared for Peace – Ready for War'.

Consent for the imposition of internal unity on the community has also been a task ceded to organised paramilitary groups resulting in the intimidation of those who have been judged to step out of line by either questioning the authority – as those appointed as the custodians of the community's integrity – or demonstrating practically that not all inter-community relations need proceed on the basis of anxiety, fear or inevitable conflict.

Yet, the continued maintenance of segregated spaces in Northern Ireland has rested on the experience of fear, whether designated as real or imagined. From the perspective of a wide variety of what can be designated as 'ethnic entrepreneurs', segregated space is a bankable asset through which significant capital can be derived. A shared commitment to a particular space of this nature enables the transcendence of other, potentially competing forms, of internal differentiation; engenders a sense of unity and common purpose, and under girds the experience of a common identity. Within the political arena which pertains in Northern Ireland, where identity politics based on a complex combination of ethnicity, nationalism and religion remains paramount, the continued reproduction of segregated space is a necessary correlate of dominant forms of political discourse.   As Shirlow and Murtagh observe:

> … disparate ideological and discursive boundaries between these [segregated] communities are maintained by a determined lack of interaction across 'interfaces' that physically replicate these discursive edges.[10]

What can be identified here is the mutual constitution of segregated spaces and exclusivist discourses which, as we shall see later, serve to undermine free, fair and open dialogue, a necessary aspect of reconciliatory process. Importantly, space is not to be understood crudely as a container within which separatist ideologies can be successfully sustained but also as productive of a sense of radical difference with the other and serves to prioritise the need to exert special control in the face of any challenge.

What has also been characteristic of the politics which has accompanied the trajectory of the 'Peace Process' over the course of the past fifteen years has been the demonstrable potency of both unionist and loyalist, nationalist and republican narratives of violence, harm and the apportioning of responsibility which draws on conflicting narratives of the past. A prominent example of this has been the considerable energy expended, in conditions where lethal violence has abated, to effect a strict separation between the bone fide victim, identifiable agents of harm and the apparently irresistible desire to wear the mantle of victimhood.

The appearance of internal unity does not only rest on the maintenance of a clearly delineated space within which a homogeneous community is said to reside,

but on an imputed history and an assertion of historical depth, within which a clear separation is effected between the blameless victim and the guilty antagonist. What tends to be prioritised is not only the identification of the blameless victim, in the form of either an individual or a whole community, but the concomitant disavowal of the victimhood of the other. To admit otherwise would be perceived to set a dangerous precedent. The potential danger involved in conceding this status to the other is that it potentially undermines the ideological security of one's own community's self-understanding and may precipitate a gradual acceptance of responsibility for demeaning or inhuman acts and threaten the legitimacy of previously maintained positions.

The difficult transition from war to peace has not proceeded along a straight line but combines leaps forward and steps back, circulus routes of advance and frequent retreats. The termination of lethal violence has only given way to a sharper antagonism between competing communities in the struggle over scarce resources. Ironically, it can be argued that the relationship between the two major communities has in many ways worsened during a period of avowed peace-making, and has been modified to accommodate newly emerging conditions. The forms of violence now practiced have been reordered or transformed into a pattern of a quite different sort. Where, in the past, paramilitary/state confrontations determined much of the nature of violent action and response, the new conditions of peace and political settlement have been accompanied by violence of a much more overtly sectarian nature, characterised by interface rioting, boundary policing and attacks on symbolic targets. As such, the forms which the conflict now takes can be related to the accomplished fact of devolved government in Northern Ireland, a major site within which resource competition between the political representatives of the major communities each vie for advantage. The limited but important powers available to local politicians through those institutions brought into being by the Belfast Agreement is a novel departure placed within the history of Northern Ireland from its foundation in the early 1920s. The Official Unionist Party (later re-named the Ulster Unionist Party) remained the ruling party, exercising control over the local state apparatus until Stormont was prorogued in 1972 and Direct Rule from Westminster was imposed. Direct Rule continued until 2007, with intermittent, but ultimately unsuccessful, attempts to establish a power-sharing executive since 1998. With a functioning Assembly and Executive now in place, political representatives are for the first time engaged in the allocation of social, political and economic resources which had not previously been made available for distribution. With the assumption of many responsibilities by local political parties which had previously been the responsibility of Westminster and the Northern Ireland Office, together with the withdrawal of troops to their barracks, the relationship between the communities of the North have become that much more direct, and are no longer as distant as they were in the past or mediated through the practice of Direct Rule.

The juncture reached in 2007 is one in which the conflict within Northern Ireland has been successfully transformed from one characterised by lethal violence to the appearance of partnership in government. What has not been accomplished, however, is a substantive change in the nature of the communities to the conflict. Indeed, at the level of political representation the more assertive parties to the conflict have risen to prominence, and the promise of a plurality of party projects occupying an expanding space between the sectarianised politics of Irish Nationalism/Republicanism and British Unionism/Ulster Loyalism, has not been fulfilled.

It could, however, be argued that the Belfast Agreement was never presented as an effective challenge to the ethno-sectarian conflict as such. The 'Peace Process', particularly as it has been driven by the British and Irish states, has been characterised by a decidedly institutional approach to conflict management which has delivered power-sharing structures. In the process, what has simultaneously been achieved is the reinforcement of those political forces that could capitalise on the presentation of their own communities as excluded, victimised and unfulfilled in securing their just reward. In short, the Agreement did not secure anything approaching a post-nationalist settlement since it never directly challenged the basis upon which ethno-sectarian competition was constituted. What has been secured is the appearance of peace but without any substantive demonstration that the peoples of the North have engaged substantially in the difficult process of reconciliation.

The Demands Reconciliation Makes

The resumption of the power-sharing Executive in May 2007 appears to suggest that opposing political forces have at last proved willing to take those opportunities made available by the outbreak of peace in Northern Ireland and the new institutions upon which much of the hope of progress had rested. Whilst peace has now been embraced, what is much less obvious is any particular enthusiasm to meet the demands necessary to secure reconciliation.

Fixated on an institutional approach to conflict management it is possible to see the struggle in and over Northern Ireland as having now been substantially transformed. The conflict, understood according to this account, as one being driven by inequality and political exclusion has been addressed even if it might still take some time for recalcitrant communities across the North to acquiesce that peace has been delivered.

This is not to suggest that either the British or Irish state or the European Union had simply abandoned the difficult task of seeking to aid and support the process

of reconciliation as a necessary component of the 'Peace Process'. Indeed, reconciliation acquired an elevated status within the official discourses of both states, and the allocation of hundreds of millions of Euros in the form of the EU's 'Peace and Reconciliation' funding packages – distributed through intermediate funding bodies such as the Community Relations Council – demonstrated an important set of commitments. To this could be added evidence of consistent support for the promotion of partnerships between disparate communities of interest and other state sponsored initiatives encompassing cross-border projects, local Police Boards and so forth. Beyond the state, significant resources had also been made available to a wide range of civil society organisations whose work explicitly incorporated a commitment to promote reconciliation.

Despite these efforts the overwhelming evidence suggests that Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society, both segregated and sectarian. A reconciled society appears beyond grasp, suggesting that the demands which it places are just too great to meet – an unrealistic, if not utopian ambition, which would be best discarded quietly in favour of settling for an uneasy peace.

In order to judge whether this pragmatic down-grading of the priority set by some in securing reconciliation is the only realistic option available necessitates an exploration of what reconciliation might actually constitute as well as those practices, attitudes and dispositions associated with its realisation.

For some, reconciliation still carries with it the marks of its origin as an orientation promoted by faith-based organisations – a distinctly Christian theological preoccupation. Yet, since the end of the Second World War it has become evoked in a wide variety of different secular contexts and promoted as a required practice in addressing conflict arising out of a clash of interest or identity, amongst others. The task of reconciliation has been particularly widely applied in the context of attempts to resolve inter-ethnic conflict; a way of addressing colonial legacies of inequality and exclusion in a post-colonial world and in the more general promotion of more equal and less divided societies.

The appeal of reconciliation is that it approaches the sources of conflict, be it in the reproduction of differential power relations or the experience of alienation, isolation or humiliation which have conventionally been discussed through the discourse and related practices of justice, freedom and rights. However, in the context of societies such as Northern Ireland or Cyprus there is a strong suspicion that the familiar language through which the conflict and its potential settlement is articulated may not be enough. The evocation of rights and justice in particular have a marked propensity to become emptied of their meaning, hollowed out and laid claim to by those who have a distinctly proceduralist approach to issues raised by

ethnic division. Reconciliation provides an important opportunity to go well beyond the reductive use of a discourse employed in this way and helps to identify and elaborate on related objectives through which conflict and deep-seated division might be better grasped and transcendence effected.

In a striking original contribution to the literature on the role and practice of reconciliation in Northern Ireland Norman Porter has elaborated at length as to how prioritising this objective serves to acknowledge less clearly defined aspects of seeking to resolve conflicts which extend beyond or necessarily complement the full reach of justice or rights to encompass the need to promote forgiveness, apology and shame.[11] To dismiss this as a soft or unnecessary part of the politics of addressing division and conflict, so Porter argues, is to neglect crucial aspects of relationships which transpire between groups and results in the promotion of solutions which are either overly procedural or simply too limited. Neither does the prioritisation of reconciliation fail to recognise that politics frequently involves hard headed bargaining and the play of coldly calculating interest. The objection raised, however, is that if this is all that politics constitutes then all are ultimately demeaned in the process.

The potential power of reconciliation is undermined and ultimately neutralised if it is assumed that what is being demanded is a balanced compromise between contending interests which can be easily reduced to a technical challenge to be solved by the careful manoeuvring and efficient management of the parties concerned. Presented in this way, where the squaring of interests takes precedence over the evaluation of those factors which have set conflict in motion, the sources of division are only likely to remain intact. The pursuit of a more thorough-going reconciliation process appears that much more nuanced and demanding than this interpretation would suggest.

A normative reading of what reconciliation entails places an emphasis on pursuing non-instrumental practices which involve what Porter describes as the act of embrace and engagement.[12] In this context, the act of embrace seeks to acknowledge the interdependency between those who may nevertheless be different whilst engagement is characterised by honest and committed encounters with others, particularly among those with whom disagreement has occurred. In so doing, risk is entertained and a sense of vulnerability frequently entailed as each is exposed to the critical gaze of the other. In the process the virtues of magnanimity, forgiveness and reasonableness need to find an appropriate place.

In the absence of this strong conception of what reconciliation demands, it remains difficult to imagine how horizons might be expanded in such a way as to encourage recognition that the reality perceived from the position occupied, is not

the only possible valid one. It is also difficult to conceive of the successful cultivation of a shared sense of belonging and a common set of shared commitments which, whilst offering due recognition to difference, bind a common citizenry together. To interpret reconciliation and its objectives in this way does not imply a vision of a future society in which contradictions have been eradicated or tensions abated, but what it does anticipate are the grounds upon which a common space can be occupied and from within which fair interaction can proceed. It is a refusal to accept fatalistically the normalised space of division and distance, a common characteristic of societies which have experienced inter-ethnic conflict.

Judged against this vision of what the transition towards a reconciled society demands, the peoples of Northern Ireland have some considerable distance still to travel. During the course of the 'Peace Process', professed attitudes to reconciliation have frequently been directed towards outsiders in order to project the appearance of commitment in order to promote self-interest. In doing so, responsibilities for the difficulties encountered in embracing either the letter or the spirit of the Belfast Agreement are conveniently displaced onto others. Whilst the rhetoric of reconciliation is articulated, considerable energy is expended in order to ensure that when blame is eventually apportioned it becomes the recognised possession of others. A common feature of much party political manoeuvring, more general attitudes, emotions and dispositions militate against reconciliation's ambition. Indifference is forthcoming from many of those who have successfully insulated themselves from the worst consequences of the conflict. Whilst others, many of whom have experienced the conflict in a very direct and personal way, find the demands of forgiveness too great and bitterness ensues.

It is perhaps fear which is the most widely felt and variously experienced emotion that remains a pervasive impediment on reconciliation's intent. Fear, commonly expressed in relation to the potential consequences which might flow from its surrender or the fear of being subject to domination; of conceding too much to the other or the deep fear of losing ontological security in a new world of risk and uncertainty.

Northern Ireland remains a place within which fear remains an important component of ethno-sectarian logic which dictates the felt need to promote a complex series of boundaries, both discursive and physical between localised communities and thus narrowing horizons, promoting exclusivity and delivering a meagre life-world. So, whilst peace of a sort has been delivered and new power-sharing institutions have, at last, come to life, the task of reconciliation and the difficult demands it undoubtedly brings, remain to be prioritised. Whilst peace has been declared, the North is hardly at peace with itself.

A Cautionary Tale for Cyprus

It is advisable to avoid offering strict parallels between either the form or nature of inter-ethnic conflicts around the globe. The texture of the disputation, it's dynamic and trajectory, as well as those conditions arising out of history or competing political projects pursued require careful attention to detail and a very cautious approach to generalisation. That aside, there appear to be correspondences, family resemblances between many conflict zones. Unequal access to resources, fractious minority/majority relations, the attendant politics of fear and the struggle for recognition suggest a set of commonalities which bind together rather than imply distance and radical difference.

Those familiar with the Cyprus problem can undoubtedly experience a sense of familiarity with the consequences of fear, isolation, ethnicised space and the imposition of internal homogenisation within respective communities. Others might identify a dominant discourse and related practices which place considerable weight on proceduralism, state-centric conflict resolution and the crude attempt to balance contending interests identified in the case of Northern Ireland.

As a consequence, considerable energy has been expended and will continue to be expended on achieving a just and viable 'solution' but with little imagination or practical political will or the necessary resources to pursue the ideal of a reconciled society once that 'solution' has been reached. There appears a wide gulf between well meaning yet small scale intercommunity projects funded by the international community and the grand designs promoted for the establishment of a functional state architecture of the ideal solution. In the space between there appears very little evidence of the desire to pursue the objective of reconciliation, to explore a grounded process through which the possibility of engagement, reciprocity and embrace might materialise.

The 'solution' to the Cyprus problem remains invariably framed as a state-centric problem to be addressed through the creation of a new political dispensation, power sharing institutions and reconvened international relations. In the absence of a felt need to promote such practices or cultivate the will to carry them through it remains difficult to predict that Cyprus will become a reconciled society anytime soon.

Notes

1. Each of these quotes figured prominently in the press coverage provided by British and Irish newspapers on the day following the Stormont event.

2. As is common in ethno-national disputes the origin of the current conflict is an object of dispute. Some accounts specify the killing of a Catholic barman, Peter Ward, on a street off the Shankill Road in loyalist West Belfast by the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1966 as appropriate. Others point to the gathering violence surrounding the Civil Rights campaign in 1968 or the curfew imposed on nationalist West Belfast the following year as other alternatives.

3. Northern Ireland's second city is frequently named differently depending on your ethnic origin or political disposition. Unionists and loyalists adhere to its official name which invokes an historic connection with the Corporation of London whilst Nationalists and Republicans tend to refer only to Derry. To signal this conflict and complication Derry/Londonderry is also referred to as Stroke City.

4. When being tempted to offer comparisons between Northern Ireland and elsewhere it is important to bear in mind that, in terms of its political institutions, Northern Ireland was never a separate state but a form of devolved governance within the United Kingdom.

5. McGuinness has always denied, and continues to do so, his membership of the PIRA's Army Council. However, perhaps the most authoritative account of the organisation, Ed Maloney's A Secret History of the IRA (2002) London, Penguin, not only names him as a member since the mid 1970s but as the Army Council's Chair throughout much of the 'Peace Process' (see pages 378-379). Maloney has yet to face any serious legal challenge to this assertion.

6. The SDLP was, for many years, labelled as a 'constitutional nationalist party' since, whilst advocating the end of partition, it repudiated the use of violence and abided by the rules of the British political process. Historically, a clear separation was made between it and 'physical force republicanism' epitomised by Sinn Fein and the PIRA. A clear distinction between these two political tendencies is now of course less easy to perceive.

7. The name of the Agreement is also variously given according to ethnic origin or political orientation. Republicans and nationalists tend to favour the appellation 'Good Friday Agreement' whilst unionists and loyalists tend towards the 'Belfast Agreement'.

8. See Torney, K 'Peaceline plan for integrated primary' Belfast Telegraph, 23 May, 2007 at [http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/education/article2574383.ece], accessed 26 May 2007.

9. Shirlow, P. and Murtagh, B. (2006) Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City. London, Pluto Press, pp. 59-60.

10. Ibid., p. 5.

11. Porter, N. (2003) The Elusive Quest: Reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Belfast, Northern Ireland, Blackstaff Press.

12. See Porter (2003), pp. 103-111.