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## **Managing Violence and Building Peace from Below**

**Neil Jarman**

Ending an armed conflict and establishing a just, peaceful and orderly society is a complex process. There is a normative acceptance of the key stages in building the peace that is largely focused on an elite political process and which involves a declaration of ceasefires, multi-party negotiations, signing a peace agreement, holding elections to establish a new government with a degree of popular legitimacy, beginning the process of reform of key institutions and perhaps addressing issues of accountability for the violence and meeting the needs of the victims. This work usually focuses on ensuring the involvement of local political leaders and the various key parties to the conflict, and is often dependent on the support of sections of the international community. Sometimes the process involves the active involvement of wider sections of the community, but often these are treated as relatively passive actors, and it is (questionably) assumed that benefits of peace will naturally trickle down to the wider population. Having held elections, established a new government and begun the process of reform it is assumed that the bulk of the work has been achieved. At this point the international community generally turns its gaze elsewhere and assumes that the process of peace-building will continue under its own momentum.

However, few if any transitions from conflict follow such a normative pathway. Elite-led political and institutional reform is necessarily only one part of a much longer and wide ranging process of conflict transformation and rebuilding the fabric of society. Political transitions are often stuttering or faltering affairs, with ceasefires breaking down, or other forms of violence undermining confidence and fostering suspicion. The transition from violent conflict to sustainable peace is rarely smooth or simple. The reality is that armed conflict impacts on the totality of a society. It changes attitudes as well as behaviour. It fractures relationships, destroys trust and creates a legacy of fear, hostility and insecurity. This may be directed towards the state as well as people associated with other factions or communities, and is particularly the case where the conflict involved violence between

different ethnic groups. The experience of living through a violent conflict leaves both an individual and a social legacy that takes a considerable time to address.

The impact of violent conflict through all levels of society in turn means that all levels of society must be involved in the process of transition, or at the very least should realise some benefits from the move away from violence. At one level this may simply involve a process of conflict management that results in the ending or reduction of military violence. At a more sustainable level it may involve a wider process of conflict transformation, which aims to address the root causes of the conflict.

John Paul Lederach's work has highlighted that reality of building peace is a long and uneven process rather than simply delivering a series of outputs or meeting specific targets (Lederach 1997). Sustainable peacebuilding involves rebuilding both horizontal and vertical relationships between different sections of the community (between for example rival or competing ethnic groups, ex-combatants and victims, as well as between communities and the apparatus of the state). Lederach also highlights the role of middle ranking leaders in the process of peacebuilding as individuals who can act as a bridge between the elite and the grassroots, although in smaller scale societies and in contexts where ethnicity is the key point of both solidarity and fracture, greater emphasis may be placed on the role of grassroots activists and leaders in helping to build relationships and deal with tensions. There is a growing acknowledgement that a successful transition needs to be a broadly inclusive process, with a need for a sustained and engaged progress, over a considerable period of time, working on several different levels (elite, grassroots, economic, institutional reforms) and broadly in parallel at the same time. This does not mean that progress must happen simultaneously across all sectors, but rather that different sectors may drive a process at different times.

Armed conflict is based on the premise that use of violence is an acceptable means of progressing political aspirations, and the state monopoly of the legitimate use of force no longer holds. Violence thus becomes a generalised tool that is accessible to all, and may be more widely acceptable, or at least tolerated. During an armed conflict the threshold for using force, or for the justification for the use of violence, drops and the scope of political violence increases. And once the use of force has been broadly accepted as legitimate for political ends, it can be difficult to re-establish the state's monopoly. To do so not only involves creating a legitimate and broadly accepted state apparatus, but also to challenge the culture

that has developed and which regards violence as an appropriate means of resolving problems and disputes.

One of the challenges that many transitions from armed conflict often face is dealing with ongoing or newly emergent forms of violence (Darby 2006; Lowe 2012). These may take the form of military violence by spoilers or others opposed to the peace process; it may be tactical violence designed to exert pressure on negotiators; it may be acts of revenge or retribution; it may involve an increase in acts of criminal violence; incidents of anti-social behaviour by young people; or tension and disorder between rival ethnic communities. Challenging the culture of violence may be more difficult in a political climate of uncertainty, where politicians defend past actions or blame each other for the conflict, where those who have died in the conflict are honoured and treated as heroes and where the rule of law has yet to be re-established. The formal ending of a conflict may not mean the end to violence, rather the process of transition from war to peace may lead to a void in authority and order that is filled by lower levels of violence and disorder.

One of the key elements of peacebuilding therefore involves confronting the local culture of violence, rebuilding the capacity and legitimacy of structures of authorities and re-establishing the rule of law. Although the normative view is that policing and order management is the responsibility of the state, it may be necessary and appropriate during a period of transition to explore broader options as to how to manage tensions, reduce violence and re-establish a sense of order and respect for the rule of law.

This paper presents two extended case studies from Northern Ireland to discuss how the challenge of post conflict violence has been addressed. It considers how inter-communal and paramilitary violence in Ireland has been addressed through the work of ex-combatants, community workers and the police and how such work has helped re-build relationships, create trust and thus provide a firmer foundation for the wider conflict transformation process.

### **From Armed Conflict to Peace**

The conflict in Northern Ireland lasted for 25 years from 1969 to 1994. The armed violence was brought to a formal end when the main paramilitary organisations declared ceasefire and this initiated the public 'peace process'. This involved multi-party negotiations which in turn led to a peace agreement being signed in 1998 and which was ratified by a referendum in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This was followed by elections to a devolved

parliament with an executive that included the four largest political parties. The Agreement also provided for a Human Rights Commission, an Equality Commission, established an independent review of policing and the criminal justice system and provided for the release from prison of politically motivated prisoners. The process was designed to ensure the involvement of representatives of all the main political parties, as well as the political representatives of the main paramilitary organisations. It was driven in part by the British and Irish governments, with support from the US government, while Northern Ireland received substantial financial investment from the European Union and other sources.

The peace process had largely followed the normative path from war to peace with a focus on engaging the political elite and agreeing a process of institutional reform. There was some engagement with the broader population through the process of the negotiations and European Union funding was made available to help develop grassroots peace-building, but there was also a large constituency who were sceptical about the benefits of peace. In large part this was due to the fact that there was no clear outcome to the conflict. There was no clear winner or loser, both sides claimed some sort of victory, but each was expected to give up some of their core demands. Each side contained people who argued that the 'war' should have continued. There was also an acknowledgment that while the violence had ended the conflict itself had not, it had merely shifted from a militarised conflict to a political one, and from the streets to the debating chamber. Although the politicians negotiated the Agreement little trust was established between rival parties, and in particular with politicians who had been actively involved in the conflict. This limited the scope for any form of public reconciliation between former opponents, and prevented any of the political leaders from transcending their narrow political constituency to take on a statesmanlike role.

The Agreement and the political parties received broad public support through the ballot box for their work, but there remained considerable tensions within the wider society. The peace process largely ended the campaign of military violence (although the paramilitary ceasefires were broken on a number of occasions), but it was marked by an increase in other forms of violence and disorder, which at times threatened to undermine the nascent peace. In particular the late 1990s were marked by recurrent cycles of sectarian rioting in response to the annual calendar of commemorative parades and also by a growing number of 'punishment' attacks by members of the various paramilitary organisations. This violence created regular fears about the viability of the peace process and raised concerns about safety, security and the legitimacy of the police.

These tensions meant that the Agreement ignored or avoided addressing a number of key issues that were central to the conflict. There was no reference to the sectarian divisions at the heart of Northern Irish society, nor any plan to address the high levels of social segregation that existed between Protestants and Catholics. And although the Agreement did require the decommissioning of weapons by the paramilitary organisations, there was limited capacity (or will) to enforce this, and more importantly there was no plan for a wider process of demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration that would ensure that the paramilitary organisations would be dissolved. These two factors have remained as significant problems in the fourteen years since the Agreement was signed and have posed considerable challenges for those involved in working to consolidate the peace.

One of the challenges in addressing the issue of paramilitarism is that the paramilitary organisations were not physically isolated or separate from the remainder of the community, but rather their members lived within the segregated residential areas. Paramilitarism was, and is, a core feature of many working class communities, and the organisations were strongly embedded in local culture, society and politics. The organisations were illegal, but individual members lived as part of the community and while some were also involved in criminal activities, many were involved in forms of community and political activity. This was particularly the case with people who had spent time in prison who had a prominent status in many communities and which gave them a level of authority to argue for peace, for building relations with the 'other side' and for engaging with the state.

A further issue was the lack of legitimacy of the police within many working class communities and which impacted on its ability to perform of neutral role as upholder of law and order. Following the creation of Northern Ireland in 1921 the police, then known as the Royal Ulster Constabulary and overwhelmingly Protestant in composition, were often in the front line of defending the Protestant state and restricting the rights of Catholics. During the conflict the RUC became increasingly militarised and acted in the front line against paramilitaries of both communities. Reform of the police was thus a core demand of the Catholic nationalist political parties and the human rights community. This occurred in 2001 when the Police Service of Northern Ireland replaced the PSNI. However, reform is one thing, but building trust and establishing the rule of law are other matters entirely and after reform the police still faced a major challenge in building their credibility and establishing relationships in working class communities.

Therefore while the political negotiations represented one dimension of the peace process, another dimension was the challenge of responding and reducing tensions at grass roots level, preventing outbreaks of violence and establishing the rule of law. The two processes often functioned in parallel and symbiotic manner. From a negative perspective political rhetoric often served to raise fears at grass roots level and thus increase inter-communal tensions, while the increase in tensions which led to outbreaks of violence served to undermine political progress and encourage sectarian rhetoric. In contrast when the tensions were managed and outbreaks of violence prevented, the political elite were reassured, which gave them confidence to take further steps to help consolidate the peace. Thus the process of peacebuilding oscillated between optimism and pessimism as the focus shifted from high level politics to tensions on the streets, from the political parties to the paramilitaries.

The remainder of this paper will briefly explore two of the main issues that have provided a challenge to building a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. Sectarian rioting and disorder associated with residential segregation and historical commemorations and the violence used by the paramilitary organisations to impose order in their communities. The paper describes the nature of these two problems and the work that has been developed as a response.

### **Inter-communal Divisions and Violence**

The north of Ireland is a divided and polarised society. The Protestant community traces its roots to the arrival of settlers from England and Scotland in the seventeenth century and emphasises its British identity, they are known as ‘unionists’ or ‘loyalists’ due to their desire to remain part of the United Kingdom. The Catholic community in contrast identifies as Irish and they are known as ‘nationalists’ or ‘republicans’ because of their aspiration to have a single state or united Ireland, with the removal of all links to Britain. The recent conflict was just the most recent of a number of political campaigns and armed rebellions that have taken place since the late eighteenth century in the cause of unified Irish state. In 1921 Ireland was partitioned by the British. The majority of the island became an independent state with its capital in Dublin, while the six counties of Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland was dominated by the Protestant unionist community, and the minority Catholic community were treated as second class citizens. A non-violent civil rights movement for equality in the 1960s was precursor to the violence that erupted in 1969.

Since partition in 1921 the two communities have lived largely parallel lives. Working class residential areas, in particular, are largely segregated; most children go to segregated schools;

the two communities read different newspapers and play different sports, while political parties are divided along ethno-national lines. There are no common or shared symbols, public events or commemorations. The conflict only served to exacerbate and deepen the divisions between the two communities and as the violence intensified the government built a series of barriers (known locally as ‘peacelines’) to protect, but also further segregate, residential communities in the main urban centres. Following the ceasefires the boundary zones or interfaces between segregated residential communities became sites of tension and disorder particularly during the summer ‘marching season’ when the Protestant Orange Order holds numerous parades to commemorate a series of battles in the seventeenth century that consolidated the dominance of the protestant community in Northern Ireland. From 1995 onwards many of the parades became increasingly contentious and generated protests from Catholic residents. Violence and rioting often followed the parades. However, while the parades may have acted as the trigger for the protests and disorder, the violence generated its own momentum and continued long after the parading season had finished. In the summer of 1996 Northern Ireland witnessed a week long outburst of sectarian rioting and disorder, during which time two people were killed and the police fired around 7,000 plastic bullets. The worst of the violence was in North Belfast, the most fragmented and segregated area of Northern Ireland and over the next six years there were nearly 400 riots and more than 5,000 other sectarian incidents.

### **Responding to Inter-communal Violence**

The scale of the violence through the summer of 1996 was a shock to many people, but it also made them determined to try to prevent a similar outbreak the following year. One of the problems was that the police, who might have been assumed to be responsible for trying to limit or control the violence, were regarded as part of the problem rather than a source of law and authority. This meant that community workers were often called upon to monitor tensions, counter rumours, act as intermediaries with the police and generally calm the situation down. However, one of the key problems they identified in being able to respond effectively was a lack of means of communication. In the office community workers could gather information and monitor an overall situation but could not intervene on the street, if they were on the streets they were effectively isolated from finding out what was happening in other areas or from monitoring the rumours that often served to mobilise people to sectarian flashpoints.

In North Belfast, where the rioting had been at its most visceral, community workers developed a two-fold solution over the winter and spring of 1997, one part technological, the other social. The technological solution was to utilise the emerging availability of mobile telephony as a means of enabling people to communicate with each other while working at street level. Mobile phones are such a ubiquitous device nowadays that it is difficult to imagine their novelty at that time. Few people had their own mobile phones, so the plan was to hire sixteen phones for a three month period and distribute them to key activists in flashpoints across North Belfast to enable them to work on the streets at flashpoints but at the same time to remain connected with people in other areas.

The second element of the model was to link the key activists into a network and to get them to work together to try to reduce rioting and acts of violence. One of the challenges at that time is that activists from the Protestant and Catholic community were often very mistrustful of each other simply because of they were from the 'other side' and there was very little interaction between the two communities. Many also had a history of involvement in the conflict, through membership of paramilitary organisation or as former prisoners. On one hand this status created a challenge for people from the other community who were being asked to work with their erstwhile opponents, particularly at this early stage of a peace process. On the other hand, former prisoners often had a significant status or degree of authority in their community and they also links to political networks and to the paramilitary groups. These links gave them authority to intervene and influence people's actions, or alternatively to mobilise other people. However, this authority could work in different ways. Activists could work for peace and to try to reduce inter-communal tensions, but at times they might choose to stir up trouble and encourage aggression from within their community. They could also take a third path and claim they did not have enough influence to prevent trouble. There was thus some unpredictability in using the key activists to participate in the mobile phone networks (as they came to be known), but the hope was so that giving them this responsibility would lead them to act in a positive role to calm tensions and reduce violence.

The sixteen activists with the mobile phones were connected in a virtual network across seven prominent flashpoint areas in North Belfast. Each phone holder had the phone number of their counterpart in the neighbouring community. They also had the numbers of each of the other phones held by people from their own community across the area and those of staff in the community centre that was co-ordinating the project. They also had phone numbers for key agencies include housing and emergency services. Some had numbers for key contacts in the



police, although in some cases contact with the police was made via the co-ordinating group. Each phone holder agreed to monitor the phone 24 hours a day over the summer and to respond to requests for information and assistance from other members of the network. In reality the phones allowed people to work on the streets at the key flashpoints to disseminate information, reduce tensions, clarify and challenge rumours, encourage people to disperse and at times to co-ordinate activity with their counterpart on the other side.

Through the summer of 1997, such contacts were often tentative. Catholic nationalists were mistrustful of both Protestant unionists and of the police; Protestant unionists were mistrustful of Catholic nationalists, although they were generally less wary of engaging with the police; while the police were generally willing to speak with anyone, although they were cautious about ceding any operational control to civilians and particularly to individuals with a background in paramilitarism. However, successful exchanges, such as when police responded to requests from phone holders and in turn saw phone holders successfully preventing tensions from escalating into riotous violence, helped to begin to build trust and to humanise the 'other'. This was a long process though.

After the relative success of the mobile phone network in 1997, the process was repeated the following summer and over the next few years became widely adopted, across Belfast and elsewhere as the default model for responding to periods of increased tensions. Initially groups in other areas of the city established their own networks, but as mobile phones became more widely owned, and as contacts between community activists became stronger and also more diverse, then the networks became looser and more fluid as people drew on their own personal contacts to deal with raising tensions. But none of this happened naturally. Through the year community-based organisations worked to facilitate contacts, held meetings to discuss contentious issues, encouraged people to air their concerns, fears and expectations, provided training to develop skills and abilities, and prepare for the tensions that would arise in the summer.

Although the summer marching season continued to be a source of rising tensions, the work of the mobile phone networks made people realise that they could have an impact on reducing the potential for violence in their communities. And while the summer months were the most problematic time tension could rise at any time, stimulated at times by incidents such as the placing of flags, or the actions of young people, by political statements and even by football matches in Scotland. The conflict management work quickly became a year round activity.

While sectarian tensions and violence could impact on the willingness or ability of activists to engage with each other, and at times fractured the emerging relationships, overtime trust and confidence increased amongst those working at the interfaces. Tensions and violence became easier to manage, was brought under control more easily and did not spread so readily to other areas. As a result confidence in the other side grew, personal relationships developed, networks increased.

### **Working with the Police**

As well as building relationships between activists of the two main communities, the conflict management work also involved networking with representatives of key statutory agencies including local government, housing agencies and in particular with the police. As has been noted relationships between the police and working class communities has long been problematic in Northern Ireland, and even after the reform programme some Catholic nationalists, particularly those affiliated with Sinn Fein, refused to accept the legitimacy of the new organisation and were reluctant to work with the police. However, in some cases Catholic phone holders were prepared to engage with the police if it helped control the violence or it prevented young people from getting involved in rioting or being arrested, even if they did not have the support of their community in doing so. It was only in 2007 that Sinn Fein agreed to formally support and work with the police. For more than a decade of peacebuilding key actors within the community refused to publically engage with the police. The important element of that previous sentence is the word ‘publically’, because it is clear that there were extensive contacts made with the police, in particular in relation to potential outbreaks of disorder.

The phone networks played a key role in developing working relationships between the police and community activists, and through them to the wider community. The phones enabled the activists to communicate with the police during a riot or as tensions were rising, and if the communication generated a positive response then it would lead to further subsequent communications. For example, phone holders might call the police to suggest that they move or remove their armoured vehicles because they were likely to become the target of attack, similarly a phone holder might request that the police delay any intervention in a situation to allow them time to try to calm the situation down, since police intervention readily led to an escalation in violence as rioters turned their attention from the ‘other’ community to the police. As relationships developed and confidence in each other grew the police became more

pro-active and might phone an activist to alert them to a deteriorating situation and ask them to intervene instead of the police. After three years of widespread summer disorder, the situation became steadily quieter from 1999 onwards. In part due this was due to an improvement in the political situation, but in part it was due to the work done by the police and the community working in a loose form of partnership. As relationships developed and greater levels of trust were established between loyalists, republicans and the police, the management of the summer marching season became easier.

The Patten Report (1999) on police reform had argued that policing should be focused on developing practice based on human rights standards, working closely with the community, and through increased accountability and it argued that these three principles should inform all elements of police activity. Historically public order policing had been viewed as an aggressive, militaristic form of intervention with little regard paid to the principles of human rights. Public order policing was seen as something done to, rather than with a community, and there had had been little accountability for how the police had acted, particularly in relation to the use of force. It was important for the police therefore to be able to prove that they had changed by applying these three principles as they policed contentious public events and riot situations. From 2001 all complaints against the police were dealt with by the independent Police Ombudsman, from 2004 policing practice was scrutinised on an annual basis by human rights lawyers acting on behalf the Policing Board, the civilian oversight body for policing, while over the same period the police increasingly engaged systematically with community-based groups in working to reduce disorder at public events. As part of this the police developed what they termed the 'no surprises' approach, whereby they would inform key activists and political representatives of their plans for policing key events and agree with them the different roles each would be expected to play. This approach had practical consequences in reducing tension and violence at parades and interfaces, but also had a positive impact on attitudes and understanding. Through this regular engagement each side developed a greater understanding of each other, and of their concerns, constraints and fears.

The work on the ground between activists in the mobile phone networks and the police has been effective in reducing violence and tensions, and was also a key strand in the process of establishing and developing relationships between working class communities and the police. Working together to address a practical problem served as the medium for building trust and understanding in a reciprocal manner. The police were forced to revise their views of people they had previously categorised as 'terrorists', while community workers and former

prisoners had to revisit their views of the police. It was not a simple or straightforward process, but one that was built up over years. Some years it worked better than others and in some years it barely worked at all. But having recognised that if the conditions were right the police and the community could work together to manage the cyclical tensions and limit outbreaks of violence this became a strong impetus to make things work.

The impact of peacebuilding work was also an important element in convincing supporters of Sinn Fein that there had been a significant change in the police and this enabled the party to agree to give public support to police reform in 2007 and this in turn allowed for the devolution of policing and justice powers to the local assembly, thus addressing one of the final unfulfilled elements of the peace agreement.

### **Intra-Communal Tension and Violence**

Although there is a tendency to talk of ethnic communities as a relatively homogenous entity, they are often riven by factions and feuding. Tensions and violence may exist within a single-identity community as much as between different communities. In Northern Ireland the two majority communities were divided politically between those who favoured non-violent approaches and by those who supported the use of force as part of their political strategy, and each community also hosted rival paramilitary groups, broadly supporting the same aim but with differences in ideology, capability and strategy. Paramilitary groups were often associated with particular residential areas, from where they drew support, launched their attacks and provided protection. Whilst the focus of the paramilitary activity was in fighting the British Army or the other side, they increasingly developed a role in helping to maintain some degree of order within their territorial communities. In a situation where the police were regarded as a counter insurgency body, the paramilitary organisations were often called in to exert some form of authority and deal with people involved in behaviour that was considered unacceptable to the community. Initially this was focused on people who were accused of fraternising with the security forces or who were considered to be informers, but soon the paramilitary organisations were encouraged to respond to acts of criminality and forms of anti-social behaviour. While the organisations were willing to undertake an informal policing role they could not replicate the methods of the criminal justice. In the absence of space to detain or punish people through imprisonment, the paramilitaries resorted to swift and often brutal justice. Informants and those accused of criminal activity might be subjected to what

was termed ‘knee-capping’, which involved being shot through the legs or arms, or in more extreme cases simply killed.

Even after the police reforms were implemented from 2000 onwards people remained suspicious and mistrustful of the police. One consequence was that ‘punishment’ violence by paramilitary groups increased to higher levels than during the conflict, around 270 people were shot or beaten by the paramilitaries each year between 1995 and 2003. Some people in working class communities continued to support the actions of the paramilitaries. They complained of the failures of the police to deal effectively with crime, the slow pace of the criminal justice system, and a perception that too many prosecutions failed or that punishment was too lenient. Paramilitary ‘informal justice’ in contrast was tangible, visible and immediate. Others argued that the process of transition should mean an end to all forms of paramilitary violence, while noting the need to find an alternative to the perceived limitations of the criminal justice system, and to create a process that responded to crime in an effective manner but which also had the confidence and support of the local communities.

In many working class communities young people were regarded as a social problem. They were accused of a range of disorderly and intimidatory practices and as a result found themselves in confrontation with adult authority, whether this be the police or the paramilitaries, with a risk of being subject either to criminal justice or to paramilitary ‘informal’ justice. A growing number of such punishments were imposed on young people, and even children, for their involvement in criminal activities and anti-social behaviour. Being targeted by the paramilitaries was one factor that further alienated some young people from adult authority and thus compounded the problem.

### **The Restorative Process**

The mainstream criminal justice system is based on a retributive process, one that responds to breaches of the law by punishment, where the scale or form of punishment is to some extent related to the scale or seriousness of the offence. Although the criminal justice system aspires to promote rehabilitation the high re-offending rates illustrates how people who get a criminal record struggle to escape remain the lifestyle. In recent years restorative processes have begun to be advocated as an alternative to retributive forms of justice in certain circumstances. Restorative justice is a term that covers a broad range of activities and practices, but which emerged from programmes advocating mediation or reconciliation between victims and offenders that were developed in Canada and the United States in the 1970s. Restorative

justice views crime not simply as an infraction of rules but rather as a form of interpersonal conflict which creates harm to real people. Restorative approaches aim to respond to crimes in a constructive and inclusive way and attempt to do so by repairing and restoring relationships between the offender, the victim and the community at large.

In Northern Ireland there was growing interest in the potential for restorative processes as part of the process of conflict transformation and reform of the criminal justice system. The state saw this as a means of responding to problems of offending particularly by young people who did not have a long history of criminality, while within paramilitary networks restorative approaches were viewed as a means of developing responses to problems of anti-social behaviour that had some level of community input and thus popular legitimacy, and which could also help reduce or eventually stop the use of punishment violence.

### **Community-based Restorative Justice**

In the late 1990s a number of groups began exploring the potential of community-based restorative justice projects as a means to address two issues: the ongoing use of punishment violence by paramilitary groups and the growing problem of youth crime and disorder. Two initiatives were subsequently established: Northern Ireland Alternatives which worked in the Protestant community; and Community Restorative Justice Ireland in the Catholic community. This discussion is based on the work of the Alternatives project in Belfast, which was established after gathering support among community activists, members of paramilitary organisations and workers with youth and community organisations (Jarman 2011). Although the project included former prisoners and former members of paramilitary organisations as part of its staff team, it always emphasised its independence and commitment to non-violence. This did raise some concerns within the state sector, which took some time to address, although it was acknowledged that many former prisoners were playing a prominent role in peacebuilding work and their connections ensured that Alternatives had good lines of contact with the paramilitary organisations, which enabled them to check out the veracity of threats on people.

A young person who was under threat of paramilitary punishment violence had limited options, they could try promising to reform their behaviour, submit to the beating, or move away from the area (often this meant leaving Northern Ireland). Alternatives offered another option, to engage with its Intensive Youth Support Programme, which involved a mix of restitution to the victim, service to the community and work to change the offender's attitudes

and behaviour. It was not an easy option, since the programme took several months to complete, involved numerous meetings and activities designed to address the problematic behaviour and perhaps meeting with the victim of their offences. If the individual agreed to participate in the programme then the paramilitary threat was lifted. Around 90% of those who participated in the programme completed it.

The success of the initial Alternatives project led to similar activities being developed in other parts of Belfast and neighbouring areas with similar problems. An independent evaluation of the community based restorative justice projects carried out in 2006 (Mika 2006) found that the projects had a significant impact on reducing paramilitary punishment violence, which resulted in a reduction of over 70% of punishments in Protestant areas where the projects were active and over 80% in Catholic areas. It also found that in 75% of cases offenders dealt with by restorative approaches experienced no subsequent problems in their communities in the twelve months after their case was closed. The evaluation also noted that the projects had successfully promoted non-violent responses to crime and anti-social behaviour, trained hundreds of volunteers in conflict resolution theory and skills, and had raised awareness of human rights issues among local groups and organisations.

Paramilitary punishment violence has continued, although the number of victims has decreased to an average of 80 per year over the past six years, and significantly few young people have been subjected to such attacks since the restorative justice programmes have been set up. The current victims appear predominately to be members of paramilitary organisations (violent punishment has always been a means of dealing with internal discipline) and people accused of involvement with drugs. It is important to note however that this form of violence is still regarded as appropriate by the paramilitary groups, and that some of the newer groups have adopted such methods in an attempt to increase their legitimacy within working class communities, and there remains some level of support for this form of activity in some areas.

### **Working with the State**

One of the key differences between the Protestant community-based restorative justice projects and those working in Catholic areas was their willingness to engage with the police. From the outset the Alternative aimed to work closely with the police, and although there were some suspicions about the project within the criminal justice sector and among some political parties, because of their association with paramilitary groups, the local police were prepared to support their work. Although these contacts did not materially impact on the

practical work of Alternatives, they were important in developing relationships, mutual understanding and trust.

The value of the work being carried out at a community level was recognised by the government in 2007, when they approved protocols for community-based restorative justice schemes, which would allow the projects to deal formally with cases of low-level crime on referral from the police. Under this approach if a young person was willing to plead guilty to a range of specified offences they could undertake a programme of work through a community-based restorative scheme rather than be subject to a criminal sanction. To be able to be accredited to take on this work the community-based restorative justice projects had to be inspected and meet five criteria: (1) be open and accountable in their work (2) be willing to work in partnership with other agencies; (3) work to equality and human rights principles and standards; 4) have staff who have appropriate qualifications and training; and 5) offer value for the money.

Having received the formal accreditation, Alternatives were able to secure funding from a variety of government departments, statutory agencies and independent funders to consolidate existing work and develop new activities. This included peer mediation training and conflict resolution projects in schools, a mediation support programme for the main social housing provider, a street work project to pro-actively address problems of low level disorder, and a demilitarisation and reintegration programme with one of the main paramilitary organisations.

The Alternatives project has now been running for more than a decade and during that time has developed a wide range of programmes to encourage restorative approaches to social problems affecting working class communities, and in particular to respond to problems that are caused by, or impact on, young people. Although there was suspicion about the potential of former combatants to take on a positive role in dealing with problems of crime and disorder, the organisation has established sufficient credibility in its approach and its practice to have been able to secure funding from government to deliver a range of projects that respond crime, disorder and social conflict. The organisation has done so while remaining true to its original principles of following a community-led, non-violent and restorative approach to low level crime and anti-social behaviour.



## **Conclusions**

This paper began by arguing that peacebuilding work needs to operate on a number of different levels and this must include grass roots activity that can help anchor change and thus complement the high level political work of institutional change. Work at the grassroots must follow similar principles as that at the political elite and should involve the building of horizontal relationships between those who had been opposing sides during the conflict. Thus elite and grassroots peacebuilding follow and support each other. Furthermore, if institutional change is to be effective it must have a noticeable impact on the ground, rather than simply through spin or rhetoric, and this must in part at least involve a reciprocal process of developing vertical relationships and building trust between the relevant institution and the people it is supposed to serve or service. Effective peacebuilding, in theory at least, involves creating and sustaining an interlocking network of relationships and working patterns that become mutually supporting and thus help create a sustainable process with self generated momentum.

One problem that peacebuilding work faces is the legacy of violence, and the fact that once use of force is justified as a means to a political end it is difficult to put the genie back in the bottle. Over time the sustained use of violence becomes normalised. It is rationalised and justified. It becomes tolerated and accepted. Societies moving out of armed conflict face addressing a context in which violence and disorder may emerge in new or unforeseen contexts, which on one hand may challenge the peace, but on the other may provide an opportunity to develop new forms of practice that can be effective in addressing the problem, while at the same time helping to build new networks and relationships and develop trust between erstwhile opponents.

The peace process in Northern Ireland generated a series of contrasting outcomes: multi-party negotiations, a peace agreement and a government that included all the main political parties. At the same time peace revealed a series of tensions, suspicions and fears at community level that fed on and sustained the sectarian differences and patterns of segregation that too often erupted in outbursts of inter-communal rioting. The rioting proved a challenge to the new institutions and to community activists working on the ground, and through responding to that challenge a new set of relationships were established and nurtured: horizontal relationships between Catholics and Protestants and vertical relationships between communities and the police.

A similar process of community-based initiatives and partnership working with the police was adopted as a means of reducing the use of paramilitary 'punishment' violence on young people. This work in turn led to the development of an innovative body of practice, designed to address the behaviour of unruly young people while keeping them out of the criminal justice system and away from the threat of a paramilitary kneecapping.

Both the mobile phone networks and the community-based restorative justice challenged existing expectations, that policing and justice issues were the responsibility of the state, with extra-state responses to crime and disorder usually being viewed as a form of vigilantism and therefore not to be encouraged (Pratten and Sen 2007). The experience of addressing post-conflict violence has helped to develop and refine new forms of practice that have involved effective partnerships between the police and community, and thus helps to consolidate the process of change and provides a foundation for future conflict transformation work.

However, although considerable improvements have been made in managing the potential for violence, significant problems remain. As I noted earlier two notable omissions from the peace agreement were a commitment to challenging the sectarian divisions that have underpinned Northern Irish society for the past two hundred years, and any formal DDR strategy that would ensure the demise of the paramilitary organisations that were established over the 25 years of armed conflict. These two factors remain as serious problems and, despite the work that has been developed over the past decade, retain the potential to disrupt, if not undermine, the progress that has been made.

These concerns highlight the fact that the process of peacebuilding can develop on a number of different levels and which may lead to a more or less successful and sustained ending to violent conflict. Johan Galtung, for instance, has highlighted the distinction between negative peace, which focuses on the process of reducing or managing forms of violence, and positive peace, which aims to address the roots causes of the original conflict and thus transform the wider social context. Others differentiate between terms such as conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict transformation to describe similar differences between processes that focus on violence management and those that aspire to more radical change as part of a process of transitioning from violent conflict to sustainable peace.

In Northern Ireland progress has been made in institution building, violence reduction and relationship building and has been successful in creating a fragmentary peace, but without addressing the root causes of the conflict and challenging the attitudes that are predicated on a

politics of ethnic opposition, it is difficult to argue that there has been a fundamental change, and thus the focus remains on managing violence rather than transforming social relations.

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